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**Kinship and Gender as Political  
Processes among the  
Miskitu of Eastern Nicaragua**

by

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'Marriage is in early stages of society a civil contract. Thus, among the wild hunting-tribes of Nicaragua, the lad who wishes a girl for a wife kills a deer and lays it with a heap of firewood at the door of her parents' hut, which symbolical act is his offer to hunt and do man's work; if the gift is accepted, it is a marriage, without further ceremony.'

E. B. Tylor (1937 [1881]: 132) *Anthropology: an introduction to the study of man and civilization* (2 vols). London: Watts and Co.

'This custom has a great influence in softening the manners of the men, and places the ladies in a very commanding position; indeed daughters are at a premium, instead of being at a discount, as with other savage tribes'

Bedford Pim and Berthold Seemann (1869: 306-307) *Dottings on the roadside in Panama, Nicaragua and Mosquito*. London: Chapman and Hall.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with local concepts of kinship and personhood in a small Miskitu village named Kakabila in eastern Nicaragua, and examines how gender identities are organised around a culturally specific variant of the set of practices which anthropologists have glossed as 'brideservice'.

Personhood in Kakabila is focussed on the establishment of a stable conjugal partnership. Men usually attach themselves to the households of their conjugal partners, and attempt to legitimate their claims to their wives by uxori-local postnuptial residence and the practice of long term brideservice. The central concern of many Kakabila men therefore is with demonstrating that they conduct themselves with their affines harmoniously in accordance with village ideals. For many men, however, the eventual objective is to detach their wives from the influence of consanguineal kin, and this produces a tension between the need to project affinal harmony and the concern that actions may be construed in terms of elopement.

Kakabila women, however, tend to be much more concerned with constructing networks of symbolic exchange and mutual assistance among themselves, particularly with their consanguineal kinswomen. In many cases, therefore, women resist the attempts of husbands and sons-in-law to disrupt these networks, and organise their actions around ensuring that errant husbands and junior male affines adequately supply them with sufficient symbolic capital to adequately maintain and cultivate these networks. This thesis, therefore, suggests a very specific formulation of the logic of gender identities in Kakabila, where brideservice is as much a style of distribution as it is a 'style of consumption' (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 275), based on a particular disjunction between men's and women's motivations.

This thesis also considers the changes in Miskitu kinship in terms of changes which have taken place among the Miskitu during the last three hundred years, particularly the marked trading and political imbalances brought about by long term contact with the English speaking Caribbean countries. The disappearance of the historically attested distinction between cross and parallel cousins and the serial exchange of offspring and siblings, and the emergence of uxori-local postnuptial residence, are analysed in terms of a gradual historical reformulation of Miskitu notions of affinity which owes a great deal to these regional contacts. An ethnographically and historically informed analysis for these transformations is considered, which in turn is used to shed light on gender identities and the practice of brideservice in present day Kakabila.

I am especially indebted to Danilo Salamanca who accepted my request to join CIDCA as an affiliate researcher, and whose interest in my work and practical help was a great encouragement throughout my stay in Nicaragua. At the CIDCA - Managua office I would particularly like to thank Betty Muñoz, Alvaro Rivas and Dennis Williamson for their stimulating company and ideas, and Marlyn Webster and Danilo Perez for their concern and practical assistance. At CIDCA - Bluefields I take pleasure in acknowledging debts of thanks to Professor Hugo Sujo, Roberto Rigby and Karen Levy for their patience and help, and for sharing their knowledge of the Bluefields and Pearl Lagoon areas with me.

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My greatest debt, of course, is to the people of Kakabila who put up with me for fifteen months. I believe I owe a debt of thanks to each and every one of them for one reason or another, and it is only for reasons of space that I do not thank them all by name. I feel that most Kakabila people would be horrified that I should be calculating debts for hospitality and friendship; nevertheless there are some of whom I feel I must make special mention. Firstly, I would like to thank my landlord and landlady Mister Mercado Garth and Miss Evinette Garth for their generous consideration and attentions. Secondly, I must mention my special friends, all of whom made my stay particularly enjoyable in one way or another; in no particular order these are Compadre Palford Theodore, Mister Rafael Bonilla, Miss Beulah Bonilla, Mister Bernadino Schwarz, Miss Rachel Schwarz, Mister Herman Humphries, Miss Virginia Humphries, Mister Charlie Humphries, Miss Loisa Theodore, Mister Eddie Garth, Silvia Archibald and Neysi Theodore. I would also like to thank *dama* "Prophet" Florentin Joseph for his treatment of my fractured arm and for imparting to me a little of his incomparable knowledge of the Miskitu way of doing things correctly.

Above all, however, I acknowledge my huge debt to Mister John, Miss Chavela Schwarz and their daughter Comadre Lorna Theodore Schwarz. John Schwarz, Miss Chavela and my Comadre made me both a friend and a member of their family, and without them this thesis would have been immeasurably poorer. It is to John, Miss Chavela and Comadre Lorna that this thesis is dedicated.

### *Language notes*

This thesis contains words and phrases from Nicaraguan English and Spanish as well as Miskitu. Words and phrases in Nicaraguan English and Spanish, such as "plantation" and "testigo", are placed in double quotation marks. Miskitu words, however, such as *lamlat*, appear in italics. Readers should also note that quotations recorded verbatim, including those in Miskitu which are also italicised, are also placed in double quotation marks. Translations of Miskitu and Nicaraguan English utterances, as well as quotations from published sources, appear in single quotation marks.

The standardised Miskitu orthography developed by the Moravian linguists and used here, is very straightforward, and Miskitu pronunciation is entirely predictable from this orthography. There are three vowels in Miskitu: **a**, **i** and **u**, the values of these being identical to those with the same orthographic representation in Spanish. The consonants **p**, **b**, **l**, **d**, **t**, **k**, **m**, **n**, **w** and **s**, and the semi-vowel **y**, however, have the same values as they do in English. The reader should note that letter **s** always represents the unvoiced sound, that the letter **r** represents a flapped rather than a retroflex sound, and that the letter **h**, which always appears in syllable final position, represents a palatalised fricative, sometimes almost assuming a [s] value in Kakabila pronunciation. One should also note however that vowels and consonants from Nicaragua English, supposedly unlicensed in Miskitu, occasionally feature in Miskitu language utterances in Kakabila, particularly the consonant **f** and the vowels **e** and **o** which have the same value as they do in Spanish. Finally it is important to be aware that stress invariably occurs on the first syllable in Miskitu (see Heath 1913, 1927, 1950; Conzemius 1929; Heath and Marx 1961, 1983; CIDCA 1985).

In this thesis I make no attempt to capture Nicaraguan English pronunciations, the sound pattern of which in fact is rather like that of other Western Caribbean varieties of English. Since standard English spelling represents the sound pattern of so-called 'International Englishes' as illogically as it does the sound pattern of Nicaraguan English, I see no reason not to use it. The plural in Nicaraguan English is not generally phonetically realised as it is in 'International' forms of English. Other than in the context of direct quotations I have chosen however to pluralise Nicaraguan English nouns with the letter **s** (and conventional variants) in the interests of greater readability (see McLean and Past 1976; Holm 1978, 1989 1&2; O'Neil and Honda 1987; O'Neil 1991, 1993).

## **Abbreviations**

**CEPAD - Comité Ecuménico para Ayuda al Desarrollo (Ecumenical Committee for Development Aid)**

**CIDCA - Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (Centre for the Research and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast)**

**IDSIM - Instituto de Desarrollo Social de la Iglesia Moravia (The Moravian Church Institute for Social Development)**

**FSLN - Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista Front for National Liberation)**

**INDERA - Instituto Nicaragüense para el Desarrollo de las Regiones Autónomas (Nicaraguan Institute for the Development of the Autonomous Regions)**

**MISURA - Miskitu, Sumu, Rama (Miskitus, Sumus and Ramas)**

**MISURASATA - Miskitu, Sumu, Ramas, Sandinistas Asla Takanka (Miskitus, Sumus, Ramas and Sandinistas Together)**

**RAAN - Region Autónoma Atlántico Norte (North Atlantic Autonomous Region)**

**RAAS - Region Autónoma Atlántico Sur (South Atlantic Autonomous Region)**

**UNCHR - United Nations High Commission on Refugees**

**UNO - Unidad Nicaragüense de Oposición (United Nicaraguan Opposition)**

**YATAMA - Yapti Tasba Masrika (Children of the Motherland)**

At several points in the text, particularly in Chapters Seven and Eight, I refer to Moravian Church periodicals with the following abbreviations:

**MC - Periodical Accounts Relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren Established Among the Heath**

**FM - Periodical Accounts Relating to the Foreign Missions of the Church of the United Brethren**

**MM - Periodical Accounts Relating to Moravian Missions**



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## Chapter One Introduction

I have written this thesis primarily as an ethnographic account of personhood, socialisation and political processes in a small Miskitu village on the Caribbean coast of eastern Nicaragua. It is, however, also intended as an attempt to analyse in diachronic perspective the relationship between marriage and politically motivated actions in societies where brideservice and uxori-locality are widely practiced, and as such may be read as a critique of earlier writers interested in this topic (e.g Turner 1979 1; Collier and Rosaldo 1981; Collier 1988).<sup>1</sup> Finally it is also intended to offer an ethnographically informed answer to the question first formulated by Levi-Strauss (1969), of how 'simple structures of kinship' based on reciprocal exchange mutate into 'complex structures' based on generalised exchange. I have not intended this thesis to provide a critique of the ethnohistorically informed approaches to marriage practices on which anthropological investigations of Miskitu kinship have largely come to focus (Helms 1970 1&2, 1976), nor have I intended it to serve as the starting point for the re-examination of the work of other authors interested in other aspects of Miskitu political processes.<sup>2</sup> Rather it is intended to complement this work by offering an account of how kinship and gender are conceptualised and practiced with respect to political processes in one small Miskitu village, and how these have been shaped over time by the involvement of Kakabila people and other *costeños* in the context of a particular regional political economy.<sup>3</sup>

### *Method*

This work is based upon a stay of eighteen months in Nicaragua between January 1992 and June 1993, fifteen of which were spent in a village called Kakabila on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. It was conducted as a research student of the London School of Economics and as an associate researcher with CIDCA (el Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica), a research institute affiliated to the Universidad de Centroamérica which specialises in researching Nicaragua's little known Caribbean coast. The CIDCA Managua office read my research proposal entitled 'Language and Concepts of Person on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast', accepted me as an associate researcher and enabled me to get research permission from MINEX, the Nicaraguan state immigration office. I flew out to Nicaragua in January 1992 and

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<sup>1</sup> See Strathern (1985), Gell (1992) and Dean (1995) for other critiques.

<sup>2</sup> The political importance of the Miskitu Kings is debated in Olien (1983), Helms (1983), Dennis and Olien (1984) and Noveck (1988). Valuable documents which bear upon this debate can be found in Von Oertzen, Rossbach and Wunderlich (1990).

<sup>3</sup> "Costeños" is the term popularly by the inhabitants of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast to refer to themselves. It is applied to all regardless of ethnic affiliation.

spent six weeks in Managua sorting out research permission and currency transfers from London, during which time I was able to meet other CIDCA researchers working on a number of varying issues connected with "The Coast". In February I flew to Bluefields and spent two weeks in Bluefields as a resident of the CIDCA Bluefields guest house to which I would later repair on periodic breaks from the field. I was also given a room to work in at the CIDCA Bluefields office, which I was able to keep for the duration of my fieldwork. In early March I took a freight boat from Bluefields up to the village of Pearl Lagoon, the administrative capital for the villages around the lagoon of the same name (map 4), where I spent ten days getting to know the town. From here I conducted reconnaissance visits to other lagoon communities, eventually deciding that Kakabila would be a good place to work. I chose Kakabila because I was interested in anthropological aspects of bilingualism and identity and wanted to work in a village in which Miskitu and Nicaraguan English were both spoken. Although there were other villages in the Pearl Lagoon basin in which Miskitu and English were both spoken - for example, Raitipura and Tasbapauni - Kakabila seemed at the time the most suitable. Raitipura was too close to Pearl Lagoon town for my liking, whereas in Tasbapauni only the older inhabitants used Miskitu among themselves. On a reconnaissance visit to Kakabila in early March I arranged accommodation as a paying lodger, and three days later moved my possessions across the lagoon to Kakabila to take up residence there.

I found fieldwork very demanding and difficult, especially in the first few months, and I found it necessary to take frequent (monthly) breaks in Bluefields. Despite the fact that I was fairly well acquainted with other varieties of Caribbean English, I found it extremely difficult at first to understand the Kakabila variety of Nicaraguan English. Kakabila English seemed to be much less influenced by the 'International English' lexicon than its Bluefields counterpart, and most of its speakers seemed much less able to understand my British English to which they had had virtually no exposure. They referred to my English as "kems", an onomatopoeic word capturing the mid vowels, nasals and word-final sibilants of many "International" English words, and Kems in fact became my nickname in the village. I eventually learned to understand the Kakabila variety of Nicaraguan English and produce a rather "kems" inflected variety of it that villagers could understand. I also made a great effort to learn Miskitu, and, according to my friends, became fairly competent by the time I left the field. However the project that I had outlined in my research proposal proved much too ambitious and demanded a much better command of Nicaraguan English and Miskitu than I could have acquired in the fifteen months I spent in the field. In any case I had begun to take an interest in what Kakabila villagers were interested in and talked about, specifically kinship and gender, and the relation of these to social processes.

In the second month of my stay in Kakabila I prepared a map (map 5) and conducted a census of the village. At this stage I was still very much a stranger and I found these tasks rather daunting. I was especially worried about projecting an intrusive and demanding presence, though in fact the villagers were mostly very co-operative. On reflection I am glad that I did this work in the earlier stages of my fieldwork. I think I would have found conducting such a personal survey among the villagers very difficult once I had become friends with so many of them. Kakabila with less than three hundred inhabitants, however, was so small that I found I could collect a great deal of quantitative data without recourse to formal interviews. Nevertheless, I did conduct detailed house to house surveys on the Kakabila "sea bob" catch of 1993, and on language usages. With Doctor Marc Isler of Bluefields I also conducted a survey in the neighbouring village of Raitipura which was concerned with the outbreaks of "fits" which took place there in 1992 and 1993.<sup>4</sup>

For the most part fieldwork was conducted through participant observation. I believe that this was the only way I could have conducted my work without upsetting or irritating too many villagers. Attempts to conduct tape-recorded interviews with villagers were curtailed when the Sony Professional recorder I was lent by the LSE Anthropology Department was ruined after the "dori" (dugout canoe with sheet sail) in which I was travelling turned over in the lagoon, but in any case I had already found that, although villagers were generally quite happy for me to take scratch notes in their presence, they were not generally enthusiastic about being recorded or participating in structured or semi-structured interviews. Consequently much of my data was accumulated through conversation. The advantages of this were that villagers tended to be more relaxed in giving me data, and were more inclined to lead me towards those topics they found particularly salient. The disadvantages were that I only had little control over the direction of most conversations. I was fortunate that many Kakabila villagers quite happily included me as a participant in their lives. I was invited to two weddings (one of which I could not attend due to a fracture sustained in Bluefields), one funeral, several parties (including two birthday parties), the Confirmation of several adolescent villagers, "Kitty Alley" (a bowling game which takes place once a year between the men and the women of the village), "Mosko" (a annual masquerade), church services for both denominations and numerous meals and rum drinking sessions. I was also privileged to be made *lapia* and godfather to two baby boys.

In May 1993 I completed my work in Kakabila and spent two weeks visiting Puerto Cabezas and other Miskitu speaking communities near the Honduras frontier. I spent six days in

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<sup>4</sup> "Fits", or *grisi siknis* as it is known further north, is an apparently culturally conditioned form of spirit attack which collectively affects groups of Miskitu teenage girls and young women periodically (see Dennis 1981 and 1985, and Chapter Five of this thesis).

Awastara and also made a short excursion to the Rio Coco, visiting Waspam and staying in Saklin. This short but rather sharp trip to the "up the coast"<sup>5</sup> Miskitu villages was very valuable in putting my fieldwork experiences into regional perspective. Finally in early June I return to Managua via Bluefields, and towards the end of the month, after several "charlas" with CIDCA staff and researchers and a trawl through the CIDCA library, flew back to London.

A great deal of the ethnography in this thesis has been culled from village gossip, some of which is presented below in the form of case histories. Gossip, even though thoroughly subjective, provides the anthropologist with an important source of ethnography because it indicates what it is that people find significant and problematic about other people's motivations, but it inevitably reflects partial perspectives of particular events. I have therefore changed the names of the key actors who appear in this thesis. Although I am quite sure that the ethnography presented in this thesis is in no way legally incriminating as far as Kakabila villagers are concerned, I see no reason to embarrass my friends, and I hope and trust that visiting researchers who believe that they recognise particular individuals from the rather subjective observations contained in this text will use this 'knowledge' responsibly. If I have embarrassed particular individuals, I apologise; my justification for using this material is that, by doing so, I hope I have been able to make a substantial contribution to our understanding of peacetime social processes on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, a wartorn region that has suffered so much in recent years for lack of this understanding (see Ortiz 1988, Reyes 1992 and Hale 1994).

### *Brideservice*

Because brideservice typically exists in 'egalitarian' hunter-gather and hunter-horticulturalist societies with little in the way of formalised political authority, it has been assumed that the study of such societies has little of interest to say about political processes. Lacking institutionalised forms of hierarchy and domination, as well as private property, these societies have been characterised as peacefully apolitical. This, I believe, is a misapprehension. Political processes in 'egalitarian' societies are frequently turbulent, and in many, the illusion of tranquillity is only preserved because it is carefully nurtured by discourses and rituals which specifically promote harmony (Overing 1975; Clastres 1989).

Anthropologists have long recognised that in many small scale societies marriage payments are extremely important for structuring economic and political relations. Dowry payments in North India, for example, have been long been linked to notions of hierarchy, while

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<sup>5</sup> "Up the coast" is a Kakabila term which refers to the Miskitu north of the Río Grande.

bridewealth payments have been studied at length in the context of litigation and transfers of rights (Goody 1973; Comoraff 1980). However, while dowry and bridewealth have received considerable attention, it is only in recent years that there has been serious attention devoted to brideservice.

Marxist anthropologists were among the first to systematically analyse gender domination in terms of marriage transactions. Specifically they sought the origins of the gender hierarchy in terms of the evolution of private property (e.g. Meillassoux 1972, 1981, Reiter 1975; Sacks 1975; Leacock 1978, 1981).<sup>6</sup> Among some anthropologists, however, there was a growing sense that gender identities and relations of reproduction were infinitely more complicated and nuanced than was indicated by Marxist models (Ortner and Whitehead 1981: 277; Overing 1986), and a new wave of anthropological studies appeared which confronted gender asymmetries in terms of ethnographically generated theories (e.g. Llewellyn-Davis 1981; Crocker 1985), as the assumption of a universal gender hierarchy was abandoned and anthropologists began to explore the ethnographic complexities of particular gender asymmetries (Moore 1988; e.g. Strathern 1980, 1981, 1988).

As theory became increasingly ethnographically led, comparative studies became scarcer, until Collier and Rosaldo published a brave paper, entitled *Politics and gender in simple societies*, which specifically attempted to account for 'the unexpected regularities in the gender conceptions', in brideservice societies. What makes Collier and Rosaldo's work so distinctive is both the amount of detail and the predictive power which they pack into their model, and the fact that they appear to account for the patterning of political asymmetries in societies which have often previously been characterised as unproblematically egalitarian, by unpacking the logic of gendered concepts of the person in brideservice societies in terms of the competing claims, obligations and debts, which obtain from normatively enacted 'marriage payments' (Collier and Rosaldo 1981; Collier 1988).<sup>7</sup>

Unlike Meillassoux and the Marxists, Collier and Rosaldo are less interested in reconstructing the history of women's universal subordination in terms of an evolutionary framework, than in creating an ideal type configuration against which gender constructs in historical brideservice societies can be held up for comparison. They are critical of those feminist anthropologists who 'have recently turned to hunter-gatherers to discover a lost

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<sup>6</sup> Turner and Sacks also used Marxist analyses to account for the domination of men over women in brideservice societies (Turner 1979 1 & 2; Sacks 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Collier (1988), following Meillassoux's (1981) analysis of the political economy of the 'domestic community' also considers so-called 'equal' and 'unequal bridewealth societies.'

primitive egalitarianism in which both women and men enjoyed autonomy and freedom from arbitrary constraints' (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 277), and argue instead that brideservice, a form of marriage which characterises many hunter-gathers and hunter-horticulturalists, actually organises inequalities by producing patterned sets of social relations which reproduce and are reproduced by a particular set of ritualised notions of gender. In other words it is marriage in brideservice societies which determines gender inequalities by means of organising a set of cultural conceptions of the sexes and 'gender-relevant productive relationships' (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 277).

For some anthropologists brideservice prestations are characterised specifically by acts of rendering service to affines, while the term 'bridewealth' is reserved specifically for the prestation of goods. This goods/service distinction is far less useful, Collier and Rosaldo argue, because it has no bearing on the structuring of claims, debts and obligations related to marriage (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 278; Collier 1988: 257). Brideservice societies, they therefore argue, are much more usefully characterised by the fact that marriage prestations, whether gifts or services, are made exclusively by the groom, and not, as in bridewealth societies, by the groom's kin (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 278; Collier 1988: 257). Thus in bridewealth societies would-be grooms are dependent on their senior consanguineal kin for their bridewealth prestations, and are thereby defined in sociological terms as clients to these senior kinsmen. In brideservice societies, however, men become adults through acquiring wives through their own efforts, male adulthood being linked to the regular access to female labour and sexual services. Access to brides is linked explicitly to affinal rather than consanguineal relations. Nevertheless Collier and Rosaldo reject the notion (espoused elsewhere by Turner 1979 1) that grooms in brideservice societies are clients of their fathers-in-law. Rather, they argue, brideservice payments from the groom to his wife's kin are seen less as payment of marriage debts and more as requests for recognition of the adult status which comes with a socially sanctioned marriage.

Because men make themselves into adult men by taking women as wives, Collier and Rosaldo argue, bachelors are seen as rather sorry individuals dependent on others for food and sex. At the same time, however, they are also seen as dangerous sexual predators, who are liable to make claims on the wives of others. Women are cast 'as the desirable prize of male competition' (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 285) and bachelors are therefore seen as potential sources of conflict. Because so much of social life in brideservice societies is seen in terms of men fighting over women, men therefore try to assume a stand-off equality with their peers, what Collier and Rosaldo call, following Fried (1967), a 'don't fool with me' stance, which is achieved by rituals of harmony, while ritual contests, such as wrestling matches, mediate conflicts that could otherwise become more serious.



According to Collier and Rosaldo, it is women's sexual transgressions in particular (adultery or taking lovers instead of husbands) which cause trouble in brideservice society discourses, and women easily become scapegoats for disputes between men. Consequently in contrast to men who require wives to achieve autonomy, unmarried women have no wish to marry since they do not want the responsibilities and subordination which marriage brings. They do not require husbands in order to get meat and sex since they can obtain meat from their male kinsmen and both sex and meat from lovers for whom they do not have to work. Women therefore organise their political actions around their sexual skills, sometimes taking lovers without commitment in order to 'escape constricting marital bonds and build the networks of affection and support that will assure them considerable freedom throughout life' (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 317), only settling down to marriage when they are ready or become pregnant.

In this complex of gender identities, people make 'a symbolic division between the "harmonious" world of men and the conflict ridden world of heterosexual relations' (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 296), and myths and ritual practices commonly problematise the disruptive nature of women's sexuality rather than fertility. Because no goods are transferred from the groom's kin to the bride's kin, neither the groom's nor the bride's kin have vested interests in the success of the marriage, as they would if substantial bridewealth payments were involved. Consequently there are few sanctions against a wife running away, and conjugal unions, especially between younger couples, therefore tend to be rather brittle. Because there are no transfers of goods to represent the woman's change of status, marriage in brideservice societies thus tends to be equated with sexual intercourse which consequently becomes a political act.

In societies of this kind, according to Collier and Rosaldo, balanced exchanges between men are viewed as the most secure means of attaining marital security and harmony between men, and in fact brother-sister relations often acquire a special significance through the institution of reciprocal sister-exchange.<sup>8</sup> Women are thus cast as objects of exchanges between men.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> These sibling or offspring exchanging societies tend to produce bifurcate merging/Dakota-type terminologies of the type given in figure 4

<sup>9</sup> Children, on the other hand, are less valued in terms of their role as future clients (as they are in bridewealth societies where marriages prestations make them debtors to their senior kin), than as markers in terms of men's claims to wives, either to their own wives or as potential returns in lieu of prior transfers of women. Consequently, while paternity is often marked through couvade practices, maternity is relatively de-emphasised, and 'there are no social contexts in which parents emphasize what they do for children' (Collier 1988: 31). Collier and Rosaldo thus emphasize that 'mothering' is a social relation, much like fathering, judging, or ruling,

Often enough, therefore, the only way a man can acquire a wife is if he promises one of his kinswomen (usually a sister or daughter) in return (e.g. Rosaldo 1980 and Goldman 1979 [1963]), 'a brother's command over his sister's marriage may be the foundation of his own claim to adult independence - his basis for acquiring a wife who will make him the equal of mature men' (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 300), and the theme of 'brother-sister incest becomes a powerful symbol of disorder' (Collier 1988: 68).<sup>10</sup>

My concerns are close enough to Collier and Rosaldo's to warrant my arguments being read as a test of their thesis. I agree that the practice of brideservice and formation of gendered identities inform one another and have to be considered together as part of a single complex of beliefs and practices, and I am certainly in sympathy with their approach to analysing gender symbolism in brideservice societies in terms of the distinction between homosocial and heterosocial relationships. However, I have some theoretical reservations. Of these two in particular stand out.

Firstly, Collier and Rosaldo's ideal type presents brideservice as a function of 'cold' societies. Brideservice therefore simply reproduces the conditions by which it is further reproduced. This thesis, however, suggests a model of brideservice which accounts for gender identities within a framework which specifically depends on the articulation of social processes to regional political economies. Secondly, Collier and Rosaldo view brideservice from a partial vantage point, one which accounts for many of the practices associated with this institution in terms of male competition over women. In short it is a 'wife-takers' model. In this thesis I provide an altogether different perspective, one which foregrounds the motives of 'wife-givers'. I therefore do not endorse their view that the 'unexpected regularities in gender conceptions' and particular inequalities characteristic of brideservice societies are to be accounted for in terms of particular 'styles of consumption' (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 275).<sup>11</sup> Rather I would argue that gender identities are better accounted for in brideservice societies in terms of 'styles of distribution'.

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whose meaning and organization must be understood with reference to a particular configuration of relationships within a complex social whole' (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 315) and not a natural relation.

<sup>10</sup> Arranged marriages between children are common in societies with institutionalised sister or daughter exchange.

<sup>11</sup> As opposed to 'estates of production' as they are, for example, in bridewealth societies (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 275).

# Part One

## Place

## Chapter Two

### Kakabila

Kakabila is a small village situated on Central America's Mosquito Coast, a vast region which, according to most writers, includes the entire Caribbean coast of Central America between the Río San Juan on the Nicaragua and Costa Rica border to the south, up to Cape Cameron in Honduras, as well as an extensive and indeterminate hinterland. This area was never settled by the Spanish during the colonial period. In contrast to the relatively benign soils and climate of Central America's western drainages, the Mosquito Coast, with its dense jungles and mangrove swamps, inhospitable climate, and lack of natural harbours, never attracted Spanish settlers, while the reputation of its ferocious inhabitants, particularly the Miskitu Indians, whose hostility to the Spanish was fuelled by a small but influential number of English settlers, proved a considerable deterrent. Even today the Mosquito Coast is extremely isolated and Bluefields, its largest city,<sup>1</sup> cannot be reached from Managua by road.<sup>2</sup> The former department of Zelaya, which many authors consider to be virtually co-extensive with the Nicaraguan part of the Mosquito Coast (apart from the relatively unpopulated and territorially small Río San Juan region) contains only 9% of the national population in spite of the fact that this area covers almost half of the national territory (Freeland 1988: 15).

Up until relatively recently the vast majority of the inhabitants of Zelaya were speakers of Miskitu and Nicaraguan English, but since the early 1950s landless Spanish speaking farmers from the west have gradually pushed the settler frontier eastwards, and have come to occupy the upper reaches of the region's rivers as well as its two major cities, Bluefields and Puerto Cabezas, in increasing numbers, now making up 65% of Zelaya's total population of 282,081 for 1981. Of this 65% however, 58% live in the western parts of the region. Outside the two cities, however, eastern Zelaya (as well as the Río Coco and its tributaries upriver to Bocay) is inhabited mainly by speakers of English and Miskitu (maps 1 and 2).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bluefields has approximately 40,000 inhabitants. Accurate estimates, however, are very difficult. The population's numbers were swelled by refugees during the Contra war, many of whom have returned to their villages, while Mestizo migrants continue to arrive in numbers.

<sup>2</sup> The geographer Parsons noted that until regular airline services were established between Managua and Bluefields, Managua and the mining camps, it was easier to reach to the Mosquito Coast from New Orleans than from Managua and western Nicaragua (Helms 1971: 12). In 1981 an all-weather road was completed to Puerto Cabezas (Howard 1993: 1).

<sup>3</sup> Estimates based upon Hale and Gordon (1987).

In this chapter, however, I am concerned not with demonstrating that "Coast" people live on the national periphery, but rather with showing how Kakabila people, as inhabitants of a small Miskitu and English speaking "Coast" village located some twenty-eight miles north of Bluefields, conceptualise the world around them and the various kinds of people who occupy that world. In the first section I am concerned with how Kakabila situate themselves within the spaces which they claim for themselves. Firstly, I consider how villagers imagine the land around their village, principally in terms of "bush" and "plantation". Secondly, I examine how villagers conceptualise water, principally in terms of particular activities, gill-net fishing, catching shrimp, and hunting turtle.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, I consider the ways in which villagers domesticate and conceptualise space within the village as a social entity as opposed to a collection of houses. Fourth and last, I consider the village simply as a set of houses, kitchens and "yards" and I examine the ways in which Kakabila conceptualise these spaces. In the second section I am concerned specifically with situating Kakabila in terms of notions of local identity. This means outlining the ways in which Kakabila people typically distinguish themselves, as villagers and as Miskitus, from the inhabitants of the other villages around the lagoon, most of whom are classified as non-Miskitus of one kind or another. I also consider how Kakabila Miskitus consider themselves to be qualitatively different from other Miskitus living in the lagoon, as well as from those Miskitus living outside the lagoon, and thereby establish the fact that Kakabila people tend to regard themselves as unique in kind.

### *Kakabila the village*

Kakabila is one of several small villages located on terraces overlooking Pearl Lagoon, a large and nearly landlocked body of water, separated from the Caribbean by a long and narrow peninsula (map 4). Strictly speaking the lagoon is an estuary which discharges the waters (and a considerable amount of silt) of two sizable rivers, the Wawashan and the Kurinwas, as well as several smaller creeks, into the Caribbean, across the "bar" at its southern end. The lagoon "edge" (shore) is characterised by monotonously flat and often swampy lands shielded from view by dense growths of mangrove, and from Kakabila the only visible elevation is Kukra Hill several miles south of the lagoon's southern shore. Most of the lagoon villages, including of course Kakabila, are situated on the banks along the western edge of the lagoon, and like Kakabila overlook swampy "vegas" (floodlands) which serve as "landings" for the inhabitants' "doris".<sup>5</sup> From a distance, it is the coconut, breadfruit, mango and other kinds of trees overlooking these occasional "vegas" which mark these banks out as inhabited village sites (Radley 1960: 65-76).

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<sup>4</sup> For an indepth analysis of Miskitu procurement practices in Tasbapauni (map 4), see Nietschmann (1973).

<sup>5</sup> The "dori" is a small dugout canoe with cloth or plastic sheet sail.

### *Land*

Lying on a bank about twenty-five feet high which runs from south south west to north north east, Kakabila occupies a long cleared area about a hundred yards wide, which runs parallel to the lagoon shore for about a quarter of a mile (map 5). On the landward side this bank gradually slopes westward towards the "centro" (the area in which many of the village "plantations" lie) and the "bush". On the lagoon side, however, the bank drops down a steep escarpment to the "vega", a swampy lowland which lies between the escarpment bottom and the lagoon's edge. Running down the escarpment are a few steep paths which join the "vega" paths leading down to the "landings" at the water's edge up to twenty-five yards away. Many of the village houses actually sit on the edge of this escarpment, which runs virtually the length of the village, except at the north and south ends where the escarpment peters out and the houses lie on lower land closer to the lagoon shore.

Other than the few wooden structures which serve as household bathrooms, the "vega" itself is hardly used. During the rainy season (*li aula taim*) between June (*li kati*) and December (*krismas kati*) this land becomes waterlogged and many of the paths between the shore and the escarpment having to be negotiated by walking along planks of wood across the mud, set down by "landing" owners with vested interests in particular paths. The lagoon waterside at the far end of the "vega" from the escarpment bottom is known as *liura*, the "edge" or the "seaside". It is here one finds the "landings", short areas of beach, where the village "doris" are "hailed up" when not in use. Each "landing" owner is expected to respect the rights of others and not use other "landings" except for short periods of convenience, for example loading and unloading, the cleaning of fishing nets, "dori" maintenance and the processing of turtles and sea shrimps.

West and landward of the village are the "plantations" (*insla*) and the "bush" (*unta*), the latter term referring to the uncultivated secondary rainforest lying beyond the village.<sup>6</sup> All the "bush" west to Pigeon Creek, north to Jackson Creek and south to Tuba Creek, is considered community property, and any member of the village is entitled to establish usufruct rights over a piece if he<sup>7</sup> clears or leaves a machete mark on the trees there, which by established convention announces that he intends to do so. "Plantations", "grounds" or *insla* are small parcels of land, typically around one manzana (1.72 acres), which have been cleared for horticultural purposes. These parcels of land are cleared with machetes and axes during the dry season (*mani taim*) months of February (*kuswa kati*) or March (*kakumuk kati*) and burned (*angkaia*) around April (*wli waintka kati*) to be ready for planting (*mangkaia*) in May (*wli mairin kati*) before the heavy rains which invariably come in late May or June (*li kati*). "Plantations" are invariably of two

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<sup>6</sup> There is no savannah close to Kakabila.

<sup>7</sup> Clearing "bush" to make "plantations" is considered men's work.

kinds and most men plant one of each every year: one on high ground for cassava (*yauhra*); and the other on swampy ground for dry rice (*rais*). Other crops, typically *ñampi* (*sustumuk*), "coco" (quequisque or *duswa*), yam (*usi*), sweet potato (*tawa*), and corn (*aya*), are planted in smaller quantities with the cassava, while dasheen (*dasin*) is planted in the swamp with the rice.

"Old grounds"<sup>8</sup> are rested for eight or so years, but are still used in a number of ways. Firstly, cassava may be replanted on a secondary rather haphazard basis while it is still being dug up (*dakbaia*); this kind of cassava is known as *bila cassava*. Secondly, bananas (*siksa*), plantain (*platu*), "kosto" (*plas*) and "pinga" (*punga*) - the so-called "greenskins" - and various kinds of fruit trees may be planted on resting grounds. These both supplement those grown in the household "yard and demonstrate to other villagers that those "old grounds" are not abandoned.<sup>9</sup> Most men also cultivate sugar cane (*kayu*) and pineapples (*pihtu*) on "old grounds" close to the village which are too weak to use otherwise.

A number of "plantations" are found to the northwest of the village and are reached on foot, a few more are located a good way to the south of the village and are mostly reached by poling a "dori" along the "edge", while still others are located in the area immediately beyond the cemetery. The largest number, however, are found in the area immediately west of the southern half of the village in an area known as the "centro." By and large "plantations" are situated as close as possible to the side of the village which the owners live. Thus the inhabitants of the southern part of the village tend to plant in the "centro", whereas villagers in the northern part of the village are likely to plant northwest of the village. Consequently villagers often find themselves planting next to or close to their neighbours. Typically the man responsible for clearing a "ground" makes a "plantation" out of a piece of bush which lies immediately beyond last year's "ground". The reason for this is so that villagers can attend to trees and other cultigens in these resting "grounds" *en route* to their more active "plantations". Consequently neighbours often, though not necessarily, find themselves planting in parallel fashion year after year.

Cassava is quite resilient but rice is quite labour intensive and requires a considerable amount of attention, and "plantations" have to be regularly visited to ensure that the rice crop has not

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<sup>8</sup> I never heard the common Miskitu term *insla prata* used for resting "grounds" used in Kakabila. See Howard (1993) for a discussion of *insla prata* among the Río Coco and savanna Miskitu.

<sup>9</sup> It is considered correct to ask the previous occupant for permission to clear a "ground" fallen into disuse. It is also possible to sell a "plantation" (but not the land itself which is owned by the community). Prices vary depending on whether the plantation is rice or cassava, whether it is already planted or just awaiting plantation, and, of course, on the size of the area for sale.

burned, flooded or become choked with weeds. Also while cassava is simply dug up (*dakbaia*) for household use as required, a rice "ground" needs to be harvested or "cut" (*klakaia*) at a single session.<sup>10</sup> For most men the rice is domestically processed, being dried (*lakaia*) on plastic sheets laid out in the sun, and then hulled (*kapaia*) by women and adolescent girls. Those with large rice "plantations", however, may require help from kin and/or paid workers. These larger scale planters make the trip to Pearl Lagoon, where a commercial rice mill operating there buys their yields.

Besides being a source of potential "plantations" the "bush" is also thought of in terms of the kinds of woods, herbs and animals it provides. Santa María, sapadilla, mahogany (*yulu*) and other kinds of tree, all of which are found in the "bush" in greater or smaller numbers, provide villagers with specialist woods for house boards, houseposts, trunks for "doris", axe handles, and so on. Various kinds of plant, with either medicinal or culinary uses, such as "slimy bush", "lemon grass", guava, "chiny root" and granadilla, as well as animals such as iguanas (*kakamuk*), armadillos (*taira*) and their eggs, are also found there, and occasionally hunters, armed with rifles and flashlights, go into the "bush" at night, and sometimes bring home deer (*sula*) or peccary (*wari*) meat. However, it is a perilous place into which only men should venture. One can get lost in the "bush" and die of heat exhaustion or hunger. Dangerous animals such as "tigers" (*limi* - jaguar), *ulak* (a ape-like figure with a voracious sexual appetite), herds of stampeding "waree" (*wari*), *liwa tara* (giant serpents), *aubiya* (a demon with feet turned back), *wakumbai* (a white horse with a single leg) and snakes (*pyuta*) abound, as well as "science men" (sorcerers) such as *duwindu* (the *dawanka* or 'owner' of the "bush" animals), *sisin dawanka* (cottontree owner) and *kwah dawanka* (fig tree owner) any one of whom might bespell the unwary traveller.<sup>11</sup> The "bush" is a perilous place and is not to be taken lightly.

### Water

During the rainy season months between June (*li kati*) and December (*krismas kati*), and provided that there are local buyers, Kakabila men sail out onto the lagoon in the early hours of the morning, and check their gill-nets for snook (*mupi*), coppermouth (*bilapau*) and drummer (*drama*), the so-called "first class fish". These are gutted and taken to the fish processing and storage plants ("fabrik") or fish boats, where they are sold for cash, thus providing most village men with their most important form of income.<sup>12</sup> The fishermen also find catfish (*laha*) and

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<sup>10</sup> There are several kinds of rice, which are named according to the time the crop takes to mature. The most common is "six months rice" which is harvested in November (*yahbra kati*).

<sup>11</sup> See Heath (1950) for an informed account of the various Miskitu demons.

<sup>12</sup> During my fieldwork there was one "fabrik" at Hog Cay which went bust. However, three others, one of which was a donation to the Cuenca fishermen's union by the Norwegian NGO, Ayuda Popular Noruega, were



other kinds of fishes in their nets which, although unsaleable, are nevertheless welcome in Kakabila kitchens, where they are "run down" (cooked with coconut oil) and served with cassava and other kinds of "breadkind".<sup>13</sup> Gill-net fishing is thus provides the most important supply of *upan* (meat or fish) without which a meal is said to be incomplete. At other times of the year, when gill net fishing is unprofitable, adolescent boys and old women take the "doris" out and fish (*miskaia*) for jack (*krawi*), ruk ruk (*rukruk*), catfish (*laha*), drummer, sheepshead (*sikuku*) and shark (*ilili*) with line and hooks (*kiul*).<sup>14</sup>

Catching fish with gill-nets is a regular seasonal occupation. Periodically, however, during semi-predictable rushes which last between one and two weeks, Kakabila men also catch shrimps. These are of two kinds: "sea bob" (*kabu wahska*, *wahsi siksa* or "black shrimp"), caught just outside the lagoon "bar"; and "white shrimp" (*wahsi pihni*), caught inside the lagoon typically around the "Big Bight" or near the upper part of the lagoon (map 4). Both kinds of shrimp provide the men of Kakabila and neighbouring villages, with an important source of cash, but while the "white shrimp", like the "first class fish", are saleable to the fish boats and fish plants who market them overseas, the "sea bob" are only saleable to entrepreneurs who market them in local towns. When the "white shrimp" are "running" the more enterprising village men drop everything else to head off in their "doris" in teams of two and three to catch them. Sometimes fishboats appear near Pearl Lagoon or Orinoco to buy, and the Kakabila men may be head out there for the duration of the run, catching shrimp all day and selling to and trading with the boats who often bring alcohol and manufactured goods to exchange.<sup>15</sup>

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due to open shortly in Pearl Lagoon. The fish boats which periodically arrive at Pearl Lagoon to buy local catches come from Bluefields, Columbia, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica.

<sup>13</sup> "Breadkind" (*tama*) is a category of foodstuffs which includes the root crops, the "greenskins" (bananas, plantains, etc.) and breadfruit.

<sup>14</sup> The intense desire for either meat or fish at mealtime and the dislike of "lone breadkind" called "so-so", is very much a feature of the notion of what constitutes a proper meal in Kakabila. As one man told me "*upan apu, plun apu*" ('no fish or meat equals no food').

<sup>15</sup> Unlike the "bush" which is considered a dangerous and malevolent place, the lagoon is a benevolent place. The "seaside" or "edge" (*liura*) is a recreational area. Adult men hunt manatee (*palpa*) there by moonlight, young men hunt mullet (*kukali*) there by torchlight with machetes, and children swim, picnic and hunt there for crabs (*rahti*), "young coconuts" (coconuts with milk) "conks" (conches), cockles (*klitu*), "wilks" (whelks), crawfish (*wahsi kluklu*) and sea grapes (*waham*). This recreational aspect of the lagoon is in no way spoiled by the fact that the fish have an owner (*dawanka*) named "merry maid". "Merry maid's" most potent sanction appears to be that she can determine whether a fisherman will be lucky or not, and she is thereby relatively harmless in comparison to those being like *duwindu* and *wakumbai* who lurk in the "bush".

The "sea bob" are usually caught around the "bar" and are brought back to Kakabila where they are "skalted" (boiled), "thrashed" (*kapaia*), "fanned" in the breeze, and dried (*lakaia*), before being graded, weighed, packed and sent down to buyers in Pearl Lagoon or Bluefields. Processing the "sea bob" is a risky business. It involves a lot of intense work for all members of the household for a week or so, and there are never guarantees that the weather will be favourable for drying, that sufficient salt will be available in Pearl Lagoon for "skalting", or that a buyer will be found even in Bluefields. Consequently some men consider it wiser to sell "sea bob" "wet" (unprocessed) to the more speculatively minded either in Kakabila or Pearl Lagoon, and make a smaller but more certain profit.

Coastal Miskitus are famed turtle hunters, and many Kakabila men are enthusiastic participants in this activity, which often takes them out to sea (*kabu*) in perilous weather conditions. During the dry season, in particular, those men who have access to larger sea-going "doris" head out in crews of three or four on one to two week expeditions outside the lagoon to the Keys, the tiny islands which lie off Nicaragua's Caribbean shore, specifically to catch turtles (*wli*), which are then brought back to the village and corralled in "crawls" along the "edge".<sup>16</sup> These animals are then butchered and the meat sold by the pound for cash, or taken to other, usually larger, villages where they are likewise butchered and sold as meat, or sold live to local entrepreneurs. Catching, butchering and the selling of turtles and turtle meat is difficult and often dangerous work which makes little money and takes its practitioners far from their families for days at a time.<sup>17</sup> During the dry season absence of "first class fish", however, turtling is one of the few sources of cash, and successful turtlers also acquire prestige as providers of meat.<sup>18</sup>

#### *The "town" (tauwan)*

Kakabila is conceptualised as a social entity with public spaces which in some sense are bounded and domesticated by the village's inhabitants. The "town" itself, as opposed to the "plantations" and "bush" around it, to which its members have rights of usufruct, is demarcated by the "wire," a barbed wire fence which runs from the lagoon beyond the last houses at the south end of the village (*mayara*), behind the houses and yards "to the back", until it reaches the

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<sup>16</sup> Those men who hunt turtle also look for "dry coconuts" (*kuku*) on the Keys. These are brought back to Kakabila and are sold for one córdoba each to women who grate them and cook with the oil.

<sup>17</sup> Occasionally when the turtle hunters return, the market for turtle meat and live turtles is glutted and the animals have to be butchered at home and the meat given away.

<sup>18</sup> As Amanda put, when her cousin had four turtles in a "crawl" and no other other villagers had any, "George feel stylish *takisa*" (George is showing off). Numbers following the names of particular individuals refer to their residences which are numbered in maps 5 and 6.

lagoon again at "the point" (*taura*) at the north end of the village. The "wire" has no specifically expressed symbolic significance, its purpose being to keep the village cattle out of the "plantations," but many villagers consider that it also marks the extent of the village as an inhabited space (map 5).

As a collection of dwellings Kakabila extends for approximately 300 yards along two roads. One, the "front road", is clearly discernible and runs along the escarpment overlooking the "vega" of the bank with houses on both sides about ten to thirty yards apart. The other, the "back road" lies at twenty to thirty yards inland.<sup>19</sup> The "back road" has fewer houses (these tend to be situated further apart) and in fact is better understood as a series of paths which connect the irregular line of houses situated inland from the village "front".

Kakabila people distinguish between different parts of the village: "uptown", "middletown" and "downtown". These divisions have no real importance in terms of the way villages understand the social organisation of Kakabila.<sup>20</sup> Essentially "uptown" is the northern section of the village, "middletown" is the central section and "downtown" is the southernmost.<sup>21</sup> Although the boundaries between the three districts are in no sense marked or obvious in any way, all villagers know exactly which houses and yards belong to which division (map 5). At the time of my arrival in Kakabila, "downtown" and "middletown" had fourteen houses each, while "uptown" had eighteen houses which tended to be spaced further apart from one another and have larger "yards". "Uptown" was thus spatially the largest of the three districts. However, villagers often separate the village into two divisions rather than three, and talk about "middletown" and "downtown" collectively as "downtown", in which case "downtown" is larger than "uptown".

The three way distinction between "uptown," "middletown" and "downtown" is the one most generally used in terms of conceptualising the village spatially. The dual distinction between "uptown" and greater "downtown", however, is the one which is sometimes used to foreground perceived differences between people from opposite ends of the village. "Downtown" villagers often say that "uptown" villagers, particularly those at the extreme north of the village up near

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<sup>19</sup> The "back" as a concept may be glossed as 'inland'. In some contexts it also means the land which immediately lies westward of the village. In others it refers to the Spanish speaking parts of Nicaragua on the Pacific side of the country (as in "the Spaniards to the back").

<sup>20</sup> Although occasionally community work teams organised by the "co-ordinator" (the elected village administrator) or by common consensus are divided into "uptown," "middletown" and "downtown" details.

<sup>21</sup> Nietschmann reports an identical division of Tasbapauni into 'uptown', 'middletown' and 'downtown' (Nietschmann 1973: 59)

"the point" (*taura*), are *wail* or *busia* (shy), because they live close to the "bush".<sup>22</sup> It is also said that they live in that part of the village specifically because it is so "lonesome". "Uptown" villagers, however, claim that they live better with their neighbours, and that "downtown" people argue with one another and get too involved in one another's business. "Uptown" people tend to project more of a Miskitu identity than "downtown" people. English is less commonly used here and there are more immigrants from "up the coast" (more northerly) Miskitu villages. For example, Mario (47), Jacinto (48), Negro (37), Kwasku (46), Findlay (41) and Faustino (44) are all "up the coast" Miskitus living in this part of the village; like Custober (30), who lives in "middletown", these men all came to Kakabila at various times via jobs in local companies and have settled with village women.<sup>23</sup> It is also in this part of the "town" that the two shamans live. "Downtown" people, however, particularly those in the real "downtown" south of "middletown" tend to focus more with the regional Creole identity and use English more. Most of the Creole immigrants to the village, for example, Miss Junie (2) from Marshall Point, Jones (19) from Pearl Lagoon, Renaldo (15) from Corn Island, and Miss Elma (22) from Brown Bank, also live in this part of the village, as do the village teachers and Sam (9) the Anglican "pastor".<sup>24</sup>

The ballfield lies in the "middletown" district, bordered by the "yards" to the west, east and south, and the school to the north. By common consent this is "community" space and nobody is entitled to build or plant on its fifty square yard or so expanse. In the dry season the village boys and adult men play baseball here with one another, and on odd Sundays visiting teams from other lagoon villages play the Kakabila men, on which occasions almost the whole village turns out to support the village team. Kakabila has two males teams, one for adult men (*waitna almuk*) and the other for adolescent boys (*wahma*), and the visitors often play both during the course of the day.<sup>25</sup> These events hold a great deal of interest for villagers as they provide a powerful arena for expressing intervillage and intergenerational rivalries, particularly

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<sup>22</sup> One "downtown" Creole boy of around ten once asked me why I was going "uptown" when the people up there were "simple".

<sup>23</sup> Mitchell (3) and Efraim (50) are "up the coast" Miskitus who have come more recently. Mitchell is an ex-Contra medic who has come to the village with his Kakabila-born wife, Albertina, while Efraim, originally from Honduras, and his "Spanish" wife are very recent immigrants from Muelle de los Bueyes.

<sup>24</sup> An exception is Miss Maggie (49), a Creole woman originally from San Juan del Norte. Nietschmann notes that in Tasbapauni, "uptown" is more Creole focussed, whereas "downtown" is more Miskitu in character (Nietschmann 1973: 59).

<sup>25</sup> Matches between the adult women (*mairin almuk*) and adolescent girls (*tiara*) are occasionally organised, and on rare occasions a women's team is put together by the village coach (a man) especially to play visiting women's teams.

when a "purse" is put at stake. In the intervillage games close attention is paid to the score with a referee appointed to ensure fair play, and games against special rivals, such as Raitipura, are likely to result in the losers accusing the winners of using "medicine" (*sika*) to influence the result. The spectators collect on the margins of the ballfields, close to houses 21 and 25 (see map 5). "Grabadors" (cassette recorders) blast out Reggae, Soca and Country and Western music, and interval refreshments are served for the visiting players.<sup>26</sup> If the team has come from Marshall Point, Orinoco or further away, they will stay the night, and the visitors are treated to an all night dance at the school hall later on.

The school is located directly north of the ballfield. It has two classrooms, situated in a single building constructed of concrete blocks and a zinc roof. These are not sufficient to accommodate all six grades over the day, and so first grade lessons have to be conducted in the Anglican church. First, second, third and fourth grade are taught in the morning between eight and one o'clock, while fifth and sixth grades are taught in the afternoon between half past one and half past six.<sup>27</sup> The sixth grade teacher is also the headmistress, and is responsible for the school's administration and the collection of fees. All the teachers are "empiricals", so called because they are technically untrained teachers who have not "bachillered" (graduated high-school), and during the school holiday between January and March they are expected to attend a teachers' workshop in Pearl Lagoon town in which they receive further education and teacher training. All the teachers except for one are natives of the village; the fifth grade teacher is from Pearl Lagoon town, spending her working days in Kakabila and her weekends at home. Four of the teachers including the headmistress are women. There used to be more male teachers, but it is impossible for a man to support a family on the teacher's salary of 450 córdobas a month, especially when teaching duties do not allow sufficient time to attend to one's "plantation" or go out gill-net fishing and catching shrimp.<sup>28</sup>

Directly north-east of the school and located near the north end of "middletown", is the "lumber"-built Anglican church. The smaller Catholic church, also constructed from "lumber" lies on the edge of the escarpment overlooking the "vega" towards the southern end of

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<sup>26</sup> Organising refreshments is the task of the home team captain. It is considered a matter of pride that these are at least as good as those served by the visitors, when they were the hosts.

<sup>27</sup> First grade is taught in the Anglican church, while third and fourth grade, owing to a village shortage of teachers, are allocated only two and a half hours' tuition each.

<sup>28</sup> The only male teacher in Kakabila while I was in the village, was able to do so because he came from a large and supportive family. He had an excellent working relationship with his father-in-law, who made money through selling sugar, flour, rice and other commodities in the village, and was once of the few village men who never drank rum.

"middletown" and affords a very good view of the lagoon during prayer (*prias*). In the "yard" behind the Catholic church is a wooden latrine built especially for visiting clerical dignitaries from Bluefields or the United States. Of the two churches (*prias watla*), the Anglican is a little larger, in terms of both its physical size and its membership, and the congregations, or at least the most active members, often express competitive feelings about the two churches. Towards the end of my period of fieldwork the village Catholics were building a cement church adjacent to the old wooden church, which was to become a guest house for visiting Catholic priests, in what seemed like an attempt to put to shame the recently completed and painted Anglican church.

Church services (*prias dingkaia*) routinely take place once or twice a day every Sunday. Occasionally, however, there are midweek services to celebrate religious holidays, such as Good Friday, New Year's Day and Christmas, and to greet visiting priests. Life crisis events, such as weddings (which always take place on Wednesday - Wednesday is for "weddin' day"), baptisms, mortuary rites, Christenings and Confirmations also take place at the churches, these being scheduled to take place when ordained priests, usually from Bluefields, visit Kakabila.<sup>29</sup> Occasionally Sunday services at one or both of the churches do not take place owing to sickness or an absence from the village by one the lay "pastors" but this is unusual, and Sundays rarely pass without at least one service at each church. Neither church has an ordained priest resident in the village. Instead both have lay "pastors", committed men who regularly conduct the services week after week. Both churches also have a committee whose members take responsibility for maintenance and for interacting with the Anglican or Catholic authorities in Bluefields, including a "doorman" (two in the case of the Catholic church), responsible for ringing the bell to call the members to worship. Sunday School takes place in the two churches, and is conducted by the village school teachers, according to denomination.<sup>30</sup>

The Anglican "pastor", Sam Patterson (9), is a young man in his early forties. He is by far the best educated man in the village, having attended school at the Colegia Morava in Bluefields, and he also lived in his father's village of Pearl Lagoon for much of his childhood. Though Sam's mother, *kuka* Sexa (16) is a Miskitu woman, his father was a Creole man, and he generally uses English, in day to day speech. The Catholic "pastor", Florentin Joseph, known as *dama* "Prophet" considers himself a real "Miskitu man". *Dama* "Prophet" is also a shaman of immense power. As a young man he was struck by lightning and lay dead for nine days,

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<sup>29</sup> In the case of the Anglican church weekday prayer meetings, in which church members meet to interpret the bible together, also sometimes take place.

<sup>30</sup> The Catholic church has a regular guitarist who accompanies the regular church and Sunday school congregation during hymn singing.

during which time *Dawan* (God) spoke to him and gave him both the power to dream cures for sickness, read the Bible (in spite of his never having gone to school), turn back hurricanes and bad weather with the aid of a calabash which he leaves at the lagoon shore when necessary, and predict certain future events.<sup>31</sup> The "Prophet" is not a *sukia*, the ordinary kind of Miskitu shaman, whose powers are acquired through an apprenticeship. Unlike the *sukia*, whose powers are limited and supposedly somewhat morally ambivalent, the powers of *Dama* "Prophet" are god-given and are exercised purely for the good.<sup>32</sup> At seventy-nine years old, *Dama* (as he is usually known) is the oldest and most respected man in the village. He is visited on a daily basis by the sick, Miskitus, Creoles and Mestizos, who come to his house from as far away as Bluefields and the Río Grande, and occasionally even wealthy visitors from Managua arrive by "panga" (motorboat) in search of a miracle cure. Within Kakabila, however, his charisma, while still powerful, is relatively routinised. As kinsman and "godfather" to many of the villagers, *Dama's* curative powers are occasionally called upon but are somewhat taken for granted. Nevertheless, nobody in Kakabila, whether Catholic or Anglican, in any way doubts his powers.<sup>33</sup>

Anglican and Catholic services are both conducted in English, and both feature a reading in Miskitu. The Creole and Creole-focussing Miskitu residents of the village, however, tend to go to the Anglican church, while the Catholic church, with its somewhat less ecclesiastically conventional services, tends to attract a more exclusively Miskitu congregation. This distinction, while quite noticeable, is not, however, absolute. People always go to church wearing their best clothes.<sup>34</sup> Many women also wear a piece of white cloth on top of their heads, and in church men sit in the benches to the left of the aisle, while women sit to the right,

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<sup>31</sup> The "Prophet" is a *Pasa Yapti* ("mother of the breeze"). Although he failed to predict or turn back Hurricane Joan in October 1988, this has done nothing to diminish the awe in which he is held. For more on the Miskitu institution of *Pasa Yapti* or *okuli*, see MC (1877, vol. 30: 283), MM (1894, vol. 2: 416-417), Conzemius (1932: 142-144), Heath (1950: 27), Helms (1971: 183), Ortega and Vega (1981: 29), Von Oertzen et al. (1990) and Garcia (1991: 92-95).

<sup>32</sup> Kakabila does also have a *sukia* named Mistalin (34). Most ethnographic accounts of the Miskitu, even the earliest, contain discussions of the *sukia*. For two of the most interesting, see Velásquez (1980) and Chow Espinoza (1987).

<sup>33</sup> There are no shamans in Asang because the villagers are very conscious of forming a Christian community' (Helms 1971: 71).

<sup>34</sup> One Creole man, Renaldo (15), told me that when he lived in Kara, a Miskitu village on the Río Grande, the inhabitants went to church barefoot in their working clothes as a mark of humility. Alfredo thought this was rather scandalous, however.

practices which Mary Helms attributes to the influence of the Moravian church (Helms 1971: 190). Generally it is only adults who attend church because children attend Sunday School.<sup>35</sup>

The cemetery (*raiti*) lies to the south of the village and is located in an area surrounded by "bush" almost immediately outside the "wire". It serves for villagers of all denominations, and all village residents are entitled to be buried there. On the whole the cemetery remains untended except for "Semana Santa" (the week ending on Easter Sunday), when villagers make a special effort to clean up the graves of the members of their families in anticipation of an interdenominational service which takes place at the cemetery on Easter morning. During this period villagers mutter to one another how *wailis* ("worthless") they are for not looking after the cemetery, because 'after all, this is our real home'. The cemetery is feared at night, particularly by children, and babies in particular are thought to be at risk from *wlasa* (ghosts) in the vicinity of the cemetery, and I saw one normally placid man get very angry at a neighbour's child for bringing her toddler sister "*raiti sait*" (near the cemetery) as night was falling.

#### *The houses*

Although there are also three cement houses in the village, as well as a few bamboo houses with papta leaf roofs, houses (*utla*) in Kakabila are typically made of planks of wood or "lumber" (*tat*) nailed to wooden frames, and are roofed with corrugated zinc. Most were made of bamboo and leaf until up relatively recently, and those still existing are exactly like the ones pictured in the nineteenth century American Museum of Natural History drawing "Mosquito village, Pearl Lagoon" reproduced in Kirchhoff (1948: opp. 228).<sup>36</sup> About eight years ago, IDSIM, the developmental arm of the regionally powerful Moravian church, began a project which donated the materials necessary to build wooden or "lumber" houses with zinc roofs, sending to the village two North Americans with the expertise to initiate the project. All that was required from the beneficiaries was their labour in "backing" (carrying) the "lumber" out of the "bush". The houses were then built by the villagers according to designs which the North Americans showed them, and it is this design which now predominates.<sup>37</sup> Typically, "lumber"

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<sup>35</sup> Sunday school is discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>36</sup> There is evidence that at one time some Indians, particularly those living in the interior, lived in long houses (Conzemius 1932: 31; Pijoan 1946: 18).

<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately this project came to an abrupt halt when IDSIM ran out of funds, allegedly the consequence of a long history of financial mismanagement, with the result that most of the Kakabila houses (like those in many of the neighbouring villages) remain unfinished to a greater or lesser degree. During my period of fieldwork, the householders of Kakabila and the neighbouring villages were approached by another NGO, CEPAD, with a scheme to advance building materials, such as zinc, nails, hinges, and motorsaw fuel, on an easy terms no interest payback schedule of installments, on the understanding that the work would be done quickly. The



houses are raised upon houseposts about four feet off the ground and are about fifteen feet square.<sup>38</sup> The roof generally slopes down about ten feet off the house floor down to the front and the back of the house and rises to about fourteen feet off the housefloor in the middle of the house.

"Lumber" houses are fronted by "verandas", the main location for sociability, on which visitors sit, usually on benches or the veranda floor. The house itself is generally partitioned into a hall area, located immediately inside the front door, and two or three bedrooms. Communally owned household property such as radio cassette recorders, clocks, kerosene lamps, Miskitu language bibles, pictures cut out of magazines, bibles, and calenders are kept in the hall, and are put up with nails or hooks, or are simply allowed to rest on the table which invariably stands in a corner. Attached to the crossbeams up above are Christmas decorations, left up there the whole year until they are replaced the following Christmas.<sup>39</sup> Personal belongings are kept in the bedrooms, which usually each contain one, sometimes two wooden platforms (*krikri*) about three feet high which serve as beds. At the foot of these are sacks in which clothes are kept. Generally there is one bedroom for the husband and wife to whom the house belongs, one for the household boys and one for the household girls. If the house has a daughter (or son) with a conjugal partner, one of the bedrooms is given up to them and the boys are made to sleep on the floor in the hall. Visitors do not generally enter the house unless specifically invited, the house being little used except for sleeping and for storing household belongings.

Younger house owners tend to favour the composite house and kitchen (*kisin*), building the kitchen at the back of the house behind the bedroom area, or at the side adjacent to the hall. Older houseowners, however, tend to prefer the house and kitchen to be separate structures, and where this is the case, the kitchen is usually made of bamboo and papta palm leaves. Inside the kitchen stands the *kubus*, a large cooking platform. There is also a washing platform, a large sheltered wooden window ledge, designed so that dirty water may drain outside, and

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beneficiaries of this scheme are those householders finishing their houses, and those men who have registered with them as wishing to build new houses. For additional details, see Kasch et al. (1987: 32-33, 95).

<sup>38</sup> Some houses have separate kitchens. Others, composite houses, have a kitchen at the back as part of the same structure. These composite houses are generally about ten feet longer than those with separate kitchens.

<sup>39</sup> In each of the two houses most forcefully projecting a Creole identity, there is a set of four rocking chairs, and in some of the more affluent or well groomed halls, there are shelves made especially for ornaments. In these wealthier Creole houses knitted doilies, known as "towel", rest upon the radio cassette recorder and other possessions of value. In less status-conscious houses sacks of rice are also kept in the hall during the months immediately after the rice harvest.

plates, cutlery and kitchen implements are washed here, as well as hands and mouths after the meal in a plastic bowl left there for the purpose. Most kitchens also contain a bench and table used for eating and another on which food is prepared, on which plastic buckets used for transporting and storing water stand, while on the kitchen walls hang *dikwa* (large metal cooking pots of varying sizes).<sup>40</sup> Machetes and often axes, macanas, hoes, paddles, a sail and a jib, as well as a kerosene lamp, are also to be found, the longer items resting on the kitchen crossbeams overhead.

The kitchen is considered the domain of the most senior resident female (*kuka*), and decisions relating to matters to do with it are her province. Thus if someone from another house approaches her husband to borrow a kitchen implement or some foodstuffs from the kitchen, he or she will be told that they must "ask the cook". The kitchen is also an area of informal sociality to which visitors are entertained, and gossip often takes place here because it is less public than that other forum for sociality, the veranda. Anybody may enter the kitchen of another household, though it is usually assumed that to do so implies that one has come on an errand or for a specific purpose. Consequently visitors often enter a strange kitchen with a gambit, such as a request for a cup of drinking water.

The house and kitchen are situated in the "yard" (*lata*). This area belongs to the members of the house by virtue of the fact that they originally cleared it (*irbaia*) of "bush" or undergrowth, or received permission to occupy it by others who relinquished a claim to it. "Yard" boundaries are not marked by fences and the only way to distinguish the boundaries of particular "yards" is either by looking for the margins of the area cleared or, where two yards are contiguous, by observing who works in which area.<sup>41</sup> The kinds of work which go on in the yard are typically the maintenance of turtle nets and gill-nets, drying, fanning and threshing rice and "sea bob", hanging out washed clothes on lines, burning rubbish, occasional outdoor cooking of calipee, cockles and so on, butchering, weighing and selling meat, and carpentry work.

Residents plant fruit trees in their "yards" to which co-residents and close kin have exclusive rights of usufruct.<sup>42</sup> Usually these are cashew (*kasu*) and mango (*mangu*), sometimes

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<sup>40</sup> The well appointed kitchen may also have a wooden plate rack on the wall.

<sup>41</sup> It is generally assumed that only the members of the house and close relatives have the right to work in the "yard". Anybody has the right to walk through provided that they stick to the paths which run through and which are recognised by villagers as public thoroughfares.

If the members of a household relocate to another part of the village, it is understood that they surrender their "yard". However they still theoretically have exclusive rights of usufruct to the trees on their old "yard" at least

breadfruit (*bredfrut*), "starapple", "plum", "apple", and "stinking toe". Bushes with culinary or curative properties, as well as "greenskins" (bananas, plantains, "kosto" and "punga") are usually fenced off to prevent cattle depredations.<sup>43</sup> The "yard" is also the area in which ideally the animals owned by house members are found. Most houses have several "fowl", including chickens (*kalila*) and turkeys ("toiky" or *kalitara*) (which are often owned by children as baptism presents) and several dogs (*yul*), which are occasionally used for hunting. A few houses have one or two pigs (*kwirku*) or a cat (*pus*), while a few men even own the odd head of cattle (*bip*), the latter generally grazing around the village with the "community herd" of sixteen cows and a bull.<sup>44</sup>

### "The Cuenca"

Kakabila is one of twelve villages or "communities" located around Pearl Lagoon. The others are the town of Pearl Lagoon itself, Haulover, Raitipura, Awas, Brown Bank, La Fé, Square Point, Orinoco, Marshall Point, Tasbapauni and Set Net Point (see map 4). For many of the inhabitants of these villages the lagoon forms a universe whose physical boundaries are determined by the fact that the lagoon is almost enclosed. Marlyn (48), for example, told me that when she was a little girl, she thought that the lagoon was the whole world.<sup>45</sup> East of the lagoon lies the sea, while westwards, as far as many lagoon residents are concerned, is "pure bush" all the way to the unknown and distant "Spanish" towns on the Pacific coast of the country.<sup>46</sup> Intervillage transport for lagoon dwellers is generally waterborne, and only the freight boats which carry paying passengers to and from the much larger towns of Bluefields and Kukra to the south, provide easy regular access to the world outside the lagoon. The

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which theoretically remain family property until they are sold or there is nobody in the village left to inherit them.

<sup>43</sup> Most house "yards" have one or two additional structures. Some have bathrooms made from second-hand or waste "lumber", two households have "lumber" latrines (*klasit*), a few have bamboo chicken coops, and one enterprising householder was even building an oven in his "yard" to bake bread during my stay in the village. Apart from the three community wells, two of which have mechanised pumps, all wells (*li unta*) are privately constructed and owned, and are operated with a bucket or can on a rope. A great many houses, however, do not own a well, and their members by arrangement "pull water" (*pankaia*) from those belonging to neighbours on the understanding that they will contribute to the maintenance.

<sup>44</sup> This herd was given to the people Kakabila by UNHCR after the war.

<sup>45</sup> On one occasion I took a freight boat down to Bluefields from Pearl Lagoon. On board was a fairly "ageable" (mature) Creole man from Brown Bank. Some of my friends were gently teasing him that he would get lost in Bluefields, because he had never or hardly ever been there, despite the fact that Brown Bank and Bluefields are only thirty miles apart.

<sup>46</sup> People from distant and unimaginable places are often referred to in English as "the cruel people".

population of the lagoon is relatively small (probably 6,500 is a reasonable but necessarily rough estimate),<sup>47</sup> and almost everyone knows everyone else, at least by sight. The lagoon therefore constitutes a moral community, whose members are bound by ties of kinship, friendship, shared norms and shared experience, and it is in this sense of the lagoon constituting a moral and social universe, that its inhabitants refer themselves collectively as "The Cuenca".

Cuenca people inhabit a world of shared meanings. By virtue of their common experience of the lagoon and "the back", the land behind the lagoon where "plantations" and "bush" are situated, they share an extremely good knowledge of their eco-system and the economy to which it is articulated. Fishing, shrimping and turtling, in particular, activities in which most people from the Cuenca villages participate at one or more stages of their lives, serve to reinforce Cuenca people's sense of sharing a common world, especially among men,<sup>48</sup> and because lagoon-oriented activities, such as fishing and shrimping are performed by men, it is the men who are most conscious of their Cuenca identity.<sup>49</sup> Fishing and shrimping, in particular, defines the Cuenca as a community, for unlike agricultural activities, which is seen as a village-specific concern, these are activities which takes place in the lagoon itself, a resource perceived as commonly owned by Cuenca dwellers. Furthermore, unlike farming, which is

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<sup>47</sup> Ecotextura (1988) estimate the population of the lagoon at 5,223, while CIDCA (1989) estimates 4,895. In spite of the fact that the Ecotextura figure (unlike mine or CIDCA's) includes the Mestizos of Pueblo Nuevo and the Wawashan River, I feel that both estimates are far too low given that many residents have now returned to the lagoon following the cessation of Contra hostilities. This is well illustrated by the fact that their population figures for Kakabila - 204 (Ecotextura 1988) and 174 (CIDCA 1989) - are much lower than the 280 which I recorded.

<sup>48</sup> The men of six of lagoon villages and the women of one village, for example, form seven co-operatives, which have grouped together to form a fishermen's union. All the larger villages are represented except for Tasbapauni. This union is working together with a Norwegian development agency called Ayuda Popular de Noruega (APN), who have donated the fishermen their own fish processing plant. APN has also helped to set up the union's management structure, giving regular seminars in Pearl Lagoon on law, marketing, gill net fishing and the environment, and has provided legal help, getting the union and the fish plant, properly registered according to Nicaraguan law. APN has stressed that the unity of the Pearl Lagoon fishermen is the only thing which can protect them against the private fish plants and boats, which they say are exploiting the fishermen, either through low prices for fish or through the "trust" system, by which fishermen are paid only when the buyer sells their catches in Bluefields or elsewhere.

<sup>49</sup> During the Atlantic coast regional baseball tournament of 1993, which took place in at the Pearl Lagoon stadium, the Kakabila men supported the Pearl Lagoon team, which had been selected to represent the Cuenca. Many Kakabila women, however, said that they would have preferred to win one of the "up the coast" teams made up predominantly of Miskitus.

primarily a subsistence activity, fishing and shrimping bring Cuenca dwellers in common into contact with an outside world of buyers, prices and markets.

In spite of the fact that for many of the lagoon villages' inhabitants the Cuenca constitutes a community in itself, it is clear there are also factors, both sociological, cultural and geographical, which work to divide the Cuenca into smaller units, notably as "communities". To begin with, although physical geography in some respects unites the Cuenca as far as many of its inhabitants are concerned, it also divides the Cuenca into smaller units coterminous with the villages themselves. For example, Kakabila, in common with other lagoon villages, is well defined as a discrete collection of houses, all of which lie very close to one another. Although Kakabila is only two miles or so from its nearest neighbour Brown Bank, the two "communities" are separated by thick "bush" and swamp, and transport between the two is only possible by "dori".<sup>50</sup> Consequently the two "communities" are clearly differentiated in the minds of villagers by the facts of geography. From Kakabila it is forty minutes at least to Brown Bank by "dori", while a visit to Pearl Lagoon seven miles away, takes at least an hour and a half, even with relatively favourable weather conditions. Visiting other villages means getting ready "dori", sail, jib, paddle, seat boards and bailer, and checking the weather and the wind, and every trip out of the "community" therefore requires a set of cognitive calculations which further serves to isolate Kakabila from its neighbours.

However the perceived differences between the villages are more than geographical; they are also conceptualised in socio-cultural terms.<sup>51</sup> The great majority of inhabitants of Kakabila consider Kakabila to be a Miskitu village, and themselves to be Miskitu or "Indian" people (*Miskitu uplika*). Almost all those born in the village speak Miskitu (as well as English), and most consider Miskitu people to constitute a "nation" essentially different to those other

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<sup>50</sup> Although odd paths connect some neighbouring Cuenca villages such as Orinoco and Marshall Point, there are no roads or tracks circumnavigating the lagoon, and transport between lagoon villages is possible only by "dori", "panga" (motorboat), or, if the village has a wharf, by freight boat. The small and mainly Mestizo village of Pueblo Nuevo, situated a little way up the Wawashan, is very small and is not generally included in the inventory of Cuenca villages by lagoon inhabitants. It is one of several recently formed communities in the Bluefields and Pearl Lagoon hinterlands said to be founded by demobilised Contras.

<sup>51</sup> What follows is a discussion of these socio-cultural differences as they are formulated by Kakabila people. I do not claim, or indeed believe, that the discourses discussed below are shared by the inhabitants of other Cuenca villages or indeed by all Kakabila people; but they are, I believe, dominant discourses in Kakabila, and since it is Kakabila I am specifically concerned with in this thesis, I make no apologies for privileging them.

"nations" whose members do not speak Miskitu.<sup>52</sup> For Kakabila people, the Cuenca population is reckoned to consist mainly of at least three different "nations" or ethnic groups each of which is associated with particular villages, and Kakabila, with its predominantly bilingual Miskitu speaking and English speaking population, is one of those identified by villagers (as well as non-villagers) as essentially Miskitu.<sup>53</sup> Kakabila people know that the Miskitu are a numerous people but are also aware of the fact that the Cuenca Miskitus constitute an enclave, and that the great mass of Miskitu villages lie far to the north "up the coast" beyond the Río Grande. As informants put it "we are the small Miskitu", the "*waupasa kat Miskitu uplika*" (Miskitu people from the south wind"). In spite of the fact that Kakabila people consider themselves to be part of a Miskitu minority in the Cuenca, which is numerically dominated by monolingual English-speaking Creoles and Garifunas.<sup>54</sup> this does not, however, mean that they consider themselves to be the same as either the other Cuenca Miskitus or indeed the so-called "up the coast" Miskitus living up beyond the Río Grande. In other words most Kakabila people make important distinctions between themselves and other Miskitus.

The most strikingly different of the Cuenca villages, from the viewpoint of most Kakabila people, is the bustling and cosmopolitan English speaking and Creole populated town of Pearl Lagoon.<sup>55</sup> "Lagoon", as it is usually called, exerts a powerful influence over the other lagoon villages, and particularly over those in the lower part of the lagoon like Kakabila. Most of the freight and passenger boats, for example, which go down (*iwi waia*) to the regional capital Bluefields some twenty-five miles to the south depart from Pearl Lagoon, and certainly all the

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<sup>52</sup> A Kakabila inventory of these other "nations" might typically include some of the following categories: "Creole", "Negro", *Karibe uplika* (Garifuna), *upla siksa* (black people), *Ispail uplika* (Mestizo), "Spaniards" (Mestizo), and *upla pihni* (white people), *Meriki uplika* (American people) and "kems" (speakers of North American or British English). The most significant of these categories are discussed at length below.

<sup>53</sup> Kakabila is a diglossic community and, unusually for the Mosquito Coast as a whole, all those inhabitants native to the village speak Miskitu and Nicaraguan English, both of which are in daily use. Nicaraguan English is the first language for the 25,000 odd Creoles living mainly in Bluefields, Corn Island, Kukra Hill, the Pearl Lagoon basin, and a number of smaller communities to the south (map 3), as well as for the 1,500 odd Black Caribs living mainly in the Pearl Lagoon basin. There are also small Creole concentrations in Puerto Cabezas and the mining towns of Bonanza, Siuna and Rosita in to the north. (Hale and Gordon 1987: 21, 23).

Nicaraguan English is often spoken by individuals in Miskitu villages, but it is only in a very few - mainly those like Kakabila which are situated in the predominantly Creole Pearl Lagoon basin - that both languages are spoken with equal proficiency.

<sup>54</sup> Many Cuenca dwellers speak fluent or excellent Spanish. However, Spanish is not a language native to the Cuenca.

<sup>55</sup> Population approximately 2,000.

boats coming down from higher up the lagoon make a point of stopping there. Pearl Lagoon is the administrative capital of the Cuenca, with an Alcaldía, a police station and a Ministry of Education office. It also has stores at which one can buy commercially produced foodstuffs, clothes and jewelry. It has a lumber mill, three fish buying plants, a clinic, two or three "ranches" (bars), a guesthouse (at which visiting officials, businessmen, tourists and anthropologists stay) and even a baseball stadium.<sup>56</sup> Although there are no roads and cars, Pearl Lagoon has electricity and television. There are people who live in the town that have travelled overseas, even as far as the United States, and one or two residents have obtained a university education in Managua. There are rich men in the town sporting gold rings and neckchains, who own stores, fish boats and fish plants, as well as residents who seem rich because of the remittances sent to them "from out" (overseas) by relatives.

Pearl Lagoon also has a secondary school and therefore offers those children, whose parents can afford it, the opportunity to obtain secondary education, and some Kakabila parents even manage to send a child or two there for a couple of grades. The English speaking Pearl Lagoon town people are thus equated with the sophisticated Creoles of the even more cosmopolitan town of Bluefields. To people from Kakabila, where none of these amenities exist, Pearl Lagoon seems very "advanced", and so although many Kakabila people resent the fact that they are "exploited" by Pearl Lagoon through the taxes on their fishing catches,<sup>57</sup> by the expropriation of donations marked for Kakabila, and by the alleged unwillingness of the town's mayor to provide any facilities or services for the small Cuenca "communities" under the town's jurisdiction, many are also in awe of Pearl Lagoon. Some Kakabila children are supposedly so awestruck by Pearl Lagoon, that they are "ashamed to eat" in the company of its townspeople, lest it be thought that they "eat ugly". When Kakabila people go to Pearl Lagoon, they always make sure that they are wearing shoes and better clothes. As soon as the "dori" has landed, women go straight to friends' houses to change out of their rougher clothes worn for the trip across the lagoon before venturing into town, often dragging their children along with them so that they too might get changed. For example, Amanda (12, a normally very down-to-earth woman, who in her haste to get a "pass" (ride) across to Pearl Lagoon had not brought her shoes, asked me if I thought it was alright for her to walk around Pearl Lagoon barefoot.

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<sup>56</sup> Tasbapauni and Orinoco towards the north end of the lagoon have their own clinics, wharves and secondary schools. Tasbapauni has some stores. There is also a clinic in Brown Bank.

<sup>57</sup> These taxes are exercised by the Alcaldia's tax on the foreign fishboats to whom the Kakabila fishermen sell.

The other sizeable village in the lagoon is Tasbapauni,<sup>58</sup> a Miskitu village at the north end of the lagoon peninsula. Tasbapauni, along with tiny Set Net Point,<sup>59</sup> differs from the other villages around the lagoon in that its economy is more oriented towards the sea than the lagoon. It is also in regular contact by sea with the more northerly Miskitu villages on the Rio Grande, and as such is seen as a conduit for the unknown and therefore largely unwelcome. For Kakabila people Tasbapauni is by far the furthest of the other lagoon villages, and for most villagers there is little reason to go there other than to do occasional business or visit friends and acquaintances. While at least one Kakabila "dori" goes to Pearl Lagoon almost every day, visits to Tasbapauni are relatively rare, and in fact there are quite a few Kakabila villagers who have never been there. For many Kakabila people Tasbapauni is a place to be feared. Its younger inhabitants are often characterised as violent and over-addicted to the marijuana and cocaine, brought to the region by "mafia", and it is sometimes said that some of the worst abuses committed locally in the Contra War, were performed by Tasbapauni boys, many of them are now allegedly afraid to come to Kakabila. These criticisms, however, are not generally extended to the so-called "older race" (older generation). Tasbapauni people over forty or so years old tend to speak Miskitu rather than English and this places them to some extent within the moral pale.<sup>60</sup>

The characteristics ascribed to the inhabitants of the Pearl Lagoon and Tasbapauni seem mainly connected with the fact that these villages are larger and their inhabitants especially well connected to the world outside the lagoon. Kakabila people's perceptions of the inhabitants of the other smaller Cuenca villages, however, are coloured by more locally-specific considerations, notably those of what may be glossed 'ethnic identity' ("nation" or *razika*). Thus, people from Kakabila, Raitipura, Awas, Tasbapauni, Set Net Point and Haulover are Miskitu "nation";<sup>61</sup> people from Pearl Lagoon, Brown Bank and Marshall Point are Creole "nation"; and Orinoco, La Fé and Square Point people are *Karibe* "nation". However, although the Creoles of Marshall Point and Brown Bank, and the *Karibe* (Garifuna) of Orinoco, La Fé and Square Point are also considered Negroes or "niggers"; the Creoles of Pearl Lagoon are

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<sup>58</sup> Population approximately 1,500.

<sup>59</sup> Population approximately 30.

<sup>60</sup> Tasbapauni people supposedly speak the same variety of Miskitu as Kakabila people. Evidently Tasbapauni had a uniquely English speaking population as early as the late nineteenth century (MC 1875, vol. 29: 349).

<sup>61</sup> Language, in conjunction with village origins, is also a determinant of "nation" membership, and there are people who claim that the inhabitants of Haulover and younger Tasbapauni people are Creoles rather than Miskitu because they no longer speak the Miskitu language (see also Kasch et al. 1987: 49, 150).



generally thought not to be so.<sup>62</sup> Pearl Lagoon is a much older town, whose "first time" occupants were Europeans, 'Creoles, Mulattoes and Samboes' (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 108); thus the present occupants are acknowledged to be "mix". The inhabitants of these smaller villages, however, are relatively recent immigrants to the lagoon. The so-called Negro Creoles arrived in the lagoon at the end of the eighteenth century to work on the coffee, cotton and sugarcane plantations of the Wawashan, and on a stock and provisioning raising ranch named Jupiter's Head (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 107-8), and founded the villages of Marshall Point and Brown Bank,<sup>63</sup> while the *Karibé* or Garífuna came at the end of the last century to work for the logging companies operating on the Wawashan, eventually founding the villages of Orinoco and La Fé (Davidson 1980; Perry 1991).<sup>64</sup>

As far as Kakabila people are concerned, Creoles, whether Negroes or not, subscribe to a particular set of beliefs and practices. Thus the inhabitants of Brown Bank and Marshall Point share, along with the inhabitants of Pearl Lagoon, a body of specifically Creole customs and beliefs putatively held in common by the greater part of the Central American English speaking diaspora (see map 2, and Parsons 1954). Sometimes Kakabila people essentialise Creoles as ungenerous (*mihta karna*), over-interested in money, fraudulent and given to cheating,<sup>65</sup> while the perception of a Creole belief that Miskitus are "wild" and given to "obeah" (sorcery) has led some Kakabila Miskitus to express the feeling that Creoles are hypocrites given to moralising, as one man put it, "funny people". It is also said that Creoles, although good to their "families" do not respect (*rispik munaia*) their in-laws properly as Indians do (see also Hale 1994: 158).

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<sup>62</sup> This distinction in the Pearl Lagoon context has an historical origin. The descendants of the predominantly Jamaican blacks who arrived to work for the big companies on the coast around the turn of the century, are now generally identified in Bluefields and other parts of Nicaragua as Creoles (map 2). However, at one time, at one time long established Creoles in Bluefields referred to these new arrivals as Negroes, and were careful to distance themselves from the newcomers, whom they saw as being different in kind to themselves. Many Kakabila people, however, still consider that there is an essential difference between Creoles and Negroes (see Gordon 1987: 137). See Lefever (1992) for an ethnographic account of a predominantly Creole village on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica.

<sup>63</sup> My estimates for the population of Brown Bank and Marshall Point are 150 and 250 respectively. Kakabila people claimed that the population of the former was in decline.

<sup>64</sup> I estimate the populations for Orinoco and La Fé as being around 800 and 250 respectively. The tiny Creole and Garífuna village of Square Point which has been rebuilt anew probably has few than 40 inhabitants.

<sup>65</sup> The influence wielded by a few Creoles within local branches of non-governmental aid agencies and the regional administrations of Bluefields and Pearl Lagoon, combined a universal perception that funds associated with these institutions are mismanaged, has also contributed to the belief (see also Nietschmann 1973: 59, and Hale 1994: 124).

Nevertheless, most Kakabila Miskitus count many Creoles among their friends, even kin and "compadres", and it should be emphasized that it is only in contexts of opposition between Miskitu and Creole that these views tend to be expressed.

In spite of the fact that *Karibe* people are considered Negroes, they are never considered Creoles, for although like Creoles they speak English as their first language,<sup>66</sup> they do not, Kakabila people say, have Creole "ways". It is often said, for example, that *Karibe* people are criminals and that they have little respect for Nicaraguan law. Wild rumours of theft and violence in Orinoco are fairly frequent, and Marlyn (48), for one, told me that she was always scared when Orinoco men came to the village. It is also said that *Karibe* people, including the women, are given to drunkenness and that they are voracious sexual predators.<sup>67</sup> *Karibe* parties are characterised as being orgiastic affairs, both intriguing and a little frightening. Consequently Kakabila *wahma* (adolescent males) who go to Orinoco to play baseball are cautioned, half jokingly and half seriously, by elder men to be careful. Sometimes it is suggested that "science" or sorcery is practised in Orinoco, a belief that is probably reinforced by reports of the *walagallo*, a dramatic Garifuna healing ritual held periodically. While Kakabila Miskitus generally regard Creoles as being different to themselves but relatively comprehensible, they tend to consider *Karibe* people as being rather strange.

Haulover<sup>68</sup> situated a one mile walk south-east of Pearl Lagoon town is said to be a Miskitu town which has become Creole. Its inhabitants are said to be "Indians" who have "lost their language", and in varying contexts they are referred to as being both Indian and Creole. Haulover people, particularly their notorious "old head" (elder) Mackie Tinkam, are known throughout the Cuenca for their hostility to Pearl Lagoon (with whom they have a land dispute), and many Haulover boys, it is said, fought in the Contra War as *unta uplika* ("bushmen") against "Sandino" (Sandinismo), because they perceived the inhabitants of Pearl Lagoon to be over-collaborative with the FSLN government.<sup>69</sup> It is partly because of this that Haulover boys are unpopular in Kakabila. This long standing antagonism towards Pearl Lagoon town has provided Haulover people with an forum on which to project their Indian identity in spite of the fact that there are no living villagers who actually speak the Miskitu language.

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<sup>66</sup> Only a few old people in these villages still speak the Garifuna language. Garifuna, however, is still spoken in villages in Honduras, Guatemala and Belize.

<sup>67</sup> Kakabila women in contrast never drink alcohol and are rarely promiscuous, according to villagers.

<sup>68</sup> Population about 1,000.

<sup>69</sup> For Kakabila people, another distinctive feature of Haulover is that many of its people are "Saturday people" (Seventh Day Adventists).

Like Tasbapauni, Haulover is a dubiously Miskitu "community" as far as Kakabila people are concerned (see also Hale 1987: 47-48). Raitipura and its sister village Awas,<sup>70</sup> however, are Miskitu speaking, and their inhabitants are acknowledged by Kakabila people to be fully Miskitu. Nevertheless, many Kakabila people are rather snobbish about Raitipura. Some say, for example, that the inhabitants of Raitipura and Awas (known collectively and pejoratively as "Purians")<sup>71</sup> speak a debased form of Miskitu, characterised by strange words and an illegitimate "mix up" of Miskitu words and syntax with English. Linked with this, Kakabila people also often take a dim view of the moral state of Raitipura and sometimes characterise its inhabitants as lazy, drunken, thieving and giving to stealing and begging.<sup>72</sup> Thus while Kakabila people consider their own village to be a well ordered community, they present Raitipura as being somewhat dysfunctional.

#### Case # 1

When a thirteen year old Raitipura girl became pregnant, Kakabila people said that this was typical "Purian" behaviour. Kakabila girls at that age go to school, it was said; they do not get pregnant. The disdain Kakabila people felt about this pregnancy was not the young age of the girl. Indeed many older Kakabila women became first pregnant at this age themselves. What they found scandalous was that the girl could have got several more years of education.

#### Case # 2

During my fieldwork, a particularly grisly murder took place in Raitipura, which so disgusted Kakabila people, that it was agreed that no "Purians" were henceforth to be allowed to come to Kakabila. This restriction was never enforced. This murder brought back memories for some Kakabila people of another murder that "Purians" had supposedly committed some years earlier. I was told that during the night the culprits had hidden the victim of this earlier murder near Tuba Creek, the southern border of Kakabila territory, so that the police would suspect Kakabila people.

In spite of the fact that they speak the same language, Kakabila people do not consider themselves particularly close to the so-called "up the coast" Miskitus living north of the lagoon. On the contrary most Kakabila people feel much closer to their non-Miskitu Cuenca neighbours,

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<sup>70</sup> Awas is a short distance across a creek from Raitipura. Raitipura is gradually being claimed by the lagoon, with the result that Raitipura people are gradually relocating to Awas. In most contexts Raitipura and Awas are considered one community, and in fact most people simply refer to Raitipura when referring to both villages. I estimate the population for the two villages taken together at 250.

<sup>71</sup> The "Purians" refer to Kakabila people as the "*baila wala wina uplika*" (the people from the other side).

<sup>72</sup> When donations arrive at Raitipura, it is said that the "Purians" sell them in Pearl Lagoon in order to raise money to buy rum.

whom at least they feel they know on a personal basis. "Up the coast" Miskitu visitors, as unknown entities, are considered unpredictable and threatening and are always closely watched by the older Kakabila men, far more so that are visitors from the other villages in the Cuenca or from Bluefields and Kukra to the south, places which are relatively well known at first hand by most adult villagers. Some Kakabila people consider "up the coast" Miskitus, particularly those from the *Wanks* (Río Coco) and Honduras (places considered especially far away), to be *puisin uplika* (poison people) and dangerous sorcerers.

Although, there are Miskitu speaking villages (Karawala, Sandy Bay Sirpi, Walpa Siksa, Kara) immediately to the north of the upper lagoon near the mouth of the Río Grande, these places are very remote for Kakabila people who are generally dependent on "dori" transport. In fact few Kakabila people have ever been north of the Cuenca villages. Situated on the landward side of the lagoon, Kakabila is badly situated to receive visits from the "up the coast" Miskitu "catboats"<sup>73</sup> who generally have little reason to enter the lagoon.<sup>74</sup> There is a channel between the lagoon and the Río Grande via Top Lock Lagoon, and occasional freight boats, containing "up the coast" passengers from the Río Grande dock at Orinoco, Pearl Lagoon and Haulover for short stops in between Karawala and Bluefields. These passers-through generally have little reason to disembark.

Although there are Miskitu minorities in the larger Mestizo- and Creole-dominated towns of Bluefields, El Bluff and Kukra to the south, the Cuenca Miskitu villages of Kakabila, Raitipura and Awas are the southernmost, and probably most linguistically isolated of all the villages which constitute the Miskitu speaking diaspora. This isolation from the other Miskitu villages is further compounded by the fact that whereas the Cuenca Miskitus are part of the Bluefields-centred regional political economy whose centre of gravity lies to the south, the "up the coast" Miskitus are politically and economically dependent on the northern regional capital of Puerto Cabezas, and have relatively little to do with Bluefields.

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<sup>73</sup> The "catboat" is a particularly large kind of sea-going "dori", typically about thirty foot long and about five feet wide.

<sup>74</sup> These closest most "up the coast" "catboats" come to the lagoon is when they are visiting Tasbapauni, or when they are heading out to hunt turtle on the Pearl Keys (map 4) or sell turtle meat on Corn Island (map 1). Tasbapauni at one time was in all likelihood one route through which influences from other Miskitu villages to the north reached Kakabila. Nowadays, however many Tasbapauni people no longer use the Miskitu language, preferring to identify themselves as English speaking Creoles. The effect of this is that the Miskitu villages in the Pearl Lagoon basin, such as Kakabila, are effectively cut off from the great block of Miskitu villages to the north, and it is only when the Kakabila men go hunting turtle for week-or-so-long trips to the Keys between January and April, that they can expect to encounter "up the coast" men.

Fully bilingual in English and Miskitu, Cuenca Miskitus are further able to distinguish themselves from "up the coast" Miskitus, many of whom speak little or no English. This, of course, enables Cuenca Miskitus, including the inhabitants of Kakabila, to pass as Creoles rather than Miskitus if they feel they need to, and in fact many Kakabila do pass for Creole when they are in Bluefields.<sup>75</sup> In addition to the obvious advantages of passing for Creole in Bluefields and other towns, Kakabila people are also sharply aware that the Cuenca varieties of Miskitu (the Raitipura and Tasbapauni/Kakabila dialects) are looked down upon by "up the coast" Miskitus who believe that Cuenca Miskitus "mix" too much English into their Miskitu, and therefore do not speak "the real grammatical Miskitu". Kakabila people, for their part, are rather uncomfortable about the obvious differences between their own Miskitu and the varieties spoken "up the coast". Some say that they speak neither Miskitu or "Creole" (Nicaraguan English) properly. Others, however, are prepared to condemn Raitipura Miskitu, but insist that their own variety of Miskitu is perfectly good, and are prepared to add that they are the more cosmopolitan for speaking both languages.<sup>76</sup>

At one level of discourse, Kakabila people consider themselves Cuenca people first and Miskitus second. Thus when Kakabila people come into contact with a single unknown "up the coast" Miskitu visiting the village, they invariably refer to him as "the Miskitu". By this Kakabila people do not intend to suggest that they are not Miskitus themselves, but rather to assert that strangers so identified do not speak English. The separateness of the Kakabila Miskitus from the "up the coast" Miskitus and their ability to speak English in common with the other inhabitants of the lagoon, acts to bind them with the other Cuenca peoples. At the same time, however, their particular sense of being Miskitu, and, linguistically speaking, better Miskitus than the other Cuenca Miskitus (according to their own reckoning), provides them with a powerful idiom for thinking about other Cuenca dwellers in terms of difference.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Some Creoles in Bluefields (and elsewhere) pejoratively say that Miskitu is "parrot language".

<sup>76</sup> The Miskitu were speaking 'broken English' as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century (Sloane 1707: lxxvii). Kakabila people seem to have been speaking English at least as early as 1852 (MC 1852, vol. 20: 214). Of 41 households polled by Bruce Barrett, forty-one identified as Miskitu, three as Creole and one as mixed (Barrett 1994: 36)

<sup>77</sup> Perry (1991) discusses idioms of difference for the Garífuna of Orinoco. Helms (1971: 222-226) contains a discussion of Asang villagers' views about the inhabitants of neighbouring villages and other Miskitu dialects.

### Chapter Three

#### The house

In this chapter I am concerned to show how Kakabila people typically conceptualise themselves in terms of intra-village groups. These groups are conceptualised according to three major principles: the co-resident members of a house; the kindred, typically centred around a rather loose confederation of matrilaterally related women; and the "family" (*taya*), all those both resident and living outside the village to whom one reckons a consanguineal relationship.<sup>1</sup> Since the third of these groups constitutes a category of persons who are rarely mobilised (except perhaps to a degree at weddings, funerals and occasional birthday parties for daughters), it is the first and second groups with which I am principally concerned: co-resident house members and the (generally matrilaterally recruited) kindred. Although both kinds of group are quite clearly sociologically significant in Kakabila, neither has a Miskitu or Nicaraguan English name, a factor, I would argue, of the fluidity rather than the sociological insignificance of these groups.

This chapter begins with a brief sketch of local concepts of house residence, and of the general forms of inter-house co-operation which centre around the set of identifiable village kindreds. It is important, however, to emphasise strongly that there are no rules for the forms of sociality which these rather loose groups take. In practice their composition and modes of co-operation are quite variable. To demonstrate both the extent of this variability and the commonly occurring themes, I then identify these groups for Kakabila, and go on to examine a number of case histories which feature villagers operating in terms of these aggregations.

#### *Membership of the house*

In spite of the fact that there is no word commonly used to refer to the household, the notion of the house containing a group of people who live together and work for one another, however, is a strong one. The residents of a particular house form a relatively self-contained unit of reproduction in day-to-day terms, one which in almost all cases centres around a conjugal partnership to whom the house belongs (see also Helms 1971: 56). In most cases house membership also includes children produced by this partnership, and in some, grandchildren,

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<sup>1</sup> "Family" has no connotations of co-residence, as it does in Britain for example. The occasionally used word "*kiamp*" refers to the house, kitchen and "yard" as a unit, but emphasises the geographical location of the unit rather than the group of people associated with that location. In "up the coast" Asang on the Río Coco the word "*kiamp*" carries an altogether different meaning. Here it refers to patrilineally recruited 'kinship groups to which an individual belongs by virtue of having the same family name' (Helms 1971: 54). One would expect the Kakabila usage to be closer to the English word "camp" from which it derives, given the fact that Kakabila natives, unlike Asang natives, are all English speakers.

elderly widowed parents, and/or children's spouses. These people sleep in the same house and eat meals in the house kitchen, food being prepared by the resident adult and adolescent women with produce brought in from the "plantations" (*insla*) belonging to the residents of the house. It is also generally expected that some (at least one) member of the house is able to provide *upan*, a category which includes specifically fish (*inska*) and meat (*wina*). The memberships of these houses are usually fairly stable on a week-to-week basis, and it is usually only births, deaths, the establishment of new conjugal unions, response to crisis situations, and the fact of members, former members and other people coming to or leaving the village for one reason or another, which alter their memberships.

Typically the *dama* or *dawanka*, the male owner of the house, is responsible for clearing and maintaining a cassava "plantation", and a rice "plantation". Ideally he also owns a "dori" which he uses for transportation, gill-net fishing, shrimping and turtling. His wife and sons also use this "dori" for occasional hook-and-line fishing, crawfish hunting, and gathering cockles, crabs and whelks, during periods when gill-net fishing and turtling are not taking place. The *dama* also typically owns a set of tools, which might be used for the house and "dori" repairs for which he is responsible. His wife, the *kuka*, co-ordinates activities in the kitchen and "yard", and delegates tasks to *tiara* (adolescent) daughters. These tasks include cleaning the kitchen and house, cleaning the house floor, washing clothes and sweeping the "yard". Sons are responsible for "pulling water" from the well, helping their fathers "haul up" their "dorises" onto the "landing", and helping them "back" (carry) sail, paddle, jib and whatever else. Elderly relatives help their same sex co-residents as best they can, while co-resident sons-in-law and adolescent sons help the house *dama* with activities out on the lagoon, such as gill-net fishing, turtling, shrimping, and clearing new "grounds".

In spite of the fact that each house is expected to be able to provide for itself, there are activities which require various forms of inter-house co-operation. Child minding, crisis loans of fish and "breadkind" (horticultural produce) require forms of inter-house co-operation among women, while house building, gill-net fishing, shrimping, and turtle hunting, entail inter-house co-operation between men. Finally reciprocal labour teams for planting rice and cassava require inter-house co-operation between men and women. Symbolic prestations of food are considered important indices of the potential for these forms of inter-house co-operation. These prestations of food are usually of the type classified as *upan* (meat and fish) although occasionally the slightly more rarified forms of "breadkind" such as breadfruit (*bredfrut*), dasheen (*dasin*), and ñampi (*sustumuk*) are also given. Cassava (*yauhra*) is considered too common, and it is

generally assumed that each house should be able to produce enough for its own needs.<sup>2</sup> These symbolic prestations, almost always made by women, are important in that they clarify the character of relationships between particular houses. Besides the more significant forms of co-operation listed above, Kakabila people often find it useful to be able to count on fellow villagers for small services of one kind or another, and are well aware that slights are often remembered and often "humbug" (negatively affect) co-operative relations. Thus requests for the loan of a "dori", sail or jib, a working tool, a rifle to go out hunting, a few sprigs of a neighbour's bush for medicine (*sika*), or a "pass" (ride) for a child across the lagoon, might well be granted or denied on the basis of the potential donor's assessment of the potential beneficiary's track record in their past relationships. Refusals, although generally couched in terms of prior need, are nevertheless registered for future reference, and behaviour interpreted as stinginess or contrariness is long remembered as evidence of hostility.

### *The village houses*

I now present a list of all the houses in Kakabila and their residents.<sup>3</sup> These houses are referred to by number (see maps 5 and 6). Each individual who appears in the text is accompanied by the number of his house; thus, for example, Macho (4) is a resident of house 4.

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Table 1

#### *Downtown*

- 1 Loco (H-46), Nadia (W-35), Diony (D-12), Makario (S-8), Rincard (S-2) Carson (S-0), Carson (S-0)
- 2 Leandro (H-56), Miss Junie (W-56), Stennet (DS-6)
- 3 Mitchell (H-28), Albertina (W-30), Jesenia (WD-9)
- 4 Macho (H-56), Loina (W-60), Manuel (HBS-25), Myrna (HaZD-15)
- 5 Manuel's unfinished house
- 6 Bayardo (H-58), Josefa (W-52), Fernando (aDS-8), Walden (aDS-5), Wallis (aDS-5)

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<sup>2</sup> Of all these kinds of foodstuff, cassava is never sold. Sometimes, however, it is given to neighbours who, for one reason or another, have not had time to go their "ground", in much the same spirit as Londoners 'lend' neighbours occasional cups of sugar.

<sup>3</sup> Kakabila was abandoned during the Contra War between 1985 and 1987 because of the intensity of hostilities in the area, and most of the houses, which at that time were mostly constructed from bamboo and leaf, no doubt became uninhabitable. Virtually all the returning refugees built their new houses in the same parts of the village that they had previously occupied. This is hardly surprising in view of the fact that "yard" spaces and social space were already well demarcated in the minds of the returnees.



- 7 Lucas (H-33), Annie (W-21), Carla (D-3), Eldon (S-1), Elton (S-1)
- 8 Junior (H-27), Swain (W-24), Pancho (S-4), Angela (D-2), Jenni Lee (D-0)
- 9 Sam (H-42), Stella (W-26), Wendy (D-10), Wendell (S-9), Mary Lou (D-7), Cynthia (D-6), Londa Mae (D-2), Susan (D-born during fieldwork)
- 10 Peter (H-25), Zora (W-22), Martelma (D-2), Annabel (D-0)
- 11 Aguilar (H-23), Anjou (W-21), Tiliansa (HM-70), Pipero (HaZS-10), Delsey (D-1), ? (D-born during fieldwork)
- 12 Lorenzo (H-38), Amanda (W-33), Ceneida (D-15), Cito (S-13), Andy (S-10), Dina (D-8), Sharon (D-6), Naila (D-4), Iraq (D-1), Ayro (S-born during fieldwork)
- 13 George (H-42), Sibella (W-36), Gaga (S-18), Neysey (D-10), Silvio (S-8), Peki (S-7), Victor (S-5), Sanu (S-3), Pollo (S-1), Becky (D-20), Yoyo (DH-24), Pususu (DS-4), Jessica (DD-1), ? (DS-born during fieldwork)
- 14 Yoyo and Becky's unfinished house
- 15 Renaldo (H-51), Elsy (W-40), Nolan (WS-22), Jose (WS-17), Macirvine (WS-14), Joanie (WD-14), Milania (D-7), Tomas (S-4), William (S-4), Dexter (S-2), Melburn (S-0)
- 16 Coco (W-38), Sexa (WM-67), Virginia (Z-24), Suzette (ZD-7), Lesley (ZS-4), Estelle (ZS-4), Penny (aZD-15), Sergio (aZS-15), Daniel (aZS-13), Mikey (aZS-10), Mark (aZS-4)

#### *Middletown*

- 17 Charlie (H-27), Loisa (W-23), Arthur (S-7), Soila (D-5), Penene (S-3), Jolisa (D-1)
- 18 Gold (H-30), Rufina (W-36), Dokey (WF-67), Tsungo (S-3), Adela (D-1)
- 19 Jones (H-65), Yvonne (W-51), Sinki (S-14), Nellie (D-11)
- 20 Iano (H-63), Libias (W-63)
- 21 Walton (H-48), Loyola (W-31), Sandy (WS-13), Jasper (WS-8), Kiaki (WS-5), Jimmy (WS-2), Kenley (S-0)
- 22 Thaddeus (H-50), Elma (55), Sikla (HS-22J), Edison (HS-21), Chigger (WS-15), Diana (WD-6)
- 23 Cain (H-55), Balbina (W-50)
- 24 Tumbo (H-65), Angelia (W-48), Barbara (WD-18), Miguel (WDS-4), Adelia (WD-17), Alicia (WD-13), Louise (WD-11), Victor (WS-5), Clarissa (D-2),
- 25 Alard (H-20), Melba (D-24), Armando (WS-8), Isolette (D-3), Heidi (D-0), ? (D-born during fieldwork)
- 26 Sansin (H-30), Lucilla (W-26), Arminta (D-8), Hilario (S-5), Minerva (D-3), (D-born during fieldwork)
- 27 Nelson (H-60), Melba (W-55), Micmic (D-15), Plipli (S-9), Docksy (aDS-9), Filbert (S-22), Claudia (SW-17), Anatui (SD-2), Pikipik (SD-0), Giro (SS-born during fieldwork)
- 28 Filbert and Claudia's house - finished and occupied during fieldwork
- 29 Silas (H-66), Vida (W-53), Jordi (aDD-9), Karen (aDD-2)

- 30 **Custober (H-42), Lina (W-37), Pio (S-16), Ofelia (D-2), Fabriola (D-20), Dikas (DH-23), Maily (DD-2), Owen (DS-0), ? (DD-born during fieldwork)**
- 31 **Dikas and Fabriola's house - finished and occupied during fieldwork**

*Uptown*

- 32 **Ernestro (H-55), Anita (W-65), Felipe (HBaSS-17)**
- 33 **Chang (H-32), Dorla (W-28), Faustino (S-7), Katarin (D-5), Ronald (S-3), Francisco (S-1)**
- 34 **Mistalin (H-53), Elfia (W-51), Isabel (DD-6), Yolanda (D-28), Jerry (DS-2), Mary (D-35), Gaspar (DH-37), Winston (DS-17), Roberto (DS-5)**
- 35 **Gaspar and Mary's unfinished house**
- 36 **Alejandro (39), Corina (34), Salvador (S-18), Amelia (D-14), Burnell (S-11), Daisi (D-7), Pedro (S-5), Alejandro (S-3), Matilda (D-0), Luis (HaMS-15), Salvador acquired a wife from Raitipura at the end of my fieldwork**
- 37 **Negro (H-30), Alvarita (W-26), Jaime (S-9), Elda (D-8), Roel (S-5), Mariano (S-3), Selmira (D-2)**
- 38 **Tistis (H-26), Evita (W-21), Winki (D-3), Elvin (S-2), Lili (D-0)**
- 39 **Florentin *dama* "Prophet" (H-78), Cristaline (W-65), Sumu (WD-48), Umberto (FS-36), Siankwa (WDS+HS-32), Tiburón (WDS-18), Martin (WDS-14), Ruben (WDS-9)**
- 40 **Avelito (H-48), Amelita (W-58)**
- 41 **Findlay (M-40), Lucy (W-39), Mauricio (S-17), Noel (S-16), Ulbino (S-12), Maura (D-10), Marva (D-8), Oneal (S-6), Elina (D-5), Horacio (S-2), ? (D-born during fieldwork)**
- 42 **Yoyo and Becky's old house, still standing**
- 43 **Capito (H-65), Binancia (W-50), Alberto (WaSS-14), Marcia (WaSD-12), Valerio (WaSS-10), Cristian (WaSS-6)**
- 44 **Gustavus (H-60), Aicilia (W-49), Nora (D-16), Elbia (D-14), Donald (S-10), Darien (S-10), Delroy (S-4), Felicia (D-24), Faustino (DH-25), Paula (DD-1), ? (DD-born during fieldwork)**
- 45 **Faustino and Felicia's house, occupied during fieldwork and abandoned as Faustino and Felicia moved to Pearl Lagoon**
- 46 **Kwasku (H-20), Ovalda (W-20), ? (baby born during fieldwork); house abandoned when Kwasku left Kakabila, at which time Ovalda moved to her parent's household (44)**
- 47 **Mario (H-46), Marga (W-30), Erica (D-12), Jose (S-11), Daniel (S-9), Jorge (S-6), Juan (3)**
- 48 **Jacinto (H-40), Marilyn (W-39), Marina (D-16), Elvis (S-15), Juana (D-13), Ronny (S-10), Irma (D-6), Mariksa (D-4), Jovando (S-0)**
- 49 **Dugu (H-50), Maggie (W-40)**
- 50 **Efraim (H-39), Idealda (W-26), Arlin (S-6), Ismael (S-4), Idealda (D-1)**
- 51 **Salvador's unfinished house**

*Notes*

- (a) The conjugal partners who "own" the house are indicated by the letters H (man) and W (woman). Their names and those of other adults considered capable of making important decisions for the household are given in bold text.<sup>4</sup> Other kinship notation abbreviations used are B (brother), Z (sister), D (daughter), S (son), M (mother), F (father) which refer to the relation of the referent to the house owners..
- (b) If S (son) or D (daughter) is prefixed by W or F, this means that the child has only one co-resident parent. Thus Jose (WS) is Elsy's (W) son, but not Renaldo's (H).
- (c) Where possible children have been placed immediately after their parent(s). Thus Miguel (WDS) is Barbara's (WD) son rather than Adelia's (WD) in house 24, since Miguel's name follows Barbara and precedes Adelia.
- (d) The prefix 'a' before an abbreviation means 'absent' or 'dead'; for example, aD means 'absent or deceased daughter'. Thus Pipero (HaZS) is Aguilar's (H) absent sister's son.
- (e) The number following the relationship abbreviation in parentheses refers to the referent's age. Thus Dina (D-8), from house 12, is eight years old.

Ages given are those recorded in a census taken by myself during April and May 1992. In the very few cases where the ages recorded in the census were inconsistent with other data, ages given are estimates.

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Co-operation frequently takes place, of course, between men who live in different houses, and less frequently between men and women who live in different houses. Men, for example, work together on the lagoon gill-net fishing or shrimping together, and at sea, turtling out on the Keys in groups of four, while co-operation between the sexes generally operates in terms of small favours. These forms of male-male and cross sex co-operation are generally thought of as being transactions between individuals. However, relations between adult women are far more widely envisaged in terms of inter-house politics, and women who live close to one another in groups (sometimes in matrilaterally recruited house ) often constitute informal confederations of common interest, binding themselves to one another through symbolic exchanges of food and services. I refer to these confederations of women as kindreds.

There now follows a list of Kakabila kindreds. Comparison of this list with both map 6 and figure 9, will give the reader a sense of the social geography of the village, and demonstrate the extent of this phenomenon. Map 6 and figure 9 are both designed to be used with this list, and

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that other adults in those houses are not capable of making important decisions in other contexts.

the letters (A-O) which appear on these, specifically refer to the kindreds with the same letters listed below.

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Table 2

*Groups of houses most visibly associated through women's co-operation on a day-to-day basis:*

A	1, 2 (women related matrilaterally)
B	4, 10 (women related matrilaterally)
C	6, 7, 8, 9, 36 (women related matrilaterally except 7 and 8)
D	2, 9 (women related matrilaterally)
E	12, 19 (women related matrilaterally)
F	11, 19 (women related matrilaterally)
G	16, 17
H	17, 19, 20, 21, 48 (women related matrilaterally)
I	23, 24, 25, 26 (women related matrilaterally except 26)
J	13, 27, 28 (women related matrilaterally except 28)
K	29, 30, 31 (women related matrilaterally)
L	8, 33, 34, 38, 41 (women related matrilaterally)
M	41, 49
N	44, 45, 46, 47 (women related matrilaterally)
O	47, 48

Groups H, I, K, L and N, in particular, constitute localised clusters of three or more houses with matrilaterally related women in close proximity. Note that relations of more casual co-operation on an occasional basis are relatively common between some houses of different groups, and if this is taken into consideration, the following groups could be said to constitute secondary kindreds: (1) A, C and D, (2) E, F and H; (3) J, K and house 32.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Tables 1 and 2 are reproduced at the end of this thesis for convenience.

### *Some case histories*

#### Case # 3

#### *Jacinto and Marlyn*

Jacinto, aged forty, Marlyn, thirty-nine, and their seven children, aged between a few months and sixteen, lived in a large house (48) with a unique (for Kakabila) pagoda-style roof in a secluded part of "uptown". The isolation of this house was not accidental. Neither Jacinto nor Marlyn particularly liked the politicking which they saw as characteristic of more populous parts of the village, and they had moved up here several years earlier during the IDSIM housebuilding project in 1987 from a "middletown" location close to Marlyn's parents (20) and sister Loyola (19).<sup>6</sup> Their new house was built close to that of Jacinto's father's brother Mario (47). Loyola, who was fond of Marlyn and her children, used to describe them as *busia* or *wail* ('shy'), because they rarely visited other houses. She attributed this mainly to their living close to the "bush" and partly to their "uptown" location where people in general are more *busia*.

Like most of the men in the village Jacinto had both a cassava and a rice plantation in which he also planted other tubers. Jacinto, however, was experimental by temperament, and, uniquely in Kakabila, was experimenting with red beans. He was an enthusiastic turtler, and during the dry season months would often go to sea with Charlie (17), Marlyn's younger sister Loisa's husband.<sup>7</sup> Jacinto was well-known for his "catboat", the only one in Kakabila, a large sea-going "dori", which during my fieldwork was rotting owing to the fact that it needed several repairs that he could not afford. Jacinto's "catboat" was the source of some amusement and he was nicknamed "Capitán", a title commonly bestowed on the generally relatively wealthy "up the coast" freightboat and "catboat" owners. Jacinto, like his father's brother Mario (47), was an immigrant to Kakabila. Both had come to Kakabila from Crata in Honduras via Kukra Hill (see map 3) in the early 1970s where they had been working in commercial banana plantations. Jacinto had arrived first and had courted Marlyn, then about sixteen years old, "*swiras*" (without

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<sup>6</sup> Because Jacinto's house was so large, it had not been completed when the IDSIM project collapsed, and there was obviously still quite a lot of work to do on it. Jacinto was a fairly good sawyer, and was given charge of one of the two village chainsaws, with which he made arrangements to "rip lumber" with other men in exchange for a 25% share of whatever was cut. The other men would pay for the fuel and lube for the saw, and be responsible for "backing" (carrying) their "lumber" out of the "bush".

<sup>7</sup> The terms 'husband' and 'wife' as they are used both here and in Kakabila does not entail that the referents are actually married. As I show in subsequent chapters partners in any kind of conjugal or sexual union are referred to with these terms.

shame),<sup>8</sup> according to Marlyn's mother, *kuka* Libias (20). Mario arrived later and eventually "took" Gustavus and Aicilia's (44) *tiara* (adolescent girl) daughter Marga.

Jacinto was very conscious of himself as *purman* (poor). Unlike most of the other adult men in Kakabila, many of whom were born in the Cuenca, he spoke only a very little English, and his house was one of the few in which both adults and children consistently spoke to one another in Miskitu.<sup>9</sup> It was this inability to speak English which seemed to impede him in making contacts which might have generated cash in Pearl Lagoon.<sup>10</sup> One one occasion he informed me that he had not even the money to buy coffee and other foodstuffs for the *pana pana* (reciprocal labour) teams which might have otherwise helped him plant his cassava and rice that year, and that consequently he would have to perform these arduous tasks single-handedly. For although to help a couple plant their "ground" with either rice or cassava, implies that they will reciprocate *pana pana*, there is, nevertheless, an understanding that the beneficiaries will give the helpers a breakfast of coffee, beans, rice and flour tortillas before starting, and a plate of meat (or fish) with "breadkind" and "fresco" (fruit juice or kool-aid) afterwards. The thirty or so córdobas needed to prepare these meals were, according to Jacinto, more than he could afford.<sup>11</sup>

Jacinto and Marlyn rarely went to Pearl Lagoon at all, and when Jacinto needed to deal with a monolingual English speaker, he would generally get Marlyn to help him translate. His inability to speak English, his unusual house at the edge of the "bush", his "catboat" and his taste for experimentation made Jacinto an unusual figure in Kakabila. On his house someone had painted "Soy característico de la RAAN" ('I am typical of the RAAN') on the exterior wall, possibly as a joke, to indicate his distinctiveness as an "up the coast" Miskitu.<sup>12</sup> Some said that he was a little "crazy"; for his part, Jacinto considered himself to be less parochial than many of the other

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<sup>8</sup> In this context the use of "*swiras*" referred to the fact that Jacinto was courting Marlyn without trying to disguise his interest in her.

<sup>9</sup> As I noted in the previous chapter English is much less used in "uptown" Kakabila.

<sup>10</sup> Jacinto actually spoke Spanish fluently, but to many Creoles in Pearl Lagoon, even those who speak good Spanish, the inability to speak English marks one out as a stranger.

<sup>11</sup> The methods of recruiting and servicing *pana pana* teams are identical for rice and cassava. Usually it is the wife of the households who announces to likely workers that her household is planting on a particular day. If another couple agree to help they may bring on the day as many helpers, men, women and children from his or her household as they see fit, on the understanding that a more or less equivalent workforce will be provided by the beneficiaries, when it is the helpers' turn to plant. Although close relatives may occasionally help a household plant without expectation of reciprocation, non-relatives invariably expect reciprocal help (see also Helms 1971: 129-132, and Nietschmann 1973: 133, 138, 145, 185).

<sup>12</sup> In fact Jacinto was from Honduras and not the RAAN.

villagers. He could read Spanish and Miskitu effortlessly, and often read passages from the Bible during the Catholic church service.

His wife Marlyn was a native of Kakabila, and was the eldest daughter of *dama* Iano and *kuka* Libias (20).<sup>13</sup> Although her parents and adult siblings all lived in the "downtown" and "middletown" areas, Marlyn rarely went to those parts of the village unless she had a particular "mission" (purpose). She considered herself a lazy woman, and admitted that she never went to either the "plantation" or the "bush". In fact she rarely ventured on the lagoon, admitting that "dori" travel made her sea-sick. Marlyn also told me that she would get frightened if strangers came to the village. She would get particularly anxious if these strangers were *Karibe* men from Orinoco, where she believed, in common with other villagers, that criminal activity and violence were rife.

Marlyn spent much of her time at home playing with her *plasni* (youngest child), Jovando, and occasionally training her younger daughters, Irma and Mariksa, in the domestic chores.<sup>14</sup> Occasionally she would visit Marga (47), her neighbour and husband's *masaia* (opposite sex affine), or would take a walk downtown to visit her parents (20) and her sister Loyola (21). Marlyn was fortunate enough to have two *tiara* (adolescent girl) daughters, Marina aged sixteen and Juana aged thirteen to help her with her domestic chores, and sometimes she would lend one of these daughters to her sister Loyola (21), who had no daughters of her own. However, the girls eventually rebelled, protesting that their "auntie" Loyola would not pay them enough. Marlyn would also sometimes visit her sister-in-law Sibella (13), from whom she would occasionally beg a little fish or "breadkind" and exchange mild village gossip. Marlyn rarely visited her other sisters-in-law, however; one, Nadia (1) was her "comadre" and this perhaps this gave their relationship an avoidance character, while the other Fabriola (30 and 31), she claimed, would shout abuse at her if she asked her for anything. Other than these visits to her sister and parents, and to Sibella, Marlyn rarely visited the other houses, preferring to remain in her own house in the quiet "back" part of "uptown".<sup>15</sup>

Elvis, Jacinto and Marlyn's eldest son, studied in the sixth grade in Pearl Lagoon.<sup>16</sup> His graduation to secondary school was a source of great pride to his parents and they made a special

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<sup>13</sup> '*Kuka*' means 'respected old woman', 'grandmother' or 'chief woman in a household' depending on the context.

*'Dama'* is the male equivalent.

<sup>14</sup> Marlyn had several buckets in graded sizes, one for each of her children, and she would sometimes send them all up to the well to fetch water together as a training exercise.

<sup>15</sup> Women quite often avoid those parts of the village where they feel they have enemies.

<sup>16</sup> Sixth grade was started in Kakabila the year after Elvis "promoted" (graduated to secondary school).

effort to attend his graduation ceremony in Pearl Lagoon. This schooling in Pearl Lagoon had been achieved at considerable cost to Jacinto and Marlyn, since they had very little money, and they had found the Pearl Lagoon school fees, smarter uniform and books and lodging costs, crippling. Fortunately, Elvis was lodged with a "Lagoon" family who accepted "breadkind" in payment, but Elvis found carrying the sacks of provisions to his landlady humiliating and he would sometimes throw away the valuable sacks instead of returning them to his father, lest he be seen with them by his fellow students. On the weekends Elvis would usually "take a pass" (get a ride) back to Kakabila.

Jacinto was known to be "jealous" (*lawisa*) of his daughters Marina and Juana, and it was said that he invariably "run" (chased away) unsuitable young men who he thought might be "courting" ("court" *takaia*) them clandestinely. Marlyn, it was generally acknowledged was less strict, and most of the *wahma* or "merong" (adolescent boys and young men), who were interested in Marina and Juana, tended to visit while Jacinto was at sea hunting turtle. Shorter visits also took place when he and Marlyn were visiting the Catholic church on Sundays.

#### Case # 4

##### *Loyola*

Marlyn's sister Loyola lived right in the busiest part of the village in a house (21) along the "front road" in "middletown". This house was a cement house, which her usually absent partner Walton, a freight boat captain from Pearl Lagoon, had built for her opposite her parents' house (20). This house was one of only three cement houses in the village,<sup>17</sup> and unusually for Kakabila had no kitchen of its own. Loyola shared a kitchen with the house belonging to her parents, an acknowledgment that she and her sons did not constitute an autonomous unit. She had five sons: Sandy, who was already a *wahma* (adolescent male), Jasparr, Kiaki, Jimmy, and a baby named Kenley who was born on the same day I arrived in the village. Of these boys, only Kenley was generally thought of as Walton's son. Loyola was known to be a "loving woman" who had had a series of relationships with other men before Walton, notably Umberto (39), Sandy's father, and Tolo from Pearl Lagoon, supposedly the father of two of her boys.<sup>18</sup>

Walton owned a freight boat, which touted for trade between Pearl Lagoon and Bluefields, and along the Rio Escondido. He was said to have a least four other wives: one (his main wife) lived in Pearl Lagoon and minded the store he was trying to get going; another lived in Haulover, another in Bluefields, and yet another in Rama, the latter supposedly a "Spanish" (Mestiza) woman rumoured to be very jealous of the others. In spite of the competition, Loyola felt that

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<sup>17</sup> The other two are houses 2 and 18.

<sup>18</sup> During my fieldwork Tolo was arrested for attempted murder following events linked with "science" (sorcery).



she had a special relationship with Walton and she showed me evidence of this in the form of an engagement ring which he had given her.<sup>19</sup> Walton occasionally came to Kakabila, and would stay for a week or so. Usually he would bring a few crates of beer, some cigarettes or some other commodities, which Loyola would then sell for him, after his departure. However, she often complained that he did not come to Kakabila often enough, or indeed give the money and goods in quantities which she felt he could have afforded.

Loyola had a reputation too for being a "gladwoman" (a woman acting younger than is considered appropriate for her age and status),<sup>20</sup> as was evidenced by her habit of wearing shorts, which were thought of as "young girl notes" (adolescent girl's fashion). She was the only woman who went to nearly all the games at the major regional baseball tournament in Pearl Lagoon, during the week of the tournament's duration, causing her sister's daughter Juana (48) to remark, "*tiara pulisa*" (she's playing at being an adolescent girl'). Loyola was well liked in the village, and was known for her sharp tongue, and forthright "style". There were those who were even prepared to elect her for the position of village co-ordinator, in spite of the fact that she was a woman. One of her neighbours, Jones (19), who was a great friend of Loyola and who was married to her mother's sister Yvonne, joked to me once, during an unusual silence in the neighbourhood, that Loyola must be eating, since this was the only time that she was ever silent.

Loyola was also apparently good at making use of her consanguineal and affinal relations. Quite often during Walton's long absences, she roped her brother George (13) into house maintenance duties, and she also had her *masaia* (sister's husband), Jacinto (48), making a "dori" for her, which she eventually used to take Jasper hook-and-line fishing. Jacinto, it seemed, was a good touch since he clearly took his affinal relations seriously.<sup>21</sup> However, Loyola took her social responsibilities very seriously and was vulnerable to manipulation herself. On one occasion when I was in Nelson and Melba's yard (27), Loyola came over and complained that her neighbour, Elma (22), had stolen her son Kenley's chicken. This chicken had been a baptism gift by Nelson and Melba for Kenley, given at the time when they had become "compadres" with Loyola.<sup>22</sup> However, Loyola felt she could not cause a row by

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<sup>19</sup> The stone had already fallen out of this ring, and Loyola was hoping that Walton would get it fixed on one of his next visits.

<sup>20</sup> The semantically equivalent masculine term "gladman", applied to men, is used more frequently than "gladwoman".

<sup>21</sup> On the one occasion when I saw him in his mother-in-law's kitchen (20), Jacinto would not even face her. This was extreme by Kakabila standards and may be accounted for by the fact that Jacinto was an "outside" man from "up the coast".

<sup>22</sup> The gift of a "fowl" to a baptised godchild is usual in Kakabila.

confronting Elma, since she and Elma were *lapia*<sup>23</sup> and therefore enjoined to show *rispik* for one another by not "rowing" or "cursing". Nor could she take the chicken back, since because she and Elma were neighbours, this would have been too obvious. In the end Melba took the chicken away back to her own "yard" and gave Loyola another one for Kenley.

Loyola's parents lived opposite her in an IDSIM "lumber" house (20). Iano and Libias lived alone, but Loyola usually got her second son, Jasper, to stay with them at night. Furthermore it was generally on Iano and Libias's veranda, that Loyola entertained visitors in the late evening, gossiping and telling jokes. Sometimes, however, in the last months of my fieldwork, Jasper's place was filled on the weekends and school holidays by Marlyn's oldest son Elvis. By this time it was reckoned that Elvis was too old to be sleeping in the same unpartitioned sleeping area as his *tiara* sisters, Marina and Juana, and, although continuing to eat in his parents' house (48), he would spend the nights at his "auntie's" house.

#### Case # 5

##### *Nelson and Melba*

Nelson and Melba (27) lived in a lumber house along the sparsely populated "back road" of "middletown" which faced onto the school and the northern edge of the ballfield. They were the parents, grandparents and great-grandparents to a number of children, so many in fact that *dama* Nelson once told me he could fill the village school with his *mula* (grandchildren). Their house contained an adolescent daughter, Micmic; two sons, Filbert and Plipli; a grandson, Docksy; Filbert's wife, Claudia; and two toddler grand-daughters, Anatui and Pikpik. Two more *tiara* (adolescent) daughters in their teens were at school in El Bluff and were living with an adult sister married and domiciled there.

Nelson and Melba were considered an affable couple who liked to joke and live peacefully with their neighbours, although in his younger days Nelson had had quite a reputation as a womaniser and drinker. They had originally lived in the "downtown" section of Kakabila, close to where their daughter Sibella was now living, and close to Melba's brothers, Leandro (2) and Bayardo (6). However, Nelson had argued with some of the residents in that part of the village, possibly his affines, and he and Melba eventually moved to their present more sparsely-populated "middletown" location, close to his sister Vida (29) who was married to Melba's mother's brother, Silas.

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<sup>23</sup> The *lapia* relationship is one in which one adult becomes a ritual friend for a child by cutting its navel cord. I discuss this relationship in more detail in Chapter Four.

Like most of the adult men in the village, Nelson annually planted a cassava "ground" and a rice "ground".<sup>24</sup> Like many of the older men, however, he did not regularly go fishing, shrimping or hunting turtle out to sea, and left these activities to Filbert. He did, however, fully participate in the catching and processing of "sea-bob". Nelson considered himself a farmer rather than a fisherman, and he spent a great deal of time at his "plantation" in "the back". Nelson also was quite involved in the activities of the Catholic church. He shared the responsibility of "doorman" with Macho (ringing the bell on Sundays) and also played guitar at the adult and Sunday School services, the latter taught by his daughter Sibella (13).

Melba spent a good deal of her time in the kitchen, preparing foodstuffs. Most of the cleaning and washing of clothes, she delegated to Micmic or to Filbert's wife Claudia. Sometimes during the dry season, when Filbert was not out gill net fishing, she would take Docksy or Plipli out on the lagoon in her husband's "dori", paddling along the "edge" in search of bait and then out to selected spots in the hope of catching a few fish. Melba was very close to her daughter Sibella (13). The two of them would quite often exchange visits, and Sibella's children were quite at home in their maternal grandparents' house.

Micmic, Docksy and Plipli all attended the village school, but not very enthusiastically. The boys were more interested in the activities of their age mates, marbles, baseball, hunting birds with bow and arrow and flying kites, while Micmic was very involved with the other village girls and her not-very-secret boyfriend Sandy (21),<sup>25</sup> who would sometimes come past the house in order to draw water from Nelson and Melba's well for his mother and grandmother. Quite a few of the village boys and men were interested in Micmic, who was considered quite a beauty, and Nelson often hung around the occasional evening dances at the school or in people's houses, so that she would not get into trouble.

Filbert, Nelson and Melba's oldest co-resident son, was a baseball enthusiast and was the village team's senior pitcher. An uncomplicated sort, he seemed uninterested in village affairs and more concerned with baseball and his own family. Claudia was an *Ispail mairin* (Mestiza) from Managua, who had fled a troubled childhood in Managua, a few years previously. She had ended up in El Bluff where Nelson and Melba's daughters living there had taken her under their

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<sup>24</sup> The terms "ground", "plantation" and *instla* are virtual synonyms.

<sup>25</sup> Eventually this clandestine courtship was terminated when the parents involved, Loyola, Nelson and Melba, realised that in fact Sandy and Micmic were cousins, Sandy being an "outside (unrecognised) child" of Umberto (39), who himself was an "outside child" of Bayardo (6). Bayardo and Melba were uterine brother and sister. I should note for now that in present day Kakabila it is generally held that second cousins or closer should not marry.

wing. Eventually they had brought her to Kakabila, where eventually she became pregnant by Filbert. Although she was a relatively recent arrival in the village, Cladia had learned Miskitu and Kakabila "ways" fluently, and was considered by many to have become a real Miskitu woman. Towards the end of my fieldwork, Filbert spent a great deal of time finishing his house (28) with the help of his father. Eventually it was made habitable and he and Claudia, along with Anatui and Pikpik moved in. During my stay in Kakabila, the kitchen section remained unfinished, and this along with the lack of pots and utensils, meant that Claudia remained working in her mother-in-law's kitchen.

Next to Nelson and Melba's house was a bare IDSIM house frame, awaiting the return of a daughter Fidelia, Docksy's mother from a previous unsuccessful union. It was hoped that Fidelia would bring her husband, Danny, and their baby, Danito, from El Bluff. During my visit to El Bluff, however, it became apparent that Danny and Fidelia were building a rather permanent looking house, and as far as I could tell, were becoming quite settled, for Danny was able to find occasional work there with the Honduran fishing boats.

Nelson and Melba had a number of other daughters, most of whom like Fidelia were already adult. Nelson had managed to send these daughters out to other towns where they had become married to relatively prosperous "Spaniards" and Creoles, and by the time I had arrived in the field, he had established a chain of sons-in-law, whom he believed would help him, from Kakabila, to El Bluff, to Managua and San Juan del Sur. During my fieldwork the elder of the unmarried daughters Telia, who was at school in Bluefields, returned to Kakabila and was immediately "courted" by an "ageable" (mature) Creole freight boat captain from Bluefields named Abdul. Unlike Walton, Loyola's (21) captain partner, who seemed to collect wives, Abdul had allegedly abandoned several girls pregnant in other communities. The fact that he already had a wife was of little significance. What was considered improper, as far as villagers were concerned, was, however, that he had simply used these girls as "pass time" and had abandoned them when they had become pregnant.

Abdul, who had actually come to buy "first class fish", also realised that he might well set up a "ranch" (bar) in Kakabila, and make still more money out of the fisherman. He engaged Telia to run this enterprise out of her parents' house (27), and on his periodic visits to the village, continued to sue for her favours. Nelson was in two minds as to whether to accept Abdul's suit of his daughter. On the one hand, Abdul was generally considered a rogue (he had already borrowed nearly a thousand córdobas from Telia's trusting sister Loyola [13]), but, on the other, the village "ranch" might expand into something profitable. In the end Telia, whose motives were economically rather than sexually motivated, forcefully rejected Abdul's advances, calling

his lechery "*dama pauta*" (literally 'old man's fire'), and Nelson had no option than to watch Abdul disappear along with Sibella's *córdobas*.

In any case the "ranch" had not proved to be a success. Telia had extended credit even to irresponsible "merong" (young men) like Sikla (22) and Edison (22), who had no qualms about not paying Abdul back. Edison, in particular, had a crush on Telia at that time and, besides cutting *kuka* Melba's firewood as a token of unsolicited and unwelcome brideservice,<sup>26</sup> kept muttering unconvincing threats of violence to Abdul behind his back. In the end Telia was sent to her older sister's house in Managua, where she met a "Spaniard", who wooed her and, to Nelson and Melba's delight, married her when the two were visiting Kakabila.<sup>27</sup>

#### Case # 6

##### *George and Sibella*

George was one of Marlyn and Loyola's older brothers. He and his wife Sibella had a large IDSIM "lumber" house (13) in the "downtown" area near the end of the "front road". Apart from their two years as war refugees they had always lived in that part of the village, George having built a house next to Sibella's parents, Nelson and Melba, during their earlier years together, before they had moved to "middletown" (27). Their house was a large one, and necessarily so. Living with them were two daughters, Becky and Neysey; five sons, Gaga, Silvio, Peki, Victor, Sanu and Pollo; Becky's husband, Yoyo; and Becky and Yoyo's toddlers, Pususu and Jessica. Another absent son, in his mid-teens, was domiciled with Sibella's sister in El Bluff, and was studying at one of the Bluefields' secondary schools.

Like other houses in the village, George and Sibella's house was partitioned into a few rooms which served both as bedrooms and store rooms for personal effects. Most of the house activity, however, took place in a noisy kitchen built onto the back, where Sibella, Becky (aged twenty) and Neysey (aged ten) prepared provisions and tended steaming *dikwa* (large iron pots) of boiling "breadkind" while shouting at the boys to "full water" (*pankaia*) from the well, stop fighting among themselves, and get changed into their school uniform of white shirts and blue trousers.

George was considered by other villagers to be a sober and hard-working man. He was one of the few men who never drank rum, and he and Sibella were acknowledged to be parents who were "trying" for their children. At one time he and his brother Loco (1) had obtained credit on a working "motor" (outboard motor) and they had made good money hiring out their services as

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<sup>26</sup> Edison was considered by Nelson to be one of the laziest boys in Kakabila.

<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately I had left the field by the time Telia married.

providers of transport for a Pearl Lagoon entrepreneur who set lobster traps, until eventually this "motor" had ceased to work. It was presumably with part of this money that George had bought his bull, one of only two in the village. George also had a large sea-going "dori" and sometimes used it during the dry season months to go to the Keys out on the Caribbean looking for turtle, while at other times he lent it to his Sibella's brother Lorenzo (12), in exchange for a share of the catch.<sup>28</sup> Whenever George butchered a turtle, he, Loco and Yoyo would sell the meat in one pound measures, weighed on a set of scales, from either his veranda or Yoyo's house frame (14), at which time the customers, waving one córdoba bills, would be joined by his sisters Loyola (21) and Marlyn (47), and Sibella's mother, *kuka* Melba (27), all of whom claimed a few free pounds.

Sibella was very close to her parents, Nelson and Melba (27), and her children often were sent over there to play if she were teaching and Neysey and Becky too busy to pay them attention. Likewise, the children from Nelson and Melba's house (27), would often come and visit Sibella. Micmic, in particular, was good friends with Neysey, and the two would exchange gossip about the other *tiara* (adolescent girls) and *wahma* (adolescent boys) in the village, while Plipli and Docksey (27) would come over and play *marbil* or "ollo"<sup>29</sup> with Sibella's pre-adolescent sons. When Sibella's younger adult sisters living in El Bluff, Managua and San Juan del Sur came to Kakabila to stay with their parents (27), they too would invariably spend a great deal of time at Sibella's house, especially in the evening hours before dusk (*saiwan*) at which time they would sit on the veranda, watching the children playing in the "yard" (*lata*) in front of them.

Sibella was the fourth grade teacher at the village school, and the Catholic Sunday school teacher, both roles which she took very seriously. More educated than most of the other villagers, she had been sent to Puerto Cabezas by her mother as a child, where she had been raised by a Creole family and had learned to speak Spanish. She was also heavily involved in the administration of the village Catholic church, and handled whatever paperwork was required. Like her husband, Sibella took a great interest in her children's "advancement", and she had no fear of approaching those whom she considered her superiors in Pearl Lagoon or Bluefields if she thought they might be of assistance. Unlike George, who, like many Kakabila men, was a rather reticent in his dealings with others, Sibella was not one to shy away from expressing her opinion, and it was this which made her popular with some villagers and unpopular with others.

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<sup>28</sup> Like the other men in the village, George usually went out gill-net fishing or catching shrimp during the rainy season if there were likely buyers in the lagoon. His associates in this enterprise were usually his brother Loco, and his *dapna* (son-in-law), Yoyo.

<sup>29</sup> *Marbil* and "ollo" are games of marbles.

## Case # 7

*Lorenzo and Amanda*

Lorenzo (12) was Nelson and Melba's (27) oldest son. Like his sister Sibella, Lorenzo had not been brought up by his parents for the early part of his childhood. Instead he been raised by his mother's brother Leandro and his wife Miss Junie (2). This, I suspect, was partly due to the fact that Nelson and Melba's marriage had not yet solidified. Nelson was allegedly a notorious *tangni* or "sweetman"<sup>30</sup> in his youth, and he had had two "outside" children by his now dead father's sister daughter, Jemina.<sup>31</sup>

The early years of Lorenzo and Amanda's association was rather similar. Amanda had had a daughter Ceneida, and Lorenzo had refused to commit himself to her. Following Cenedia's birth Amanda left Kakabila for some time going down to work in a fish plant in El Bluff. Eventually, however, she returned to Kakabila, and Lorenzo moved in with her and her mother, Miss Yvonne (19). Some while later Lorenzo built a house up at the "point" (the part of "uptown" Kakabila north of house 39), where they were to spend some years before eventually moving "downtown" and settling at their present location (12). Lorenzo told me that at the time of their move the "back road" area of "downtown", where their house was situated, was still very quiet.

Amanda also made some money selling flour, sugar, salt, baking soda, and other commodities from her kitchen. Around once a month she would go down to Bluefields where she would stay with a friend and go to wholesalers, after which she would take her purchases to the "wharf" and have the "mailboat" captain Alan bring them up to Pearl Lagoon as freight, for which she paid a fee.<sup>32</sup> Once the freight arrived in Pearl Lagoon she would get Lorenzo to pick it up or "take a pass (ride)" with another "dori" and meet it herself, after which she would transport it back to Kakabila. Although her costs made it necessary to sell her goods more expensively than her customers would find them in Pearl Lagoon or Bluefields, she nevertheless offered both "convenience" and "trust" (credit).

Lorenzo was an enthusiastic turtler and fisherman, and Amanda was proud of the way in which he would really get down in the water among the shrimps with a bucket. When it came to work, Amanda would say, Lorenzo was a "first class man". On the minus side, however, she found

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<sup>30</sup> *Tangni* (literally 'flower') and "sweetman" are both terms which in Kakabila refer to men said to be given to chasing women.

<sup>31</sup> Nelson was rather reticent about his earlier relationship with his father's sister's daughter because nowadays it is generally considered incorrect to "take" (have sexual relations with or marry) anyone closer than "third cousin".

<sup>32</sup> The "mailboat" was by far the most regular and reliable of the freight/passenger boats which operated between Pearl Lagoon and Bluefields.

his rum-drinking a real problem and, in addition to the fact that he would sometimes "drink out" his earnings, he would sometimes get violent when drunk. During these drunken bouts, Amanda would collect the children and some clothes and seek refuge in her mother's house (19) where she knew Lorenzo would not misbehave. There she would find sanctuary with her mother and stepfather "Mister" Jones (19), and be close to her mother's sister Libias (20) and her cousin Loyola (21).

#### Case # 8

##### *Silas and Vida*

Nelson's sister Vida (29) was the wife of *dama* Silas, one of the oldest and most loved men in the village. Silas was Melba's mother's brother (*tahti*) and so Silas and Nelson were simultaneously *waikat* (brother-in-law) and *swikat* (niece's husband and wife's uncle) to one another, although in fact they always used the more committed term of address for brother-in-law ("*waik*") with one another. Silas and Nelson were therefore reciprocally 'wife-givers' and 'wife-receivers'.

Silas was the "doorman" for the Anglican church and on Sundays rang the bell<sup>33</sup> and took the church collection, while Vida was one of the two village "parteras" (midwives), a rôle which in Kakabila was in no way seen as incompatible with her rum-selling enterprise. Often enough groups of men on a drinking session would collect on Silas and Vida's veranda, where this eminently respectable and amusing woman would be on hand to sell the next bottle and receive the empties, which were ferried to and from Bluefields by her son-in-law Custober (30). Drunks who wanted more and had no money were politely advised that supplies were finished and that they should try another house, where it was rumoured there were still bottles.

Every six months Vida and her "comadre" Miss Junie (2) would visit Pearl Lagoon for the "talles" or workshops in which the Cuenca midwives would receive training.<sup>34</sup> Vida was a fund of knowledge about childbirth, and besides doing a tidy business selling rum and delivering children at the going rate of about seventy córdobas a time, occasionally took baby's cauls (*kal*) in lieu of payment which were then sold on as "good luck" *sika* ("medicine").<sup>35</sup>

Silas and Vida had two adult daughters, Rosa, who lived with a dreadlocked Creole named Mandingo in El Bluff, and Lina who lived a few yards away with her husband Custober (30). Rosa had been Nolan's (15) wife, but the two had broken up allegedly owing to sexual

<sup>33</sup> This was done by hitting a hammer against an empty lobster diver's oxygen canister.

<sup>34</sup> Often they were joined by Melba (27) who was reciprocally *lamlat* (sister-in-law) to both.

<sup>35</sup> It is interesting that "good luck" is alienable. See Chapter Four for more details about beliefs to do with cauls.



jealousies on both sides, and although Nolan continued to visit Rosa's parents, who looked after Rosa's two children, these visits ceased once he learned that Rosa had a new man.<sup>36</sup>

Case # 9

*Lina and Custober, and Dikas and Fabriola*

Lina and Custober (30) lived to "the back" close to Lina's parents, Silas and Vida (29). With them lived their *wahma* (male adolescent) son, Pio; two infant daughters, Fabriola and Ofelia; Fabriola's husband, Dikas; and Dikas and Fabriola's children, Maily and Owen. Opposite their IDSIM "lumber" house stood another similar house (31) which was eventually completed and occupied by Fabriola, Dikas and their children, following the birth of a third child.

Custober, an "up the coast" man, originally from Wawa Bar, was often cited by villagers as an example of a good son-in-law (*dapna*). When his father-in-law (*dapna*) Silas was sick, Custober would go to Silas's "plantation" and "pull provisions" (collect horticulture produce) for him, and when Silas was fitting windows to his house, Custober assisted him. To those who argued that "outside men" made better husbands, Custober provided a good example. Dikas, Custober's own *dapna*, was also reckoned to be a good son-in-law, often going to Pearl Lagoon with his *wahma* brother-in-law Pio in Custober's big "dori" to collect the goods his father-in-law was having sent up from Bluefields.<sup>37</sup> These goods usually included flour, sugar, rum, beans, kerosene, cigarettes and menollitos (packets of manufactured savoury chips beloved by Nicaraguan children). The rum and cigarettes were brought up for Fabriola's grandmother Vida, his *mula yapti* (mother-in-law), while the other goods for his wife Lina.

Shortly before Fabriola gave birth to her third baby, she and Dikas got married "to the law" at the Pearl Lagoon Alcaldía. Dikas paid the Alcaldía's fee, and also paid for the foodstuffs used for wedding "feast" which took place at the Lina and Custober's house (30). Custober, however, captained the "dori" which carried Dikas and Fabriola, Dikas's father, Iano (20) and sister, Loyola (21), myself, and the "testigos" (witnesses), Mitchell and Albertina (3), to Pearl Lagoon, and also supplied a crate of rum. The "feast" (party) was attended by about fifty villagers most of whom were invited by written invitation. As with most "feasts", the hosts' "families" were invited, although not all attended; Marlyn (48), Dikas' oldest sister, did not get on with her

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<sup>36</sup> One of these children, Karen, was Nolan's; the other, Jordi was by another man not from Kakabila.

<sup>37</sup> Unlike many of the village "merong" (young men), Dikas never drank rum, and because of this it was sometimes said that he was under Fabriola's thumb. Dikas was also the first grade teacher at the village school and sometimes took Sunday School at the Anglican church.

sister-in-law, although she made the excuse that she could not go because she did not have the money to buy a "broken glass" from Pearl Lagoon.<sup>38</sup>

Shortly after the wedding Fabriola gave birth to a baby girl, and she and Dikas, and their three children, moved into the newly completed house (31) situated only yards away. Dikas, Custober and Silas continued to live as model fathers-in-law and sons-in-law, while Vida, Lina and Fabriola co-operated as grandmother, mother and daughter.

### *Summary*

It has not been the intention of this chapter to show how men, women and children are imagined in Kakabila - that is the purpose of the next three chapters - but rather to provide a sketch of how the members of the house and of different houses become enchained in relations of production and reproduction. Although it is an ideal in Kakabila that each house should be self-reproducing, it is, I hope, evident that the members of most houses are generally involved in often quite intricate political and economic relations, usually expressed in terms of the idioms of kinship, with the members of both other village houses and outsiders. These are infinitely variable. Nevertheless, I believe that those which I have presented in the case histories given above, are in many ways eminently characteristic of the kinds of concerns which Kakabila people habitually have to confront. Although I could have chosen other houses on which to focus, I have specially chosen the ones presented above because they serve as useful introductions to characters who are enchained to one another in a number of ways, and who reappear later in this thesis.

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<sup>38</sup> "Broken glass", in fact chipped glasses, are purchased in the Pearl Lagoon stores as wedding gifts.

## Part Two

### Persons

## Chapter Four

### The gendering of children

In Chapter Two I examined the ways by which Kakabila people imagine and classify social space both outside and within the village, while in Chapter Three I shifted discussion to the most significant social groups within the village, namely the inhabitants of the house and the kindred (defined here as a rather loose group of mutually co-operating matrilineal kinswomen and neighbours, and their husbands). I illustrated the rather variable forms this co-operation takes by means of a series of impressionistic case histories. In this chapter and the two which follow, however, I consider how the actors (who constitute the members of these groups) actually acquire and negotiate particular concepts of themselves and others as they go through their lives.

The socialisation of Kakabila children (*tuktan* or "pikninny") into gender specific roles to a large extent shapes and constrains their actions in adulthood. In this chapter the extent to which these processes of socialisation adequately prepare villagers for the kinds of choices they are likely to face in adult life is examined, as too is the extent to which these choices are actually reproduced by the practices of kinship and gender. The first section considers local notions of conception and birth, as well as the ritual socialisation of children through the institutions of *lapia*, *compadrazgo* and Confirmation, while the second section considers Sunday school, school and pre-school for children and the impact these have on the socialisation of Kakabila children. The third section examines the status of children generally with respect to adults and situates them in terms of Kakabila notions of personhood, considering local notions about how children should behave and what activities they should participate in, while the fourth and fifth sections are concerned specifically with the socialisation of girls (*tukta mairin*) and boys (*tukta waitna*)<sup>1</sup> respectively, and examine the enculturation of gender specific modes of behaviour over the course of childhood. The concluding section summarises the previous sections and discusses the socialisation of children in Kakabila in terms of its impact on kinship and gender related political processes in the village, and thereby prepares the way for the examination of women's and men's rôles in the subsequent chapters.

#### *Birth and children's rites of passage*

Kakabila people generally consider a single act of sexual intercourse to be sufficient to "breed" a woman (initiate a pregnancy). However, sexual intercourse, although a necessary condition of conception, is not always a sufficient one. I heard one woman, for example, advising her mother's sister's son's wife (*lamlat* or classificatory sister-in-law) that if one wishes to ensure

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<sup>1</sup> Both the English language terms "boy" and "girl", and the Miskitu terms are widely used in Kakabila

conception, it is better to have intercourse every three nights or so rather than every single night, since this ensures that during copulation the man ejaculates enough of the saved up semen or "glue" (*makalaya*) to ensure that the women's blood, out of which the baby is formed, coagulates. In any case there are some, particularly adolescent girls (*tiara*), who believe that a woman does not become pregnant (*kwira*) through sexual intercourse unless she specifically wants to become pregnant.<sup>2</sup> Generally, however, Kakabila people do not seem to have particularly fixed ideas about the relationship between sexual intercourse and conception, other than that the two are causally linked, imagining conception rather generally in terms of a "mixing of the blood" as one man put it, and in fact there are rather more developed discourses about sexual intercourse as a recreational rather than a reproductive activity.<sup>3</sup>

Once a woman becomes pregnant, announced some say by the cry of the *inpalila* bird, the effect on her activities soon become apparent. She must not be lazy during her pregnancy lest the baby become lazy, and she is not supposed to engage in those activities classified by the verb *mamaia* (to knit or weave), such as making shrimp nets, hammocks and so on, since these activities may cause the umbilical cord to become tangled and kill the baby by strangulation. Pregnant women should beware of getting cravings for the meat of particular animals since the baby may be born with a birthmark shaped like the animal its mother desired, they should avoid watching eclipses of the moon,<sup>4</sup> and it is also said that certain kinds of meat and fish, for example those not killed by men (*wasu*) should not be eaten (see also Conzemius 1932: 73, and Nietschmann 1973: 108-111).

There is a weakly developed notion that a pregnant woman is polluting. At one time, I was told, there used to be a feeling that the presence of a pregnant woman would upset a shaman's (*sukia*) work, and so women had to "pass" along the "back" of the village in order to avoid "humberging" them (ruining their work) (see also Bell 1862: 253, and Dennis (1981: 470). It is, however, still felt that a pregnant woman should not be seen by a snake doctor's patient

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<sup>2</sup> It is said that *sukia* (shamans), or others wise about "bush medicine", can either cure infertility (*biarapara*) or prevent future pregnancies.

<sup>3</sup> It is, however, generally held that the baby resembles the 'biological' parent whose blood is the strongest during conception, and a few people also believe that the sex of the baby is also determined in the same fashion. Some people also say rather that a child who resembles its same sex parent will be unlucky. Other people say that the sex of one's future children can be determined by the length of one's fingernails.

<sup>4</sup> See also Timar (n.d.: 28). This is probably related to the Kakabila idea that cows become impregnated during the full moon.

during the nine days needed to effect a snakebite cure (see also Conzemius 1932: 124).<sup>5</sup> However, there are no restrictive practices associated with menstruation, other than a belief held by some that a menstruating woman should not prepare food. The three or so days of seclusion in a specially constructed shelter for Miskitu women suffering *kati siknis* (menstruation - literally 'moon sickness') in earlier times, reported by earlier authors, is not practised by present day Kakabila women (see Bell 1989 [1899]: 165, and Conzemius 1932: 148-149).

One of the principal dangers associated with human fertility is the possibility that non-humans might be involved. For example, the threat of being carried off into the bush by an *ulak* - a black hairy apelike creature with a voracious sexual appetite for humans of the opposite sex - is very real for those adolescent girls "molested" by "fits" (see Chapter Five), while occasionally it is discreetly suggested that a particular pregnant woman has been impregnated by a "satan" (*wlasa*) of one kind or another. The ejection, for example, of a premature foetus by a woman is regarded by many Kakabila people as the birth of a *wlasa luhpia* (spirit's child). It is said that such *wlasa luhpia*, identified as *daiwan lupia* (small animals) such as *sukling* (toad), "spring chicken" (a species of frog), *swain* (lagartillo), *lam* (porpoise), and *tunki* (small catfish), are conceived when women dream of having sex with *wlasa* (spirits).<sup>6</sup> In all cases, it is said, these creatures die. *Wlasa luhpia* are not considered anything to be ashamed of, and those women who have given birth to such creatures, are quite unselfconscious about the fact that they have participated in these involuntary conceptions (see also Conzemius 1932: 129).

The entrance of a newly born human baby into the Kakabila social world is marked by a "nine days" seclusion of its mother following the birth (see also Henderson 1809: 188, Strangeways 1822: 33, Young 1842: 75-76, Pim and Seemann: 1869: 308, Bell 1862: 254, and Conzemius 1932: 150, 151). During this period she is not supposed to leave the house lest she or the baby contract "fresh cold" or *siahkwa* (the common cold), also known during this period as *bibi kaula* (baby cold), and either pass it onto the baby thereby killing it, or die herself. Both baby and mother are also considered vulnerable to spirit attack and the two dangers ("fresh cold" and spirit attack) are not necessarily conceptually distinguished. Consequently mothers routinely place open Bibles, usually the Miskitu language '*Dawan Bila*' (God's word), by their bedside in

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<sup>5</sup> A mother-to-be is also considered vulnerable to attack by boa constrictors (*waula*), who it is said, loathe pregnant women. If a boa sees a pregnant woman he chases her and whips her to the ground. Nelson (27) informed me that his wife's brother's daughter Nadia (1) was chased in just such a fashion during one of her pregnancies. A possibly related belief is that if a venomous snake bites a pregnant woman there is no possible cure for her (see also Bell 1989 [1899]: 226, and Conzemius 1932: 133).

<sup>6</sup> It is said that a baby should not be born near a dead person, nor should a newly-born baby be taken to the cemetery (*raili*), lest the baby contract *damma* (swelling of the "belly") or even die.

order to ward off *wlasa* (malevolent spirits) that might attack (*prukaia*) the baby. In one case Lucy (41) and her husband Findlay played taped cassettes of hymns in her baby's presence for much of the day as a prophylactic measure.<sup>7</sup> During the "nine days" the mother is also supposed to refrain from eating certain kinds of food which are considered likely to hurt the baby. These include deer meat, eggs, milk, beans, breadfruit, rice, corn and *supa* (pejibaye)<sup>8</sup> The "nine days" seclusion might be said to constitute a continuation of the pregnancy, with the house representing the womb. This interpretation, I suggest, is lent support by the fact that it is considered important that men from other households do not enter the house in which these women are secluded, and it is also said that women who have just given birth do not leave the house during the "nine days" because they are ashamed (*ai swira sa*). Once the nine days are completed, these prohibitions may continue in an attenuated form until the baby is a month or so old, but it is the nine days which are considered the most significant. Interestingly it is women who seem to be responsible for enforcing these prohibitions and some have significant lee-way in the way these taboos are interpreted. Loisa (17), for example, made occasional sorties out of the house during the post-partum period and was quite prepared to receive the occasional male visitor. Nevertheless, she did remain at home for most of this period and, like Lucy, was careful to place an open Bible close to her baby's cot.<sup>9</sup>

Births (*aisubaia* or *baikaia* - to give birth) are generally handled by village "parteras" (village midwives), of which the village has two. One of these, Vida (29), is a Miskitu woman in her fifties born in Kakabila, while the other, Miss Junie (2), is a Creole woman of about the same age, originally from Marshall Point and married to a Kakabila man. Both of these regularly attend the workshops held in Pearl Lagoon every six months or so by the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health for the Cuenca "parteras", and by virtue of their training are considered fit by villagers to charge the seventy or eighty córdobas from each mother for whom they performed this service.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Since not all households have "grabadors" or the money for batteries, this is less usual.

<sup>8</sup> The list of these foodstuffs tended to vary from informant to informant but the list given here is fairly typical. Food prohibitions are usually known as "diet" or *kulki*, though sometimes the more general word for 'enemy' - *waila* - is used. One of the rationales for these food prohibitions is that if they are not observed the child will get colic (see also Helms 1971: 79).

<sup>9</sup> Contrary to Collier and Rosaldo's expectations, I found no evidence of the *couvade* in Kakabila (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 314).

<sup>10</sup> Another woman, Miss Melba (27), *lamlat* to both "parteras" - BW to one and HZ to another, also regularly attends but does not practice as a regular "partera". There is a general feeling that mothers do not like to have their babies delivered by "parteras" to whom they are consanguineally related, but this belief is not strictly adhered to (see Helms 1971: 95, for related practices in Asang).

Besides the training which they receive at the workshops in Pearl Lagoon, both "parteras" have a knowledge of effective herbal and plant remedies for birth-related crises, and these too are administered during difficult births. Of these the most dramatic, generally used as a last resort, is to prepare a drink from water in which a "thunderbolt" has been boiled (see also MM 1910, vol. 7: 560). This water is also splashed over the patient.<sup>11</sup> Miss Junie has a particularly good knowledge of these and other remedies, though she is not considered a "bush doctor" or "curandera". Miss Vida, for her part, has an extensive knowledge of the magical properties of babies *kal*, the caul which some babies are born with over their heads. To be born with a *kal* is considered very lucky indeed, and although these usually belong to the child's mother, Vida has managed to collect a few of these, probably in lieu of payment for her services as midwife.<sup>12</sup> Vida also told me that it is particularly good to have two, one from a baby of each sex, and that she occasionally sold them singly or in cross-sex pairs to other villagers. Both *dama* "Prophet" (39) and the village *sukia*, Mistalin (34), I was told, are capable of making strong "good luck" (though not curative) "medicine" (*sika*) for the owner when working with one of each.<sup>13</sup> These matters, Miss Vida told me, "only we Indian know".

Naming a baby usually takes place after a few days or weeks. Except for baptism, which has more to do with establishing ritual kin ties than giving the baby its name, there is no ritual associated with naming, and parents often change their minds about which first name to give the baby several times before they settle on something suitable. Usually it is conceded that the mother has the right to choose the baby's name, though in some cases the father actually makes the final selection. As Helms notes for Asang (Helms 1971: 95), Kakabila people generally prefer that a baby's name be new to the village and mothers often ask strangers to select a nice sounding name for their babies (see also Conzemius 1932: 106). Girls' names usually end with the 'a' vowel, following a diphthong in the preceding syllable, such as Ceneida, Micaila and Loisa, whereas boys' names usually end with the vowel 'o' (if they are Spanish borrowings), or a consonant (for example, Stenet, Rinkart and Palford). These first names which are given later formally at baptism, however, are rarely used by villagers, most of whom acquire nicknames.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Thunderbolts" are large smooth stones which crash down to earth during thunderstorms (*alwani pulisa*).

<sup>12</sup> Normally *kal* or "crowns" fetch anything from sixty up to one hundred córdobas.

<sup>13</sup> This "medicine" is not effective in the presence of a menstruating woman.

<sup>14</sup> Children's nicknames are often taken from animals, for example, "Kiaki" (agouti) and "Goatshi" (goat), or are composed of meaningless single syllables reduplicated, for example, "Plipli" and "Singsing". Often these childhood nicknames continue into adulthood. Adults typically have two nicknames in circulation at any one time. One of these is usually considered relatively respectful, and children may use it provided that it is prefixed



Until the child is baptised, he or she is still considered spiritually and morally vulnerable, though less so than during the post-partum "nine days". However, he or she may acquire some protection in the meantime by acquiring a *lapia*. The institution of *lapia* among the Miskitu is considered a specifically Miskitu form of *compadrazgo*. In Kakabila the two institutions are distinguished principally in terms of a religious/secular distinction, godparenthood being thought of as a religious obligation, and *lapia* as a secular duty.<sup>15</sup> Although it is considered essential for every child to have godparents, it is nowadays considered optional for him or her to have a *lapia*, and many parents these days, I was told, do not take the trouble to arrange for their children to have one, or simply arrange for the "partera" (midwife) to be the child's *lapia*. Usually the *lapia* is selected by the mother and invited to her house where he or she is invited to cut the baby's dried umbilical cord (*klua*) into four pieces, after which he or she cuts a tuft of hair from the baby's head. These are later buried by the child's father and the *lapia* underneath a newly planted coconut tree, which then, as far as I understand, becomes the property of the child. From then on the child and its parents, on the one hand, and and their *lapia*, on the other, are considered to have a special bond and are supposed to address one another reciprocally as "*lapia*". *Lapia* are expected to demonstrate *rispik* (respect) for one another; they should "live good" (*pain iwaia*) with one another and should never "run bad joke" (exchange sexually explicit banter) or row (*unsabaia*) with one another. The *lapia* thus becomes a sort of guardian for the child, keeping a concerned eye over him or her, giving occasional presents, and occasionally expecting small favours (see also Conzemius 1932: 146, 151, and Helms 1971: 95).<sup>16</sup>

Whereas the institution of *lapia* is considered by some to be optional and somewhat old-fashioned, the structurally similar institution of godparenthood is very strongly adhered to. Relations of godparenthood are, as elsewhere, initiated by baptism. Generally the parents of a child, whether Anglican or Catholic, inform the church committee members or the pastor, that they wish to baptise a child, and when several babies of the same denomination are awaiting

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by the honorific "Mister" or "Miss", for example, "Mister Island", while the other is generally less so. This less respectful name is only used by other adults with whom the referent has a joking or neutral relationship, but never by those with whom one has a *rispik* (respect) relationship (see also Helms 1971: 62).

<sup>15</sup> I use the term 'godparenthood' in preference to 'compadrazgo', since this institution, as it is practised in Kakabila, is rather different to 'compadrazgo' as it is practised elsewhere in Latin America (e.g. Gudeman 1976: 190-231).

<sup>16</sup> Bell gives an interesting account of the institution of *lapia* as it was practiced in the mid-nineteenth century (1989 [1899]: 88).

baptism, the village representatives of the church arrange for an ordained priest (usually from Bluefields) to come to the village especially for this purpose. Usually the baby is baptised into the denomination of the parents, but many parents, especially those in denominationally mixed conjugal partnerships, are not particularly concerned about this. There is no discourse of theological difference between denominations, and it is generally held that it is the change of spiritual status, rather than the facts of the child's parents' particular church membership, that is the most significant aspect of the baptism (see also Helms 1971: 95-96).<sup>17</sup>

The parents of the child generally invite another older couple, with whom they "live good", to "stand" *takaia* (act as godparents for the child), and the parents and the godparents become "compadre" and "comadre" to one another, always addressing one another as "compadre" (or "compa" for short) and "comadre" (or "comad" for short).<sup>18</sup> If the "compadres" and "comadres" have "run joke" with one another in the past, this now stops, and they reinvent their relationship in terms of a strict *rispik* (respect), often bordering, as Lorenzo (12) told me, on avoidance. As Loisa (17) and Virginia (16) told me when you see your "compadre" "*swiram mai daukisa*" (you become ashamed): "no answer them up", "no hard ears them (don't act stubborn)" and "no curse them up". Or as Amanda (12) put it, it as though a "worm is crying in your belly". This embarrassment no doubt partly rests on the differing sets of expectations that parent and godparent have of one another. The child's godparents theoretically have to show the parents that they are looking after the spiritual welfare of the child, telling him "*upla rispik muns*" (respect people) and "manners *bris*" (show manners), while the parents show the child's godparents that they are looking after his or her secular needs (see also Helms 1971: 96).<sup>19</sup>

Sometimes "godsons" and "goddaughters", even if they have not been sent by their parents, are given meals by godparents, and children are quite entitled to ask "goddies" (godmothers) for food, provided that they do so respectfully. Likewise a "godmother" or "godfather" is quite entitled to ask a "godson" or "goddaughter" to perform small favours, and it is considered very important that the child do these willingly. To refuse a godparent or a *lapia*, is considered a

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<sup>17</sup> Discourses of disapproval against denominationally mixed marriages do not seem to exist in Kakabila as they do in Asang (Helms 1971: 88).

<sup>18</sup> "Compadres" and "comadres" also refer to one another with these honorifics in one another's absence, sometimes followed by the first name if the referent's identity is in doubt; for example, "compa Mario".

<sup>19</sup> In theory the godparents have special responsibility to the child if it is orphaned or deserted, although in practice the child is usually cared for by the mother's kin (see also Helms 1971), and if the parents separate, it is almost always the mother with whom the child remains. Separations, according to what people told me, are usually sudden and in most cases are brought about by the father running off ("*witin swi plapan*" - "he ran off and left her").

serious offence, and would almost certainly result in a beating for the child by its mother.<sup>20</sup> Although most of these requests are spontaneous, children are sometimes packed off by their parents to perform specific tasks for a "comadre" or "compadre" as a token of *rispik*.

The importance of *rispik* between "compadres" is well illustrated by the following case histories, the first told to me by Rufina.

Case # 10

Alejandro (36) was in charge of the administration of the CEPAD house building and completion programme. Rufina (18), his "comadre", had asked him to put down her name to be one of the programme's beneficiaries for easy credit on building materials, and, according to what she told me, she had received a promise from "compa Alejandro" that he would indeed put her down. When CEPAD had produced the list of beneficiaries which included almost all applicants from the village, Rufina, it turned out, had been excluded. According to Alejandro, this was because Rufina's house was made of cement and not lumber. The programme, Alejandro argued, was for those with lumber houses. Rufina was very upset because in fact her house was in a very poor state. She was particularly aggrieved because she felt her "compadre" had made her a promise and had then let her down. Although she was a woman who was known for and proud of her forthrightness, Rufina could not, however, bring herself to argue about this face-to-face with Alejandro, because he was her "compadre", and as villagers often told me one should not "fight", "curse" or "row" with a "compadre".

Case # 11

On one occasion Loyola (21) told me that she had been startled to see Nelson (27) wandering around the village drunk with his genitals hanging out of his trousers. When I asked why she had not alerted him to this, she replied, "ent compadre-*ki*?" ('he's my "compadre", isn't he?').

The offspring of a child's godparents are considered to be like his or her own brothers and sisters. It is generally expected that they should "live nice" with one another,<sup>21</sup> and children are sometimes sent off or taken to visit godparents in other villages.

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<sup>20</sup> Often these requests from godparents continue in a weaker form into adulthood, with, for example, older men sometimes requesting that their adult "godsons" buy them a can of beer, if they see them drinking on someone's veranda. It is said that there is no way a "godson" could refuse such a request.

<sup>21</sup> One is not permitted to marry "god brothers" and "god sisters" (one's godparents' children), though this prohibition is not extended to the children of godsiblings, and one is certainly permitted to marry a "god brother's" or "god sister's" sibling (for example, one's parents' godchild's sibling), provided that there are no other impediments to marriage). See also Helms (1971: 76).

The ritual transformation of children is also achieved through Confirmation, which (usually though not always) takes place in early adolescence. This particular event seems to be particularly important for girls. Once she is confirmed, a *tiara* (adolescent girl) may take Holy Communion, but should no longer "talk"<sup>22</sup> to boys until she is married. In spite of this belief, however, there are adults in Kakabila who are yet to be confirmed, and the fact that one of these, a woman with two children, regularly takes Holy Communion, is a source of scandal for some villagers, who feel that this behaviour is sinful. Girls who are confirmed generally wear a white dress, which forever afterwards is associated with this ritual and which is only worn thereafter when the girl takes Holy Communion. It should not be worn on secular occasions, and, as one girl Myrna (4) emphatically told me, never when dancing at parties. This dress, is a major expense for many Kakabila parents, and lack of money may well delay the Confirmation until sufficient funds are found to purchase the dress.

An interesting aspect of 'godparenthood' in Kakabila is that this institution seems to be as much about adult-to-adult relationships as it is about adult-to-child relationships. As I show in the following two chapters individuals only become recognised as adults (*upla almuk*), and therefore autonomous individuals with opinions to be heard and respected, through the fact of having children for whom they are responsible. Since 'godparenthood' operates, at least theoretically, to police this responsibility, the fact of having "compadres" and "comadres" for one's children seems to work as a monitor on one's right to be considered an adult. In some respects 'godparenthood' has many of the features of teknonymic forms of address, as they have been used by other Miskitus (see Helms 1971: 61-63, 93). Both institutions, it seems, allocate status to individuals through children. Teknonyms, while certainly used occasionally, however, are much less evident in Kakabila than they seem to have been in 1960s Asang (Helms 1971: 61-62). The reasons for this I believe are twofold. Firstly, as I have noted above, 'godparenthood' as it is imagined in Kakabila, seems to be mobilised for many of the same ends as teknonymy. Secondly, teknonyms allowed Asang people to manipulate or elide consanguineal and affinal distinctions in ways which are no longer relevant for Kakabila (see Overing 1975: 169 and chapter XIII).<sup>23</sup>

### *Sunday School, school and "pre-school"*

Younger children ("pikninny") are generally warned for their own safety not to wander too far from the house ("one big Satan to the well"), while *tiara* (adolescent girls) are told by parents to be on hand to help their mothers around the "yard" and kitchen, and not to "bargos" (wander aimlessly) with unsuitable "merong" (young men). Consequently Sunday School, "pre-school"

<sup>22</sup> "Talk" is often used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse.

<sup>23</sup> These differences are discussed in Chapter Eight.

and grade school provide the only regular contacts with children living in distant parts of the village, and the walks to and from Sunday School and school, and the recess periods, in particular, provide useful opportunities for children to meet and exchange information.

Most Kakabila children go to Sunday School on Sunday morning at one of the two village churches. Children of both sexes go dressed in their best clothes, "pants" (*trausis*), shirts (*praka*) and "tennis" (trainers) for boys, and lacy dresses (*prak*) and "tennis" for girls. The tendency for males to sit on the left side of the church door and females to sit on the right (facing the altar), observed during the adult church services, is only weakly adhered to in Sunday school. Services, conducted in English by one of the village schoolteachers, consist of songs sung in English, Miskitu and Spanish, and are usually punctuated by a lesson from a children's book of parables, following which children are asked to demonstrate their comprehension of the lesson by answering questions. For most younger children attendance is made compulsory by their parents, and even the very youngest toddlers attend, usually being taken by older siblings. Adults keep a reciprocal eye on one another's children by making sure that they do not slip off. In some instances truants are reported to parents who may well then beat them; in others children are warned by observant neighbours that "Satan going bust unu bunka!" ('Satan is going to break your arses!'). Sunday School is not generally considered compulsory for adolescents but many do attend, since it affords opportunities both to meet friends and sing out loud to the accompaniment of a guitar. Others feel impelled to go because of the fear that "Satan" will catch them should they wilfully miss Sunday school.<sup>24</sup>

Children first attend "pre-school" the village kindergarten, at about the age of four. This takes place in the 'hall' (or front room) of the house belonging to Amanda (12), who works as the 'pre-school' teacher. "Pre-school" education is conducted in English in Kakabila and takes place for two years, after which time most boys and girls begin first grade at the village school house. The teaching at "pre-school" level is semi-structured in that the teacher is given a schedule of the topics and subjects to be covered by the English Bilingual Education Program. Unlike the much more formalised grade school teaching methodology imposed upon the village grade school teachers by the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education office in Bluefields, the "pre-school" teacher has some latitude as to how she wishes to teach these topics; Amanda had developed an imaginative repertoire of her own of educational games and songs. Although many "pre-school" children have previously attended morning "Sunday School" at one of the two village churches, this is a passive experience in which they watch as the older children sing and listen to the lessons. In "pre-school", however, they are expected to participate. Consequently for most of the boys and girls who attend "pre-school", this is the first directly participatory

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<sup>24</sup> One of the most popular Sunday school songs is "Satan in the family"!

experience of social life they receive outside the family. Amanda complained to me that many of the "pre-school" pupils seemed to get it into their head that she was some kind of mother to them, and would ask her in the middle of class or even in non-school time, to delouse them.

After two years at the village "pre-school" the children "promote" ("promote" *takaia*) and go on up to grade school the following academic year. All parents send their children to school and there is a strong sense in Kakabila that education is a very important thing that should be taken advantage of. The mothers and older sisters of children starting "first grade" sometimes told me that these children are sometimes frightened to begin first grade at the school house, because they had been teased that they would be beaten by the teachers. In fact school discipline in Kakabila is very good and I never saw or heard of corporal punishment being administered in class. Older people told me, however, that beatings were quite normal in years gone by when "Daddy Green" and other Jamaican and Creole teachers "from out" had taught in Kakabila, and some adults in fact bemoaned the disappearance of corporal punishment in school, questioning how children could be expected to learn without it.

The school is one of many in the RAAS which adhere to the national English Bilingual Education Programme. The programme was initiated in 1985 for mainly RAAS (South Atlantic Autonomous Region) communities and, like its Miskitu equivalent introduced a year earlier, was designed to meet the demands of *costeños* for schooling in native languages (Yih and Slate 1985; Gurdián and Salamanca 1991). Although most Miskitu villages chose the Miskitu Bilingual Education Programme, the parents of Kakabila, aware of the fact that their children, unlike many "up the coast" Miskitu children, spoke Nicaraguan English quite as well as Miskitu, opted for the English programme. Village parents told me that they thought it better that their children learn to read and write English, since this would "capacitate" (equip) them better should they get the chance to work in Bluefields, or the opportunity to "ship out" (work on a commercial tourist ship) (Freeland 1994).<sup>25</sup>

The Bilingual English Programme, however, is not well thought out, to a large extent addressing the needs of Bluefields Creole children who speak both English and Spanish, rather than those of the Cuenca children who barely speak any Spanish at all. Consequently many of the Cuenca children, on reaching third grade (the point at which Spanish becomes the medium of instruction), do not speak enough Spanish to make a successful transition to the higher grades. Lessons in English are taught by rote, according to a curriculum devised for the programme, teachers have very little room for innovation, the variety of English used in the

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<sup>25</sup> Many parents, particularly those living in "downtown" Kakabila, tend to use English with their children rather than Miskitu which is reserved for adult intercourse.

textbooks is International English, (a form with which Kakabila children have little or no experience at all),<sup>26</sup> and much of the subject matter is of little or no relevance. The illustration, for example, of shower units, with captions telling the children to take a shower every day, which appears in one of the "Moral" subject textbooks, is curiously inappropriate for Kakabila children who have never seen a shower unit. Kakabila children, faced in class with the strange syntax and vocabulary of International English on the one hand, and the necessity, imposed by the constraints of a strict programme curriculum, that they learn by rote on the other, are thus ill-equipped to develop a critical and self-motivated approach to learning.

Few parents are literate enough to check that their children give their homework sufficient attention, and it is only at the parent-teacher meetings, when the "boletín" (report) cards are handed out that most parents get an idea of their children's performance.<sup>27</sup> It is mothers who usually monitor their children's education and it is generally with mothers whom the teachers have to remonstrate if particular children are repeatedly failing ("flunk" *takaia*) and having to resit grades. I heard Amanda (12) threaten her daughter who was continually failing fifth grade that if she failed again she was going to "put a nail in the fire" (to heat up the point of the nail in order to drill a hole in her child's head) if she did not do better next year. Many children "flunk" at least one year and have to repeat grades, and most children are about fifteen or sixteen year old by the time they reach sixth grade.

The school in Kakabila has no grades beyond sixth, and children who wish to "promote" and study at secondary school have to go to Pearl Lagoon or Bluefields. The cost of sending children to be educated outside the village, however, is prohibitively expensive for most parents, and those that do are usually only able to do so for one or two years.<sup>28</sup> In spite (or perhaps because) of the considerable impediments, getting educated or "capacitated" is considered to be a very good thing, and many adolescent boys (*wahma*) earnestly express the wish to obtain at least enough education to "ship out",<sup>29</sup> for which a demonstrable level of

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<sup>26</sup> In fact, as far as the Curriculum allows, the Kakabila teachers sensibly use the Kakabila variety of Nicaraguan English with a little Miskitu, as the medium of instruction.

<sup>27</sup> Three times a year they report to the school for special meetings at which the "bóletin" are distributed and discussed.

<sup>28</sup> See the case # 3 in the previous chapter.

<sup>29</sup> To "ship out" is to obtain paid (usually menial) work on a tourist Caribbean cruise ship.

literacy as well as connections in Bluefields is usually required. Up to my period of fieldwork only one Kakabila boy, Orville (1), had managed to do so.<sup>30</sup>

### *Children as social persons*

In many parts of Europe and North America children are constituted as a distinct 'other' (Ariès 1973). They have said to have their own world, one which, although eventually lost as adulthood arrives, should be recognised and engaged by adults. Kakabila people, however, tend not to conceive of childhood as a distinct realm of thought and practice, and rather imagine children (*tuktan*) (a category which includes unmarried adolescents of both sexes) as potential adults (*upla almuk*), who only become fully constituted social persons through acquiring the trappings of adulthood, most notably spouses (*maia*) and children of their own (see also Helms 1971: 60).

Whereas adults (*upla almuk*) are entitled to express their opinions in public arenas, children are expected to demonstrate their "manners" by not speaking to adults until they are spoken to, and by keeping their opinions to themselves.<sup>31</sup> Children are expected to address adult men and women to their faces as "sir" and "ma'am" respectively, or address them as "Mister" and "Miss" followed by their first name or respectful nickname; for example, "Mister Nelson" or "Miss Amanda".<sup>32</sup> On one occasion I witnessed a great deal of amusement because a small boy addressed an adult as "Mister Guyan", the addressee's disrespectful nickname.

Children are also expected to show *rispik* (respect) towards adults through compliance. This may entail assenting to an adult's statement of fact ("yes sir" or "yes ma'am") or fulfilling a request for assistance. If an adult arrives at a "landing" in a "dori", for example, and needs a child to help him carry some articles up to the village, he or she is quite entitled to order a child

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<sup>30</sup> This almost unanimous wish of Kakabila boys to "ship out" is probably also related to the fact that they are unpopular marriage partners as far as village girls and their parents are concerned. This is explored in later chapters.

<sup>31</sup> In fact Kakabila children seem to subvert this view by means of two secret languages or backslangs, both known as "gibberish", which adults apparently do not understand. Each is based on the incorporation of a particular phoneme into the first syllable of the word. Both are used with English rather than Miskitu.

<sup>32</sup> This use of "Mister" and "Miss" is also used by adults to address or refer to adults with whom one has a relationship of *rispik* (respect). For example, Sansin (26) used to refer to his wife's stepfather, a Creole man named Jones Forbes (19), as "Mister Jones". See also Conzemius (1932: 107), Helms (1971: 64-65) and Timar (n.d.: 6).



who is close by to help him or her.<sup>33</sup> Although in most instances children willingly help adults on an occasional basis, at other times they refuse and run away. Adults have recourse to few sanctions towards *ruk* or "rude" (disobedient) children (except for those considered close enough kin to beat), other than to inform their parents.<sup>34</sup> However, telling parents of a child's misbehaviour is considered quite extreme and is only generally reserved for reporting theft and other serious misdemeanours.

Punishments for *ruk* or "rude" (badly behaved) offspring, come in several forms, and some parents more readily "beat" (*wipaia*) their children than others. Sometimes a parent simply cuffs a child around the head, or hits him or her around the legs with the flat side of a machete. On other occasions, however, beatings are quite sustained and one fairly frequently hears the screams of children crying "ai mama! ai mama!", as they are hit repeatedly with a leather belt or switch (see also Conzemius 1932: 152, or Helms 1971: 97). Usually it is the mother who administers these more sustained punishments, some fathers saying that they do not like to beat their children because they fear that their hands are "too hard" (*ai mihta uba karna*).<sup>35</sup> Far more often, however, mothers simply threaten their children, and it is common to hear them shouting at disobedient offspring in English or Miskitu, "I going beat you today!" or "*mai wipaisna naiwa!*".<sup>36</sup> A child who is habitually stubborn may also be told that in English or Miskitu he or she is "hard ears", "*kiama karna*" or simply *kiamapara* (no ears).<sup>37</sup>

The notion that children should have "manners", or *rispik* for adults,<sup>38</sup> is considered very important in Kakabila, and mothers become quite ashamed if their children demonstrate

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<sup>33</sup> It would not be considered correct to be always asking the same neighbour's children, unless they are "family", since it is the parents of these children who ultimately have the right to direct their labour.

<sup>34</sup> Although many villagers theoretically consider it acceptable that other adults, especially teachers, beat their children if the latter have misbehaved, many in practise, one teacher told me, do not like it. Consequently, she told me, most teachers and other adults steer clear of hitting children belonging to "families" other than their own. In this more restricted view only older siblings and close senior kin are licensed to beat a child without parental "privilege". Children wilful enough to continually refuse to help adults soon develop reputations for being "mannish" or "womanish" (combative).

<sup>35</sup> Reyes notes that in Awastara it is the mother's brother and not the father who has the right to beat his sister's children (Reyes 1992: 10). The significance of this is considered in Chapter Eight.

<sup>36</sup> Children who used bad language (*saura bila*) at one time were made to eat a pepper (*kuma*) in much the same way as English children had their mouths washed out with soap and water.

<sup>37</sup> Sometimes mothers simply cry in exasperation "*kiama!*" (ears) for short.

<sup>38</sup> Adults are also entitled to dismiss children from areas in which certain kinds of activity are taking place, and adult men in particular sometimes exercise this privilege. If men are drinking together, or simply conversing

"manners *apu*" (no manners) in front of strangers or ritual kin. Godparents in particular, but *lapia* too, are entitled to special *rispik* and "manners" from children, since it is these adults who are in some sense responsible for their moral welfare. One mother, Amanda (12), told me how embarrassed she was when her seven year old daughter Sharon failed to address her "godmother" in Pearl Lagoon with the appropriate relationship term. In short Kakabila children - and this includes adolescent *wahma* (boys) and *tiara* (girls) - are expected to learn to navigate themselves discreetly in a world that is ordered by and for adults. They are rewarded by correct forms of behaviour with the forms of address "mama" (for girls) and "papa" (for boys), both of which express adult approval.

Kakabila children are acutely aware that they only become social adults (*upla almuk*) through the processes of establishing conjugal partnerships and having children of their own.<sup>39</sup> Consequently marriage is a central preoccupation and source of embarrassment (*swira*) even for young children.

"Kiss and be gone" is a game played by pre-adolescent children in Kakabila in the late afternoon or early evening. The participating children join hands in a ring and elect one of their number to stand in the middle. A verse is sung which invites the child in the middle to select his or her wedding partner. After much giggling and embarrassment a partner is chosen and he or she joins the first child in the centre of the ring. A second verse is then sung in which the first child is invited to kiss his or her spouse-to-be. More giggling and embarrassment follows and the first child kisses his or her chosen partner, after which another child is chosen and the game begins again.

During the Christmas and Semana Santa periods short plays known as "Minstrel" are sometimes organised for the villagers by Miss Junie (2) and put on in the early evening. A common feature of these are the mock civil weddings which take place between the village *wahma* (adolescent boys) and *tiara* (adolescent girls). These are conducted with a great deal of laughter and embarrassment, and the adult actors take great pleasure in embarrassing the participating *tiara*. One amusing aspect of these "Minstrel" is that the couples are joined in marriage by Mister Manny Hodgson (11), a villager with the same name and "title" as the registrar at the Pearl Lagoon mayor's office.<sup>40</sup>

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together, they often shoo away children by telling them that they are discussing adults' business (see also Helms 1971: 89).

<sup>39</sup> Up until then they are treated as children, and they are not generally allowed to play in the adult baseball teams or eat meat from the head of the manatee.

<sup>40</sup> Mister Manny, Aguilar's father, was not present when I made the village census.

Those adolescents who are really ready to become adults demonstrate this in a ritual called "Mosko" which takes place every year during the New Year period.

"Mosko" is a masked dance, which incorporates features of both the San Jerónimo festival in Bluefields and the Coronation of the Miskitu King ritual which takes place "up the coast" (Dennis 1982).<sup>41</sup> In this ritual, as it is enacted in Kakabila, the distinction between male and female is suppressed, while the distinction between adult (*upla almuk*) and child (*tukta*) is specifically foregrounded.

The "Mosko" which I witnessed, began "uptown" when eight dancers, *tiara* and *wahma*, emerged from house 49. Their identities and sexes were concealed, their faces hidden by cardboard masks on which red designs of no obvious significance had been painted, and their hands by woollen socks.<sup>42</sup> They wore clothes which obviously were not their own, and the backs of their pants were stuffed in order to make their rumps seem larger. Each dancer also carried a wooden switch. The dancers were accompanied by two guitarists, Island (27) and Winston (34) as well as a *wahma*, who played percussion on a washboard grater.

This group made a rough anti-clockwise circuit of the village stopping at every house and playing a song for the inhabitants of the house for every córdoba they received from the occupants. They were marshalled by the "Mosko" leader Richard (15) who collected the money in a bag.<sup>43</sup> The guitarists sang and played mostly "Palo de Mayo" songs, such as "Give Me Back My Shilling" and "Come Down Brother Willie", while the masked dancers danced singly, occasionally in a sexually suggestive style. Close at hand young children would approach the dancers in excited trepidation. The dancers, for their part, would sometimes peel off from the guitarists and chase the children with their switches, whipping whoever they caught.

After about three hours the dancers returned to house 49, shutting the door and wooden windows, changed into their ordinary clothes and began an ordinary dance accompanied by a radio cassette recorder. At this point several of the children tried to look in through the windows in order to learn the identities of the dancers, but they were shooed away. With the money raised Richard bought two chickens and organised a

<sup>41</sup> The Coronation ritual, described by Dennis for Awastara, is unknown, I believe, to most Kakabila villagers.

<sup>42</sup> Among the dancers, it transpired, were Sandy (21), Telia (27), Silvia (4), Elvis (48), Mauricio (41), Nora (44) and Tiburón (39). See Young (1842: 31-32), Irias (1853: 165), Bell (1989 [1899]: 91-95) and Conzemius (1932: 162-163) for masked dances in the nineteenth century. See Helms (1971: 31) for the masked "Dixie Man Dance" in Asang.

<sup>43</sup> "Mosko" is said to come from Honduras, and since Richard's mother Elsy (15) is "Karibe mix" and therefore of Honduran origin, he claimed the right to lead the "Mosko".

dance especially for the *wahma* (adolescent boys) and *tiara* (adolescent girls) which took place several nights later in house 28.

Although nobody ascribed a particular meaning to ritual, other than it makes people happy (*lilia briaia*), I believe that "Mosko" encodes the readiness of *wahma* and *tiara* to enter the adult world. The dancers disguise themselves in masks and bulky clothes and thereby present themselves as strangers. At the same time they show that they are willing to deal with adults by contracting to dance for them for money. Finally they distance themselves from the village children by whipping any who come too close.

### *Girls (tukta mairin)*

Kakabila villagers tend to prefer that babies to be born female rather than male (*contra* Conzemius 1932: 134). The usually stated reason for this is that whereas boys grow up to leave their parents, girls stay and produce sons-in-law. In the words of Nelson (27), a man in his fifties with several adult children, daughters give "a better result"; with sons the mother's "sweat" is passed onto the daughter-in-law and lost.<sup>44</sup>

#### Case # 12

Loyola (21) told me that she desperately wanted a daughter, even to the pointing of occasionally putting her youngest baby son's hair in ribbons. She had five sons and no daughters, and from time to time had to persuade her sister Marlyn (48) to lend her one of her two *tiara* daughters, Marina or Juana, to help her wash clothes.

Women with few girls in particular seem keen to have one or two more daughters, since when these girls grow up, it is expected that they will help them with household chores.<sup>45</sup> Consequently the conscious socialisation of Kakabila girls emphasises their need to work hard for their mothers. This begins at an early age. As soon as toddler girls are able to walk, they

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<sup>44</sup> However, this tendency towards a preference for girls is by means universal. A few parents prefer boy babies, while other claim not to be concerned what sex their babies are at birth. Although Conzemius (1932: 152) reports the one-time practice of female infanticide for the Miskitu because female babies were considered unlucky, I certainly doubt whether this has been widely true for the last hundred and thirty years (see Mueller 1932: 48, 49, 79). The historical trend towards uxorilocal postnuptial marriage and brideservice over the last century and a half, which I argue for in Chapters Seven and Eight, has surely made female babies appear an asset as several of my informants noted (see also Pim and Seeman 1869: 306-307). If anything, there is a particular anxiety that daughters should not die prematurely; for example, it is said that if one sees one particular lizard (species unknown), your daughter will die.

<sup>45</sup> Many Kakabila adults, however, hope to have both sons and daughters in relatively equal numbers.

are made to know that misbehaviour is no longer indulged, and they suddenly find themselves liable to sharp scoldings and slaps from mothers and older siblings. By the time they are five, they are expected to watch out for their younger siblings, making sure that they come to no harm and defending them from attack from other older children. Girls over seven or eight in particular, who are assumed to have acquired *sins* (sense), are expected to take special responsibility for their younger siblings, and it is a common sight to see girls of this age leading their junior uterine siblings around the village in large gangs. Girl children are thus actively encouraged to develop senses both of themselves as representatives of their mothers and of belonging to sibling groups for whom they have special responsibilities and loyalties (see also Dennis 1981: 480).

By the same token, however, most Kakabila girls know that they can expect a high degree of loyalty from their mothers and siblings.

#### Case # 13

Amanda (12) was very close to her *tiara* daughter Ceneida, and it was to her that she entrusted her business selling flour, sugar and cooking oil, when she was away in Bluefields buying. In one occasion Amanda became incensed because one of the village "merong" (young men), Salvador (36), had allegedly punched Ceneida. Amanda was so angry that she did not wait for a letter from the *wihua* (arbiter), at the time a new appointment, and "took a pass" by "dori" to Pearl Lagoon the following morning accompanied by Ceneida in order to report the assault to the police. When they arrived at Pearl Lagoon they found that the police office was closed in order to celebrate a public holiday. However, she was still very angry and the next day insisted that her husband Lorenzo go instead. Lorenzo was rather loathe to become involved in this dispute but pressured by Amanda went to Pearl Lagoon in his own "dori" the following day. When he returned he was very drunk and told Amanda that he had lost the summons that the police had given him to give to Salvador. Amanda was livid and accompanied Lorenzo herself two or three days later at which time she came back with a summons which she promptly presented to Salvador, who eventually failed to turn up at the police office at the time indicated, thereby risking imprisonment for ignoring the summons. Typically nothing more was heard with respect to this case, although it was suspected that Salvador's name had been recorded and that he risked arrest the next time he went to Pearl Lagoon.

As daughters approach adolescence and become *tiara* (adolescent girls or young women), their mothers detach them from these wandering sibling groups and they are given responsibilities in the kitchen and house, preparing food for the pot and table (*tama swakaia*), cooking (*piarkaia*), washing the dishes ("plate" *sikbaia*), splitting firewood (*pauta baikaia*), cleaning the house floor ("floor scrub" *munai*), and washing clothes (*kwala tuskaia*) for the other members of the house, along with their mothers, older sisters and maternal aunts. By this time it is assumed

that they are fully capable of running the house on their own, and many mothers in fact shift a great deal of their workload onto their daughters. Because mothers and daughters spend so much time working together, they often develop very close friendships and become closely identified, and daughters of this age are often the only people to whom women entrust their small babies (and as noted above for Amanda, their businesses if they have them) during prolonged absences.

Care given by girls to children other than their own is conceptualised in terms of debt, this being accumulated during childhood and theoretically discharged later. This concept of caring for a smaller child is expressed in the idiom of "backing" (carrying). Younger children are often looked after by their older sisters or mother's younger sisters of around nine or ten upwards, and are typically seen being "backed" on the latter's hips. Children cared for in this way are expected to demonstrate gratitude in later life by helping their erstwhile carers in reciprocal fashion, either by caring for them in their old age and therefore discharging the debt directly, or by caring for their children in turn, thereby passing the debt on.

#### Case # 14

One woman of forty, Marlyn (48), told me that she had brought up her younger sister Loisa (17) almost as a daughter, having been given her by their mother Libias (20) to help her when she and her husband Jacinto moved into their first house together. At this period Marlyn had no daughters old enough to help her to look after her own infant daughter Marina and it was thought that her younger *tiara* sister Loisa would be a useful help. Loisa "backed" her elder sister Marlyn's daughter Marina until the child was old enough to get around herself.

Now that Marina was a *tiara* herself, and Loisa was a mother with four young children of her own, Marlyn told me that she had thought it appropriate to send Marina to help her *anti* (aunt) thereby paying her back for the care that Loisa had given her during her toddlerhood. Marina had helped Loisa for a little while but had not enjoyed working for her *anti* without pay and had come home. Marlyn was very disappointed with Marina for not doing her duty towards her *anti* Loisa. She told me that she felt Marina owed her *anti* a debt for "backing" her during her babyhood.

Kakabila girls are also socialised from an early age to have *swira* ("shame"). Unlike Miskitu boys, who often run about the village completely naked until they are eleven or twelve, girls are dressed in "panty" from the moment they no longer require diapers. It is considered a poor reflection on a mother to allow an adult from another household, particularly a stranger, to see even a baby daughter crawling about naked, and one commonly hears mothers shouting at their daughters to "put panty on the baby" (see also Bell 1989 [1899]: 128-129, 261, and Conzemius 1932: 24). By the time they are four or five years old, Kakabila girls have already developed a

strong sense of *swira*, which continues to develop and encompass other aspects of behaviour as they become older. *Tiara* (adolescent girls), in particular, are assumed to possess a special sense of their *swira*, which enjoins them to observe certain restrictions on their behaviour. If an adult man (*waitna almuk*), even a relative, addresses her, her *swira* enjoins her either not to acknowledge him or to do so minimally with extreme *rispik* (respect). She should, as noted above, address him with the title "Mister" followed either by his (first name) or by his nickname if this is a respectful one. If he is old enough, she should address him simply as "*dama*" (old man). A *tiara* is not supposed to "run joke" (exchange sexually explicit banter) or even discuss sex; to do so is considered "bad" (*saura*), and if a man "courts" her publically by flirting, she should not give him any indication of encouragement. Often enough, however, the presentation of *swira* is a facade, which is only demonstrated fully in front of parents or other adults, and many *tiara* have considerably less *swira* when they are with their age mates. Nevertheless *swira* has a political dimension in the sense that it seems to work, more or less successfully, to keep girls' sexuality under parental control. Even those Kakabila *tiara* (adolescent girls) who rarely actually experience shame as an emotion, certainly make sure that they demonstrate their *swira* in public. Consequently demonstrations of sexual encouragement by *tiara* are more constrained than many of the younger male villagers would like. As Yoyo (13) told me, when a young *tiara* walked by blushing, 'it is shame which makes men and women enemies'.

### **Boys (*tutka waitna*)**

The socialisation of Kakabila boys contrasts with that of girls in that it emphasises individual achievement rather than family and household responsibility. When mothers with boy babies meet, for example, they often get them to fight, making the two hit one another until one of the two gets angry enough to either fight of his own volition or simply bursts into tears. This is considered a great joke. Mothers also baby talk to their baby sons, sometimes pretending to mimick them bragging how tough they are or how many girlfriends they have, and kiss and play with their genitals. On one occasion, for example, I heard Amanda (12) imitating her baby son in baby talk, boasting how he would steal a "panga" (motorboat) and go on the run, taking his mother to Costa Rica.

Once baby boys become capable of walking and talking, however, their mothers tend to lose their special interest in them as individuals, and for the next four or five years, they wander round the village in gangs with their toddler siblings and older sisters in a rather undifferentiated mass. During this period it is assumed that boys, like little girls, have yet to acquire *sins* (sense), and, like little girls of this age, are educated, I was told, by slappings and scoldings. Otherwise they receive little special attention, except from adult men who occasionally tease them and playfully flick their penises (*puru*). During this period they are subordinate to their

older sisters, both in the household area and within the sibling groups, the latter typically led by girls of between eight and ten years old.

From about seven years old, boys (*tukta waitna*) begin to detach themselves from these sibling groups and form playpacks of their own made up of pre-adolescent boys of between seven and twelve. When compared to their sisters, who are beginning to assume some of their mothers' responsibilities at this age, it is evident that Kakabila boys in this age group are given a considerable amount of freedom, and most spend a great deal of time playing games of marbles, "cashew",<sup>46</sup> baseball, and "catcho" (hopscotch), as well as flying kites, fishing and gathering delicacies in "doris", stealing fruit from neighbours' trees and hunting small birds and animals with slingshots and bows and arrows.<sup>47</sup> Many of these games are fiercely competitive, and boys who win shout (or are celebrated with the cry) "*waitna!, waitna!*" (literally 'man!, man!').

Their only routine responsibilities are to fetch water from the wells for their mothers and older sisters, to help their parents, older brothers and brothers-in-law, up and down to the "landings" with "dori" equipment and provisions, and to be home by sundown. Boys are expected to anticipate the occasions that they are needed for these tasks, and those boys who are routinely absent when water is required or when dark comes, can expect a beating from their mothers, or if the infraction is deemed sufficiently serious from their fathers. Occasionally boys accompany their mothers hook-and-line fishing or their fathers to the "plantation" to "pull provision" (dig up some cassava and other cultigens), and at planting time they are occasionally required to help members of their "family"<sup>48</sup> sowing rice and cassava on the *pana pana* (mutual assistance) teams (case # 3). These activities, however, are relatively infrequent.

Once boys reach about eleven or twelve, they begin to give up associating with the younger boys and become *wahma* (adolescent boys, generally aged between eleven and seventeen). *Wahma* rarely collect together in gangs (other than to form baseball teams) as their younger brothers do. Rather they tend to form partnerships with best friends, which often become very close. One woman told me that her younger brother Dikas (31) and his best friend Tistis (38) had been so close to one another at this age, that she and her family used to joke that they were married. She and Tistis continued to jokingly address one another as "*lam*" (short for *lamlat* - reciprocally "sister-in-law").

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<sup>46</sup> "Cashew" is a game played with cashew nuts.

<sup>47</sup> Most of these activities are seasonal in character.

<sup>48</sup> The term "family" as it is used in Kakabila is discussed in more detail in later chapters. As far as most children are concerned it includes parents, siblings, grandparents, parents' siblings and parents' siblings' children.



Some *wahma*, often with parental help, begin to cultivate their own "plantations" as young as thirteen, and it is these boys who establish reputations for being "serious". Others, however, wait until their early twenties before they begin to plant, thereby deferring their adulthood. Most, however, go out gill net fishing occasionally in order to earn a little money from the fish plants or fish boats in Pearl Lagoon, and *wahma* can often be seen on their parents' verandas making shrimp nets in the hope that they will be lucky the next time the shrimp are "running". Any money that they earn is theirs and most spent it on "notes" (fashionable) clothes, often in the locally popular "rasta" style. Some boys, when they start to earn a little money make a point of buying something for their mother. Elvis (48), for example, told me that he planned to buy his mother a dress. Boys of this age are also allowed out after dark, and some begin to "court" girls, a process discussed more fully in the following chapters.

### *Summary*

Children, and girls in particular, in some sense belong to their mothers. As one orphan (*tukta rua*) boy, Luis (36) noted that "when you have no mother, you are just like a dog".<sup>49</sup> The Kakabila girl, in particular, soon becomes identified with her mother and her mother's social spaces. The older she becomes, in fact, the more fully integrated a member of her own house she becomes, and the less opportunity she has to express herself outside the confines of her mother's spaces. The Kakabila boy (*tukta waitna*) on the other hand, begins his social life as a member of a sibling group composed of the children of his household, but soon becomes detached from this sibling group, and instead joins playpacks composed of the boys from his own part of the village. These playpacks of boys, whose composition varies from day to day, conduct themselves with little regard to the responsibilities of the house, with the consequence that boys, far more than girls, are encouraged to invest their time in relationships and spaces that have little to do with the house and more to do with relationships which lie outside the idioms of kinship and "family". These processes of socialisation have an important bearing on what happens to boys (*tukta waitna*) and girls (*tukta mairin*) as they negotiate their approaches towards adulthood.

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<sup>49</sup> In Kakabila the worst possible insults are those in which the protagonist "curse about the mother" or "curse by the mother". Usually this curse is "son of a bitch". In "up the coast" Miskitu villages "*yaptam*", an allegedly archaic form meaning 'your mother' is extremely insulting, though in Honduras apparently this form is used simply with no insulting connotations.

## Chapter Five

### From *tiara* to *kuka*

In Chapter Three the rights and responsibilities of adult women as conjugal partners were sketched in the context of a discussion of the Kakabila house, and in one section in Chapter Four I examined the socialisation of girls. In this chapter I am specifically concerned with the processes which turn girls (*tukta mairin*) into "old lady" (*mairin almuk*) and eventually *kuka*.<sup>1</sup> In the first section I consider the beliefs and practices associated with "courting" ("court" *takaia*) from the perspective of *tiara* (adolescent girls).<sup>2</sup> The second section deals with the establishment of the conjugal partnership, which for most young woman is initiated by their first pregnancy (*kwira takaia*). It is this first pregnancy which most conclusively for Kakabila people transforms a girl (*tukta mairin*) into an adult woman (*mairin almuk*). The third section considers the processes by which women become active members of kindreds, loose confederations of usually matrilaterally related women, while the fourth examines the transformation over time by which women gradually establish themselves as *kuka*, a polysemic term which means wife, grandmother and 'respected old woman'. The fifth and final section very briefly sketches Kakabila notions of women's female relationships in broader terms.

#### "Courting"

The term "courting" ("court" *takaia*) in Kakabila connotes a number of activities, all of which are associated with the attentions of men directed towards women. These are generally understood to be motivated by sexual interest and include casual flirting (or making "pretty eye") at one extreme and the more serious business of persuading a woman or girl to become a wife at the other. *Tiara* are generally well socialised to demonstrate *swira* ("shame"), and are therefore inhibited from talking in public to men. This inculcation of *swira* is even said to make some *tiara* become "ashamed to eat food" or "ashamed to hold the plate" when their "boyfriends" (or boys they like) appears at their mothers' kitchens during mealtime, and as Yoyo (13) put it, makes men and women enemies.<sup>3</sup>

"Courting" is thought of as being a male activity, one in which women take a passive rôle. Although some girls are supposedly *wail* or *busia* (shy) and reluctant to find "boyfriends", these girls are teased and encouraged by their peers and unrelated adult women towards the view that they have to use their charms to attract men. Kakabila *tiara* (adolescent girls) know

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<sup>1</sup> "Old lady" simply means 'woman with children'.

<sup>2</sup> I return to "courting" in Chapter Six and examine it from the vantage point of men (*waitna*) and adolescent boys (*wahma*).

<sup>3</sup> See MM (1925, vol. 11: 373) and Helms (1971: 91) for accounts of weddings of girls with shame.

that it is only by having children and acquiring husbands that they really become adult women (*mairin almuk*), since parents do not arrange marriages for their daughters, and girls, according to local discourse, have to rely on their ability to project sexual attractiveness to men if they wish to attain social adulthood.

Kakabila girls are brought up to believe that most men are unreliable, treating women as "pass times" (good for short term sexual satisfaction) (see also Helms 1971: 61). Desertions ("fool up" or "trick" *munaia*) of pregnant girls are fairly common in the Cuenca, and male irresponsibility with regard to "courting" is acknowledged by villagers in proverbial terms - "man is satan, you know!" or "*waitna ba waitna*" (a man is a man). Consequently "boyfriends" are carefully scrutinised by parents, who sometimes express the view that their daughters are too foolish to weigh up the consequences of ill-considered entanglements. Daughters therefore require parental "permission" to "talk" to particular boys or men, and would-be suitors are required to apply formally for "the privilege" from their "girlfriend's" parents (see also Helms 1971: 87).

Because, however, girls are often too young or still at school, and because their "boyfriends" are not considered "serious" enough to make the granting of "permission" likely, many courtships are hidden from parents. Kakabila adults place a very high premium on the value of education, and girls generally only get parental "permission" to have "boyfriends" once they have finished sixth grade (usually at sixteen or so) or gone as far as they can.<sup>4</sup> Consequently clandestine relationships among school age *tiara* are common. They are often exciting affairs because if the girl is caught too flagrantly disobeying her father, she risks a beating (*wipaia*) from him. If the courtship is discovered by the parents but discreet and innocent enough, however, the girl's parents may ignore, and even deny its existence.<sup>5</sup>

Most *tiara* find that there are few opportunities to "talk" with secret "boyfriends", and courtships are often conducted to a considerable extent through messages relayed via third parties and written notes.<sup>6</sup> From morning (*titan*) until the last meal (*tutni pata*) they are either at school or occupied with household chores, and they are generally forbidden to leave the house or the "yard" area without good reason. Girls generally find this restriction relaxed only

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<sup>4</sup> Most parents are concerned that a daughter's future husband will "show her points" (educate her in some sense).

<sup>5</sup> See Palmer (1945: 46) for a detailed account of the sexual mores of the turn-of-the-century Miskitu.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis notes that "to talk to her" is a euphemism for sex in Awastara (Dennis 1981: 460). This is also sometimes true for Kakabila, although in Kakabila "talk" is also sometimes used as a euphemism for non-sexual forms of "courting". Presumably in Awastara, which is largely non-English speaking, the Miskitu word *aisaia* is used. In Kakabila both '*aisaia*' and the English word "talk" are used.

when they are sent on errands to other houses, while they are washing clothes at the stream, on during the walks on the way to and from school, and on Sunday when a limited amount of strolling (*kirbaia*) around the village is permitted by most parents (see also Helms 1971: 85-86). Occasional dances and picnics provide other opportunities for boys and girls to meet one another with minimal adult supervision, but with both sexes surrounded by their peers these occasions are often inhibited by *swira* ("shame").

If the girl is old enough (sixteen or seventeen) and the couple decide that their courtship should be taken seriously, the "boyfriend" may decide to approach his "girlfriend's" father. Generally the girl will have sounded him out and will have an idea of what they think of her "boyfriend". If the father approves of him, he may set out terms and conditions for the courtship and allow the "boyfriend" to visit his daughter on their veranda in the late evening, or even take her strolling (*kirbi taukaia*).<sup>7</sup>

Theoretically fathers have the right to quash relationships between their *tiara* daughters and their "boyfriends", and even the most reasonable exercise it if they discover that the terms outlined for the courtship are being violated, or if they believe that their daughters are being "courted" by unsuitable characters.

#### Case # 15

A Pearl Lagoon boy named Billy, visiting other friends in Kakabila over a period of about a month, was bold enough to sit on Ceneida's veranda (12). Amanda, Ceneida's mother, had told me previously that she encouraged Ceneida to try and get to know boys up to a point, since she did not wish to be seen as an over-protective parent. I had been told by other *tiara* that Ceneida was also interested in Billy, and it was apparent that she was doing little to dispel talk in the village about their mutual interest. Eventually, however, a piece of intelligence came to light that the boy had already left a previous "girlfriend" in Pearl Lagoon with a baby, and it became necessary for Lorenzo, Ceneida's father, to "run" Billy (chase him away). It was generally felt that Billy's previous history gave Lorenzo and Amanda more than adequate justification for taking this course of action.

Some fathers, however, use their right of veto excessively, and are referred to as being "jealous of their daughters".

#### Case # 16

Jacinto (48), had two *tiara* daughters, Juana, aged fourteen, and Marina, aged sixteen. Jacinto was feared by the *wahma* (adolescent boys) in the village, and he would "run" ) chase those who came to sit on his

<sup>7</sup> The nature of these terms are set out in more detail in the next chapter.

veranda. According to his wife Marlyn, Jacinto would not allow the girls to attend the occasional dances, which took place at the village school (usually well attended by their age mates), lest one of the village boys "breed" (made pregnant) one of the girls. Other adults considered this man to be over strict (*ai laka uba karna*) with his daughters.<sup>8</sup>

Courtships, both those which are sanctioned and those which are clandestine, are therefore fraught with danger, excitement and frustrations, which collectively produce a very culturally specific set of contradictions for *tiara*. For although they perceive their futures in terms of projecting sexual attractiveness in order to catch a suitable husband and are actively encouraged by their peers to seek excitement in clandestine relationships, at the same time they are also well socialised to demonstrate *swira* ("shame") and are repeatedly told that men are intrinsically unreliable (see also Helms 1971: 87, and Dennis 1981: 480).

Occasionally these conflicting expectations produce a phenomenon known as "fits" or *grisi siknis*, a supposedly culture-bound condition to which Miskitu young women and adolescent girls are particularly prone. Philip Dennis has studied this phenomenon in the "up the coast" villages of Awastara and Dakura in some detail.

'Victims of the condition lose consciousness, believe that devils beat them and have sexual relations with them, and run off into the bush. The condition may also involve violent, aggressive behavior such as threatening others with machetes and broken bottles. It affects mainly young women and is contagious in form' (Dennis 1981: 445).<sup>9</sup>

Victims told Dennis that attacks are preceded by a feeling of *bla* (giddiness) and irrational anger, shortly after which the victim loses consciousness, and is carried away into the bush by the devil in one guise or another where she is forced to have sex. Some victims find the experience terrifying, others pleasurable, and others still both terrifying and pleasurable (Dennis 1981: 448). One of the curious features of this condition is that it is epidemic in character. Thus if one girl begins to have attacks, she is often followed by a number of the other girls and young women in the village.

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<sup>8</sup> Marlyn did not share her husband's strong views, and visiting boys would come and sit on the veranda when Jacinto, who was an enthusiastic turtle hunter, was at sea. Otherwise they would come on Sunday while Jacinto and Marlyn were at church.

<sup>9</sup> 'Grisi siknis among the Miskito', originally published in *Medical Anthropology* (1981), has been reprinted in a shorter form in a collection edited by R. C. Simons and C. C. Hughes, entitled *The culture-bound syndromes* (1985).

Although the particular hallucinations experienced by victims vary from individual to individual, attacks are often characterised by village specific patterns. In the Dakura epidemic, for example, several victims reported being carried off to exciting places by white men. In Awastara victims reported seeing seeing ugly black dogs and being beaten by a devil named Nil. In Andris Tara, however, victims claimed that it was a 'bearded man with a blood drink' who came for them (Dennis 1981: 449, 465). These apparitions, it is said, are motivated by the wish to have sex with their victims, and especially come for those they find most attractive (Dennis 1981: 451).

Attacks mainly take place around dusk (*saiwan*), and victims generally suffer repeated attacks often on a daily basis for months on end. During these attacks the victims typically scream and shout, wave knives and machetes about, tear off most of their clothes and run off into the "bush" (Dennis 1981; 450, 454-457, 481-482). The village response to these attacks is to catch these victims before they run into the "bush" and hurt themselves, and generally it is the village young men who undertake the chase. The pursuit of these girls is a dangerous and exciting business, not least because often the victims would carry machetes or broken bottles, and according to some informants *grisi siknis* attacks are occasionally characterised by gang-rape of the victims by the pursuers. Skeptical informants, according to Dennis, claim that *grisi siknis* attacks are in reality pretexts to seduce men, with victims shouting out the names of those young men whom they hoped would catch them, and thereby *grisi siknis* provides 'an excuse for girls to sleep with men they liked' (Dennis 1981: 453). In any case attacks are matters of great concern for parents and who sometimes tie up their daughters if an attack is thought to be imminent (Dennis 1981: 450-453).

Dennis accounts for *grisi siknis* in terms of it being a 'social drama', one in which young women, who 'are expected to be relatively passive and subordinate to their parents and later to their husbands', demand attention (1981: 482). In other words,

'a woman seems to be saying something like: "I may be young and subordinate but I am also a sexual, aggressive, self-assertive person! I can have sex with the devil! I can grab a machete and scare everyone to death! I am stronger physically than you are! Catch me if you can, but at your own risk!"' (Dennis 1981: 482)

'*Grisi siknis* ... strikes the observer as an uninhibited expression of emotions, a flood of repressed libidinal feelings pouring out at once. *Grisi siknis*, like the earlier *mishla* feasts, seems to be a wild orgiastic rite of sex and violence. Miskitu culture has institutionalized periodic outbursts of violent

emotions, and has turned them into social events like the *mishla* feast, or "diseases" like *grisi siknis*' (Dennis 1981: 482).<sup>10</sup>

During my fieldwork there were two epidemics of *grisi siknis* in the neighbouring village of Raitipura (map 4), as well as a few individual attacks in Kakabila itself.<sup>11</sup> Kakabila villagers usually ascribed *grisi siknis* molestations (which they called "fits") to *prahaku*, a *sky wlasa* (spirit or "satan") of great power who appears in the guise of an *ulak*, a black hairy man with red eyes. Some Kakabila villagers suggested that human agency ("handwork") was generally responsible for "fits", and that girls attacked were bespelled by "science man" (sorcerers).<sup>12</sup> The more skeptical, however, attributed attacks to "love stroke"; in other words these *tiara* are obsessed by particular boys and men, and find "fits" the only way in which they can express their infatuations ("he [she] get crazy"). Whatever the truth is, however, it is certainly interesting to note that these sceptical Kakabila villagers consider that it is the controls upon *tiara* sexuality that is primarily responsible for these attacks.<sup>13</sup>

Eventually the Raitipura victims, all girls and young women between thirteen and twenty-six, were cured by the Kakabila "Prophet". The villagers, and the girls in particular, were told to observe certain food prohibitions (*kulki*), and they were especially enjoined to avoid tarpon, the smell of which is particularly likely to bring on attacks. This, according to some, is because the tarpon is a great fighter and very hard to catch. One by one the victims recovered and normal life returned to the village.

In my view "fits" or *grisi siknis* is a rather institutionalised form of rebellion directed against a set of gender related contradictions in which girls are at once restrained and at the same time encouraged to use their sexual skills to attract men. *Grisi siknis* hallucinations typically feature weathy strangers (often white men) who show the victims a good time or terrifying evil-

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<sup>10</sup> *Mishla* was an alcoholic beverage made of fermented cassava. As far as I am aware, it is no longer made in Miskitu villages.

<sup>11</sup> In Kakabila, attacks have never, to the my knowledge of my informants, been collective. Other tensions may also induce "fits". The four or five girls whom I was told had been victims of "fits" had each experienced their attacks on an individual basis at quite different times.

<sup>12</sup> Sexual attraction is quite often attributed to love medicine. One woman told me that during a particularly stormy period during her marriage both she and her husband had taken lovers. Whereas her husband, she claimed, had been involved with another woman out of "*ai* own freewill-*ka*" (his own freewill), she in fact had been bespelled ("spell" *alkan*) and eventually had to be cured with *sika* ("medicine").

<sup>13</sup> One victim in Kakabila, for example, was an adult woman who had an attack following a row with her son-in-law. See Dennis (1981: 462) for an account of a mother-in-law victim.

smelling hairy men and other demons who carry them into the "bush" and force them to have sex, and thereby project the contradictions outlined above, which confront Miskitu *tiara* as culturally specific dilemmas, onto a set of stereotypical (and very public) representations of experience (see also Helms 1971: 71, and Dennis 1981: 480-481).<sup>14</sup>

### *Establishing a conjugal partnership*

Three kinds of conjugal union are recognised in Kakabila: consensual unions, civil marriages and church marriages. A couple who enter a consensual union are said to "take", a couple who marry at a mayor's office (either at Pearl Lagoon or further afield) are married "to the law", while a couple who marry in church are married "to the church". Couples often embrace these three stages in turn, "taking" to begin with, getting "married to the law" a little later as their partnerships stabilise, and eventually getting "married to the church", the most prestigious of these, when they are "ageable" (middle aged).<sup>15</sup>

Some people say that at one time people never married and just "took" together. Others say that in the past couple never "took" without marrying and conjugal unions would only begin if a wedding had taken place, following a courtship of at least two year's duration. Whichever is true, it is certainly evident that consensual unions are indeed common among younger couples nowadays. Although consensual unions have no legitimacy according to either the Anglican and Catholic churches or the Nicaraguan state, they are nevertheless recognised in village discourse as pragmatic stop-gap measures for those couples unable to afford the money for either a civil or church wedding (see also Cattle 1977: 37),<sup>16</sup> and children born to such unions are considered quite legitimate from the village point of view, provided that their parents recognise them as dependents.

Ideally the "privilege" or "permission" to conduct a courtship is granted at a special meeting between the "boyfriend" and the girl's parents which takes place at the girl's parents' house, at which time the terms of the "courtship" are discussed.<sup>17</sup> Whether the terms agreed stipulate that the "courtship" constitutes an engagement necessarily leading to marriage varies from case

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<sup>14</sup> See MC (1883, vol. 32: 574) for an account of a young woman overcome with convulsions as she was just about to be wed into an unpopular marriage.

<sup>15</sup> Villagers say that they are in danger of going to hell if they are not "church married" by the time they die.

<sup>16</sup> The terms "husband" and "wife" are used to refer to men and women in consensual unions quite as much as they are to men and women in legal marriages.

<sup>17</sup> The gift of cooked food is one way in which girls' mothers express approval of suitors: "*plun ba nara sa* - the food is there for you". Another common means of expressing parental approval is for the mother to offer a daughter's services as laundress.



to case, but once a girl and her suitor have "permission" to "talk" and it is agreed that they are "engaged", it is understood (but never explicitly stated) that they may begin a sexual relationship provided that it is conducted discreetly.<sup>18</sup> However, because it is never actually stated that the "privilege" for a man to "talk" to a daughter actually includes this right, resultant pre-marital pregnancies are generally treated as something of a surprise for which the young couple are responsible. Parents should, villagers say, make marriage a precondition of a man or boy's "permission", strictly speaking. Consequently pre-marital pregnancies, even those which take place between properly "engaged" couples, suggest elopement (see also Helms 1971: 87).<sup>19</sup>

If a man is prepared to acknowledge ("study" or *stadi munaia*) his responsibilities towards his pregnant "girlfriend", he usually joins her in her parents' house.<sup>20</sup> Thereafter the couple become fully acknowledged by other villagers as *maia* (husband and wife). But for many young mothers the first years of conjugal co-residence are periods of chronic uncertainty, as they try to ensure that their husbands are not driven away by the burden of their conjugal and affinal responsibilities, or tempted away by other *tiara*.<sup>21</sup> Older women in securer and more established conjugal unions sometimes spoke to me of the insecurity they felt during the early years of their partnerships, when their "merong" (bad boy) husbands continued to have relationships with other women, and how they had sometimes found themselves in competition with other women for the same man (see also Helms 1971: 93).

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<sup>18</sup> In most cases sexual relations at this stage are indeed conducted discreetly, since neither the girl nor her suitor usually wish the other villagers to tease them, and girls in particular do not wish to be thought of as running off into the "bush" "like animals". Until the "privilege" to "court" is explicitly linked to an engagement symbolically marked with a ring, it is assumed by parents in most cases that their daughters are still virgins ("young girl").

<sup>19</sup> "Take" means both "to begin a conjugal partnership" and "to initiate a sexual relationship", while the terms *maia* (spouse) and "wife" can also mean "sexual partner", even a one time partner, without any notion of a conjugal union being involved. These, however, are rather peripheral meanings of those terms.

<sup>20</sup> In some instances, however, pregnancies materialise before the man or boy has even obtained "permission", and in these cases the girl's parents bring strong pressure to bear on him to take responsibility and assume his position as their daughter's conjugal partner (*maia*).

<sup>21</sup> Some girls opt for elopement and virilocal postnuptial residence, but for reasons which I deal with in the following chapter, these elopements tend to be relatively short-lived and result in the couple returning to the bride's parents' house.

## Case # 17

Amanda (12) told me that, after she had had her first baby by Lorenzo, she could not get him to settle down with her, and so she left Kakabila going to El Bluff in order to work in a fish processing plant, leaving the baby with her mother, Miss Yvonne. In the meantime Lorenzo had another baby by Mary (34). Mary, however, had no more success in getting Lorenzo to set up a household than Amanda had.<sup>22</sup> When Amanda returned to Kakabila, Lorenzo joined her in her mother's house (19). Later she and Lorenzo built their own house, had several more children and eventually married "to the church".

## Case # 18

On one occasion, for example, I heard Loyola (21) telling some other villagers how she had teased her mother's sister's daughter, Anjou (then resident in house 19), a young mother with two infants, that her husband Aguilar (one of the village young men or "merong") would find a woman at the baseball tournament in Pearl Lagoon to which he was going. When the Kakabila men meet the Karawala girls, she had told Anjou, "that's your woman right there". She knew that Anjou was prone to jealous tears and could not resist teasing her younger kinswoman.

## Case # 19

Melba (25), a woman in her early twenties, was the daughter of Angelia (24) and the grand daughter of Balbina (23), two notoriously argumentative women who were known for their "cursing" (*kas munaia*), "rowing" (*unsabaia*), "fighting" (*aiklabaia*) and "living bad" (*saura iwaia*) with other villagers. Even when villagers emphasised to me that 'we all live good with one another here', they often made exception for this "bad tribe", indicating the four rather isolated "middletown" houses (23, 24, 25, 26) in which Balbina, her daughter and grand daughters lived with their conjugal partners and children. At the beginning of my fieldwork Angelia's oldest daughter, Melba lived with Alard, a young *Karibe* (Garifuna) man from Orinoco, and their two babies. Although Alard had built a leaf house (25) in which they lived, it was evident that he had not shown much commitment to Melba, and he frequently deserted her for extended trips back to Orinoco. Usually villagers commented, after he had gone, that he would not come back to Kakabila, but he always did.

Alard was one of only two socially adult in Kakabila who had not made a "plantation", and it was this perhaps more than anything which demonstrated to other people in the village his unwillingness to become involved. However he was not condemned by the other villagers for his lack of commitment to Melba. If anyone was held up to blame, it was thought to be Melba's mother, grandmother and sisters.

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<sup>22</sup> Lorenzo later told me himself that during this period of his life he was also seriously "courting" a Pearl Lagoon girl as well as taking an interest in Amanda's matrilineal cousin Loyola (21), then a *tiara*. He told me that during this period he had bought Loyola a gold chain, a common token of courtship.

who kept driving him away by their continual fighting and bickering, both among themselves and with other villagers.

Into the second half of my fieldwork Alard left Kakabila again for Orinoco for a rather more extended period when it became clear that Melba was pregnant with their third child, and nobody seemed surprised when he did not return for the birth. About a month or so afterwards, however, he reappeared as a member of the visiting Orinoco baseball team. The town's people found it amusing that Alard, who had failed to return for the birth of his baby, should deign to put in an appearance as part of a visiting baseball team, and during the games between the Kakabila and Orinoco teams, the village men shouted to him as he was preparing to bat, "the girl's watching you," teasing him as though he and Melba were "shamey" "courting" adolescents.

In fact, Alard remained with Melba in Kakabila after the Orinoco team went home, but he still did not make a "plantation" for the coming year, and a few uncharitable wags speculated that he would stay just long enough to "breed" (make pregnant) her once again. The view of many villagers was that Melba gave him sexual favours too cheaply in terms of what he was doing for her. As Loyola (21) put it, she was "Alard piece of meat".

One of the means by which women are able to strengthen their positions with respect to their husbands is by marrying them. A civil wedding is known as a "Spanish wedding" whereas a church wedding is known as an "English wedding". This is because the civil wedding is a state institution and therefore conducted in Spanish, while the church wedding is performed by visiting Anglican or Catholic priests from Bluefields and is given in English. In Kakabila the distinction between civil marriage and church marriage is significant because these two forms are understood in quite different terms. The "Spanish wedding" only carries the theoretical sanction of Nicaraguan law.<sup>23</sup> Since it is generally felt that it is husbands who are more likely to transgress - for as people say "man is satan" or "*waitna ba waitna*" ('a man is a man') - the civil wedding certificate is given to the bride for whom it is meant to offer some protection (see also Helms 1971: 91). The "English wedding", however, carries much greater authority, and constitutes a promise and commitment to *Dawan* (God). Thus it is considered considerably more binding (see also Helms 1971: 92).

Kakabila people say "*wedin napa brisa*" ("wedding got teeth"). This means that, once he is wed, the groom has to show that is prepared to fully shoulder the responsibilities of a conjugal union. It means that he should no longer behave like a "boy", and that he should become

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<sup>23</sup> It seems doubtful whether Nicaraguan law could be satisfactorily enforced in the case of disputes following marital breakdowns.

"serious" demonstrating "man's brains" (full commitment) to his conjugal partnership. In other words he should treat his bride in terms of their corporate partnership rather than as a sexual "pass time". Marriage therefore offers the bride a public statement of commitment from the groom, one sanctioned by public opinion (see also Hlems 1971: 91-92).

Sometimes it is the wedding which enables a groom to take the bride out of her parents' house. Thus Dikas and Fabriola (30), who already had two children, only moved into their new house (31) next to Fabriola's parents' house, when they got "married to the law" in Pearl Lagoon. In other words a statement of commitment, such as a marriage, is often the means by which a groom is able to negotiate his bride's removal from the ambit of her parents (and, as shown in the next chapter, her mother in particular). Typically, young women do not wish to move far from their mothers. A wedding, however, sometimes gives them some reassurance.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Co-operation within the "family" and hostility between "families"*

As I noted in the previous chapter, Kakabila girls are socialised to work closely with their mothers from as early as eight or so. Girls as young as ten are quite capable of doing everything that is required to run the kitchen including peeling cassava, gutting fish, tending steaming *dikwas* (large metal pots), washing floors, and minding children. Most also learn that their closest allies and co-operators are their mothers and sisters. In many cases, these girls' mothers are similarly linked to their grandmothers, maternal aunts and certain unrelated others, and thus women grow up to view the village as a number of loose female confederations whose members are linked by bonds of kinship (*taya*), networks of reciprocal assistance, and memories of nurture, often conceptualised in terms of credit and expressed in the idiom of "backing" (carrying) of junior kin (Gow 1991).<sup>25</sup>

Women who consider themselves "one people" or *tiala kakma kumi* (one nipple) do not have to say that they are "living good" (*pain iwaia*) with each other. "Living good" is a state for relations between unrelated individuals or groups, which denotes a stand-off *rispik* (respect) characterised by the lack of "rowing" (*unsabaia*), "fighting" (*aiklabaia*) and "cursing" (*kas munaia*). Women who work together as kindred do not think of themselves as "living good"

<sup>24</sup> One fourteen year old *tiara* Juana (48) told me that she had no intention of taking a husband, since she did not wish to receive the beatings which in her opinion generally come with a husband. She added that she would rather stay and help her mother at home. As Collier (1988: 34) has noted for brideservice societies in general, marriage in many respects is not a particularly attractive option for girls in Kakabila.

<sup>25</sup> As I made evident in the case histories of Chapter Three, children are often raised by matrilineal kin (see also Cattle 1977: 38).

because women who have grown together into dense networks of close co-operative relations, it is understood, support each other without considering the alternative, "living bad" (*saura iwaiia*), as a logical possibility. In short whereas "living good" implies a truce, kindred co-membership (usually equated with *taya* or "family") means absolute and unconditional loyalty.

When a Kakabila man brings back a surplus of any foodstuff, for example, fish, dasheen, ñampi, coconuts or delicacies gathered along "the edge", he gives it to his wife, who then takes charge of its distribution.<sup>26</sup> Almost invariably the first portions are sent to her mother and sisters (see also Nietschmann 1973: 185; Cattle 1977: 48). Usually neighbours are included if the windfall is big enough, and they too receive something.

It is generally held by villagers that these small prestations of foodstuffs are never calculated. "Got, got to give", or as one of Nietschmann's informants told him in neighbouring Tasbapauni (map 4),

"Indian have kind mind. Give you food; don't study that. Give it away and when its done, its done. Dats de way de Indian like it" (Nietschmann 1973: 182).

On occasion intra-kindred generosity is overtaxed and this is resented, particularly if extra work is involved.

#### Case # 20

When Findlay (41) caught a lot of fish, and decided to salt it to sell it on in Kukra Hill, his wife Lucy complained that her youngest sister Evita (38) came and asked for some after it was salted: Evita could have taken as many fish as she wanted out of the "dori", Lucy reasoned, but to ask for it *after* Findlay had gone to all the trouble of salting it, was in her view a little calculating.

One the whole, however, sharing of surpluses of raw foodstuffs between kindred co-members is axiomatic.

Crisis lodging is also important for kindred co-members. Some Kakabila women like Emelita (39) go to larger towns in order to seek work because their husbands have deserted them, while others like Rita (6) and Fidelia (27) have second husbands who do not wish to rear stepchildren, and these women often leave their children with mothers and sisters. In other cases the house may be overpopulated, and so a child is sent to live elsewhere, perhaps to help

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<sup>26</sup> Meat (usually turtle) is weighed on scales and sold by the pound by men from a veranda. Generally speaking, however, a man's mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, mother and sisters come by and claim a few free pounds.

ageing grandparents (Stennet [2], for example) (see also Helms 1971: 97-98).<sup>27</sup> Finally mothers also provide women with places of refuge if conjugal relations turn bad. Both Amanda (12) and Lucilla (26), for example, periodically repaired to their mother Miss Yvonne's (19) house, when their husbands, Lorenzo and Sansin, became violent.

Members of the kindred are generally intensely loyal to one another, and will defend one another physically if the need arises.

#### Case # 21

Alicia was a thirteen year old *tiara*, who lived with her mother Angelia (24), her step-father Tumbo, a step-brother, two older sisters, Adelia and Barbara, and some smaller children. Barbara, the oldest had a baby but had been deserted by the father. In a house close to theirs, lived another sister, Melba (25). Melba had one baby and was pregnant with a second. Alicia's maternal grandmother, *kuka* Balbina, and Balbina's second husband, Cain (23) also lived close by. These three houses, along with another which contained Alicia's, older brother Sansin (26), his wife and several children, constituted a distinct and isolated cluster in the village, whose presence seemed to geographically divide the village into two halves, one half situated above it, and the other situated below it.

I soon came to realise that the inhabitants of this cluster had very little to do with the other villagers. Although they attended church and village meetings, it was quite apparent that other villagers were particularly anxious not to become involved with them in any way, and in spite of the fact that these houses lay on the "front road", the main street of the village, many people actually made a detour to avoid this group of houses. I was told repeatedly, to questions designed to identify village conflicts, that all the villagers were for the most part good people, except for the inhabitants of this particular group. One Creole resident Renaldo (15), commenting on the moral condition of Kakabila, told me that it was only "that tribe", referring to this group, that were "bad".

Originally, I thought that the reason for this was that one of the householders, Tumbo, Angelia's husband, was a notorious cut-throat, who had commanded a group of three hundred Contras during the War, and had allegedly been personally responsible for several atrocities in neighbouring villages. I also wondered whether the fact that *kuka* Balbina's husband Cain was also supposedly the father of several of his step daughter Angelia's children, was considered a breach of local morals, sufficient to guarantee a general avoidance of this group on behalf of the other villagers.

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<sup>27</sup> Mothers' sisters and adult daughters (as well as godparents) in Pearl Lagoon and Bluefields sometimes provide accommodation for children seeking secondary education.

However, I eventually came to realise that the villagers, had no particular quarrel with either Tumbo or Cain, both of whom, for the most part kept themselves to themselves. The objects of the villagers hostility were the womenfolk in this group, who, it was said, liked to "fight", "row", "curse" and generally "live bad" (*saura iwaiia*). One man, Gustavus (44), who had married one of *kuka* Balbina's daughters, Aicilia, had many years previously found these women too much, it was said, and had taken his wife and children up to "the point" at the far end of "uptown".<sup>28</sup>

Kwasku (46) was a young "up the coast" man who lived in the "uptown" part of the village, in a rather temporary and flimsy looking leaf house with Ovalda, one of Aicilia's daughters. Kwasku had recently been away from Kakabila for three or four months, having allegedly stolen Silas's (29) "dori" (canoe), taken it to Kukra for sale and gone on the run with the proceeds. He returned to Kakabila with a young "up the coast" man from Puerto Cabezas, whom he promptly introduced to Alicia. Alicia liked this stranger, and invited him back for a clandestine assignation later that night at her sister Melba's house, which she believed would be empty. However, Kwasku and his friend were discovered and attacked by Melba. In the fight which followed, she hit Kwasku. The following day, Kwasku's guest left Kakabila.

The following Sunday, as I was walking around the village, I became aware of a big commotion on the ballfield. I saw Angelia, her mother and her three oldest daughters, Melba, Barbara and Adelia, armed with large staffs, advancing as one upon Kwasku. Melba hit Kwasku twice but he was able to seize her staff and hit her back, knocking her almost senseless to the ground. Following this, there was a lot of running around, accompanied by shouting and cursing, which involved threats by Sansin (Chavela's sister) on the one side, and Negro (37) (Kwasku's brother) and Alejandro (36) (Negro's wife's brother) on the other. Kwasku disappeared, the commotion died down, and Melba's family went home to give her medical attention.

The following days were tense. Villagers, particularly those with relatives on either side of the conflict, took special pains to avoid the hostile house clusters even more than usual, and there was talk of *wa* (war).<sup>29</sup> A couple of days after the fight on the ballfield, Sansin, Melba's brother, went "uptown" after Kwasku with a harpoon in the middle of the night, but, after nearly catching him, was chased away by Kwasku's brother Negro who was wielding a machete. There was talk of Angelia, Melba's mother, going

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<sup>28</sup> Aicilia, who was already a grandmother by three of her own daughters, had quite a reputation herself for 'living bad' particularly with her daughter Felicia's husband Faustino (44), but generally kept out of the more public disputes, in which her mother, sister, and sister's daughters were periodically involved. Aicilia was, in fact, already conducting her own kindred, made up of three adult and two adolescent daughters, all of whom lived close by her (45, 46, 47).

<sup>29</sup> Women often take pains to avoid those parts of the village where they have enemies. See also Helms 1971: 67).

to Pearl Lagoon, to register a charge of assault against Kwasku, but this did not happen, possibly because Angelia felt that her group were already considered trouble-makers by the Pearl Lagoon police. Finally the conflict was ended by a truce mediated between Negro and Sansin.

Working with their mothers, sisters, daughters and matrilateral *anti* (aunts), women have little need to co-operate with their affines as men do. Consequently members of different kindreds (and even whole kindreds), with little need to co-operate and with few sanctions impelling them to "live good" (*pain iwaia*) with one another, sometimes engage in hostilities.

#### Case # 22

During the week in which the inter-regional baseball tournament was taking place at Pearl Lagoon, Zora (10) discovered that a large amount of *fiampi* had been stolen from her "ground". She then discovered that one of her neighbours Stella (9) had been selling *fiampi* to baseball spectators from the veranda of her brother's house in Pearl Lagoon. Zora believed that Stella had no *fiampi* at her "plantation" and therefore deduced that it was she who must have stolen them. She told me that she had been informed that Stella along with her elder sister, Corina (36), and two of Corina's children, had been seen going to their "ground", which lay alongside hers, during the night. Zora inferred that since Stella and Corina had gone to their "plantation" at night, they must therefore have had ulterior motives.<sup>30</sup> Zora also pointed out that Stella, her husband and their children had spent nearly the whole following week at the regional baseball tournament at Pearl Lagoon, in spite of the fact that under normal circumstances they could not have had the money to do this. She therefore concluded that the *fiampi* must therefore have been stolen to help subsidise this extravagance. Zora made some accusations and publicly shouted at Stella that she was going to report her to the Pearl Lagoon police but in the end nothing was done. Zora's husband Peter, then the village *wihta* (arbiter), showed no interest in taking the matter further.

#### Case # 23

Sibella (13) sometimes complained to me that she had a bad relationship with her mother-in-law, *kuka* Libias (20). She put this down to the fact that *kuka* Libias had originally wanted her son George to marry a Creole woman because, although she was Miskitu herself, she believed that Creole women had more "manners" than Miskitu women. Sibella told me that this was quite plainly false. George's brother Loco (1), she pointed out, had married a Creole woman (in fact Sibella's mother's brother's daughter), and this woman, Nadia, had no *rispik* (respect) whatsoever. Whereas Nadia often cursed George, her brother-in-law, for no apparent reason, Sibella, for her part, always tried to "live good" (*pain iwaia*) with George's family.

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<sup>30</sup> Other villagers told me that while they believed that theft from "grounds" fairly commonly take place, they did not believe that Stella and Corina had taken the *fiampi*.



No long before Sibella told me this, I recorded a case of a dispute between Sibella and Nadia, in which Nadia accused two of Sibella's young sons of stealing a large sum of money from out of her house. In this dispute the two husbands, George and Loco, brothers who often worked together, both tried to keep a low profile, but once Nadia and her mother Miss Junie (2) had engaged Ernesto (32), Sibella's meddlesome paternal uncle, to work the ring-in-the-glass oracle,<sup>31</sup> and had been shown by the oracle that Sibella's sons had indeed stolen the money, George got sufficiently riled to sail his "dori" across the lagoon to take the case to the Pearl Lagoon police. He returned later the same day with summons for Nadia and Ernesto to appear at the Pearl Lagoon police station the following day, and the next morning the disputants' "dorises" set out across the lagoon. The police found in favour of Sibella and George, and gave both Nadia and Ernesto strongly worded cautions, telling both that if either were caught making unsubstantiated accusations or practising "science" (sorcery) again, they would "drop jail". Most of this I learnt from Sibella and her mother, Melba (27).

#### Case # 24

The hostility which existed between Sibella and George's mother, Libias, (20) and sister, Loyola, (21) was mediated by the observance of extreme *rispik* (respect) and avoidance. However this stand-off came under severe threat, when in early 1993, a new school teacher was appointed by the Bluefields Ministry of Education office. This teacher, a woman from Pearl Lagoon, was not a resident of the village, and was told that she would have to make arrangements for food and accommodation herself in Kakabila. She would spend the five working schooldays as a guest in one of the village houses and return to Pearl Lagoon on the weekends.

About nine years previously, the Kakabila villagers had fled in the face of a battle which had taken place in the village, and had become refugees in Pearl Lagoon where they remained for two years. At some point during this period, Sibella had discovered that George had been slipping off every evening to conduct a sexual relationship with a Creole woman. It transpired that it was this same woman was now coming to Kakabila to assume the position of fifth grade teacher. Sibella was furious and became even more angry, when she learned that Loyola (21), George's sister, was taking responsibility for this woman's food and accommodation.

This arrangement was clearly going to cause too much trouble, for Loyola's house (21) was situated in the geographical and social centre of the village and so, Loyola lodged this woman with her shy elder sister, Marlyn (48), who lived in a rather "lonesome" part of "uptown" Kakabila (maps 5 and 6). Sibella

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<sup>31</sup> According to Jones, the village *wihita* (arbiter), who believes in the efficacy of this particular kind of "negromancy" (sic), this oracle requires a glass of water, a wedding ring belonging to a woman known to be faithful to her husband and a strand of woman's hair. The ring is tied to the hair and dipped in the water. A "password" is uttered and when the name of a culprit is uttered the ring shakes violently in the glass.

regarded this involvement of George's sisters as an affront. She felt particularly angry about Marlyn's involvement, for which she blamed Loyola, because, up until that time, she and Marlyn had enjoyed good relations, and she lost no time in linking the whole business with George's mother's wish to have her son marry a Creole woman. Sibella soon found an ally in her cousin Fabriola (31), who was married to Dikas, George's younger brother.<sup>32</sup> Shortly after the new teacher's arrival Fabriola was given a letter addressed to Dikas by Loyola. Fabriola opened the letter, and discovered that it was a love letter, intended for Dikas and written by a Garfuna woman living in Orinoco. Although Loyola denied any knowledge of its source and contents not being able to read and write, and Dikas denied any interest in the letter's author, Fabriola interpreted the appearance of this letter as an act of collusion between Loyola and Libias to wrest Dikas away from her. The same day I found Fabriola and Sibella in conversation, finding common cause. They bemoaned the fact that they shared a hostile mother-in-law who was unhappy at her sons marrying Miskitu women, and a sister-in-law who colluded with their husbands' lovers. During this sharing of their common grievances, I noticed that Sibella addressed Fabriola as "sister" rather than *kosin* (cousin). Although Fabriola belonged to a kindred other than Sibella's, they were *kosin* in two ways, and Sibella was clearly invoking the fact that they were kin by using the term *sista*. The implication of this usage in this context clearly highlighted the fact that Sibella and Fabriola were united in opposition to an affinally related enemy kindred.<sup>33</sup>

As women become less *tiara* and more *kuka*, they tend to lose the *swira* (shame) that characterises their years as *tiara*, and they become more prepared to engage in the inter-kindred politics which often characterise relations between unrelated women.<sup>34</sup> While on occasions these inter-kindred relationships break out into overt hostility, as the case histories given above demonstrate, more often they are characterised by sister-in-law (*lamlat*) type ribald joking relationships, of the kind known in Nicaraguan English as "bad joke". "Bad joke" is never theoretically "run" with "compadres", "comadres" and *lapia*, (with whom *rispik* - respect - is expected), but most certainly is characteristic of relations between otherwise unrelated women, and older women in particular subject younger village women to this kind of teasing, safe in the knowledge that their older years protect them from retaliation in kind. These joking

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<sup>32</sup> I had been told by Marlyn, Dikas' oldest sister, that Fabriola always cursed her, when she appeared at their door to ask for a little flour, and so I knew that Fabriola's relations with Dikas' consanguineal kinswomen were already bad.

<sup>33</sup> Kerns (1983: 130-131) contains a similiar discussion of hostile relations between affines among the Miskitu's northern neighbours, the Black Caribs.

<sup>34</sup> I was also told of physical fights (*aiklabaia*) in past years between the female members of kindreds J and D, and at another time between kindreds J and I (table 2 and map 6).

relationships apparently encode either hostility or the potential for hostility, and thereby demarcate boundaries between different groups of allied women.<sup>35</sup>

I witnessed an example of joking expressed as inter-group hostility at the village level during a baseball match between the Kakabila and Raitipura teams.

Case # 25

Some of the Raitipura *tiara* had come to Kakabila with their team and were giving their "home boys" support from a bench under the big mango tree near Jones Forbes' house (19) where the spectators usually sat. The normally rather "shamey" Kakabila girls subjected these Raitipura girls, as well as their team to both teasing and abuse, shouting that they all looked like toads (*sukling*), and that their men had no balls (*mahbra apu*) and only knew how to catch shrimps (*wahsi alka baman nusa*), suggesting they were too lazy to learn horticulture).

*Becoming a kuka*

As women become older and produce daughters who give them grand daughters, they become *kuka*, the focus of the "family" as far as the female members are concerned. Although they in no sense control adult daughters, they do nevertheless possess influence by virtue of the fact that junior kinswomen are well socialised and strongly enjoined to be attentive to them. *Kuka* thus become important centres of attention for the members of their kindreds, and their verandas become places for kindred members to talk and make plans. At the hub of intra-kindred affairs, they often find themselves in the rôle of co-ordinator to problems relating to the redirection of junior female labour and the crisis lodging of children.

Kindred members (which sometimes also include unrelated women) also ensure that the *kuka* is well provided for in terms of brideservice prestations from sons-in-law (*dapna*), grand daughters' husbands (*dapna kuya*)<sup>36</sup> and other male affines (*masaia*), which often appear in the form of symbolic prestations of foodstuffs brought home by junior affines. Small surpluses are given to wives, who then give them to their *kuka* mothers and grandmothers, while on occasion *kuka* also redistribute foodstuffs to younger and possibly needier junior kinswomen

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<sup>35</sup> For further evidence that Kakabila women see themselves as a single kindred in some contexts, see the village foundation story in Chapter Eight. See Helms (1971: 104) for a different view of *lamlat* (sister-in-law) relationships in Asang.

<sup>36</sup> In Kakabila usage *kuya* denotes that the affinal term that it qualifies, is an extensional and not a primary use of that term. Thus *lamlat kuya* means 'classificatory sister-in-law' rather than 'brother's wife' or 'husband's sister'. See Heath (1927: 83) for an altogether different meaning of *dapna kuya*.

or kindred co-members (see also Nietschmann 1973: 58, 59, 184-185). As one Tasbapauni woman expressed it to her Creole husband,

"Remember we Indian rule here. Indian he don't worry if no have meat for tomorrow. Piece here, piece there - he going to give. Can't eat the money. I have to give to my mother, my aunt, my sister. If you don't like dat, den take another woman" (Nietschmann 1973: 57).

Thus as women become older, they tend to move from the periphery of a network of symbolic redistribution to its centre (see also Helms 1971: 105-106, and Nietschmann 1973: 183, 187-188). Since parents usually ask adults older than themselves to "stand" ("stand" *takaia*) (act as godparents or *lapia*) for their children, women acquire more "compadres", godchildren and *lapia* as they become *kuka*, and these ritual kin, "worm crying in the belly" with *swira* ("shame"), also show them *rispik* (respect) in relationships which cross-cut kindred and "family" divisions.

The *kuka* also provides a rallying point for her female "family" members and kindred allies to collect and express hostility towards other similarly constituted kindreds, but by the same token she is also a mediator. Under most circumstances hostilities between women are conducted on a one-to-one basis and do not involve all the kindred's members. Since the *kuka* may have political access to younger kinswomen's enemies through ritual kin ties of 'godparenthood' and *lapia*, she may find that she is able to act as a calming influence, or at least prevent the further spread of hostile relations.

A *kuka*'s death seems to entail the segmentation of her kindred into smaller units. Thus, for example, in the years which followed Missy's death, her *kuka* daughters, Yvonne (19) and Libias (20) came to head two quite distinct kindreds. The members of these kindreds considered their matrilineal *kosin* to be "one people" and allies, but operated in terms of redistributions as though they were two distinct groups. However segmentation of the kindred does not automatically follow the *kuka*'s death directly as the following case history shows.

#### Case # 26

After Miss Yvonne's death, her eldest daughter Amanda (12), and her husband and children moved in with her mother's widower Jones (19) for a few weeks.<sup>37</sup> Rachel's younger sister Anjou and her husband Aguilar (11) also moved in with him, and decided to stay.

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<sup>37</sup> Amanda also spent a great deal of time mourning on the veranda of her mother's sister, *kuka* Libias (20), in the company of Libias, and her matrilineal cousin Loyola. Loyola had assumed the role of mourner's attendant.

Jones was Amanda's step-father, having "taken" Miss Yvonne some time after the death of her first husband. Amanda was very close to him. She always made a point of showing him *rispik* (respect) and addressing him as "Mister Eddie", while her husband Lorenzo treated Jones as a father-in-law, often working with him either fishing, shrimping out on the lagoon, or helping him to harvest his rice. Jones, a man known for his wisdom and judgment always treated Lorenzo and Amanda with consideration, behaving towards their children as a grandfather should towards his own grandchildren.

Jones made it known to other villagers that he would not "take" another woman until a year had elapsed after his wife's death. This announcement was greeted with general approval by other villagers; a year's mourning following the death of a spouse is considered usual and appropriate. It did not take long, however, for Jones to consider the possibility of "taking" another woman and he soon began to take an unrequited interest in a "Spanish" (Mestiza) girl, who was staying with Lorenzo's parents, Nelson and Melba (27). Shortly afterwards, a Garífuna woman named Janet arrived in Kakabila from Marshall Point, saying that she was not sure whether she would go back because she had such bad relationships with the villagers there. Janet, who had come to visit her "auntie" Elma (22), soon picked up a bad reputation with the Kakabila villagers, having supposedly been seduced by Sikla, one of Elma's husband Thaddeus' "merong" (bad boy) sons.<sup>38</sup>

A few days later I visited Amanda, and found her very distraught.<sup>39</sup> Apparently, she had learned that Jones had taken Janet to the "ground" that he and her recently deceased mother had planted. In Kakabila discourse, for a man to take a woman to someone's "plantation" means that he intends to have sexual intercourse with her. Amanda was very upset. She told me that she could understand it if Mister Jones wanted to have relations with this woman, but felt that he was quite wrong to take her to her mother's "ground", which she and Mister Jones had planted together. If Mister Jones had wanted to give or sell her "breadkind" (as he had said), he should have gone by himself and brought it back to her. Another woman, Loína (4), to whom Amanda also told this story, agreed that Jones had behaved quite wrongly on this occasion. Amanda also told me that she was disappointed with her sister Anjou for not taking Jones to task. She put this down to the fact that Anjou was "*kau tiara*" (still a girl). A few days later, Amanda told me that she had confronted Mister Jones with this, but had done so respectfully, keeping her voice

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making sure that Amanda did not throw herself into the grave after Miss Yvonne during the burial, by covering her head with a shawl and leading her from the graveside.

<sup>38</sup> Sikla had told his friends at a gathering after a baseball game, that Janet would be anyone's "wife" for "ten bucks" (ten córdobas).

<sup>39</sup> Amanda took the death of her mother particularly hard, saying that she would not be holding the New Year's party which took place annually in her house, because she was still feeling so distressed, and felt that to celebrate would be disrespectful.

down and reminding him that she had always treated him with *rispik*. As she put it to me, "yang no taim out of the way *wiras*" ('at no point did I say anything out of order'). Shortly afterwards Janet left Kakabila.

Several months later I got a letter from a villager telling me that Amanda's sixteen year old daughter Ceneida was pregnant, and that she would be marrying Manuel, presumably "to the law". Amanda was now becoming the *kuka* of her own kindred.

### **Summary**

The present day inhabitants of Kakabila are for the most part said to be the descendants of a group of sisters, the daughters of Cristobal Vega (figure 10). These women were the grandmothers and great-grandmothers of the present day "older race" (older generation). Kakabila is thus essentially an aggregation of often distantly related matrilineal *kosin* (cousins) whose unity has been compromised by the facts of death and genealogical segmentation.<sup>40</sup> In structural terms, female sociality in Kakabila may be summarised as follows: uterine sisters work together, close matrilineal *kosin* occasionally help one another, while remote *kosin*, for whom no relation can be directly specified, avoid, fight, "run bad joke" and exchange token of formal *rispik* (respect) with one another, according to circumstances.<sup>41</sup> The sisterhood of Kakabila, in this conceptualisation, has been fragmented into a number of stand alone confederations, most too remotely related to be concerned with one another.

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<sup>40</sup> Kakabila people, unlike the "first time" classificatory sibling and offspring exchanging Miskitus, place a great deal of importance on genealogical relatedness (*taya*). See Chapter Eight.

<sup>41</sup> See Hale (1994: 49-50) for the importance of kin-based divisions in Sandy Bay Sirpi politics.

## Chapter Six

### From *wahma* to *dama*

In the previous chapter I showed that a woman's career in Kakabila is usually characterised by lifelong membership of a kindred of predominantly consanguineally related women, and the incremental accumulation of influence over persons. Often enough this takes place without the woman having to detach herself socially or spatially from her kindred. Careers of men, however, tend to be very different.

In Chapter Three I alluded to the rights and responsibilities of adult men in the context of the Kakabila house, while in one section of Chapter Five, I examined the processes by which infants are socialised to become *tukta waitna* (boys) and *wahma* (adolescent boys). In this chapter I take up from there and I consider how Kakabila *wahma* become *dama* (respected old men).<sup>1</sup> The first section explores those discourses which reproduce the ideal of village exogamy in the form of a preference for marriage with "outside men", as opposed to "home boys", and compares the arguments used by proponents of this discourse with those marshalled by subscribers to a minority counter-discourse in which "outside men" are characterised as *aura saura* (bad drifters).<sup>2</sup> In the second section I examine the practice of "courting" from the vantage point of adolescent boys and unmarried men. This section is intended to complement the first section in the Chapter Five. In the third section, I focus on the means by which *wahma* (adolescent boys) become *waitna almuk* (adult men) by establishing conjugal partnerships and showing that they can "live good" (*pain iwaiia*) with their affines, especially their wives' parents. In the fourth section I consider the processes by which men over time become *dama* or "old heads", while in the fifth I consider how men 'create law' (*laka paskaia*) and construct a homosocial harmony among themselves through rituals of rum drinking. In the sixth and final section I present a summary of the previous sections and consider in theoretical terms the positioning of Kakabila notions of manhood within local politics of gender and kinship.

#### *Village exogamy and inside/outside discourses*

"Home boys" are adolescents and young men (*wahma*) who have grown up in Kakabila, while "outside men" are men born and raised outside the village. Put simply, there are two opposing discourses in Kakabila concerning "outside men" (*waitna trinsal*), and both are usually invoked in respect of fitness to "take" village women. The dominant discourse extolls the virtues of

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<sup>1</sup> The term "*dama*" like "*kuka*" is polysemic and contextually dependent. Later on in this chapter I unpack its meanings in more detail.

<sup>2</sup> Heath (1950: 25) and Holm (1978: 355) discuss similar meanings for the term *kuka aurika* (drifting coconut).

"outside men" in comparison to Kakabila "home boys", while the subordinate discourse takes the opposite position.

The dominant discourse, expressed mainly by young women and parents, casts the "outside man" as an individual with "manners" and *rispik* (respect). "Outside men", like Custober (30) for example, (see case # 9) make willing and dutiful sons-in-law. Custober could often be seen very visibly performing brideservice for his mother-in-law Vida (29) and father-in-law Silas, helping with house repairs, "backing lumber" (carrying planks) from out of the "bush", and bringing back provisions from their "ground".

There is a certain logic to this assertion that "outside men" make better husbands. By virtue of the fact that they have no consanguineal kin to whom they can turn, "outside men" are less well equipped to provoke serious trouble with their affines. Custober, for example, had no relatives in Kakabila at all, except for his cousin Findlay (41) with whom he had little to do. On the other hand "outside men" who provoke trouble in the village are soon marginalised.

#### Case # 27

Renaldo (15), a Creole man from Corn Island, lived with Elsy. Both were already "ageable" (middle aged) people, and Elsy already had one adult daughter named Trisu. Trisu's husband Fire was a notoriously bad village "merong" (bad young man) who often beat her, and Renaldo was often taking him to task for this. Fire, however, resented Renaldo's intrusion, and attacked him, nearly killing him by beating him over the head with a staff. Scared of arrest by the Pearl Lagoon police, Fire fled to Tasbapauni taking Trisu with him. The sympathies of many villagers were with Fire rather than with Renaldo. Fire after all was a "home boy", whereas Renaldo was an "outside man" who was supposed to mind his business. As Renaldo told me time and again, despite the fact that he had lived in Kakabila for thirteen years, he had never been accepted by the other villagers. This incident almost certainly confirmed Renaldo's isolation, after which he claimed he had faced relentless hostility from other villagers, in particular from Fire's sister, Amanda (12), who was a near neighbour.

"Outside men", in other words, should know their place. They are less likely to fall out of line, because if they do they will become isolated. The logic of this is that as marginalised men, "outside men" are compliant men. This tendency to keep "outside men" marginalised is well expressed in the following case history.

#### Case # 28

During a village meeting Gaspar (34) was nominated by one of the villagers for the position of village "secretary", a job which principally would have involved writing letters for the wihta (village mediator) and "coordinator". Gaspar, with his wife Mary and their son Roberto, lived with Mary's parents at the



lower end of "uptown", and was building a house close by (35). He was considered a quiet and responsible sort of man, and was clearly demonstrating a commitment to a life in Kakabila by building a house.<sup>3</sup>

At this moment in the meeting *dama* Bayardo (6) raised an objection to Gaspar nomination for "secretary". I was not aware of any hostility between Bayardo and Gaspar. The problem was simply that Gaspar was not a Kakabila man; he was a "Purian" (from Raitipura). Because he was not born in Kakabila, most villagers at this meeting agreed that Gaspar was not entitled to hold a village office, and his nomination for the position of secretary was therefore quashed.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly afterwards, I was in a "dori" with some Kakabila woman, and Albertina (3), who was married to Mitchell, an "up the coast" man from Yulu, complained bitterly about Bayardo's objection to Gaspar's nomination. In particular, she bemoaned the village stereotype of the "outside man" as *aura saura* (bad drifter).

Kakabila people feel that the danger from "outside men" comes from those who do not have affines in the village. It is these unconstrained men who are especially likely to prove to be *aura saura*.<sup>5</sup> The "outside man" who settles in the village without "taking" a village girl is a particular liability, since he is likely to pose a long-term threat to the harmony of the village.

#### Case # 29

Many villagers felt that the village sawyer Efraim (50) was an *aura saura*. A Honduran Miskitu from the Wanks,<sup>6</sup> Efraim had only recently arrived in Kakabila,<sup>7</sup> and had already established a reputation as being a violent drunk. He was said to have chased Jacinto (48) with a machete on one occasion, and he leered at the village *tiara* disrespectfully in front of their parents. Efraim had brought with him a "Spanish" woman, whom he had "taken" at Muelle de los Bueyes, and three children, none of whom spoke

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<sup>3</sup> Gaspar was also the reserve school teacher, who filled in if the usual teachers had to be absent. He also took Sunday School at the Anglican church.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly the position of *wihta* (mediator) was held for most of my fieldwork by Jones Forbes (19) a Creole man, originally from Pearl Lagoon. Jones, nicknamed "Solomon," was considered an exceptionally wise and impartial individual, whose "outside" origin may well have been considered an asset for this position in which impartiality was considered vital.

<sup>5</sup> Often unknown men who come to Kakabila without an obvious motive for visiting, are suspected of being fugitives from justice. Why else, villagers ask, would a man "bargos" (wander) from one community to the next where he has no family? See also Helms (1971: 163, 226).

<sup>6</sup> The *Wanks* is the Miskitu name for the Río Coco

<sup>7</sup> He arrived in Kakabila about one month before I did.

either Miskitu or English, and they lived in a rickety wooden house with thatched leaf roof just outside the "wire" which marked the village boundary (50).<sup>8</sup>

Kakabila people address the in-marrying outsider as "*waik*" (brother-in-law - male ego), "*swik*" (junior kinswoman's husband - male ego) and "*maisai*" (my kinswoman's husband - female ego), even those with no known genealogical relation to the bride. Marriage therefore provides an important context in which villagers domesticate in-marrying "outside men", who thereafter become classificatory affines to the village inhabitants.<sup>9</sup> As a universal affine, the "outside man" finds himself under special pressures to "live good" (*pain iwaia*) with other villagers. The "home boy" who marries within the village, however, experiences affinity this intensely only with his wife's close consanguineal kin, and he avoids the further reaching constraints under which the "outside man" labours.<sup>10</sup>

"Outside men" are malleable provided that they "take" village girls; "home boys", however, are matrimonial liabilities. If the "outside man" causes trouble he is on his own. With their own "families" and networks in the village, "home boy" husbands, however, have more allies and are less likely to be diligent affines. According to this discourse they are lazy (*srinwas*), lack "manners" and *rispik*, and are more likely to "curse", "fight" and "row" with their in-laws. The following case histories, the first concerning an "outside man", and the second a "home boy", demonstrate this nicely. In the first, a recalcitrant "outside man" is brought quickly to heel; in the second, much more desperate measures are required to ensure compliance.

#### Case # 30

An "outside man" from Puerto Cabezas named Faustino lived in the "uptown" part of the village with his Kakabila-born wife, Felicia. When I arrived in the village, Faustino and Felicia were living with Felicia's parents (44). Eventually Faustino built a leaf house (45) next to Felicia's parents, and he and Felicia moved there with their first baby in an attempt to establish their own house. Unfortunately, however, Faustino often rowed with his mother-in-law Aicilia (according to some villagers a notoriously combative woman) about their respective rights over Felicia. After one row with Faustino, Aicilia got so

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<sup>8</sup> Ephraim was often referred to as "the Miskitu", partly because he spoke no English at all, and partly because as the most recent "up the coast" arrival, he seemed to live outside the mainly English speaking Cuenca moral universe, membership of which was seen in geographical rather than ethnic terms.

<sup>9</sup> One Pearl Lagoon young man who was planting in Kakabila and thinking of settling down there, was often teased by villagers telling him that "the girl crazy about you".

<sup>10</sup> Native Kakabila men rarely address one another with affinal terms of address unless they consider themselves to be genealogical affines.

agitated that she ran into the "bush" overcome with "fits", and several village men had to run after her in order to restrain her in case she did herself serious harm.

On another occasion, it was said, Faustino knocked Felicia down, while she was pregnant with a second child, and Felicia's parents violently rowed with him again. Her father, Gustavus, got sufficiently angry to threaten Faustino with a bow and arrow, and he had to leave his "uptown" house (45), close to which were several houses occupied by members of Aicilia's kindred (38, 44, 46, 47). Faustino was able to take refuge at the extreme far end of the village in the house of Albertina (3) and her husband, Mitchell, a man from Yulu, close to Puerto Cabezas, where he moped around in a distraught state until eventually he made his peace with Aicilia and returned "uptown".<sup>11</sup>

The second case history demonstrates a much more protracted dispute between a son-in-law and mother-in-law, one made more so by the fact that the protagonist son-in-law was a native of Kakabila.

#### Case # 31

Yoyo, Sibella's (13) son-in-law, had a reputation for being something of a boaster, a loud mouth who considered himself the coolest and most sophisticated young man in the village. People said he was a drinker, a spendthrift, who spent all his money on rum, a social hazard who, when drunk, would talk incessantly about his prowess in various spheres. To most of the village men he was something of a figure of fun. However, they tended to be wary of him, because it was thought he was also a thief. Becky, his "wife", was a rather shy girl with a well developed sense of *swira* (shame). Her mother considered her rather feckless, and would often refer to her as "that crazy girl", while her younger sister Neysey said that she considered Becky a "dunce".<sup>12</sup>

Talking to villagers, I learned that some years previously Becky had eloped with Yoyo to live virilocally with his parents in their house "uptown" (41) at the other end of the village. Sibella had been furious about the elopement and had told Becky that she had acted very foolishly. Since she had made her decision without parental consent, she would not be allowed to return home. Becky gave birth to a son and then to a daughter, but was never happy in Yoyo's parents' house, where she was allegedly victimised by Yoyo's mother (41) and Yoyo's maternal aunts (her *lamlat kuya* or classificatory sisters-in-law), who lived close by (33, 34, 38). Yoyo therefore built a little ramshackle house (42), next to his parents, into which he,

<sup>11</sup> Shortly afterwards, however, Faustino took Felicia and his children across the lagoon and he built a new house in Pearl Lagoon. When I saw him in Pearl Lagoon some months later, he told me that he blamed his mother-in-law's love of rowing for his departure from Kakabila.

<sup>12</sup> Neysey told me that she had no intention of remaining a *laha Miskituka* (catfish Miskitu) in Kakabila. She told me that she planned to continue her education and find work in the city.

Becky and the two babies moved, partly in an attempt to ease the tensions between Becky and his matrilineal kinswomen.

However things did not improve for Becky. Away from his father, who sometimes beat him up for drinking, Yoyo allegedly often spent his money on rum, coming home drunk and beating her. Having had enough, Becky patched things up with her mother and fled Yoyo's house while he was out fishing, returning home to her parents with her two children. According to Yoyo, Becky left him on this occasion because her *tahiti* (uncle) Ernesto had told her falsely, that he had been periodically visiting another woman in Orinoco. Becky's gullibility and jealousy, he told me, had precipitated her flight.

By the time I came to Kakabila, Yoyo had ingratiated himself with his parents-in-law, and was living rather uneasily in their house as their acknowledged son-in-law.<sup>13</sup> As I have already noted, Kakabila people regard the mother-in-law/son-in-law relationship as one which should be conducted with extreme *rispik* (respect) arguments and fights between a man and his mother-in-law being considered the paradigm example of *saura iwaia* ("living bad"). Yoyo's relationship with Sibella was generally conducted with the appropriate tokens of *rispik* but this concealed a bitter tussle for control over Becky, which they both privately and separately acknowledged to me. One of the most bitterly contested issues was Yoyo's right to beat Becky. Yoyo was occasionally hitting Becky and this really rankled with Sibella.<sup>14</sup>

Shortly after my arrival in Kakabila, Becky became pregnant again. She eventually bore a baby boy and entered into the nine days of post-partum seclusion required of Kakabila women. On the tenth day she emerged onto the house veranda with the baby, an act which provoked an incident. As I noted in Chapter Four Kakabila people believe that a mother and baby should not come out of the house too soon after a birth because of the risk of the baby catching "fresh cold" (a head cold) and subsequently dying. According to Neysey, Becky's sister, Yoyo, on seeing his wife and baby on the veranda, began to hit Becky. Neysey ran to fetch her mother, who came running back to the house to demand an explanation. Yoyo told Sibella that he had not really been hitting Becky, but had rather been banging her head against the wooden house wall to knock some sense into her, and shouting at her because she had brought the baby out of the house. Giving me his side of the story later, Yoyo told me that he had been angry at Becky for risking the baby's health by bringing it out so soon (though of course technically the nine days had elapsed). Despite the fact that he worked hard for his children, he added, he was too poor to buy medicine for a sick baby. In

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<sup>13</sup> How this was done and under what conditions I am not clear.

<sup>14</sup> It is generally argued by both men and women in Kakabila that a man has the right to beat his conjugal partner, but whether this right can be exercised while she is living in her parents' house is not at all clear. That there is no consensus on this point is supported by the fact that I recorded details of another dispute which hung upon this very same issue, between Faustino and his parents-in-law, Gustavus and Aicilia, who figured briefly in the previous case history.

the row that followed, according to Sibella, Yoyo demonstrated a lack of *rispik*, by telling her that he would never build his house next to hers.<sup>15</sup> Sibella claimed that by remarking that he would not build his house next to hers, Yoyo had shown her a lack of *rispik*. It was this, she told me later, which now prompted her to banish Yoyo from her house. While Yoyo left in disgrace, Becky along with her children remained with her mother.

In trying later to make sense of the course of events up to this point later, Yoyo expressly told me that he felt that his relationship with his mother-in-law was bad because she tried to control Becky too much. He told me that since Becky was his woman, it was up to him to decide what she did and did not do. He added that he was always respectful to his mother-in-law, but made it clear that he thought she should relinquish her rights over Becky.

Yoyo left his parents-in-law's house. He did not go back to his own parents' house (41), because, it was said, he did not get on well with his father, and moved in with his maternal grandparents (34), who lived with two adult daughters, one son-in-law and several grandchildren in the "uptown" part of the village. He no longer walked down the "front" road, the main street, which ran the length of the village, and took to furtively poling a "dori" along the "edge" (the shoreline of the lagoon) to get from one end of the village to the other, thereby avoiding other villagers.

After two months of exile, Becky's father George relented and agreed to let Yoyo come back into the house. George, Becky's father, had a much more relaxed relationship with his son-in-law. Yoyo would accompany him gill net fishing and turtling, and demonstrated a capacity for hard work which George clearly valued. Thus when the village co-operative secretary of the fishermen's union of Pearl Lagoon collected the first membership fees, at a meeting I attended, George was not only one of the few men to pay, but even paid for Yoyo, prompting the other men present to remark, "there's a real father-in-law". Typically, Yoyo told me that he had been at perfect liberty to return to his parents-in-law's house at any time, but had refrained from doing so until he was good and ready. At first, Yoyo made an effort to reform and tried hard to be a model son-in-law. He told me that he would give up drinking and save his money; some he would give to his mother-in-law, the rest he would spend on Becky and their three children. He began to "rip lumber" in the forest with the village sawyer, and with the help of his father-in-law and an adolescent brother-in-law, began to build a house right next to George and Sibella's. It was common knowledge in the village that it had been Yoyo's assertion that he would never build his house next to Sibella's which had provoked her to throw him out of her house in the first place, so the appearance of the

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<sup>15</sup> The birth of a third baby often marks the occasion for a co-resident son-in-law to move out of his parents-in-laws' house into a new house built next to theirs (14). Up to this point, Yoyo had not even started construction of his house, despite the fact that along with several other men he had been a fairly recent recipient of materials given on credit by CEPAD especially for this purpose.

frame for Yoyo's new house created some interest. As Albertina (3), Sibella's half sister, expressed it, this capitulation over the location of the new house was a sure sign that now Becky was "oficial" and Yoyo, who had been "oficial", was now "rasa".<sup>16</sup>

Back in his parents-in-laws' house, Yoyo began to slip back into his old ways, drinking and allegedly stealing money from Sibella. The money earned from fishing and turtling, which should have been spent completing the new house (14), was spent on rum, while the house frame that had so quickly been erected became a climbing frame for the "downtown" children, and was never fitted with either lumber walls or zinc roof. Tension between Yoyo and Sibella began to mount again, and Sibella began to mutter to her closest friends that she might have to send Becky away from Kakabila to work, partly to get her out of Yoyo's reach and partly to knock some sense into her.

The Christmas season came to Kakabila, and two of Sibella's sisters arrived to spend the holiday season with their parents. These sisters, Whitty and Gloria had married "Spaniards" (Mestizos) and now lived on the Pacific side of Nicaragua. They had become much hispanicised, and were regarded as being very sophisticated by other village women. As their visit drew towards a close it was decided by Sibella's parents (27) and these sisters, that two younger *tiara* (adolescent) sisters, Micmic and Telia, would go with them. It was thought that some time spent on the Pacific coast would be beneficial to the two girls. They would learn better Spanish and become, like their elder sisters, more "experience" (worldly wise). This plan to send the girls was public knowledge in the village. Unknown to Yoyo, Sibella was also planning to spirit Becky away with them.

While Yoyo was at sea, hunting turtle with George, Sibella's sisters left Kakabila for Managua. With them went Becky and her youngest baby. Yoyo returned to the village after a week, and was taken by complete surprise. He told me later that he had been totally unprepared for this turn of events, and had been quite devastated. In spite of the fact that Becky had gone, Yoyo remained as a residence in Sibella's house, continuing to consider himself her son-in-law (*dapna*) and therefore responsible for his two older children, who remained in Sibella's care. He repeatedly questioned his father-in-law, about whether Becky would be coming back to Kakabila, and if so when. George told him that she would be coming back at some point, implying that the time would depend on his behaviour.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Oficial" in Spanish means 'official'. In Kakabila slang it is commonly used ironically to mean 'one who thinks he or she is in charge'. "Rasa" probably comes from the Spanish 'rasado', meaning 'levelled' or 'razed'.

<sup>17</sup> I received two letters from Kakabila after I returned to London. In the first I was informed Becky had returned to the village. The second said that Yoyo and Becky had had a fourth baby, and that Sibella was trying to get them to move out into their own house, possibly house 14.

Although village exogamy in Kakabila is generally preferred, it is by no means prescriptive, and it is not hard to find examples of village-born men who have established conjugal partnerships with village-born women.<sup>18</sup> There are several reasons for this. Firstly and most obviously, not all villagers share the opinion that "outside men" are best, as is evidenced by Albertina's defence of Gaspar. Secondly and fairly frequently, conjugal unions are initiated when village *tiara* (adolescent girls) become pregnant by "home boys". Thirdly and lastly, there are reasons to do with Kakabila's recent history. At one time "up the coast" Miskitus came to the village fairly frequently,<sup>19</sup> but since work for the companies has virtually dried up in recent decades, regional mobility has been impaired, and the most regular visitors to Kakabila nowadays are Creoles and *Karibe* people from the neighbouring villages in the lagoon, who are wary of settling in Miskitu villages.<sup>20</sup> Consequently parents often have to make do with village-born sons-in-law.

Because many villagers are quite closely related, and because marriage with second cousins or closer is frowned upon, boys who are fathered by men who are also from the village, often find that most of the village girls are too close to "take". Thus when Orville (2) returned from working "out", he was discouraged from marrying in the village by the fact that the whole village seemed like "one family". Consequently, as Manuel (4) told me, "home boys" tend towards the view that Kakabila is short of available girls.<sup>21</sup> Thus, from the point of view of Kakabila boys, "outside men" who come looking for wives are not particularly welcome. As "home boys" are well aware, they are best served by promoting the *aura saura* discourse and the validity of village endogamy. Kakabila *wahma* and "merong" young men often claim that they are not really interested in the village *tiara*, except for recreational "bunky" (sex), for to admit they were would show that they are resigned to remaining *laha Miskituka* (catfish Miskitus) or "machete men", dependent on fishing and "bush work".<sup>22</sup> But despite the assertions of many boys that they wish to seek their fortunes outside Kakabila, the present state of the regional economy makes it quite likely that they will end up staying in Kakabila. Many "home boys" are therefore jealous of men

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<sup>18</sup> There is, I suggest, a strong case for arguing that the distinction between "outside" men and men who are natives of Kakabila is reproduced by the fact that men in *both* categories live in Kakabila in conjugal partnerships with village women.

<sup>19</sup> In the past men who came "courting" were often young men from other villages, working in the commercial sugar cane or banana plantations at Kukra Hill, or in the logging camps near the Wawashan and Kurinwas rivers (map 4).

<sup>20</sup> Very few Creoles and Garífunas speak Miskitu.

<sup>21</sup> Kakabila slang words for adolescent girls include *butku* (pigeon) and *waikas* (possibly deriving from expression meaning either 'no tail' or 'no brother-in-law').

<sup>22</sup> Timar (n.d.: 107) notes how young men "took shame" at machete work.

from "outside" who express interest in village girls, and even, it is said, go so far as to attempt to disrupt these courtships.

### "Courting"

If a would-be suitor considers that he might like a girl to be his conjugal partner (*maia*), he is supposed to ask her parents for the "privilege" of being able to "talk" with her.<sup>23</sup> It is usual in these instances for the suitor to make a preliminary approach to the girl's father in order to ask for an interview, which if granted generally takes place after dusk (*saiwan*). In some cases, the suitor sends a "testigo" (or "pilot") to ask on his account; in others he comes himself accompanied by the "testigo".<sup>24</sup> In most instances, however, he brings or sends a crate of rum as a gesture of goodwill.<sup>25</sup> At one time, I was told, if the father of a *tiara* considered a suitor unsuitable he would call for his wife to fetch the suitor a bowl of *wabul* (a *duswa* or banana porridge), remarking that he looked hungry. This was supposed to make it clear that the girl's father considered the suitor too immature and was intended to be insulting. Nowadays, however, this way to reject a daughter's suitor is considered old-fashioned and is no longer practised. If the girl's father is inclined to entertain her suitor's proposition favourably he too may provide some rum for the evening. The "testigo" acts as a referee for the suitor and is considered partly responsible for the latter's good conduct during the "courting" stage.<sup>26</sup>

If the suitor's application is accepted, the father may spell out conditions. These often include the requirement that the groom lives with his parents-in-law to begin with, and then builds his own house close by. The criteria for the acceptance of a suitor by a young woman's parents may be several, but usually include his ability to provide (marked by the number of working tools he possesses), his willingness to "hustle" (look for money by gill-net fishing, shrimping and turtling) and the fact that he has planted a cassava "ground" (see also Conzemius 1932: 145-147, and Helms 1971: 85, 87-88). If the *wahma* does "hustle", astute parents will look to see whether he spends his money on "notes" (fashionable) clothes, "grabadors" (radio cassette recorders), reggae ("rasta") cassettes and the like, objects which are valorised in terms of a *wahma* specific symbolic economy known as *wahma laka* (boy's way), or whether he spends his

<sup>23</sup> The suitor is likely to discuss this with his "girlfriend" at first, partly to ascertain her own feelings and also partly to get some idea of the likely response of her father.

<sup>24</sup> The "testigo" is typically an mature ("ageable") man.

<sup>25</sup> At one time, I was told, the "testigo" almost always came alone.

<sup>26</sup> If the suitor "fool up" ("trick" *munisa*) the "woman" by making her pregnant and refusing to acknowledge her as his wife, this reflects badly upon the judgment of the "pilot".



money accumulating working tools (see also Helms 1971: 150, 152-153).<sup>27</sup> Most important for many parents, however, is the criterion that the relationship between a man and his parents-in-law be conducted with "manners" and *rispik* (respect). When, for example, I asked Loisa (17) why her parents had accepted the suit of her husband Charlie, she remarked that it was because her mother, *kuka* Libias (20), said that Charlie had "manners" (see also Helms 1971: 105).

If a man is accepted as a legitimate suitor by the father of his "girlfriend", I was told, he may sit on the veranda in order to "talk" with her, and he may eventually ask her to accompany him on a late evening stroll (*kirbi taukaia*). This request may be refused, since the girl may consider her assent to be too visible a compromise of her reputation.<sup>28</sup> However a refusal need not jeopardise the courtship, since boys realise that girls are sometimes "shamey" and do not wish their "courting" relationships to become too public. Furthermore it is said that girls often require time to get used to a suitor (*yus takaia*).<sup>29</sup>

In some cases "permission" to "court" is explicitly linked to engagement, and is symbolised by the suitor giving the woman a ring. In these cases the courtship is considered to be quite binding. In other cases "permission" is understood simply as allowing the couple to get to know one another. If the suitor has the "privilege" to "court" but pulls out of the courtship before an engagement is made, his withdrawal is theoretically not considered to be too serious.<sup>30</sup>

#### Case # 32

Orville, was a village "merong" who had been brought up with "Creole ways" under the influence of his mother Nadia (1) (a "perfect Creole" despite having been born in Kakabila) and his Marshall Point born grandmother Miss Junie (2). He had "shipped out" on a Caribbean cruise liner, and, in spite of the fact that he had not yet acquired a wife, was no longer considered a child, because he had gained "experience" through undertaking paid work "out". Orville had even been to the United States and in many ways had acquired more "experience" than most of the village "old heads", for whom Panamá, Costa Rica, Honduras and the Cayman Islands marked the limits of their first hand knowledge. Orville was "engaged" to Myrna

<sup>27</sup> *Wahma ruk* (bad boys) and young adult males who subscribe to the values of *wahma laka*, are known as "merong", a word with pejorative connotations implying womanising, irresponsibility and "bargosing" (wandering around aimlessly).

<sup>28</sup> Alternatively her parents might refuse, considering that this would risk their daughter becoming pregnant (*kwira*).

<sup>29</sup> A Moravian missionary working in Tasbapauni noted, 'it is very difficult to obtain the woman's consent to be married' (MC 1872, vol. 28: 315).

<sup>30</sup> Engagement is differentiated from "permission" to "court" since the former necessarily implies an absolute commitment to eventual marriage.

(4), a seventeen year old village *tiara*, and had been granted the "privilege" from Myrna's guardian, her *tahti* ("uncle") Macho, before he had "shipped out", having approached Macho to ask for "permission" accompanied by Mitchell (3), an "up the coast" man who acted as "testigo".<sup>31</sup>

Before Orville's much talked about return to Kakabila just before Christmas, there was a great deal of speculation about whether Orville would actually "take" Myrna on his return. Although he had made a commitment towards Myrna, it was known that Orville was something of a "rude little boy", given to chasing other village girls. Before getting "engaged" to Myrna, for example, he had also been "engaged" to Adelia (24), another village *tiara*, and a member of a notoriously combative kindred situated along the "front road" near the top end of "middletown".

It was widely said to Myrna's credit that she was still a "young girl" (virgin), and she clearly identified with other village children through her participation with the other village children and by her attendance at Sunday school. Adelia, however, was not really regarded as being a child, in spite of the fact that she was the same age as Myrna. She never joined in the children's games organised and, instead of going to Sunday School with the children, went to the Anglican church as an adult. Most tellingly of all Adelia and Orville, during their courtship, had often been seen slipping off into the "bush" to "hide and fool around". In more recent months Adelia had sometimes travelled by herself to towns such as Pearl Lagoon, Kukra and even Bluefields, where it was uncharitably assumed by some that she was looking for men.<sup>32</sup> Adelia clearly wished to be recognised as an adult, but although she was recognised as a "woman" in that she was thought to be having sexual relationships, she was not really recognised as a true adult because she did not have a husband or children, and as such was unfavorably compared with Myrna who supposedly had remained a "young girl".

After Orville "bounced" (broke off with) Adelia, and during his subsequent courtship with Myrna, it was said that Adelia would periodically walk all the way "downtown" to Macho's house where Myrna lived, to subject her to a barrage of curses and abuse. The other *tiara*, speculating on whether Myrna or Adelia would "win", tipped Myrna; Adelia had simply been a "pass time". Some of the villagers, however, doubted whether Orville would be interested in either *tiara*, having met more "up to date" girls "from out".<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Loco (1) had also told his son that he was not to "fool up" Myrna since she was an orphan and therefore particularly vulnerable.

<sup>32</sup> It is rare for children and particularly *tiara* to be permitted to go to larger towns by themselves. Usually children only make such journeys by themselves if they are expected by kin or godparents.

<sup>33</sup> Loina had been sending Myrna to wash clothes for Orville's mother, Nadia, but once she had got wind of Orville's alleged involvement with other girls while he was away, Loina had withdrawn Myrna from doing this work.

When Orville did return, there was much *swira* (embarrassment) between him and Myrna, and it transpired that Orville in fact did not want to "take" her. According to Loyola (21), Orville's father's sister, Orville said that he felt that the village was too much like "one family".<sup>34</sup> Myrna remained dignified about the matter, telling her friends that the break between her and Orville was one of mutual agreement, adding that she was no longer really interested in Orville and that she was not really ready to begin a conjugal partnership. Subsequently the engagement was annulled. I asked Albertina, Mitchell's wife, what her husband felt about this course of events, since Mitchell had been Orville's "testigo". Albertina told me that there was no problem, because both parties had agreed to give up the "engagement" by mutual consent due to "feelings". Other villagers told me that since Myrna had remained a "young girl", no harm had been done.<sup>35</sup> Shortly afterwards Orville "shipped out" again for another term at sea.

In this case the dissolution of the engagement was relatively smooth. I was told, however, that if a father is "jealous" (*lawisa*) of his daughter, and if it is public knowledge that his daughter and her suitor have been having "bunky" (sex),<sup>36</sup> the suitor may find it considerably more difficult to extricate himself from this commitment.

Assuming that a courtship or engagement is established, a suitor may start to bring fish for the parents of his "girlfriend". At this stage people may begin to discuss the relationship between the actors (the suitor, his "girlfriend" and their families) in terms of anticipatory affinal terms of address, for example, *maiam* (your spouse), *dampna* (your son-in-law or your father-in-law - male addressee), *mulam yapti* (your mother-in-law), *waikatkam* (your brother-in-law - male addressee), *mamsaia* (your opposite sex sibling-in-law), *swikatkam* (more distant male affine - male address), *lamlatkam* (your sister-in-law - female addressee), and so on (see also Bell 1989 [1899]: 87, and Conzemius 1932: 106).<sup>37</sup> These terms of address are used initially as a form of

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<sup>34</sup> He had also told his "auntie" Loyola and grandmother Libias that he wanted Micmic (27), who was in fact his *kosin* (cousin), in this case MFZD.

<sup>35</sup> A few months later Myrna showed me a love letter she had written to a village *wahma* named Gaga (13), asking me not to tell her *tahti* (uncle), lest he beat her. Shortly after this she told me that she now had other ideas adding that she liked a boy who lived in Kukra and was considering losing her virginity to him the following year if she felt ready. I got a letter about two years after I left the field which informed me that Myrna had had a baby by a boy who had then come to live with her at her uncle's home (4).

<sup>36</sup> Some commonly used verbs for 'sexual intercourse' are *sabaia* (to "strike"), *munaia* (to "drive" or instigate) and *nata briaia* (to have another's bottom).

<sup>37</sup> If the suitor is from outside the village, he is likely to be treated as an affine by the village as a whole. Adult men may call him "*waik*" (brother-in-law - male addressee) and adult women "*maisaia*" (opposite sex sibling-in-law).

gentle teasing by those members of the village who approve of the relationship, and as a form of irony by those who do not,<sup>38</sup> and it is at this stage that girls typically become "ashamed to eat" (in front of their "boyfriends"). The suitor for his part is likely to demonstrate "shame" in front of his "girlfriend's" mother and he may well begin to cultivate mild avoidance behaviour towards her.<sup>39</sup> He may also initiate joking relationships with his wife-to-be's younger sisters and pre-adolescent brothers (see also Helms 1971: 103, 104). In the case of the boys this may involve tickling ("icklish" *munaia*) them, pulling down their shorts, and the like. According to Renaldo (15), in Kara on the Río Grande brother-in-law/sister-in-law joking often results in a weak form of sororal polygyny in which sexual relationships take place between men and their wives' sisters.<sup>40</sup>

### *Establishing a conjugal partnership*

A conjugal partnership usually begins with several years' residence in the house of the bride's parents following the wife's first pregnancy. If things are going smoothly the son-in-law may bring his parents-in-law fish from his gill nets, "provisions" from his "plantation", help his future father-in-law with house and "dori" repairs, and chop firewood for his mother-in-law, especially if either is sick. The mother-in-law, for her part, may encourage him to appear for cooked meals and give him small treats such as eggs, cashews, sugar cane and pineapple pieces. In the meantime the groom works with his father-in-law and brothers-in-law gill-net fishing and catching shrimp and turtle, and cultivates relations of co-operation with the other men of his wife's "family" (see also Helms 103-104, 109).

This affinal co-operation usually takes place in the context of residence at the house of the parents-in-law, uxori-local postnuptial residence usually having been made a condition of engagement. This arrangement often works out well, and the groom and his affines achieve a mutually acceptable working relationship. Sometimes, however, conflicting expectations and the demands for mutual *rispik* (respect) make uxori-local postnuptial residence very difficult, and relations, particularly between son-in-law and mother-in-law, become extremely strained.

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law), a usage which may continue indefinitely. Women who settle in Kakabila are addressed by children as "*tahti maia*" (uncle's spouse).

<sup>38</sup> Note that *maiam* (your spouse) is also used as a form of teasing by *tiara* and *wahma* among themselves to suggest that the addressee is or could be having sex with the referent.

<sup>39</sup> *Kuka Libias'* (20) memory of the "courtship" of her daughter Marlyn by Jacinto (48), an "up the coast" man, nearly twenty years previously, was that Jacinto had prosecuted this courtship "*swiras*" (without shame), implying that, in contrast to the norm, he had been quite open and not at all "shamey".

<sup>40</sup> I have no independent confirmation of sororal polygyny in present day Miskitu villages.

Kakabila people take great pains to stress that a man should always treat his parents-in-law with "manners" and *rispik* (respect). He should always use appropriate forms of address with them,<sup>41</sup> never "run bad joke" with them (i.e. use sexually explicit banter), or quarrel and fight with them. Breaches of *rispik* towards parents-in-law are considered extremely serious. Consequently affinal relations which are not working well are often characterised by avoidance.<sup>42</sup> As I noted in the previous chapter, it is a mother who generally exercises authority over co-resident daughters. In some situations a son-in-law, living in the house of his parents-in-law, may find it hard to exercise the socially sanctioned forms of proper authority over his wife, because these are contested by the mother-in-law. In these cases the relationship between a mother and her daughter's husband may turn into a tussle for control over the daughter. One solution is for the son-in-law to move his wife and children into another house, for a source of tension may be that the house is getting too full.<sup>43</sup> It is generally understood, and sometimes made a condition of "permission" to become "engaged", that a son-in-law's house be built next to that of the wife's parents, and this is usually adhered to. This results in a weakened but nevertheless continuing uxorilocality, which both ensures the continuation of support and protection of brides by their kindred, and keeps those grooms inclined to shirk brideservice duties in close proximity.

From the point of view of some grooms, however, the fact that this house is situated next or close to his wife's parents' house, may mean that their mothers-in-law are able to continue to exercise an unwelcome control over their wives, and even the most easy-going sons-in-law sometimes feel that they would do better to move away from the influence of their wives' "families". Several "ageable" (mature) men told me that, after periods of uxorilocal post-nuptial residence as younger men, they had eventually moved their wives and children to more isolated parts of the village. The reason given for this was usually that they had found their "neighbours" too combative, "neighbours" in this context being a euphemism for affines who for reason of *rispik* they did not wish to directly implicate.

#### Case # 33

Jacinto (48), an "up the coast man" from Crata, Honduras, had originally lived in "middletown" close to Iano and Libias (20), his wife's parents, during the early years of his and Marlyn's twenty odd year union. He gave this reason for his eventual decision to built a new house eventually in a quiet part of "uptown" Kakabila. The part of

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<sup>41</sup> Acceptable forms of address for a father-in-law include "*daipna*", "*daip*", "father-in-law". Acceptable forms of address for a mother-in-law include "*muli yapiti*", "mother-in-law" and "old woman". It is generally held that one should not address one's parents-in-law by name.

<sup>42</sup> Note all son-in-law/mother-in-law relations are characterised by avoidance. Custober (30) and his mother-in-law Vida (29) occasionally went looking for crabs (*rahti*) along the "edge" together.

<sup>43</sup> The birth of a third child is often the cue for a young couple to move into a house of their own.

middletown" in which he and Marlyn had originally lived, was dominated by a cluster of houses occupied by several members of Marlyn's kindred (H), including, her mother Libias (20), her adult sister Gollita (21) and her mother's sister Yvonne (19), all of whom exercised a significant influence over events taking place this part of the village (see map 6).

It seems likely that Jacinto felt that his mother-in-law construed his relocation to the "uptown" area as a theft of her daughter. Following this move "uptown" Marlyn was now situated outside her sphere of influence, and it was possibly this which made Jacinto's avoidance of his mother-in-law particularly extreme by Kakabila standards.<sup>44</sup> Only on one occasion did I see Jacinto inside the kitchen of Marlyn's mother during which time he never looked her direction once. Although Jacinto sometimes visited this part of "middletown" specifically to help Marlyn's father Iano gill net fishing, he never sat with Marlyn's kin on their veranda, and always behaved extremely shyly in this very public and central part of the village.<sup>45</sup>

For some men, the process of gradually prising their wives away from their mothers-in-law is too slow and painful, particularly if the necessary parental "permission" is lacking, and like Yoyo (13) they persuade their "girlfriends" that elopement is the best bet.<sup>46</sup> Although elopement seems to work in the short run, it has drawbacks in the long run, particularly if he treats her badly, for as long as she has her mother and sisters living in the village, she may at any time pick up her children and leave him, secure in the knowledge that she will be provided for by the network of women who constitute her mother's kindred. For his part the abandoned lover loses something of his adult status, and he may find himself having to negotiate with his wife's parents after all.

Although some men remove their wives and escape the kinds of problem that living close to their wives' "families" can produce, this not mean that they altogether escape their affinal obligations. As I noted in the previous chapter, *rispik* towards one's affines theoretically continues in one form or another after death, and even the most recalcitrant men may well be called upon to perform duties towards affines in crisis situations.

#### Case # 34

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<sup>44</sup> Note that it was Jacinto who had "courted" Marlyn "*swiras*" (without "shame") when he had first come to Kakabila.

<sup>45</sup> Jacinto sometimes told me that others frequently told lies about him, and it seemed likely to me at the time that as in in-marrying man from "up the coast" with a Kakabila woman, he felt unpopular.

<sup>46</sup> Aguilar and Anjou (11), Sansin and Lucilla (28), Amanda and Lorenzo (12), Sam and Stella (9), Junior and Swain (8), Alejandro and Corina (36), and Custober and Lina (30)) all supposedly began their conjugal partnerships in circumstances of elopement.

When Miss Yvonne (19) was taken sick, it was her son-in-law Lorenzo (12) who her to the clinic at Pearl Lagoon. Her illness was obviously extremely serious, and Lorenzo borrowed Sansin's "dori". Sansin (26) was also one of Yvonne's sons-in-law and his "dori" was acknowledged to be the fastest in the village, but Lorenzo was a more experienced sailor. In Pearl Lagoon the staff at the clinic were unable to save Miss Yvonne and she died. Her grave in the village cemetery (*raiti*) was dug by her male affines Lorenzo (12) (son-in-law - *dapna*), Sansin (son-in-law - *dapna*) (26), Aguilar (11) (son-in-law - *dapna*), Iano (20) (sister's husband - *masaia*), Rafael (48) (sister's daughter's husband - *masaia kuya*) and Charlie (17) (sister's daughter's husband - *masaia kuya*).

Both Sansin and Aguilar had both previously eloped with Miss Yvonne's daughters (Lucilla and Anjou). On Miss Yvonne's death, however, Aguilar and Anjou moved into Miss Yvonne's house (19), and Aguilar began to work closely with Anjou's widowed stepfather, Jones.

Consequently most elopements end up sooner or later with the guilty couple returning to the bride's parents and the groom co-operating with them in the approved fashion. As Albertina (3) put it to me in the context of the Yoyo and Sibella dispute, "*mairin kau pauwa brisa*" (a woman has more power).

### *Becoming a dama*

Once a man decides he is better off working with his affines rather than sneaking around them, he is part way towards becoming accepted by the village "older heads" (elder men) as a "serious man". He may attend village communal meetings without being embarrassed by the presence of his wife's father and brothers, and he may speak out in the knowledge that, as a responsible man, he will be respectfully heard.<sup>47</sup> Above all, he takes care not to row or fight with other men, and especially those who are members of his wife's "family" (see also Bell 1989 [1899]: 86-87).

#### Case # 35

Lorenzo (12) and George (13) were about the same age. Lorenzo was Sibella's sister, and he lived in the "back" part of "downtown" in a house about thirty-five yard's away with George's mother's sister's daughter, Amanda. Lorenzo was a keen turtler but did not have a large "dori" of the size needed for sea-going expeditions to the Keys, where the turtle were located. Consequently, according to his sister Sibella, he often pestered George for the loan of his large "dori." This would have been no problem in

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<sup>47</sup> In these meetings, "outside men" are relatively disenfranchised. Although they are listened to, they do not generally have the authority that men born in the village do in terms of making important village-wide decisions or holding office. These offices are *wihta* ("juez." or arbiter), "co-ordinator", deputy "co-ordinator", "secretary" and "policeman".

itself. George, she said, was a generous-hearted man, who unlike some never charged borrowers using it to "carry" freight. Furthermore a "dori" owner's share of the meat from a butchered turtle was always welcome. The problem was Lorenzo's unreliability. George had loaned Lorenzo his "big dori" in the past. On one occasion, she claimed, George never got a share of the meat, while on others, Lorenzo had not bothered to "haul up" his brother-in-law's "dori" properly, leaving it to George to make sure that it was in good shape after a week at sea.

On one occasion, Lorenzo had been drinking rum and decided he would take the opportunity to ask George for its use the following week. Lorenzo and I arrived at George's veranda where he and Sibella and he put forward his request. George plainly did not wish to lend Lorenzo the "dori". Unable to tell him so because he did not wish to be seen to be "living bad" with his *waikat* (brother-in-law), but unable to think of a convincing excuse on the spur of the moment, he told Lorenzo that he would let him know in due course. Lorenzo, however, would not take this for an answer and continued to press George, clearly hoping to press his claim on the basis of his being George's brother-in-law and by using the term "*waik*" (address term for brother-in-law). In the end Sibella spoke up and told Lorenzo off roundly for his insistence on an immediate answer.

It is perfectly acceptable for brothers-in-law to solicit favours from one another, and bad form to refuse such requests if they are not too unreasonable. These might be requests for loans of tools, "dorises", barbering services or bottles of rum. Although villagers say that a man has the right to expect such requests from his wife's consanguineal kinsmen as well as his consanguineal kinswoman's husbands, in practice it is usually the former (the wife-givers) who are most prepared to make requests and claim insults for imagined slights. For example, when Tistis (38) and Mario (47), his sister Marga's husband, fell out, it was Tistis who smashed up Marga's kitchen.<sup>48</sup>

Kakabila men do not like to provoke disputes, because they see themselves essentially as outsiders. Some, like Jacinto (48) and Renaldo (15), see themselves as such, because they are "outside men" who have married into the village. Village "home boys", on the other hand, tend to view themselves as outsiders, because they have to detach from their own kindreds and affiliate themselves to the "families" of others as affines in order to become adults.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> It seems that Tistis took his anger against Mario out on his sister's property, since disharmony between male affines is particularly frowned upon in Kakabila.

<sup>49</sup> Men co-operate with their affines and are sometimes required to co-operate with the affines of their affines. For example Jacinto (48) and Charlie (17) whose wives were sisters sometimes caught turtle at sea together.



In this atmosphere it is hardly surprising that men tend to see one another through the prism of affinity, and construct their relations with other men in such terms. Consequently Kakabila men, in common with other Miskitu men, tend to address other men as "*waik*" (brother-in-law), and extend them affinal forms of *rispik* (respect), albeit in a weaker form. As fictive affines to one another, men take care not to row (*unsabaia*) or fight (*aiklabaia*) with one another in public. While public inter-kindred rows between women are relatively common and taken somewhat for granted, it is considered very demeaning and unmanly for men to involve themselves in shouting matches, and villagers who witness such disputes, especially the "older heads", always express great disapproval.<sup>50</sup>

As men become older, and acquire sons-in-law who give them grandchildren (*mula*) and *rispik*, they become known as *dama*. Although *dama* means 'grandfather', in most contexts it is used to mean 'respected old man', denoting a status which is achieved by the accumulation of *rispik*. Although men acquire *rispik* in a number of fashions, in structural terms, it is accumulated in two ways. Firstly, the older a man becomes, the more offspring, *rispik*-giving wife-receiving affines and junior ritual kin he acquires,<sup>51</sup> while his senior kin, affines and ritual kin, those to whom he demonstrates *rispik*, gradually die out. Secondly, men acquire *rispik* by showing that they can "live good" (*pain iwaia*) with others, most especially with their affines.

As men get older, they have less brideservice obligations to perform towards their wives consanguineal kin, and have the right to expect more of those men who have "taken" their junior consanguineal kinswoman. However, because old men only accumulate *rispik* through demonstrating that they can "live" good with their affines, they are not really in a position to actually demand this as a right. Consequently, they depend to a considerable extent on their *kuka* wives to do their politicking for them.<sup>52</sup>

Consequently the father-in-law/son-in-law relationship usually runs relatively smoothly. Firstly, the father-in-law often desires a son-in-law's labour. Nelson (27) told me that it was for this reason that Tumbo (24) hoped his stepdaughters found husbands shortly because he was getting old and needed help. Secondly, because a daughter labours in those gender specific

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<sup>50</sup> Rows between fathers-in-law and sons-in-law, are less common than rows between mothers-in-law and sons-in-law. Fathers-in-law, for the reasons given above, may perceive themselves to be as much outsiders, in terms of their wives' kindred social spaces, as their sons-in-law.

<sup>51</sup> One mother, Amanda (12), told me that she routinely asks *dama* "Prophet" to "stand" for his children when they are baptised.

<sup>52</sup> Holloman (1976: 139) notes for the Cuna, 'If the mother-in-law dies first the traditional system is embarrassed ... The father-in-law becomes a visitor in his own house'.

domains controlled by her mother, it is the latter, rather than her husband, who is more likely to contest the influence of a son-in-law. However, most significantly, a *dama* may be as much an in-marrying affine as he is, as far as his wife's senior kindred are concerned.

#### Case # 36

An *aura saura* (bad drifter) from Puerto Cabezas stole Leandro's (2) "dori". This man supposedly had a pistol and the *wihta* (arbiter) Peter (10) said he would only organise a posse to go after the thief if a gun could be acquired. A messenger was sent to *dama* Tumbo's house (24). It was known that Tumbo, an "outside man" originally from Tasbapauni, had an AK-46, and it was hoped that he might lend it to the pursuers. However, the messenger returned empty-handed, reporting that although Tumbo had not actually refused to lend the gun, his wife, Angelia had quite firmly refused to allow the gun to leave the house.

Whereas a *kuka* tries to maintain her authority over her kindred, (sometimes, for example, contesting control over her daughters with her sons-in-law), a *dama*, if he is to be a respected man, has to make sure that his relations with other men, some of whom are actual or potential affines, are harmonious. Thus *dama* are involved mainly in the cultivation of relationships in which *rispik* is the most important element. Whereas *kuka* gain *rispik* and authority from their "families" and ritual kin, *dama* are crucially dependent on the smooth running of affinal relations.

#### *Rum drinking*<sup>53</sup>

Almost all the accounts of the Miskitu and Sumu, from first contacts to the period of Moravian influence, comment on their *mishla* drinking sessions. *Mishla* was an alcoholic beverage made from cassava, which was chewed mostly by women (who thereby imparted their sexual attractiveness to the consumers) and allowed to ferment in canoes which served as vats. It was then consumed during mortuary rituals (*sikro*), weddings and other celebrations in prodigious quantities, resulting in scenes of both sexual license and violence which evidently disgusted many European and North American observers, not least the Moravian missionaries. What is particularly interesting about these drinking bouts, however, is that, as far as men's participation was concerned, they seem to have been extremely ritualised (see Appendix A). Nowadays, due in no small measure to Moravian influence, *mishla* drinking sessions have come to an end. Nevertheless rum (*waru*), which in coastal Miskitu villages at least has come to replace *mishla*

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<sup>53</sup> So many accounts of the Miskitu discuss their drinking of *mishla* and rum drinking, that it is impossible to list them all. Among the most interesting are Dampier (1927 [1697]), M.W. (1732: 293-294), Roberts (1965 [1827]: 132-136), Bard (1965 [1855]: 99, 200-224), Collinson (1870: 151-152), Bell (1989 [1899]: 28-29), Mueller 1932: 48, Conzemius 1932: 98-100), and Dennis (1981).

the most common alcoholic beverage, continues to have ritual significance as far as many Miskitu men are concerned, and it is to the consumption of rum to this which I now turn.<sup>54</sup>

Drinking rum and getting drunk (*bla* or "block up") is a specifically gendered activity in Kakabila, one in which only adult men (*waitna almuk*) are supposed to participate. *Wahma* who drink rum run the risk of attracting ridicule from adults, and women are not supposed to do so at all. Rum drinking sessions are specifically male affairs and are composed of anything between two and up to twelve or fifteen men.<sup>55</sup> Usually they take place spontaneously on veranda of a vendor, or underneath Ernesto's (32) large breadfruit tree which overlooks the lagoon near his house, and they often last a whole day, sometimes even two or three.<sup>56</sup> Peer pressure from the other drinkers makes it very difficult for the participants to leave, and once a man joins a session, his family and other villagers know that he is likely to be drinking the entire day. Consequently men who do not wish to get involved sometimes make detours to avoid the calls of their fellows to join them.

Rum drinking is most evident during the fishing season between June and December, and during the short periods in which shrimp catches are made, for the simple reason that more money is available at these times. Payment for catches is usually made on a single day, at which time the fishermen's accumulated "white paper" or "trust notes" (credit notes) for several weeks are redeemed for considerable (by local standards) amounts of cash. These occasional pay outs are very special causes for celebration, and they initiate drinking sessions either in Pearl Lagoon (where the fish "fabriks" are situated and the fishboats moored), or in Kakabila where village vendors (usually women) are more likely to extend credit to those men already busted.<sup>57</sup> A prevailing view is that "fishermen catch hell" and therefore have a right - even duty - to drink ("who is fisherman have to drink"). The mutual proximity of those men who have collected their cash in exchange for their "trust notes" around the Hog Cay wharf or the Pearl Lagoon "landings", makes avoiding these drinking sessions all the more difficult, and because it is so hard to leave a drinking session and because each drinker has to take his turn buying one of the pint bottles, men sometimes "drink out" their entire earnings at one session.

As I noted above men often go fishing or catching shrimp with their affines, usually their fathers-in-law or brothers-in-law. Men are generally in relationships of *rispik* for their wife-

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<sup>54</sup> Among the many slang words for rum are *laya pihni* (white water) and *laya lapta* (hot water).

<sup>55</sup> Occasionally adult women sometimes sit in and listen.

<sup>56</sup> Vida (29) and Sumu (39) are the most regular rum sellers.

<sup>57</sup> One of the fish buyers and some of the purchasers of "white shrimp" out on the lagoon even sell rum or beer, knowing that they will be able to get back the money spent buying the fishermen's catches.

giving affines and therefore find it very difficult to refuse requests of any type for men in this category. If a man knows that his wife's uncle (*swikat*) has seen him pick up two hundred córdobas for "first class fish" sold to a fish boat or "fabrik", for example, it is very hard for him to refuse to participate in a celebration with him. Consequently rum drinking sessions often take on an affinal character.

Case # 37

When Sam (9) went hunting turtle with his wife's brother, Lucas (7), and his father-in-law, Bayardo (6), for example, they spent a great deal of the money that they made, drinking rum together on Corn Island.

Rum drinking therefore makes an important contribution to the gendering of males in so far as it provides an important forum in which the principle of affinity is enacted in male homosocial contexts.<sup>58</sup>

Rum drinking is a strongly egalitarian practice. All men who drink together are "socios" (comrades), and through drinking rum, through taking turns to buy bottles, and by taking turns to takes "tragos" (swallows), they construct an illusion of solidarity among themselves,<sup>59</sup> a masculine republic' (Gell 1992: 166) which exists outside the realm of problematical heterosocial interactions and outside the conditions imposed by brideservice obligations. In rum drinking rituals all men are equals, and all become *waik* (brothers-in-law) regardless of actual affinal relations. Asymmetries based on the distinction between wife-giving and wife-receiving affines are abolished and the Kakabila ideal of masculine harmony is achieved.

In one interesting instance this harmony was severely disrupted.

Case # 38

One one occasion I was returning to Kakabila after a short break in Bluefields. As the "mail boat" docked at Pearl Lagoon my closest friend met me at the wharf as arranged. I was keen to set off immediately in his "dori" and get back to Kakabila, but he was less so. The "fabrik" at Hog Cay, he explained had redeemed the "trust notes" (credit notes) that the fishermen had been accumulating for the last few weeks, and they were in a mood to celebrate. We walked up to the Pearl Lagoon "point" and found about fifteen Kakabila men drinking together with other men near a private house whose owner was selling rum. It transpired that one of the participants was the Brown Bank pastor. This man had a "motor" (outboard motor) and announced that if the money could be collected to pay for the extra "gas"

<sup>58</sup> See Papataxiarchis (1991) for a detailed analysis of this type for the Greek coffee house.

<sup>59</sup> Sociality is given a specifically constructionist emphasis by Miskitu people themselves. One commonly used expression meaning 'to converse' is *laka paskaia*, literally 'to create law'.

required to "haul" seven "doris" across the lagoon, he would tow the Kakabila fleet home. The Kakabila men made a collection and produced the necessary money, the "gas" was purchased, and the convey set off with the pastor's "motor" pulling all seven "doris" in a string one behind the other. Most of the men were quite inebriated and were quite prepared to enjoy an easy ride home made possible by this all-male team effort. In the penultimate "dori", however, Sam (9) was very drunk. Not satisfied with enjoying the ride, he began to stand up in the "dori" and shout out incomprehensibly. The other men tried to persuade him to sit down, but he would not do so, and before long had fallen out of the "dori" into the lagoon twice. Sam was sharing this "dori" with his wife's brother Lucas (7); while the other men were mildly irritated with Sam's antics, Lucas became quite angry and began to shout, "He's not a real man! He doesn't drink like a man! A drinks like a little boy".

I am not the first person to observe this phenomenon of affinal harmony being achieved through ritualised alcohol consumption among the Miskitu. Mervyn Palmer, a naturalist who spent several months on the Mosquito Coast in 1905,<sup>60</sup> notes,

'Soon after their arrival the cheap whiskey gave out, so they [a party of Miskitu men] started in on wine. One man invited his "huaiqui" [*waiqi*], or brother-in-law, to take a friendly drink. Another did the same, then others and still more, and very soon the bottle was drained. A fresh one was broached, that emptied still more were opened, and presently someone commenced to dance in grotesque imitation of a waltz' (Palmer 1945: 42).

## Summary

The careers of Kakabila men are radically different to those of village women. Unlike girls who are strongly socialised into becoming productive members of their mother's house and kindred, boys are encouraged to detach themselves from these groups at an early age. A young man who seeks a conjugal partner has to make a considerable readjustment, forsaking *wahma laka* (boy's way) and the independent life of a "merong", in order to gain recognition as a "serious" man from his wife's kin and fellow villagers. For many young men, this transition is especially difficult because they have to embrace domestic life within an atmosphere charged by the fact that they are outsiders working within the potentially hostile kindreds of their wives. Furthermore they have to achieve this by themselves. Unlike their sisters they are never truly members of their mothers' kindreds, and it is significant in this respect that many adult men in Kakabila, once they have acquired wives, tend to let lapse their relationships with their own "families".

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<sup>60</sup> Although Palmer's work was published in 1945, in fact his visit was some forty years earlier (Elliott 1924: 215), a fact nowhere indicated in the text. I am grateful to Margaret Taylor for drawing my attention to this.

Kakabila adult men thus tend to perceive their relationships with others through the idiom of affinity. All other villagers are in some sense affines, and therefore they must be treated with "manners" and *rispik*. Unable to convincingly categorise themselves as members of particular village kindreds, and lacking the solidarity which comes with an idiom of consanguineal association, they must therefore act with greater caution in order to preserve the illusion of harmony and *rispik* with which they become *waitna almuk* (adult men) and *dama*. Kakabila men see themselves essentially as wife-takers, who cultivate potentially ambivalent relationships with affines. These relationships require delicate handling (see also Conzemius 1932: 104-105).

## Part Three

Time

## Chapter Seven

### Political economy and Miskitu history

This chapter is divided into three sections each of which deals with particular aspects of Miskitu history. These accounts are cumulative and are collectively intended to rethink particular aspects of this history in terms of the kind of social processes which I and others have identified as being characteristic of Miskitu modes of sociality.

The first section specifically provides an etic contextualisation for the accounts given in subsequent sections. Because it is necessarily brief I have had to focus on specific developments and events at the expense of others, and have thus chosen to concentrate on those which I believe have impinged more forcefully on the lives of Kakabila people. Thus, while I accept that the regional ascendancy of the Moravian church, the Contra War peace process negotiations, and the rise of YATAMA (the most important Miskitu political organisation in recent years) have been developments of great importance, I have rather cursorily skipped over these simply because they have had relatively little direct impact on the people of Kakabila, who are neither Moravian, nor actively involved in recent or present regional political processes.<sup>1</sup>

The second section focuses on those developments in the post-contact regional economy which, I go on suggest in the following chapter, have had an elective affinity with the changing ways the Miskitu, and Kakabila people in particular, have thought about social relations. In particular I am concerned with changes in trading and raiding patterns, the practices of provisioning and labouring for Europeans and Americans, and the impact of these on local notions of exchange and affinity at various moments in time.

Following Helms (1983) and Noveck (1988) I distinguish three periods of Miskitu history. The first is the late pre-contact and early post-contact period (up to about 1700) during which time the Indians populations exchanged goods and raids with one another bilaterally on an apparently equivalent basis (Helms 1971: 14-15, 1978, 1983; Noveck 1988). I have chosen to call this period 'the barter period'. The pattern of exchange which characterised 'the barter period', however, was gradually superseded in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries by other

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<sup>1</sup> As Vilas notes, ethnic mobilisation in the 1960s and 1970s had very little effect on the Indians in the Pearl Lagoon and Bluefields areas (Vilas 1989: 89-93). For useful discussions of the Moravian church's influence in the region, see Helms (1971). Reyes (1992) and Hale (1994) contain interesting discussions of the peace process, while Matamoras (1992) contains a useful analysis of the YATAMA (Yapti Tasba Masrika - 'children of the motherland') factions.



forms of interaction, as "The Coast" entered a new era, which following Noveck (1988), I have called 'the mercantile period. During this period the Miskitu, as the coastal Indians around Cape Gracias and Sandy Bay came to be known, acquired firearms and other manufactured goods through their contacts with visiting and resident foreign traders. During 'the mercantile period', the Miskitu were able to establish a marked ascendancy over their inland neighbours, and they expanded north, south and inland, making unreciprocated raids, often for slaves and women and exacting tribute from less advantageously situated neighbours (maps 7-9) (Helms 1971: 19-26; Holm 1978; Helms 1983; Noveck 1988; Naylor 1989). The third era, 'the company period', begins in the mid nineteenth century, when a number of principally North American companies began to engage in the commercial extraction of local resources. During 'the company period' Miskitu men were employed on relatively short term contracts and became involved as occasional proletarians in a globally peripheral 'enclave economy' (Helms 1971: 27-33; Dozier 1985; Sollis 1989; Vilas 1989; see De Kalb 1893 for an interesting contemporary account).

The third and last section considers the evidence for the character of political processes among the Miskitu at the village level during these periods. In particular I am interested in how the economic circumstances of the Miskitu affected the evidently changing nature of the relationships between leaders and followers, and I discuss the waxing and waning of patterns of Miskitu authority in terms of responses to developments in the regional political economy (Olien 1983; Dennis and Olien 1984; Helms 1986; Noveck 1988; Von Oertzen et al. 1990).

### *A history of the Miskitu*

The first encounters between the Indians of the Mosquito Coast and Europeans took place in the early sixteenth century. On his last voyage Columbus reached Cape Gracias a Dios in 1502, a land with 'very savage people' of little interest (Sauer 1966: 123-130). He was followed in 1510 by Nicuesa, who was searching for Veragua. This expedition ended in disaster when the caravel, which formed part of Nicuesa's fleet, broke up on the Mosquito Coast with great loss of life (Sauer 1966: 175-176). According to Holm, English corsairs were beginning to explore "The Coast" by the mid 16th century, and by 1589 there were already pirate lairs in Pearl Lagoon and Bluefields Lagoon (Holm 1978: 16-17). Informative accounts, however, begin with the appearance at Cape Gracias a Dios of settlers from the nearby island Providence (present day Providencia), a colony founded by a joint-stock of London Puritans in 1629.<sup>2</sup> These visitors were headed by Captain Sussex Cammock, who in company with one Samuel Axe, set up a trading depot on one of the Mosquito Keys some eight or ten miles offshore. Although the locals proved friendly and willing to trade, Cammock soon lost interest in the rather petty trade for

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<sup>2</sup> The inhabitants of this colony were expelled by the Spanish in 1641.

turtleshell, cacao, slaves, animal skins and turtle meat, and he returned to England in 1635.<sup>3</sup> Captain Axe, however, remained on the Coast, and carried on the trade which Cammock had established (Parsons 1954: 8-9, Naylor 1989: 30-31). Evidently there were slave merchants trading Negro slaves in the region, and on one occasion in the mid seventeenth century, escaping slaves from a wrecked 'Guiney ship' found their way ashore and took up life among the local Indians (Naylor 1989: 31; Helms 1971: 16; Conzemius 1932: 17-18).<sup>4</sup> According to Conzemius, these Indians around the Cape were part of the group known later as *Bawihka*, one of the small Misumalpan speaking groups situated in eastern Nicaragua and Honduras (Conzemius 1932: 17; see also Helms 1971: 18). It was these Indians, some of whom were evidently marrying the Negroes and Europeans at the Cape, who became known as Mosquito or Zambo.<sup>5</sup>

Before contact the Indians of the Cape Gracias area had been primarily river and savannah dwellers. Instead of the permanent shore habitations and inland agricultural stations characteristic of post-contact villages, pre-contact coastal peoples inhabited inland habitations, only periodically visited coastal fishing stations (Helms 1978; Magnus 1978). With the appearance of visiting and resident European and Jamaican traders, however, some of these Indians now began to locate their villages more permanently on the Coast (Helms 1978: 145) and, by the second half of the seventeenth century, the Cape, with its small population of European traders and friendly Miskitu Indians, had already become an established rendezvous and reprovisioning base for English speaking Caribbean adventurers. The buccaneers appreciated the Miskitus' skills as fishermen and "strikers" of turtle and began to employ them as provisioners and as mercenaries on their raids on the Spanish settlements in the region. These raids, which began in earnest with the sacking of Granada in 1665, 'kept the frontier in flames' (Floyd 1967: 43), and were to persist virtually unpunished until the early nineteenth century, in no small measure accounting for the retardation of Spanish colonial settlement in eastern Central America (Raveneau de Lussan 1930

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<sup>3</sup> It is quite possible that Cammock took with him the man referred to by Sloane as the '*Indian Prince*' (Sloane 1707: lxxxvi-lxxvii), said to have been taken as a visitor to England and eventually returned to his people (Olien 1983: 201).

<sup>4</sup> I fully endorse Von Oertzen's suspicion of those accounts who have accounted for the birth of the Miskitu purely in terms of a mythological miscegenation which is supposed to have taken place between the survivors of the 'Guiney ship' and the coastal Indians (Von Oertzen n.d. 5-6; see Helms 1977 for a discussion of related issues).

<sup>5</sup> Other names recorded are Mosqueto, Moskito, Mosco, Moustique, Musketo, and Musquito (Helms 1971: 15-16). In some accounts the Zambos or Sambos were those thought to be of 'mixed' Negro and Indian parentage, though in fact it is far more likely that the political divisions between Sambos and Miskitus, which Europeans identified according to a 'Eurocentric obsession with race', were more based upon geographical than racial loyalties (Helms 1977: 162; Von Oertzen n.d.: 9, 11-12).

[1689]: 286-287; Uring 1928 [1726]: 159-160; Young 1842; Sorsby 1969; Floyd 1967; Dozier 1985; Naylor 1989: 34-35).<sup>6</sup>

Miskitu raids were largely motivated by the desire to trade for the manufactured goods which the British traders brought, and in order to facilitate this trade many Indians learned English (Hodgson 1822 [1757]: 53; Young 1842: 55). Among the commodities which the traders sought were sarsaparilla, tortoise shell, slaves, mules, mahogany. In return they acquired guns, powder and shot, hatchets, axes, iron pots, beads and knives, and with the advantage of guns, ammunition and metal points, they quickly assumed a military and economic hegemony over their neighbours (Uring 1928 [1726]: 125, 143, 154; Hodgson 1822 [1757]: 18-19, 53; Mueller 1932: 31; Floyd 1967: 22, 58, 198; Helms 1983; Naylor 1989: 41-42, 43; Von Oertzen et al. 1990: 20).

By 1700 there were small numbers of English settlers, known as 'marooners',<sup>7</sup> from Cape Cameron to Bocas del Toro (Floyd 1967: 56, 57; Sorsby 51-52; Naylor 1989: 51). Some of the larger communities were eventually to attract Miskitu settlement, but it was the growth of the important English town at Black River (founded in 1699) in particular, which seems to have prompted the first wave of Miskitu expansion, resulting in Miskitu occupation of the entire coastline between Sandy Bay and Cape Cameron (map 7) (Hodgson 1822 [1757]: 18-19).<sup>8</sup> It was this northern group of Indians who most frequently came to be called Zambus.

The Miskitu also developed a pattern of seasonal migration which saw the men travelling southwards in large numbers between May and March, and returning in October with the southwind (*waupasa*). On these expeditions, which took them as far south as Bocas del Toro, the Miskitu collected the hawksbill tortoise shell which the English traders coming to the region so desired and acquired locally produced goods and slaves through trading, raids and tribute (M.W.: 1732; Roberts 1965 [1827]: 93, 124; MC 1851, vol. 20: 101; FM, 1889 vol. 34: 529; Floyd 1967: 20, 45, 58, 198; Sorsby 1969: 90-93; Naylor 1989: 43).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Long (1774, vol. 1 : 317) claims that these raids began as early as 1630. Dozier gives the dates for the earliest raids as 1645 and 1654 (Dozier 1985: 12-13).

<sup>7</sup> See Uring 1928 [1726]: 125, 143; Sorsby (1969: 10) and Holm (1978: 42) for discussion of the term 'marooner'. This term was gradually replaced in the mid eighteenth century by 'shoreman'.

<sup>8</sup> Estimate for the settler population of Black River and environs (including slaves) range from 1,200 (Naylor 1989: 236) to that given by a contemporary Spanish spy of 3,706 (Floyd 1967: 56).

<sup>9</sup> These trips to the south for the hawksbill were to continue until the mid-nineteenth century at least. According to Bourgois even today the Costa Rican Indians still retain elaborate tales of Miskitu wars. In fact, Guaymi parents scold misbehaving children with: "the Musiki [Guaymi for Miskitu] will come and get you" (Bourgois 1986: 9).

Smaller English settlements also grew up at Bragmanns Bluff, Pearl Lagoon, Bluefields, Punta Gorda and other locations to the south of Sandy Bay, resulting inevitably in a second wave of Miskitu expansion and a string of Miskitu settlements southwards towards the present day Costa Rica border (map 9) (Floyd 1967: chapter V). The Miskitu also pushed inland where they either absorbed the remnants of other Misumalpan groups or forced them to retreat upriver,<sup>10</sup> until by the second half of the nineteenth century virtually the entire Coast between Cape Cameron and Pearl Lagoon in Nicaragua, the Río Coco as far inland as Bocay (275 miles upriver), and the lower reaches of the other rivers which flowed into this coastline, were occupied by the Miskitu (map 10) (Naylor 1989: 36; Helms 1971: 15, 18-22; Conzemius 1932: 12-15, 84).

The British had from the earliest times crowned a Miskitu "king", and the authorities in Jamaica and Belize continued this practice, recognising the value of formalising their alliance with the Indians. Eventually, the British also created offices for other significant chiefs, and by the late eighteenth century the Mosquito Coast was divided into four spheres of influence, each controlled by one of the four titled chiefs, the "king", the "general", the "governor" and the "admiral" (map 11). Theoretically the "king" was the most important although in fact local chiefs generally acted quite independently of one another (Hodgson 1822 [1757]: 46-47; Young 1842: 71; Floyd 1967: 62-64; Olien 1983; Dennis and Olien 1984; Dozier 1985: 15; Helms 1986; Noveck 1988; Naylor 1989: 49, 75-76; Von Oertzen et al. 1990).<sup>11</sup> By the early decades of the eighteenth century the Anglo-Miskitu alliance was so well established that, on no fewer than three occasions between 1720 and 1735, the British authorities in Jamaica hired detachments of Miskitu warriors to put down Maroon rebellions (Uring 1928 [1726]: 160-161; Long 1774, vol. 2: 344-345; Young 1842: 35-36; Conzemius 1932: 87; Naylor 1989: 44).

In 1786, however, the Anglo-Spanish Convention resulted in the evacuation of the English settlements along the Central American coast (Floyd 1967: 164-165; Dozier 1985: 27), and the English trade, which the Miskitu had so carefully cultivated, fell into decline. Nevertheless, by 1800 'a gradual influx of colonists occurred' (Dozier 1985: 33), and soon English traders,

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During this period, 'the Kukra Indians, around Pearl Key Lagoon led a miserable existence, in constant dread of Mosquito raiding parties' (Naylor 1989: 50).

<sup>10</sup> These Misumalpan groups, collectively known as Sumu, included the now extinct *Yusku*, *Prinsu*, *Boa*, *Silam*, *Ku*, *Bawihka* and *Kukra*, as well as the still surviving *Twahka*, *Panamaka* and *Ulwa*. (Conzemius 1932: 14-16; Helms 1971: 16-18).

<sup>11</sup> The extent to which these chiefs exercised influence in the Miskitu villages is the subject of the third section in this chapter.

operating from Jamaica and perceiving the absence of a Spanish presence, resumed a clandestine contraband trade with the small communities of Miskitus and English speaking Creoles around Bluefields, Pearl Lagoon and elsewhere (Roberts 1965 [1827]; Dozier 1985: 35; Naylor 1989: 76-77, 98-100).<sup>12</sup> The Independence of the Central American Republics from Spain in 1821 enabled Britain to take a more active interest in the region again, one which was increasingly dominated by the possibility of controlling the inter-oceanic traffic along the Río San Juan, and in 1844 the British made the Mosquito Coast a protectorate (Dozier 1985: 27; Naylor 1989: chapter 14). The young king was placed under the guardianship of English settlers in Bluefields, and the Mosquito monarchy, which by now was virtually a fiction as far as the inhabitants of the remote Miskitu villages were concerned, came increasingly under the control of the English and Creole residents around Bluefields and Pearl Lagoon (De Kalb 1893: 274-5; Vilas 1989: 32)

Under pressure from the United States, who resented British influence in the isthmus, Britain conceded in the Treaty of Managua in 1860 that the Mosquito Coast belonged to Nicaragua. Under the terms of this treaty, however, a large part of "The Coast", although formally under Nicaraguan sovereignty, was to remain a virtually autonomous polity known as the "Mosquito Reserve". Finally in 1894, chafing under the restrictions which the Treaty of Managua had placed upon him with respect to "The Coast", and encouraged by the United States, President Zelaya sent Nicaragua troops to occupy Bluefields. Despite a spirited though militarily ineffectual resistance by the citizens of Bluefields, the "Mosquito Reserve" was dissolved, and its territory became an fully integral part of the Republic of Nicaragua (Naylor 1985: chapter 17).

The second half of the nineteenth century also saw the appearance of the Moravian church on "The Coast". Arriving in 1849 (MC 1849, vol. 19: 150-152) Moravians missionaries worked first with the Creoles in Bluefields and then began to work northwards in the "Reserve's" Miskitu villages. In 1855 they founded a mission in Pearl Lagoon which they named Magdala (MC 1857, vol. 22: 35), and by 1881 they reported 'the first symptoms of a spiritual awakening' (FM 1881, vol. 35: 91) at Magdala, which within a few years resulted in the conversion of many thousands of Miskitus to Christianity (Mueller 1932: 88), although the Miskitu in the smaller villages in the Pearl Lagoon basin like Kakabila proved peculiarly resistant to Moravianism (MC 1885, vol. 31: 357; MC1919, vol. 10: 347; MM 1948, vol. 156: 16).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Holm refers to this period between 1790 and 1830 as 'The Intercolonial Period' (Holm 1978: 60).

<sup>13</sup> "(T)he Indians at Ritapoor (Raitipura) and Klukumlaya (almost certainly Kakabila) yet remain in a heathenish state' (MC 1860, vol. 23: 529). These villages later adopted Anglicanism and Catholicism.

In the years preceding the Reincorporación of 1894, the region's economy became greatly modified by the appearance of large and often speculative investments of foreign capital, primarily concerned with the extraction of local resources.<sup>14</sup> Banana plantations appeared in the 1880s around Bluefields and later on the Río Grande and the Puerto Cabezas hinterland (Dozier 1985: 116, 120-121, 141-143; Sollis 1989: 488); commercial rubber plantations in the 1890s (Dozier 1985: 158-159); mahogany logging on the Kurinwas and the Río Grande in the mid 1880s (Dozier 1985: 142; Sollis 1989: 488); gold mining from the turn of century onwards (Dozier 1985: 201-203; Sollis 1989: 488-489); and, from the 1920s, pine logging camps (Dozier 1985: 201, 218-279). Wage labouring soon came to replace trade as the main source of income for manufactured goods (Helms 1971: 27-30), and Puerto Cabezas became an important town. However, localised economic booms, initiated by the appearance of these companies, were often followed by periods of bust in which companies pulled out as local resources became depleted, too expensive to extract, or otherwise spoiled, with the consequence that the regional economy jolted along in extremely erratic, and often quite localised periods of boom and bust.<sup>15</sup>

Since the 1950s costeños have experienced a long and virtually uninterrupted period of bust, while state directed developments in Nicaragua's Pacific regions in the 1950s and 1960s saw dispossessed Spanish speaking campesinos advance the agricultural frontier eastwards into

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<sup>14</sup> The Miskitu were already beginning by this time to collect india rubber for sale to traders (MC 1864, vol. 25: 225; Pim and Seemann 1969: 347; MC 1874, vol. 29: 155-156; MC 1880, vol. 31: 319, 339; Helms 1971: 22-23; Dozier 1985: 116; Sollis 1989: 488). They had also long been supplying the English and Creole residents with agricultural produce as well as contracting out their services as rowers, labourers, hunters and fishermen.

<sup>15</sup> The rubber trade was eventually killed around 1890 by Brazilian competition, mahogany became depleted at the end of the last century, banana blights such as Panamá disease and Sigatoka brought an end to the banana boom in the 1930s, and in more recent decades the mining industry has contracted as local minerals have become increasingly expensive to exploit (De Kalb 1893: 257; MM 1938, vol. 146: 84; Dozier 1985: 159, 224, 225, 215-216; Helms 1971: 27-33). Depredations against foreign enterprises by Sandino and his forces during the late 1920s and early 1930s also discouraged company activity (Brooks 1989). The Second World War encouraged short-lived revivals of the rubber and gold industries in the region (Dozier 217; Vilas 1989: 51, 60). The 1970s were characterised by a demand for calipee, the cartilage located between the upper and lower shells of the turtle (Nietschmann 1973: 238-244, 1988; Helms 1978: 144; Dozier 1985: 231; Vilas 1989: 84; Sollis 1989: 492). Many Kakabila men in their late thirties and older, told me that they had participated in this industry, before restrictions on turtling were brought in, and the Sandinista revolution drove the buyers away.

Miskitu and Sumu lands.<sup>16</sup> These landless farmers also arrived in the unemployment-wracked towns of Bluefields, Puerto Cabezas, Siuna, Bonanza and Rosita, and in Bluefields, Mestizo immigrants and their families, known to the previously dominant Creole population as "Chontaleños", have come to constitute the largest part of the population (Vilas 1989: 61-62, 70; Hale 1994: 119).<sup>17</sup>

The FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional) Triumph in 1979 resulted in the flight of whatever foreign capital remained (Vilas 1989: 137), while the low intensity warfare perpetuated by the Contras and the United States blockade of Nicaraguan ports, also conspired to keep the region impoverished. Much of the fighting took place in Miskitu speaking areas and actually involved Miskitus, many of whom had genuine grievances against the revolutionary state, in active fighting units (Reyes 1992 and Hale 1994).<sup>18</sup> In 1987 peace the Autonomy Statute, formulated to address the grievances of *costeños*, became law. The RAAN (North Atlantic Autonomous Region) and the RAAS (South Atlantic Autonomous Region) were created out of the old North and South Zelaya departments and were a measure of autonomy, and peace returned to the region. The Autonomy Statute enshrined the rights of "*costeños*", at least theoretically, to their traditional cultures, languages and community lands, and succeeded in defusing some of the tensions which had accumulated during the 1980s (Vilas 1989; Howard 1993 1&2; Hale 1994).<sup>19</sup>

Today, however, the region is still greatly troubled. In 1990 a national election put the FLSN out of government and brought to power the opposition UNO (Unidad Nicaragüense de Oposición) coalition, who clearly has little respect for the institutions which the Autonomy Statute

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<sup>16</sup> In spite of the fact that Somoza's state embarked on a nationwide modernisation following the Second World War, very few of the inhabitants of "The Coast" actually saw any of the benefits, many of which in fact went to prominent Somocistas (Vilas 1989: xiii, chapter 3, 70, Hale 1994: 119-121).

<sup>17</sup> De Kalb noted of Bluefields in 1893 that 'There is not the slightest suggestion of Spanish influence anywhere discernible' (De Kalb 1893: 254). Vernooy (1992) and Campbell et al. (1991) contain useful discussions of the how Mestizo traders have come to situate themselves in the economy of Bluefields and its hinterland.

<sup>18</sup> Some Miskitus had to flee from their villages; some were relocated by the Nicaraguan authorities, sometimes against their will; some were kidnapped by Contras; some have been drafted into the army or jailed for being *kiama* or "ears" (spies); others still felt impelled to fight in "the bush" with MISURASATA, MISURA and other Miskitu insurgency organisations. Many Miskitu villages, including Kakabila, were occupied repeatedly by both Nicaraguan army and Contra units, and both kinds of occupation are remembered by the majority of Kakabila villagers as deeply unpleasant experiences.

<sup>19</sup> The Autonomy Statute was also intended to give *costeños* a voice in determining how the region's resources would be used.

had created. Funds to the locally elected regional governments and the bilingual education programmes, which the Autonomy Statute promoted, are being cut off or redirected to INDERA (Instituto Nicaragüense para el Desarrollo de las Regiones Autónomas), a government appointed and unelected body given powers to make decisions which, according to the Autonomy Statute, should be made by the elected regional governments. In the meantime the region is still awash with assault weapons brought to the region during the war. Local "mafia" have flooded the region with cocaine, a consequence of the region's geographical position on the trade route between Columbia and the United States, and the combination of weapons, cocaine and war-traumatised young men is a worrying one which continues to occupy the minds of many costeño community leaders.

Most Miskitus have been forced to return to a reliance on subsistence farming and fishing, practices which fortunately many had never relinquished, but for coastal Miskitus, however, limited periods of demand for marine resources continue to generate a little cash, and the markets for the lagoon's white shrimp, snook, drummer and coppermouth, and local demands for turtle meat and sea shrimp, all provide Cuenca men with limited and unsteady seasonal incomes. Cuenca-dwellers are luckier than many of their fellow costeños. Fortunate enough to be situated on the banks of Pearl Lagoon, they have been able to sell fish and "white shrimp" for cash in order to meet in part the needs created by cash dependencies (Gordon 1981; CIDCA/FNUDC 1987; Ecotextura 1988; Tansjö 1988, 1989 2). This does not mean, however, that the disappearance of wage labour does not hurt, for the money raised by fishing is considerably less in real terms than the wages that the companies paid, and older Cuenca men often told me wistfully that at one time there was so much work in the area, that employers' recruiting officers would actually come round to the village looking for men; cash was plentiful, and the stores in Pearl Lagoon and Bluefields were full of cheap and good quality goods.<sup>20</sup> Now there is "*lalah apu*" (no money), "money hard" and people must do what they can as fishermen to make a "buck".<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The 'company period' in which it was possible to acquire manufactured goods in quantity is remembered by the Miskitu with nostalgia (Dozier 1985: 5; Gordon 1987: 143; Sollis 1989: 489; Vilas 1989: 51, 115, 233; Sujo 1991: 33-34; Hale 1994: 67-70, 73).

<sup>21</sup> Many villagers voted for Violeta Chamorro in the 1989 election in the belief that she would restore prosperity to the Coast. So far they have been disappointed. The belief in the village that the return of Somocista policies will restore the world to rights is a common one, and with the almost unanimous disaffection with both the FSLN and UNO accompanied by a suspicion of the "up the coast" dominated YATAMA, it is likely that the village will support the newly-reinvented National Liberal Party in the next election. One cause for hope is the project devised by Ayuda Popular de Noruega (APN), a Norwegian government aid agency, who have provided a fish processing



*The Miskitu involvement in the region's economy*

In this section and the one which follows I am concerned with trying to reconstruct the history from more emic perspectives, using the models of sociality which I and others (notably Helms 1971, 1983) have developed for the Miskitu. Firstly I consider the Miskitu involvement in the region's economy from pre-contact times up until the present.

The evidence for the pre-contact and early post-contact economy, summarised conveniently in Helms (1983) suggests that a pattern of alternate trading and raiding existed between various Indian groups situated along different stretches of the same rivers. The Miskitu, when the adventurer M.W. was among them, lived in fear of their enemies the 'Alboawinneys' and 'Oldwawes', who likewise lived in fear of the Miskitu (M.W. 1732: 288, 290, 291).

'These people are continually, in dry seasons, invaded by the Mosquito-men, who take away their young wives and children for slaves, either killing or putting to flight the men and old women. They many times pay the Mosquito-men in their own coin' (M.W.1732: 291).

As M.W.'s account notes, slave raids were common, apparently one of the primary motivations of these raids being to acquire wives (M.W. 1732: 290, 291). However, these mutual raids were generally interspersed with trading. Commenting on one group of Indians, M.W. notes,

'They wear some few beads which they buy of the *Mosquito-men*, with whom they have commerce at certain times of the year, in which they civilly intreat one another, meeting in equal numbers on some small island in the great river between both their homes: but when their fair or mart is over, they hold it allowable to rob and murder each other as much as they can, which they do by surprize, and private incursions into each other's country, and again keep touch at the season appointed for a civil commerce' (M.W 1732: 290).

Clearly part of the character of Indian social life was the reciprocal exchange of women through raids between groups of people who also reciprocally exchanged goods at seasonal fairs at regular rendezvous. Helms is no doubt correct in arguing that 'The mutual seizing of women intended for wives and consorts by raiding groups signals that raids were part of a pattern of reciprocal

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plant in Pearl Lagoon for the members of the six village "cooperativas" who are members of the local fisherman's union, organised by APN. When I left Kakabila, the member "cooperativas" were those of Pearl Lagoon, Haulover, Kakabila, Brown Bank, Orinoco and Raitipura. I understand that a women's "cooperativa" from Orinoco has now joined.

social interactions rather than strictly economic affairs (Helms 1983: 188; Von Oertzen n.d.: 3). This period, for which we have regrettably little information, is referred to here as 'the barter period'.

By the time M.W. was writing, however, the pattern of mutual exchanges of trade and raids, which up to this point had characterised relations between Indians groups, was already being supplanted by a new kind of asymmetric exchange relationship which the Miskitu were developing in order to exploit the trading possibilities afforded by the buccaneer presence (Helms 1983). This new type of exchange system involved Miskitu raids on their enemies specifically for captives, and the exchange of these slaves for goods with Europeans. These new raids tended to be unreciprocated because the Miskitu now possessed a military advantage based on the possession of firearms which were acquired downriver in exchange for captives (Conzemius 1932: 17; Roberts 1965 [1827]: 116-117; Helms 1971: 19-21; 1983: 184). In short, the direction of goods and women between the Miskitu and their neighbours inland became increasingly one-way towards the coast, while new forms of trade relations developed between the coastal Indians and the Europeans. This regional re-orientation of the directionality of exchange has been set out by Helms (1983: 188) in a useful diagram which is reproduced here (figure 8), and I have followed Noveck (1988) in referring to this period as 'the mercantile period'.

The trade with the Europeans was also supplemented or reinforced by conjugal unions arranged between the traders and the Miskitu, a pattern which has persisted to the present day. Exquemelin already noted in his visit to Cape Gracias a Dios in the early 1670s that a buccaneer could purchase a woman from an Indian for a old axe or knife, and for this she would stay with him until he left and would return to him on subsequent visits. (Exquemelin 1969: 219-220; see also De Kalb 1893: 266; Sorsby 1969: 89; Holm 1978: 20, 26).<sup>22</sup> Roberts notes how conjugal arrangements were an integral part of establishing trading relationships as far as coastal people were concerned, and of the 'Creoles, Mulattoes, and Samboes' of English Bank (the present-day village of Pearl Lagoon), he notes 'many of them have married Indian women' (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 108).

I never knew an instance of a marriage being celebrated among them [the Creoles, Mulattoes and Samboes], according to the prescribed forms of the English, or of any other church; these engagements are mere tacit agreements, which are sometimes, although rarely, broken by mutual consent. The children here, and at Bluefields, are in general baptised by the captains of the trading vessels from

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<sup>22</sup> M.W. (1732: 302) comments that at Dakura three buccaneers lived with 'forty wild Indian slaves and harlots to attend them'.

Jamaica; who, on their annual return to the coast, perform this ceremony with anything but reverence, on all who have been born during their absence; and many of them are indebted to these men for more than their baptism. In proof of this, I could enumerate more than a dozen of acknowledged children, of only two of these captains, who seem to have adopted, without scruple, the Indian idea of polygamy in its fullest extent. By this licentious and immoral conduct they have, however, so identified themselves with the natives, and with some of the principle people on the coast, as to obtain a sort of monopoly in the sale of goods, which it would be difficult for any stranger, not possessed of an intimate knowledge of the Indian character to shake' (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 109-110).

As a trader himself, working the Caribbean Coast of Central America and based in Jamaica for several years in the early nineteenth century, we can credit Roberts with a knowledge of what he was writing about (see also Uring 1928 [1726]: 125, 143; Helms 1971: 224; Holm 1978: 20, 37; Naylor 1989: 39; for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see MM 1891, vol. 1: 396; Palmer 1945: 46, 54; for the present see Holm 1978: 66; Timar n.d.: 23).<sup>23</sup> As Holm notes 'the Englishman became the Miskito's kinsman, with all the little-dreamt-of political, cultural and linguistic consequences' (Holm 1978: 37; see also Helms 1971: 224).<sup>24</sup>

Interestingly enough, Roberts' contact in this region was an Indian trader named "Whykey Tarra" (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 55). Roberts does not indicate whether this trader was a Miskitu or not, but it is quite likely that "Whykey Tarra" is Roberts' orthographic rendering of '*waiki tara*', ('big brother-in-law' in Miskitu), and it is quite likely that the Belize, Bay Island and Cayman Island habit of referring to the Miskitu as the '*waika*' (Miskitu for 'cross cousin' or 'brother-in-law' - male ego) came into being through the Miskitu practice of cementing ties with traders through marriage (Bell 1989 [1899]: 295; Conzemius 1932: 172; Heath 1950: 27; Holm 1978: 302, 1983 1: 14; Heath 1927: 83; Heath and Marx 1983: 127; Mathiessen 1989: 241).<sup>25</sup> Trade thereby transformed the Miskitu's relations with European and Jamaican visitors into one of affinity, as the exogamously inclined Miskitu men attempted to secure partners by offering these

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<sup>23</sup> While Roberts was at Chrico Mola near Chiriquí Lagoon, at the southern extreme of the Miskitu sphere of influence, the headman offered him a wife (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 59).

<sup>24</sup> '(A)ccording to one leading citizen, anyone claiming membership in the creole aristocracy should be prepared to produce at least one Indian princess and one Scottish sea captain in his genealogy' (Holm 1978: 82).

<sup>25</sup> Note that Heath (1927: 83) and Heath and Marx (1983: 127) argue that *waika* (cross cousin) and *waikat* (brother-in-law) are different words. While I accept that Heath's command of Miskitu is infinitely greater than mine, I am convinced that in fact *waikat* is a more formal version of *waika*, reflecting the more respectful relationship characteristic of actual, rather than potential, brothers-in-law. Even if Heath is correct, however, this point does not detract from the argument developed here.

traders wives, and began to develop institutionalised forms of 'groom capture' by which particular trading alliances could be secured. As Holm notes, 'circumstances would have changed that generation of Indian girls into economic assets, rather than liabilities for their families, ending the need for female infanticide' (Holm 1978: 37; see also Pim and Seemann 1969: 306-307).<sup>26</sup>

As increasing involvement in the trade for captives, as well as other goods, produced a greater availability of guns and ammunition which further augmented their domination over their neighbours, Miskitu raids on their neighbours became increasingly effective and commercially oriented (Long 1774: 322, 326-7; Roberts 1965 [1827]: 103, 116-117, 119; Bell 1862: 258; Conzemius 1932: 58, 66; Helms 1971: 19, 1983: 184; Von Oertzen n.d.: 26-27). The well-armed coastal Miskitu continued to capture wives from other Indians and Miskitu polygyny became increasingly well established. Roberts, for example, writes that the Miskitu leader, Old King George, who had enslaved the 'Blancos, Woolwa [Ulwa], and Cookra [Kukra] tribes' had 'a great number of wives and women' (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 146).<sup>27</sup>

Twahkas, Panamakas, Ulwas, Payas, Kukras, Ramas, and so on, either retreated further into the interior or sought to become, sometimes through marriage, Miskitus themselves (see Roberts 1965 [1827]: 117-119; Conzemius 1929: 66; Conzemius 1932: 14; Ashby 1976: 16; Von Oertzen et al. 1990: 20). One Sumu group who seem to have been absorbed by the Miskitu were the Prinsu from Tungla, Layasiksa and perhaps Quamwatla, who because known as the Toongla (or Tungla) (MM 1929, vol. 137: 319; Heath 1950: 28) The Toonglas, who evidently enjoyed better relations with the Miskitu than many of the other Sumu groups (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 119-120),

'seem to be a mixed race between the Smoos and Mosquito Indians, and their dialect is nearly pure Mosquito with a large mixture of Smoo words' (Bell 1862: 258).

The village I am staying in is a Toongla village, and the Toonglas are a sort of non-descript people. They claim to be the same as the Mosquito Indians, but although they speak the Mosquito language, they do not quite resemble the Mosquito men. But neither do they resemble the interior and riverine tribes,

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<sup>26</sup> See Nietschmann (1973: 52) for discussion of Miskitu female infanticide.

<sup>27</sup> See Henderson (1809: 14), Strangeways (1922: 15), Roberts (1965 [1827]: 115, 134, 138) for evidence of polygyny specifically among the Miskitu leaders. Henderson (1809: 187), Young (1842: 73), MC (1849, vol. 19: 171), MC (1850, vol. 19: 316), Bard (1965 [1855]: 202, 243), MC (1870, vol. 27: 405), MM (1916, vol. 9: 420), Mueller (1932: 47, 87), Von Hagen (1940: 255), Palmer (1945: 67), Dennis (1981: 472) all contain more general discussions of Miskitu polygyny.

such as the Smoos, Twakas, Ramas, etc. The Mosquito men are prone to domineer over the Toonglas in much the same manner as they do over the Indians of the interior' (Bell 1989 [1899]: 267).<sup>28</sup>

With the gradual disappearance of the market for slaves and the cessation of warfare in the early nineteenth century (Bell 1862: 261-262; Von Oertzen et al. 1990: 48), trading (which in any case had always co-existed with raiding to some extent) was slowly resumed as the dominant mode of interaction with the interior Sumu groups. Sometimes Sumus came to Miskitu villages to trade, bringing rough canoes, chocolate, india rubber, skins, cacao and maize, and returning with metal goods, cloth, beads and salt; other times they would leave their goods at a particular spot by the mouth of a tributary stream and return to pick up whatever goods were left in exchange (Bell 1989 [1899]: 266-267; Bell 1862: 252; Helms 1978: 133-134).<sup>29</sup> Generally, however, the coastal Miskitu often took advantage of the interior Indians whom they often despised and put upon. Sometimes the Miskitu travelled inland to Sumu villages in order to collect tribute for their "king"; at other times Sumus brought their tribute to the coast (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 109, 113; Young 1842: 87; Bard 1965 [1855]: 126; MC, vol. 24: 517; Bell 1989 [1899]: 122; Palmer 1945: 56; Hale 1987 1: 37; Brooks 1989: 324; Vilas 1989: 15; Von Oertzen et al. 1990: 33).

Helms writes that slaving was most profitable during the 1700 to 1740 period, and she suggests that during these years there was a dramatic increase in the size of the Miskitu population (from about 2,000 to 7,000). It was also around this time that inhabitants of the Sandy Bay area began to migrate south. The reasons for Miskitu settlement were twofold: firstly the migrants wished to take advantage of the trading possibilities afforded by proximity to the English settlers; secondly, poor soil quality and hurricane damage made relocation an attractive option (Conzemius 1929: 59 in particular; but see also MC 1862, vol. 24: 435; MC 1863, vol. 25: 56; Roberts 1965 [1827]: 142, Helms 1971: 22, 1983: 186; Nietschmann 1973: 33-32).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Up the coast" and Cuenca Miskitus told me that the Miskitus around Prinzupolka still use a great many Sumu words in their variety of Miskitu.

<sup>29</sup> The goods desired in exchange were indicated by samples left by the upriver Indians according to Bell (1989 [1899]: 266-267).

<sup>30</sup> It was poor soil quality, according to Nietschmann's informants, which motivated some Sandy Bay inhabitants to resettle in Tasbapauni around 1860 (Nietschmann 1973: 17). Hale reports that the first Sandy Bay Sirpi inhabitants were people from Krukira, Dakura and Sandy Bay (Hale 1994: 64, 65-66).

Kakabila was almost certainly one of these resettlements of Sandy Bay migrants from Sandy Bay.<sup>31</sup> The Pearl Lagoon basin had, in pre-contact and early contact times, been home to the Kukra Indians, who had occupied the coast and lagoon shorelines between Rio Grande and Bluefields Lagoon (maps 7 and 8) (Conzemius 1929: 66). By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, Pearl Lagoon had already become a base camp for Miskitu attacks against the Spanish, and by the middle of the century the Pearl Lagoon basin was considered part of the "admiral's" domain (Olien 1983; Tansjö 1989 1).<sup>32</sup> In 1790 there were no fewer than five Miskitu settlements in the lagoon under the control of one Captain César (Porta Costa 1990 [1790]: 57; Romero 1990: 21), and by the time Roberts reached Pearl Lagoon in the early nineteenth century, the Miskitus had many years previously already enslaved or driven the Kukras inland (Roberts (1965 [1827]): 116-117; Conzemius 1929: 66).<sup>33</sup>

As Nietschmann notes, 'Coastal villages remained attractive settlement sites because of the abundance of fish and turtles, and the opportunity for contact and trade relations with Europeans' (1973: 33), and Miskitus exchanged woods, skins, hawkbill shell, turtle meat, sarsaparilla, gum, chinaroot, anatto, silkgrass, rubber, indigo, cacao and canoes and paddles with the English traders, for which they received lines, cotton clothes, iron tools, fish hooks, cooking pots, glass beads, rum, gunpowder, muskets and fowling pieces, as well as with resident traders who handled goods 'adapted for the Indian trade' (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 109; Nietschmann 1971: 35). Roberts describes 'Kirkaville' (almost certainly Kakabila) as one of two settlements of 'Mosquito

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<sup>31</sup> Linguistic evidence certainly suggests as much. To this day Kakabila people speak Baldam Miskitu, a regional variety of Miskitu, characterised by a phonological process which occurs among Pearl Lagoon Miskitu speakers and natives of the area between Sandy Bay and the Cape, but not among Miskitu speakers living along the long stretch of coast in between (Conzemius 1929: 61, 1932: 59; Kirchhoff 1948: map 5). In this variety 'bal-ram' becomes 'bal-dam' (you came) 'wal-ram' becomes 'wal-dam' (you heard/understood) (Heath and Marx 1983), 'win-ram' becomes 'win-dam' (you called) 'ani-ra' becomes 'an-da' (where), 'States-ra auna' becomes 'States-da auna' (are you going to the States) and so on (my notes). Conzemius (1929) contains comparative word lists from various varieties of Miskitu.

<sup>32</sup> The "admiral" was one of the titled regional Miskitu chiefs.

<sup>33</sup> Roberts writes about the slave raids on the Kukras, Ulwas and other local Sumu groups by the Miskitus of Pearl Lagoon, Rio Grande and Prinzapolka as though they were easing off (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 117). Probably the demand for slaves had contracted while the supply, at least in the Pearl Lagoon area, had certainly dried up with the virtual disappearance of the Kukras and the upriver retreat of the Ulwas (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 117). Conzemius (1932) claims that the Kukras were already extinct, although 'At Pearl Lagoon may be met a few Miskito, who are mixed with Kukra' (Conzemius 1932: 15). Small numbers of Kukras were still attending the Moravian services in Pearl Lagoon in 1939 (MM 1939, vol. 23: 111).

Indians and Samboes' around the edge of Pearl Lagoon, whose inhabitants were involved in trade with the local 'Creoles' and 'Mulattoes' at English Bank (the present-day village of Pearl Lagoon), settling their services as 'hunters and strikers' of fish (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 108, 111).<sup>34</sup> Bell, writing at the end of the century on his experiences on the Coast some decades earlier, notes that 'almost all of the turtles used in Europe come from the Mosquito Shore' (Bell 1989 [1899]: 41), and it is safe to assume that Pearl Lagoon men were involved in this occupation. Another industry to have an impact in the Pearl Lagoon basin around this time seems to have been the india rubber trade, whose local influence was so great that Moravian missionaries complained about its effect on their congregations (MC 1864, vol. 25: 229; MC 1880, vol. 31: 319, 339; Tansjö 1989 1).

By the end of the century the so-called 'company period' arrived in earnest, and as Helms notes, 'Simple trade or barter of a wide range of local products gave way ... to exploitation of a few major natural resources involving private investment of large amounts of foreign capital' (Helms 1971: 27). By the late 1880s working in the John D. Emery mahogany camps on the Kurinwas and Rio Grande, or in the banana plantations around the Río Escondido, for example, had become an attractive means of obtaining cash for Pearl Lagoon Miskitus,<sup>35</sup> and the men who went away to do this work became known as *mani uplika* (one year person) because the work usually involved one year contracts (Nietschmann 1973: 40-41; Rivera and Vernooy 1991: 28).<sup>36</sup>

For the Miskitu, this meant a new kind of economic relation. They became occasional proletarians, alienating their labour and the products of their labour in exchange for cash and commodities, often extended on a credit basis (Dozier 1985: 228-230; Helms 1971: 21-32; Hale 1994: 51), and instead of participating in the local economy as exchange partners with both

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<sup>34</sup> The other was called Rigman's Bank (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 108). Kakabila is also mentioned by Bard (1965 [1855]: 112) as 'Kirka', and by the Moravian missionary Pfeiffer as 'Cocka Bill' (MC 1852, vol. 20: 214).

'Cacabeela' appears on the map given in Bell (1862), while 'Cockerbilla' (1892), 'Kokibilla' (1894), Kokabilla (1912) appear on a number of other maps (Davidson 1980). It is likely that the village identified by the Moravian missionary Lundberg as the mysterious 'Klukumlaya' (literally 'Duckwater'), a Miskitu village 'about seven miles distant' from Pearl Lagoon, is Kakabila (MC 1858, vol. 22: 514)

<sup>35</sup> Other forms of work available were lumber scout, trail cutter and boatman (Helms 1971: 28; Nietschmann 1973: 40). Although Miskitus further north worked in mahogany and pine lumber camps and in the mines, these jobs were probably too far away for Kakabila men.

<sup>36</sup> De Kalb (1893) and Von Hagen (1940) contain good descriptions of life during the company era. Davidson (1980: 36) provides ethnographic evidence of work available on mahogany camps in the late nineteenth century at Square Point in the Pearl Lagoon basin.

foreign traders and middle-men as they had done, they became employees, valued for their labour power rather than for the goods they could provide. As the cash economy took hold the Miskitu became less important as suppliers of goods and more important as customers, as they became locked into relations of credit which according to one Moravian commentator approached slavery (MM 1916, vol. 9: 560). As Vilas expresses it,

'With the boom of new extractive activities, the Indians began to leave their villages; they accepted contracts as salaried workers and descended into the Coast hierarchy. Their growing dependence on wages income opened the way to a flow of money and manufactured goods into Indian villages and to the progressive introduction of new necessities of consumption as well as to a certain monetarization in economic relationships' (Vilas 1989: 30; see also Dozier 1985: 228-230, and Nietschmann 1973: 243, 273).

### *Leadership among the Miskitu*

In this section I attempt to reconstruct the history of how political processes among the Miskitu have operated at different periods. These political processes, I argue, are only fully comprehensible if they are related to the changes which have occurred within the regional economy. Once understood, however, they shed a great deal of light on the nature of social processes among the Miskitu, and go a long way towards making sense of present day notions of Miskitu personhood and power.

Nowadays the authorities in most Miskitu villages are the "older heads" or *kasiki* who try to achieve consensus, the *wihita* ("juez") who acts as an advisory arbiter, the "co-ordinator" who speaks for the village with respect to external matters, or the "síndico" who seems to be a combination of the "co-ordinator" and the *wihita* (Bell 1862: 251; Mueller 1932: 49; Vilas 1989: 32; Reyes 1992: 143; Pijoan 1944: 259, Pijoan 1946:16; Helms 1971: 71-72, 165-167; Nietschmann 1973: 59-60; Hale 1994: 65-67).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> In some villages like Sandy Bay Sirpi, the position of "síndico" seems to be hereditary, being passed down in some cases from mother's brother to sister's son or father-in-law to son-in-law (Hale 1994: 65-71). 'Matrilineal descent played an important role in Miskitu kinship. It was by no means unusual that the son of Princess Victoria, sister of the deceased Chief should be preferred to the Chief's direct heirs' (Von Oertzen et al. 1990: 67). Note too that some of Captain César's subchiefs in the Pearl Lagoon basin were his nephews ('sobrinos') (Porta Costas 1990 [1790]: 57). The significance of this is discussed in the next chapter.



Between 1633 and 1894, however, the Miskitu had leaders called "kings".<sup>38</sup> Olien has established that the "kings" were not installed and deposed at will by the British but in fact constituted (at least between 1655 and 1894) a single dynasty, with succession mostly by primogeniture between members of a single family (1983).<sup>39</sup> Dennis and Olien have argued that these Miskitu "kings" were 'leaders of real stature in their own society', albeit with a legitimacy 'based on different cultural conceptions of leadership than those held by the British' (Dennis and Olien 1984: 713), while Helms argues that the "kings" in fact were little more than 'Big Men writ large' (Helms 1986: 506). I am rather more inclined to agree with Helms, and Noveck (1988), who argue persuasively that the power of Miskitu leaders waxed and waned. However, while Noveck argues that, 'the kings represented a political force operating outside the bounds of kinship and egalitarianism', I contend that the controls exercised by the "kings" and other leaders over their followers were actually articulated through Miskitu concepts of 'kinship'.

The notion of an internationally recognised Miskitu kingdom was convenient to the British, in so far as it legitimated British economic activity in a region which was formally claimed by Spain (Helms 1969 1: 82), and it is well established that the British in Jamaica and Belize distributed the titles of "governor", "general", "admiral" and so forth, to Miskitu leaders in different parts of the region, because they saw the incumbents of the 'offices' as potential representatives of British interests.<sup>40</sup> The Miskitu, for their part, valued these titles because they conferred a pragmatic legitimacy on their bearers in the eyes of their 'subjects'. It was well understood that the bearers of these titles were men whom the British recognised as brokers, empowered to deal with traders, officials and the British military, and that the other 'cultural trappings of this system', such as the uniforms, were 'elements of the king's justification and validation of their power' (Noveck 1988: 22; see also Dennis and Olien 1984: 718, 722-723, 727; Conzemius 1932: 102; Floyd 1967: 124; Naylor 1989: 31).

As Helms (1986) notes, the amount of absolute power that these leaders were able to wield over their 'subjects' is open to question. The most conclusive evidence available suggests that in fact the "kings" held very little power indeed. According to M.W., for example, the Miskitu

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<sup>38</sup> Although between 1860 and 1894 these were officially known as hereditary chiefs.

<sup>39</sup> Some authors, like Dozier (1985: 15) have erroneously suggested that the "kings", "governors", "generals" and "admirals" 'were puppets of the British'.

<sup>40</sup> Theoretically, in 1760 the "king" controlled the area between Cape Gracias a Dios and Sandy Bay, the Miskitu territory of origin, the "general" the area between Cape Gracias a Dios and Cape Cameron, the "governor" between Sandy Bay and Prinzupolka, and the "admiral" between Prinzupolka and Bluefields, an area which would have included the Pearl Lagoon basin (see map 11 and Olien 1983: 210).

'live peaceably together in several families, yet accounting all *Indians* of one tongue, to be the same people and friends, and in quality all equal, neither king nor captains of families bearing more command than the meanest, unless it be at such times when they made any expeditions against the *Albowinneys*; at that time they submit to the conduct, and obey the orders of their kings and captains' (M.W. 1732: 293)

Hodgson writes that 'even the young men are above serving the king, and will tell him they are as free as himself' (Hodgson 1822 [1757: 48]).<sup>41</sup>

'The power of these three principal men ["king", "governor" and "general"] (which is hereditary) is nearly equal ... but none of these chiefs have much more than a negative voice; and never attempt any thing without a council of such old men as have influence among those of their countrymen who live around them. When any thing of importance is to be done, the people of consequence meet, and argue, each as he pleases, but are seldom unanimous, except when they think their country is immediately concerned' (Hodgson 1822 [1757]: 47).

'a Chief which they call King; though there are several other Chiefs, that have great Power and Authority among them; but no Man was compell'd to go upon any Service, and they are not above 800 fighting men' (Uring 1928 [1726]: 159).

These leaders evidently held power primarily in their capacity as war leader/entrepreneurs. As Roberts clearly indicates, these "kings" and other titled figures were 'individual competing Big Men seeking personal prestige and influence by control particularly of external sources of power' (Helms 1986: 510), principally through the British and Jamaican traders (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 117-118, 137-138). In short, they were interested less in political power and more in economic gain (Vilas 1989: 18, 19).<sup>42</sup> As Noveck and Vilas note,

'In the second period, beginning roughly in the early 17th century, integration as a periphery in the British mercantile empire engendered a political economic transformation in which local headmen emerged as focal points in the articulation of coastal production with British exchange networks' (Noveck 1988: 27).

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<sup>41</sup> Long (1774) claims that the "king" was not recognised as such by his "subjects" (see Vilas 1989: 18, 19).

<sup>42</sup> I see no reason to give credit to the suggestion that the Miskitu "kingship" contained 'possible elements from West African traditions which have yet to be investigated' (Von Oertzen et al. 1990: 19) or to the idea that 'The Indians probably developed a sense of hierarchy from their association with the English' (Naylor 1989: 36).

'it seems that the practical effects of the relationship with the British - access to manufactured goods, firearms, and so forth - were felt mainly by the leadership and not by the population as a whole' (Vilas 1989: 15).<sup>43</sup>

Through organising slave and tribute-taking raids, Miskitu leaders acquired the locally produced goods required by the traders, and in turn received European goods 'adapted for the Indian trade', which they distributed to their adherents (see Roberts 1965 [1827]: 113-118) and Conzemius 1932: 101). The more influential chiefs, such as King George II were able to co-ordinate large armies of warriors for these raids, and it was probably during this period (the late eighteenth century) that the English word 'soldier' came to mean 'economic dependent' in Miskitu (*salyar* or *suliar*) (Heath 1927: 15; Heath and Marx 1983: 106; Palmer 1945: 24).<sup>44</sup>

The evacuation of the British from the Mosquito Coast in 1786 following the Anglo-Spanish Convention effectively eliminated the market for slaves and other locally produced goods. This was predictably accompanied by a significant reduction in the amount of goods that leaders could obtain from the Europeans to maintain local followings (Noveck 1988: 24),<sup>45</sup> and the period which follows is one in which contemporaries noted a marked increase in factional disputes and assassinations among the titled chiefs, and a decrease in chiefly authority (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 137-138, 147; Olien 1983: 211-214; Dozier 1985: 28-29; Naylor 1989: 69, 71; Von Oertzen n.d.: 13-14). Roberts correctly predicted that 'as the influence of the Mosquito chiefs is daily decreasing, these cruel proceedings [slave raids] will gradually cease' (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 118). By the mid nineteenth century, the king had become nothing more than a figurehead as far as most Miskitus were concerned, one to whom matters demanding arbitration were occasionally submitted.

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<sup>43</sup> Naylor comments that in the early nineteenth century, some Miskitu leaders such as General Lowry Robinson and Governor Clementi were immensely rich. Robinson, Naylor claims, had 5,000 head of cattle on the Black River (Naylor 1989: 54, 75).

<sup>44</sup> Palmer, writing of the first decade of the twentieth century, notes, 'It is rare to find a "free" Indian. All are more or less compromised with a merchant, and the dishonest ones with two or more, under varying names'. It is these Indians whom Palmer notes are called the merchants "soldier" (Palmer 1945: 24).

<sup>45</sup> In the Pearl Lagoon basin it also seems as though the supply of potential groups for the Miskitu was disappearing as the neighbouring Kukras, the local target for slave raids, became increasingly few and elusive (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 117). See also Bell (1989 [1899]: 230-231).

'The little government they require is carried on by the king through the head men of the villages, selected from among the oldest and most renowned for discretion and ability. By them all minor grievances are settled, while graver matters are referred to the king' (Bell 1862: 251).<sup>46</sup>

The later eighteenth century brought about further reductions in the powers of local leaders, and the involvement of Miskitus and other *costeños* in wage labour activities for the companies brought about further changes in the character of Miskitu political processes. As Noveck writes, 'The Miskito's mode of production thus took on a dualistic character as the kin-ordered mode, stripped of its political dynamic, came to be supplemented by market relations' (Noveck 1988: 26), and the Miskitu *mani uplika* (one year contract men) became "soldiers" of the trading posts which arrived with the companies (MM 1916: vol. 9: 560; Palmer 1945: 24).

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<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the assumption of the British protectorate on the Mosquito Coast in 1844 gave the British further impetus to revive the flagging monarchy which now fell into the hands of the dominant Creole elites at Bluefields and Pearl Lagoon. During this period the "kings" appointed "quartermasters" (*quatmus*) in each village, who were theoretically responsible for the collection of taxes and for the upkeep of the "king's house" (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 106, 125, 126, 129, 131; Bard 1965 [1855]: 95-96, 235; Bell 1862: 251). The king, however, seems only to have made occasional tours of the villages formally in his domain (see also Bell 1989 [1899]: 278-282).

## Chapter Eight

### Kinship and gender as political processes

This chapter is concerned with demonstrating that the complex of gender identities and concepts of personhood which I identified for Kakabila is best understood within an analysis that is both historical and regional in scope. The purpose of the previous chapter was to situate the political economy of the Miskitu specifically within a historical and regional context. In this chapter I am concerned more specifically with identifying particular changes which have taken place with respect to Miskitu notions of gender and 'kinship' and with locating them within a framework which accounts for their present day manifestations in Kakabila within the wider changes which have taken place in that political economy.

I have divided this chapter up into three sections. The first presents the evidence for how the Miskitu have both imagined and practiced 'kinship' over time. This section includes one subsection on betrothal and postnuptial residence arrangements during the 'barter' and 'mercantile' periods, and another on the same theme during 'the company period'. The second section produces a unified analysis in which these regional and temporal variations are accommodated, and social processes in present day Kakabila accounted for. Finally, in the third I turn to the wider questions posed by this analysis for the anthropology of kinship and gender in general.

#### *Kinship and gender - temporal and regional variations*

##### *Wife capture, betrothal and patrilocality*

As I noted in Chapters Five and Six conjugal unions in Kakabila are ideally fixed up between the groom and the bride's parents, subject in most cases to the bride's consent. Postnuptial residence is ideally uxorilocal with the couple usually spending some years in the bride's parents' house and eventually moving to an adjacent house built by the groom (and his wife's father and brothers) as more children are born. Evidence, however, suggests that the legitimation of marriage<sup>1</sup> by uxorilocal postnuptial residence and brideservice is a practice of fairly recent origin among the Miskitu.

During the 'barter' and 'mercantile periods' the Indians of the region seem to have practiced a form of semi-institutionalised wife capture, which, as I noted in the previous chapter co-existed with other forms of exchange as a distinct sphere.

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I use the term 'marriage' simply to mean 'conjugal union'.

'They wear some few beads which they buy of the *Mosqueto-men*, with whom they have commerce at certain times of the year, in which they civilly intreat one another, meeting in equal numbers on some small island in the great river between both their homes: but when their fair or mart is over, they hold it allowable to rob and murder each other as much as they can, which they do by surprize, and private incursions into each other's country, and again keep touch at the season appointed for a civil commerce' (M.W 1732: 290).

'These people are continually, in dry seasons, invaded by the *Mosqueto-men*, who take away their young wives and children for slaves, either killing or putting to flight the men and old women. They many times pay the *Mosqueto-men* in their own coin' (M.W.1732: 291).

'I have heard many of these *Oldwaw* [Ulwa] slave, to the *Mosqueto-men*, confess, That, when their countrymen took any of their enemies, they would never give quarter to any except young women, who serve them for wives, of which each keeps as many as he can maintain (like the *Mosqueto-men*) (M.W. 1732: 291).

Although we have no evidence it is quite likely that a two-line prescriptive terminology of the type described for the Miskitu by early twentieth century ethnographers (figure 4) also existed during this period. Enemy groups were affines with whom one exchanged sisters and daughters during raids, and the terms for certain kinds of cross kin (*klua*, *waikat*, *kauhka* and *tahti*) in all likelihood connoted 'outsider' and 'exchange partner' rather than genealogical 'cross cousin' or 'mother's brother'. Apparently virilocal marriages were also initiated during 'the barter period' by peaceful means, but unfortunately the accounts of these are rather uninformative with regard to what kind of relation generally held between groom and bride's kin.

'They keep up various ceremonies to do with marriage. An Indian may not marry a girl without the consent of parents and friends. A suitor is asked by the father whether he can hunt well and fish well, make good spears and harpoons and rope. If his answers are satisfactory, the father takes a small calabash of liquor from which he drinks, then passes it to the young man, who drinks and then gives it to the bride. Usually when anyone is offered a calabash of liquor he is supposed to drink it all up, but in this case all three share it, as a sign of their blood-friendship (Exquemelin 1969 [1678]: 222-223).

'They are not very hasty in their ways of marriage to tie an indissoluble knot, but make a sufficient trial before-hand, so that neither side be cheated. The man has time enough to prove the woman's affection to him, and she to find out how well he can maintain her and her children, if any; for when first a young man meets with a mistress that he likes, and gets her in the humour, which is done without any more courtship than the bare telling his mind, *he takes her home* to be his bedfellow (without asking her parents consent) for a year or two, and perhaps hath children by her; then finding her to be very good, that

is, obedient, and handy in dressing his victuals and getting children, which they all covet to have; lest any other should get her away from him, which sometimes is with her consent, he, to secure her, goes to her father or other relations, and makes some small present to him of what he hath; which if it procure the consent, a small drinking-bout is made by the suitor and the girl's parents, and the marriage is thereby irrevocably consummated. After this ceremony they do not use on any account, neither does this wife so married ever repine or find fault if her husband takes another wife or mistress, both which is very frequently done, so long as he provides for them both' (M.W. 1732: 295; italics my emphasis).

As the European trade at Cape Gracias and Black River grew in importance, two significant marriage patterns emerged. Firstly matrilineal marriages of Miskitu women and English men were established as affinal relations were created in the interests of trade (see Exquemelin 1969 [1678]: 219; M.W. 1732: 302; Uring 1928 [1726]: 125, 143; Bell 1989 [1899]: 293; De Kalb 1893: 266; Conzemius 1932: 85; Sorsby 1969: 89; Holm 1978: 20, 26, 37; Helms 1971: 224).<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the formerly reciprocal raids for women became increasingly unidirectional as the well armed Miskitu, organised under titled entrepreneur Big Men, began to exercise a military supremacy over their neighbours, the victims of these raids becoming unwilling suppliers of surplus wives to polygynous Miskitu chiefs (figure 8),<sup>3</sup> who secured the loyalty of their followers and allies through redistributions both of booty and captive women (Exquemelin 1969 [1678]: 247; Uring 1928 [1726]: 157; Roberts 1965 [1827]: 59, 108, 138). Like the Englishman/Miskitu man relationship, the Big Man/"soldier" relation between chief and follower came to be imagined in terms of affinity.<sup>4</sup>

The evacuation of most of the European and Jamaican settlers in 1786, curtailed the economic power and political influence of the Miskitu chiefs, and as peace returned to the region, raiding for women gradually ceased. Marriages between visiting European and Jamaican traders and Indian women persisted (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 59, 108, 109-110), but the asymmetries which had evidently characterised affinal relations among the Indians themselves became considerably

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<sup>2</sup> It should be born in mind that the Miskitu population at this time was quite small. Exquemelin estimates 'fifteen or sixteen hundred' (Exquemelin 1969 [1678]: 220).

<sup>3</sup> William Pitt, head of the English settlement at Black River, apparently kept a 'harem' of sixty women (Sorsby 1969: 89). For more about marriages and aspects of kinship between the Miskitu and English traders see M.W. (1732: 302), Henderson (1809: 187), Strangeways (1822: 15) Roberts (1965 [1827]: 15, 134, 138), Conzemius (1932: 17) and Helms (1971: 19-21, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Evidently adultery came to be viewed in terms of European commodities, becoming punishable by a fine of a head of livestock or a gun (Henderson 1809: 186; Strangeways 1822: 333; Young 1842: 73; Collinson 1870: 153; Pijoan 1946: 16). According to Bell (1862: 251), some men kept several wives purely for 'the purpose of the revenue derived from their misconduct'.

less stark, as nineteenth century marriages, although still virilocal, came increasingly to be effected by peaceful means.

The young men and women associate freely together, but if a couple begin to take a liking to each other, it is soon known by their refusing to eat in each other's company, and although they try to conceal the case, it is not long before an enfant terrible blurts out: "I say, mother, so-and-so are not eating together". Then it becomes generally talked about; the girl gets still more bashful, and will not on any account look at her lover, but she is always alone in her pitpan, paddling and fishing in the creek, and he is always absent, too. The old women exclaim, "Just see how these two are going on!" and before long it is known that he has given her father a gun, and mother such a lovely Dutch looking-glass! Next you hear that she has moved over with all her clothes to his mother's house, where they will probably live till the first child is born, and then they will build a house of their own' (Bell 1989 [1899]: 88).<sup>5</sup>

In many villages, particularly those of the Indians of the interior, marriages seem to have been arranged. Commenting on the 'Smoos' (Sumus) Bell remarks,

' They have no marriage ceremony, nor anything like one. When a man see a girl he fancies, he asks the father for her, and, if he consents, the girl is sent with her bundle of clothes and bedding to her new home. She is never consulted in the matter, and has no option but to give in. If, however, her opposition is very violent, they generally yield to her wishes: sometimes not even in that case. Girls are chosen as wives during their earliest childhood' (Bell 1862: 258).<sup>6</sup>

The early twentieth century ethnographers suggest that serial affinity between exchanging groups was commonplace.<sup>7</sup> Helms notes that, "To judge from the information recorded by Conzemius (1932: 146) and Heath (1927: 82), and completely substantiated by informants, cross-cousin marriage [among the Miskitu] was the rule until approximately the early decades of the twentieth century' (Helms 1971: 82); Conzemius remarks, 'the children of brother and sister are not considered blood relatives, and a union between such cousins is the common, and originally perhaps the only, marriage allowed' (Conzemius 1932: 146); and Spinden likewise writes of the Miskitu, Sumu, Paya and Jicaque, "Their marriage is of the inbreeding South

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<sup>5</sup> Bell is writing about the mid nineteenth century.

<sup>6</sup> See Roberts (1965 [1827]: 202), Young (1842: 75), Wickham (1895: 205), Conzemius (1932: 147) and Helms (1971: 85) for similar accounts of the betrothal of of female children among the Miskitu in earlier times.

<sup>7</sup> The phrase 'serial affinity' comes from Overing (1975: 142).



American type with the cross-cousin as the normal mate' (Spinden 1924, quoted in von Hagen 1940: 253; see also Heath 1927: 82, 85, and Conzemius 1932: 146).<sup>8</sup>

Samuel Bard (Ephraim Squier), writing about the same period as Bell, notes that the Twahka Sumus had rather elaborate wedding ceremonies, which featured arranged marriages between children of appropriate categories, and a ritualised form of wife capture which suggests that, like Miskitu marriages at the time, Twahka marriages were virilocal.

'Among all the Indians, polygamy is an exception, while among the Sambos [Miskitus] it is the rule. The instances are few in which a man has more than one wife, and in these cases the eldest is not only the head of the family, but exercises a strict supervision over the others. The betrothals are made at a very early age, by the parents,<sup>9</sup> and the affianced children are marked in the corresponding manner, so that one acquainted with the practice can always point out the various mates.<sup>10</sup> These marks consist of little bands of coloured cotton, worn either on the arm, above the elbow, or on the leg, below the knee, which are varied in color and number, so that no two combinations in the village shall be the same. The combinations are made by the old men, who take care that there shall be no confusion. The bands are replaced from time to time, as they become worn and faded. Both boys and girls also wear a necklace of variously-colored shells or beads, to which one is added yearly. When the necklace of the boy counts ten beads or shells, he is called *muhasal*, a word signifying three things, viz., ten, all the fingers, and *half-a-man*. When they number twenty, he is called '*all*, a word which also signifies three things, viz., twenty, both fingers and toes, and *a man*. And he is then effectively regarded as a man. Should his affianced, by that time, have reached the age of fifteen, the marriage ceremony takes place without delay.

'As I have said, a sleek young Towka was called upon to add the final bead to his string, and take upon himself the obligations of manhood, during my stay at the village. The event had been anticipated by the preparation of a canoe full of palm-wine, mixed with crushed plantains, and a little honey, who had been fermenting, to the utter disgust of my nostrils, from the date of my arrival. The day was observed as a general holiday. Early in the morning all the men of the village assembled, and with their knives carefully removed every blade of grass which had grown up inside of a circle, perhaps a hundred feet in diameter, situated in the very centre of the village, and indicated by a succession of stones sunk in the ground. The earth was then trampled smooth and hard, after which they proceeded to erect a little hut in

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<sup>8</sup> Commenting on the logic of this form of marriage among the Miskitu, Conzemius writes, 'Unions of this kind are still encouraged to this day, for it is felt that family ties are strengthened thereby' (Conzemius 1932: 146).

<sup>9</sup> Strangeways (1822: 332-333) and Conzemius (1932: 149) note that Miskitu marriages were sometimes arranged by both sets of parents.

<sup>10</sup> It is significant that in present day 'groom capture' oriented Kakabila "courting" commitments are demonstrated by the woman or girl painting her "boyfriend's" thumbnail red.

the very centre of the circular area, above a large flat stone which was permanently planted there. This hut was made conical, and perfectly close, except an opening at the top, and another at one side, toward the east, which was temporarily closed with a mat, woven of palm-bark. I looked in without hinderance, and saw, piled up on the stone, a quantity of the dry twigs of the copal-tree, covered with the gum of the same. The canoe full of liquor was dragged up to the edge of the circle, and litterally covered with white calabashes, of the size of an ordinary coffee-cup.

'At noon, precisely, all the people of the village hurried, without order, to the hut of the bride-groom's father. I joined in the crowd. We found the "happy swain" arrayed in his best, sitting demurely upon a bundle of articles, closely wrapped in a mat. The old men, to whom I have referred, formed in a line in front of him, and the eldest made a short address. When he had finished, the next followed, until each had had his say. The youth then got up quietly, shouldered his bundle, and, preceded by the old men, and followed by his father, marched off to the hut of the prospective bride. He put down his load before the closed door, and seated himself upon it in silence. The father then rapped at the door, which was partly opened by an old woman, who asked him what he wanted, to which he made some reply which did not appear satisfactory, when the door was shut in his face, and he took his seat beside his son. One of the old men then rapped, with precisely the same result, then the next, and so on. But the old women were obdurate. The bridegroom's father tried it again, but the she-dragons would not open the door. The old men then seemed to hold a council, at the end of which a couple of drums (made, as I have already explained by stretching a raw skin over a section of a hollow tree), and some rude flutes were sent for. The latter were made of pieces of bamboo, and were shaped somewhat like flageolets, each having a mouth-piece, and four stops. The sound was dull and monotonous, although not wholly unmusical.

'Certain musicians now appeared, and at once commenced playing on these instruments, breaking out, at long intervals, in a kind of supplicatory chant. After an hour or more of this soothing and rather sleepy kind of music, the inexorable door opened a little, and one of the female inmates glanced out with much affected timidity. Hereupon the musicians redoubled their efforts, and the bridegroom hastened to unroll his bundle. It contained a variety of articles supposed to be acceptable to the parents of the girl. There was, among other things, a *machete*, no inconsiderable present, when it is understood that the cost of one is generally a large *dory*, which it requires months of toil to fashion for the rough trunk of the gigantic ceiba. A string of gay glass beads was also produced from the bundle. All these articles were handed in to the women one by one, by the father of the groom. With every present the door opened wider and wider, until the mat was presented, when it was turned back to its utmost, revealing the bride arrayed in her "prettiest", seated on a crickery [*krikri* - sleeping platform], at the remotest corner of the hut. The dragons, affected to be absorbed in examining the presents, when the bridegroom, watching his opportunity, dashed into the hut, to the apparent utter horror and dismay of the women; and, grasping the girl by the waist, shouldered her like a sack, and started off at a trot for the mystic circle, in the centre of the village. The women pursued, as if to overtake him and rescue the girl, uttering cries for help, while

all the crowd huddled after. But the youth was too fast for them; he reached the ring, and lifting the veil of the hut, disappeared within it. The women could not pass the circle, and all stopped short at its edge, and set up a chorus of despairing shrieks, while the men all gathered within the charmed ring, where they squatted themselves, row on row, facing outward. The old men alone remained standing, and a bit of lighted pine having meanwhile been brought, one of them approached the hut, lifted the mat, and, handing in the fire, made a brief speech to the inmates. A few seconds after an aromatic smoke curled up from the opening in the top of the little hut, from which I infer that the copal had been set on fire. What else happened, I am sure I do not know! (Bard 1965 [1855]: 202-206; see Appendix A of this thesis for the full account).<sup>11</sup>

### *The shift to matrilocality*

The only conclusive evidence for uxori-local postnuptial residence before the mid nineteenth century is for those marriages between the resident or visiting Europeans and Jamaicans and coastal Indian women. It is not until the 1860s that uxori-local postnuptial residence for Indian grooms is first reported.

'Their marriage rites are of the simplest. A girl at a very early age, say between eight and nine, is betrothed to a young man, who at once takes up his residence in the house of her parents, whom he assists until such time as his lady-love is old enough to be married, when, without any ceremony, they are recognised as man and wife ... The young couple sometimes start housekeeping on their own account, though generally they remain with the bride's parents' (Pim and Seemann 1869: 306-307).

'The custom is that the future bridegroom resides with the father-in-law elect, and overlooks the education of his future wife, until such time as she become fitted to be taken to his own lodge. At such times they seem to be much petted, and not a little spoilt' (Wickham 1895: 205).<sup>12</sup>

'the Indian always set up the home of his married life in the native place of his wife' (MM 1895, vol. 2: 470).

'The man is considered a member of his wife's family and he goes to live in the house of his parents-in-law. When the family enlarges he will build a house of his own near by' (Conzemius 1932: 147).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Although Bard's work was semi-fictional and polemical, his ethnography is generally reliable, and his account of this mid nineteenth century Twahka wedding is entirely ethnographically plausible.

<sup>12</sup> Wickham is writing of his visits to the Río Escondido Ulwas during 1866 and 1867.

<sup>13</sup> See also Bell (1989 [1899]: 270-271). Helms notes that Schneider (1890: 72) also contains evidence for uxori-local postnuptial residence at this time (Helms 1970 1: 462). Unfortunately I was unable to obtain this work.

A putative move towards matrilocality among the Miskitu has been the subject of some attention by Mary Helms, who locates the reasons for this shift in changes in men's working practices. During 'the mercantile period' Miskitu men were often away from their villages for considerable periods of time, engaged in activities connected directly or otherwise with the European trade. As Miskitu men became rubber collectors,<sup>14</sup> and took on work in the banana and rubber plantations, and in the logging and mining camps, these long absences continued into 'the company period' (Helms 1971: 14-23, 110-157; Nietschmann 1973: 34-44; Bell 1989 [1899]: 262-266). Matrilocality, Helms argues, developed as a functional adaptation to, or found an elective affinity with, the absence of adult men in the Miskitu villages, since it effectively ensured inter-household solidarity between neighbours who counted themselves kinswomen ((Helms 1970 1 & 2, 1971: 23-27, 1976; see also Vilas 1989: 10-11; Von Oertzen et al. 1990: 19).<sup>15</sup>

Helms is no doubt correct that the origins of Miskitu matrilocality lie further back in time than the first reports in the 1860s suggest. However, it was not only the need to ensure inter-household co-operation during male absences, as Helms argues, which encouraged this practice. Matrilocality and brideservice also came to be important means by which influential Miskitus, and the exploitative forms of trade which the coastal Indians conducted with the interior Indians, often in the name of tribute due the "king" (Bell 1989 [1899]: 83; Conzemius 1932: 1932: 55; Helms 1971: 20), were conceptualised in terms of affinal relations of exploitation and dependency (see Roberts 1965 [1827]: 117-120; Conzemius 1929: 66; MM 1929, vol. 137: 319; Heath 1950: 28; Helms 1971: 17; Ashby 1976: 16; Von Oertzen et al. 1990: 20).<sup>16</sup>

As Helms notes the appearance of the companies in the second half of the nineteenth century no doubt greatly popularised matrilocality, as young Miskitu and Sumu men, on the move in search of work which paid in cash found themselves separated from their own kin (MM 1895, vol. 2: 470; Vilas 1989: 30; Rivera and Vermooy 1991), and increasingly dependent on commoditised relationships of affinity. Marriages, which had had previously been enacted by the serial exchange of daughters and sisters, now came increasingly to be legitimated by the transfer of

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<sup>14</sup> Murphy (1956) has related the shift from patrilocality to matrilocality among the Mundurucú indirectly to the appearance of the rubber collecting industry.

<sup>15</sup> See Bell (1989 [1899]: 85-86) for an intriguing account of village life without men during the seasonal migration of men southwards to look for turtleshell.

<sup>16</sup> Evidently some of these Big Men also established alliances through marriage among themselves. For example, the immensely wealthy Governor Clementi married his younger sister to Admiral Earnce (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 138).

goods and services between groom and wife's kin, as economic relationships became increasingly monetarised and depersonalised (Vilas 1989: 30). According to Bishop Karl Mueller, who was among the Miskitu and Sumu during 'the company period',

'Marriage does not seem to have a moral foundation, but rests on a solely utilitarian basis: the wife is the servant and chief laborer of the husband, who purchases her for one or several cows, or from some other consideration, or for his services to the mother' (Mueller 1932: 47-48).<sup>17</sup>

The conditions of economic dependency of many *mani uplika* (one year contract labourers) on the companies for credit allowed these companies to revive in structural terms the relationship which had existed between the early 'mercantile period' Big Men and their "soldiers", a similarity which was not lost on 'the company period' Miskitu men who also came to refer to the company men as "soldiers" (MM 1916, vol. 9: 560; Heath 1927: 15; Heath and Marx 1983: 106; Palmer 1945: 24).<sup>18</sup>

These itinerant Indians labourers often found wives in the districts where they worked, and they settled down to married life among strangers (see Mueller 1932: 121).<sup>19</sup> Although they were outsiders as far as their affines were concerned, they tended to bring tools bought at company stores, a proven capacity for hardwork, and a manipulable reliance on the goodwill of their hosts. As "outside men", they had to work hard to win the trust of their in-laws, and then as now, no doubt, they were watched and vetted closely. This monitoring took place through the institutions of uxorilocal postnuptial residence and brideservice. As I show below, this new form of legitimating marriages eventually came to produce an action-oriented matrilateral emphasis, a widespread belief on the virtues of village exogamy (particularly in the coastal

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<sup>17</sup> Mueller was not the only observer to remark on the commoditised nature of relationships during 'the company period'. The naturalist Palmer writing in 1905, noted that 'a stupid looking Sumu man tried to get us to barter for his daughter but nobody was anxious, and we passed on' (Palmer 1945: 67). Palmer was also offered a wife of ten or eleven years old with a piebald heifer thrown in as a 'dowry', no doubt on the understanding that as a wealthy man he would provide for her family later (Palmer 1945: 32). Prostitution with company men is discussed in the Sandy Bay Sirpi context by Hale (1994: 72) and more generally by Conzemius (1932: 149).

<sup>18</sup> Many previously dispersed villages began to regroup around the missions and the mission stores during this period (Vilas 1989: 35).

<sup>19</sup> Those men coming to Kakabila would have been probably provisioners for the Pearl Lagoon settlers and traders in the late 'mercantile period', rubber collectors at the onset of 'the company period', loggers on the Kuringwas for the John D. Emery period at the turn of the century and later banana plantation workers or cane cutters for the sugar mill at Kukra Hill.

villages) and, in the case of Kakabila, interesting changes in the meanings of Miskitu language relationship terms.

Those company workers who married into strange villages often found themselves in positions of weakness with respect to their affines, many of whom may have chosen to take advantage of their daughters' and sisters' husbands. With the advantage of having their co-villagers and kindreds around them, villagers made sure that in-marrying sons-in-law and brothers-in-law were compliant, and the kingly rôle, which the companies (like the Miskitu chiefs before them) exercised over dependant "soldiers", become transposed to the affinal relationship. The notion of the "king" as wife-giving superior who demands brideservice from a dependent, is given expression in the following very typical Jack *kisi* (trickster story).<sup>20</sup>

Jack is travelling around looking for work. At one place he is told that only the King has work. So Jack goes to the King's house, a mansion with several stories, and he tells the King that he is looking for work. The King gives Jack a job feeding the pigs. Jack knows that this is a poor sort of job, but nevertheless accepts it.

Jack sees that the king's daughter is in the upper part of the house but for now continues with his work. Eventually he approaches the king's servant and asks that he take a message to the daughter, but the servant says that not even he can get past the King to see her. Jack looks up at her and she looks down at him and they exchange "plenty sign". At night he goes to visit her but the King is there and will not let him visit her. However, when the King is not looking the girl lets down a rope to Jack and he climbs up. Jack spends the entire night with the girl. As daylight arrives he climbs down and goes back to work for the King.

The girl becomes pregnant and the King is furious. He sends for his servant and asks him how this was able to happen. He confronts his daughter who tells him that it was Mister Jack who has made her pregnant. The King summons Jack who demands to know how Jack got up to his daughter, to which Jack replies, "Mister King, you know that Jack never lose", telling him that he only took on the job so that he could get to his daughter. To this Jack adds that he is claiming the girl, that "that is my girl now". The King acknowledges this, but tells Jack he better marry the girl. He says that he is a poor man but that he will let Jack marry his daughter anyway. Jack marries the girl, there is a big wedding and the King is pleased. The King gives Jack three days to build his house. Jack asks for more time but the King will

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<sup>20</sup> The Pearl Lagoon Miskitu trickster Jack (a species of fish as much as a name in the minds of Kakabila people) is said to be known "up the coast" as "Pepito". According to Dennis (1982: 395), 'A favorite *kisi* plot revolved around a youth who, through cleverness and bravery, wins the hand of the king's daughter'.

not give him this. However the following night the King opens his window to see a huge house even bigger than his own. Everything is pretty and made of gold and the house is full of servants.

In this story Jack is the "king's" dependant (or "soldier"). He is a poor man but being the trickster he is able to seduce and capture the king's daughter in spite of the "king's" wishes. The "king" demands that Jack build his house next door to his own and quickly to boot. Jack complies and builds the most beautiful golden house thereby showing that he is in no sense the "king's" inferior.<sup>21</sup>

### *Kakabila - kinship and gender as political processes*

As I have already noted Kakabila is a diglossic community whose residents are equally comfortable with both Miskitu and Nicaraguan English and reference terms for kin exist in both languages.<sup>22</sup> Since most of the terms from one language are thought to be exact translations of terms in the other, the two terminologies, diagrammed in figures 1 and 2, may be said to belong to a single conceptual framework.<sup>23</sup> It would be an error to suggest that Kakabila view relationship terminology in terms of two 'systems', for although Kakabila people quite clearly distinguish between most Miskitu and English terms, they use both quite happily in mixed language utterances. Furthermore some relationship terms, as they are used in Kakabila, are now thought of as being as much Miskitu (*kosin, nefyu, nis*) as they are English ("cousin", "nephew" and "niece"), and can not really be thought of as belonging uniquely to one or the other language.

It should be heavily stressed that Kakabila people do not experience and think about kinship in terms of relationship terminologies. Rather, as I showed in Chapters Four, Five and Six, they do so in terms of practical action and gendered selves which are transformed as individuals go through various age and gender related statuses. Males are strongly encouraged to demonstrate independence from their consanguineal kin, in a sense being socially ejected from their natal kindreds. As they become older and seek wives and adult status, however, they have to

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<sup>21</sup> As villagers always say, "Jack never lose". I collected a very similar *kisi* in which the king's son-in-law is "Ashes Man" (*yampus waitnika*). This *kisi* is a fascinating brideservice transformation of the Cinderella figure who eventually wins the king's daughter (at a event held by the king) though clever use of a set of props.

<sup>22</sup> In purely genealogical terms the English relationship terms in Kakabila are broadly the same as those found those in other English-speaking communities around the world (e.g. Schneider 1980 [1968]). Needless to say, however, these terms have very different connotations for Kakabila people.

<sup>23</sup> All relationship terms discussed here are reference terms, unless otherwise stated. Although I am aware that the analysis of reference terminology is by no means a straightforward business, address terminology is so methodologically problematic that I am not sure it is amenable to systematic analysis (Zeitlyn 1993).

resocialise themselves and reinvent themselves as affines, often in other villages. For many young men, used to the freedom of male adolescence and unwilling to be constrained by affinal obligations to mothers-in-law and the like, this is a difficult process. Kakabila women on the other hand tend to remain members of their natal kindreds until they die. Servants of their mothers during childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, they are enjoined to show, through demonstrations of "shame" (*swira*), that their productive and reproductive powers remain under parental control, although this is eventually wrested away by their husbands. Only with the eventual accumulation of *tiara* daughters to work for them and sons-in-law to give them *rispik* (respect) do they finally become *kuka* and acquire the influence denied their *dama* husbands, who are culturally and socially constrained to show that they can "live good" with other men and their sons-in-law in particular. Given this set of circumstances it is hardly surprising to discover that, whereas adult men are inclined to think of their relations with others in terms of affinity, women do so in terms of consanguinity.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of the very differently gendered experiences of social relationships by men and women, however, Kakabila people have a clear and unified sense of how people are related to one another as "family" (*taya*), and for the most part individuals reckon or assume kinship to others by means of a set of genealogically determined relationships, which are terminologically distinguished according to a restricted set of principles. Although they occasionally use consanguineal kin terms for non-kin, this is by no means particularly common, and Kakabila people are quick to distinguish those people who are real consanguineal kin (*taya*, "family" or "one people") from those who are not. Ideally one's *taya* include all those descended bilaterally from one's great grandparents (or PPP where P=parent), and it is generally held that one should not "take" with anyone who falls into this category (see also Helms 1971: 66, 72).

One incipient courtship between two adolescents, for example, was quashed by the parents, when it was realised that the boy's paternal grandfather was brother to the girl's mother. This had not been immediately realised because the boy was an "outside child" as far as his father was concerned.<sup>25</sup> In another case, I learnt that a long-established husband and wife pair were *kosin* to one another, the fathers being brothers. The husband was an "outside child" of his wife's father, but because this had been hushed up, I was told, neither knew that this was the case until

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<sup>24</sup> Seymour-Smith (1991: 640-641) has noted how the Achuar and Shiwiar Indians of Ecuador tend to 'consanguinealize' relations between and towards women, and 'affinalize' relations between and towards men. She also notes how Shiwiar relationship terminology captures this tendency to some extent.

<sup>25</sup> Clandestine relationships between *wahma* and *tiara* who are "second cousin" and belong to different kindreds, are fairly common but these are considered "bad error".



it was too late. The couple were not stigmatised for this, since it was understood that they were victims of their own ignorance about the facts of their own procreation.

Figures 1 and 2 of course represent a reification, as far as people were prepared to formulate it for me. The extent to which particular individuals considered genealogically close relatives as *taya*, is of course variable, and genealogically more distant members of one's *taya*, for example *kosin*, are less likely to be included as "family" if they live in other communities or have been thought to have acted in a way unbecoming of co-"family" members. *Dama* Nelson (27), for example, who was estranged from his brother *dama* Cain (23), never referred to his brother's children as *nefyu* or *nis*, and seemed uncomfortable in classifying them as *taya* or "family". In other cases "family" scandals or processes of increasing genealogical distance between the descendents of *kosin* sometimes lead to different generational perspectives of who are "family" and constitute reasons for genealogical amnesia.

#### Case # 39

Virginia (16) informed me that her elderly mother, *kuka* Sexa, complained that despite the fact that her "family" were "one people" with the Fox family (27), Nelson Fox no longer considered himself "family" with them. Sexa and Teresa (Sexa's dead sister) were *kosin* to Nelson (in fact first cross cousins) but Nelson had once had two "outside children" with Teresa, and *kosin* marriage is, according to Virginia, a "wickedness" and "worthlessness" from "olden days time", a "first time" people's practice which Nelson was probably ashamed to acknowledge.<sup>26</sup>

In figures 5 and 6 the reference terms for affines are diagrammed. It should be noted that these terms are ego-focused, affinal terms never being used between members of different "family" unless one is actually a conjugal partner of one who is *taya* to the other. In Kakabila there is absolutely no sense that different "families" or *taya* are affines to one another on a serial basis. Marriage is a matter for a woman, her husband and her "family", or for a man and his in-laws. It is not a matter of concern for two spouse exchanging corporate groups.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This knowledge did not stop Virginia's brother Charlie (17), however, from flirting with Nelson's daughters.

<sup>27</sup> Affines, even husband and wife, are never said to be members of the same "family" (*contra* Helms 1971: 93). See Bell (1989 [1899]: 86) for a similar observation. As with the terms for consanguineal kin or "family", most of the Miskitu terms for affines are said to have direct equivalents in English, though the Miskitu terms, unlike their English equivalents, are virtually all reciprocals. One term for which there is no English language equivalent is *swikat*, which was translated for me in English as "he has my niece". I later found that this term, as it used in Kakabila, actually has a somewhat wider scope, one which is explored in detail below. For Asang, see Helms (1971: 102).

Helms argues that the loss of the cross cousin terminology (figure 4) and the extension of the terms for uterine siblings and parallel cousin terms to cross cousins (a process which evidently took effect around the turn of the century in Asang) was largely due to the influence of the Moravians (Helms 1971: 63-70; Heath 1927: 82; Heath and Marx 1961). One elderly informant informed her that 'after her parents became Christians the children were no longer taught the cross cousin terminology' (Helms 1971: 67).<sup>28</sup> Helms also considers other factors which might have influenced the loss of the cross/parallel distinction and, following Dole (1957) and Service (1962: 137, 139), suggests that 'depopulation, social disruption, and population dislocation due to Western contact', as well as 'the increased dependence on wage labor', may have also been in some measure responsible (Helms 1971: 67-69). She concludes that 'Unfortunately, a detailed reconstruction of pressures and reactions [which motivated this change] is not possible' (Helms 1971: 69).

In Kakabila, however, the more thorough-going changes which have taken place with respect to Miskitu relationship terminology make such a reconstruction more feasible.<sup>29</sup> The terms *muihni*, *lakra*, *tahti*, *anti*, *tubani*, *yamsi*, *kuka*, *dama* and *mula*, which were in general use a century ago (figure 4) and are still in use in Asang and other "up the coast" villages (figure 3), are applied in present day Kakabila with very different meanings (figure 2). Assuming that Kakabila once used the bifurcate merging/Dakota-type terminology (figure 4), how is one able to account for the fact that the meanings of these terms have so dramatically changed? It is tempting to assume to state that Kakabila terminology simply became 'acculturated', as Miskitu terms acquired semantic equivalence with the English language terms used by the Cuenca's numerically and politically dominant Creoles. Certainly the two forms of classification in use in Kakabila - the one English and the other Miskitu - are, as I have noted above, virtually structurally identical (compare figures 1 and 2). This answer, however, begs the question in that it does not account for the *particular forms* that these changes took. Why, for example, did Kakabila people choose to expand the term *tahti* (mother's brother) to mean 'parent's brother' rather than *rapia* (father's brother)?

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<sup>28</sup> See Vilas (1989: 34, 59) and Hale (1994: 49-50) on Moravian attitudes to Miskitu sexual mores.

<sup>29</sup> Nobody remembered terminologies with the kind of 'structure' represented in figures 3 or 4 ever existing in Kakabila. As far as villagers were concerned the Eskimo-type/lineal terminologies captured in figures 1 and 2 had always been used there, though in fact this is highly improbable. Kakabila is unusual, possibly unique. Kin classification in most other Miskitu communities, those referred to as "up the coast" communities by Kakabila people, conform to the bifurcate merging, Hawaiian-type reported by Helms, as was evidenced by my conversations with "up the coast" men resident in Kakabila. I do not have conclusive evidence, but it is very likely that the Kakabila classification is shared by the members of the other enclaved Cuenca Miskitu speaking villages.

I believe that the reinvention of Miskitu relationship terms in Kakabila owes a great deal to the particular character of the changes in the local political economy of gender identities.<sup>30</sup> In comparison with other Miskitu villages Kakabila has been located rather fortunately in terms of access to regional trade. Within easy reach of the commercial centre of Pearl Lagoon, the Cuenca Miskitus for most of their history have found themselves close to both trading depots (Roberts 1965 [1827]: 108-109) and sources of paid labour.<sup>31</sup> Unlike the less advantageously situated Indians "up the coast" and in the interior, Kakabila people have been geographically well placed to accommodate visiting traders and/or high status Creoles like Orlando Roberts, Walton (21) (case # 4) and Abdul (case # 5), and "up the coast" Indians like Jacinto (48), Mario (47) Faustino (44), Negro (37), Kwasku (46), Findlay (41) and Custober (30), coming south to look for work.<sup>32</sup>

For Kakabila both traders and "up the coast" men are desirable affines: the first, because they provide access to manufactured commodities and cash; the second, because, according to village discourse, they provide labour for fathers-in-law and *rispik* (respect) for mothers-in-law. Village exogamy<sup>33</sup> and uxori-local postnuptial residence thus form part of a Janus-faced complex of institutions, with "outside men" viewed as either clients ("soldiers") or patrons ("kings"),<sup>34</sup> and,

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<sup>30</sup> The relationship between relationship terminologies and social institutions is evidently important in societies with serial affinity (Rivière 1969: 61; Needham 1971: 14). For an interesting comparison of relationship terminologies with 'pricing mechanisms', see Gregory (1982: 202-203).

<sup>31</sup> As I noted in the previous chapter this has been provided by the buyers of wild india rubber, the John D. Emery logging camps on the Kurinwas, the banana and sugar plantations at Kukra Hill and more recently the buyers of marines resources. Mister Max Atily, an 'ageable' resident of Bluefields, told me that he and a partner used to bring goods up to the Cuenca villages by canoe especially for the Indian trade.

<sup>32</sup> Helms reports a swing towards to virilocal postnuptial residence and village endogamy, which she, rightly in my view, links to the regional recession in the Río Coco area. Outsiders, she notes, are viewed with considerably greater suspicion (Helms 1971: 71-81).

<sup>33</sup> Of course village "home boys", characterised as rude and lazy, tend to express the view that village endogamy is preferable. Holloman and Viveiro de Castro report a similar phenomenon among the Cuna and Araweté; on the one hand, there exists an older male and females discourse favouring uxori-locality, while, on the other, there is a younger male discourse favouring virilocality (Holloman 1976: 133-134; Viveiros de Castro 1992: 166).

<sup>34</sup> The reader should note that the terms "soldier" and "king" are never used in Kakabila to express this relation between father-in-law and son-in-law, except of course in Jack stories.

like their Big Man chiefly forbears, Kakabila people view "outside men" in terms of either being suppliers of goods and knowledge, or suppliers of labour and respect.<sup>35</sup>

Many Miskitu villages to this day are divided into 'two halves or moieties' (Dennis 1982: 395; see also MM 1916, vol. 9: 424 on 'double villages'), and most subscribe to the bifurcate merging terminology reported for Asang by Helms (figure 3) (Helms 1971: 81-84 for details). In Kakabila, however, the particular importance attached to village exogamy and groom capture stimulated by the lagoon's advantageous location as a trading nexus, has entailed an historical abandonment of the abstract idea (encoded in bifurcate merging type terminologies [e.g. figure 4]) of two or more "families" or settlements who reciprocally exchange siblings and offspring. In an abstract sense Kakabila has become a village of "one people", a village without a complementary moiety, essentially composed of a core of related women and a number of "outside men" who have attached themselves as individuals by marrying in. This conceptualisation is elegantly captured by the story usually given to account for the village's origin (figure 10).<sup>36</sup>

Kakabila was originally founded about a hundred years ago by two men. One of these men was Silvester Joseph, the father of *dama* "Prophet" (39); the other was Cristobal Vega. Vega had several daughters, one of whom, Angeline, became Silvester Joseph's wife. The others, Claudine, Pelina, Matilda and Pryda, were married to outsiders who settled in the village.<sup>37</sup>

This village foundation story, I argue, codifies the qualitative differences between men and women's forms of sociality in Kakabila, and captures important characteristics of Kakabila gender politics nicely. Firstly, according to this story, the village is founded by a single pair of men who become affines. This one affinal relationship stands for all similarly constituted relationships between individual males. Secondly, Vega's daughters are taken by in-marrying "outside men" and demonstrate the importance and salience of exogamy and uxorilocality for

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<sup>35</sup> The relationship between trading asymmetries and changes in the patterning of affinal relations is explored by Irving Goldman (1963) in a masterly paper on the Alkatcho Carrier Indians of British Columbia, and by Thomas (1982) in an examination of the gun/manioc grater trade among the Pemon and their neighbours.

<sup>36</sup> I should note that *dama* "Prophet" himself told me a somewhat different and less anthropologically intriguing story of Kakabila's origin. For versions similar to the given in the text, see Kasch et al. (1987: 92) and CIDCA (1989: 4).

<sup>37</sup> Helms reports a very similar story for Asang's origin; 'The nucleus of the village formed around five daughters (one of whom was adopted) and two sons of a Miskito man surnamed Bobb' (Helms 1971: 57-58).

Kakabila villagers. Thirdly, the villagers are descendents from five or so sisters who thus constitute both a single "family" and a matrilaterally recruited kindred.<sup>38</sup>

Because Kakabila people have dispensed with the view of marriage as a matter of sister (or brother) exchange, many of the relationship terms which had previously encoded a two-line prescriptive classification (figure 4), have either become redundant or acquired new genealogically specific meanings (figure 2) derived from previously matrilaterally specific usages.<sup>39</sup> The meaning of *rapia* (father's brother) (figure 4), for example, has become restricted to 'stepfather', recalling the days when the levirate was widely practiced,<sup>40</sup> while *tahti*, formerly 'mother's brother' (figure 4), has come to mean both 'mother's brother' and 'father's brother' (figure 2). Similarly *anti* (formerly 'mother's sister' and now 'mother's sister' and 'father's sister') (figures 4 and 2) has displaced *tahka* (formerly 'father's brother') (figure 4). *Kauhka* (female cross cousin - female ego) and *klua* (opposite sex cross cousin), both terms which once connoted membership of a group with whom one exchanged (figure 4), have disappeared as Kakabila has become increasingly conceptualised by its members as a single (sub-divided) matricore, or as a collection of rival groups of sisters who capture, rather than exchange, individual men (see Helms 1971: 66-70).

This view of Kakabila as a group of groom capturing sisters was forcefully brought home to me one day as I prepared to cross Pearl Lagoon with a group of village women.

#### Case # 40

I was about to take a ride home from "Lagoon" to Kakabila with three Kakabila women, Amanda (12), her *lamlat* (sister-in-law) Albertina (3), and Coco (13). We were going to cross the lagoon by "dori", a trip of about seven miles which usually takes about one and a half hours. Even in Kakabila it fairly unusual for women to sail "dorises" themselves, but for "Lagoon" women to do so is unheard of. While the women put up the sail, two Pearl Lagoon men bathing along the "edge" laughed at them, inquiring if they could swim, implying that they would turn over into the lagoon. Amanda retorted that they would reach

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<sup>38</sup> This matrilineally skewed myth of origin bears a superficial structural resemblance to an account Heath gives of *yaptimisri* (mother scorpion), the Miskitu 'goddess of the realm of the dead'; 'She is considered to be the mother of all Miskitos and is described as having innumerable breasts' (Heath 1950: 34). See also Mueller (1932: 31-32) and Conzemius (1932: 31-32).

<sup>39</sup> See Helms (1971: 98) for evidence of matrilateral emphasis in the use of relationship terms in Asang.

<sup>40</sup> *Yapti diura*, an archaic term for 'mother's sister' (figure 4), now simply means 'stepmother' in Kakabila. See Conzemius (1932: 146) and Helms (1971: 69, 81) for discussion of the levirate and sororate and the lexical conflation of 'step mother' with 'mother's sister'. For *rapia* as 'stepfather' see Heath and Marx 1983: 135) under the entry for *wrapia*.

Kakabila in "one cut" (without having to alter the sail or their course) and added that Kakabila women were not useless like "Lagoon" women. She joked that, unlike "Lagoon" women, Kakabila women know how to keep their men. This is why, she added, pointing at me, when "outside men" come to Kakabila (and meet the Kakabila women) they stay.

The term *waik* (originally 'male cross cousin' or 'brother-in-law' - male ego) has remained.<sup>41</sup> No longer is it thought of in terms of a two-line prescriptive terminology, however; such a thing no longer exists in the minds of many Kakabila men. It is used now solely as a term of address for 'brothers-in-law' and, as often as not, unrelated affineable men. The potential for affinity which it still denotes has no doubt always been more significant than genealogical cross cousin relatedness (figure 4), and in this sense the meaning of *waik* has probably remained the same. This difference, perhaps, is at one time *waik* implied the potential for the reciprocal exchange of sisters. Nowadays this promise is absent.<sup>42</sup>

Because in Kakabila all men in some sense have come to be seen as outsiders, the significance of the mother's brother seems to have waned in comparison to other Miskitu villages. Certainly, for example, the mother's brother in Kakabila has less right to beat a child than the father, as opposed to the Awastara of Reyes childhood, for example (Reyes 1992: 10; see Heath 1927: 83 under the entry for *yamsi*). Likewise the importance of the wife's mother's brother (*swikat*) (figure 7) has also declined, as the interlocking destiny of brother and sister has become increasingly unravelled in conjunction with the abandonment of classificatory sister exchange. One manifestation of this in Kakabila is that *swikat* is now used more generally as a reciprocal between a man and his wife's male kin (those that she calls *tahiti* and *kosin*) (figure 8).<sup>43</sup>

Because adult males have come to be thought of as outsiders - with respect to either the village (if they are "outside men") or their natal kindreds (if they are "home boys") - male control of

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<sup>41</sup> Unlike the other terms which are both terms of reference and address, *waik* is purely a term of address; the reference term for 'brother-in-law'/cross cousin' (male ego) is *waika* or *waikat*.

<sup>42</sup> The *aimapaia* incest myth, which once mythologised the unwillingness to exchange sisters, is disappearing I was told. *Aimapaia* were, according to John Schwarz, a brother and sister who committed incest and now live as a double star near Orion. John told me that he knew no more of this story because it had fallen into disuse. According to Heath (1950: 21) 'aimapaya - the double star Theta Tauri, twin points of light west of Aldebaran, said in Miskito mythology to be the human pair, a man and his sister, who escaped the universal deluge. Aldebaran is their hearth fire'. See also Loveland's account of Miskito brother-sister prohibitions (*yul swin*) (Loveland 1975: 451)

<sup>43</sup> It is also worth noting that I recorded an extensive reciprocal classificatory usage of the term *masaia* (figures 7 and 8), elsewhere unreported.

sisters and daughters has passed into the hands of the older village women. Although Kakabila fathers still nominally vet prospective sons-in-law and brother/sister avoidance still exists, these relationships are no longer central in terms of the social reproduction of the village. In their place it is the son-in-law/mother-in-law relationship which has come to acquire this generative capacity.

As I showed in Chapters Five and Six it is the tug-of-war between son-in-law and mother-in-law over wife/daughter, which essentially underpins the political aspects of acquiring male and female personhood. This tug-of-war which is ethnographically demonstrated in Chapter Six of this thesis, most especially in the account of Sibella's (13) tribulations with Yoyo, is also represented in the following Sumu myth.

'Some hours after leaving Yalok, we caught sight of Kakausa and her "son-in-law". Kakausa is an active volcano, but there was no sign of activity when we passed. The "Son-in-Law", a much smaller, conical hill, looks much more like a volcano than does old Kakausa. These mountains too are said to have originally been houses. The "Son-in-law", as all good Indians should, had built his house close to his wife's mother's; but one day Kakausa became very angry with the young man, because he had made chocolate<sup>44</sup> and not given her a share; and a fierce quarrel ensued, in which Kakausa's house was set on fire. This was the origin of the frequent but harmless eruptions' (G.R. Heath 1990 [1915]).<sup>45</sup>

At stake for men is the adult status which comes through acquiring a wife without upsetting harmonious relations with affines (see also Bell 1989 [1899]: 261-262); for women it is the *rispik* (respect) which accumulates through acquiring these in-marrying male affines. Abundant evidence suggest that historically it is the mother-in-law (*mula yapti*) who has come to gain the upper hand.<sup>46</sup>

'After his marriage his good wife and energetic mother-in-law saw to it that temptation would not overcome him. The mother-in-law in an Indian household was a person of great influence, who often ruled the house with an iron hand, even in the days when she was not allowed to be seen with her son-in-law. This mother-in-law of Yulu might have addressed her son-in-law somewhat after this fashion, "Simon, do not forget that you married a Christian girl! If you attempt to run out of the house now to

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<sup>44</sup> Among the Bribri Indians of Costa Rica chocolate symbolises a man's sister and tapir meat his wife (Bozzoli de Wille 1982: 145). See also Loveland (1975: 10) for the association between tapir meat and affinity among the Rama to the south of the Miskitu.

<sup>45</sup> I would like to thank Sue Hawley for bringing this story to my attention.

<sup>46</sup> Evidently in recent decades men have come to assume the burden of agricultural work in coastal Miskitu villages (Helms 1971: 23, 123; Nietschmann 1973: 148, 237-239; Ashby 1976: 12)

share in the wild carousels of the unfaithful ones at Christmas, when the throat of the parson is still hoarse from singing at your wedding, you will get a good thrashing! There are still plenty of sticks lying about for the purpose" (Mueller 1932: 107-108).

'This custom [brideservice and uxorilocal postnuptial residence) has a great influence in softening the manners of the men, and places the ladies in a very commanding position; indeed daughters are at a premium, instead of being at a discount, as with other savage tribes' (Pim and Seemann 1869: 306-307).<sup>47</sup>

For many Miskitu men, the central dilemma which they face in life, is that they have to demonstrate affinal *rispik* (respect) towards their mothers-in-law while at the same time stealing their daughters, and it is this knowledge which induces sons-in-law and mothers-in-law to practice mutual avoidance.<sup>48</sup>

'Among the heathen, a man and his mother-in-law must not speak to one another, and according to the strictest usage must not see one another' (Heath 1927: 85).

'MOTHER-IN-LAW TABOO. \_ As soon as the marriage ceremony has taken place the young Sumu husband must not speak any more to his mother-in-law, nor even look at her. When he is at home she remains in her own apartment, which is separated from the remainder of the house by a partition of bark cloth or imported calico. After he has left she comes out and follows her usual occupations. Upon his return he must give warning by striking the boat with the paddle or pole before proceeding to the hut, and she retires immediately to her own apartment. When she returns from the plantation or from fishing she must likewise give notice, and he walks away for a few minutes, until she has reached her quarters. Should the two meet unexpectedly she will quickly throw a cloth over her head, and he will pass on, turning his face away from her. Should, however, he purposely look at her, or fail to give the prescribed warning upon his return, she will consider this an insult for which she will demand payment through a third person.

'This custom appears to exist among all the Sumu subtribes; it is also found among the Miskitu of the upper Río Coco, who are largely mixed with the Sumu, but it has not been observed in other parts of the

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<sup>47</sup> Evidently Pim and Seemann were quite familiar with the Pearl Lagoon Miskitus (Pim 1863: 79, 92-93).

<sup>48</sup> Heath (1927: 77) and Heath and Marx (1983: 36, 139) give the terms '*kati aiskura alkan*' (the moon is holding/catching his mother-in-law) and '*ai sukurka alkuya*' (the sun is getting hold of/catching his mother-in-law) for eclipses of the moon and sun respectively. Both phrases in Miskitu carry sexual overtones. I witnessed an eclipse of the moon in Kakabila but never heard either phrases. Note that *skura* is never used in Kakabila as a term for 'mother-in-law'; instead villagers invariably use either '*mula yapiti*' or "mother-in-law".



the Mosquito Coast.<sup>49</sup> The origin of this custom is somewhat obscure, and I was unable to obtain from the Indians any satisfactory explanation regarding it. The usual answer is that they observe it because it has been handed down to them by their ancestors. According to Grossman [1917: 4], each mother stands under the special protection of the tapir,<sup>50</sup> who is angry at the man who has robbed her of her daughter, and only refrains from punishing him on condition that he never looks on her. Therefore the man who has looked on his mother-in-law is fated to meet his death from the enraged tapir, unless absolved by making a payment to the wronged women' (Conzemius 1932: 147-148).<sup>51</sup>

In Kakabila the historical emergence of uxorilocal postnuptial residence, brideservice and mother-in-law avoidance, which I have outlined in this chapter, has generated a reinvention of personhood. The one time opposition between kin and affines (actual or potential), expressed in the *aimapaia* myth<sup>52</sup> and bifurcate merging/Dakota type relationship terminology (figure 4), has receded, while male and female have gradually come to assume in their place the status of totemic opposites (Shapiro 1988). In other words, while the conceptual distinction between spouse-givers and spouse-takers as sibling or offspring exchanging groups, has disappeared, the mother-in-law/son-in-law structurally induced tension has produced a schismogenesis between male and female who have replaced spouse-giver and spouse-taker as the focus of cultural differentiation.<sup>53</sup>

This opposition between the sexes in Kakabila, in particular the domination of older women over younger men, is no more clearly dramatised than in an day-long celebration which takes place in the village on one day of the year every January (*siangkwa kati*). This event is known as "Kitty Alley".<sup>54</sup>

"Kitty Alley" is a bowling game played over the course of an entire day by two teams. One is composed exclusively of the village women and *tiara* (adolescent girls), while the other is composed

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<sup>49</sup> I am not sure why Conzemius excludes the coastal Miskitu. Lundberg, Moravian missionary at Magdala (Pearl Lagoon), noted that in Raitipura, only five miles away from Kakabila, 'the son-in-law and mother-in-law are not permitted to be in the same house' (MC 1859, vol. 23: 113).

<sup>50</sup> See footnote 44.

<sup>51</sup> 'In former days the same taboo existed among the Miskito between a man and his sister-in-law, the wife of his birth friend (*lapy*) and the wife of his covenant friend (*libra*); or between a woman and her brother-in-law, and the husbands of both her *lapy* and *libra*' (Conzemius 1932: 148). See also Helms (1971: 103).

<sup>52</sup> See footnote 42.

<sup>53</sup> See Bloch (1975) for a similar process among the Merina of Madagascar.

<sup>54</sup> "Kitty Alley", I understand, is found in other villages in the RAAS, both Miskitu and Creole. As far as I know it does not take place in the RAAN Miskitu villages.

entirely of the the village men and *wahma* (adolescent boys). Differences of marital status are suspended, as for once adolescents and adults play together, and the differences between the sexes are brought sharply into focus. The men are supposed to wear something blue for the day, while the women are supposed to wear something red (although this is not strictly enforced), a distinction which is mirrored by the blue and red ribbons which are tied to the right and left sides respectively of the palm leaf and bamboo arches, which mark out the bowling alley. The men sit to the right of the alley and drink rum, while the women sit on the left hand side and drink "fresco" (non-alcoholic fruit juice) especially prepared for the day. One man arranges to keep score, while a few women labour away in a neighbouring kitchen producing food for the participants, whose entrance fees pay for the refreshments. During the day the two teams take turns to play innings, and each team's members have three rolls of the ball every innings to try and knock down the skittles which lie at the end of the "strench".<sup>55</sup> After each member of one team has rolled, the other team have an innings, and innings are thus exchanged over the course of the day without interruption until the end of the game is reached by common consent or prearrangement. After the bowling is finished and the score totted up, the participants reassemble at night at another venue for a dance.

During the "Kitty Alley" in which I participated, the participants conducted a non-stop stream of encouragement to fellow team members. When the younger men were rolling the older women invariably subjected them to non-stop ridicule, claiming that unless they (the young men) deliberately missed their shots, they (the older women) would ensure that the "young girls" would not let them "scrub up" at the dance later that night,<sup>56</sup> a thinly veiled claim by older women that they control the younger women, and that they are perfectly capable both of using their daughters' sexuality as bait, and of withdrawing it when it suits them. Both men and women repeatedly told me during the preparations for "Kitty Alley" that it was *always* the women who won, because the men got too drunk, and it is tempting to interpret this as an admission that men's rituals of solidarity (drinking rum) actually reproduce the conditions by which older women are able to exercise their influence in the context of Kakabila social life.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The "strench" ('trench' in Nicaraguan English) is the smoothed out length of ground from which the turf is cut away down which the ball is rolled.

<sup>56</sup> "Scrub up" is an erotic form of dancing which involves a man and woman rubbing themselves up against one another until, as Yoyo (13) put it to me, "he pop" (one ejaculates) and you have to start all over again.

<sup>57</sup> Interestingly it was the men who won in 1993. Nobody seemed to be concerned with noting the discrepancy between village discourse and the actual result! For an account of male/female rivalry in Anris on the Río Coco, see Mueller 1932: 124-125).

### *Conclusion*

Throughout Lowland South America, ethnographers repeatedly report that discourses of harmony are vitally important. Often enough this has been overlooked by anthropologists, who have tended to see this as a function of the fact that political organisation in these societies is weak, and the potential for political turmoil therefore insignificant. In fact as Overing Kaplan (1975: 53), Clastres (1989) and Belaunde (1992: 13) have noted, political life among Lowland South American Indians, typically manifest in affinal relations, is potentially very turbulent, and therefore great efforts in many of these societies are made to ensure that peace rather than conflict reigns. For many of the Guiana Indians, for example, the notion of a distinct category of affines is so potentially fraught, that great efforts are made to marry genealogically close kin, and reinvent affines as consanguineal kin; in these societies special relationship terms for affines, as opposed to affinales, are few, while teknonyms (which cloak affinity in ambiguities) are many (e.g. Rivière 1969 and 1984: 67-71; Overing 1975; Thomas 1982).<sup>58</sup> Other groups such as the Miskitu's neighbours, the Rama, and the Tsimanes of Bolivia, manage structural fault lines caused by affinity by neolocality and repeated visits between wife's parents and groom's parents,<sup>59</sup> and take great care not to show favoritism between either group (Loveland 1975: 8-9; Rebecca Ellis: personal communication). For the Gê and Bororo societies the affinal relations are handled by a plethora of cosmologically organised institutions which to a considerable extent determine proper marriages (e.g. Maybury-Lewis 1976 and 1979; Crocker 1985). Finally, for the Cubeo and the Tukanoan Indians of the Northwest Amazon strict settlement exogamy ensures that affines are kept at arm's length (e.g. Goldman 1979 [1963]; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971; Jackson 1983). Marriages are organised by institutionalised forms of wife-capture, and male domination cosmologically legitimated by supposedly phallogocentric cults of sacred trumpets (e.g. Hugh-Jones 1979; see also Murphy 1956: 429).<sup>60</sup> In sum South American Indians, like the Miskitu and Sumu, spend a great deal of energy involved in practices which seem designed specifically to accommodate affines.

Von Hagen remarked in the 1940s that 'Several authors have noted resemblances between the ethnology of the South American tribes and those of the Caribbean coast of Honduras and Nicaragua' (Von Hagen 1943: 12). One of these resemblances was the practice of serial affinity: 'The marriage is of the inbreeding South American type with the cross-cousin as the normal mate' Spinden (1924), quoted in Von Hagen 1940 253; see also Helms 1971: 14). In short the

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<sup>58</sup> For evidence of Miskitu teknonymy in other villages, see Conzemius (1932: 106) and Helms (1971: 62-63)

<sup>59</sup> See Helms (1971: 79) for evidence that some couples adopt this strategy in Asang.

<sup>60</sup> See Roach (1784: 34-39), Young (1842: 31-32) and Irias (1853: 165) for evidence of a male cult of sacred trumpets among virilocal period Miskitu and Sumu.

Miskitu shared with the Lowland South American Indians a form of sociality based on 'restricted exchange' (Lévi-Strauss 1969). Over the course of the last hundred years, however, the Miskitu villages, and the Kakabila in particular, have abandoned 'restricted exchange' and have adopted 'generalized exchange' as the means by which spouses are circulated.

In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* Lévi-Strauss devotes some attention to the transformation from 'restricted exchange' to 'generalized exchange' (Lévi-Strauss 1969: chapter xxviii). 'Generalized exchange', he argues, appears when goods are found to represent tokens for women, as with *lobola* payments among the Bantu. However Lévi-Strauss is unable to account for why people might actually rethink the relation between marriage and goods, in the first place (see also Strathern 1985 and Gell 1992). To my mind his observation that 'generalised exchange' engenders hypergamy (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 475), suggests that he is looking at the problem the wrong way round. As the ethnography and history produced in this thesis demonstrates, it is the development of asymmetrical relationships which produce 'generalized exchange' not the other way round, forcing me to conclude that Lévi-Strauss' dictum that 'we should resist to the very end any historico-geographical interpretation which would make restricted or generalized exchange the discovery of some particular culture, or of some stage in human development' (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 463) should not be taken to mean that we should give up trying to find structurally based models for the political dynamics which motivate particular historical transformations (Wolf 1982).<sup>61</sup>

In Marxist terms the transformations which I have outlined in this chapter for the Miskitu have been impelled by the contradiction between two distinct and formally exclusive modes of reproduction: one based on reciprocal wife capture; the other based on son-in-law capture.<sup>62</sup> This contradiction is not simply a theoretical problem to be pondered by social scientists at some abstract level of analysis; it is for Miskitus an existential problem which has to be worked out on a day-to-day basis between mothers-in-law like Sibella (13) and Aicilia (44) and sons-in-law like Yoyo and Faustino.

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<sup>61</sup> Seymour-Smith (1991: 630) has detected a failure in Amazonian anthropology to grasp the historicity and political dynamics of particular societies.

<sup>62</sup> In this thesis it is quite clear that I am arguing that brideservice is a historical transformation of wife-capture in the Miskitu context. This does not mean of course that I am saying that I see brideservice as a universally 'intermediary phase of social development emerging between the stage of marriage by capture, and marriage by purchase' as Dean suggests evolutionists have argued (Dean 1995: 104). I am quite happy with the suggestion that brideservice appears in different societies for a number of reasons on various trajectories.

Dean has criticised early evolutionists for arguing that brideservice is 'an intermediary phase of social development between the stages of marriage by capture, and marriage by purchase'. (Dean 1995: 104), and I agree with him that brideservice and wife capture should not be implicated as separate stages in an evolutionary framework. However, in Kakabila and, I suspect, many other brideservice societies, the two forms co-exist as coeval transformations of a single mode of reproduction. What I find particularly interesting is why, among the Miskitu, one of these forms *historically* came to gain a gradual ascendancy over the other.

Belaunde (1992: 20) and Dean (1995) have both criticised Collier and Rosaldo (1981) for modelling the logic of brideservice on the viricentric premise that it is produced by men fighting over women.<sup>63</sup> In my view, the problem is not that Collier and Rosaldo are wrong; it is rather that, like Turner (1979 1 & 2) (who considers brideservice in terms of father-in-law/son-in-law power relations), they have been looking at the set of practices which tend to cluster around brideservice from a rather lopsided vantage point.<sup>64</sup> In general ethnographic terms Collier and Rosaldo's ideal type stands up rather well in Kakabila with many, though not all, of its ethnographic predictions born out. The problem with their ideal type, I believe, is not that it predicts badly the kind of ethnography one might expect to obtain in a brideservice society, but rather that it presents a partial picture, one which by virtue of some serious omissions misrepresents the political dynamic which actually reproduces brideservice. The mother-in-law/son-in-law relationship in the Kakabila context is so pivotal in making sense of Miskitu social life, that it seems extraordinary, from the vantage point of my fieldwork, to have constructed a model of brideservice without placing this relationship centre stage.

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<sup>63</sup> See Overing (1986) and Strathern (1985: 196) for criticism of the view that men reproduce society by exchanging women.

<sup>64</sup> While I do not claim that my own particular model necessarily carries more authority, it does have the virtue of explaining 'the phenomenon of mother-in-law avoidance, examples of which abound in the ethnographies of Amazonian brideservice societies' (Dean 1995: 101). Collier and Rosaldo (1981) and Collier (1988) make only one mention of mother-in-law avoidance: 'it is only with age that conjugality gives women new privileges. As the mothers of daughters, an older woman enjoys special access to the labor and products of sons-in-law, who, of course, are sexually taboo' (Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 295). The reason for why the mother-in-law is 'of course' thus avoided, however, is never given. Note that Dean also fails to explain mother-in-law avoidance.

**Appendices, maps, figures,  
tables and bibliography**

## APPENDIX A

The following is a more complete version of the Twahka wedding ceremony discussed in Chapter Eight. This more complete version contains an interesting account of the ritualised consumption of alcohol.

**From Samuel Bard's "Waikna; or adventures on the Mosquito Shore"**

'Among all the Indians, polygamy is an exception, while among the Sambos it is the rule. The instances are few in which a man has more than one wife, and in these cases the eldest is not only the head of the family, but exercises a strict supervision over the others. The betrothals are made at a very early age, by the parents, and the affianced children are marked in the corresponding manner, so that one acquainted with the practice can always point out the various mates. These marks consist of little bands of coloured cotton, worn either on the arm, above the elbow, or on the leg, below the knee, which are varied in color and number, so that no two combinations in the village shall be the same. The combinations are made by the old men, who take care that there shall be no confusion. The bands are replaced from time to time, as they become worn and faded. Both boys and girls also wear a necklace of variously-colored shells or beads, to which one is added yearly. When the necklace of the boy counts ten beads or shells, he is called *muhasal*, a word signifying three things, viz., ten, all the fingers, and *half-a-man*. When they number twenty, he is called *'all*, a word which also signifies three things, viz., twenty, both fingers and toes, and *a man*. And he is then effectively regarded as a man. Should his affianced, by that time, have reached the age of fifteen, the marriage ceremony takes place without delay.

'As I have said, a sleek young Towka was called upon to add the final bead to his string, and take upon himself the obligations of manhood, during my stay at the village. The event had been anticipated by the preparation of a canoe full of palm-wine, mixed with crushed plantains, and a little honey, who had been fermenting, to the utter disgust of my nostrils, from the date of my arrival. The day was observed as a general holiday. Early in the morning all the men of the village assembled, and with their knives carefully removed every blade of grass which had grown up inside of a circle, perhaps a hundred feet in diameter, situated in the very centre of the village, and indicated by a succession of stones sunk in the ground. The earth was then trampled smooth and hard, after which they proceeded to erect a little hut in the very centre of the circular area, above a large flat stone which was permanently planted there. This hut was made conical, and perfectly close, except an opening at the top, and another at one side, toward the east, which was temporarily closed with a mat, woven of palm-bark. I looked in without hinderance, and saw, piled up on the stone, a quantity of the dry twigs of the copal-tree, covered with the gum of the

same. The canoe full of liquor was dragged up to the edge of the circle, and litterally covered with white calabashes, of the size of an ordinary coffee-cup.

'At noon, precisely, all the people of the village hurried, without order, to the hut of the bridegroom's father. I joined in the crowd. We found the "happy swain" arrayed in his best, sitting demurely upon a bundle of articles, closely wrapped in a mat. The old men, to whom I have referred, formed in a line in front of him, and the eldest make a short address. When he had finished, the next followed, until each had had his say. The youth then got up quietly, shouldered his bundle, and, preceded by the old men, and followed by his father, marched off to the hut of the prospective bride. He put down his load before the closed door, and seated himself upon it in silence. The father then rapped at the door, which was partly opened by an old woman, who asked him what he wanted, to which he made some reply which did not appear satisfactory, when the door was shut in his face, and he took his seat beside his son. One of the old men then rapped, with precisely the same result, then the next, and so on. But the old women were obdurate. The bridegroom's father tried it again, but the she-dragons would not open the door. The old men then seemed to hold a council, at the end of which a couple of drums (made, as I have already explained by stretching a raw skin over a section of a hollow tree), and some rude flutes were sent for. The latter were made of pieces of bamboo, and were shaped somewhat like flageolets, each having a mouth-piece, and four stops. The sound was dull and monotonous, although not wholly unmusical.

'Certain musicians now appeared, and at once commenced playing on these instruments, breaking out, at long intervals, in a kind of supplicatory chant. After an hour or more of this soothing and rather sleepy kind of music, the inexorable door opened a little, and one of the female inmates glanced out with much affected timidity. Hereupon the musicians redoubled their efforts, and the bridegroom hastened to unroll his bundle. It contained a variety of articles supposed to be acceptable to the parents of the girl. There was, among other things, a *machete*, no inconsiderable present, when it is understood that the cost of one is generally a large *dory*, which it requires months of toil to fashion for the rough trunk of the gigantic *ceiba*. A string of gay glass beads was also produced from the bundle. All these articles were handed in to the women one by one, by the father of the groom. With every present the door opened wider and wider, until the mat was presented, when it was turned back to its utmost, revealing the bride arrayed in her "prettiest", seated on a crickery, at the remotest corner of the hut. The dragons, affected to be absorbed in examining the presents, when the bridegroom, watching his opportunity, dashed into the hut, to the apparent utter horror and dismay of the women; and, grasping the girl by the waist, shouldered her like a sack, and started off at a trot for the mystic circle, in the centre of the village. The women pursued, as if to overtake him and rescue the girl, uttering cries for help, while all the crowd huddled after. But the youth was too fast for them; he reached the ring, and lifting the veil



of the hut, disappeared within it. The women could not pass the circle, and all stopped short at its edge, and set up a chorus of despairing shrieks, while the men all gathered within the charmed ring, where they squatted themselves, row on row, facing outward. The old men alone remained standing, and a bit of lighted pine having meanwhile been brought, one of them approached the hut, lifted the mat, and, handing in the fire, made a brief speech to the inmates. A few seconds after an aromatic smoke curled up from the opening in the top of the little hut, from which I infer that the copal had been set on fire. What else happened, I am sure I do not know!

When they saw the smoke, the old women grew silent and expectant; but, by-and-by, when it subsided, they became suddenly gay, and "went in strong" for the festivities, which, up to this time, I must confess, I had thought rather slow. But here I may explain, that although the bridegroom has no choice in the selection of his wife, yet if he have reason for doing so, he may, while the copal is burning, take her in his arms, and cast her outside of the circle, in the open day, before the entire people, and thus rid himself of her forever. But in this case, the matter is carefully investigated by the old men, and woe betide the wretch who, by this public act, has impeached a girl wrongfully! Woe equally betide the girl who is proved to have been "put away" for good reasons. If, however, the copal burns out quietly, the groom is supposed to be satisfied, and the marriage is complete.

The copal, in this instance, burned out in the most satisfactory manner, and then the drums and flutes struck up a most energetic air, the music of which consisted of about eight notes, repeated with different degrees of rapidity, by way of giving variety to the melody. The men all kept their places, while I was installed in a seat of honor beside the old men. The women, who, as I have said, could not come within the circle, now commenced filling the calabashes from the canoes, and passing them to the squatting men, commencing with the ancients and the "distinguished guests" - for Antonio and my Poyer were included in our party. There was nothing said, but the women displayed the greatest activity in filling the emptied calabashes. I soon discovered that every body deliberately and in cold blood getting up of what Captain Drummer called the "big drunk!" That was part of the performance of the day, and the Indians went at it in the most orderly and expeditious manner. They wasted no time in coyish preliminaries - a practice which might be followed in more civilized countries, to the great economy, not only of time, but of the vinous. It was not from the love of the drink that the Towkas imbibed, I can well believe, for their *chicha* was bad to look at, and worse to taste.

With the fourth round of the calabashes, an occasional shout betrayed the effects of the *chicha* upon some of the weaker heads. These shouts became more and more frequent, and were sometimes uttered with a savage emphasis, which was rather startling. The musician, too, became more energetic, and as the sun declined, the excitement rose, until, unable to keep quiet

any longer, all hands got up, and joined in a slow, swinging step around the circle, beating with their knuckles on the empty calabashes, and joining at intervals in a kind of refrain, at the end of which every man struck the bottom of his calabash against that of his neighbor. Then, as they came round by the canoe, each one dipped his calabash full of the contents. The liquid thus taken up was drunk at a single draught, and then the dance went on, growing more rapid with every dip of the calabash. It got to the stage of a trot, and then a fast pace, and finally into something little short of a gallop, but still in perfect time. The rattling of the calabashes had now grown so rapid, as almost to be continuous, and the motion so involved and quick, that, as I watched it, I felt that kind of giddiness which one often experiences in watching the gliding of a swift current of water. This movement could not be kept up long, even with the aid of *chicha*, and whenever a dancer became exhausted, he would wheel out of line, and throw himself flat on his face on the ground. Finally, every one gave in, except two young fellows, who seemed determined to do, in their way, what other fast young men, in other countries, sometimes undertake to accomplish, viz.: drink each other down, or "under the table". They danced and drank, and were applauded by the women, but were so closely matched that it was impossible to tell which had the best chance of keeping it up the longest. In fact, each seemed to despair of the other, and, as if by a common impulse, both threw aside their calabashes, and resolved the contest from a trial of endurance into one of strength, leaping at each other's throats, and fastening their teeth like tigers in each other's flesh.

There was instantly a great uproar, and those of the men who had the ability to stand, clustered around the combatants in a confused mass, shouting at the stretch of their lungs, and evidently, as I thought, regarding it as a "free fight". But there was little damage done, for the old men, though emphatically "tight", had discretion enough to send the women for thongs, with which the pugnacious youths were incontinently bound hand and foot, and dragged close to the hut in the centre, and there left to cool themselves off as they were best able, no one taking the slightest notice of them. "Verily", I ejaculated to myself, "wisdom knoweth no country".

The dance which I have described was resumed from time to time, until it became quite dark, when the women brought a large number of pine splinters, of which the men each took one. These were lighted, and then the dancers paced up to the little hut, and each tore off one of the branches of which it was built, finally disclosing the newly-married couple sitting demurely side by side. As soon as the hut was demolished, the groom quietly took his bride on his back - literally "shouldering his responsibility!" - and marched off to the hut which had previously been built for his accommodation, escorted by the procession of men with torches. This was the final ceremony of the night, although some of the more dissipated youths returned to the canoe, and kept up a drumming, and piping, and dancing, until morning. Next day every body brought

presents of some kind to the newly-married pair, so as to give them a fair start in the world, and enable them to commence life on equal terms with the best in the village'.

Bard 1965 [1855]: 202-211

## APPENDIX B

The following is a bizarre and improbable account of a ritual witnessed by an English traveller in the Honduran Mosquitia, which the author interprets as a form of wife exchange.<sup>1</sup> Keenagh admits that neither he nor his companion spoke Miskitu, and he disarmingly warns his readers that 'neither the author nor Mr. Nigel MacDermott, who went with him, had the slightest scientific knowledge of any kind. For these reasons let no learned conclusions be drawn by the reader from the material of this book' (Keenagh 1938: xi). I include it for its curiosity value.

### From Peter Keenagh's "Mosquito Coast: an account of a journey through the jungles of Honduras"

'The Zambus of the Patuca are polygamous. But their polygamy is not the orderly marital pluralism of most primitive tribes; it is little more than sanctioned promiscuity. Wedding ceremonies take place four times a year, and in these the whole of the tribe takes part. Enormous dowries of gold dust and ornaments are prepared and there is feasting and revelry for three days, after which there follows a matrimonial General Post. The young are married for the first time, and only those girls who have proved themselves capable of child-bearing are allowed to compete. Among the senior members of the village wives are exchanged and bought and sold, on the quarterly wedding-days, according to the whims of the husbands and the prices they are able to pay for their friends' wives. And, let it be understood, exchange of wives at any other time but the four appointed 'wedding-days' is regarded as extremely immoral. As far as we could see the system was satisfactory, and caused no trouble.

'The occurrence of a Zambu wedding-day depends upon obscure calculations based upon the movements of the moon, which is regarded with a great deal of awe and reverence. We could not find out from *M'tsamu* exactly what the calculation was; our sign language was limited to expressing the more simple functions of life. But it was he who decided, on behalf of all the elders of the tribe, when it was time to change. And luckily he saw fit to have one while we were with him.

'There is nothing more impressive than the sight of a primitive people in a frenzy of ritual ecstasy, a group of human beings completely uninhibited and governed by instinct free from the warped temper of reason. There is nothing ludicrous about the wild natural force that moves them, so much stronger than the half-hearted passions of civilization, and it is a little frightening. *M'tsamu* not only allowed us to watch the wedding but encouraged us, as he said the Zambus would be

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<sup>1</sup> In fact it sounds startlingly like "Kiss and be gone" (Chapter Four).

honoured to have us present. When we agreed he did his fairly intelligent best to explain the customs and rites of his people.

'I think I have already pointed out that both Nigel and I, from the point of view of exploration, were extremely ignorant and had no scientific knowledge whatever. For that reason it is impossible for me to set down in orderly fashion those facts about the Zambus and the other tribes we were to meet later, which would be of use to ethnographers. The best I can do is to give a faithful account of the people as we saw them, and hope that among our random observations something intelligent will appear.

'When we finished our evening meal with *M'tsamu* the village was already deserted and an indistinct rhythmical chanting was in the air, echoing faintly through the trees so that it was impossible to tell from which side of us it came. As we stepped from *M'tsamu's* hut into the circle of the other huts it grew louder, lifted, and then faded again into a silence that was only broken by the throb of the jungle itself. *M'tsamu* led us slowly out of the village picking his way carefully over the great roots and vines that crossed the path. For twenty minutes or half an hour we made our way through the undergrowth with our backs to the village and the river, twisting this way and that until we had completely lost all sense of direction. *M'tsamu* never hesitated although neither Nigel nor I could see any trace of a path or trail. Before long the singing started up again and grew continually louder. By the time we reached the clearing, where the grass had been burned away over about twenty-five square yards, it seemed to fill the air completely, but it was still hard to tell from which direction the sounds came.

'When we stepped out of the shadow of the trees into the ceremonial clearing the chanting died away quickly and the Zambus who had been sitting around a large fire in the centre rose to their feet and greeted us with '*Naaksa*', '*naksaa*'! There must have been thirty or forty of them altogether, men and women, all from the seven huts of the village. *M'tsamu* told us that there were no other villages very near at the moment, for most of the Zambus were up-country, but that usually guests came from other tribes and entered the matrimonial market.

'The arrival of *M'tsamu* was obviously the signal for the start of the wedding ceremony. We stayed on the fringe of the gathering, unnoticed, while he took the position of honour in the centre. The fire burned fiercely, red flames from the dry Santa Maria wood licking up into the night and giving a coppery red tinge to the Zambus. They were naked save for the skins of tigers and deer, reserved for the more solemn ceremonials, which hung around their waists. Their black bodies were oiled, muscles shining smooth and strong in the firelight. It was the night of the full moon, but the sky was overcast and clouds covered the moon. *M'tsamu* held a consultation with the men around him in which we gathered that they decided to wait till the

clouds parted, for the moon plays an important part in their ritual. For a long time nothing happened, and we saw rows of flat black faces turned impassively upward. The silence was broken only by the sharp crackling of the fire. We waited.

'After the arrival of *M'tsamu* the *Zambus* had grown much quieter, and there were no more of the wild lilted shouts that had carried to us through the jungle as we left the village. During the interval of waiting for the moon they remained silent, but there was a continual shuffling of bare feet upon the dry burnt grass, and we saw that they were arranging themselves in orderly circles around the central fire, women in the middle and men surrounding them in two rings. Finally they were quiet, and the depth of that expectant silence is a thing that I cannot describe. From miles around came the occasional noises of the tropical jungle, carrying crystal-clear through the hot night air. A raucous chatter from a baboon, the grunt of a boar and the flapping of heavy wings stood out vividly upon the incessant throbbing background croak of frogs and insects. The mosquitoes were swarming thick, but apparently the oiled bodies of the *Zambus* were immune.

I do not know how long we stood in silence watching the clearing and waiting for the moon to appear. It seemed like hours. We stood motionless and quiet, occasionally rubbing oil on our faces to keep the insects away. *M'tsamu* stood in the centre of the circles next to the fire, his face like the others turned to the sky.

The rift in the clouds came suddenly, and the pale rays of the moon broke through, giving a frigid tone to the red lights of the great fire. *M'tsamu* threw his arms upward in a gesture of embrace. The men rose to their feet and began a wild chant.

There was nothing Indian in the sound of that song: it was pure African. At first it rose and fell slowly in a long lament, gradually growing quicker as the full disc of the moon appeared, till finally it was quick and rhythmical and the men stamped their feet in time as they sang. The chant itself was a monotonous theme on about four notes, but the words seemed endless.

From time to time a solo voice broke in with a few high-pitched words, then came the chorus again. As the song went on it grew faster and more animated, and the stolid reserve which is so characteristic of Indian tribes gave place to the spontaneity of their black blood. Gradually they were working up to a frenzy, and from their faces we could see that the men were quite oblivious of everything but the song. Finally the gentle shuffling of feet became a dance, and the two circles moved around the fire in opposite directions, tossing their heads back and waving their arms. The skins of their loin-cloths, dull yellows and browns, contrasted vividly with the polished jet of their naked muscles.

'During the development of the ritual dance around the fire the women sat silent and still, eyes fixed on the ground. Like the men they wore loin clothes, and above the waist nothing. For the ceremony, *M'tsamu* had told us, they were forbidden to wear any kind of ornament or decoration.

'Now that the first part of the ceremony was approaching its climax, we began to wonder what was to come. *M'tsamu* had told us nothing, beyond the fact that wives would be taken and exchanged. The dancing and singing were obviously no more than preliminaries. As the excitement grew we came forward into the edge of the clearing, since we were by now accepted in the village and *M'tsamu* himself had invited us to the wedding.

When the dance was at its height *M'tsamu* threw several handfuls of salt on the fire. As the flames turned yellow and leaped high into the air, the singing ceased suddenly and the men fell panting to the ground. Only *M'tsamu* remained standing, and there was silence. He held up his hand.

"*Naksaa, a moia na'o naksaa?*" (Greeting, O why do you come here?) In chorus came the answer:

"*Naksaa, a na nyakaa mao!*" (Is it not the time of the full moon?)

*M'tsamu* threw another handful of salt upon the fire.

"*Na a nyakaa mao!* (It is the time of full moon!)"<sup>2</sup>

'At the end of this ritual of question and answer came silence again, then *M'tsamu* rose to his feet once more and made a very long speech of which we understood nothing. At first there was general approval, but after a few minutes the Zambus grew tired of listening and hushed conversations were started all over the clearing. By the end of the speech there was a considerable chatter, and *M'tsamu*, in common with many distinguished old gentlemen in more advanced parts of the world, found himself addressing an audience as restless as it was bored. The Zambus were impatient for the next part of the ceremony to begin.

'What happened next was very hard to follow, for our knowledge of the Zambu dialect was practically nil, and such information as we had received from *M'tsamu* had been imparted slowly and carefully with frequent excursions into sign-language and complicated representations made of pebbles and bits of stick. It seemed that there was from that moment no order about the ceremony. All the men began to shriek and gesticulate, holding varying numbers of fingers aloft to indicate what they were prepared to sacrifice from their own property in exchange for the wife

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<sup>2</sup> Apart from the common Miskitu greeting "naksaa" (literally 'how is it?'). I do not recognise these utterances as being anything like spoken Miskitu.

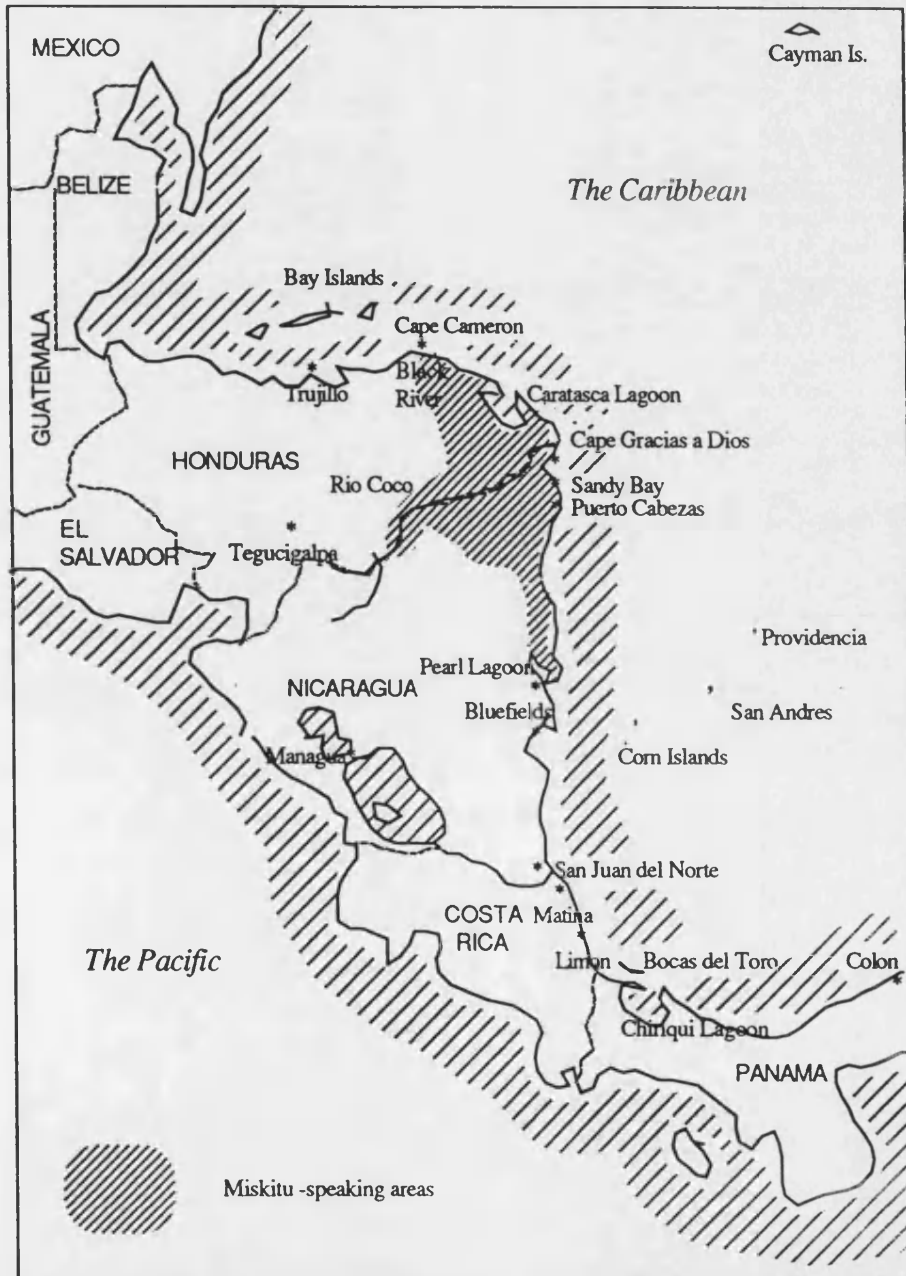
of someone on the other side of the circle. It rather reminded one of a busy day on the stock exchange, and some of the transactions involved were suitably complicated: for instance, a man might be willing to buy another man's wife for his own plus a certain stipend, or he might wish to get rid of his own wife to some third party to get hold of enough salt to buy the bride of his fancy. The women, with maidenly modesty, sat in the middle with bowed heads. Apparently the Zambu woman has nothing to say in the disposition of her affections: but one hates to think of what happens to a Zambu who does his best to get rid of his wife, only to find that he must go back to her because he is short of money! A woman once married cannot be put aside unless a new husband is found for her: but there is nothing to stop the Zambu man, if he is rich enough, from having a dozen wives reserved for himself. Young brides are bought for the first time (often at an incredibly early age) by negotiation with their fathers, who adjust their prices carefully according to the supply and demand. There is almost always a considerable shortage of women in any Zambu community.

The frenzied bartering went on steadily for a long time, while *M'tsamu* stood in the centre of the clearing looking benevolently patriarchal. He took no active part in the market, but occasionally shouted a few words to one man or another. There were a great many jokes made and a great deal of raucous laughter. Little by little, as the men reach satisfactory agreements about their women-folk, couples began to steal away from the fire and disappear into the jungle. Presently even the disappointed men had made off towards the village, and we were left alone with *M'tsamu*.

There was still apparently work for him to do. In the strange vague ritual that is the religion of the Patuca Zambus, it is decreed that the ground upon which a wedding ceremony takes place is unclean and must be purified. It is for that reason that the full-moon ceremonies take place away from the villages, otherwise the impurity of the ground might blight the fruits of the weddings made upon it. *M'tsamu* scraped the ashes from the edge of the fire and scattered them wide over the clearing, chanting quietly to himself. He went about his business slowly and methodically, making sure that ashes had fallen on all the ground that had been within the circles. When it was done he pulled out his bag of salt and emptied the remains of it into the dying embers of the fire. For a few minutes he stood staring into them, still chanting his prayer of purification. The ceremony was over, and the marriage made that night must last for three more months.

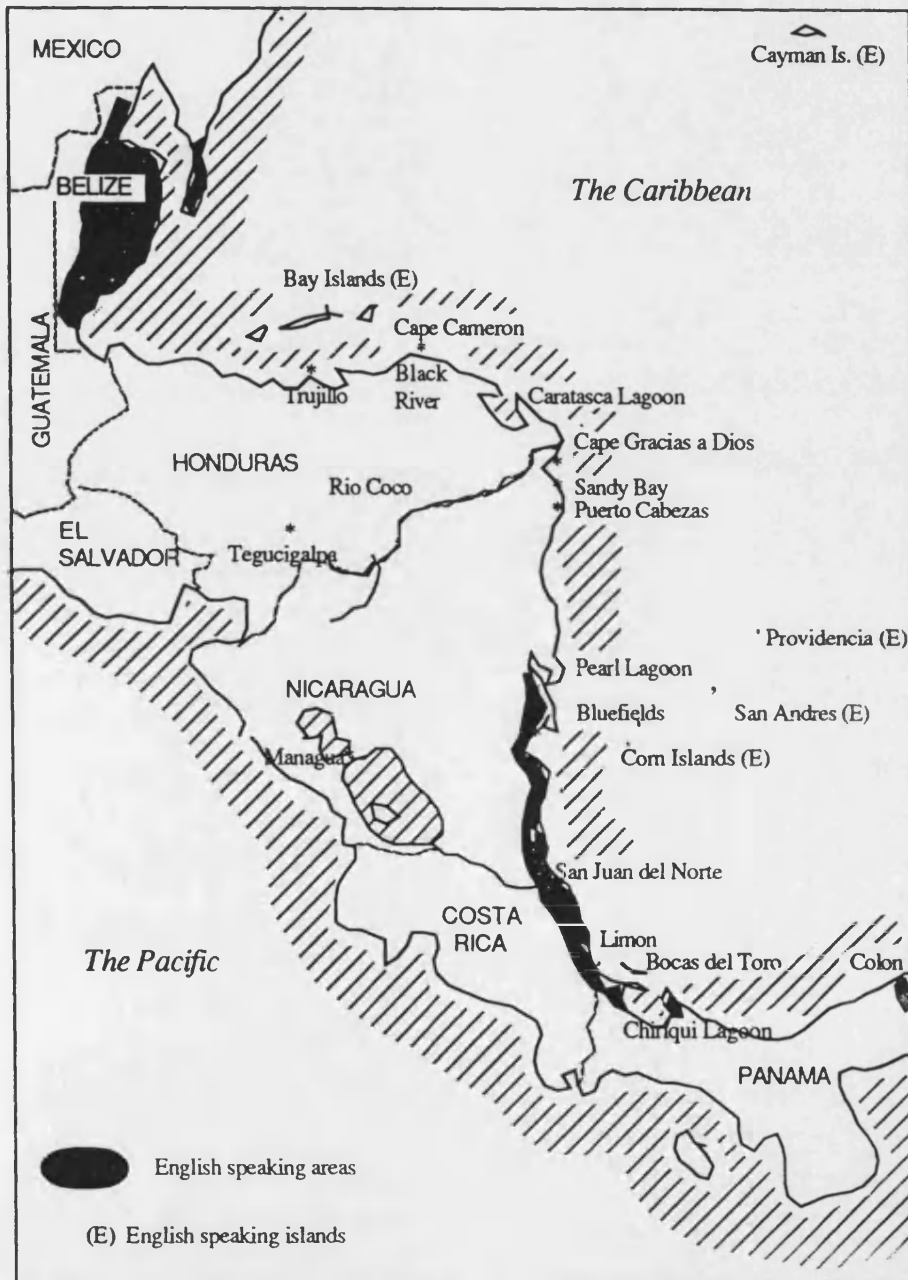
'We had plenty of reason to suppose, from what we learned during our days with *M'tsamu*, that the Zambus took their quarterly weddings very seriously indeed.'





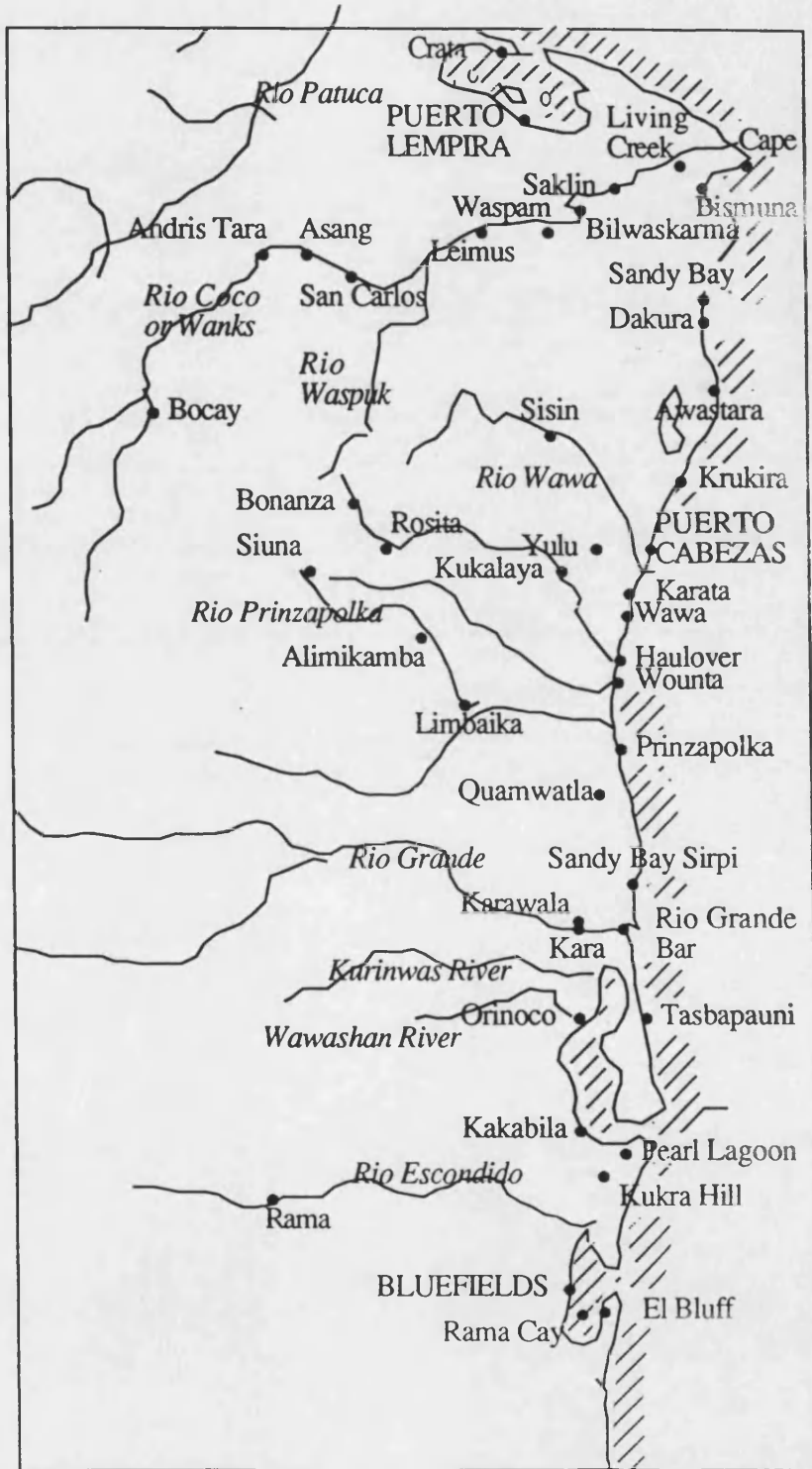
Areas of Miskitu speaking settlement in Central America

Map 1

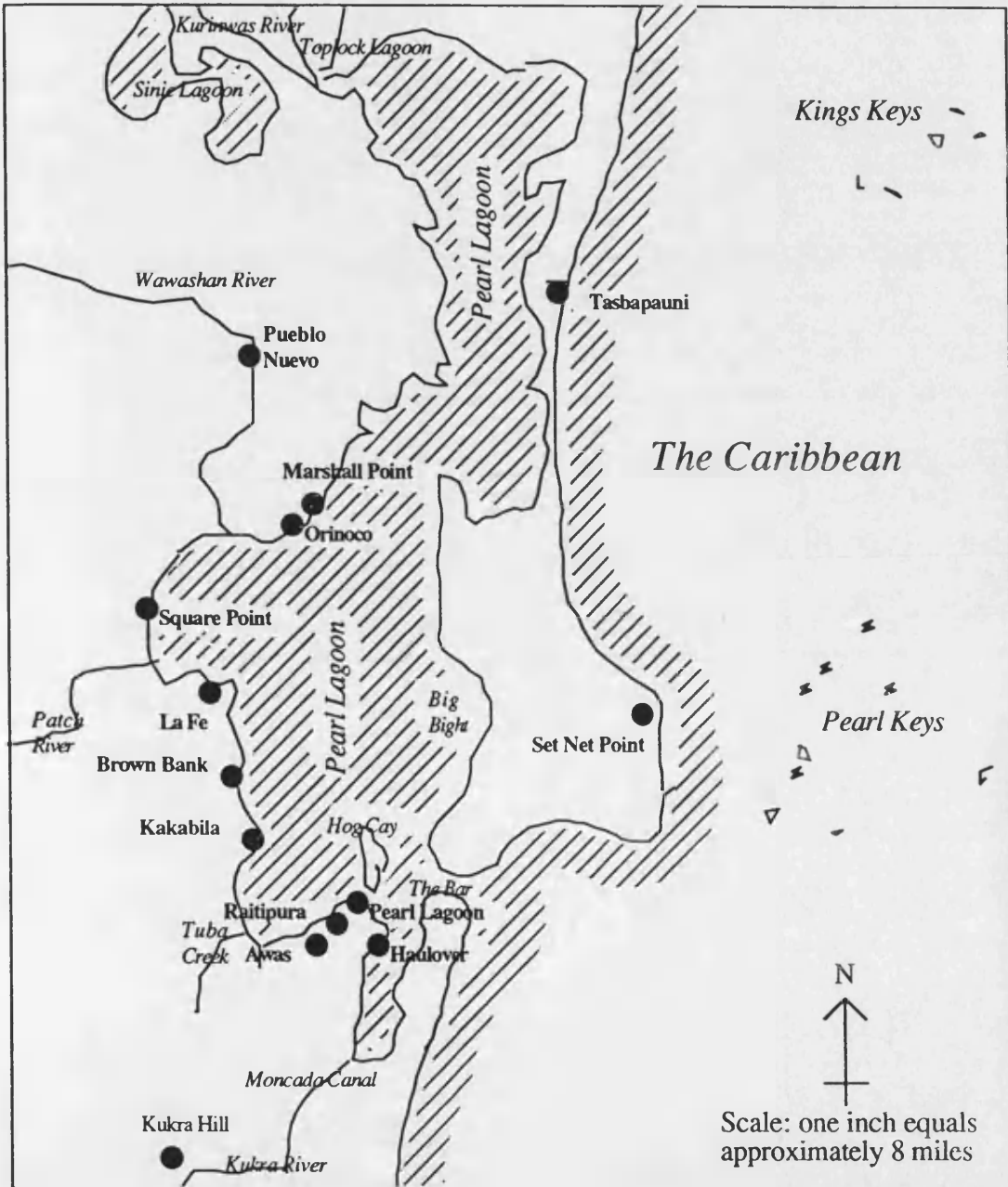


Areas of English speaking settlement in Central America

Map 2



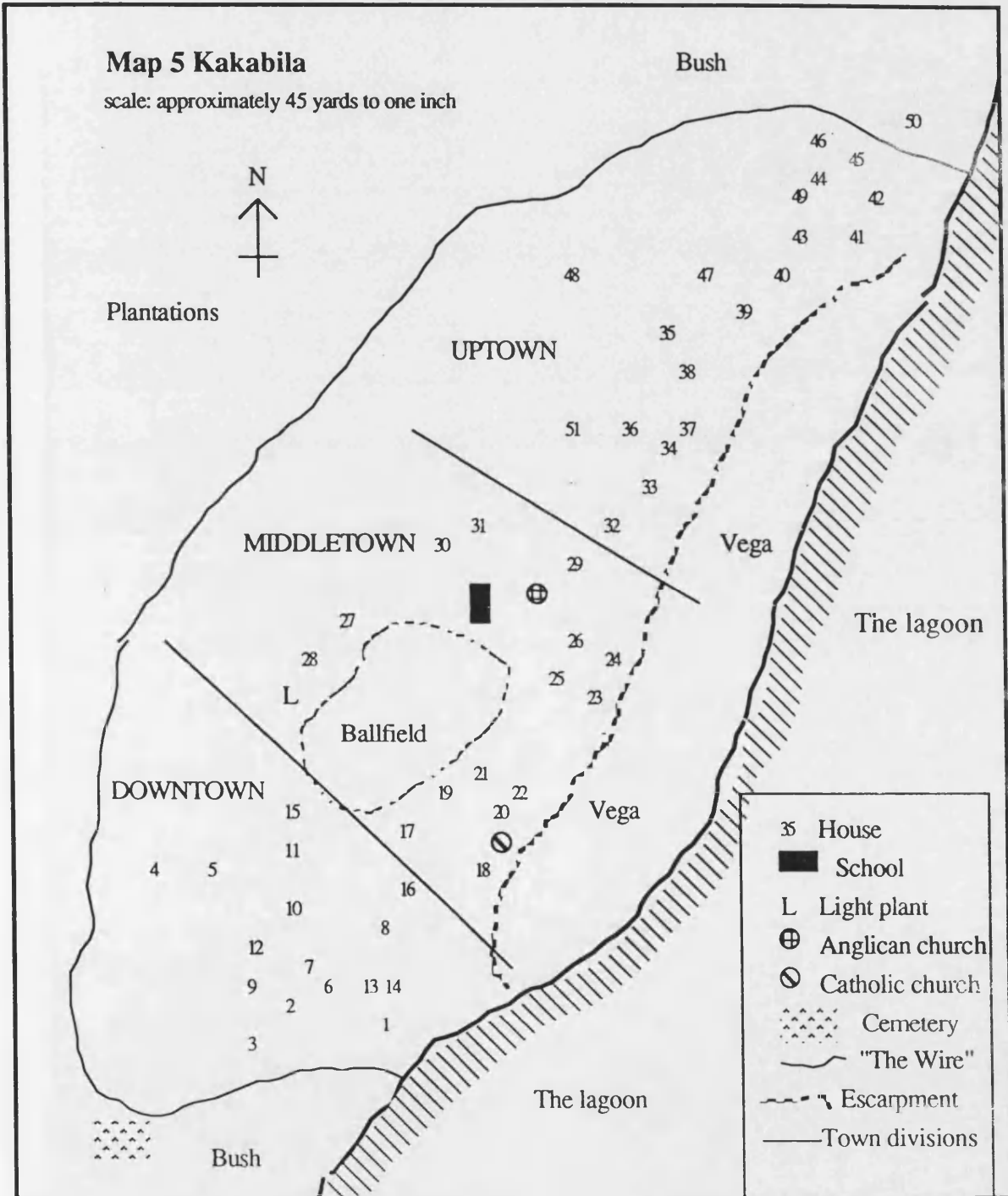
Map 3 The Mosquito Coast



Map 4 The Pearl Lagoon basin

**Map 5 Kakabila**

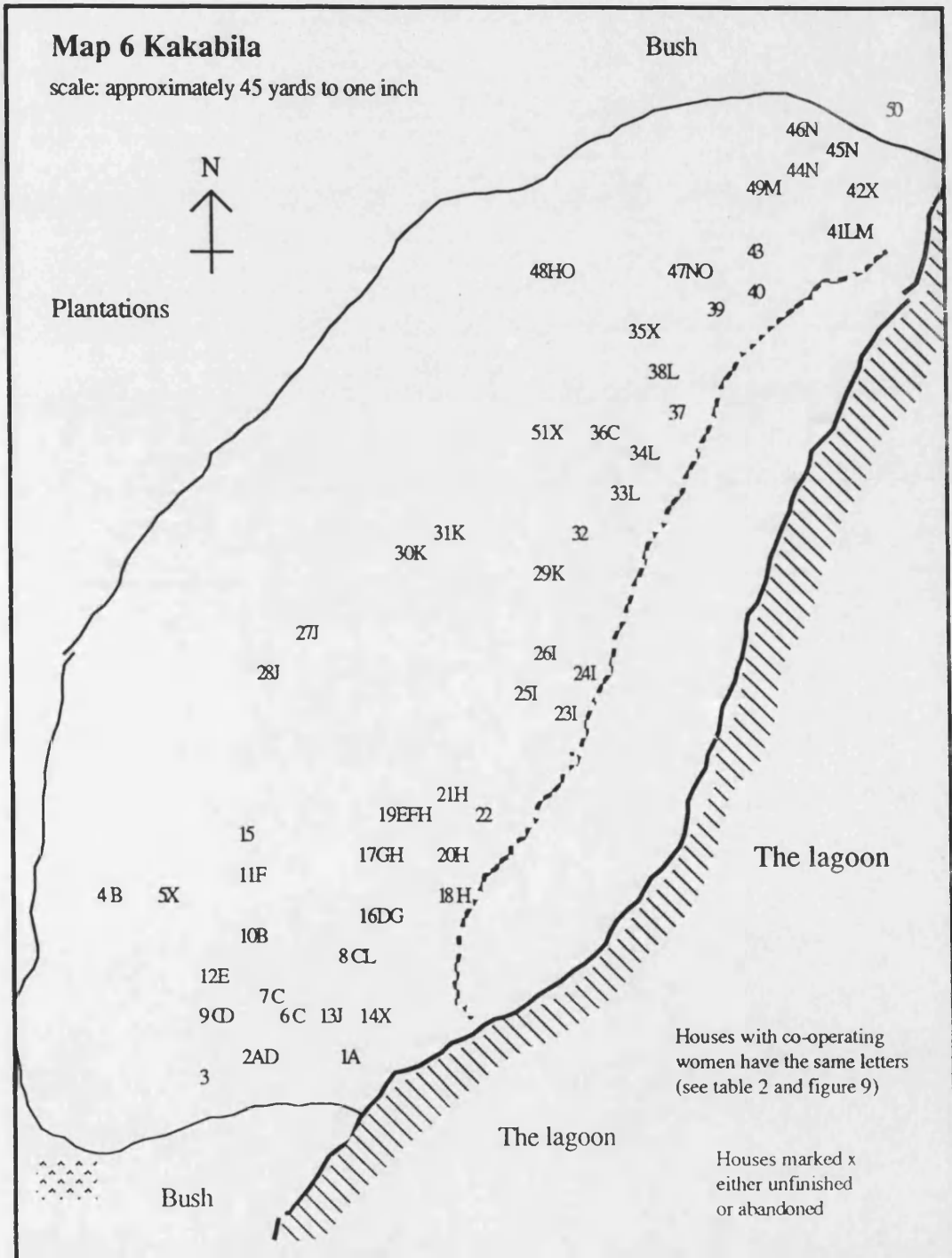
scale: approximately 45 yards to one inch



- 35 House
- School
- L Light plant
- ⊕ Anglican church
- ⊙ Catholic church
- ⋯ Cemetery
- ~ "The Wire"
- - - Escarpment
- Town divisions

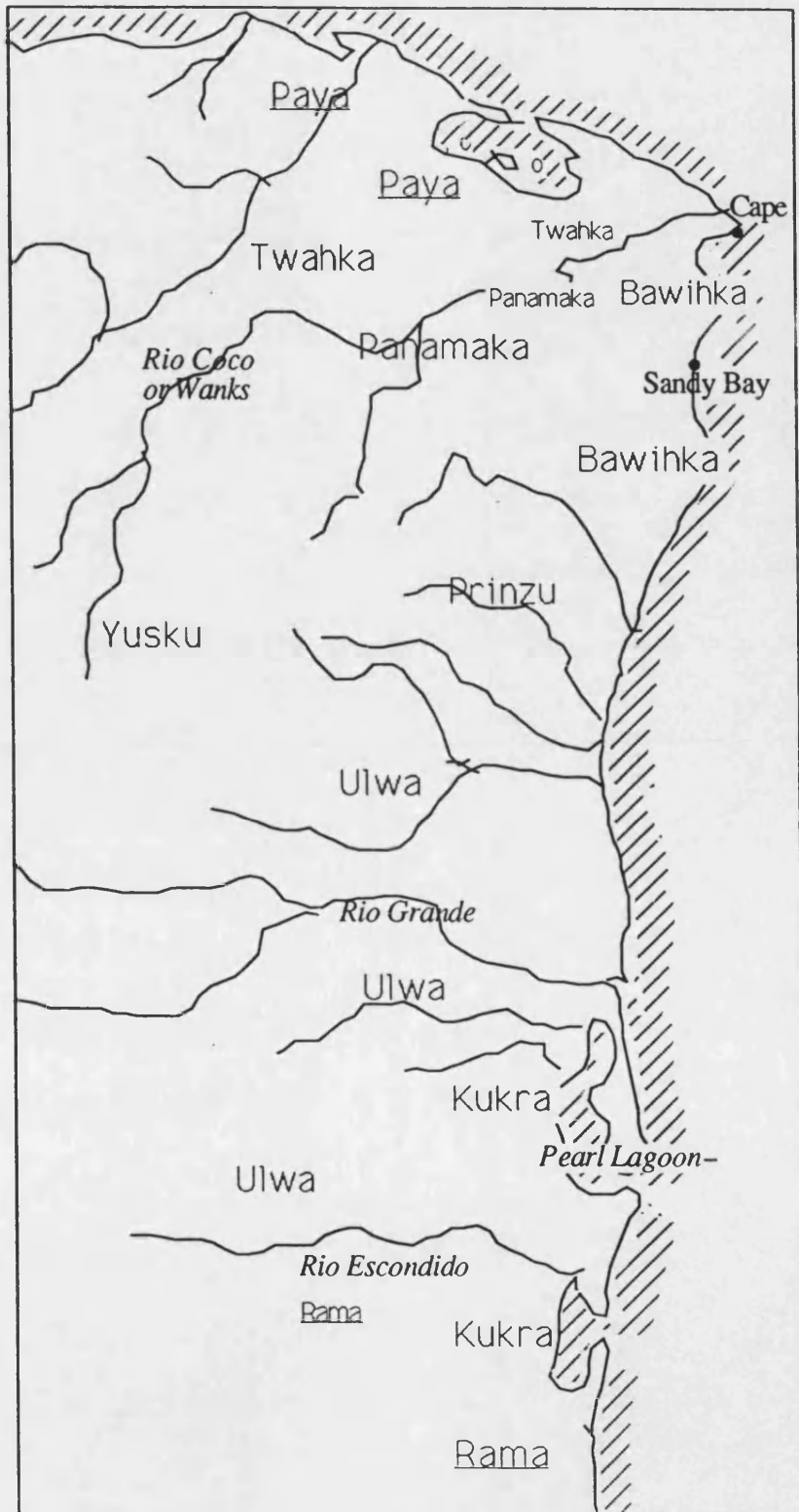
### Map 6 Kakabila

scale: approximately 45 yards to one inch



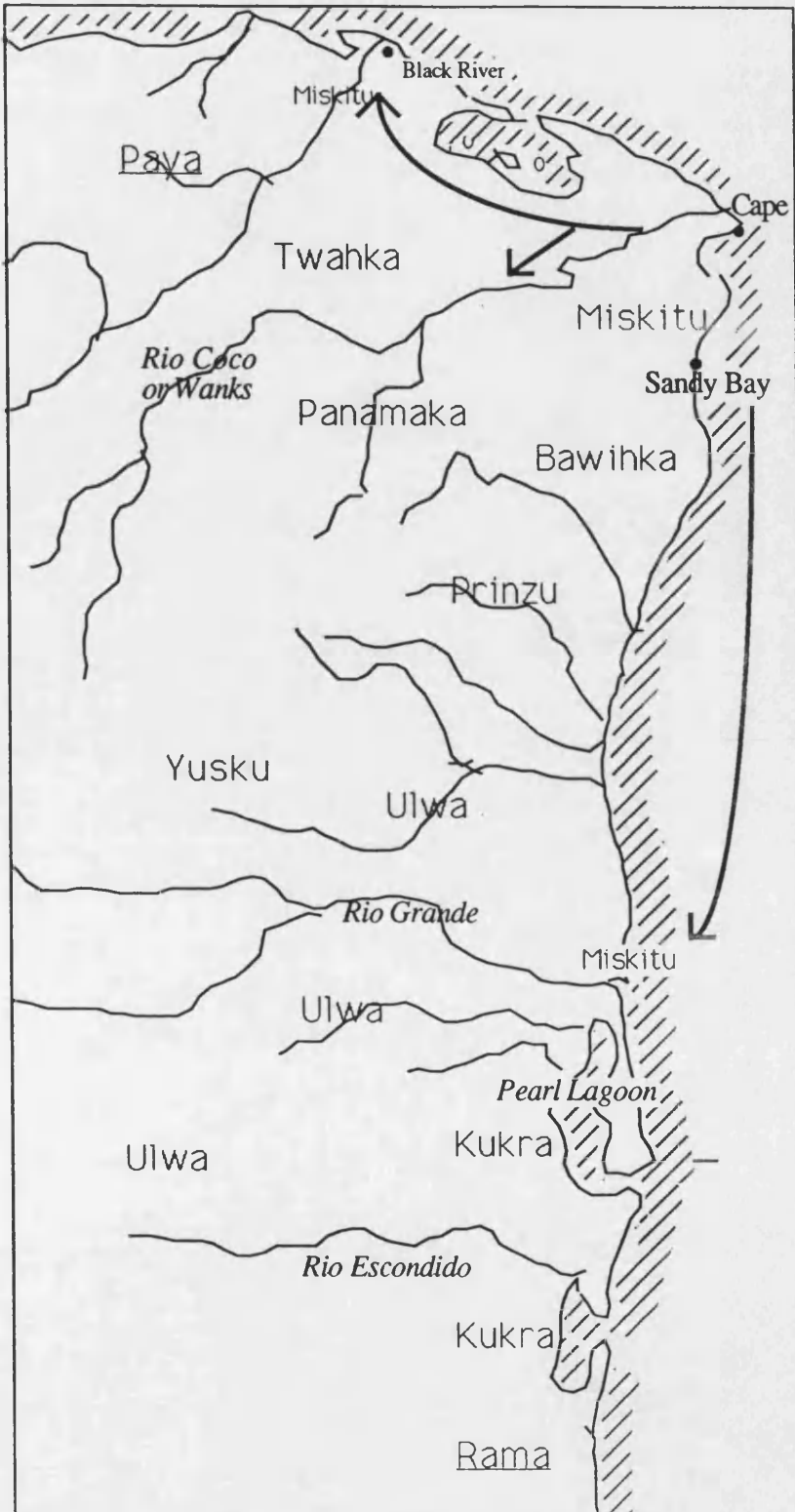
Houses with co-operating women have the same letters (see table 2 and figure 9)

Houses marked x either unfinished or abandoned



The probable location of Indian groups circa 1600  
 Names of non-Sumu groups are underlined

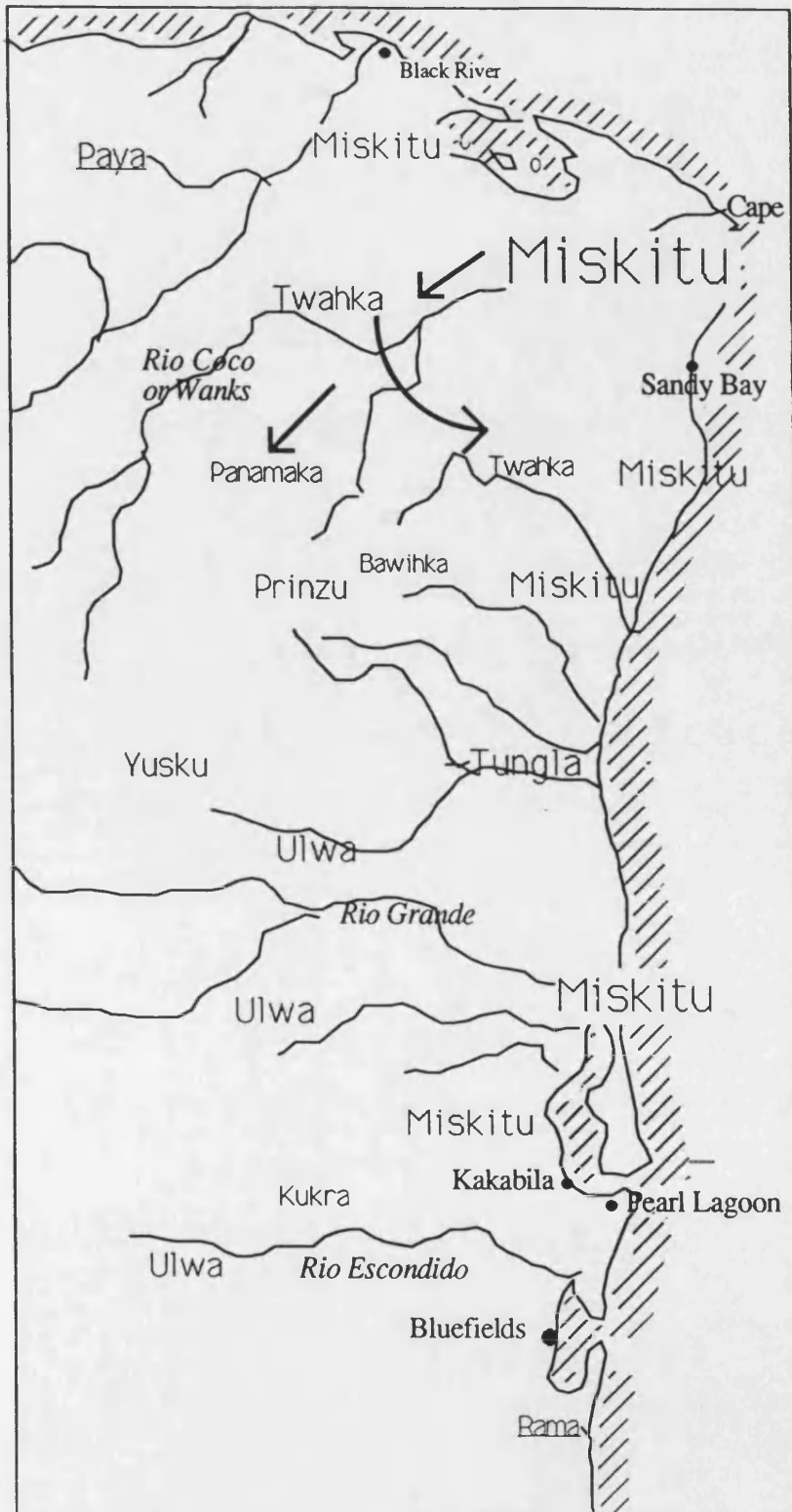
Map 7



Miskitu expansion 1700 - 1750  
Names of non-Sumu groups are underlined

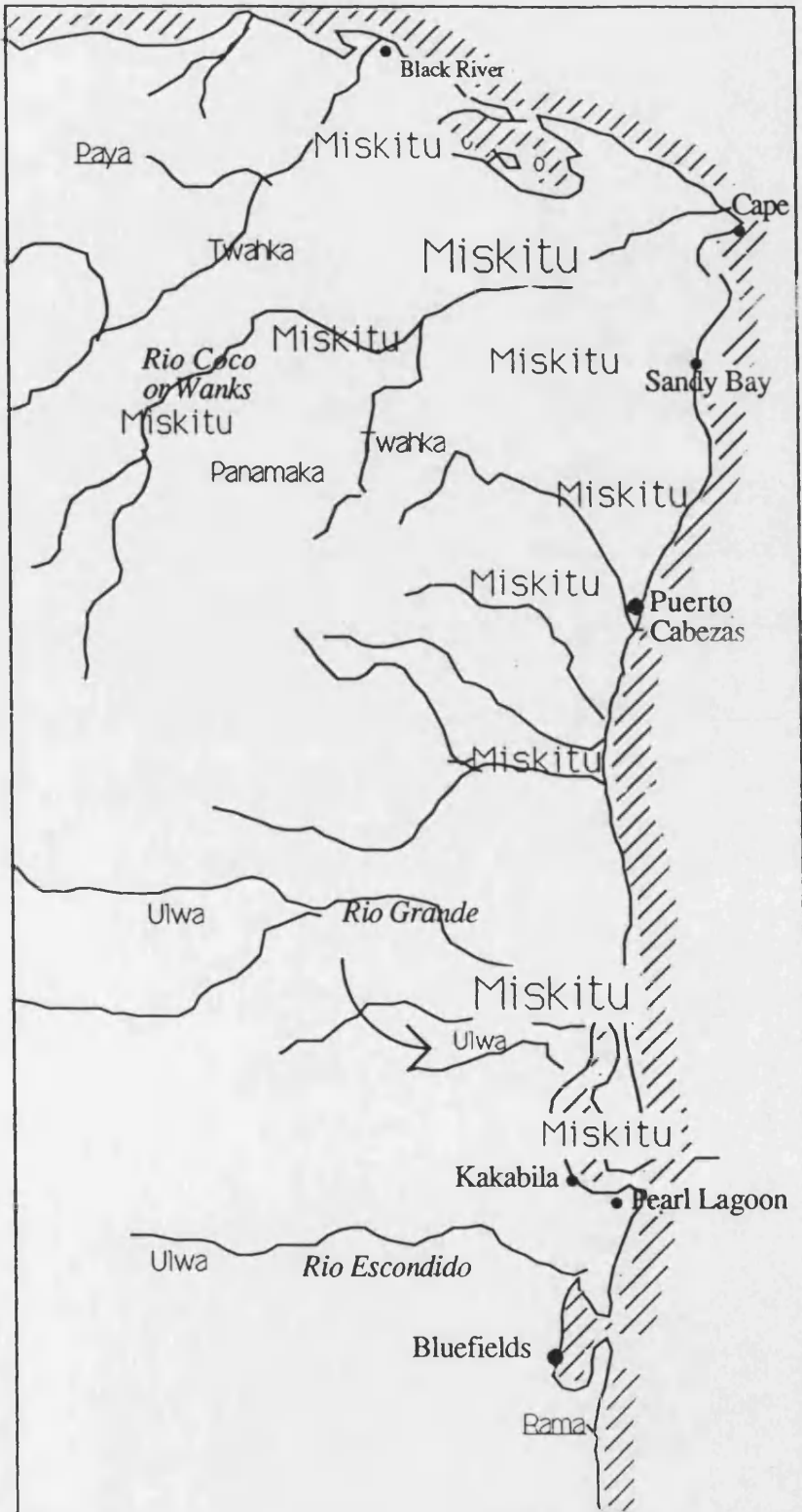
Map 8





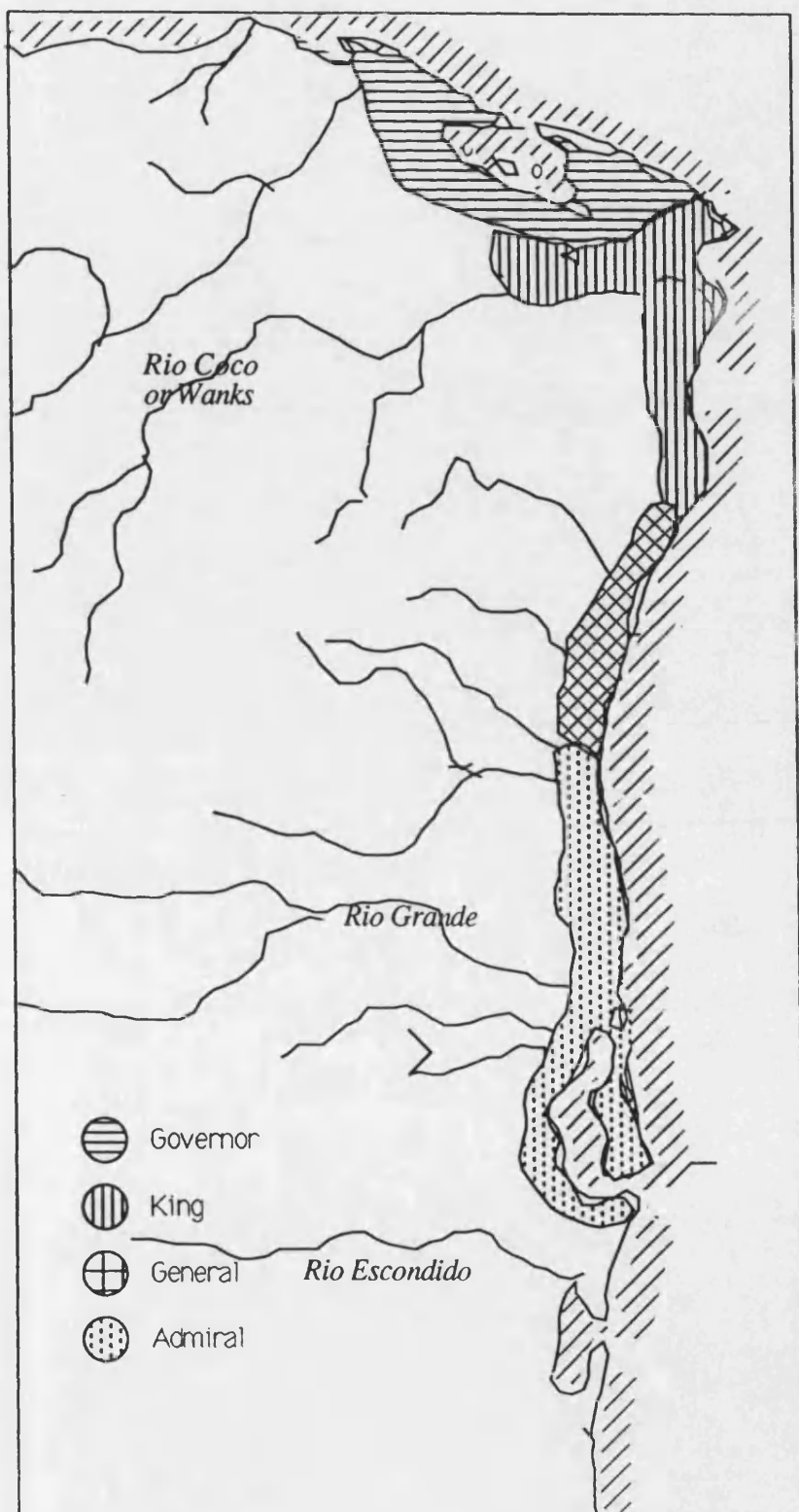
Miskitu expansion and Sumu retreat up to 1850  
 Names of non-Sumu groups are underlined

Map 9



Location of the Miskitu and other Indian groups in 1995  
 The names of non-Sumu groups are underlined

Map 10



Approximate ranges of the followings of the principal titled Miskitu chiefs during the 18th century

Map 11

	LINEAL	CO-LINEAL	ABLINEAL
+2	grandmother (MM, FM) grandfather (MF, FF)	auntie (PPZ) uncle (PPB)	
+1	mother (M) father (F)	auntie (PZ) uncle (PB)	auntie (PPD) uncle (PPS) cousin (PPC)
0	EGO	brother (B) sister (Z)	cousin (PPCC)
-1	daughter (D) son (S)	nephew (GS, GCS)  niece (GD, GCD)	cousin (PPCCC) nephew (PPCCS) niece (PPCCD)
-2	grannie (CC) grandson (CS) granddaughter (CD)		

KEY: F=father, M=mother, S=son, D=daughter, Z=sister, B=brother, P=parent, C=child, G=sibling

Figure 1 English language relationship terms of reference for consanguineal kin in Kakabila. Note that the terms "uncle" and "aunt" are never used for spouses of parents' siblings. The Miskitu terms "tahti maia" (uncle's wife) and "anti maia" (aunt's wife) are used instead.

	LINEAL	CO-LINEAL	
+2	kuka (MM, FM) dama (MF, FF)	anti (PPZ) tahti, dinma* (PPB)	ABLINEAL
+1	momika, yapti (M) popika, aisa (F)	anti (PZ) tahti (PB)	anti (PPD) tahti (PPS) kosin (PPC)
0	EGO	muihni (same sex G) lakra (opposite sex G) breda (B) sista (Z)	kosin (PPCC)
-1	lupia mairin (D) lupia waikna (S)	nefyu, tubani (GS, GCS)	kosin (PPCCC) nefyu, tubani (PPCCS) nis, yamsi (PPCCD)
-2	mula (CC)	nis, yamsi (GD, GCD)	

KEY: F=father, M=mother, S=son, D=daughter, Z=sister, B=brother,  
P=parent, C=child, G=sibling

\* "Dinma" was reported as extinct in Asang by Helms (1971: 70). This was formerly a reciprocal term between "a man's sister's daughter's child; and vice versa a maternal grandmother's brother" (Heath 1927:82). "Dinma" was still occasionally used in Kakabila during my fieldwork. The meaning of dinma, however, was different to that reported by Heath, and this term was never used as a reciprocal.

Figure 2 Relationship terms of reference for consanguineal kin in Kakabila.

PARALLEL

LINEAL

CROSS

+2	kuka (female)      dama (male)	
+1	anti, yapti diura (MZ) rapia (FB)	yapti, momika (M) popika, aisa (F)
0	lakra (opposite sex) muihni (same sex) (incl. uterine siblings)	EGO
-1	lupia diura	tubani (male - male EGO) yamsi (female- male EGO) saiwra (female EGO)
	-2	mula

KEY: F=father, M=mother, S=son, D=daughter, Z=sister, B=brother

Around a ninety or so years ago, the cross-cousin terms in EGO's generation, "waika(t)", "klua" and "kauhka", came to be replaced by the terms "muihni" and "lakra", previously used exclusively for parallel-cousins and uterine siblings. .

Figure 3 Relationship terms of reference used in Asang and other present-day "up the coast" Miskitu villages, based on Helms findings and analysis (1971: 59-70), and supported by my own limited observations.

	PARALLEL	LINEAL	CROSS
+2	kuka (female)      dama (male)		
+1	anti, yapti diura (MZ) rapia, aisa diura (FB)	yapti, momika (M) popika, aisa (F)	tahka, aisa diura (FZ) tahti (MB)
0	lakra (opposite sex) muihni (same sex) (incl. uterine siblings)	EGO	klua (opp. sex) waikat (same sex - male) kauhka (same sex - female)
-1	lupia diura	lupia waikna (S) lupia mairin (D)	tubani (male - male EGO) yamsi (female- male EGO) saiwra (female EGO)
	-2	mula	

KEY: F=father, M=mother, S=son, D=daughter, Z=sister, B=brother

Figure 4 Relationship terms of reference used at one time in "up the coast" Miskitu villages, based on Helms' ethnography and interpretations of Ziock (1894), Heath (1927) and Heath and Marx (1961) (Helms 1971: 59-70).

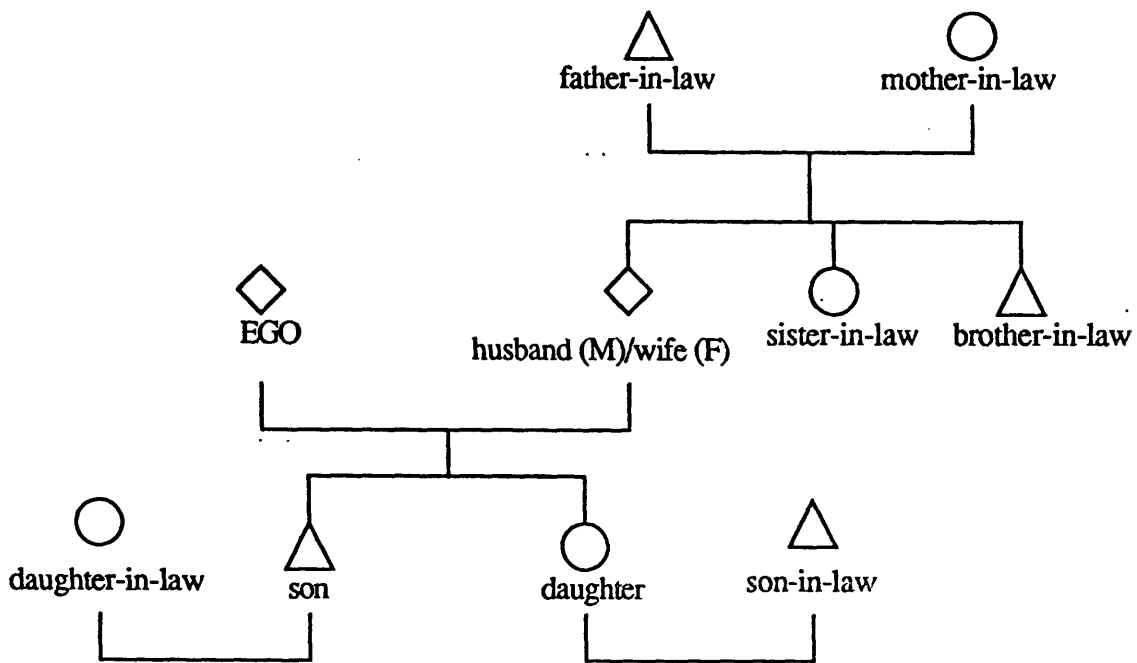
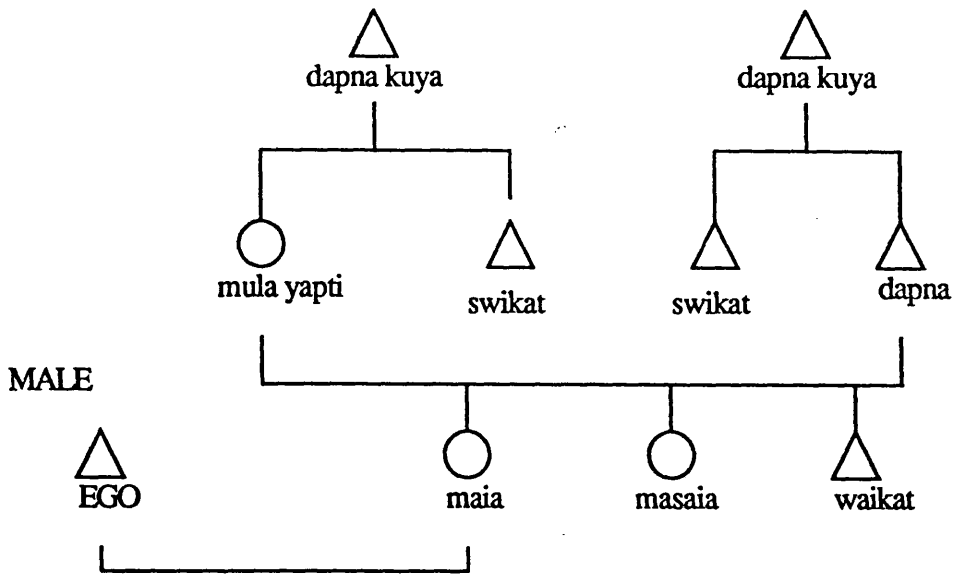


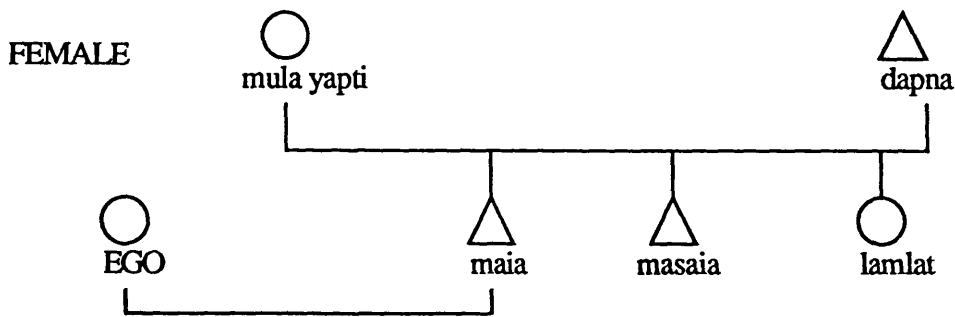
Figure 5 English language relationship terms for affines as used in Kakabila





"swikat" = also potentially anyone whom EGO's wife calls "kosin" (if in her own or ascending generation) in which case "swikat kuya" is more correct

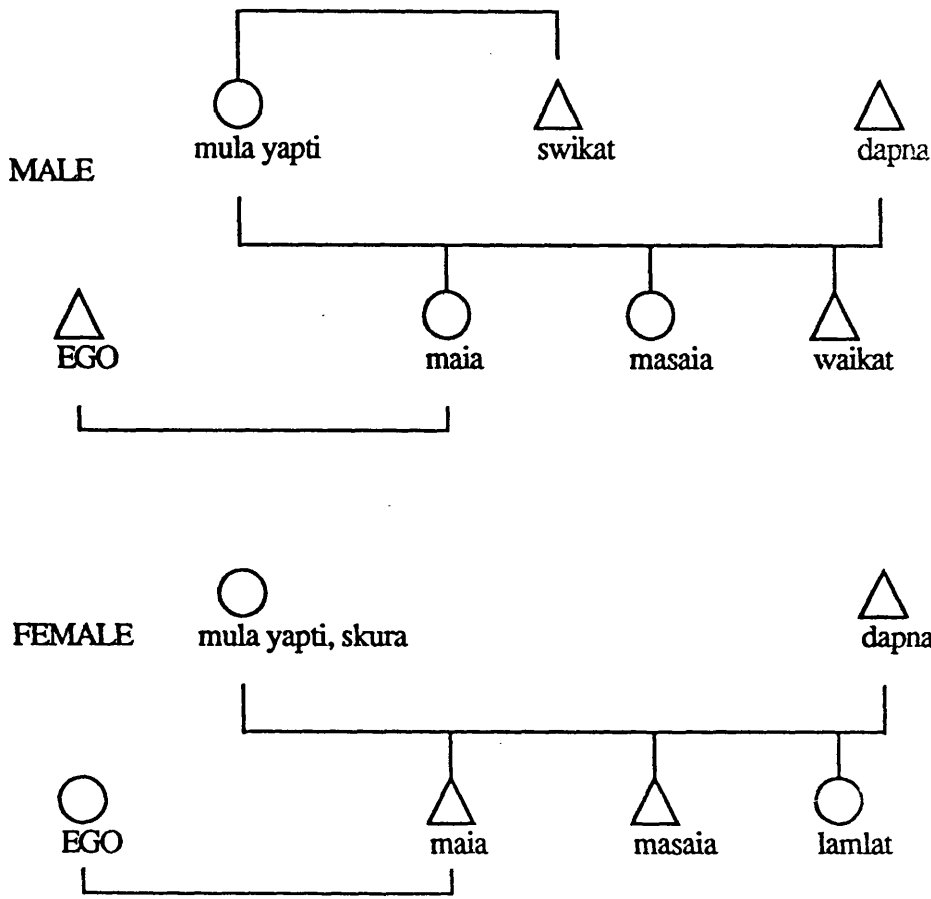
"masaia" = also potentially anyone whom ego's wife calls "sista", "muihni", matrilateral "anti" or matrilateral "kosin" (if in her own or ascending generation) in which cases "masaia kuya" is more strictly speaking correct



"masaia" = also potentially anyone whom ego's husband calls "tahti" or "kosin" (if in his own or ascending generation), in these cases strictly speaking "masaia kuya"

"lamlat" = also occasionally used to refer to one whom ego's husband calls "anti" or "kosin" (if in his own or ascending generation), in which case "lamlat kuya" is more correct

Figure 6 Relationship terms for affines in Kakabila  
All terms are reciprocals



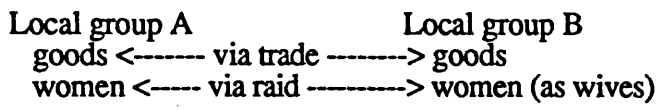
Helms gives the term "lisang" as a term used by parent-in-law to parent-in-law after the birth of a mutual grandchild.

All terms are reciprocals except "skura" (indicated in Heath and Marx 1983: 102)

Figure 7. Relationship terms for affines in "up the coast" Miskitu villages, primarily based on Helms (1971: 102-104).

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Pre-1700



Post-1700

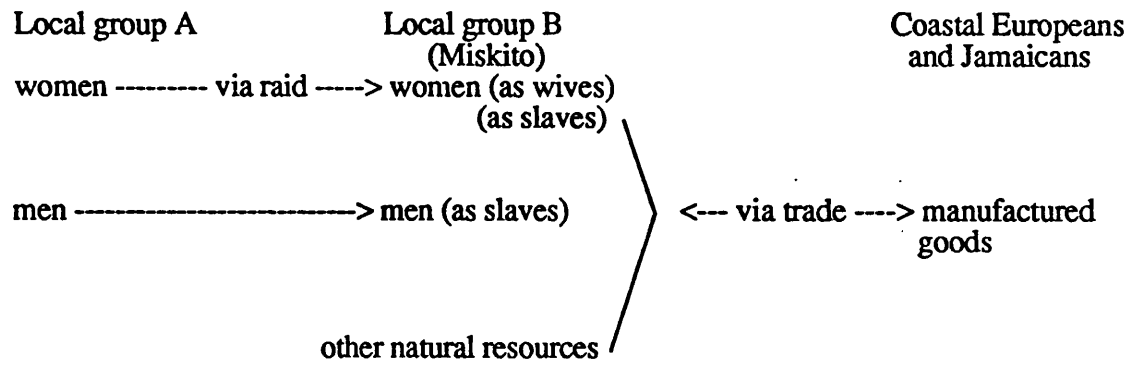


Figure 8 Exchange patterns (reproduced from Helms 1983: 188)

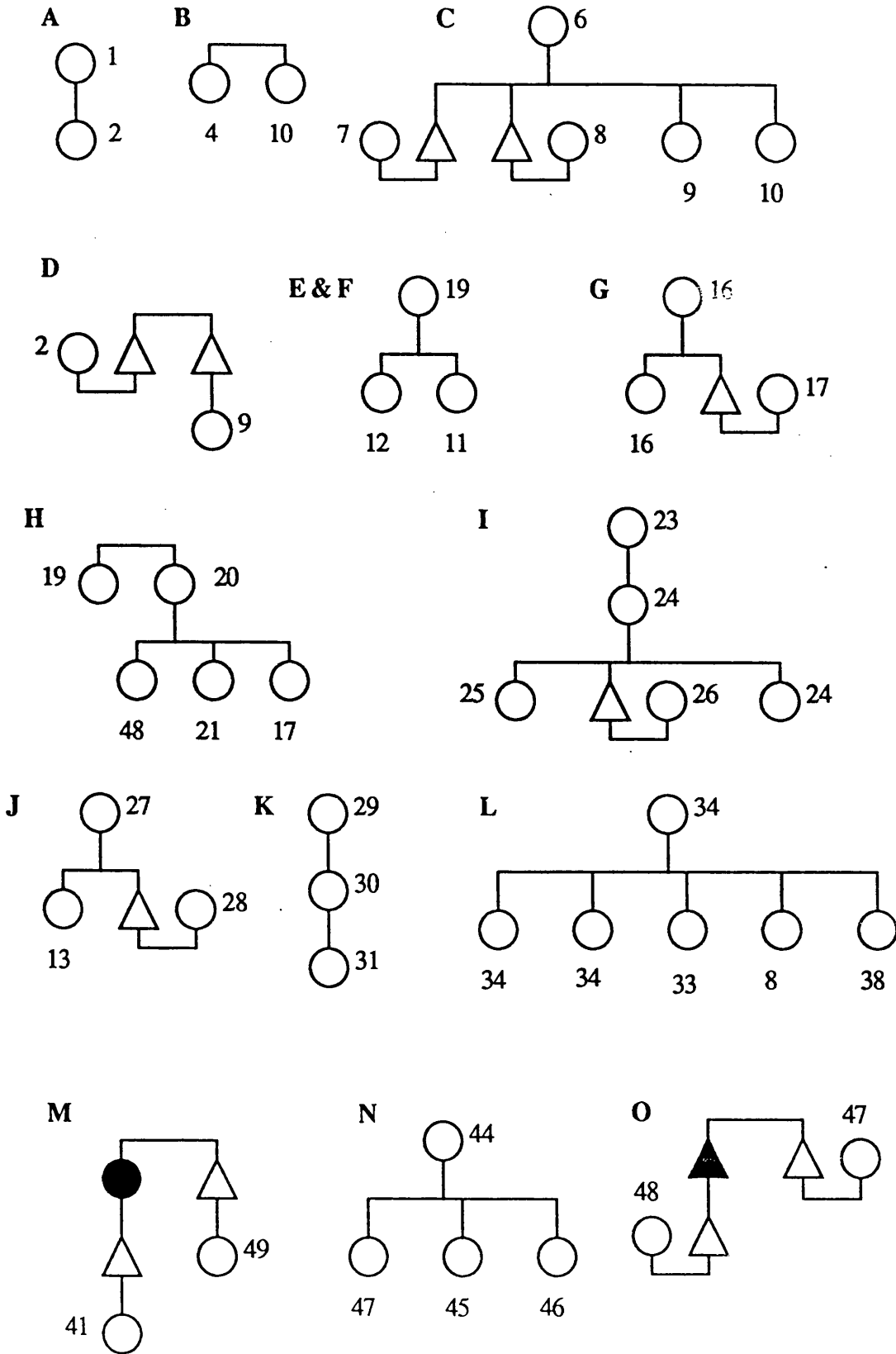
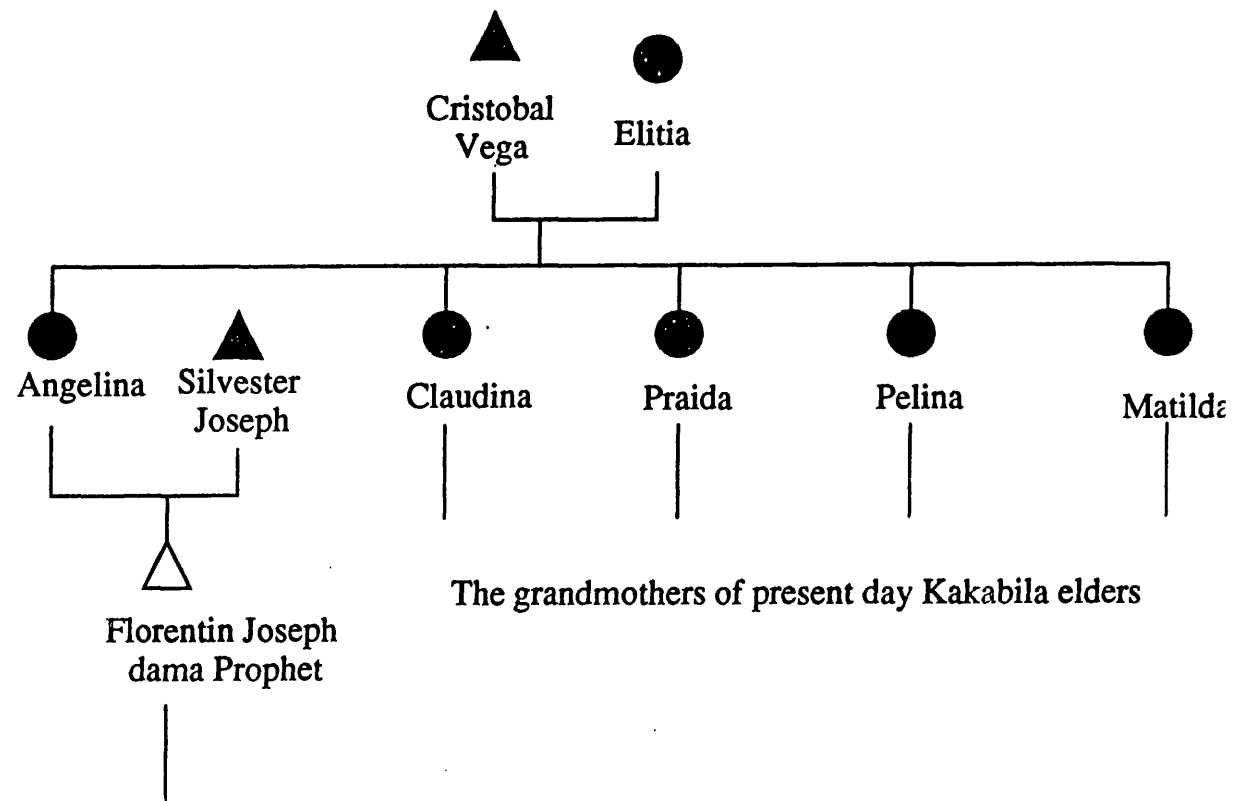


Figure 9 Relationships between women in co-operating houses

Figure 10 The founders and original inhabitants of Kakabila



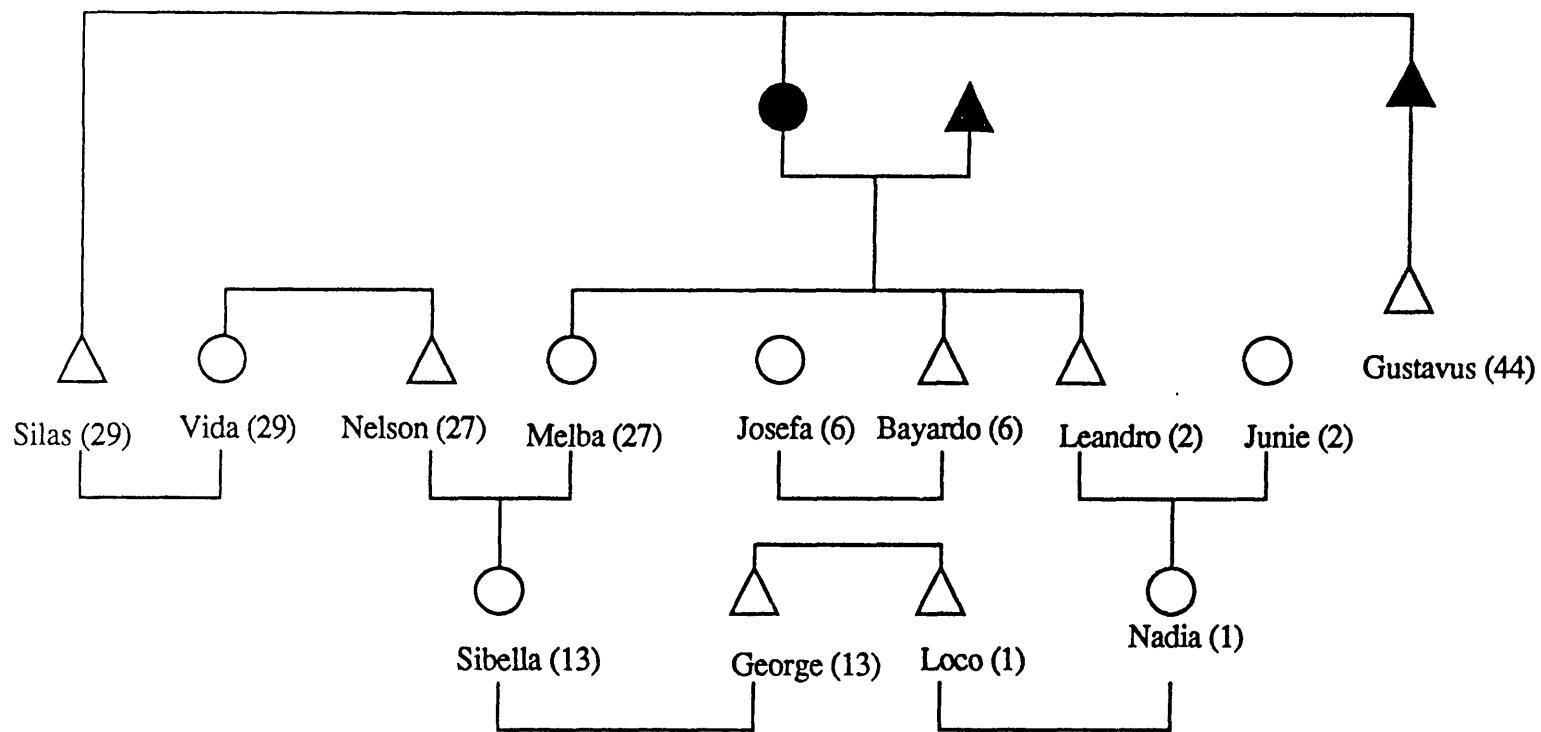


Figure 11

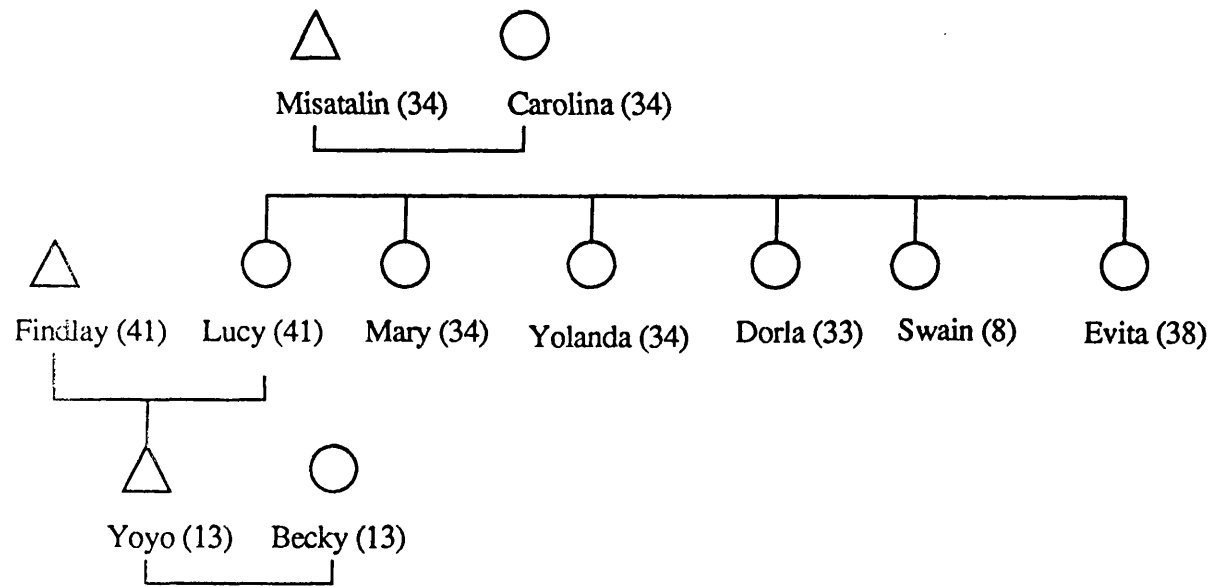


Figure 12

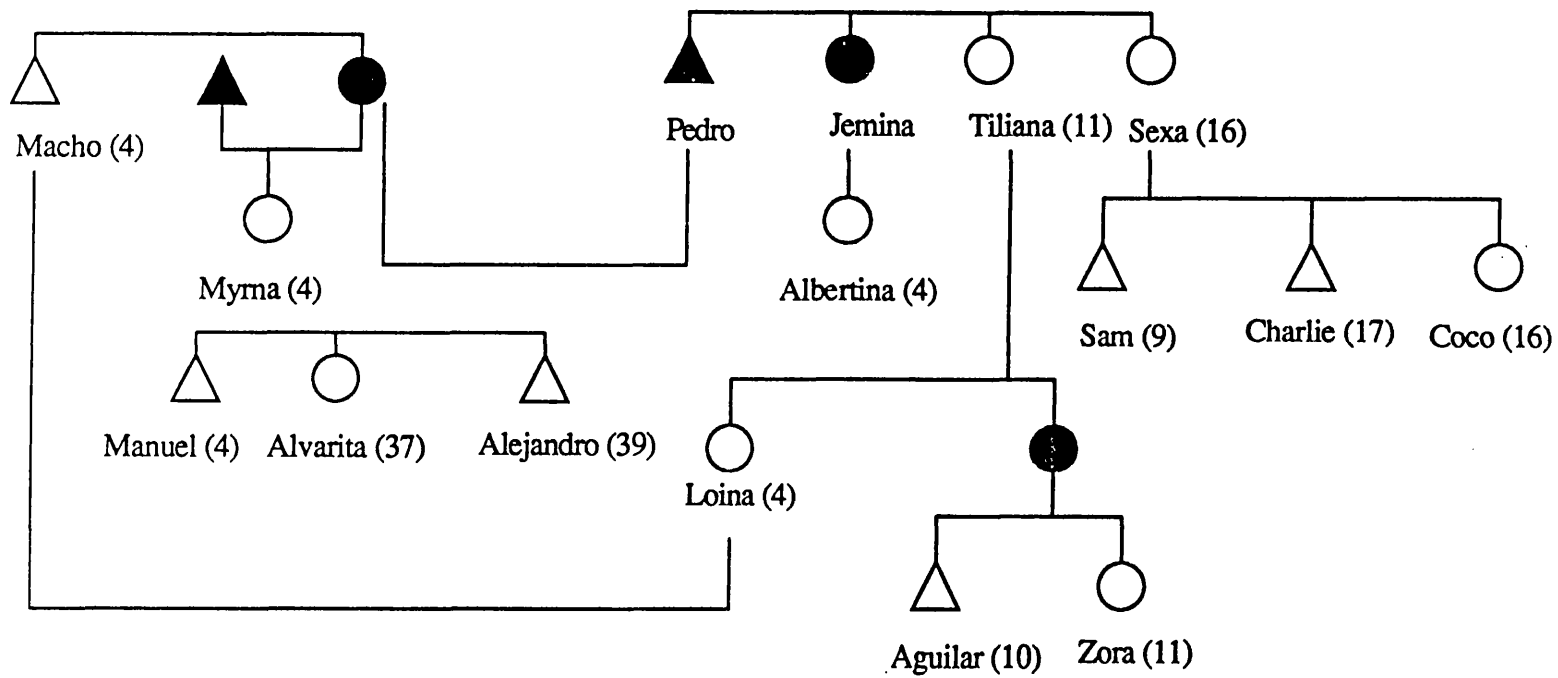


Figure 13



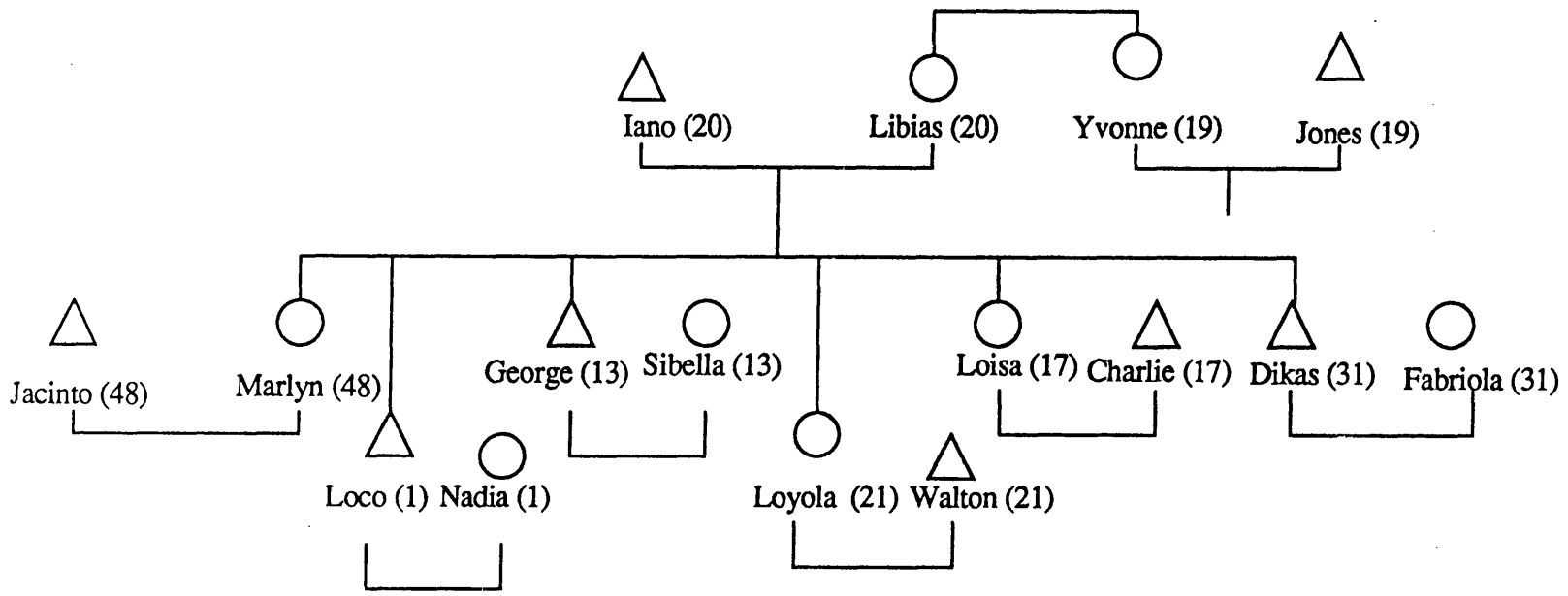


Figure 14

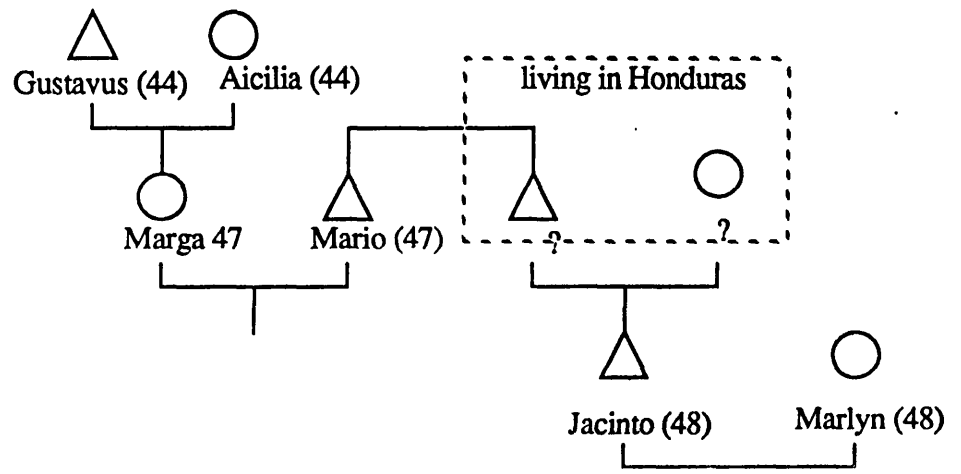


Figure 15

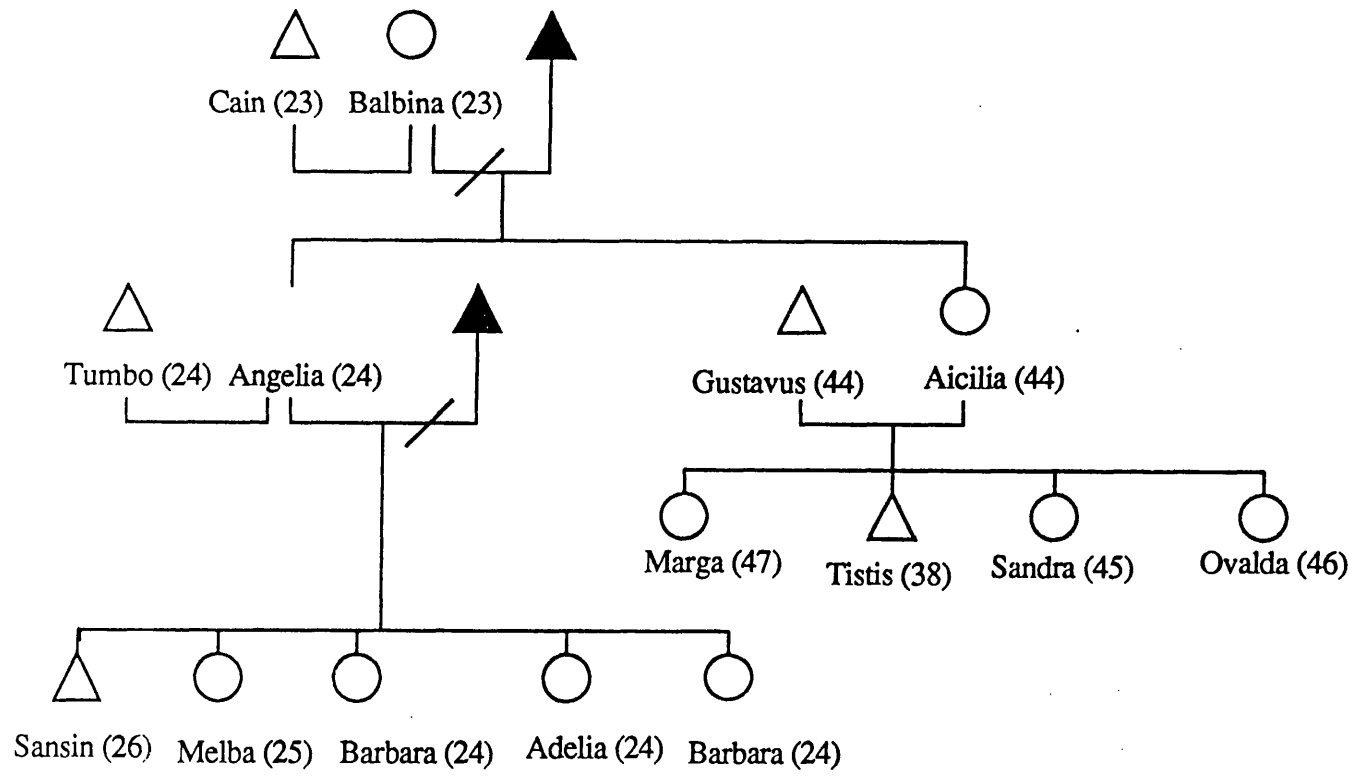


Figure 16

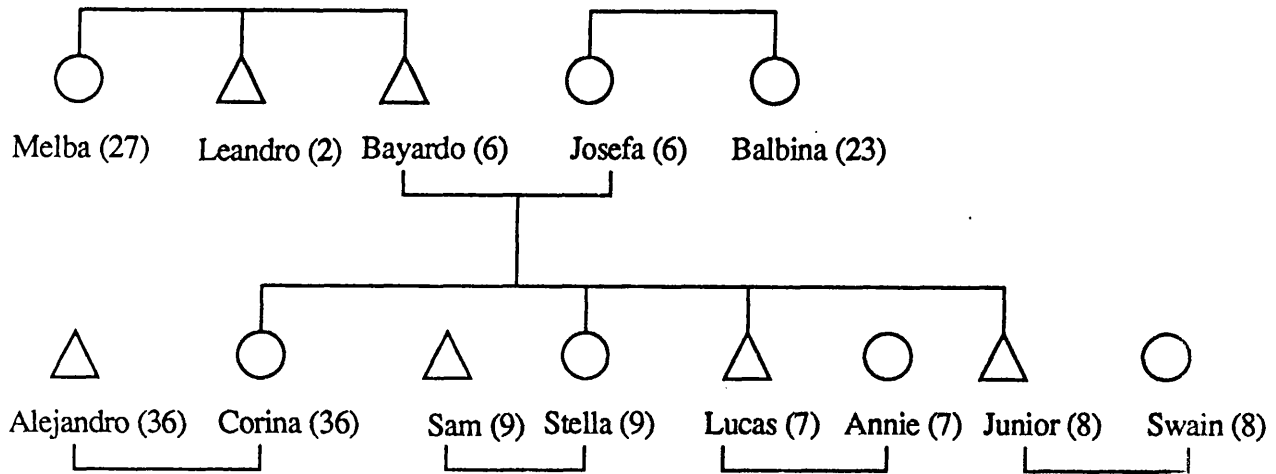


Figure 17

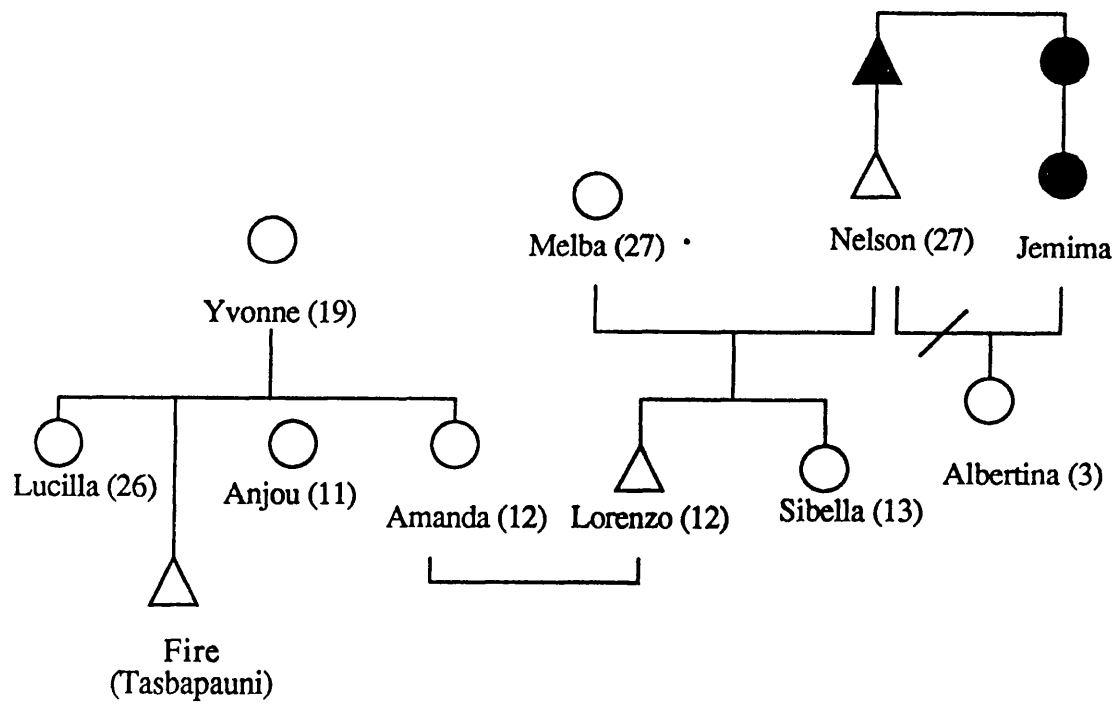


Figure 18

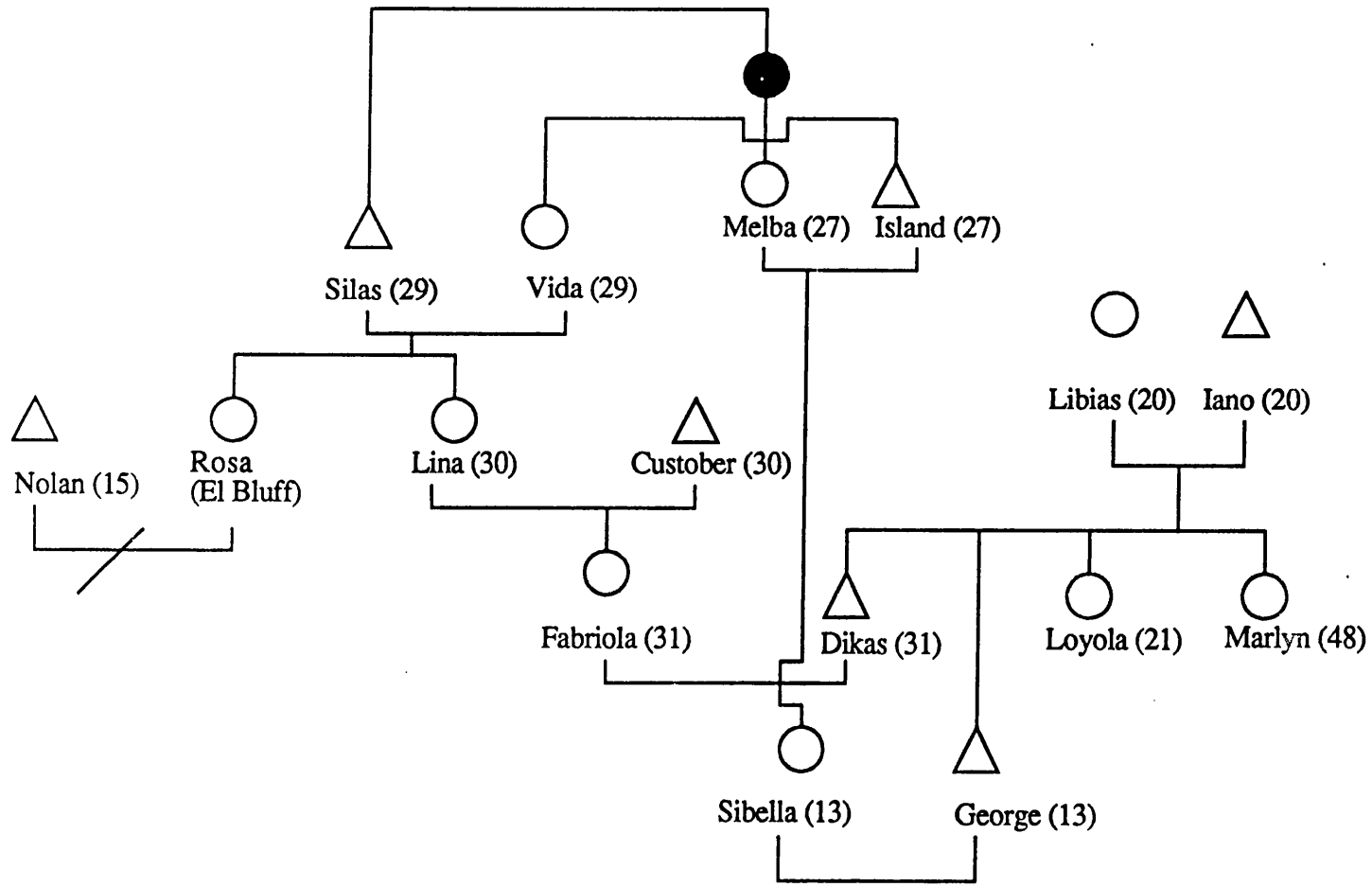


Figure 19

Table 1

*Downtown*

- 1 **Loco (H-46), Nadia (W-35), Diony (D-12), Makario (S-8), Rincard (S-2) Carson (S-0), Carson (S-0)**
- 2 **Leandro (H-56), Miss Junie (W-56), Stennet (DS-6)**
- 3 **Mitchell (H-28), Albertina (W-30), Jesenia (WD-9)**
- 4 **Macho (H-56), Loina (W-60), Manuel (HBS-25), Myrna (HaZD-15)**
- 5 **Manuel's unfinished house**
- 6 **Bayardo (H-58), Josefa (W-52), Fernando (aDS-8), Walden (aDS-5), Wallis (aDS-5)**
- 7 **Lucas (H-33), Annie (W-21), Carla (D-3), Eldon (S-1), Elton (S-1)**
- 8 **Junior (H-27), Swain (W-24), Pancho (S-4), Angela (D-2), Jenni Lee (D-0)**
- 9 **Sam (H-42), Stella (W-26), Wendy (D-10), Wendell (S-9), Mary Lou (D-7), Cynthia (D-6), Londa Mae (D-2), Susan (D-born during fieldwork)**
- 10 **Peter (H-25), Zora (W-22), Martelma (D-2), Annabel (D-0)**
- 11 **Aguilar (H-23), Anjou (W-21), Tiliansa (HM-70), Pipero (HaZS-10), Delsey (D-1), ? (D-born during fieldwork)**
- 12 **Lorenzo (H-38), Amanda (W-33), Ceneida (D-15), Cito (S-13), Andy (S-10), Dina (D-8), Sharon (D-6), Naila (D-4), Iraq (D-1), Ayro (S-born during fieldwork)**
- 13 **George (H-42), Sibella (W-36), Gaga (S-18), Neysey (D-10), Silvio (S-8), Peki (S-7), Victor (S-5), Sanu (S-3), Pollo (S-1), Becky (D-20), Yoyo (DH-24), Pususu (DS-4), Jessica (DD-1), ? (DS-born during fieldwork)**
- 14 **Yoyo and Becky's unfinished house**
- 15 **Renaldo (H-51), Elsy (W-40), Nolan (WS-22), Jose (WS-17), Macirvine (WS-14), Joanie (WD-14), Milania (D-7), Tomas (S-4), William (S-4), Dexter (S-2), Melburn (S-0)**
- 16 **Coco (W-38), Sexa (WM-67), Virginia (Z-24), Suzette (ZD-7), Lesley (ZS-4), Estelle (ZS-4), Penny (aZD-15), Sergio (aZS-15), Daniel (aZS-13), Mikey (aZS-10), Mark (aZS-4)**

*Middletown*

- 17 **Charlie (H-27), Loisa (W-23), Arthur (S-7), Soila (D-5), Penene (S-3), Jolisa (D-1)**
- 18 **Gold (H-30), Rufina (W-36), Dokey (WF-67), Tsungo (S-3), Adela (D-1)**
- 19 **Jones (H-65), Yvonne (W-51), Sinki (S-14), Nellie (D-11)**
- 20 **Iano (H-63), Libias (W-63)**
- 21 **Walton (H-48), Loyola (W-31), Sandy (WS-13), Jasper (WS-8), Kiaki (WS-5), Jimmy (WS-2), Kenley (S-0)**
- 22 **Thaddeus (H-50), Elma (55), Sikla (HS-22J), Edison (HS-21), Chigger (WS-15), Diana (WD-6)**
- 23 **Cain (H-55), Balbina (W-50)**

- 24 **Tumbo (H-65), Angelia (W-48), Barbara (WD-18), Miguel (WDS-4), Adelia (WD-17), Alicia (WD-13), Louise (WD-11), Victor (WS-5), Clarissa (D-2),**
- 25 **Alard (H-20), Melba (D-24), Armando (WS-8), Isolette (D-3), Heidi (D-0). ? (D-born during fieldwork)**
- 26 **Sansin (H-30), Lucilla (W-26), Arminta (D-8), Hilario (S-5), Minerva (D-3), (D-born during fieldwork)**
- 27 **Nelson (H-60), Melba (W-55), Micmic (D-15), Plipli (S-9), Docksy (aDS-9), Filbert (S-22), Claudia (SW-17), Anatui (SD-2), Pikpik (SD-0), Giro (SS-born during fieldwork)**
- 28 **Filbert and Claudia's house - finished and occupied during fieldwork**
- 29 **Silas (H-66), Vida (W-53), Jordi (aDD-9), Karen (aDD-2)**
- 30 **Custober (H-42), Lina (W-37), Pio (S-16), Ofelia (D-2), Fabriola (D-20), Dikas (DH-23), Maily (DD-2), Owen (DS-0), ? (DD-born during fieldwork)**
- 31 **Dikas and Fabriola's house - finished and occupied during fieldwork**

#### *Uptown*

- 32 **Ernestro (H-55), Anita (W-65), Felipe (HBaSS-17)**
- 33 **Chang (H-32), Dorla (W-28), Faustino (S-7), Katarin (D-5), Ronald (S-3), Francisco (S-1)**
- 34 **Mistalin (H-53), Elfia (W-51), Isabel (DD-6), Yolanda (D-28), Jerry (DS-2), Mary (D-35), Gaspar (DH-37), Winston (DS-17), Roberto (DS-5)**
- 35 **Gaspar and Mary's unfinished house**
- 36 **Alejandro (39), Corina (34), Salvador (S-18), Amelia (D-14), Burnell (S-11), Daisi (D-7), Pedro (S-5), Alejandro (S-3), Matilda (D-0), Luis (HaMS-15), Salvador acquired a wife from Raitipura at the end of my fieldwork**
- 37 **Negro (H-30), Alvarita (W-26), Jaime (S-9), Elda (D-8), Roel (S-5), Mariano (S-3), Selmira (D-2)**
- 38 **Tistis (H-26), Evita (W-21), Winki (D-3), Elvin (S-2), Lili (D-0)**
- 39 **Florentin *dama* "Prophet" (H-78), Cristaline (W-65), Sumu (WD-48), Umberto (FS-36), Siankwa (WDS+HS-32), Tiburón (WDS-18), Martin (WDS-14), Ruben (WDS-9)**
- 40 **Avelito (H-48), Amelita (W-58)**
- 41 **Findlay (M-40), Lucy (W-39), Mauricio (S-17), Noel (S-16), Ulbino (S-12), Maura (D-10), Marva (D-8), Oneal (S-6), Elina (D-5), Horacio (S-2), ? (D-born during fieldwork)**
- 42 **Yoyo and Becky's old house, still standing**
- 43 **Capito (H-65), Binancia (W-50), Alberto (WaSS-14), Marcia (WaSD-12), Valerio (WaSS-10), Cristian (WaSS-6)**
- 44 **Gustavus (H-60), Aicilia (W-49), Nora (D-16), Elbia (D-14), Donald (S-10), Darien (S-10), Delroy (S-4), Felicia (D-24), Faustino (DH-25), Paula (DD-1), ? (DD-born during fieldwork)**
- 45 **Faustino and Felicia's house, occupied during fieldwork and abandoned as Faustino and Felicia moved to Pearl Lagoon**



- 46 **Kwasku (H-20), Ovalda (W-20)**, ? (baby born during fieldwork); house abandoned when Kwasku left Kakabila, at which time Ovalda moved to her parent's household (44)
- 47 **Mario (H-46), Marga (W-30)**, Erica (D-12), Jose (S-11), Daniel (S-9), Jorge (S-6), Juan (3)
- 48 **Jacinto (H-40), Marlyn (W-39)**, Marina (D-16), Elvis (S-15), Juana (D-13), Ronny (S-10), Irma (D-6), Mariksa (D-4), Jovando (S-0)
- 49 **Dugu (H-50), Maggie (W-40)**
- 50 **Efraim (H-39), Idealda (W-26)**, Arlin (S-6), Ismael (S-4), Idealda (D-1)
- 51 **Salvador's unfinished house**

*Notes*

- (a) The conjugal partners who "own" the house are indicated by the letters H (man) and W (woman). Their names and those of other adults considered capable of making important decisions for the household are given in bold text. Other kinship notation abbreviations used are B (brother), Z (sister), D (daughter), S (son), M (mother), F (father) which refer to the relation of the referent to the house owners..
- (b) If S (son) or D (daughter) is prefixed by W or F, this means that the child has only one co-resident parent. Thus Jose (WS) is Elsy's (W) son, but not Renaldo's (H).
- (c) Where possible children have been placed immediately after their parent(s). Thus Miguel (WDS) is Barbara's (WD) son rather than Adelia's (WD) in house 24, since Miguel's name follows Barbara and precedes Adelia.
- (d) The prefix 'a' before an abbreviation means 'absent' or 'dead'; for example, aD means 'absent or deceased daughter'. Thus Pipero (HaZS) is Aguilar's (H) absent sister's son.
- (e) The number following the relationship abbreviation in parentheses refers to the referent's age. Thus Dina (D-8), from house 12, is eight years old.

Ages given are those recorded in a census taken by myself during April and May 1992. In the very few cases where the ages recorded in the census were inconsistent with other data, ages given are estimates.

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 Table 2

*Groups of houses most visibly associated through women's co-operation on a day-to-day basis:*

<b>A</b>	1, 2 (women related matrilaterally)
<b>B</b>	4, 10 (women related matrilaterally)
<b>C</b>	6, 7, 8, 9, 36 (women related matrilaterally except 7 and 8)
<b>D</b>	2, 9 (women related matrilaterally)
<b>E</b>	12, 19 (women related matrilaterally)
<b>F</b>	11, 19 (women related matrilaterally)
<b>G</b>	16, 17
<b>H</b>	17, 19, 20, 21, 48 (women related matrilaterally)
<b>I</b>	23, 24, 25, 26 (women related matrilaterally except 26)
<b>J</b>	13, 27, 28 (women related matrilaterally except 28)
<b>K</b>	29, 30, 31 (women related matrilaterally)
<b>L</b>	8, 33, 34, 38, 41 (women related matrilaterally)
<b>M</b>	41, 49
<b>N</b>	44, 45, 46, 47 (women related matrilaterally)
<b>O</b>	47, 48

Groups **H**, **I**, **K**, **L** and **N**, in particular, constitute localised clusters of three or more houses with matrilaterally related women in close proximity. Note that relations of more casual co-operation on an occasional basis are relatively common between some houses of different groups, and if this is taken into consideration, the following groups could be said to constitute secondary clusters: (1) **A**, **C** and **D**, (2) **E**, **F** and **H**; (3) **J**, **K** and house 32.

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