

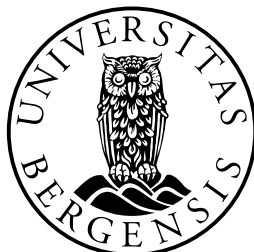
‘It’s May Pole time’

Public spectacles and Creole people at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua



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Front cover photograph: The picture shows a Creole woman dancing May Pole on 'Día de los Comparsas'.

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Acronyms and word topography

Atlantic Coast	The Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua/ La Mosquitia/ The Coast
Barrio	Neighbourhood
BICU	Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University
‘Bluefileño’	Person from Bluefields
CONADETI	Comisión Nacional de Demarcación y Titulación (The National Commission of Territorial Demarcation)
Contra war	The war between Nicaragua and the counterrevolutionary forces
Costeños	Coast-people; people from the Atlantic Coast
Creole	An African-Caribbean group that speak Creole-English
Día de los Comparsas	Procession day
El Palo de mayo	The May Pole festival
Flor de Caña	Nicaraguan rum
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberación National (Sandinista National Liberation Front)
INTUR	The Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism
Law 28	Autonomy law for the regions at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua
Law 445	The demarcation law
Liga de saber	League of knowledge
MISURATA	Miskitu, Sumu, Rama, and Sandinistas working together
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OCCA	Organización Cooperativa de la Costa Atlántica
Pacific Nicaraguan	Person from the pacific side of Nicaragua
Panga	River boat
PLN	Partido Liberal Nacionalista (National Liberal party)
RAAN	Región Autónoma Atlántico Norte (South Autonomous Region)
RAAS	Región Autónoma Atlántico Sur (North Autonomous Region)
URRACAN	Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe (University of the Autonomous Regions at the Atlantic Coast)

Maps of Nicaragua



Figure 1: Map of Nicaragua. Derived from <http://www.welt-atlas.de/datenbank/karten/karte-8-641.gif>



Figure 2: Map of Nicaragua, on which the Atlantic Coast is marked out with red. Derived from http://samviten.no/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Map_Miskito.png

1. Introduction

Every month of May, the Creole festival May Pole converts the city of Bluefields at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, into a colourful, absorbing place packed with dance, music and vivid atmosphere. This thesis uses the annual festival May Pole as a prism to explore the position of the ethnic group, Creoles, in Nicaragua, and the festival's potential to upgrade their status within the country. The overall research question for this thesis is; how is the nation's project to integrate the Creole population, and May Pole, into the rest of Nicaragua, received among Creoles today? I have chosen this particular festival as a vantage point as it is the largest cultural event on the Atlantic Coast, and was additionally used as a tool in nation-building in the country; the festival was appropriated by the state, and transformed from an 'ethnic' event connected to the Creoles, into a nation-wide, Nicaraguan event.

The Atlantic Coast is separated from the rest of the country; politically, historically, and at the geographical level. One of the main aspects which set Bluefields and the Caribbean Coast apart from the rest of the country is its ethnic and cultural diversity. In contrast to the Pacific part, which mainly is inhabited by Spanish-speaking Mestizos, the Atlantic Coast is characterized by a heterogeneous, ethnically plural population. The festival May Pole has been celebrated in Bluefields for centuries, and was brought to the Atlantic Coast during the eighteenth century, by the British, who celebrated May Day in Great Britain. The festival was absorbed by the Creole population; it was changed and modified, as British elements were mixed with coastal characteristics.¹

The Sandinista revolution swept Nicaragua in 1979, and thirty years of dictatorship led by the Somoza-family came to an end. A central principle of the Sandinista program was to develop a better relationship with the Atlantic Coast and 'integrate them' into Nicaragua. However, the Mestizo-led Frente Sandinista de Liberacion National (FSLN) did not have knowledge or understanding for the situation at the Atlantic Coast, which led to serious missteps, and civil war broke out in the start of the 1980s (Scruggs, 1999:316).² The solution became the implementation of law 28, a Statute of Autonomy which recognized the ethnic diversity at the Coast, in 1987. Two autonomous regions were established; *Región Autónoma*

¹ The festival's origin is also connected to the fertility goddess Mayaya Maya, which will be elaborated in chapter two (McCoy, 2002:131).

² After the revolution in 1979, the party Frente Sandinista de Liberacion National (FSLN), called Sandinistas, gained victory. FSLN is a socialist party, the members of the party are called Sandinistas, and Daniel Ortega is the leader – and also the current president in the country.

Atlantico Norte (RAAN) is the name of the northern part of the Coast, while Región Autónoma Atlántico Sur (RAAS) refers to the southern part, where Bluefields is located.

In 1987, with the establishment of the autonomous regions, a transformation of Nicaragua started, towards becoming a multicultural country (PNUD, 2005:29). The new government, FSLN, started to inject capital into the cultural activities at the Caribbean Coast. One of these festivities was the Creole May Pole festival, which had a particularly important role in the city of Bluefields. The festival was implemented as a national festival, and made into one of Nicaragua's most important cultural and ethnic arrangements in end of the 1980s, and announced as 'Mayo-Ya' ('May, right!') (Wilson, 1991:104).³ From a local, coastal event practiced by Creole people in Bluefields which did not have any existence outside the Atlantic Coast, the festival was converted into a planned and arranged activity, as part of Nicaraguan culture. Mayo-Ya functioned as a cultural institution to reinvigorate and expand the festival into a nation-wide event, and involved a commercialization of the event (Deerings Hodgson, 2008:14-15).⁴

In brief, I will argue that by appropriating, documenting and promoting the May Pole festival, the state of Nicaragua had an intention to incorporate Creole people into Nicaraguan self-understanding, which at the same time would create a common national identity in the country. At first glance, this might appear as an undisputable and successful process, but my ethnographic material reveals that the initiative is accepted to varying degrees among Creole people. Most people accept the appropriation, a few are against it; while the pattern shows that most people accept it as they still refer to Creole celebrations as the 'real' and 'traditional' May Pole. I argue that there is a concern over authenticity connected to the festival; Creole people feel they have prerogatives in the celebration as it's *their* festival. Illuminated by perspectives from the anthropology of knowledge, I suggest that this can be explained through knowledge forms, as the festival entails certain embodied features that cannot easily be 'taught' by words, lectures, or power-point presentations. The embodied, inalienable knowledge in May Pole differs from the knowledge that the organizations are implementing; a school-like, cognitive education which can be imparted and learned in a classroom. This seems like it is done in order to upgrade the position of Creoles within Nicaragua, and is related to the marginalized position of people of African descent. The

³ This has also happened to other cultural arrangements at the Atlantic Coast, for example to the crab feast in Corn Island.

⁴ The organizing committee of May Pole in Bluefields is composed of universities, institutions, promoters of the neighborhoods and the city hall. By commercialization, one has in mind the organizations and governmental INTURs position on the event, and the money used on t-shirts, support the neighborhoods with clothes.

government also takes the concept in use to describe how they wanted to document the festival in its 'traditional form'.⁵

This makes the concept of authenticity relevant, which will be elaborated in chapter four and five. The concept authenticity has received a lot of critique and is, according to the anthropologist Richard Handler, a Western concept; a social construct of the modern world which is closely connected to the western notion of the individual. The concept refers to people who seek for the authentic, genuine, untouched, or traditional cultural experience (Handler, 1986:2). Despite this critique, local people often use the term 'tradition' as a daily concept to refer to various issues, as for example to talk about old, Creole neighbourhoods; Old Bank, Pointeen, Beholden, and Cotton Tree. It was also common to talk about 'traditional May Pole'; what May Pole used to be, and should be – unchanged and old.

The aim of the thesis

The overall objective of this thesis is to enhance the understanding of the role of festivals/state spectacles in nation-building. It will explore the benefits and pitfalls of drawing on cultural events and marginalized groups. By this dissertation, I hope to increase the insight and awareness about Creole people at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. Before I started the fieldwork, I wanted to make an anthropological analysis of the state. As the state is not a tangible entity, this implies some methodological problems due to the anthropological method, which involves participant observation. One way to solve this problem, can be to look for what the anthropologist Trouillot calls *state effects* and *state processes* in other less obvious settings than in established and institutionalised bureaucraties (Trouillot, 2001:133). By making my point of departure in an empirical occurrence as a festival, I regard this thesis as a contribution to the anthropological study of the state. May Pole today can be seen as an effect of the state, which a political scientist probably would not choose to study, as it is a cultural event more appropriate for anthropological scrutiny and involves a detailed, ethnographic fieldwork where participant observation is crucial.

The main theoretical argument of the thesis displays how the change from an ethnic event into a state spectacle is somewhat ambiguous. The anthropologist Cohen, who writes about the Notting Hill carnival in London, claims that one way to analyse the relations

⁵ One has the point of view of the native of a culture, emic categories, in contrast to understandings of an outsider observing, namely etic categories Barfield (1997:148). Despite the fact that 'tradition' is a problematic category as it refers to various things, it still cannot be cut of as it a concept used in Bluefields, by people, the organizations and the state.

between cultural forms and political formations, is to explore the expressive process underlying rituals, ceremonies, and other types of symbolic activities that invade social life (Cohen, 1980:65). The cultural symbols and the communal relationship events such as rituals and carnivals sustain are so strong for people that governments often want to manipulate them in their own manner (Cohen, 1980). The May Pole festival was converted into a Nicaraguan cultural and national event, while the state legitimized its actions by taking the role as ‘saviours’ of Creole culture’. Creoles had historically not been included in Nicaraguan self-understanding as they are of African descent, and the change of the festival contributed to create a position for Creoles in Nicaragua. May Pole has several resemblances to a carnival, festival, and ritual, and can be seen as what Cohen refers to as a two-dimensional movement, including interplay between cultural forms and political relations (Cohen, 1980:66).

Existing research by social scientists at the Atlantic Coast and in Bluefields

Few social scientists and anthropologists studied the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua before 1979 (Sollis, 1989:481). The area has received more attention since the 1980s, and most research carried out in the area has been of political character and centred on the autonomy law and the many ethnic groups in the region. Topics of research have alternated between history (Sollis, 1989), the revolutionary government and the Costeños (Vilas, 1989, Baracco, 2011a), the political situation and the autonomy (Frühling et al., 2007, González, 2011), land-related issues (Jamieson, 2011) and the many indigenous groups which have been a centre for attention (Hale, 1994). There is only one monograph about Creole people in Bluefields, called *Disparate Diasporas*, written by an anthropologist called Edmund Gordon (1998). In the sectors that concern the Atlantic Coast, I will draw upon the works outlined above; especially the monograph about Creoles by Gordon will be of importance throughout the thesis.

Earlier research about May Pole has concentrated on the dance itself (Ylönen, 2003), the song lyrics (Wilson, 1991, Scruggs, 1999) and the historical background of the festival (Deerings Hodgson, 2008). I add to this body of research by studying the political role of the May Pole festival, and how the appropriation of the festival is apprehended at the local level in Nicaragua.

I aim to give a fair and vivid description of the festival, and to give life to the May Pole, therefore I have been inspired by a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a philosophical movement, and its principle aim is to describe phenomena in their most radical form. A phenomenological anthropology wants to capture how people experience and

perceive a phenomenon, and is connected to the senses of experience. The anthropologist Thomas J. Csordas (1994) stresses how one should evolve an anthropology that unites both the body and the mind, and he draws this even further in his contribution; to expand and pursue the paradigm of embodiment by taking part of departure in phenomenology. To understand the essence of May Pole with all its movements, smells and atmosphere, I find a phenomenological point of view fruitful, and this has been an underlying thought in the description of the festival, which is elaborated in chapter three. By this, I hope to transfer an element of 'being-in-the-world' into this thesis and give the reader an image of Bluefields.⁶ In addition to presenting a more phenomenological and experience-near analysis (at least in chapter three), this thesis also departs from former studies of the May Pole and Atlantic Coast by emphasising two additional issues. Firstly, how institutions like states and other organizations can take use of a festival to upgrade the status of a marginalized minority, and secondly, how processes like these may involve certain problems, despite all good intentions.

The May Pole festival has been celebrated at the Atlantic Coast for several hundred years, and for this reason, I have taken advantage of a historical perspective. I have chosen to distinguish between four phases in the history of the Atlantic Coast, and I am additionally suggesting in chapter six that the period I document in this thesis might form the beginning of a fifth phase. I will now elaborate on the theoretical framework which will be drawn upon in the chapters that follow.

Theoretical framework

The May Pole festival is difficult to categorize as ritual, carnival or public event, as it involves elements of all. However, local people usually applied the term festival, or simply May Pole, and in accordance with this, the May Pole will be referred to as a festival, and its ethno-political character will be of particular importance. The primary theoretical framework I draw on in this thesis concerns what I have chosen to refer to as public spectacle; a rough joint umbrella to capture the main theoretical stances; Connerton's ritual, Hobsbawm's tradition, what DaMatta and Cohen refer to as carnival, and Handelman's public event. I will

⁶ Phenomenology was in the beginning associated with Edmund Husserl's theory in the period before world war one (Husserl, 1931). At this time, the movement considered the study of phenomena, and how they appear. Heidegger (1962), Sartre (1956) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) all changed the philosophy in their distinctive ways, by developing it (Barfield, 1997:353-355). Thomas Csordas has contributed to bring phenomenology into consideration in anthropology (Csordas, 1994:11), with basis in the thoughts of the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1962). Several of the theorists in this thesis who are writing about the body are influenced by a phenomenological approach (Connerton, 1989, Csordas, 1994).

begin with ritual and Geertz, and continue with studies that will be of particular importance throughout the thesis.

Public spectacles and the state

In some contexts, the May Pole festival is referred to as a ritual. Ritual as a field of study has long roots of different meanings in anthropology. Especially two basic meanings are central, actions separated in time and space where a particular event can be seen to explain and dramatize deep-seated cosmological truths, and on the other hand where it refers to the expressive aspect of all human activity, religious as well as non-religious (Barfield, 1997). Due to the vagueness of the term, several scientists have argued for relocation from the umbrella concept of ritual (Cohen, 1993, DaMatta, 1991, Handelman, 2004). Thus, one should move towards a more flexible and open-ended concept and analysis of the term, and for this reason I choose to refer to the various theoretical perspectives I take into use as 'public spectacles', a junction between the state and public event.

One of the first important contributions in the field of state rituals was the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who published the book *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-century Bali* in 1980. Geertz was inspired by Weber, and concerned with symbols, and is seen as 'the founder' of an interpretive anthropology. In the book *Negara*, Geertz analysed social organization in Bali, Indonesia, before the colonization by the Dutch in 1906. According to Geertz, Bali was 'a theatre state' governed by rituals, symbols, and ceremonies rather than by force, what he referred to as *a Negara*, a classical state of pre-colonial Indonesia. The expressive nature of the Balinese kingdom was toward spectacle and public dramatization of Balinese culture: social inequality and status through large cremations, tooth filings, pilgrimages and blood sacrifices. These great spectacles mobilised hundreds or thousands of people and great quantities of wealth. All of these rituals and celebrations were not merely a reflection of the state, but rather the state itself (Geertz, 1980:13).

While Geertz wrote about state rituals in a pre-colonial setting, state formation and nationalism in more recent times have gained considerable attention in social sciences, particularly since the 1970s. See, for instance, Gellner (1983), Anderson (1983) Scott (1998) Hobsbawm (1983) and Smith (1995). All over the world, states have implicated rules and principles to make inhabitants feel affinity to a particular nation state and a nationality. According to Gellner who writes with example from Europe (1983), nationalism appears and becomes necessary in the modern world as an outcome of the transition to industrialization.

As work turns technical, there arises a need for standardization. Earlier means, as religion, feudalism, and kinship are no longer capable to organize people effectively. Anderson (1983) sees the nation as ‘an imagined community’, and writes about the main causes to the emergence of nationalism the last three centuries, and connects it to the invention and spread of print technology and emergence of books in the world. In the book *Seeing Like a State* James Scott reflects upon how states have shaped inhabitants through mapping and designing of cities, creation of surnames and languages as important tools in control and surveying (Scott, 1998). According to Scott, they have done this without taking local particularities into consideration, and his concepts of ‘mētis’ and ‘techne’ will be of importance in chapter five. I will now introduce the theoretical perspectives and authors on nation-building and state formation, which have a particularly note-worthy influence in this thesis, Hobsbawm, DaMatta, Connerton, Cohen and Handelman.

The British historian Eric Hobsbawm (1983) has written about traditions in Europe the last 200 years. He claims that states have been ‘designing’ nationalism by selecting elements of the past and transforming them into ‘traditions’, a process which Hobsbawm refers to as ‘invention of tradition’ (Hobsbawm, 1983:14). Ancient materials from the past, such as songs, stories and national symbols, have been modified, ritualized, and institutionalized for new national purposes (Hobsbawm, 1983:6). Traditions that appear to be ancient are often recent in origin, and sometimes invented.

According to Hobsbawm, the changes of the last 200 years, due to the rapid transformation of societies, led to an increase of ‘invented tradition’ in the world (Hobsbawm, 1983:14). Hobsbawm also emphasizes how tradition needs to be distinguished from custom, which dominate so-called traditional societies. Custom refers to daily practice; tradition is the formalized appurtenances and ritualized practices enclosing the real plot (Hobsbawm, 1983). For example, while custom is what judges do, tradition refers to installed formalities such as the wigs and robes the judges use (Hobsbawm, 1983:2-3). As I show in chapter one and four, the May Pole festival had been present in Bluefields for centuries, and after the revolution the state appropriated the festival and made it into a nation-wide event. In accordance with Hobsbawm, the state made use of old elements in creation of new national phenomena. Invented traditions are highly relevant to understand nationalism, nation state, and national symbols (Hobsbawm, 1983:13). The parts of Hobsbawm’s study which will be of particular relevance for this thesis, are ‘Invention of tradition’ and ‘custom’, and will be elaborated in chapter four.

In line with the argument of Hobsbawm (1983), the British sociologist Paul Connerton also emphasizes how states often draw on symbols from the past (Connerton, 1989). In contrast to Hobsbawm, Connerton is concerned with bodily memory, and argues that memory and knowledge of the past are sustained by ritual practices, and that performative memory is bodily. Connerton distinguishes between personal memory, cognitive memory, and bodily memory. Personal memory refers to how people present their life stories; cognitive memory involve how people remember all forms of cultural knowledge (meanings of words, stories, and jokes), and bodily memory, how our bodies remember a certain performance (Connerton, 1989:22). These different classes of performance often merge.

Like Hobsbawm, Connerton is also concerned with how rituals cannot be seen as separate from their history, because all rituals need to be invented at some point. In addition to being expressive acts, they are formalized, stylized, stereotyped, and repetitive (Connerton, 1989:44-45). Connerton presents an example from Germany between the years 1933 to 1939, when a series of commemorative practices were performed in the country after the Führer Adolf Hitler's seizure of power. For example, the anniversary of the foundation of the party, Hitler's birthday, and the harvest in October were some of the many celebrations that took place during the year (Connerton, 1989:41-42). Connerton claims that through these commemorative acts, people were constantly reminded of the National Socialist party and its ideology. These new celebrations were transformed into rigid and unchangeable occurrences, where the content was without possibility to change.⁷

Commemorative celebrations were not only reminders of the past, but also representations; its attendance participated in an embodied form of the ritual (Connerton, 1989:42-43). Examples are New Year's eve and birthdays; the festivals of Christian saints are commemoration certain days of the year; flags at half mast, flowers on graves, in addition to national days (Connerton, 1989:45).

Though Connerton uses examples from Europe, his perspective can nevertheless shed light on the situation of May Pole in a Nicaraguan context. Connerton writes that national elites have invented new rituals that claim continuity with an appropriate historic past, by organizing ceremonies, parades and mass gatherings, and constructing new ritual spaces (Connerton, 1989:51). Applied to May Pole, this perspective can illuminate how the state

⁷ According to Connerton, the most vigorous celebration was the commemorative celebration was 'Putsch', a coup from 1933 with Hitler in lead, where the party failed to gain power. The event took place in 'Bürgerbräukeller', a beer cellar. Despite its failure, this event made Hitler a known figure in Germany, and the 16 men from the National Socialist party who had paid with their lives, obtained an almost martyr status. This was acted out under the commemorative practices all over the country, and every year the same procedure was performed as a fixed rite where the 16 men were honored. (Connerton, 1989:42-43)

made use of an event with long historical roots. The Nicaraguan state implemented the May Pole festival as a ‘new’ nation-wide event under the label ‘Mayo-Ya’. Its history was documented, celebrations were performed in the capital Managua, and the governmental institution The Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR) became involved in the festival. Connerton’s point about bodily memory, how our bodies remember a certain performance, will be treated further in chapter five, to see how cognitive knowledge and bodily knowledge are present in May Pole. To explicate various forms of local knowledge, he distinguishes between ‘inscribing’ and ‘incorporating’ practices, which I will draw on in my analysis of how the state version of May Pole relies on a completely different form of knowledge than that which characterizes the Creole performance of the festival.

Connerton’s emphasis on ‘the form’ of rituals as stylized and repetitive acts, are also stressed by the Brazilian anthropologist Roberto DaMatta (1991). DaMatta argues for a break with the conceptualization of ritual as something set apart, dispersed from everyday life. DaMatta is influenced by Victor Turner’s (1969) work on symbols and rituals, and by Louis Dumont’s (1986) work on hierarchy and individualism. DaMatta analyses the military parade, religious processions, and the annual carnival in Brazil, showing how each of these festivals is related to a specific sector of the Brazilian society. His main emphasis is on the carnival, which makes it particularly relevant in the present thesis.

Carnival has its origin in Ancient Greece and Rome, and involved the use of masks and disguises, sexual orgies, food, drinks, and dance, and the rules and principles of everyday life were converted for a limited period of time (Rowe and Schelling, 1991:131). The study of carnivals was first associated with the Russian philosopher and critic Bakhtin and the book *Rabelais and his world*, which discusses carnival from the medieval Europe and the Renaissance (Bakhtin, 1984). He makes his point of departure in the novels written by Francois Rabelais. Bakhtin introduced the concept of the ‘carnivalsque’, which refers to an immersive period where people organize themselves ‘in their own way’ as a collectivity where individual members become an inseparable part of the human mass. Hierarchical precedence does not matter anymore, and everyone is considered equal during carnival. This creates a special form of communication, which is impossible in everyday life (Bakhtin, 1984:10). It might provide people with a symbolic representation of utopia, the image of a future state of the people. The rites of the carnival represent and foreshadow the rights of the people (Bakhtin, 1984).

According to DaMatta, carnival is not only a multidimensional and pluri-level festival, but also creates its own level of social reality; its own social space with own rules and social logic (DaMatta, 1991:62). The carnival becomes the dominating principle as a uniting component, and other factors such as class, work, and ethnicity, do not seem to have a crucial significance (DaMatta, 1991:20). These colorful events are often deeply connected to people's feelings, senses, and hearts, and DaMatta argues that governments probably would fall the next day if they ceased to celebrate these festivities (DaMatta, 1991:52)

DaMatta describes various characteristics that distinguish a carnival, most of which can also be found in the May Pole festival; parades, laughter, action, music, and dance.

Additionally, May Pole turns the city of Bluefields upside down in May, and creates its own level of social reality; its own social space removed from everyday life. While DaMatta argues that distinctions such as race, class, and ethnicity present in everyday life are temporarily dissolved in carnival, this is only partly to be seen in Bluefields. While the celebration is going on and one is in the flow, there are no noticeable differences and DaMatta's statement is valid, nothing outside the carnival, like ethnic affiliation or social status, seem to matter. However, as I intend to show in this thesis, ethnicity is far from dissolved in May Pole, particularly when it comes to the relation between Creoles and Mestizos.

The sections of DaMatta's study of particular relevance in the following chapters concern how carnival is not just a mere celebration, but touches our hearts and souls, thus suggesting their importance for people (DaMatta, 1991:15). Another point of relevance to the present thesis involves how one cannot study ritual without taking into account the everyday world with all its problems and values (DaMatta, 1991:129). In line with this, I will try to give the reader an idea of what Bluefields is like beyond the time of the May Pole festival, and the situation of Creole people in Nicaragua will be of particular significance in this regard.

Politics and culture

Another carnival study I find useful is Abner Cohen's account of the carnival in Notting Hill, London. Cohen was part of the Manchester school, studied under Max Gluckman, and is concerned with how culture and politics are in an ambiguous unity in carnival (Cohen, 1980:81). According to Cohen, 'carnival is a season of festive popular events characterized by revelry, playfulness and overindulgence in eating, drinking and sex, culminating in two or three days of massive street processions by masked individuals and groups, ecstatically

playing loud and cheerful music or as ecstatically dancing to its accompaniment' (Cohen, 1993:3).⁸ Cohen uses the Notting Hill carnival in London as an empirical window into how political strategies are melted into cultural movements (Cohen, 1980:84).

The Notting Hill carnival is staged on the August Bank holiday every year, and is located in Notting Hill, North Kensington (Cohen, 1980:66).⁹ The carnival was first held in 1966, and started by a local community leader, Rhaunee Laslett, who had a vision to gather the culturally heterogeneous inhabitants of Notting Hill through street processions.¹⁰ In the beginning, the Notting Hill carnival was local, poly-ethnic and attended by a few thousand people. However, after a couple of years the carnival changed; it became known throughout the country, and almost exclusively Caribbean in arts, music, attendance, and leadership (Cohen, 1993:1).¹¹ In 1976, there was a violent conflict between British youth of Caribbean descent and the police, and hundreds were hurt. After this, during the period between 1980 and 1986, the state initiated various steps to institutionalize the carnival with intensive policing, pressure by authorities, and increased financial inducements (Cohen, 1993:45). Its leaders were now moderate professionals, more white people participated, and almost two million people took part in the celebrations.

What makes carnivals so attractive, according to Cohen, is how they give release from the social order, as they generate relationships of amity between strangers and allow forbidden access (Cohen, 1980:79). It gives space for what Turner refers to as 'communitas', as contrasted to 'structure'. 'Communitas', the Latin word for community, refers to an unstructured, non-rigid period of time characterized by fellowship where people are removed from the everyday structures, and experience equal status and comradeship in a time of change (Turner, 2010 [1969]:171-172). The political forms are in a dialectic relationship with the cultural, artistic forms of carnival. Music, colorful clothes, and cultural characteristics are structured by political features, though not determined by them. There is no 'pure' culture and no 'pure' politics – they are both interrelated. This is why the analysis of the interface between culture and politics is so fundamental (Cohen, 1993:8). Carnivals are fertile to explore politics, as their symbolic forms have the potential for political articulation, and as they always are contested by different interests and forces (Cohen, 1982:24-25).

⁸ Some of the famous carnivals in the world are Mardi Gras in New Orleans (Edmonson, 1956), Notting Hill carnival in London (Cohen, 1980, Cohen, 1982, Cohen, 1993), Carnival in Brazil (DaMatta, 1991). These multi-faceted and colorful fairs fascinate, invoke feelings and set emotions in people, and attract thousands of participants and interested every year.

⁹ The carnival is still staged today, often referred to as the biggest street festival in Europe (ix)
<http://www.thenottinghillcarnival.com/>

¹⁰ Her mother was American-Caribbean and her father Russian, and she identified with her mother's origin (Cohen, 1993:10).

¹¹ Cohen uses the term 'West-Indians', but I have chosen to use 'British of Caribbean descent' (Caribbeans) or 'Trinidadians'.

In contrast to the Notting Hill carnival, May Pole never turned into a violent event, nor did it involve such a magnitude of people. One of the most important symbolic features of the Notting Hill festival was a steel-band, a Trinidad invention with a particular symbolic significance (Cohen, 1980:71), which is not a feature of May Pole.¹² While the Caribbean youth ‘longed back’ to the Caribbean, the participants of the May Pole festival were at home. However, there are several common features between the two celebrations, as we will see. Both Trinidadians and Creoles are people of Caribbean descent, and have a several hundred year old tradition for carnival/festival, which has a deep symbolic significance.¹³ For Creoles as well as Trinidadians, carnival/festival was introduced to both groups during slavery, by ruling plantation owners, and was incorporated by local people who transformed it and made it into their own celebration.¹⁴ In both the Notting Hill carnival and in May Pole, music, dance, and drinking are present factors. The two-day long celebration in Notting Hill is a culmination of a whole year of activities by music and masquerading groups (Cohen, 1993:4). Also in Bluefields, all-year activities conclude in the month long festival. Both festivals are connected to African traditions, as drumming, masking, and masquerading are part of the practices of both British of Caribbean descent and Creoles (Cohen, 1980:79). Cohen writes how carnival is in a continuous change (Cohen, 1980:78), and this is also true for May Pole. As the Notting Hill carnival, the May Pole festival has also gone from a local to a nation-wide and politicized event. In sum, despite some differences, the Notting Hill carnival and May Pole have several common characteristics.

In this thesis, Cohen’s emphasis on how culture and politics are interrelated is of particular relevance, and how carnival may be a fruitful window into the examination of politics. Carnivals’ symbolic forms have the potential for political articulation, as they go to the core of certain deep-seated political issues and ambiguities, and are often contested by different interests and forces (Cohen, 1982:24-25). Cohen’s ideas about how states often take use of cultural events for political goals are of importance, and I will come back to this in chapter four.

¹² The steel band became an ingredient in the Notting Hill in 1973, when a musician John Baker who emigrated from Trinidad to London. He started a band and was invited to participate in the carnival (Cohen, 1980:72).

¹³ While the Notting Hill was established in 1966, May Pole has existed at the Atlantic Coast for several hundred years

¹⁴ (Cohen, 1980:70).

Public events

Cohen emphasizes the importance of seeing culture and politics as interrelated, also a point stressed by the anthropologist Don Handelman. Handelman is influenced by Bruce Kapferer (1988), Victor Turner, and Gregory Bateson, and has conducted fieldwork in Israel.

Handelman argues that the umbrella term ‘ritual’ should be abandoned, as it is bewildering and refers to a multitude of concepts which have little or nothing in common (2004:4). Public event is a better concept, as it is more suitable for sites of performance constructed to convey the participants’ role in the social order. These public events often take place as displays, spectacles, pageants or processions, and can openly be viewed and observed (Handelman, 2004:4). ‘Public events are social forms that mediate people into collective abstractions through different logics of the forming form’ (Handelman, 2004:16). Events of presentations are the dominant form of public occasion in the modern bureaucratic state, showing, enunciating, and indexing lineaments of statehood, nationhood, collectivity, collective memory, solidarity – so whether these exist or not, they are shaped as if they do (Willke 1999:149 cited in Handelman, 2004:17-18). The public event shows itself as a mirroring of social and cultural order, as what they are, or what they in the future should become (Handelman, 2004:17).¹⁵

Handelman is more concerned with political imbued events, such as commemorative practices, Remembrance Day of the Holocaust, and Independence Day. His examples are more serious and austere than May Pole, with more common features with a carnival. While Handelman shows example from Israel, May Pole takes place at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, in a border area between Latin America and the Caribbean, and is more multiethnic than Israel. However, there are also common features between Handelman’s material and the May Pole festival. In line with what Handelman writes about Israel, the May Pole festival also takes form as a display; through the month of May processions, celebrations in the streets, parades, and exhibitions are performed. During this time of year, characteristics of Creole people can be observed, also by outsiders. As Handelman claims; ‘through public events it might be possible for a third-party to get an understanding of what is going on. The task of the public event is to engage in the ordering of feelings, ideas and people, through

¹⁵ Handelman also takes the concept of ‘bureaucratic logic’ which refers to a way of invoking, shaping and organizing existence, into consideration. The state creates, reproduces, legitimates, changes and sanctifies itself through every day practice (Handelman, 2004:7). Numerous of public events, whether small, large or political, are all shaped by bureaucratic logic. Handelman claims that this perception is overlooked by many scientists who have been studying ‘ritual’, who perceive them solely as symbolic reflections of social order (Handelman, 2004:5-6).

practice' (Handelman, 2004:4). Handelman claims that public events are fertile grounds to investigate nationalism. These points will be of particular importance in the thesis.

Until now, I have presented researchers who have written about public spectacles from different phases and locations. They argue for a removal from the umbrella concept of ritual (Cohen, 1993, DaMatta, 1991, Handelman, 2004). Thus, one should move towards a more flexible and open-ended concept and analysis of the term. May Pole has resemblances to a ritual, and was referred to as such in the media. Additionally, May Pole holds several characteristics of a carnival, as it involves parades, colorful costumes, liberating dance, and loud music, are all part of the event. The May Pole festival has resemblances to what Handelman refers to as a public event, as it takes shape as a display through processions, celebrations in the streets, parades and exhibitions, and Creole people and Bluefields can be viewed, also for outsiders. In sum, I want to stress that the May Pole festival contains features of ritual, carnival, and public event, and is located somewhere between these concepts. As mentioned, local people usually use the term festival, and I will consequently refer to May Pole as a festival throughout the thesis.

I want to build on these theoretical perspectives about state spectacles, as they constitute useful platform to analyse the role of the festival May Pole in nation building, and I will return to them in the following chapters. However, I want to depart from the earlier research just mentioned, as they come short in explaining exactly how the May Pole festival is perceived locally in Bluefields. I will attempt to widen the perspective by taking other analytical perspectives into consideration, particularly those pertaining to include 'authenticity', 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalism, and 'forms of knowledge'. It is important to find out how various ethnic groups perceive the festival and what this can tell about May Pole as a public spectacle and what kind of ambivalences such a local glance can convey, connected to knowledge sociology and authenticity of the festival. Local apprehensions about whose ritual the festival rightfully is, or should be, are central.

As mentioned briefly above, this thesis started as an attempt to make an analysis of the state. According to the anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, anthropologists cannot expect to conduct an analysis of the state as an overall unity ready to be studied. There is no necessary site for the state – neither institutional nor geographical (Trouillot, 2001:127). One possible way to solve this problem is to look for what the anthropologist Trouillot calls *state effects* and *state processes* in other less obvious settings than established and institutionalised bureaucracies (Trouillot, 2001:133). According to the social scientists Hansen and Stepputat

one should rather refer to what they – call ‘languages of state-ness’ – everything the state is; its characteristics, factors and aspects (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001). One cannot talk about the state as an entity consisting of certain features, functions and forms of governance, but should approach each actual state as a historically specific configuration of a range of languages of state-ness (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001:6-7). They claim that state, governance, and the effects shaped by the languages of state-ness need to be denaturalized and studied in rich ethnographic detail. We should regard rituals, schemes, papers, titles – means of the state – as parts of the continuous state spectacle which asserts and affirms the authority of the state (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001:37). In accordance with these thoughts, there are reasons to regard this study as a contribution to regard the study of the Nicaraguan state’s phil-anthropological co-optation of a minority festival both as a ‘state effect’ and a manner to denaturalize the state.

I want to transfer these issues from a Western context, over to a Caribbean/Latin American context. My fieldwork is carried out in a regional border area, as the Atlantic Coast is politically located in Latin America, but culturally Creole people have a stronger affiliation and cultural characteristics similar to the Caribbean. This regional border area makes the subject of study of particular relevance here, as it might be particularly difficult for people to feel affiliation to the Nicaraguan state, and the issues turn out particularly harsh.

At the micro level, I have conducted a detailed ethnographic study of the festival, and I have been inspired by the extended case-method, also called situational analysis, developed by Max Gluckman and the Manchester school of Social Anthropology. This method takes point of departure in a highly empirical case, and the following analysis extracts themes from this first example. The advantage of this method is that one is able to bring empirical detail into the analysis, and additionally limit the ethnography by giving a clear and specific empirical focus (Evens and Handelman, 2006:1-2).¹⁶ In accordance with this, I will begin the ethnographical presentation with a detailed description of the festival, and later extract subjects from this first chapter. I will now present the chapter overview for the thesis.

¹⁶ The situational analysis evolved as a reaction to the structure-functionalism which had been dominating in anthropology after world war one (Evens and Handelman, 2006:1).

Outline of thesis

The following chapters will elaborate on the topics I have introduced in this first chapter. It has become an advantageous technique to structure the thesis with basis in one particular event. All the chapters in the thesis are about the Creoles and the May Pole festival.

In chapter two, I will introduce the setting; geographic location and a historical outline of the arrival of the May Pole to the Coast. I have chosen to divide the history of the Atlantic Coast into four historical phases, and show how each particular phase is characteristic for Creole people (how they gradually got a more marginalized position within Nicaragua). Chapter two will also include methodological considerations.

Chapter three is almost purely ethnographic, and will give an outline of the May Pole; to give the reader an idea of the festival, - with all its sounds, senses, smells, and atmosphere, - drawing on an impressionist literary genre, aiming to approach a phenomenological perspective.

Chapter four continues with the ethnic diversity at the Coast, and the festival as a Creole event. It will go in depth regarding the appropriation of the festival in the 1980s, and Hobsbawm's concept of 'invented tradition' will be applied to shed light on the use of older Creole, May Pole elements in Nicaraguan nation building. Further, I will draw on ethnic and civic nationalism, and I claim there is a gradual effort to change the nationalist ideology from an ethnic towards a civic form of nationalism. However, this is not a complete transformation, and it still has characteristics of both. Then, I will discuss how Creole people conceptualize the festival. While some accept the commercialization of the festival, others still refer to 'traditional' and 'real' neighbourhoods. Additionally, one has a third group, who shows displeasure and annoyance with what is happening, which inspires me to engage in Harrison's analysis to suggest that people feel the festival make up 'inalienable possessions' for them. The pattern shows that people are concerned with 'authenticity'.

Chapter five opens by describing Liga de Saber (League of knowledge), a competition the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Bluefields have introduced recent years to inform youth about the history, characteristics, and origin of the May Pole festival. The chapter sustains its emphasis on the thought of authenticity, and goes into what makes the Creole celebrations of May Pole more 'authentic' in the eyes of Creole critics. To understand this critique, I will draw on theories of forms of knowledge, and Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' will be used to demonstrate how the festival is embodied for Creole people. The knowledge the organizations contribute to expand to youth, differs from the knowledge

already present in the festival, as it is more related to a cognitive form of knowledge – that can be taught and learnt in a classroom. To distinguish between these forms of knowledge, I will draw on the concepts ‘incorporating’ and ‘inscribing’ practices, launched by Connerton, and ‘mētis’ and ‘techne’ introduced by James Scott. I claim that even though there seems to be a gradual change from an embodied to an ‘academic’ form of knowledge in the transmission of festival knowledge, this is not a complete transition, but rather a management of both forms of knowledge. Lastly, I will examine why the organizations make such a strong effort of passing on knowledge about the May Pole festival in a classroom-style manner, arguing that this is connected to the effort to uplift the marginalized African-descended people in Nicaragua.

Chapter six gathers the threads and sums up the argument. It will also speculate in what will happen to the festival in the future. Will the May Pole festival move toward a fifth historical phase, thus continuing the line of development depicted in chapter two? Is the present disgruntlement and bustle about authenticity only a transition before the state’s version of May Pole is accepted, and the Creole people will be better included into Nicaragua?

This thesis might appear slightly heavy in the start, as texts within political anthropology tend to do, as it is necessary with considerable explanation of context, before one can dive into the empirical material. The conclusions here are based on ethnographic examples from a specific time and place, the May Pole festival in Bluefields, 2011. I will now introduce Bluefields main demographical characteristics and historical phases of the May Pole festival up to the time of my fieldwork.

2. The setting

Introducing Bluefields

You go into the street. It is Tuesday, four o'clock in the afternoon in Bluefields, and as usual, a lot is going on. The pineapple vendor talks with a man in a shop, while the taxis are rushing by at a fast pace, almost touching the pavement. A man walking at the edge of the road jumps in by surprise. Some ladies are selling 'empanadas', stuffed bread with meat or vegetables, on the street for a small amount; a boy comes down the street screaming 'pati-pati-pati-pati' with a basket of snacks on his head, in such a velocity that an outsider, who experiences all this for the first time, stands left with a questioning look. The sounds are not easily separable from each other; dogs barking, children screaming, and a noisy car which has seen its best days leads to a cloud of emission, well mixed with the continuing reggae music. Music is clearly a dominant and pervasive character of the city, as it is present more or less everywhere, at all times. People are asking for money, sometimes it comes with a story as well, while others only want to say hello. Compliments, greeting, and statements like 'gal whay walk faaaast' (Why do you walk so fast, girl?) are all usual ingredients to a stroll through the city center. Positive and friendly, as well as rude comments can be heard, and it might be hard to decide whether to laugh, get angry, or become embarrassed. 'Buenas días, quieres un sandía?' (Good day, do you want a watermelon?) 'Where gao?' (Where are you going?) In Bluefields, there is an existing noise day in and out, and a scarcity of silence.

Fieldwork location – a regional border area

The Republic of Nicaragua is located in Central America, and borders to Honduras in the north and Costa Rica in the south. The population was estimated to 5 888 945 people in 2011, and the country is 130 374 square kilometres.¹⁷ In Nicaragua there are two main geographic regions (Sollis, 1989:482). While the Pacific region primarily is characterized by tropical savannah and a longer dry season, the Atlantic Coast is marked by a hotter, more humid climate and heavy rainfall (Vilas, 1989:2).

¹⁷ <http://www.europaworld.com/entry/ni.ss.2?&authstatuscode=200>

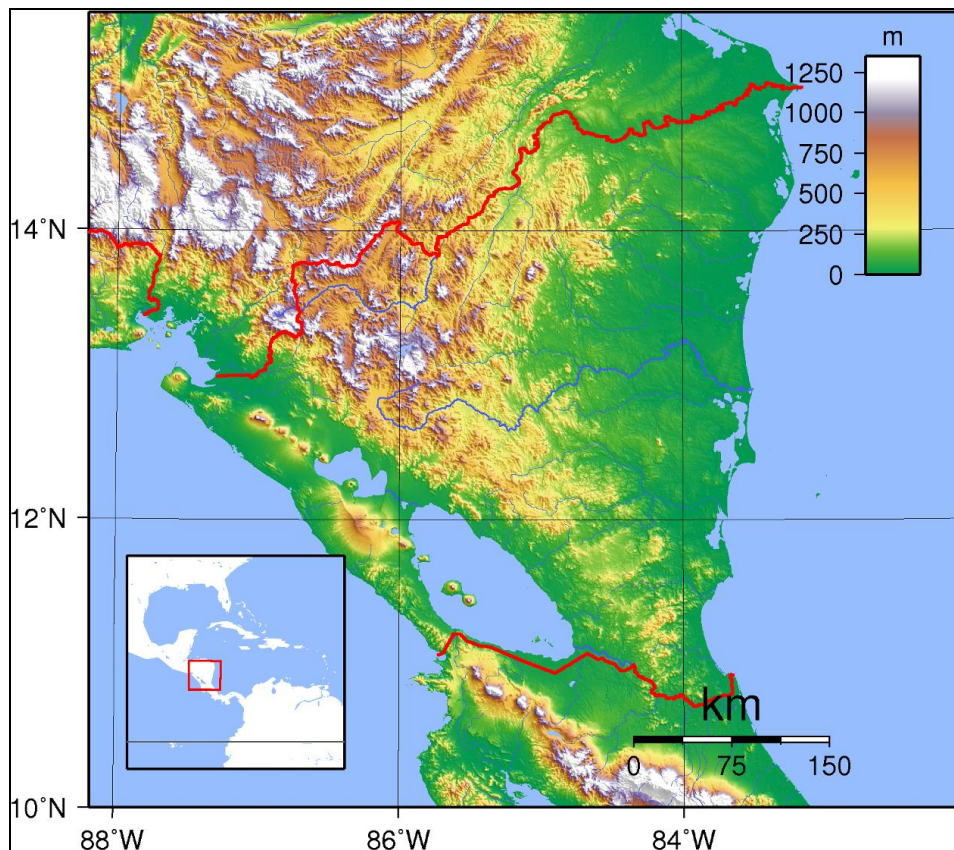


Figure 3: Topographical map of Nicaragua. Derived from http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f5/Nicaragua_Topography.png

The two autonomous regions at the Atlantic Coast make up 60 366 square kilometres, approximately 43, 3 percent of the country (PNUD, 2005:61), and over 50 percent of the territory of Nicaragua.¹⁸ The population at the Atlantic Coast, in both autonomous regions, Región Autónoma Atlántico Sur (RAAS) and Región Autónoma Atlántico Norte (RAAN), constitutes 737 913 inhabitants, approximately 12, 5 percent of the population in Nicaragua (Frühling et al., 2007:281).¹⁹

The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua is located in a regional ‘border area’ between two different ethnographic regions; Latin America and the Caribbean. As a part of Nicaragua, the Atlantic Coast is politically categorized as part of Latin America, but as I soon will show, the area has nevertheless several features in common with the Caribbean. Latin America refers to Central- and South America. Latin America was colonized mainly by Spain, and some countries by Portugal and France. On the other hand, one has the Caribbean, which refers to

¹⁸ When I was in Bluefields, the Sandinista government (with Daniel Ortega as president) decided to categorize three municipalities which had belonged to RAAS, to the Pacific side. This led to commotion among many Costenos, who apprehended it as a strategic move made by the Sandinista government before the election November 2011.

¹⁹ The population at the Atlantic Coast is probably higher today, as the numbers are from 2006.

the Antilles islands, stretching from North America, with Bermuda and the Bahamas in the north, to Trinidad in the south. Common to the area is a history of colonization (from 1492), and slavery. Thus, there is an ethnic diversity and a high proportion of the population is of African descent. There exist several Caribbean enclaves within Central America (Hylland Eriksen, 1996:278), and Bluefields has historically been considered one of these enclaves, as will be specified in the historical section. The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua was not colonized by Spanish, but by the British, and has a diversity of ethnic groups. One of these groups is English-speaking Creoles, people of African-descended origin who arrived to the area as slaves on plantations (Baracco, 2011b:1).

The main themes of anthropological study in Latin American have involved the impact of Spanish and Portuguese colonization, indigenous people, cultures of poverty, gender and family, *compadrazgo*,²⁰ and religion (Archetti and Stølen, 1996:258-259). The anthropological research of Caribbean life has primarily pertained to ethnicity, skin colour, class, nation-building, household organization, historical globalization, and migration. Due to a history of slavery, colonization and plantation economy is crucial in all research in the region (Hylland Eriksen, 1996).

The location of the Atlantic Coast in an ethnographic border region is of crucial significance to understand the role of public spectacles in Nicaragua, as I will show in the following chapters. Its border position may further explain why it is more difficult to develop a sense of national unity here, than in many other parts of the world. Part of the difficulty concerns the ethnic diversity in the area.

Ethnic diversity and Costeños

The Atlantic Coast is inhabited by six ethnic groups, where three are indigenous; Miskitus, Sumu/Mayangnas, and Ramas. Two of the ethnic groups are of African descent; one of them, Garífunas have origin in West-Africa, speak English or Garífuna, and are well renowned for their dance. The other African-descended group is Creoles, who speak Creole-English and are considered the ‘indigenous’ inhabitants of the city of Bluefields.

²⁰ *Compadrazgo* refers to co-parenthood; before the Roman Catholic baptism of a child, the parents choose a godfather and a godmother that have important roles in the life of their child.

Figure 4: Ethnic composition of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, 2006 (Frühling et al., 2007:281).

Ethnic group	2006 RAAN	2006 RAAS	2006 Atlantic Coast	Total
Mestizos	174, 598 (56,65%)	386, 149 (89,90%)	75,99 %	
Creoles	3, 506 (1,15%)	23, 691 (5,51%)	3,68 %	
Garífunas	-	3,440 (0,80%)	0,55%	
Sumu/ Mayangna	18, 270 (5,93%)	1,100 (0,25%)	2,62%	
Miskitus	14,358 (36,18%)	14,358 (3,31%)	17,05%	
Ramas		1,290 (0,30%)	0,17%	

People from the Atlantic Coast are collectively referred to as Costeños; the Spanish term for people from the Coast. However, this is not a close-knit group, due to the differences among the South and the North autonomous regions, the huge territorial area, ethnic diversity, as well as the many communities scattered around in a great geographic distance in the area.

The numbers in the table above derive from a survey made by the Universidad de las Regiones Autonomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense (URRACAN) University at the Coast in 2006, of the population from each of the 19 municipals from both of the regions. The table shows how most of the indigenous population is located in RAAN, while most of the African-descended groups are in RAAS, where one can find Bluefields. Further, the Mestizo presence in the region in 2006 is solid, while Creoles constitute a small part.²¹ The present day Creole population lives mainly in the city of Bluefields, and on Corn Island, Pearl Lagoon, and Puerto Cabezas.

In Bluefields, a change in the demographic composition, what Appadurai (Appadurai, 1996:33) calls ethnoscape, has taken place due to the high numbers of Mestizos who migrated into the region.²² According to Gordon, a census taken by the reserve government in 1889, revealed that of the 2089 people living in Bluefields these days, 90 percent were of African

²¹ This is most recent survey made over ethnic diversity in the region.

²² Arjun Appadurai (1996) writes about global interactions, and how imagination creates new alternatives for the nation-state. He divides global cultural flows into five dimensions; ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas and ideoscapas. For Appadurai, these are building blocks of what he refers to as 'imagined worlds', multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of people around the world (Appadurai, 1996:33). 'Ethnoscape' refers to the landscape of persons who make up the changeable world in which we live; tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, and guest workers who move between places and nations (Appadurai, 1996:33-34).

descent (Gordon, 1998:60). In RAAS in 2006 Creoles only formed 5, 5 percent of the population, while 80 percent were Mestizos.²³ I will soon come back to these changes, but first turn to the city of Bluefields.



Figure 5: The harbour in Bluefields

The city of Bluefields and its neighbourhoods

Bluefields is the largest city in the southern part of the Atlantic Coast, RAAS, and the population is estimated to approximately 60,000 inhabitants. The city got its name from the Dutch Captain Abraham Blauveldt, a pirate who established a small shipyard Bluefields in 1660 and the city still carry his name in English (Frühling et al., 2007:19).

There are no roads connecting Bluefields to the rest of the country, and the travel to the Pacific side is a rigorous business as it involves two hours with the *panga* (riverboat) up the river to a city called Rama – followed by an approximately 6-7 hours bumpy bus ride in

²³ Mestizos are people of mixed European and Indian descent.

an old chicken bus to the capital, Managua. It is also possible to travel by plane, but as this trip is about four times more expensive, it is something few people can afford.²⁴

The city of Bluefields is divided into 17 different neighbourhoods (barrios).²⁵ While various ethnic groups usually live side by side, some neighbourhoods are mainly inhabited by Mestizos, while others stand out as Creole. These Creole neighbourhoods are the oldest and considered ‘the traditional’ by locals in the city. All of these – Old Bank, Beholden, Pointeen, and Cotton Tree – are located around the central part of the city, called ‘El Barrio central’ (the central neighbourhood). Here one can find most of the grocery stores, cloth shops, cafes, hotels, and bars. Cotton Tree (also called Punta Fría) lies south of town, while Pointeen, Beholden and Old Bank are situated in the north, alongside the basin with a view against the sea. As one strolls through these parts of town, one will see that the population is mainly of African-descent.

Figure 6: The statue in the park



A crucial landmark in the city is the Moravian church; a tall, white building with red roof down by the sea, across the street to the

Moravian school, which lays next to the sea. The park, ‘Parque de Reyes’, is also located in the central part of the city. The park is a gathering place in Bluefields, and is situated between the regional government building and the City Hall. The park consists of some green areas, a couple of benches here and there, a playground, and a small playing-ground for children. A

²⁴ The trip in Panga and bus costs 350 Córdoba, approximately 15 dollars, while you have to pay 80 dollars for the one hour trip in a plane.

²⁵ The neighbourhoods in Bluefields: Santa Rosa, El Barrio Central, San Mateo, Pointeen, Fátima, Tres Cruces, Ricardo Morales, Old Bank, San Pedro, Teodoro Martínez, 19 de Julio, Pancasán, Cotton Tree (Punta Fría), New York, Beholden, El Canal, and Loma Fresca.

row of big, massive mahogany trees tower many meters up in the air. The park is also home to a statue that symbolizes the six ethnic groups inhabiting the Atlantic Coast. The statue consists of a ring of six people of different colours holding their hands up together in the middle – to signify the unity of Miskitus, Sumo-Mayagna, Creoles, Garífunas, Mestizos, and Rama.

Figure 7: A boat loaded full of bananas in Bluefields

The neighbourhoods have important roles to play during the May Pole festival by serving as organizational building blocks. In 2011, 13 neighbourhoods participated in the May-Pole celebrations. Celebrations differ in scale and form from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and are usually more carefully planned and better accomplished in the ‘Creole’ neighbourhoods, such as Old Bank, Beholden, Pointen and Cotton Tree.

Organizations and contributors in the May Pole festival

Although Bluefields is a relative small city, there is a large amount



of non-organizations (NGOs) which operate in the city. In Bluefields today, people seek the assistance of NGOs to carry out different tasks, or for different kinds of help or support.²⁶

The May Pole festival is planned a long time in advance, and today, different organizations are involved in the accomplishment of the event; local and regional institutions,

²⁶ As I spent half a year in an organization named Organización Cooperativa de la Costa Atlántica (OCCA), it seldom passed more than a day without people arriving, asking for help to get a scholarship, or support with daily matters.

as well as the governmental tourism-institution The Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR).

After the change of May Pole in the 1980s,²⁷ INTUR, has become an important contributor in the festival, and has increased its influence and presence at the Atlantic Coast. INTUR is a national organization, whose main goal is to promote and facilitate the country's tourism sector in a way that tallies with the ambition to promote sustainable development in the country.²⁸ During the May Pole festival in 2011, INTUR arranged a regional fair *Feria Turística RAAS* in Bluefields during the last week of May. The organization was present in the park, Parque de Reyes, where participating with 120 small and medium-sized companies that displayed their products. The products included local handicrafts and food, targeted at national and international tourists. Some cloth weavers had arrived from Guatemala, and local and international artisans sold self-made bracelets, ornaments and earrings made of coconut, local shells and nuts.

The two universities in Bluefields, Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU) and Universidad de las Regiones Autonomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense (URRACAN) are also important contributors to the festival.²⁹ Both universities were active in the planning and accomplishment of May Pole, and work closely with the organizations. For example, the League of knowledge is a collaborative project between the governmental institution INTUR, the non-governmental institutions, NGOs, and the universities. We will now turn to see how the Atlantic Coast is marginalized, both the area and Creole people.

The Atlantic Coast; the poorest part of Nicaragua

A United Nations report from the Atlantic Coast regions from 2005 shows that the autonomous regions are in a considerable poorer condition than the rest of Nicaragua (Frühling et al., 2007:283). Unemployment, poverty, underground economy, the drug industry, and the lack of infrastructure are persistent and serious problems, and the differences

²⁷ As presented in the first chapter, May Pole went through a change, from a local, Creole event to become national in scale.

²⁸ http://www.intur.gob.ni/mision_vision.php

²⁹ Both universities were established in 1994, but until recently curriculum and syllabus have not been adapted to reality at the Atlantic Coast. URRACAN is present in both RAAN and RAAS. The main indigenous population is located in RAAN, while most of the African descended groups are located in RAAS. The university situated in RAAS is in process of developed into an 'African descended university'. The objective is to transform and strengthen the URRACAN University to becoming an intercultural university that promotes the consolidation of the autonomy process and documents the development of the African descended identity, its cultural revitalization and the respect of its human and autonomic rights. This will be accomplished through some changes. For the first, more subjects will be taught in English and Creole English. Secondly, the curriculum will be changed, and the University will offer new subjects with emphasis on African descended art, traditional medicine, music, history and the diaspora.

between the Atlantic Coast and the rest of the country are remarkable, as the Coast has lower levels of most development indicators than the rest of the country (Frühling et al., 2007).

The Atlantic Coast constitutes a little more than 50 percent of the territory of Nicaragua, but only eight percent of the road network (Frühling et al., 2007:285). Respiratory diseases and diarrhea among small children are more widespread; four to five times as common at the Atlantic Coast than in the rest of the country (Frühling et al., 2007:287). Environmental challenges are also rampant, as marine resources often are exploited as national and international companies fish up and clear the waters of lobsters and turtles (Frühling et al., 2007:288).

One of the most serious problems at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua is drugs, largely due to the geographical position between Colombia and the United States. Many police boats patrol thoroughly the ship traffic in the area. The boats transporting cocaine from Colombia to Mexico often throw out so-called 'white lobsters', packets of cocaine that drift up on the beach in the many communities around Bluefields (PNUD, 2005:147-148).³⁰

The marginalized position of people of African descent in Nicaragua and in Latin America

The category of 'Creoles' refers to an Afro-Caribbean group who first arrived in the country as slaves of the British colonizers, to be used in the plantations along the Coast. When the slavery ended, they took on the positions as leading figures in cultural, social, economic, and political life in the city of Bluefields (Vilas, 1989:5). The term Creole started to come into use after the eighteenth century, and identified English speakers of African descent (Pineda, 2006:33).

In Latin America, people of African descent have a marginalized position, and are often discriminated against. It is estimated that over 90 percent of the descendants of African slaves brought to the Americas during the colonial era live below the poverty line, access only the most poorly paid jobs, and have little formal education. They also face intense discrimination, based almost entirely on the colour of their skin (Cevallos, 2011).³¹ Several anthropologists have examined people of African descent in Latin America (Wade, 1997, Gordon, 1998, Ng'weno, 2007), though most of the research has centred on Colombia and Brazil.

³⁰ During my stay in Bluefields, I met several people who had found white lobsters.

³¹ United Nations declared year 2011 as International year of people of the African descent.
<http://www.un.org/en/events/iypad2011/index.shtml>

The category of mestizaje is present in Latin America. It refers to the construction of identity and to the idea of the creation of a unique people through particular forms of racial and cultural amalgamation. Elite constructions of national identity typically praise and promote mestizaje, imagining the citizenry as a homogenous group of mixed European and indigenous people unified by the Spanish culture and language. ‘The indigenous past’ is often glorified, even though often continued to be seen as backward and marginal (Wade, 1997:28, Gordon, 1998:121).

Mestizaje is a debated category in Latin America, as it has been used strategically by elites to cover up the existence of racial discrimination in the region. Diditzky claims that Latin America has been portrayed as without racism as people have referred to the category of mestizaje to cover up racism (Diditzky, 2005). People of African descent are usually not included in the term of mestizaje (Gordon, 1998:121, Wade, 1997:84, Diditzky, 2005).³² According to Jeffery Gould, in Nicaraguan nation-building is rooted in a myth of ‘a Mestizo Nicaragua’, a collective belief that Nicaragua has been an ethnically homogenous society since the nineteenth-century (Gould, 1993:394). While indigenous people were associated with ethnicity, African descended people were connected to ‘race’.³³

During the fieldwork, I participated in a long series of presentations, meetings and activities with topics related to African-descended people in Bluefields and in the surrounding communities. I often heard young people and adults emphasize the marginalized position of Creoles in the country, especially in relation to education. One of the informants from the organization, twenty-eight year old Creole John, had studied in Managua and had been actively involved in the organization Organización Cooperativa de la Costa Atlántica (OCCA) since adolescence. Now he mainly worked with issues related to the Creole population, and said the following phrase when we discussed education.

We learned about railways, Sandino, the Spanish conquest, but they did not tell us about Black people, pangas (boats) and the heroes – the reality here in Bluefields. I had to read to find it out. And it is hard to get those books.

When I asked people working with the organization, and the students I got in touch with at schools and in the communities, about education and Creole people, I was usually met by

³² As the anthropologist Peter Wade claims, the term Indio was an institutionalized category as they were recognized as people living in the communities. Though exploited, they were still an administrative category. On the contrary, African-descended were solely apprehended as slaves by the government (Wade, 1997:28).

³³ While the indigenous groups have a common, more tangible history, this is not the case for Creoles. The manner to speak Creole also differs, and in the small communities Haulover and Laguna de la Perlas, the differences are remarkable.

statements of this kind; ‘what the students learn at school is not in accordance with the reality at the Coast.’ Time after time people emphasized the importance of Costeños knowing more about culture, as they know so much about the culture and customs of the rest of the country, but nothing about their own, coastal practices. This factor increases the discrimination and sub-ordinal situation of the Creoles. In conversations with educated Creoles who had been enrolled in universities at the Coast or in Managua (often worked in the organizations) they emphasized the shortage of knowledge at the universities regarding Creoles. They stressed how the role of the Creoles and the Atlantic Coast are not included in historical material. Even though there exist a Creole elite of educated and influential people, Creoles stand out as a minority, and people of African descent are the most marginalized in all of Nicaragua. Year 2011 was declared International Year for People of African Descent by United Nations, and this was stressed by the organizations during my fieldwork, which I soon will come back to.³⁴

I will now turn to history of the Atlantic Coast. I have chosen to divide the history into four phases, and illustrate the role of the Creole population in Nicaragua in each period.

History

As the Argentinian political scientist Carlos M. Vilas (1989) claims, to be familiar with history is important to understand the contemporary situation and recent problems at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. In this section, I will account for the history of the area, with emphasis on May Pole and the Creole population. I will distinguish between four distinct periods that each indicates the people with greatest influence in the region; ‘Colonial rule and arrival of people of African descent’, ‘The period of Moravian church’, ‘From the Treaty of Managua to Samoza dictatorship’, and ‘The Sandinista Revolution, Autonomy law and conflicts over land’.

Colonial rule and arrival of African descendants to the Atlantic Coast (ca.1522-1847)

The first Spanish conquistador, Gil González de Ávila, arrived in what is now Nicaragua in 1522, and this marked the beginning of a three-hundred year long period of Spanish colonial expansion in the country, characterized by exploitation, Christianisation, and militarism (Disney, 2008:11). However, the Atlantic Coast had since the seventeenth-century been characterized by British colonial expansion. In contrast to Spain, which used a method that urged for direct control and domination, Britain used methods which included indirect control

³⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/events/iypad2011/index.shtml>

through an alliance of trade and exchange with indigenous institutions and cultures (Vilas, 1989:14). During the mid-seventeenth century, the British imported slaves to the Atlantic Coast, through Jamaica, and used them as slave labour in plantations, together with the Indians (Bell, 1989 cited in Gordon, 1998:33).

To strengthen the alliance with the ethnic group Miskitus, the British created the Kingdom of the Mosquitia governed by a Miskitu king, a leader who had been crowned and recognized in Jamaica in 1687 (Sollis, 1989:484). Miskitu kingship was not anything the British took too seriously, but was rather a means to legitimize British intervention in the region. At this early stage, the Miskitus were the closest allies of the British, but this decreased the first half of the 1800s (Gabbert, 2011:18-19).

The British influenced way of life at the Atlantic Coast in many ways, including the introduction of the custom May Day, where people danced around a tree on the first day of May to celebrate spring and the flowering of new leaves. This involved young girls and boys going out to cut flowers, and gathering a tree they decorated with ribbons, fruits and the collected flowers - an activity which was called 'going a maying'. Later the same day, they gathered in the street to play and sing while they danced around the tree. British songs such as 'Brown girl in the ring' and 'London Bridge is falling down' were appropriated by the Creole population, transferred, and kept alive by the Creoles at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, and are still sung today during the festival (Deerings Hodgson, 2008:8-9). Creole people mixed elements from May Pole with their own practices and characteristics, as for example dance and food.

The Peace of Versailles in 1783, and the Convention of London between Great Britain and Spain in 1786, resulted in British troop and settlers leaving the Atlantic Coast in 1787. Many of the people of African descent remained at the Atlantic Coast (Gabbert, 2011:13), and formed new communities in Pearl Lagoon, Corn Islands, and Bluefields (Vilas, 1989:20). However, this did not change the relationship towards the Spanish, and the relationship with the British did not disappear altogether (Vilas, 1989:21).

Miskitus had been the dominant group in the area, but now Creoles took over the role as politically leading figures as they became the closest allies of the British, and English language replaced Miskitu as lingua franca (Gordon, 1998). The Creole community began to flourish in the absence of any direct colonial control, and consolidated economic control over 'La Mosquitia', which refers to the Atlantic Coast of several Central-American countries. An elite group of Creoles took over the positions British settlers had once occupied as

commercial intermediaries with the communities, and as political advisers to the Miskitu king (Sollis, 1989:484). Penetration of US capital transformed Bluefields into a busy trade and market town, and during this time the emerging Creole population began to exercise considerable economic, political, and social power in the Mosquitia. In the 1840s, Bluefields became the capital of the Mosquitia, which led to a dramatic increase in Creole political power in the area, due to two things. The first was the re-entry of the British into the Mosquitia, and the other that the Mosquito king moved from Wasala on the Rio Coco to Bluefields, which triggered a dramatic increase of Creole political power in the area (Gordon, 1998:40-41). In short, during this period Creoles arrived at the Atlantic Coast as slaves of the British plantation owners. During the slavery and the following years, Miskitus was the ethnic group that held the most important political positions in the area.

The period of the Moravian church (ca.1847-1900)

In 1847, two missionaries from the protestant Moravian church arrived in Bluefields, from Jamaica, on a request from the British consul at the time, Patrick Walker.³⁵ This marked the beginning of the presence of the Moravian church at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, which led many Creoles and Indians to convert to Protestantism (Vilas, 1989:33).³⁶ The solid political and cultural influence of the Moravian Church is often presented as one of the most outstanding elements of Costeños national identity, in the same way as the Catholic Church is for Pacific Mestizo (Vilas, 1989:53-54).³⁷ The church served as an assembly, and became the principal institution of civil society; it was the only organized European religious institution in the Mosquitia reserve. It held a strong Sunday school program; arranged prayer meetings, organized choirs, and started Bible study groups (Gordon, 1998:55). The Moravian church founded the first schools at the Atlantic Coast, and increased the literacy rates in the area, in order to make the Bible accessible for the population. Later, when the Nicaraguan government set up schools, the schools founded by the Moravian church always held higher prestige in the community (Baracco, 2011b:20-21). Close association with the Moravian missionaries enhanced the status of the Creoles, and they were the first to be educated, and to achieve influential positions. Consequently, Creoles became shop owners, employees in North-American businesses, and small scale producers of bananas. Their protestant education and

³⁵ Missionaries from the European protestant denomination the Moravian church who established religious community in Bluefields.

³⁶ The Moravian church was formally established in Bluefields in 1849 and until 1855 it primary engaged with the Creoles, and after this year it established in the communities among the Indian population as well.

³⁷ The church is still important at the Atlantic Coast today, especially among the Creole population.

English language put them in a favourable position to benefit from the economic boom in the 1880s (Hale, 1994:41).

Membership in the Moravian church was not solely religious, but additionally required a great deal of personal initiative and commitment, and there was a strict moral code which included prohibition against tobacco, alcohol, dancing, and swearing. The Moravian church preached about the importance of hard work, and values of family life. The church wanted to transform the religious beliefs as well as the very lifestyle of the communities; by introducing 'proper' clothing and living rooms in houses (Gordon, 1998:54-55). Additionally, the church considered hunting and fishing practiced by locals as 'uncivilized activities', and preached about the advantages of agriculture, which they considered proper labour (Vilas, 1989:34). The church was against the African-originated religious practices of the Creoles, which involved marathon drumming, dancing, and ritual alcohol consumption to prevent disease, death and misfortune. The church wished to convert the rituals of the dead, their thanksgiving to the soil, the sun and the crops - and replace them with Christian practices. While the Creoles cured sickness and other ailments with herbs, traditional medicine, and rituals as they had done for decades, the church wanted to replace it with Western medicine. However, many retained their spiritual practices that derived from their African past, often as a combination with Protestantism (Vilas, 1989:33).³⁸

The Moravian church implied problems for the May Pole festival, which had been changed by Creole people since its arrival at the Coast as a European custom. The church asserted that factors such as alcohol and provocative dance were too dominant in the festival. The church wanted to change many of the habits and practices of the Creole people. In line with this, May Pole dance became more formal and conservative. Those of the Coastal population, who refused to follow the recommendations of the church, radicalized the dance in such a manner that others perceived it obscene. On the other side, many wanted to retain the dance like it had been implemented by the British. The impact of the Moravian church resulted in the establishment of two versions of May Pole; a formal style with large dresses, and an emancipated version without any form of formality, but with a lot of creativity and improvisation (Deerings Hodgson, 2008:9-10).

Even though the church declared non-involvement in political issues, the Moravian church participated actively in governmental bodies, first in the Mosquito kingdom and later

³⁸ This was also a present factor during my fieldwork, as many of my informants went to the Moravian church at the same time as they practiced local spiritual practice.

in the Mosquito reserve (Vilas, 1989:33). The church held a considerable degree of political power (Gordon, 1998:44). Another interesting aspect of the presence of the Moravian church was their local ‘helpers’; local assistants who gave the missionaries contact with the local communities by the coast. These helpers took over administrative tasks and became key figures in the local communities.³⁹ In short, this historical period implied the arrival of the Moravian church. Creoles became the closest allies of foreign settlers, which included a stronger position, as they and obtained important political positions within Nicaragua.

From the Treaty of Managua to Somoza dictatorship (ca.1860-1930)

The establishment of the Moravian church happened simultaneously with political changes; Nicaragua gained independence from Spain in 1821 (Wolfe, 2007:19). In 1860, the Treaty of Managua between Nicaragua and Great Britain was signed. The British abdicated their protectorate and recognized Nicaraguan sovereignty over the southern portion of the Mosquitia. The region, which had been known as ‘The Kingdom of the Mosquitia’ until 1860, lost some of its independence, and was established as ‘the Mosquito reserve’ until 1890 (Gabbert, 2011:11). The Mosquito kingdom and the Mosquito Reserve were dominated by foreign interests, as Belizean traders, British, German missionaries, and a few Creoles held the leading positions during this period of time (Baracco, 2011a:37). The Atlantic Coast was drawn into the industrial economy of the United States, producing rubber, bananas, minerals, and different types of wood (Sollis, 1989:485). By the 1880s, Bluefields constituted the most economically thriving area in the entire country, and by the 1890s, US companies had capital investments in bananas, coconuts, lumbering and other resources (Gordon, 1998:57). The period between 1880 and 1930 is known as ‘the enclave economy’, as the area was seen as an economic enclave of the United States (Vilas, 1989:44).

By 1894, Creoles had formed a strong sense of Mosquitian nationality, with consent to Anglo hegemony, developed through the Moravian presence and U.S. entrepreneurs (Gordon, 1998:60). However, in 1894, the Nicaraguan government, with president José Santos Zelaya at lead, decided to integrate the Atlantic Coast with the rest of the country (Sollis, 1989:486). Nicaraguan troops occupied the city of Bluefields in February 1894, and initiated what the Nicaraguan government referred to as the ‘Reincorporation of the Atlantic Coast’ – what Creoles called ‘the Overthrow’ (Gordon, 1998:61).

³⁹ The Moravian church fronted a position which did not support Nicaragua and the Spanish conquest. The church felt threatened by the revolutionary government (Gordon, 1998:227).

Foreign intervention from United States, accumulated in the wish to create an inter-oceanic channel, led to rebellion conducted by the resistance leader, Augusto César Sandino, from 1927-1933. Sandino was a worker from the countryside who believed in justice and anti-imperialism before personal gain, and would later turn out to be the source of inspiration for today's FSLN party (Baracco, 2005:43). General Sandino's struggle against the United States' military invasion led to a more exposed economy at the Atlantic Coast, and Indians, as well as Creoles, had an ambivalent attitude towards Sandino and his army (Vilas, 1989:50). Sandino was killed in 1934, as the new Director of the National Guard; General Anastasio Somoza García took power (Baracco, 2005:52). Somoza was inspired by the fascist regimes in Europe at the time, and took power by force in Nicaragua in 1936. Followed by his sons, he held political and military supremacy in the country for more than 40 years. The dictatorship was one of the worst at the Latin American continent, and was characterized by corruption, smuggling, and violence. However, the regime also invested in infrastructure, which led to a significant modernization and resulted in economic prosperity for the coast, at least until the 1970s (Baracco, 2005:55).

By the 1960s, Nicaragua had entered a phase of rapid nationwide economic growth, mainly by manufacturing, and exporting cotton and cattle. However, the economic model followed by the State resulted in desperate poverty for most of the population at the Pacific side, especially in the countryside. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Nicaragua was affected by a series of economic crises, such as world inflation, international economic recession, and collapse of international trade accords, which led to unemployment, inflation, and deterioration of the living standard. In this context, President Anastasio Somoza Debayle, called Tachito, saw the Atlantic Coast as especially fertile grounds, due to its economic prosperity and the possibility for economical investments (Gordon, 1998:122).

The Somoza state encouraged Mestizos to migrate to the Atlantic Coast, and considered the area a solution to the demographic pressure at the Pacific side.⁴⁰ Many Mestizo peasants were forced off their land, and migrated eastward to the Atlantic Coast in pursuit of a sustainable livelihood. However, the sudden boom of Mestizos led to conflicts between Costeños and the Spanish speaking population, especially concerning land rights. This conflict is still vital today, and will soon be elaborated. Much of the state's investments

⁴⁰ The Mestizos from the Pacific had started to arrive in 1860s, and President Zelaya implemented a Spanish speaking Mestizo bureaucracy at the coast. While earlier reasons for migration were grounded in possibilities for labour in the coasts economy, the reasons during the sixties were that small farmers at the Pacific side had been pushed off their land for the benefit of larger productions (Vilas, 1989:62).

into the coast, regarding fishing, reforestation, and agro-industry, were meant to serve the Spanish-speaking Mestizos, not the Coast people, something which led to displeasure (Hale, 1994:119-121). Coastal marine resources were exploited for the export of shrimps, lobsters, and turtles, and this led to overfishing and a decline in biodiversity. In addition to environmental consequences, arriving Mestizos did not have the local knowledge about regular reciprocal customs, and this led to displeasure and misunderstandings. Conflict arose, and is still a present problem at the Coast today, for example regarding land rights. The command of the Samoza family's dictatorship came to an end in 1979 (Baracco, 2011a:117). In short, during the second half of the 1800s, and the first part of the 1900s, Creoles held important positions at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. However, with the arrival of Mestizos into the region, they gradually started to lose some of this power.

The Sandinista revolution, the Autonomy law and conflicts over land (ca.1979 –)

With a few exceptions, the Costeños did not take part in the revolutionary process in Nicaragua, which led to the end of the Samoza family-dynasty. The revolution that had characterized the country from 1976 to 1979 had been absent at the Atlantic Coast. In 1979, the revolution came to an end, and the party Frente Sandinista de Liberacion National (FSLN), gained victory.⁴¹ FSLN is a socialist party; the members of the party are called Sandinistas, and Daniel Ortega is the leader – and also the current president in the country, as I write these pages. The Sandinistas introduced a series of national projects, the largest of which was ‘The Sandinista National Literacy Crusade’, The Crusade, in the 1980s (Baracco, 2004:339). This project was implemented to teach the population to write and read. However, as claimed by Baracco; the project also had a far wider ambition of promoting a new kind of nationhood, to connect rural and urban areas. The material promoted knowledge about the revolution, the origin of FSLN, and the inspirational hero of the party, Sandino (Baracco, 2004:345).⁴² Through the Crusade it was made clear that the nation Nicaragua existed.

However, the Sandinistas committed a series of mistakes in their handling of the Atlantic Coast after the revolution. Sandinistas arrived at the Coast and declared how Nicaragua was free from the barbarous command of the Samoza and North-American imperialism. The Sandinistas were unaware of the negative perception of their movement at the Atlantic Coast, and encountered a people with good memories from economically thriving

⁴¹ Sandinista National Liberation Front.

⁴² Paulo Freire participated in the discussion and planning of the Crusade (Baracco, 2004:345).

times during 'Company time' (Vilas, 1989:115).⁴³ The FSLN approached the Atlantic Coast in the same manner as they had with peasants and workers at the Pacific side. The ethnic diversity, historic ties to international foreign companies, reciprocity practices, languages, and the dominant position of the Moravian church were not taken into account (Vilas, 1989:96).⁴⁴ The Spanish language and foreign concepts were difficult to comprehend for the Costeño population (Frühling et al., 2007:39-40).

These mistakes were crucial for the Creole population for five reasons.⁴⁵ Firstly, the Creoles had taken over the position of the Miskitus during the mid-nineteenth century, and they experienced a decline after the revolution, as the government chose Mestizos into important positions, which led to irritation among educated Costeños. People from the Pacific were brought in, and given higher salaries and benefits in order to make them stay (Vilas, 1989:136). Secondly, the government dealt with the Creole population in an abstract way, and categorised all the ethnic groups as 'Indians'. A political organization, called Miskitu, Sumu, Rama, and Sandinistas working together (MISURATA), was established to represent the Costeños and Sandinistas. Its members were mainly Indigenous, and this prevented the Creole population from getting a voice. While MISURATA got a seat in the council of state, Southern Indigenous Creole community (SICC), the Creole organization of Bluefields and Pearl Lagoon did not receive attention from the government. Many perceived these events as the first steps in the subordination to Miskitus (Vilas, 1989:137). Thirdly, the economic decline in Bluefields, Pearl Lagoon, and Corn Islands after the revolution was remarkable due to the flight of Samozistas and foreign capital. As mentioned, the 1960s had been an economically prosperous period, and the contrast was remarkable. Fourthly, the changing work conditions, reduced incomes, and lack of Costeños into influential positions, combined with ethnocentrism and arrogance of many of the arriving Mestizo government officials, did not improve the conditions (Vilas, 1989:137).

The 1980s was a difficult and problematic decade for Nicaragua. In 1981, a rupture between the Miskitu Indians and the revolutionary state broke out, and developed into a war that lasted for six years. The counterrevolutionary forces, called the Contras, were backed up

⁴³ The FSLN was based on the memory of General Sandino, who had not been much appreciated at the Atlantic Coast, and was in these parts renowned to represent communist and anti-religious people (Frühling et al., 2007:37).

⁴⁴ The Sandinistas did not take the monopoly of the church into consideration. This led to tensions as the Church felt threatened (Vilas, 1989:116).

⁴⁵ Additionally, Mestizos often had the same stereotypes as Samozas and people from the Pacific, and apprehended the Costeños as lazy men, sexy women, backward people who needed to be civilized (Vilas, 1989:117).

by the CIA. The war's main objective was to undermine the revolution by supporting the Atlantic Coast to become an independent country.⁴⁶

The result of the conflicts between the two parts of the country was the National Assembly of Nicaragua's approval of law 28; Autonomy Statutes for the regions at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. Two autonomous regions were established in 1987. The northern part of the coast was called *Región Autónoma Atlántico Norte (RAAN)*, while *Región Autónoma Atlántico Sur (RAAS)* referred to the southern part.

The law represented three important political advances. Firstly, the central government and the party FSLN confirmed that the conflict at the Atlantic Coast, the Contra war, had found a peaceful solution. Secondly, the ethnic diversity was recognized, ethnic groups were given legal rights as Nicaraguan citizens, and Nicaragua was on its way to be recognized as a multi-ethnic country. Thirdly, the law led to a transformation of governmental politics towards the Atlantic Coast and its inhabitants (Frühling et al., 2007:73). When law 28 was established in 1987, many *Costeños* apprehended the law as a peace treaty with the Spanish from the Pacific Coast.

The Statute of Autonomy was one of the first laws to recognize to indigenous rights in Latin America, with objective to recognize the multiethnic and pluri-cultural nature of Nicaragua within the North and South Atlantic Autonomous Regions. The law confirms the rights to communal land and resources, and recognize the historical, social, economic, political, and educational rights of the indigenous peoples and ethnic communities (Sollis, 1989:514). In February 1980, the first regional elections were to be held in regional autonomous councils of the Caribbean Coast. This was a new political situation in the country, and Nicaragua was for the first time considered 'by nature multi-ethnic' (González, 2011:147-148).

Even so, autonomy on the Atlantic Coast has showed to be highly contested, and national institutions, as well as ethnic group at the Coast have challenged the process (Baracco, 2011b:5). When hurricane Juan swept the Atlantic Coast in 1988, its consequences were enormous. In Bluefields, 80 percent of the buildings were destroyed, and during my fieldwork in 2011, Juan's effects were still visible. During the 1980s, after the revolution,

⁴⁶ In 1823, the Monroe doctrine was formulated by United States. This doctrine was evolved to prevent European countries from intervening and colonizing American countries, and claimed that any attempt of European intervention into the continent would lead to a reaction from United States. United States has intervened in the region time after time to serve their own economic and political requests/wants, and Latin America has often been seen as 'America's backyard' (Nymark, 2006). Nicaragua has experienced a row of interventions from United States. The most recent incident was the Contra revolutionary war in the 1980s.

Nicaragua became an immediate and long-term recipient of enormous amounts of foreign aid. This led to aid dependency, and has also been a breeding ground for corruption. In the middle and end of the 1980s, inflation destroyed Nicaragua's currency, the Córdoba, and it became close to worthless – at the same time that the country was at war (Morris, 2010:135-136).

The use and ownership of land has been a recurrent issue of conflict between the Atlantic Coast and the state of Nicaragua since the 1960s (PNUD, 2005:254). With the large migration boom of Mestizos and a change in the ethnoscape (Appadurai, 1996:33) at the Atlantic Coast, Mestizos and foreigners received land titles which belonged to the Indian and African descended population in the communities, something that led to conflicts and displeasure (PNUD, 2005:254).

Though the autonomy law implemented in 1987 confirmed the right to communal land, this did not have any practical implications, and it not solve any of the land-related issues. In January 2003, an indigenous land demarcation law, called *Ley de Demarcación y Titulación de Tierras Comunes*, known as law 445, was passed by the National Assembly in Nicaragua (PNUD, 2005:255-257).⁴⁷ The demarcation law created for the first time a legal framework for recognition of indigenous and African-descended territories. In essence, Law 445 was a judicial and administrative tool to demarcate and legalize their territories. It recognizes the rights of such communities to utilize, administer and manage their traditional lands and resources as communal property. As such, Law 445 re-establishes the property rights of Nicaragua's ethnic minorities and devolves political power to the communal level.⁴⁸

A National Demarcation and Titling Commission referred to as Comisión Nacional de Demarcación y Titulación usually referred to with the acronym CONADETTI,⁴⁹ was established (Jamieson, 2011:288). There are five steps in the demarcation process. Firstly, 'diagnosis' of land in which a technical team checks the land physically and various forms of land tenure within a territory is identified, private as well as collective land. Secondly, conflict resolution, where communities come together to discuss possible disputes over land. Thirdly, one has boundary setting, where territorial boundaries are set. Fourthly, the 'land titling' where CONADETTI submits the territorial claim to the government that issues a title. Fifthly, one has *saneamiento* (securing), the last step in which land is distributed. All illegal settlers in possession of land have to pay rent or leave the territories. This is also the most difficult step.

⁴⁷ Law 445: Law of Communal Property Regime of the indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Communities of the Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and of the Rivers Bocay, Coco, Indio and Maíz.

⁴⁸ Interview with the Rama-Kriol government 3th of June 2011.

⁴⁹ National commission for demarcation and titling.

⁵⁰ However, the demarcation is long and arbitrary, and still is not finished, as the rules of decision making are still under construction (Finley-Brook, 2011:309-310).

During my fieldwork, conflicts about land were topic of debate in Bluefields, and I interviewed the leader of the Rama and Kriol government, the Creole government, and some members from CONADETTI. The Creole government was established in 2003 to demarcate indigenous and African-descended land, as a result of the implementation law 445, the demarcation law. The Rama-Kriol territorial government (GTRK) is an organization established in order to demarcate 10 communities (seven Rama and three Creole) south of Bluefields in RAAS.⁵¹ They all work with demarcation issues. The land disputes probably lead to an increase in ethnic tensions, which appeared in the diverging point of views concerning the May Pole festival as it was appropriated by the state and the organizations. I will return to problems related to land in the following chapters.⁵²

In short, after the revolution, the economy worsened at the Coast, and Creoles lost their status as economic elite. Many Creoles claimed that the Sandinista revolution was the reason for this (Gordon, 1998:245-246). The Sandinistas solved this by implementing an autonomy law which acknowledged the rights of indigenous and people of African descent. However, this has not yet been successful, and African-descended people are still marginalized in Nicaragua today.

Fieldwork and methodology

Before I arrived in Bluefields, I had wanted to explore the relationship between the Nicaraguan state and the Atlantic Coast, due to the problematic relationship between the two parts of the country. Specifically, I wanted to do this by following a 'case'. The May Pole festival became a focus for attention for three reasons. Firstly, it was the largest cultural festival at the Atlantic Coast. Secondly, it had undergone a transformation from being uniquely Creole, to being appropriated by the state, and made into a nation-wide, and then national, event that was contested locally. Thirdly, during the fieldwork, so much of the local

⁵⁰ An interview I had with the Rama-Kriol government 3th of June 2011.

⁵¹ Rama Cay, Tiktik Kaanu (Zompopera), Sumu Kaat, Wiring Cay, Bangkukuk (Punta de Águila), Indian River (Río Indio), Monkey Point, Corn river and Greytown.

⁵² A history with dictatorship, one-man-rule, and the complex political situation has led to an open void which has been filled by non-governmental organizations. During the 1980s, the government also changed its cultural politics, which amongst others led to a change of the festival May pole, and the Creole festival was made into a national event. The last years, several countries have withdrawn their economic support and embassies from Nicaragua. Norway withdrew their embassy from Nicaragua in July 2011, as Holland, Denmark, and Sweden also have done the last two years.

life revolved around preparations and celebration of the festival, and I consequently had a lot of information about May Pole.

I arrived in Bluefields on the 25th of January, and stayed until the 20th of July, 2011. Before I left Norway, I was fortunate to get in contact with a local non-governmental organization (NGO), which I will refer to under the pseudonym Organización Cooperativa de la Costa Atlántica (OCCA). They welcomed me into their work, arrangements, and fellowship, from the first day in the field. I have carried out most of the fieldwork in Bluefields, but I have also visited other communities at the Coast, such as in Haulover, Rama, Bluff, Laguna de Las Perlas, Kukra Hill, and Corn Islands. I have also visited the Pacific side; the cities León and Managua. Within Bluefields, I have carried out research in various social locations; the office of OCCA, meetings with other organizations, reunions with youth and adults, houses of informants, shops, at the street, and in the park.

My informants have included both skilled professionals who have attended universities at the Coast or in Managua, as well as ‘unskilled’ and unemployed people, and participants in the underground economy. Employees in the organization, young volunteers, and people I got to know in meetings and reunions, have made up my main informants. People in Bluefields are generally friendly; they invite you into their homes, bring you to meet their friends, and are very pleasant. During the fieldwork, if I did not have anything to do for some hours, I just went into the street, and I would always run into someone to talk with. This friendliness made the fieldwork in Bluefields an enjoyable experience.

The main method of obtaining information (data) has been participant observation. During the fieldwork, I worked with the organization in the planning of May Pole, and I was also present during Liga de Saber, which will be elaborated in chapter five. I attended most of the arrangements that took place in the city this month; many local neighbourhood-celebrations, events in the park, and around in the city.⁵³ I participated as a dancer in one of the most important days in May Pole, Día de los Comparsas, where I danced together with one of the Creole neighbourhoods. I also took part in the Tu lululu, where several hundred people dance throughout the city centre in a long parade. During May Pole, I was usually in the middle of everything, and I experienced the fieldwork as an absorbing swirl where I participated with my whole self, one hundred per cent. After the fieldwork, I found it somewhat difficult to develop an analytical distance to the whole fieldwork experience which

⁵³ I do not have too much information about people who choose not to participate in the festival. Some Mestizos and Creoles I talked with, from the older generation, claimed that they were too old to participate in the Tu lululu. Many older Creoles did not participate in the Día de los Comparsas, but said they used to dance when they were younger.

I had experienced so close. The reflective, critical-analytical mode thus took some time to develop, due to the extensive process which involves what the anthropologist Galina Lindquist referred to as 'going native and coming back' (Lindquist, 1995). I have conducted informal, as well as formal interviews, with and without tape recorder. I have interviewed individuals and several influential governments and organizations at the Coast.⁵⁴ Additionally, I have carried out some interviews at the Pacific side, in the cities Leon, San Juan del Sur, as well as in the capital Managua.

Media has also been useful during my fieldwork. Akhil Gupta (1995) writes about discourses of corruption in a local village in India to be able to analyse everyday encounters with the state. Gupta claims, through media, especially local and national newspapers, political themes become topic for local debate. During the fieldwork, I have listened to the local radio, the Spanish and the Creole news, and watched news broadcast on television, local as well as national. Today, there are no local newspapers in Bluefields, only national newspapers, such as the independent 'La Prensa' and 'El Nuevo Diario'. Discussions which took place in the organization and the cityscape were often off-spins of on-going debates in media. By reading newspapers, listening to radio programs, and watching television programs, I could to a certain degree engage in these debates. I did not only enhance my understanding about the Atlantic Coast and the current situation in this way, but my involvement in politics and contemporary social topics was apprehended as positive among locals. It also stimulated further questions. Though important, the media is not a central source of information in this thesis, rather an additional source. Moreover, I have gathered information from other authorities, such as legal acts about the autonomy and land demarcation, and various documents regarding the population of Indian and African descent.

The organization hosting me during the fieldwork, OCCA, operated in both RAAS and RAAN, and had their office in Managua. It was established in the 1990s, and was manned mainly by volunteers. In the office in Bluefields, approximately 10 employees worked, most of whom were Creole. The office was located in a small house with a patio and a fence outside, over two floors. Downstairs was an office with five desks, where usually 4-6 of the employees sat. This open space created a social environment where it was easy to get in contact with people, observe, and ask questions. Three offices were located upstairs, with a

⁵⁴ The Rama Kriol Gobierno works with demarcation of land in ten communities south of Bluefields. The Creole government works with titling of land and promote Creole people. The Black Farmers in Bluefields work with farms where people of African descent can cultivate land. The Black farmers in Laguna de Las Perlas also work with cultivation of land. The Creole News is a radio program in Creole language.

balcony outside, which usually was used for meetings. I was at the office in Bluefields almost every day, from eight in the morning until noon, and from two until five in the afternoons. Four Creole people were my main informants in the organization, and I will refer to them under the pseudonyms John, Carla and Oscar. The aim of OCCA was to contribute to a more efficient autonomy, promote indigenous rights, and the development of a better situation for all the ethnic groups at the Atlantic Coast. By making people aware of their history, language, and rights, they wanted to strengthen their position in Nicaragua. Due to the marginal role of African-descended people in Nicaragua, this was a central topic of OCCAs work.⁵⁵ OCCA has also performed election observation, and was a crucial contributor in the May Pole festival. During my internship with the organization, I participated in different projects; meetings, arrangements, and activities. The months of April and May were especially busy, due to preparations for May Pole, and everyone, myself included, was occupied planning the different arrangements to be carried out, together with other organizations and the universities.

Lisa Markowitz (2001) has done fieldwork in an NGO in Peru, and writes about how ethnographers collaborating with NGOs might be problematic. To perform fieldwork in a NGO may have certain methodological implications, due to the role of the ethnographer as situated in a nexus of interpersonal and institutionalized relationship in an organization (Markowitz, 2001:41). For me, to stay in a NGO entailed both advantages and challenges. On one hand, it enabled quick access into the social arena in Bluefields, not only in this particular organization, but also in the social business activity in the city. Through the organization, I got the opportunity to acquire a network rapidly, and participate at conferences, assemblies and congresses, with a wide spectre of topics; HIV/AIDS, migration, drug problems, or planning of May Pole. Indisputably, without the organization, these conferences and meetings allowed me to establish relations which otherwise would have been inaccessible to me. In the beginning, some people asked what I was doing there, why this *chele*, white person from Europe, was going to participate. After some months, I was familiar in the surroundings and started to get to know people, in the relatively small city. On the other hand, even though I always emphasised my independent role (and my thesis) in meeting with people and

⁵⁵ During my stay in Bluefields I participated in many reunions and activities that targeted on the African-descended population. This was a particular important theme in 2011, as this year was declared International Year for People of African Descent by United Nations. The objective for United Nations to have an emphasis on the African-descent population was to fight racial discrimination, and promote human rights for black people in the Americas. By stressing African-descended year 2011, UN wanted to create a catalyst that would spread knowledge and enhance people's awareness and understanding for the situation.

organizations, I cannot be hundred per cent sure whether everyone understood my independent role. For some, I might be seen as a ‘worker’ for this particular organization. Though I have been collaborating with a NGO, this thesis is not primarily about a ‘case’ of the NGO, but staying in an organization became rather a means to get in contact with people, establish a social network, and be able to carry out my research.

My role as a 25-years old, white, Norwegian student of anthropology should also be taken into consideration. Before I arrived to the field, I did not know what implications gender, age, and skin colour would have on the fieldwork. As the Nicaraguan anthropologist Roger Lancaster claims, the Nicaraguan society has a long tradition for machismo. Macho refers to ‘a real man’, and machismo produces a row of values where ‘the macho-man’ is dominant in relations between men and women (Lancaster, 1992). The country’s custom for machismo would probably have importance for whom my informants would be, and for which social spheres I could participate in. However, this turned out to be somewhat different than what I had imagined, as most of my informants were Creole, and way of life and thinking differs from the Mestizo, Latin American way of life. As mentioned earlier, Creole people are on some levels culturally more similar to the Caribbean than Latin America. Among Creoles, the concept of machismo is not in particular dominating, and one can find more traits towards what can be seen as a ‘Caribbean mentality’, characterized by a more laid-back atmosphere marked by laughter, friendliness, and individuality (Hylland Eriksen, 1996:295).⁵⁶ As a young, western woman I experienced how it was easy to come in contact with people, as it seemed like most people were interested in talking to me, both women and men.

The greatest challenge I encountered the first months of the fieldwork was the language. Before I arrived, I spoke English and Spanish fluently. However, in Bluefields and in the organization, people usually talked Creole-English amongst each other, and the first months I had trouble to follow conversations. Creole-English has roots from the period of slavery, and contact between African languages and English (Freeland, 2011:268). The Creole language was understandable when people spoke slowly, and during one-to one conversations. The problems arose when I entered a larger discussion with many people participating; the communication moved quickly and there was no shortage of jokes. People tended to mix Creole and Spanish, often in the same sentence. However, my level of understanding improved as time passed, and after two months I experienced a turning point

⁵⁶ Hylland Eriksen writes that one does not operate with different ‘mentalities’ in anthropology, but this still has to be taken into consideration, as it is widely documented in various texts and research from the Caribbean (Hylland Eriksen, 1996:295).

where I suddenly understood everything said. I could participate in a joint conversation, follow up jokes, respond to quick talk, and I had no trouble understanding. This moment was a breakthrough for the fieldwork, and after this I was accepted into the team in a completely different manner. I was in a larger degree invited to parties and social reunions, and introduced for my informants' circle of acquaintances.

Ethical considerations

During the fieldwork, many of the people from the organizations and other informants became my friends. As Amit-Talai writes, it might be difficult to distinguish people whom one has gotten to know for half-a-year as neighbourhoods, friends, or advisers – as research subjects. Some might also question the integrity of the anthropologist. On the other hand, this methodology also makes the fieldworker able to see people as multi-dimensional people (Amit-Talai, 1999:2-3). In the organization, I was considered a mixture between a friend, a colleague, and a student. 'And this is Silje, who does her thesis here. She helps us with everything' was a usual statement to be heard when I was introduced for new people. I will refer to research subjects as informants throughout the thesis. As Amit claims, in anthropology, personal relationships between researcher and subject are so fundamental. Relations are not a side-issue, but rather the main focus. This has dilemmas of ethics (Amit-Talai, 1999:2). In this relation, good communication is essential.

Norwegian is my mother tongue, but I have decided to write the thesis in English, though this is not my first language. Additionally, I have chosen to keep quotations in Creole and sometimes in Spanish, as I think this is important to bring out the vividness and presence from the fieldwork. Whenever necessary, I will also include the English translation. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

One main ethical concern is how I present the organization in this thesis. The work that the organizations do is of importance, and I hope this study does not lead to discourage the organization by taking its spirit away. I hope to be able to impart recognition of the importance of their work.

Another concern during the fieldwork was my skin tone. In arrangements and in lectures regarding people of African descent, I was often the only white person present in the room, and I sometimes questioned whether my presence was inappropriate, when only people of African descent discussed topics as racism, colonialism, and slavery. However, I was assured by my informants that this was not the case. One time, some informants from the

organization OCCA and I, had travelled with panga (river boat) to a community along the Coast, to hold a presentation regarding this subject. During the presentation, John and Oscar held a lecture where empowerment of African-descent was the main theme. The presentation stressed how people of African descent were equal to everyone else, and as the presentation draw to a close, John talked, and said with a smile. 'We are all only black people here today. Without Silje then, but she is our sista'. As this example illustrates, I was included into the group despite not being Creole.

I aim to preserve the anonymity of the organizations, interviewees, and informants, except when I mention geographical places. I have made use of pseudonyms for two reasons. The first is due to ethical considerations for my informants and the organization. Secondly, I see anonymity as crucial for critical analysis, and not have to feel obligated to present the organization in a certain positive manner, and consequently under-communicating critical aspects which may have importance. I will now turn to chapter three, where I will shift to a phenomenological genre by describing, as vividly as possible, the May Pole festival of 2011.

3. 'It's May Pole, time'

Before you can see or comprehend what is going on, you are caught by the sounds of music. Catchy, appealing, striking tones make it impossible to sit still, as they seduce the body to move by itself. The sounds usually come from an old, ramshackle CD-player in the corner, that still manages, in some way or another, to produce an impressive level of sound waves – despite being marked by a certain degree of jarring. However, minor details such as granting sound or a drunken man trying to take over the show does not seem to have any impact on the attendance. While some are dancing around the characteristic May pole Tree, a tree decorated with ribbons and fruits, others are casually watching, while drinking a beer or a glass of rum and coke. It starts to rain and this confirms the presumed: we are in Bluefields at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, and it is time for May Pole.

In this chapter I will empirically describe the prominent festival in Bluefields May Pole, which I will later use as a prism to study the relationship between state and periphery in Nicaragua. The chapter will start with a description of the month-long festival and its most important events, continue with a piece about the organization of the festival, and end with a brief introduction to the historical background and the changes May Pole has experienced.



Figure 8: Día de los Comparsas

A Creole neighbourhood celebration

We are situated in a street in one of the city's old, 'traditional' neighbourhoods. It is time for May Pole; an annual festival that takes place during May month and turns the whole city upside down. The locals have spent days putting up banners with the May Pole logo, buying drinks and preparing food; to make this neighbourhood celebration particularly noteworthy. On the day in question, people from the neighbourhood spend most of the day getting ready for the party in the street. On each side of the road you can find houses in different colours, most of them are laid in bricks, and small gardens are situated outside each building. Plastic tables and chairs are carried out from the different houses and put in the street – usually five or six around each table. Children are running around playing, and people are walking in and out of their houses to get what they need. A young man walks determined towards the tables, and lays out the characteristic table cloth always present during the domino games – and it does its job when one of the players bangs the domino chips in the table with a force making it reverberate. The scent of coconut, fried fish, and seafood soup starts to spread across the street in the neighbourhood. A crucial constituent is the decorating and implementation of the traditional May Pole tree – a tree has been cut and decorated with colourful ribbons and fruits. A couple of hours later, as the evening turns, people will be swinging themselves around the red, blue, green, and yellow blushing tree in full immersion. Young and older men are totally absorbed in the domino playing – an activity which unites a significant part of the Bluefileño population throughout the year, through competitions at a local, as well as regional and national level. Others are situated around while they follow the game played out in front of them intensely.⁵⁷

The local beer is an obvious guest, and a couple of women are in control of the Caribbean dishes available for sale. 'One more night – give me just one more night, girl – one more night...' can be heard from the speakers. The man in charge of the music alternates between typical May Pole songs which derived from the British, as well as hip-hop, rap, reaggeton, - and sometimes even a touch of country music. The influences from Jamaica and United States are indeed present. A number of different Reggae styles, from tranquil versions to faster and more hard-core reggae, returns over and over again.⁵⁸ The languages used are English, Creole and Spanish, often a mixture between the three, and the lyrics in the texts are

⁵⁷All are equal. Other features present everyday such as class and work (or rather the lack of it due to the high numbers of unemployment) suddenly does not have any implications anymore.

⁵⁸ The most crucial characteristic is the trailing rhythm, and the prominent role of the bass instruments. The Rastafarian religion is a central aspect, especially in the texts which usually contains an element of social revolt (<http://snl.no/reggae>).

usually about love, sex and girls. The combination of African music which has been modified, in combination with other styles like rock, hip-hop and rap is prominent.⁵⁹

Throughout the afternoon more people appear; some are talking together, others are hanging around to watch the domino players or the children playing, - while refreshing themselves with something to drink. There are a significant number of people present, old grand-parents as well as small children. Costeños of all ages take part in the May Pole celebrations. As the night passes and dusk spreads across the city, the atmosphere gets tenser; people keep showing up, and more Bluefileños get involved in the celebrations. Everything becomes more powerful and alive, as we step into the late hours of the night. The music stops for a moment, and it is announced that a competition, that will select the best dancers, will take place. Everybody rushes into the street, and even the domino players rise from their respective seats, where they have been situated with intense focus on the board for the last hours,- in order to participate. The music – which earlier has been a mixture of reggae and reggaeton, switches to strictly being the characteristic May Pole songs ‘Tu lululu Pass Anda’, ‘Brown girl in the ring’, and ‘Sing Sayman, sing my love’ are played over the stereo. The music and dance is a collective act during May Pole, a form for communication between musicians, the soloist, the public, and the dancers forming an integral part of the events of May Pole. The songs and melodies are an outcome of British and Coastal currents (Deerings Hodgson, 2008:11).

People are dance, and it does not go by unnoticed. A couple of women have already started the dance; they are dressed up for the occasion with high heels and short dresses in bright colourful material which make a pronounced contrast to their dark skin. There is laughter, there is dancing, and it is time for May-pole. People dance with a rhythm, a pace, and a sensitivity that is outstanding; bodies are vibrating at an impressive pace and with an integrated rhythm. A woman is dancing by herself – a man enters into the ring of people which makes up the dance floor. He moves his body in line with the music. Quickly, but at the same time controlled, he circular movements with his hips in time with the notes. He tries to seduce her by dance, but she dismisses him with a flat refusal, and continues by herself. By now, the crowd has gathered in a ring; people are clapping their hands together, cheering and smiling. There is laughter in the air, and flashes are blazing as photos are being taken. However, the man does not seem to give up, despite the repeated dismissals of his attempts. The way he sweeps himself from side to side is probably impossible for most Northern

⁵⁹ During the 1980s, several ‘May Pole bands’ were popular, amongst the Creole band Dimensión Costeña (Scruggs, 1999:317).

Europeans, due to of lack of development of sense of rhythm from the upbringing. It is as if children have an innate sense of rhythm. The woman continues by herself, - but she starts to notice his determination, and more importantly, that the man sure knows how to dance. The cheering continues, new moves are created and modified during the dance. The atmosphere makes it impossible to sit still; one is overwhelmed by the inferno of laughter, dance, and music – the ambience is immersive. The man sneaks behind the woman and offers her a dance. She considers it for a second, but while she thinks he has already sneaked himself next to her, and in a fraction of a second everything changes, and they are suddenly dancing together. A howl from the audience follows. Close, sensual, and immersed in the movements of the dance. Arms, legs, ties, and hips are linked together, and they follow the vibes and the rhythm at the same impressively quick pace. People are cheering, and others go into the ring and start to dance. The couple in question is only one among many that are dancing and taking advantage of the music. The audience has a hard time deciding who to follow, as everyone is dancing in various manners, with curious and creative ways to challenge the dance. What they all have in common however, is a manifestation of rhythm in their bodies. Someone brings in the May Pole tree, which until now has been situated in the background. The tree enters the dance floor in all its glory, with the ribbons and a couple of large jackfruits hanging in the branches, and becomes the midpoint as the dancers start to swing themselves around the tree. The cheering continues. Everyone dancing is one hundred percent immersed in what they are doing; they only have eyes for the dance, the movements, and each other. The celebrations continue into the late hours of the night.

The May Pole

The May Pole festival is the largest cultural festival at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. Vibrant Caribbean rhythm and colourful processions characterize this vivid celebration which lasts throughout May. This month is a time for movement; a lot is going on in the city, and this is without doubt a very important time, which touch most of the inhabitants in one way or another. As mentioned before, the British custom ‘May Day’ was transferred to the Coast with the British several hundred years ago, and adapted the local reality at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. While some refers to this explanation about the origin of May Pole, others believe that the festival derived from the fertility goddess Mayaya Maya. By singing and dancing May Pole, one asked for fertile times. The fertility goddess does have a role in the event, and for example the t-shirts produced by the organizations for the Tu lululu, displayed

the fertility goddess. However, which of these explanations of the origin of May Pole which is the historically accurate one, is not the main subject of discussion. And the explanation one of my informants said in answering the question; ‘we dance, because we used to dance’, is probably the best way to sum up in one sentence why people practice May Pole today.⁶⁰

During May Pole, people get together; they discuss, organize, prepare, and argue about minor details, and drink, dance, and have fun together. The festival is without a doubt the most important event of the year. Some of the activities carried out during the month are forums, photo expositions, domino playing, mural contests, gastronomic fairs, concerts, parades, drumming, marches, a sailboat race, and election of Miss May 2011. The festival starts on the first of May, with an opening arrangement in the park filled with music, dance and food. A couple of bands play, and some of the significant ‘personas’ in cities welcome everyone.

The celebration also has Caribbean characteristics, and this can be seen through the songs that derive from the Caribbean islands during the slavery, probably from Belize or Jamaica. There exist small differences in the text, and the text from the left is how it is in Bluefields (Deerings Hodgson, 2008).

There’s a brown girl in de ring
 Tra la la la la
 A brown girl un de ring
 Tra la la la la la
 Brown girl un de ring
 Tra la la la la
 For she’s like sugar and I like plum
 Plum plum

There’s a brown girl in the ring
 Tra la la la la
 A brown girl in the ring
 Tra la la la la
 Brown girl in the ring
 Tra la la la la
 And she looks like a sugar in a plum
 Plum plum

During the first part of May, small, local, and intimate festivals are compromised to the different neighbourhoods in the city, which will be packed with people dancing, music, alcohol, and of course the traditional May pole tree.⁶¹ However, as we will see in chapter four, it needs to be mentioned that the range of these celebrations varies in scale and forms from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and are usually more planned and better organized in the Creole neighbourhoods, such as Old Bank, Beholden, Pointeen and Ctton Tree. Here, one can taste delicious Creole food such as coconut bread, coconut gallo pinto, and pati pati. We will now return to the second part of the festival; when things really heat up in Bluefields.

⁶⁰ Also the logos of the May Pole t-shirts have the fertility goddess on them.

⁶¹ The alcohol is usually beers and ‘Flor de caña’, Nicaraguan rum, mixed with coca cola.

The last week of May Pole

Around the 20th of May, we enter into the most eventful, vivid and entertaining part of the festival; the final 10 days. Some local celebrations continue throughout this period as well, but in addition a cluster of other activities are arranged around in the city. Amongst other things, a sailboat race was held at the wharf, which led to an intense atmosphere marked by applauding, hollering and shouting. Boats sailed between the city of Bluefields, and Bluff, one of Bluefields' neighbourhoods which is located at an island 20 minutes away. People gathered at the wharf to enjoy the music, the race and the refreshments.

In 2011, the 'last week of May Pole' was opened with a documentary film 'The Black Creoles', about the Creoles at the Caribbean Coast exhibited at one of the universities in the city.⁶² The documentary was the first presentation about the Black-Creoles at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, and displayed historical roots and origins, as well as on the current situation involving practical duties, customs, and racism. The film also had a comparative part with the Creole population in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica.⁶³ The same night, the well-known and famous Nicaraguan singer Katia Cardenal, one of the most prominent female singers in Nicaragua, was present in the city for a concert.⁶⁴ Despite the fact that this was a pretty expensive affair for the regular 'Bluefileño' as the price was about 250 Córdoba's (approximately 11 dollars), the concert was sold out.

Throughout the month, especially during the first and last four days, several concerts and dance events took place in the park, Parque de Reyes. As mentioned in chapter two, the park is a gathering place in Bluefields. The least years, several actors have become active in the May Pole celebrations, amongst others the tourist office el Instituto Nicaragüense de Turismo, (INTUR). At a regional level, they have a project where they concentrate on 'selling' Nicaragua as a tourist destination. In May 2011, they arranged a cultural festival, 'Feria Turística RAAS', Touristic Feria in RAAS. They were present in Bluefields during the last week of the festival, when they arranged a regional fair with handicrafts and a display of food in the city centre. On the other side, after spending a couple of weeks here, you cannot walk through the city centre without being stopped at least five times – for the simple reason

⁶² In the documentary, the Creoles p said they preferred the term 'Black Creoles' as they are Black people who speak Creole (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klaTyTYis8g>).

⁶³ Puerto Limon belongs to the Caribbean Coast of Costa Rica, and has a large Creole population. However, some claim that the Creoles in Puerto Limon has been assimilated, and thereby lost some of their distinctive qualities. Many Creoles from Bluefields have also migrated to Puerto Limon. For example one of my informants, the Rastafarian Freddy, lived several years here.

⁶⁴ Katia Cardenal has visited Norway several times, and is renowned in Norway for her translations of songs made by Alf Prøysen into Spanish.

that it is easy to get friends at the street, in the shops, at the market, or in any other public space.

Día de los Comparsas

A highlight in the festival is without doubt Día de los Comparsas (The procession day), a highly colourful and effervescent event – where all the different neighbourhoods, organized in their respective teams, dance throughout the city centre. People practice all year to prepare for the day in question, when they are not only going to show themselves off in front of the whole ‘Bluefileño’ population, but also defend the honour of their respective neighbourhoods, in the most important competition of the year. As mentioned, the first 2/3 of the month was packed with various neighbourhood celebrations. In Día de los Comparsas, all the different events in various neighbourhoods of the city come together in this event which by many are considered ‘a carnival-like occasion’. This is the day to see and be seen.

It is Saturday, around noon, and the action takes place on a porch in a house in Cotton Tree, one of the old, ‘original’ Creole neighbourhoods in Bluefields. A bench, a couple of chairs, and a table are located outside on the small veranda. The house is white, with pared-down paint here and there, but it does not matter as the house is thoroughly enjoyable. It belongs to Miss Anna, an older, well-respected woman who is in charge of the May pole celebrations in this old, Creole neighbourhood. She grew up and has lived her life for the May Pole. Every year, during the festival, the dancers from different teams have new costumes; Anna is liable for this particular neighbourhood’s attire - in addition to preparing a whole range of arrangements connected to the celebration in the neighbourhood the same night. The house is busy; daughters, grand-children, cousins, and siblings, are coming and going from the old, white, wooden house. Some neighbours are coming by to pick up their dresses; a girl needs help with a scarf, while some are delivering a message or have a question. The atmosphere in the house is busy and vivid, and Miss Anna’s house functions as a gathering point for the people in the neighbourhood. A little girl with prominent cheekbones, and a May Pole dress that suits her perfectly, does not want to wear the head-band. She looks like a little princess with her delicate features, the dark skin, big brown eyes and the vividly colourful May Pole dress.

Little by little, things are getting ready. The plan is that people from all the different neighbourhoods are going to unite in El Barrio Central; from there the march starts, and the teams will dance their way in the city centre, where they all are meeting up. Most people are

dressed up by now; the instruments, the banners, and everything else seems to be ready. Time is a relative aspect, - even though it is already 30 minutes after the planned departure, people do not seem to rush, and outwardly do not seem the least stressed. For an outsider, it might seem like people have a certain secret dialogue, or a hidden language, about when something is 'really starting'. After a while, most people are ready, and the whole neighbourhood leaves together in a parade, and the next two-three hours are marked by aliveness and intensive dance. Some men are walking in front with drums, and the women are following them – dancing and shaking and moving their behinds as fast as the music is playing. The dance is going through the neighbourhood, and eventually into the central area of the town. People of all ages are participating; from elders in their seventies that have experienced the festival their whole lives, to small children. Men are wearing matching attires to the women; they are responsible for the musical instruments and the front banner that reveals what neighbourhood we are in. There are nevertheless a majority of women present. By now a lot of people have already gathered at the sidewalks to see the diversity of dance, people, and the bright, colourful dresses that are spreading like a blanket over the town this particular day. Acquaintances meet and talk. It is a beautiful day; the sun is shining, and the whole city of Bluefields is vibrating. 'Come on gal! Wahoo! Que te baila!' National and international tourists have lined up with their cameras, ready to snap photographs – some dancers jump away in startle as a man plunges into the street in front of the parade in order to shoot a shot. Everyone is in the streets; most of the attendance is dressed up as well, and happy, smiling people are greeting each other. One can both see and feel that this is an important day in the city. Many of the dancers are barefoot for some reason, - included the little girl who lost the discussion and is wearing her hair band. She cannot be more than six years old, but the way the small person swings her hips in the dancing is incredible – and she quickly becomes the centre of attention. There is no doubt that this girl has been raised in a home of dancing. People are dancing and shaking throughout the city; the music is playing, the rays of the sun cause the sweat to run, and Bluefields is electric. The members of Old Bank have dressed in long leopard dresses while Cotton Tree in dresses compromised of flowers and Beholden in short, sexy skirts and tops, which do not leave much to the imagination.



Figure 9: Día de los Comparsas

For several days, you can hear people around in different parts of the city discuss the outcome and the accomplishment of this year's costumes, and the performing of the dance. The route is a pretty long run, and the participants dance and dance for hours in the burning hot sun. Sweat, laughter, music, booty shaking, clapping, and the sounds from the drums continue. When the whole parade is finished, people meet up in the park where it is time to elect the winner. The different teams await their turn to enter the stage for their dance performance. The day ends with an election of the neighbourhood with the best dancers. The 'traditional' Creole neighbourhoods such as Beholden, Cotton Tree (called Punta Fría in Spanish), Old Bank and Pointeen are usually good candidates. Afterwards, the arrangements continue with different prominent characters in the city, as the mayor, and some local government officials keep on entertaining. In 2011, the toastmasters were Spanish-speaking people from Managua. Periodically, the speeches are interrupted by musical acts and competitions, where t-shirts are handed out to the winners. The area is packed with people,

the park is located right behind the scene, and in this arena you can find a small amusement park with rides, ferris wheel, merry-go-round, and carousels. Vendors are selling popcorn, fried chicken, French fries, and in the booths local as well as Guatemalan artisans have toys, purses, clothing, wallets and dresses on display. The arrangements continue in the park, and the party is moved to local bars and discos after the event in the park.

Later the same night the neighbourhood of Miss Anna is having a party in the street and a lot of people gather in this neighbourhood. The coconut scent from the local Creole seafood dish, Rondón, spreads across the plaza. This stew usually includes seafood and vegetables such as cassava, green banana, coconut, quequisque, pepper, onion, and a kind of sweet pepper, called chiltoma. These ingredients are cooked together in a big pot – preferably outside over open flame, and tastes absolutely delicious. The Creole cooking differs from the rest of the country, and while the typical Nicaraguan food is characterized by a lack of spices, the Creole food is spicy, and the coconuts flavour dishes is certainly notable. Coconut bread and coconut gallo pinto (rice and beans) are other dishes. A lot of people are present, and many of the dancers from the morning are still wearing their colourful outfits. Different activities are going on; children are playing, people drinking and chatting, and others are dancing. Some people start to play a local ‘bullet-local’ game where one throws balls on logs. A typical coastal activity and everybody is participating and it is easy to feel welcomed into the fellowship of the neighbourhood. The atmosphere is great, and the clothing, costumes and dancing from earlier the same day is a hot subject of conversation.

As the event draws to a close, some are satisfied with the happenings of the days, and wander back home, while others continue the party at the reggae club Four Brothers, - a legendary place which many locals consider the core of Bluefields social life. The club also goes under the Spanish name Cuatro Hermanos and is so dark that it is impossible to see anything. The place is located barely a fifteen minutes’ walk outside the city centre, but as the area is dark and difficult to follow, a taxi ride is preferable. Outside the club, there is often a crowd of people; most of them are Creoles wearing baggy clothing and hip hop fashion, hair bands, and large adornments. Many have braids in their hair – a couple have dreadlocks. Beautiful, dark/skinned women are wearing tube tank tops, tight-fitting jeans, and colourful make-up. The hair is dragged back with such a force that the naturally curly, thick hair sticks adhesively to their heads. A bunch of taxis are waiting outside in a pitch. As you go into the locale/club it is too dark to see much, only the shadows of people dancing. It is Saturday; one o’clock in the morning and Four Brothers is without a doubt the place to be in Bluefields. The

slow reggae music is playing at this point of the night, the place is packed with people, and there is only one way of dancing: Close, intimate, sensual. A bar is located at the other side of the room, a patio in the end besides the toilets. *I want to give you some sweet love, sweet love – on the night shift, later on the night shift.* As the music is too loud for talking, the only option one has is to dance by following the rhythm and movements of the locals.

Tu lululu

The whole festival culminates in the accomplishment of ‘Tu lululu pass Anda’ which is held during the evening 31 of May. On the night of the Tu lululu, people gather in the neighbourhood Old Bank or Cotton Tree. Every year the parade changes between starting in Old Bank and Cotton Tree, and subsequently is completed in the other.⁶⁵ Most people meet up early in the evening in the current neighbourhood to enjoy refreshments, and have a chat with some friends, or acquaintances. The ones that have been dancing in the Comparsas some days in advance have put on their costumes; others are wearing the May Pole t-shirts that have been handed out during the festival. People drink, talk, and listen to music until the event starts.

In 2011, the Tu lululu started at the baseball court in Cotton Tree – usually a gathering place for young and older basketball players who unite to take a game on the pitch. The place is packed with both locals as well as visitors, which have shown up in order to participate in the final celebration. Because of the heavy rain at this particular day, people meet up later than first planned. Suddenly, the locals scream something incomprehensible, and start to run towards the crowd of people that have begun to appear. The days in advance, it has been a lot of talk about the Tu lululu, but for me it had been hard to get a grasp on how exactly the Tu lululu is going to take form, practically. The song ‘Tu lululu Pass Anda’ rings out of the stereo at full blast.

⁶⁵ Every other year the two neighborhoods alternate between starting.

Tu lululu pass anda
gal and buay they pass anda
pass anda, pass anda
gal and buay they pass anda
Beholden gal she pass anda
Old bank she pass anda
Cotton Tree she pass anda
pass anda, pass anda

Tu lululu pass under
girl and boy they pass under
pass under, pass under
Girl and boy they pass under
Beholden girl she pass under
Old Bank girl she pass under
Cotton Tree she pass under
pass under, pass under

This song is always played during the Tu lululu, and was originally supposed to gather dancers from the different parts of the city while they arrived at these points. As you can see it refers to the girls of the traditional neighbourhoods; Beholden, Cotton Tree and Old Bank, who are encouraged to pass under the arc made up by peoples arms, which are soon to come forward.

There is excitement and suspense in the air, and people find each other and congregate in pairs. ‘Come on – lets go’, people scream as they grab each other’s hands and run towards the line that has started to appear. ‘It’s May Pole time!’ Two and two come together; they stand facing each other while holding up their arms to form an arc; a tunnel of people holding their hands up is created. The first ones enter into the tunnel, hold each other’s waists, and dance through the tunnel. Once one has passed through the tunnel and is situated on the other side the arc of arms, is it necessary to line up oneself, be part of the tunnel, and wait for other people to pass under. It develops into a parade which twists through the city. People are singing as they dance, and follow the rhythm of the dance. The drummers are walking on the side of the march, drumming the Tu lululu song and create a magical atmosphere. The parade is marked by music, song, and dance. Movement is a central factor as the parade is constantly in motion; moving from one of the neighbourhoods to another. One has to run, grab each other in the hands, and cooperates; comfortable footwear is a must. Together, everybody dance their way through the whole city centre; from the ‘original’ neighbourhood ‘Cotton Tree’ to ‘Old Bank’. People are wet, dingy and happy, – one has no choice but to dance as one is swept away into a crowd of smiling, laughing people, - the all-consuming atmosphere is embracing. At times the synchronization of people lining up do not work as it should, as certain individuals only want to ‘Pass Anda’, and not stand up to make an arc. The procession continues through the city centre, and at the end of the stroll everyone gathers in the neighbourhood which marks the end of the parade. Drinks and food are available, and an

upbeat version of the 'Tu lululu' reverberates through the speakers. New and old friends meet, and have a chat, - a few are dancing. Some of the organizations present are thanking everyone for their participation and for the May Pole festival of 2011. As the heavy rain has a certain influence, little by little people start to wander back to their respective neighbourhoods. Some are heading home, others to take a drink at a pub, while the most obstinate continue the party at Four Brothers. A long parade of approximately 5000 wet people wander out of Old Bank. The rain pours down. The raindrops are as large as marbles, and water hits the ground with such forces which make the downpour jump up again from the ground and catch into the legs of the pants. The fertility goddess indeed seems to be pleased with the implementation, and the outcome of the festival (at least if one were to measure it in relation to the rain).

4. An 'authentic' Creole festival

Ethnic diversity is a distinctive characteristic of the Atlantic Coast, and as the previous chapter demonstrated, it was also significant during May Pole, partly because May Pole traditionally was a local, Creole festival, and partly because it now was being used to integrate the Creoles into Nicaraguan nationhood. As mentioned before, there was an intention to incorporate Creole people, and to a certain degree Costeños, into Nicaraguan self-understanding by changing the May Pole festival. Before 1980s, the Creole May Pole festival did not have any 'tradition' outside La Mosquitia. How is ethnicity conceptualized through the festival? How is the state's appropriation of the festival perceived by Creoles in Bluefields? To examine these questions, I also need to make use of a few analytical concepts from the anthropology of ethnicity, especially the notions of ethnic taxonomies and situational ethnicity.

Ethnicity, ethnic taxonomies and situational ethnicity at the Atlantic Coast⁶⁶

Ethnic categorization refers to both ethnic taxonomies, people's classifications of ethnic groups into a system (Hylland Eriksen, 1993:25-26), and to static categorizations (Kertzer and Arel, 2002). As the survey over ethnic groups in chapter two shows, ethnic classification at the Atlantic Coast divides the population into six ethnic groups. Three of these groups are indigenous; Miskitus, Sumu/Mayagnas, and Rama. Two of the groups are of African-descended origin, Creoles and Garífunas. Additionally, Spanish-speaking Mestizos today constitute the majority of the coastal population (Baracco, 2011b:3). Recognition of ethnic diversity is one of the principle ingredients of Statutes the Autonomy implemented in 1987, as shown in chapter two. As the survey over ethnic groups on page 21 shows, the categorizations of ethnic groups at the Atlantic Coast are also statistical categorizations. Categories like these objectify people and boundaries. Kerzer and Arel write about how certain states have attempted to classify and categorize inhabitants into racial, ethnic and language categories

⁶⁶ Before 1969, a primordialist approach to ethnicity was dominating in anthropology; ethnic groups were seen to exist in relation to others, and to have an essential 'core' of ethnic mass. Ethnic identities were stable and unchangeable (Banks, 1996). The Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth had a large impact on the study of ethnicity, as editor of *Ethnic group and boundaries*, which was published in 1969. This synopsis of essays outlined a new approach to ethnicity, which apprehended ethnic identities as flexible, and emphasized how ethnic boundaries define the group, not the cultural stuff it encloses (Barth, 1969:15). There is an on-going negotiation of boundaries, as ethnic groups exist in relation to others; it is in meeting with others one understands who one is (Barth, 1969). People can also have an instrumentalist approach to ethnicity, and then choose ethnic affiliation strategically. Ascription and self-ascription come into existence in the boundaries; in encounters with other groups, one understands one's own features (Barth, 1969). However, this perspective has been criticized for putting too little emphasis on ascription, and for not taking the state into account (Banks, 1996). There exists a debate about whether ethnicity can be both an imperative status and a subject to situational selection and choice.

(Kertzer and Arel, 2002). Attempts to categorize have implications for peoples' own identities, as well as for national political processes. According to Kerzer and Arel, censuses do much more than simply reflect social reality; they play an important role in the construction of that reality. With the emergence of nationalism, a need for states to represent populations along identity criteria became important (Kertzer and Arel, 2002:2-3). During my fieldwork, local categories merged with the categories in the table, as this is the categorization used by local people, the universities, and also the Nicaraguan state.

In Nicaragua, the relevance of ethnicity varies hugely in regard to location and situation. At the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua, Mestizos are clearly the dominant group, and ethnicity is in general not an issue. In meeting with people of African descent, Mestizos at the Pacific side are convinced they are from Bluefields. When I travelled to the Pacific side of the country, and had conversations about the Atlantic Coast, I was met by statements by Pacific Mestizos such as 'Vas a Bluefields? Bastante negros alla' (Are you going to Bluefields? Enough black people there). Another time I was going with some Creoles to a large market in Managua, and Mestizos were constantly throwing comments after us; 'Hola Negro!' 'Negrita, ven aqui!' (Hello black! Black girl, come here!) Generally in Nicaragua, the Atlantic Coast is associated with people of African descent and also with May Pole, as I soon will come back to.

Also within the city of Bluefields, the level of importance of ethnic affiliation varied. In one society, ethnic relations might be dominant in some spheres, while less decisive in others (Okamura, 1981). In everyday context, however, there did not seem to be any particular tensions. I will now turn to see how ethnicity was made relevant in Bluefields during the May Pole festival.

Neighbourhood celebrations

The first part of May is characterised by neighbourhood celebrations. As displayed in chapter two, the city of Bluefields is divided into 17 neighbourhoods. While some stand out as Creole, others are mainly inhabited by Mestizos. In 2011, 13 neighbourhoods participated in the May-Pole celebrations.⁶⁷ A large proportion of the population is involved in the celebrations of the May Pole festivities, and there are no obvious distinctions between the participating neighbourhoods at first glance. The size of each of the neighbourhood celebrations differs widely in size and form, as it varies how much each neighbourhood put into the festivities,

⁶⁷The neighborhoods that participated: Ricardo Morales, Nueva York, Loma Fresca, Canal, El Bluff, Santa Rosa, Beholden, Tres Cruces, Pancasan, Pointeen, Cotton Tree and the Central.

regarding effort, exertion and strain. In chapter three, I described a typical celebration in one of the Creole neighbourhoods, with all the elements and characteristics of a May Pole celebration. Overall, it was a returning fact that the scale and accomplishment of these events were better planned, prepared and more thoroughly organized in the Creole neighbourhoods, than in the ones mainly inhabited by Mestizos. The oldest, Creole neighbourhoods, Old Bank, Pointeen, Cotton Tree, and Beholden, have great importance during the festival, in particular in two of the events described in chapter three. One of these is *Día de los Comparsas*, where Creole neighbourhoods usually are considered ‘best performers’ of the local celebrations, and the other is ‘*Tu lululu*’ where people dance their way from Old Bank to Cotton Tree (or vice versa).

To demonstrate how the celebrations in the Mestizo neighbourhoods differs from the ones in the Creole neighbourhoods, I will now describe an incident where I went to visit a May Pole celebration in one of the Mestizo neighbourhoods. Prior to the festival, a list had been made that singled out the dates and places for the celebrations in each neighbourhood, to make it possible for locals, nationals, and international tourists to meet up, and participate in the celebrations. One of the first days of May, I tried to visit one of these celebrations in a Mestizo neighbourhood, which had been marked out at the list. Ever since my arrival in Bluefields in January, I had heard a lot about the May Pole celebrations, which were going to take place in May. When people talked about the celebrations, their voices became infatuated with an atmosphere of joy, passion, and enthusiasm, and this affected my expectations for what people referred to as ‘the happening of the year’. Since punctuality is not a central concern in Nicaragua, as in most of Latin America, schedules are not rigid, and a while after the appointed moment of time, I walked towards what I believed to be my first ‘intimate neighbourhood celebration’. When I reached the neighbourhood, all left was a May Pole tree with some colourful ribbons, a couple of children were playing football, and half a dozen grown-ups sitting randomly around drinking beer. I hung around for a while, but as time passed and nothing happened, I wandered home. The next day, I talked with some of my informants who work in the organization, Carla and Oscar, and I told them about the previous day and my rather failed visit to the neighbourhood celebration. They looked at each other, nodded with consent, sighed, and started to explain the reason for the rather moderate attendance and scale of the celebration.

If you really do want to see the real May Pole – you have to go to the Black neighbourhoods, Old Bank, Pointeen, Cotton Tree and Beholden – there you see real May-Pole. That's where you really should go. Because the Black peoples them take the Palo de Mayo more serious them. That's the original and they are very organized.

This was an opinion I was to encounter several times during May Pole. As a foreigner, I often experienced how locals seemed occupied with the importance of how I had to see the 'genuine and real May Pole celebrations'. According to my informants, the reason for the rather moderate attendance and lack of a consistent organization was that this particular neighbourhood was inhabited mainly by Mestizos. Creole people are seen as the 'original' participants and dancers of May Pole, and by Nicaraguans, Creole neighbourhoods are the 'real celebrators' of May Pole. As this example conveys, categorizations are made relevant in celebrations in the neighbourhoods.

When I first arrived in Bluefields, it seemed to be accordance and consensus among the ethnic groups. 'We are all Costeños', and 'all the ethnic groups live happily together' were statements that I encountered. As mentioned before, in the park in Bluefields, one can find a statue, consisting of a ring of six people of different colours holding their hands up together in the middle, to signify the unity of Miskitus, Sumo-Mayagna, Creoles, Garífunas, Mestizos, and Rama. In everyday life, Costeños unity is emphasized, but in some social contexts, such as May Pole, ethnic distinctions within the Costeño category become relevant. According to Jonathan Okamura 'situational ethnicity' is an approach, which emphasizes the importance of each social situation for the analysis of ethnicity and ethnic relations (Okamura, 1981:463). The degree of ethnicity differs from society to society, and also from situation to situation. While it might be of critical relevance in some contexts, it seems not to have particular relevance in others (Okamura, 1981). During May Pole, the neighbourhoods are important, and the celebrations differs from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. As demonstrated in the example above, and described in chapter three, by going to Creole neighbourhoods, one can experience a different, more thoroughly organized celebration,- what my informants referred to as 'the real May Pole celebrations'.

As Okamura writes, how decisive ethnicity is for social relations, depends on the local context of the society, and might vary according to situation. Ethnicity might be highly relevant in some social settings, while in other situations, other attributes, such as gender, class, religious background, occupation or personality, are determining principles (Okamura, 1981).

Another arena where ethnicity is made relevant is in relation to land. As described in chapter two, land is a current topic of conflict at the Atlantic Coast, and is related to the high numbers of Mestizo migration into the region. Despite the establishment of the land demarcation law in 2003, this five-step process is very gradual, and consequently questions of land often arises to the surface in conflicts between the ethnic groups in the region. When I talked to people who worked with the demarcation, they often connected Mestizo migration into the area to current problems over land.

In sum, arenas where ethnic categorizations often arise to the surface include May Pole, and issues related to land. In Bluefields, the May Pole celebrations in the Creole neighbourhoods were considered more 'real' and 'authentic', and people were genuinely concerned that I would not get the 'real experience' of May Pole. This suggests a concern over authenticity, and I will now turn to an examination of authenticity and 'the real May Pole celebrations', by drawing on a comparative case from ethnic beauty pageants in Guatemala.

Authenticity and 'real May Pole'

In Bluefields, 'the authentic' and 'the traditional' were recurrent themes, and as mentioned briefly, 'traditional' and 'real' are people's own categories when they talk about old, Creole neighbourhoods and May Pole celebrations. As the previous example from May Pole illustrates, people wanted me to go into the Creole neighbourhoods to experience what they considered the authentic May Pole. Authenticity is also an issue of interest in anthropology, particularly in relation to culture, traditions, and tourism. As we saw in chapter one, according to the anthropologist Richard Handler, 'authenticity' is a Western concept, a social construct of the Western world (Handler, 1986). As the anthropologist Richard Handler writes, 'authenticity' has to do with how we conceive that things 'really are'. It refers to what we consider true, genuine, untouched and 'original' to its possessors. Not the image we present to others, but the truth as it is, apart from any roles we might play (Handler, 1986:2-4).

Authenticity is often used in relation to traditions, and like Handler and Linnekin claim (1984:281), one cannot divide between genuine and pristine traditions, as everything is always reinvented in the present. In anthropological studies of tourism, staged authenticity is often a centre for attention (MacCannell, 1973).

While the Creole celebrations are considered 'authentic', on the contrary one has the Mestizo neighbourhoods, where Mestizos are in charge of planning. The only reason why people talk about 'real' and 'traditional' May Pole celebrations, are because there exist May

Pole celebrations which are not considered authentic, namely the Mestizo celebrations. Despite that both sorts of celebrations involve most of the same features, Mestizo celebrations are irrespective of this considered less authentic. According to the anthropologist Carlota McAllister, the claim to authenticity recognizes the possibility of in-authenticity; some representations are more genuine and real than others, and therefore eternal (McAllister, 1996:107). In Bluefields, Mestizo neighbourhoods can be seen as what McAllister refers to as ‘in-authentic’ (McAllister, 1996:107).

Some of the same takes place in Cobán, Guatemala, where an annual beauty pageant among Mayas, called *Rabín Ahau* (National Indigenous Queen) takes place every year (McAllister, 1996). McAllister writes how the objective of the pageant is to elect a representative for indigenous in Guatemala. Communities from around the country send candidates who are judged in relation to their degree of ‘authenticity’; what is considered to represent something ‘really real’ of a people or of a nation (McAllister, 1996:105-106). During the competition participants are evaluated in relation to five levels; authenticity, typical costume, expression in the Maya language, expression in Spanish, and performance of dancing the *son*, an indigenous dance. According to McAllister, the competition is not about beauty, but elects a princess who is to represent what makes the indigenous woman most distinct; her Indian past (McAllister, 1996:106). Both *Rabín Ahau* and May Pole are nation-wide events. While *Rabín Ahau* was planned as a national event from the start, when it was first held in 1971, May Pole was on the other hand first carried out as a Creole event, and then changed into a nation-wide event during the 1980s. In contrast to *Rabín Ahau*, May Pole had been practiced for several hundred years, before it was appropriated by the Nicaraguan state.

In both Guatemala and Bluefields, local people refer to ‘authenticity’, and both Creoles in Bluefields and Indians in Guatemala, have a marginalized position. The Indian is in national discourse considered traditional, soft-spoken, and loyal, but on the other side also seen as lazy, dirty, and primitive (McAllister, 1996:110). The Indian is connected to her outfit, a hand-woven colorful dress most Maya women wear. Creoles in Nicaragua are often connected to May Pole dance. As expressed by one of my Creole informants;

Most of the people at the Pacific [in the rest of Nicaragua] only think we are good for dancing May Pole. They put on the Tu lululu or some of the other May Pole music and expect us to dance. Like that is the only thing we are good for.

As this example illustrates, in meetings with Pacific Nicaraguans, Creoles are often associated with the May Pole festival. Creoles stressed how this was the issue when they went to the Pacific Coast, as well as in Bluefields. While Indians in Guatemala is related to certain features, as their colourful dress – the Creoles have been connected to African-descended and May Pole in nationalistic discourse. The expression outlined above also reflects strongly the sense of marginalization of Creole people. In both Guatemala and Nicaragua, marginal ethnic groups and authenticity are bound together. Due to the bloody past of Guatemala, marked by civil war and slaughter of indigenous people, McAllister claims Guatemalan nationalism had to invent itself and the Indians in it. *The Rabín Ahau* was to be a source of national pride in Guatemala. According to McAllister, the competition *Rabín Ahau* offers indigenous people a space in the public sphere (McAllister, 1996:120). This can also be seen in Nicaragua, by appropriating May Pole and changing the festival into ‘a Nicaraguan event’, Creoles, who historically had a marginal role, were given a position within Nicaraguan. May Pole can be seen as part of a process to transform the nationalist ideology in Nicaragua, and I will now examine how nationalism gradually changed from ethnic to civic.

May Pole – an important constituent in the change from a civic to an ethnic nationalism⁶⁸

The Canadian sociologist Raymond Breton takes the terms civic and ethnic nationalism into use, and shows examples from British-Canada and French-Canada to demonstrate how nationalism has changed (Breton, 1988).⁶⁹ Ethnic nationalism is a nationalism built on cultural unity. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of membership in the collective are ethnic, and related to ancestry, language, religion, and ‘cultural distinctiveness’. The cultural character of the community and its preservation is a crucial concern, and ideal societies are those where cultural and political boundaries coincide (Breton, 1988:86-87). On the other hand, one has a civic form of nationalism, where inclusion and exclusion is based on civic ties

⁶⁸ In his book *The Idea of Nationalism* from 1944, the philosopher and historian Hans Kohn first introduced the concepts of civic and ethnic nationalism that recognizes features with various types of nationalism (Kohn, 2005 [1944]). These concepts have also been elaborated by others, including Anthony Smith (1995) and Raymond Breton (1988). The concepts have encountered critique, for the first as Western states have been recognized as ‘civic’, and secondly as types of nationalisms are not rigid dichotomies (Kuzio, 2002). However, I still find them useful in an analysis of the change May Pole encountered in the 1980s.

⁶⁹ According to Breton, nationalism can be defined as an ideology which is based on a system of ideas. Although nationalisms differ in scale, form and outcome, they usually tend to contain four basic elements. Firstly, the principle of inclusion and exclusion, which separate insiders from outsiders. Secondly, what Breton refers to as ‘the national interest’ of the group, what the group needs or wants. Thirdly, comparison with other groups; how the group manages in comparison to other groups, and what distinguish it from others. Fourthly, the element which recognizes the threats and motivations of other groups in regard to nationalism (Breton, 1988:85-86).

and legally established criteria. Accordingly, various ethnic affiliations may be involved (Breton, 1988:87). These categories are ‘ideal types’; consequently, nationalism seldom appears exactly like this, but can contain some of the features. However, the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism can be useful, as it makes it possible to explore certain features of a particular nationalism (Breton, 1988:87). In the 1980s, Nicaragua redefined itself as a multi-ethnic nation (Frühling et al., 2007:74). I want to apply these terms to highlight how the effort of converting an ethnic nationalism gradually changed in Nicaragua, from ethnic and solely refer to Mestizos as legitimate citizens of the Nicaraguan state, to a civic nationalism including all the ethnic groups within the boundary of the state.

Nicaragua during the Samoza: an ethnic nationalism

During the Samoza regime, before the revolution in 1979, nationalism in Nicaragua can be seen as ethnic. As mentioned earlier, Nicaragua experienced two historical developments simultaneously, and the Atlantic Coast was ‘incorporated’ into the rest of Nicaragua in 1894 (Gabbert, 2011:11). Although they were formally under Nicaraguan command, in national discourse indigenous and African-descended were not considered legitimate members of Nicaragua. As we saw in chapter two, there exists an idea of mestizaje, the idea of a Mestizo Nicaragua (Gordon, 1998:121). This ‘Mestizo Nicaragua’ only referred to the Pacific part of the country, and did not take the Atlantic Coast into consideration, which is characterized by its visible African descended and indigenous populations (Gordon, 1998:122).⁷⁰

As shown above, the basis for inclusion and exclusion in ethnic nationalism is related to ancestry, language, religion and cultural distinctiveness (Breton, 1988:86). In line with these thoughts indigenous and African-descended in Nicaragua during Samoza were not considered proper members of the nation. One had to be Mestizo to be considered an ‘insider’ of the nation Nicaragua (Breton, 1988).⁷¹ Samoza considered Costeños as ‘marginal others’; indigenous were considered simple-minded and backwards, and Creoles were ignored and invisible in official Samozista discourse (Gordon, 1998:126-126).⁷² In line with what Breton

⁷⁰ In Nicaragua, modern and civilized Mestizos from the Pacific were seen as the source of knowledge necessary for the Costeños development into the Nicaraguan nation (Gordon, 1998:123).

⁷¹ In ethnic nationalism, societies and institutions are founded on a common goal, and the cultural character of the community is a central preoccupation. The main threat to such nationalism, are those which affect ones cultural and linguistic integrity and maintenance (Breton, 1988:86). Despite the fact that Samoza visited the Atlantic Coast at several occasions and the Atlantic Coast officially was a part of Nicaragua, the Coast was segregated ethnically and geographically from the rest of the country.

⁷²Edmund Gordon has used material from La Prensa from 1969 to 1972, when the first references to the Atlantic Coast started to appear, to document the emergence of Atlantic Coast and Creoles in national discourse (Gordon, 1998:127).

writes, in ethnic nationalism, a multilingual and multicultural policy does not make much sense, as they are considered 'awkward' and inappropriate (Breton, 1988:87).

The language of Nicaragua was Spanish, the language spoken by Mestizos. Languages spoken at the Atlantic coast, such as Creole-English and Misquito, were not considered appropriate Nicaraguan languages. Creole and English were not mentioned in speeches by Samoza, not even during his visits in Bluefields (Gordon, 1998:126). Nicaragua during this time can be seen as an ideal type of ethnic society, where political and linguistic boundaries coincided (Breton, 1988:87).

A central preoccupation in an ethnic community is the safeguarding of the interests of the group (Breton, 1988). The Coast was taken into consideration at certain times, and after the Second World War, President Samoza gradually changed his position towards the Atlantic coast (Gordon, 1998:122). The Coast was seen as an important potential source of wealth for the nation, and government programs encouraged Mestizos to migrate to the Atlantic Coast. As mentioned earlier, many Spanish-speaking arrived in the 1960s,⁷³ (Vilas, 1989:62) which led to a change in what Arjun Appadurai calls the ethnoscape (Appadurai, 1996).⁷⁴

Before 1979, membership in the nation can be seen to be ethnic; based on the national ideology and ethnic in character. Ethnic groups at the Atlantic Coast were foreigners in their own country, and unable to change the perception of their own cultural practices as backward (Baracco, 2004:117). Mestizos were considered the proper and prototypical members of the nation, while indigenous and African-descended were not. The Atlantic coast was segregated from the rest of the country, and when financial investments towards the coast started, Samoza wanted to assimilate Costeños to become Mestizos.⁷⁵ However, after the revolution and the victory of FSLN, a lot changed in the country. I claim that Nicaragua inserted a gradual change towards a multicultural discourse and civic nationalism, and I will now turn to analyse this.⁷⁶

⁷³ The ethnoscape was changed even more in the 1980s, when the Contra war at the Pacific side led even more Mestizos to migrate to the Atlantic Coast (Gordon, 1998:14).

⁷⁴ As we saw in chapter two, Arjun Appadurai (1996) writes about global interactions, and how imagination creates new alternatives for the nation-state. 'Ethnoscape' refers to the landscape of persons who make up the changeable world in which we live; tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, and guest workers who move between places and nations (Appadurai, 1996:33-34).

⁷⁵ In Bluefields today, Creoles and Mestizos represent the largest ethnic groups; the usual distinction in the city is between Creoles and Mestizos

⁷⁶ In line with what Breton writes, nationalism does not appear exactly like these 'ideal forms' outlined above. The Atlantic Coast had an ambivalent role. On one hand, the area constituted a potential source of wealth, but on the other side it was physically isolated, not under firm government control, and the area was interrelated to foreign powers (Gordon, 1998:149).

A gradual change towards a civic nationalism

After the revolution in 1979, and due to the problematic relationship with the Atlantic Coast, the new government wanted to integrate the Atlantic Coast into Nicaragua. 30 years of dictatorship led by Somoza – which involved revolution and war – had characterized the country, and the Sandinista government had to insert new instruments. They introduced several projects, among the largest was the nation-wide project ‘The Sandinista National Literacy Crusade’ (The Crusade), described in chapter two (Baracco, 2004:339).⁷⁷

With the declaration of the Statute of Autonomy, the ethnic groups in the country were recognized, and Nicaragua was on its way to become a multicultural country (Frühling et al., 2007). In contrast to ethnic nationalism, one has a civic nationalism, where citizenship is based on civil rights. The economic well-being or development of the society is central, and in this society, the cultural is dissociated from the political (Breton, 1988:87). In line with characteristics of a civic nationalism, inclusion is based on rights and legally established criteria and procedures (Breton, 1988:87).

The Statute of Autonomy was implemented, but other tools had to be utilized to integrate Creoles into Nicaraguan nationhood. The party introduced a new cultural policy in the end of the 1980s, and one of these changes entailed the transformation of the largest cultural festival at the Atlantic Coast, the May Pole festival, into a national event.⁷⁸ As mentioned in chapter one, Cohen is imbued with how cultural elements have solid power, as they become alive and real for people, and thereby can function as important tools in national constructions. Cultural symbols are so powerful in their hold on people that political groups everywhere, including the state, always attempt to manipulate them in their own interest (1980:81). The May Pole went from a private event performed in Creole gardens or neighbourhoods in Bluefields, to become an arranged and planned event involving inhabitants in the whole country. In accordance with a civic nationalism outlined by Breton (1988) there was a shift from a culturally exclusive, to an inclusive conception of the collective.

The state wanted to document the festival, and turn it into a nation-wide event. They wanted to preserve the ‘original and ‘traditional’ May Pole to make sure nothing was forgotten, and took on the role as ‘saviours’ of the festival. The state utilized material of the

⁷⁷ This project had the intention to teach the population to read and write, but a larger intention to create an imagining of the nation Nicaragua, and connect the rural and urban areas Baracco (2004). Additionally, the material used promoted knowledge about the revolution, the origin of FSLN and the inspirational hero of the party, Sandino. Even though this project was supposed to be applicable for the whole country, the coast stood at the side of this development, and by reason of this it was necessary to implement the autonomy process and appropriate May Pole.

⁷⁸The same happened to the Crab festival at Corn Islands.

past, in this case a festival with all its characteristics, and attempted to transform it into a new national symbol (Hobsbawm, 1983).

Before 1980s, the Creole May Pole festival did not have any 'tradition' outside the Atlantic Coast. Since 2008, the festival has also been performed in the capital, Managua, though it has never been a local event in this part of the country, as I will soon come back to. The Nicaraguan government used well-known and familiar concepts already familiar to the people at the Atlantic Coast and implemented older elements as nation-wide events, to create a new form for nationalism. Like Hobsbawm claims, ancient materials from the past, as songs, stories and national symbols, have been modified, ritualized and institutionalized for new national purposes (Hobsbawm, 1983:6). Modern nations that claim to be old and undisputed entities are on the opposite often new and constructed (Hobsbawm, 1983:14).

In a way, it can be seen as two different forms of tradition. On one hand, one has the tradition the Nicaraguan state talked about when it wanted to save the 'traditional' and 'authentic' May Pole festival. On the other hand, one has the tradition Creoles referred to – the authenticity important for people in Bluefields. In accordance with Hobsbawm, tradition needs to be distinguished from custom, which dominate so-called traditional societies. Custom refers to daily practice; tradition is the formalized appurtenances and ritualized practices that enclose the real plot (Hobsbawm, 1983). In Bluefields, the elements important in the festival are Creole, parts of everyday daily life also present and practiced outside the festival itself, and what Hobsbawm defines as 'custom'. With the change of the festival, cooperation's and organizations play an important role in May Pole today. Existing customary traditional practices have been institutionalized for new national purposes, while it earlier was danced only in local celebrations, and May Pole has partly become 'invented tradition' in Bluefields as well.

Accordingly, the May Pole is more than one clearly defined and uniform event. Hobsbawm (1983:4) writes that it might be difficult to reveal the invention of tradition where it is partly invented, and partly evolved in private groups. This was true for May Pole. In line with Handler and Linnekin, tradition is always constructed in the present (Handler and Linnekin, 1984). With the appropriation of May Pole, Creole people were also given a position within Nicaragua. Today, May Pole is promoted as a Nicaraguan event, and the festival can be seen as a symbol of national unity in Nicaragua. Here, one can draw a parallel to Handelman's public events: events like these are where symbolism of the state, of nationalism and classification, intersect most powerfully (Handelman, 2004:18).

With the Literacy Crusade, the Statute of Autonomy, and the change of May Pole, the Nicaraguan state has initiated a gradual shift from an ethnic, Mestizo nationalism, towards a civic form of nationalism, in which all the ethnic groups are to be seen as Nicaraguan. There seems to be a change from a cultural exclusive to an inclusive conception of the collective (Breton, 1988:93). However, there are features within today's society, that reveal that this shift by no means is completed, and the process is still under way. My point is that there is a symbiosis between ethnic and civic ties, and people have ethnic as well as civic rights and duties, and it is rather a continuous than a clear distinction.⁷⁹

In sum, the categories of 'ethnic' and 'civic' nationalism cannot be viewed as rigid categories, but they have nevertheless helped to highlight how nationalism in Nicaragua appears in a process of change. The state legitimized its appropriation of the May Pole by claiming the role as the saviours of the festival, and, as discussed above, it can be seen as a gradual change from an ethnic to a civic form of nationalism. However, this had other implications in real life as well. Was this a straightforward and indisputable process? While some people accepted the change, others continued to refer to the Creole celebrations as the 'real' and 'authentic'. I will now return to how the appropriation of the May Pole festival was perceived by the Creole population in Bluefields.

Inalienable possessions in May Pole: a Creole festival

As illustrated in chapter three, the Creole neighbourhoods have a prominent role during Tu lululu and the local celebrations. Though most neighbourhoods participate in the neighbourhood-celebrations, independent of ethnic ties, newly arrived Mestizos do not have the same traditions or the same customs to practice the festival. I will now turn to people in Bluefields who are dissatisfied about the appropriation of the festival, describing a conversation between some Creole women who were against the 'commercialisation' of the event.

One day, leaders of different Creole neighbourhoods, mostly women, were gathered with the organization OCCA to discuss the implementation and organization of Tu lululu.⁸⁰ As the NGO is involved and contributes to arrange and plan Tu lululu, they were going to discuss how this was going to be carried out in practice. The discussion evolved into becoming an

⁷⁹ For example with the implementation of law 28, the languages spoken by the indigenous- and African-descended groups at the Atlantic coast, were to be considered national languages, on the same manner as Spanish, which is talked by the majority of the population in Nicaragua. As expressed through my fieldwork, Spanish is still the official language used in most social settings despite the fact that most of the attendance is Creoles.

⁸⁰ Organización Cooperativa de la Costa Atlántica (OCCA).

intense argument about May Pole, and the changes the festival has experienced over the last years. Generally, there was dissatisfaction among the gathered about the change and commercialization of the festival. Sally, a Creole, middle-aged woman who had been practicing the May Pole her whole life, was particularly committed to the conversation;

Leave the May Pole to us so we can do it as we do it. We not need nothing to dance the may pole. No money. Now the *licensido* [educated] Sandinistas want to tell you how to dance the May Pole. My grandma had one tree. And one banjo. Clapping and making the music. It used to be danced by the poor people. That's May Pole.

As this example illustrates, Sally – and the many others who agreed with her – put emphasis on how the May Pole had changed from something the poor Creole people did, into a commercialized event. Before, it was danced in gardens, and people did not need much money or commodities to dance, as they used what they had. With the Sandinista's appropriation of May Pole, many have considered the festival a 'Sandinista event' in newspapers, which I will elaborate in chapter five.

To interpret her anger analytically, I turn to the anthropologist Simon Harrison, who writes about inalienable possessions in ethnicity (Harrison, 1999). He draws on Annette Weiner's study from the Kula-trade at the Trobriand Islands in Melanesia where people participate in a gift economy, and ornaments and bracelets are exchanged from island to island, and are part of a system of exchange. Weiner claims that Kula valuables, material objects, have a certain value and constitute 'inalienable possessions' for people (Harrison, 1999:240). Harrison wants to extend these thoughts of Weiner to illuminate a rather neglected area in the study of ethnicity; social situations where groups come into existence over use or possession of symbols of identity (Harrison, 1992:249). To include how ethnic groups represent their identities through symbolic practices, like rituals and festivals. This might include flags, logos, songs, uniforms, or other kind of practices, which are used to represent aspects of social identity (Harrison, 1999:240). According to Harrison, ethnic practices can have a certain value for people, and be vulnerable to appropriation and loss, in the same manner as Kula valuables discussed by Weiner (Harrison, 1999:241).

In Bluefields, the Creole population have practiced May Pole for several hundred years; children are virtually born into the celebrations, and parents and grand-parents have grown up and lived with May Pole. Among Creoles, all these May Pole elements – dance,

Food,⁸¹ and music – are fundamental parts of lifestyle and everyday life, and the celebration can be seen as ‘inalienable possessions’ for Creole people. For the women in the example above, the May Pole festival have been a part of them and their families for decades, and has a place close to their hearts. In line with DaMatta, carnival is located close to the heart, touches upon feelings and senses, and is an arrangement of the people (DaMatta, 1991:90). Creoles have ‘property rights’, and this can explain why the appropriation of the ritual’ by a far-away state is experienced as hurtful.⁸² For Creoles, it is *their* festival, *their* practices, *their* food dishes. They wanted to give an impression to outsiders what it ‘really’ was about. Even though the state was preoccupied with the importance to save the ‘traditional’ and ‘original’ May Pole’, the Creole people emphasized how one had to see the festival as it was carried out in the Creole neighbourhoods. People in Bluefields wanted me to experience the ‘authentic’ May Pole, what is considered the ‘real’ and ‘traditional’, the ‘original’ way things have been carried out.⁸³ As mentioned before, the May Pole festival has a several hundred year long tradition in Bluefields, and as I tried to convey in chapter three, the dancing, movement, and playfulness it comprises have some deeply embodied characteristics. As one of the Trinidadians Cohen wrote about stated, ‘carnival is inside our blood, it is ours and cannot be taken from us’ (Cohen, 1980:73). In accordance with the arguments of both DaMatta and Cohen presented in chapter one; there is something more to events like carnival as they are closely connected to people’s hearts and souls.

Harrison writes about various forms of appropriation; both when the powerless appropriate from the dominate group, as well as when the privileged appropriate practices of the marginalized. The latter may take two different forms. Firstly, when majority groups borrow from the ethnic practices of minority groups, or at least perceived to do so by the minority (Harrison, 1999:245). Secondly, when cultural characteristics of ethnic minority groups are appropriated by commoditization. Cultural elements might be assimilated into mainstream society and commercialized (Harrison, 1999:246). According to Harrison, ethnic groups might end up in a conflict over claiming or having aspirations to the same identity (Harrison, 1999:239). All symbolic practices are capable to be copied, which might take place with or without the approval and cooperation of their originators (Harrison, 1999:241). As

⁸¹ Rondón (a coconut, seafood dish), Johnny cakes (coconut buns) and kèke de quequisque (cake with local root vegetable).

⁸² You cannot easily learn to dance it. As remarked in the first chapter, the manner people move their bodies and feel the rhythm in the dance is something one ‘is born into’. In the upbringing, in the society, at the schools, at the discos and in the social sphere – people dance, men and women, old and young. This will be elaborated in chapter five.

⁸³ The writing of the history of the festival was also an issue which received attention in the discussion. Some of ‘the old dancers’ of May Pole were mentioned by name in the written historical document, but not all. Some of the attendance was frustrated by how their own family members, or acquaintances, were not mentioned.

illustrated in the example from May Pole above, the women were concerned about the authenticity and appropriation of the May Pole celebrations, and people were genuinely worried about the outcome of the festival.

As in inalienable possessions, these symbolic practices might be experienced as defined constituents of the self, and thus cannot be appropriated by others without a sense of agony and violation to one's integrity (Harrison, 1999:243). In accordance with the claim of Sally above, 'leave the May Pole to us so we can do it as we do it.' May Pole can be seen as something people 'are'. Dance, food and characteristics are incorporated into people's bodies and minds, and be experienced as a dimension of the self. Ethnic competence might work as a scarce resource, and have to be protected from inauthentic appropriation from outsiders. The embodied element of the festival will be elaborated in the next chapter.

May Pole in Managua

With the appropriation of the May Pole festival, a certain commercialization of the festival was inevitable. Sale of beers, banners in the streets and production of May Pole t-shirts is the reality today. Since 2008 the event has been celebrated in Managua as well, and food, craftwork, dance and music from the Atlantic Coast are present in the capital during the month of May.⁸⁴ Additionally, a Tu lululu dance is celebrated in the Plaza de la Revolution, in Managua.

However, there are ambiguous opinions associated with the appropriation of May Pole and the celebrations in the capital, and it is conceived differently among people in Bluefields. On one side, one has those who are enthusiastic about the appropriation of the festival, as they consider it fertile as an institutionalized event, which can spread over larger areas. They emphasised how it is positive that Costeños now could celebrate May Pole in the capital, as many Creoles have migrated to Managua due to the high unemployment rates in Bluefields.⁸⁵ On the other hand, some people reacted negatively to the transfer of the festival to the capital, and claimed this was done to politicize the festival. Newspaper articles from 2008 in one of the national newspapers, La Prensa, revealed how some well-known coastal people have

⁸⁴ Mario Salinas, the former head of INTUR proclaimed after a meeting with governmental officials the 9th of February 2012, which they expected the international tourist industry to increase with 7 percent in 2012. From 2007 until 2011, the country's tourist businesses increased from 2500 to 5600, and for 2012 they are expected to increase with 1000 more. More than 26000 people have started to work in the tourist sector, and for 2012 one hope to increase this number with 8000 more http://www.el19digital.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=35381&Itemid=12. Salinas resigned in February 2012 <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2012/02/17/poderes/91027-aun-confirmarse-destitucion-mario>.

⁸⁵ A very high proportion of those people I met during the fieldwork had relatives that worked in Managua at call-centers, or at cruise-ships (in Managua, Costa Rica, or United States).

replied to the commercialization of the event. One of these was a politician who today belonged to the Movimiento Renovador Sandinistas (MRS).⁸⁶

There is also a monetary issue related to this, as national and international tourists who earlier went to Bluefields to celebrate May Pole, now can go to the capital Managua. A proportion of those I talked to claimed that, due to Bluefields being a liberal city (politically speaking), Managua wanted to take over the event and make it Nicaraguan, only to extract money from the Coast. Some newspaper articles from 2008 speculated in how taxi-drivers, hotels and restaurants would lose money on the transfer of the festival to Managua. In line with what Hobsbawm writes (1983:4-5), the May Pole celebration in Managua can be seen as a true ‘invention of tradition’, - as certain elements are selected from the Coastal festival May Pole, and implemented in a location without any tradition for it. Although May Pole has never historically been celebrated in Managua, today, it is celebrated here as well. By appropriating May Pole, institutionalizing it and transferring it onto other locations, the state incorporated May Pole. In line with what Harrison writes; an ethnic majority might try to incorporate a minority by claims to participate in its identity and to share its symbolic practices (Harrison, 1992:247).

In Bluefields 2011, both local and national characteristics were present. On one hand, one had local elements such as neighbourhood celebrations, Día de los Comparsas and Tu lululu, but on the other hand, the singers Katia Cardenal and McPuppet were national actors who participated in the celebrations in 2011.

The renowned anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff have written a book named *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009) which explores the rise of commodification of ethnicity and identity. They show examples from various parts of the world; South America, Pacific islands, Africa and Europe, and problematize the consequences, beneficiaries and future of this ‘commodification of ethnicity.’ The Comaroffs claim that commercialization of ethnicity is currently on the rise ‘to fit into a consumer economy’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009:150). This has certainly occurred in the case of May Pole. In Bluefields, beers are sold, the feria in the park described in chapter three sell food, and t-shirts with the Palo de Mayo logo are handed out. Tourist brochures front May pole as a ‘commercial’ festival where ethnic diversity is one of the elements. Ethnicity has become an attraction in itself, and ethnicity becomes more corporate, commoditized, and involved than before in the economics of

⁸⁶ Movimiento Renovador Sandinistas (MRS) is a political party that wants to return to the politics of the FSLN under the revolution. They think the party has changed too much since the revolution, and does not agree with the politics of FSLN today.

everyday life (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009:1). Ethnicity has become an everyday concept all over the world (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009:38). However, commercialisation can also be experienced as hurtful.

This feeling of hurt might increase with the appropriation of May Pole, as some consider it an FSLN event, and I will now turn to an example which illustrates this. Despite this change from everyday life during May Pole, as the whole city of Bluefields entered a time for feast and celebration, the scarcity of public advertising in the national newspapers stroked me by surprise. Why did they not write more about the Atlantic Coast and May Pole? I had been informed that the highlights of May Pole would take place the second half of the month and assumed consequently that the papers would write more during the end of the festival. However, as time passed I started to wonder when this was going to happen. On the last day of May, the Tu lululu was just finished, and some informants and I were walking home after the parade to continue the celebration in a bar. The rain was pouring down as we walked, together with 5,000 others in the same situation, and our white t-shirts with the logo from May Pole were getting wet as well. As we were walking, I started to ask about the festival. 'I have not been reading much about the Palo de mayo in the national papers, even though it is such a big and important festival here at the Coast.' Oscar answered 'You're right; they [the newspapers] have not been writing much at all.' I continued, 'Why is it like that, do you think?' Oscar answered, 'because they [the newspapers], see it as a FSLN event, and they do not want to publish something that can be seen as publicity for the party.'

The example above shows that after the appropriation of May Pole, newspapers consider the festival a Sandinista event, as the Nicaraguan state is involved through INTUR. As illustrated through the historical phases in chapter two, Creole people have not been followers of the revolution nor the FSLN. With the appropriation of May Pole, where their event might be considered a FSLN, is experienced as hurtful as it increases the sense of vulnerability.

Several factors amplify this vulnerability. As demonstrated in chapter two, African descended people have historically been discriminated in Latin America and in Nicaragua, and this is still the issue for Creoles in Nicaragua today. As mentioned, conflicts over land has been a persisting issue the last 60 years, and can also be seen as an additional reason for increasing Creole vulnerability.

Here I am tempted to make a brief comparison to the Western New Agers in the United States, who seek spiritual and cultural meaning through appropriating certain

traditions and cultural elements of Native Americans. According to the anthropologist Lisa Aldred these New Agers make a lot of money on the commercialization of Native Americans practices. New Agers write books about 'how to practice Native American spirituality', run seminars and arrange workshops (Aldred, 2000:331-332). This commercialization is often experienced as hurtful for the Native Americans, who feel their spiritual practices are 'robbed away', and exploited to the fullest. This susceptibility is increased by Native Americans' already marginalized and discriminated position in the United States. In Bluefields, there is not the same scale of commercialization as in United States, as May Pole is not a large, well-known brand, and there exist neither bookstores nor seminars. However, the problems are nevertheless rather similar, also in May Pole a certain commercialization is taking place, and cultural characteristics are taken out of context and inserted into new ones. For Aldred, the most problematic with the New Agers interest in Native American practices, is the commercialization. The spiritual practices of the Native Americans are developing into a product to be bought for money (Aldred, 2000:345). Despite the angry reactions among Native Americans, the New Age plastic shamans legitimize their actions by various reasons. Several refer to their 'good intentions' to help indigenous people, and support Native Americans charities (Aldred, 2000:337). In Bluefields too, the festival was appropriated by the state, which justified its actions by referring to how it had to 'save' the festival from being forgotten.

Like Native-Americans, Creoles are also marginalized in an everyday context. True, Native Americans expressed more harm and resentment than Creoles, but even the latter were clearly concerned with the authenticity of *their* festival, as it has roots in Creole practices.

Concluding remarks

At first sight, there may not appear to be any obvious distinctions between the ethnic groups in Bluefields, as both Mestizos and Creoles are mixed in everyday life. Ethnicity is situational, and an arena where ethnic categorizations often arise to the surface is in May Pole. The Nicaraguan state appropriated the Creole May Pole festival, and by this, the festival was made into a nation-wide, Nicaraguan event. I have argued how this can be seen as an example of Nicaragua's development from an ethnic form of nationalism towards a multi-ethnic form of nationalism. It can partly be seen as what Hobsbawm refers to as invention of tradition, as the Nicaraguan state has taken elements from the past and put them into a new context for a new purpose.

As my ethnographic material from the May Pole festival shows; the appropriation of the festival is received differently in May Pole. While some accept it, others reject it. Thus, the pattern shows there is a concern over authenticity in the festival, as most people accept it, but still refer to Creole celebrations as the 'real May Pole'. Even though it has been appropriated into an event by and for all of Nicaragua, it is still to a certain degree something inalienable connected to the festival for Creole people, as they feel a certain ownership towards it. This is reinforced by the situation of people of African descent today, as a marginalized group in Latin America and Nicaragua. I will now elaborate on this, by going more deeply into what makes the Creole festival more real and authentic, and to explain this, I want to explore the relations between embodied and cognitive knowledge in the next chapter. We will then see how the May Pole festival is perceived as more deeply entrenched in Creole's bodies, and this makes Creole peoples celebration more 'real' and 'authentic'.

5. Liga de Saber – Authenticity and Forms of Knowledge

Liga de Saber, 2011

Monday, 23th of May, eight teams from different schools gathered in the gymnasium of the Moravian school to participate in a competition called Liga de Saber (League of Knowledge), to identify which school knew the most about May Pole. Each school had picked out a team, with six participants each, accompanied by forty-fifty class-mates. The hall was almost full, which made the atmosphere enchanted, as students all cheered ardently for their school. The judges read out the questions, and the team wanting to answer had to rise up and wave with colourful flags to catch the attention of the judges. Only the team first to raise their flags after a question was allowed to answer. If the question was not met with an adequate answer, other participants could challenge the first team, and gain points. Everyone inside the room was able to feel the competitive atmosphere that characterized the event. ‘May-pole-songs’ such as ‘Tu lululu Pass anda’ and ‘Sing Sayman, sing my love’ were played out loud in the hall, and the aura was palpable. The competition intensified, and expectations to win increased during the event. After the quiz, everyone enjoyed some refreshments, while anxiously awaiting the results. When the calculations were over, the final results were read out loud, leading to applause and incitement among the crowd. The school walking away with the victory won honour and glory – in addition to 4,000 córdobas.⁸⁷

The appropriation and nationalization of May Pole involved changes in the structure and form of the festival, as it went from a local and rather incidental event, to becoming more organized. The history of May Pole was documented, and information about the festival distributed across the country. As emphasized in chapter two, various actors are today involved in the event; universities, NGOs, and governmental institutions all participate in preparations for May Pole. One important transition during the festival was the event described above, a recently added competition called Liga de Saber (League of Knowledge). Throughout the first part of the month of May, organizations and universities visited local schools to inform Bluefields youth about the festival’s origin and characteristics.⁸⁸ After the organizations had carried out classes for students, each school elected six students to compete in Liga de Saber, to honour team who knew most about May Pole. Although most of the

⁸⁷ 4000 Córdobas are approximately 170 dollars.

⁸⁸ Colegio Moravo, Horatio, Escuela 30 de Octubre, Madre del Divino Pastor, El Verbo, Colón, San Marcos and La Escuela Normal.

students already had first-hand knowledge about the festival, from years of living in the city and participating in the event, they learned detailed information about the history and ancient traditions of May Pole.

To what extent did the state's appropriation of May Pole rely on a transformation, - from embodied to cognitive knowledge about the festival, - that indulgently produced a sense of de-familiarization among the Creoles? In pursuit of answering this question, I want to explore the relations between forms of knowledge, and go deeper into the scholarship of knowledge; to explore what makes Creole celebrations more 'authentic' to those involved. In this chapter, I will first and foremost make a distinction between the embodied knowledge outlined in chapter three, versus with a new form of cognitive knowledge, as promoted with the appropriation in recent years. The cognitive knowledge refers to two things. Firstly, the information the state introduced when they appropriated the May Pole festival in late 1980s. Secondly, a scholarly knowledge, that can be transferred in the classrooms in Bluefields. Further, I will show that the reason why the organizations do this is related to the marginalized position of people of African descent in Nicaragua.

Embodied and cognitive knowledge

While 'embodied' and 'cognitive' knowledge are not rigid categories, - and there is not a clear-cut distinction, as they to a far extent imply each other – the distinction has nevertheless been central in anthropological research since the 1970s. May Pole is interesting as a meeting place for different forms of knowledge, and the sharpest divide is between 'performing May Pole', as how to dance and make Creole food, versus knowledge which can be imparted in a classroom through fact sheets and power-point presentations.⁸⁹

The first, embodied form of knowledge, I attempted to describe in chapter three, by using a phenomenological approach. According to Thomas J. Csordas (Csordas, 1994), a phenomenological anthropology wants to unite the body and the mind, and capture people's perceptions and experiences of a phenomenon. On the other hand, one has a historic form of knowledge that cannot be danced, but rather presented through texts and power-point presentations, as stressed by the legal anthropologist Annelise Riles. In the book *Documents* (2006) Riles claims that 'documents are artifacts of modern language practices', and documents can serve ethnographic object categories (Riles, 2006:7). By concentrating on

⁸⁹ I am aware that this dichotomizing should not be apprehended as strict and unchangeable units, but I anyway find these concepts useful to explore the implications the change entails.

documents, one can gain insight into how modern forms of knowledge, expertise, and governance work (Riles, 2006:4). In accordance with Riles' point of departure, documents will be in central in this chapter, as ethnographic material that examine what knowledge has appeared in May Pole recently. In sum, Csordas' emphasis on phenomenological anthropology, and Riles' interest over documents will both be underlying in the chapter, as they both on either side, indicate the two main forms of knowledge present in May Pole.

I will now turn to the main analytical concepts to be used. As demonstrated in chapter one, the English sociologist Paul Connerton (1989) takes the body into consideration, with emphasis on memory, society and knowledge of the past, and is concerned with how the body remembers. Connerton argues that images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by performances, and that ritual performance is bodily (Connerton, 1989). Connerton takes into use the terms personal-, cognitive-, and bodily knowledge. Though, these three categories often merge. The embodied features present in May Pole can be seen as an example of Connerton's bodily knowledge, while the educational aspect introduced by the organization can be seen as what he refers to as cognitive knowledge. Regarding bodily knowledge, Connerton distinguishes between two fundamentally different forms of 'habit memory'. The first is what he calls incorporating practices, where we use the body as a device for remembering; the messages and information people send with their bodies (Connerton, 1989:72-73). The second type of habit memory is inscribing practices; how the body is retained in technical information such as texts and computers; modern devices to save and re-establish information (Connerton, 1989:72-73).⁹⁰ However, it is important to have in mind that these concepts are not absolute, and most inscribing practices might include elements of incorporating practices, and vice versa.

Similar concepts are introduced by the anthropologist and political scientist James Scott, who in the book *Seeing Like a State* (1998) reflects upon how states have shaped inhabitants through mapping, design of cities, creation of surnames, and languages. Scott introduces two concepts from ancient Greece, - *mētis* and *techne*. *Mētis* refers to practical skills, which are learned through daily practice and experiencing. Local people often held this form of knowledge, and can for example concern the best way to farm in a particular area. On the other hand, one has *techne*, which refers to a settled, systematic and impersonal knowledge made by rules (Scott, 1998:318-320).

⁹⁰ It should be mentioned that Connerton emphasizes how inscription and incorporating practices overlap, and contain elements from each other (Connerton, 1989:78).

These analytical concepts, emphasized by Connerton and Scott, both treat local, contextual skills in contrast to a cognitive, more standardized form of knowledge. On one side, Scott is concerned with the lack of local knowledge due to the transformation of society due to industrialization and modernization. Connerton, on the other hand, is more occupied with incorporated, bodily memory. My analysis will mainly concentrate on the concepts derived by Connerton, as he to a further degree emphasizes how the body remembers, which is crucial to understand the embodied aspect present in May Pole. Although I – for the purpose of description – draw on a distinction between different types of knowledge, it is important to keep in mind that these are not static entities, but rather analytical tools which are useful for analysis. I will now start to explore the embodied forms of May Pole, where I need to make use of the concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘doxa’ developed by Pierre Bourdieu to analyse the festival’s embodied features.

Embodied knowledge in May Pole

As demonstrated in chapter three and four, the neighbourhood celebrations constitute an important part in the first weeks of May. I will now exemplify the embodied aspects of the celebrations in the Creole neighbourhoods that make people – Creoles and non-Creoles alike – see these celebrations as more ‘real’ and ‘authentic’.

In the middle of May, I was in one of my informants’ neighbourhood to celebrate May Pole. A couple of weeks in advance, I had been told I was going to participate in the Día de los Comparsas with one of the traditional neighbourhood teams, Cotton Tree. As explained in chapter three, this is one of the most important events of the festival, where people from all the different neighbourhoods come together in a long, colourful parade in which they dance through the city centre. To be able to participate, I had talked to Sara, an older, respected lady well-known throughout Bluefields. She was in charge of the neighbourhood Cotton Tree’s team, and promised to involve me in the dance practice. However, time passed, and I did not hear anything from her. I mentioned it briefly when I met her in the street, and she nodded while she stated ‘yes, no worries, we will teach you’. This made me more relaxed, as she was the one who knew how this worked, and I felt certain that she would tell me when it was time. But as the day approached, measures for ‘competition clothes’ had already been submitted, and I started to worry whether I would learn the necessary dance steps in time. I uttered my concerns about not learning to dance May Pole for my informants. ‘It is already the middle of May, and I still don’t know how to dance. I want to learn to dance May Pole.’ One of the men

in the organizations, Peter, looked at me; a smile dragged over his face, before he exclaimed, while laughter crept over his voice: ‘But Silje, you can’t learn to dance the May Pole! Everyone: Silje wants to learn to dance the May Pole!’ This was followed by a grumbling laughter that spread across the room. He continued, ‘you can’t learn to dance May Pole. You just have to dance. You can’t learn it.’

As the example above illustrates, people started to laugh when Peter told them I wanted to learn to dance May Pole. The renowned French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has developed the concepts of habitus and doxa.⁹¹ According to Bourdieu, people’s understandings of reality, decisions and actions are determined by systems of internalised, convertible dispositions, which make them able to think, act, and feel in certain ways; what he refers to as habitus. These dispositions are determined through life experience influenced by certain social circumstances (Bourdieu, 1977:82-83). Actions are not solely a product of structures; habitus equip people with a formula for how they understand, perceive and act under certain conditions. It is not a rigid, detailed structure, but rather a basis of dispositions, which are converted into how one thinks and acts in various situations.⁹² As shown in chapter three, and in the example above, May Pole constituents such as dance and food, are parts of everyday life for Creole people. How to dance May Pole cannot easily be read, learned, or taught in a quick manner, as it is a product of dispositions internalised in peoples bodies, and active only when embodied a in a capability acquired in a specific history (Bourdieu, 1977:81).

For most locals, dance had been a part of life since childhood. May Pole dance is bodily, as dance is incorporated into people’s bodies. It has become knowledge of the body; people remember with the body as they do with their brains (Bourdieu, 1977). When I said I wanted to learn to dance, people seemed rather puzzled and started to laugh about my question. For them, dance was incorporated. Bourdieu’s concept ‘doxa’ refers to the obvious, the unspoken, what is not up for discussion. What is taken for granted, which goes without saying (Bourdieu, 1977:164-166). Doxa is present in society as well is in people’s habitus, and doxa is decisive for the choices people take. It refers to a non-reflexive knowledge which one does not ask any questions about. For people in Bluefields, how to dance can be seen as

⁹¹ Bourdieu was born in southern France in 1930, and was son of the postmaster in a small village. With help of good marks and scholarships, he managed to climb the social ladder and become one of the most important sociologists in the 20th century. He was concerned with the class society and how power structures work in the society (Wilken, 2006).

⁹² Hexis refers to the pattern of postures of the body. According to Bourdieu, schemes of how to behave/act/pose can be translated from practice to practice without people being aware of it happening. Children can apprehend how people act; sit, behave, talk, do things. Through repeating, it is mastered more easily as it does not need to be memorized (Bourdieu, 1977:87-88).

doxa. People do not question this practice, and no one asks how to dance. It is an un-reflected assumption, and there exists a common understanding of this as the truth. ‘What is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying’ (Bourdieu, 1977:167). They never showed me how to dance, and when the day was there I was told: ‘Just do like the others do, you’ll be good’.

As I have demonstrated above, the general view of the locals is that May Pole cannot be learned quickly; since people have celebrated May Pole from childhood, generation after generation. It is part of Creole life. Like Bourdieu, also Connerton is concerned with how the body remembers.⁹³ Ways of behaviour, for example how to move in dance,- are what Connerton refers to as incorporating practices; actions entrenched in peoples bodies (Connerton, 1989:72-73). The act of dancing May Pole is so automatic for people that it is not even recognized as an isolated piece of behaviour. How to dance cannot be read straight forward like instructions in a recipe; to be performed correctly it needs to be incorporated into the body (Connerton, 1989). In May Pole, people have practiced the festival their whole lives; when people dance around the May Pole tree, they actually do what they have done for a long time. Habit is knowledge, and remembrance is in the body (Connerton, 1989:95). As we saw in chapter four, the Creole lady Sally showed displeasure with the transition of the festival. While the festival earlier only was practiced by the poor, Creole people, who had grown up with the festival, it had evolved into an event educated politicians informed people how to do. One of the reasons why the festival was experienced as hurtful was that it had been practiced for such a long time, and had become a part of people. It was incorporated into people’s bodies, - what Connerton refers to as bodily memory, and thus ‘an authentic celebration’.

Scott’s concept of *mētis* refers to a particular local, practical, experiential knowledge which one needs to feel in order to perform (Scott, 1998:313-314). In line with this, the knowledge present in May Pole; as for instance dance, is closely connected to the body and needs to be experienced, lived and practiced. It is personal, and based on a certain touch. To dance May Pole is highly situational and bound up towards a local context. To know where and how to apply in a concrete situation is the essence of *mētis* (Scott, 1998:316). As described in chapter three, I was surprised by how the locals seemed to know when to turn up for the event; how long to wait for everything to begin; and especially *how* to dance. Even though I was a Western student, with a lot of educational and travel experience, this did not matter. I did not have the skills necessary; the local, embodied knowledge that people in

⁹³ Though Connerton does not refer explicitly to Bourdieu, they say much of the same.

Bluefields already had about the May Pole festival. Even though I would have stayed in Bluefields for a longer period of time and danced on every occasion possible, it might have proven impossible ever to learn the movements and the dance – at least not in the same manner as the locals. Dancing can be seen as a general skill, however, how to dance in May Pole and in Bluefields can be seen as a highly contextual skill. It might be called ‘a local and situated knowledge’ (Scott, 1998:317). Dancing May Pole, playing local games, nor knowledge of Creole food can easily be read, learned or taught in a quick manner. People know it from what their grandmothers made them do from they were young.

In line with the argument of Harrison, outlined in the previous chapter, as inalienable possessions, symbolic practices can be experienced as a part of the self, and consequently cannot be appropriated by others without a sense of injury and as violation of one’s integrity (Harrison, 1999:243). The embodied and incorporated factors of May Pole make it a part of people, and when the state appropriates the event, it might feel hurtful, as it perhaps triggers a sense of estrangement. As shown here, knowledge in May Pole can to a large degree be seen as *mētis*; incorporated and habitual in the body. However, over the last years, with the changes of May Pole, the NGOs and the government has contributed to an expansion and extension of May Pole, to other people and places, and also translated in other ways than before; into a form of knowledge which can be imparted in a classroom. I will now elaborate on an example from a presentation at a school during Liga de Saber.

Presentations at schools about Liga de Saber

In recent years, one prominent activity in this multifaceted festival has been to inform youth about the origin and significance of May Pole, through the competition Liga de Saber. In 2011, several organizations in Bluefields, in collaboration with the universities, cooperated for this to be accomplished.⁹⁴ Before they carried out the activity, the youth organizations met and delegated the responsibility and tasks between them. Two or three of the members were supposed to visit each school, and give a two-hour lecture about the festival, - its origins, and characteristics. After the presentation, each school had to choose a team of six students to represent them in the annual competition Liga de Saber, which is held in the middle of May to determine ‘the most knowledgeable school’, as illustrated in the vignette of the chapter. I will now describe one of the training sessions which took place in advance of the festival, and

⁹⁴ HIV-organizations, human rights organizations, indigenous organizations, and political organizations – all of them labeled ‘youth organizations’, participated. The active political organizations were both Sandinistas (FSLN) and liberals from the National Liberal party (PLN).

subsequently analyse the event, to show how this cognition differs from ‘embodied’ knowledge.

One day in the middle of May, we were going to one of the schools to teach the students about the history of May Pole. John from the organization, a girl from another organization, and I jumped in a taxi, the easiest way to get around in the city. As we arrived at the school, approximately fifty girls and boys were already waiting inside the crowded classroom. The students were sitting, watching and waiting, while John turned on the computer and started the power-point presentation. I went around and handed out a four page fact sheet, written by a local historian and political scientist in the area, which included a historic summary about the origin and characteristics of the festival. John started to talk;

Today we will tell you about May Pole. What you know about May Pole? You probably know a whole lot, since you always have been practicing it, but maybe you not know all the facts, and all the information. So we will tell you about that. It is important to know this, so we can empower ourselves.

The majority of the students at this school were Creole youth between 12 and 15 years old. The presentation started with a film about the origin and characteristics of May Pole. The film ended, and the underlying meanings and stories behind the Creole songs were presented. Most of the students knew the food, dancing, and songs by heart. However, they did not have knowledge about the underlying meanings behind the songs. For example, most of the students knew the song *Sing Saiman, sing my love* by heart, but most of them did not know the story about Simon and his girl.⁹⁵

Sing Saiman sing mai lov
Sing Saiman sing mai lov
Sing Saiman sing mai lov
Sing Saiman sing mai lov

Sing Simon, sing my love
Sing Simon, sing my love
Sing Simon, sing my love
Sing Simon, sing my love

Show mi di ring we you
Lova gui you
Sing Saiman sing may lov

Show me the ring, will you
Love you
Sing Simon, sing my love

Show mi di ring we you
Lova gui you
Sing saiman sing mai lov

Show me the ring, will you
Love you
Sing Simon, sing my love

⁹⁵ Creole version of the song at left, and English version at right.

John told the story behind the song; a love story between a girl and a boy called Simon, in which the girl wants the boy to give her an engagement ring to demonstrate his love.

During the presentation, the assumed origin of May Pole was presented. The festival originated in Europe, where it was celebrated as ‘May Day’, on which people danced around a tree on the first day of May. The custom arrived at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua with the British, and the Creole population adopted and transformed it, and gradually made it into their own festival. John talked to the students;

Many of the traditional customs are in danger of being erased and forgotten, as they might not be passed down from generation to generation. Costeños need to be proud of their own culture and ancestors. This is why we celebrate May Pole today; for our own practices, and our ancestors. Pole arrived here from England; we took care of it because we wanted to, modified it, and transformed it.

The speakers let the students interact in the presentation; they asked questions and engaged them. The lecture stressed the historical trajectory of the festival, the influence of the British, and the influence of the Moravian church. The history of Creoles in Bluefields and in May Pole was also central. The presenter also emphasized why it is important to know the facts and information about May Pole;

We don’t know why we dance, we only dance. We need to know our culture, our history here at the Coast. We only know the culture of the rest of the country, about the culture and customs of them. Not our own.

The students listened with concentration to what they were told, asked questions and answered when they were asked. When the presentations were finished, the students were encouraged to read the paper handed out, and learn more information and facts about the festival. At the end of the presentation, each student was encouraged to read and prepare for the competition to be held towards the end of the month, Liga de Saber, where teams from each school were going to participate.



Figure 10: Slide from power-point presentation. Prepared by OCCA and presented at Liga de Saber.

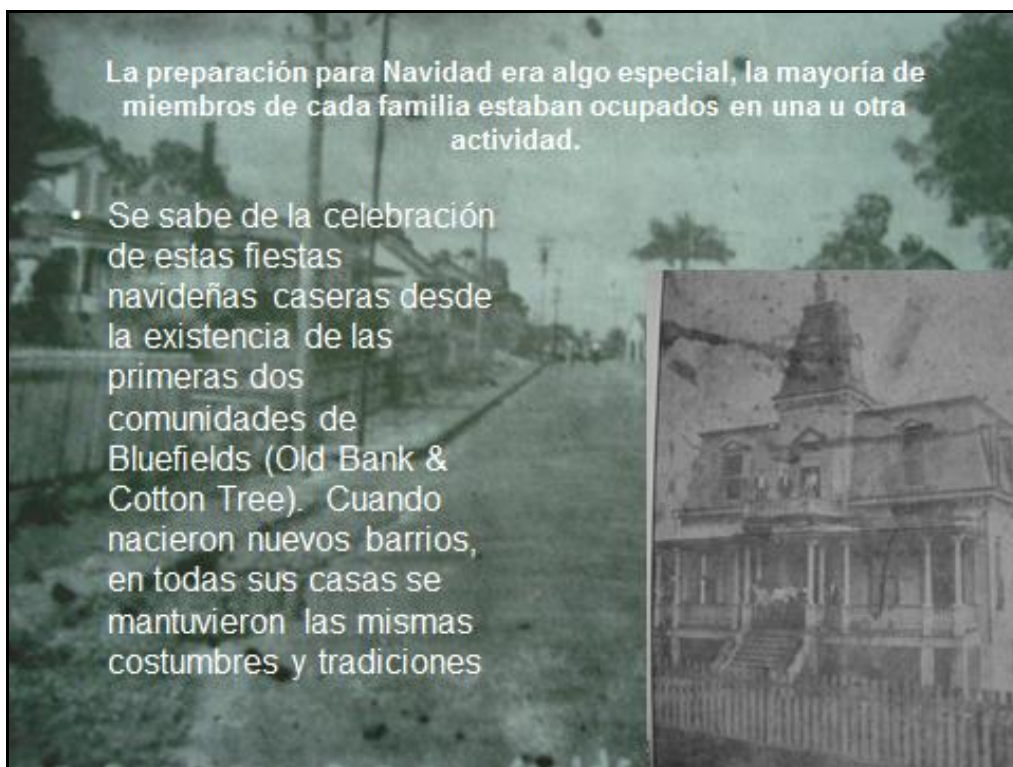


Figure 11: Side from power-point presentation. Prepared by OCCA, and presented at Liga de Saber.

As this empirical example from May Pole illustrates, although most of the youth in the city had celebrated the festival every year since they were born, the presentations supplied their concept of May Pole with facts and textual information. The students did not only learn by listening, but were additionally presented with documents. Documentation, what Riles refers to as artifacts of modern knowledge has become a present feature of May Pole (Riles, 2006:2). In line with Riles, various types of documents are without doubt omnipresent features of everyday life most places in the world, as tickets, records, letters, transcripts, and other documents are used on a daily basis (Riles, 2006:5). By emphasizing such documents, anthropologists can gain insight into how modern forms of knowledge, expertise and governance work (Riles, 2006:4).

This new cognition, which is appearing with the organizations through power-point presentations and fact sheets, differs from the knowledge inhabited in the festival, - dancing and doing May Pole. These new channels for information are what Connerton refers to as inscribing practices, modern devices for saving and re-establish information, such as photographs and sound tapes. This refers to devices that hold the information, long after the human organisms have stopped informing (Connerton, 1989:72-73). This can be written text or citing of the alphabet (Connerton, 1989:74). From being used to 'doing' and 'performing' May Pole, students were supposed to learn about fixed information about the festival.

The May Pole fact sheets and power-point presentations used by the organizations can also be seen as what Scott refers to as technical knowledge. It is encoded in certain rules and principles, and differs in how it is taught, what it consists of, and how it appears (Scott, 1998:319). Technical knowledge is rule-based and generic, as for example power-point slides can be used every year and in different locations and situations, and it represents an universal western knowledge that acknowledges historical facts (Scott, 1998:319). *Techne* refers to the form, style, or formula of presentation of information. But the information itself, the content of the power-point presentations such as facts, May Pole songs, and the festivals characteristics, cannot be explained by *techne*. The way information takes shape, the framework and borders of how the material is presented is governed by systematic and impersonal rules of *techne*. Through presentations and documentation of the information has facilitated production of knowledge that can be readily assembled, comprehensively documented, and formally taught (Scott, 1998:320).

In May Pole, this inscribing, technical knowledge refers to two different forms of knowledge; both the knowledge which the state introduced when they appropriated the May

Pole festival in late 1980s and also a technical, history-characterized knowledge transferred in the classrooms in Bluefields. Unlike knowledge that is usually connected to the festival, through facts sheets and Liga de Saber, the latter was made formalized and produced through rigid and fixed frames. All the different arrangements at various schools come together in this event, which often can be seen as what Handelman refers to as a public event, and take place as displays, spectacles, pageants or processions, open to be viewed and observed by the public (Handelman, 2004:4).

Writing with example from small-scale to large-scale agriculture, Scott claims that states concerned with appropriation will transform the local knowledge present into a standardized system that would allow control over the work and its intensity (Scott, 1998:338). Applied to the May Pole festival, this would include making the history concrete and written, and by this control was made through standardization. As *techne* is more easily acquired than *mētis*, it constitutes a possibility for the organizations and the government to spread knowledge about the festival to people inside and outside of Bluefields. When stories, facts and characteristics are written down, they become ‘settled knowledge’. Historical documents such as fact sheets are universal and can easily change location and context. In the form of books, or over the internet, these artifacts can be read by anyone, and are basics to develop theoretical knowledge. As product of written language, they constitute some general principles. This leads us to the reason why the organizations do this.

Education and Creole people in Nicaragua

As the example above illustrates, the organizations highlight Atlantic Coast, Costeños and Creole people’s role in May Pole. As locals, they should be proud to be Creole, and of May Pole, and the organizations considers it necessary to have knowledge about the history and culture of the festival. Even though May Pole originally was introduced by the British, it is Creole people’s festival, as they chose to adopt and transform it. In accordance with DaMatta, everyday context is crucial to understand what happens in carnival (DaMatta, 1991:129), and I will now show how this empowerment is connected to the marginalized position of Creole people in Nicaragua.

Throughout this thesis, it has been emphasized how Creole people have a marginalized position in Nicaragua. The Atlantic Coast is the most Indian, the most black and the most European, and with its ethnic diversity, the region is often cast in a negative light in the rest of the country (Pineda, 2011). The marginalized position of the Atlantic Coast is also visible

through the shortage of education. Education at the Atlantic Coast has mainly dealt with the history and development of Spanish-speaking Nicaragua; Mestizos, the Spanish conquest, and events played out in Central America. Consequently, it has been a lack to teach students at the schools and universities about the history and traditions of the Atlantic Coast. Local particularities, as heroes, history, and geography have not been taken into consideration.⁹⁶

As the example above illustrates, awareness exists about how the history, characteristics, and reality of the Atlantic Coast is portrayed negatively in national discourse. In meeting with students, the workers in the organizations emphasized the agency of Creole people. According to my observations, the main reason why the organizations carried out the whole activity was to inform and empower youth about ancient history and cultural practices related to the festival. It seems to be a vulnerable aspect related to this, as the organizations wanted Creole youth to have knowledge about the festival. The fact that the festival constitutes inalienable possessions for Creole people might increase this vulnerability, and Creole May Pole is considered 'authentic', as we saw in chapter four. The organizations are aware of the marginalized role of the Atlantic Coast and of African descended people in Nicaragua, and it seems like by utilizing May Pole, the organizations try to promote and upgrade the role of Creole people, and all Costeños, in Nicaragua. With the transformation of May Pole, it can be seen as if they try to give people of African descent a space within the Nicaraguan state, by adopting new forms of knowledge to channel the festival, and consequently Creole people.

After the appropriation of the May Pole festival and its change into a nation-wide event, people wanted to know the history and the traditions of the festival. Songs, characteristics, and origin stories were written down, formalized and institutionalized. According to Connerton, the transition from an oral to a literate culture is a transition from incorporating- to inscribing practices. When stories are not told in the same live manner anymore, improvisation becomes difficult, and innovation is institutionalized (Connerton, 1989:75). It seems like May Pole is experiencing a gradual change towards a new form of knowledge, and there is an ambiguity connected with this. The organizations are aware of the importance of cognitive knowledge; how it is more accepted in national and international

⁹⁶ According to the anthropologist Edmund Gordon, over the last fifty years, no books regarding the history of Creoles have been accessible in Bluefields (Gordon, 1998:93). There only exist two earlier descriptions of Creole history, written by Brautigam Beer and Hugo Sujo Wilson (Gordon, 1998:93-95).

discourse, and might be a fruitful tool to increase the importance of African descended people in Nicaragua.⁹⁷

In short, the organizations seem to influence the incorporation of a cognitive knowledge. The organizations and universities implement a scholarly knowledge through the presentations and Liga de Saber; they promote the importance of this activity, as means to 'empower' young people, and make them aware of their history, customs, and traditions. Here we can draw a parallel to people of African descent in United States. The historian and political scientist Howard Zinn has written the book *A Peoples History of the United States*, first published in 1980. The book entails the history of United States from 1492 until present day, but with the point of view of the 'common' and marginalized people. While written history in United States used to have mostly white men of European descent as its main characters, this book emphasized colonizers' eradication of the local population; diseases, slavery, and the inhuman conditions that colonization involved. In Zinn's book, the grass root was in centre; women, children, the poor, factory workers, African Americans and Native Americans are the main actors (Zinn, 2003). In Nicaragua, the organizations try to empower and change the marginalized position of people of African descent within the Nicaraguan nation state, by emphasizing a Creole festival. It can seem like the organizations are trying to inspire the same kind of understanding of history as stressed in Zinn's book.

In one way, it appears like the work of the NGOs leads to a transition from an incorporating to an inscribing form of knowledge, but on the other hand, this is not a complete conversion, and my main point is to claim that there was rather a management of both. Insertion of a new form of knowledge is double-edged; on one side, one has the important assignment of empowering youth at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. However, on the other side, this increases the importance of literate knowledge. Textual information differs from the knowledge inhabited in people; an embodied knowledge people have experienced (Scott, 1998). May Pole changed from an incorporating practice, oral and narrated, to additionally embrace an inscribed practice, formal and literate. However, though this change of the festival has taken place, May Pole is still danced, a vital festival, and it might be danced by even more people than before, as more people learn about the festival. Although most May Pole celebrations in both Creole and Mestizo neighbourhoods all include elements such as music,

⁹⁷ However, the gradual change from a bodily to a written form of knowledge might be problematic as academic knowledge, (from a western perspective) often is perceived more valuable and important in comparison to bodily knowledge (Polhemus 1975:141) cited in (Jackson, 1983:328). Practical knowledge has been considered as static and unchangeable, despite flexibility and fluidity are its main characteristics. However, as it is not written down or have a textual reference point, keeps its fluidity (Scott, 1998:331-332).

dance, alcohol, and a May Pole tree, the celebrations still differ. The Creole celebrations, which are embodied and inscribed, are for Creoles and non-Creoles alike, considered more 'real' and 'authentic'. By reason of this, the appropriation and change of the festival might lead to a sense of hurtfulness.

A factor that increases this vulnerability even more is, as we saw in the previous chapter; after the appropriation of May Pole, some regard the festival a Sandinista event.⁹⁸ In line with Comaroff's argument displayed in chapter four, ethnicity is becoming commercialized in large parts of the world. However, it is hard to say what will happen to the May Pole festival, as we do not know what the future will bring.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has shown that embodiment of knowledge is a persistent feature of Creole May Pole celebrations, and the main reason why Creole celebrations are considered more 'authentic'. The May Pole festival, with all its characteristics, is a highly embodied practice for Creole people. With the appropriation of May Pole, its history was written down and the event institutionalized. Additionally, an activity to inform youth about the origins and history of the festival was initiated, called Liga de Saber, where organizations go around to schools in Bluefields to inform youth about the features and history of the festival. This is followed by a competition at the end of the month, to honour the team that knows the most about the festival. Through the chapter, I have shown how this produces a new form of scholarly, cognitive, inscribed, technical knowledge, in addition to the embodied, incorporated form of knowledge already present in the festival. The Nicaraguan state has made the festival known all over the country, and the organizations emphasize cognitive knowledge when they present the students with power-point slides and fact sheets. People still dance May Pole in the neighbourhoods, but there seems to be a concern over 'authentic' and 'real' May Pole. The reason why the organizations do this is related to the marginalized position of people of African descent in Nicaragua; members are aware of the importance of scholarly knowledge, and use the festival as a means to empower people. However, it must be noted that that the

⁹⁸ As we have seen before, Sandinistas are the supporters of the political party FSLN, who stood behind the revolution in 1979, and is also the largest party today. As showed in chapter four, with the appropriation of May Pole some newspapers considers May Pole a FSLN event.

existence of various types of knowledge does not imply that one can talk about a clear dislocation between mētis and technical knowledge, incorporated and inscribing practices. There seems to be a slight dislocation from one form of knowledge to another, as they both exist side by side and today there is rather a management of both types of knowledge.

6. Concluding remarks

The overall objective of this thesis has been to enhance the understanding of the roles of festivals in nation-building. I started out by implying that I wanted to explore the relationship between the Atlantic Coast and the state of Nicaragua. To make an anthropological analysis of the state implies some methodological problems, as the state is not a tangible entity out there, ready for the scrutiny of the anthropologist's participant observation. One way to solve this is to look for what the anthropologist Trouillot calls *state effects* and *state processes* in other less obvious settings than in established and institutionalized bureaucracies (Trouillot, 2001:133). Inspired by these thoughts, I have taken point of departure in a highly empirical, vivid, and fascinating event; the Creole festival May Pole, which is celebrated in the city of Bluefields each year in the month of May. This celebration naturally became a centre of attention, and I consider this locally grounded analysis, a contribution to the anthropology of the state.

The research question for this thesis has been to explore how the nation's project to integrate the Creole population, and May Pole, into the rest of Nicaragua, is received among Creoles today. I have suggested that anthropological perspectives on what I have chosen to label under the umbrella 'public spectacles' – a junction between the state and public event – can constitute a useful framework in order to see the May Pole festival as a multi-faceted event, with resemblances with ritual, carnival, and public event.

Connerton (1989) writes about 'commemorative practice' in Israel, where the state has taken memories from the past and made them into national symbols, by creating parades, gatherings, and events. Similar features can also be seen in Bluefields, with the appropriation of May Pole, the state has taken use of the several hundred year old festival, and given it new meaning. I have suggested how a 'carnival approach' can be fruitful to explore dimensions and aspects of the May Pole festival. In line with what DaMatta writes, carnival is located close to people's hearts and souls, and this makes them so important for people (DaMatta, 1991:15). A comparison with the Notting Hill carnival described by Abner Cohen, verifies how May Pole shares several characteristics with a carnival, as it involves colourful clothes, music, and parades. As Cohen writes, carnivals are always structured by both politics and culture, and are fertile grounds to explore politics, as their symbolic forms have the potential for political articulation, considering carnivals always being contested by different interests

and forces (Cohen, 1982:24-25). This is true for May Pole, and both festivals have experienced a change.

Handelman's concept about public event is also advantageous to see how the state interferes in the festival. According to Handelman, public events are central to be used about sites of performance, which are constructed to convey participants' role in the social order. The public event shows itself as a mirroring of social and cultural order; as what they are, or in the future should become (Handelman, 2004:17). The May Pole festival can be seen as a public event; through May Pole, is it possible for a third-party to understand what is going on; dance, Creole food, and local neighbourhoods are suddenly everywhere. According to Handelman, public events are where symbolism of the state, of nationalism, and classification intersect most powerfully (Handelman, 2004:18).

However, as mentioned in chapter one, these perspectives fall short of explaining just how the May Pole festival is perceived at the local level in Bluefields. I wanted to make use of classic existing theory, 'public spectacles', but additionally separate from earlier research by giving my own contribution and taking other approaches into consideration, by drawing on ethnic/civic nationalism, authenticity, and forms of knowledge.

The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua experienced a different historically development, and form of colonization, then the rest of the country. The May Pole festival was first brought to Bluefields by the British during the period of slavery, and was maintained and changed by the Creole population. After the revolution in Nicaragua in 1979, the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) gained victory. The Nicaraguan government implemented a row of means to integrate people into Nicaragua. Due to the particular difficult relations with the Atlantic Coast, an autonomous statuette was created for the Atlantic Coast in 1987. In accordance with Cohen, the cultural symbols and the communal relationship events such as rituals and carnivals sustain are so strong for people that governments often want to manipulate them in their own manner (Cohen, 1980). The Nicaraguan state appropriated the May Pole festival. The governmental institution INTUR became involved in the event, and since 2008 the festival has been celebrated in Managua as well. The festival has gone through a change, from a small-scale event privately performed mainly by Creoles, to become a planned event, nation-wide in scale. By transforming, documenting, and appropriating the festival, the state had an intension to incorporate Creole people into Nicaraguan self-understanding, by appropriating and form Creole identity.

However, this process is especially difficult here, due to the regional context, as the May Pole festival takes place at the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua and is located in a 'border area' between Latin America and the Caribbean, is a factor which makes it even more difficult for a state to implement nationalism in this part of the world. Due to these historical implications, I have found it necessary to take a historical perspective into consideration.

I have indicated that after 1979, and the Sandinista revolution, politics gradually changed towards making Nicaragua into a multi-ethnic state where all ethnic groups are recognized and given equal rights. By taking use of Bretons (1988) concepts about ethnic and civic nationalism, I have suggested that May Pole can be seen as one constituent in this process towards making Nicaragua into a multi-ethnic nation. However, this is not a complete transformation, and the festival still has characteristics of both ethnic and civic nationalism. The government legitimated its appropriation of the festival by taking the role as 'saviours of the festival' and by retaining it in its 'traditional' form, it was converted into Nicaraguan cultural and a national event. In line with Hobsbawm, ancient materials from the past, as songs, stories and national symbols, have been modified, ritualized and institutionalized for new national purposes (Hobsbawm, 1983:6). Modern nations which seem to be natural and undisputed entities with roots in the oldest antiquity are, on the opposite, often new and constructed (Hobsbawm, 1983:14). The state of Nicaragua took in use older, well-known elements and employed them in nation-building.

However, as my ethnographic material showed, there is an ambivalence connected to how the appropriation of the event is apprehended by Creole people in Bluefields. There is ethnic diversity in the city, and I have displayed that ethnicity is situational; it becomes important in some circumstances. One of these situations is in relation to the May Pole festival, when people suddenly become aware of their ethnic identities. I have demonstrated that the May Pole festival is not one standardized and uniform event, but includes a range of different meanings and formation of opinions. While some accepts the appropriation of the festival, others reject it, but the pattern indicates that most people accept it, while still referring to celebrations in Creole neighbourhoods as the 'traditional' and 'authentic' form of May Pole. According to many of my informants, Creoles as well as Mestizos, the 'real' May Pole celebrations are to be found in Creole neighbourhoods. I have intended to demonstrate that there is something inalienable and embodied connected to the practices of the festival for Creole people, and it can be seen as what Harrison refers to as 'inalienable possessions' in the festival. As in inalienable possessions, these symbolic practices might be experienced as

defined constituents of the self, and thus cannot be appropriated by others without a sense of agony and violation to one's integrity (Harrison, 1999:243).

When commercialization becomes a part of the festival and the festival additionally is celebrated in Managua, people feel their festival is exploited. Though people usually accept it, there seems to be a concern over authenticity in the festival. I have tried to illuminate the constituents of this 'authenticity' by shedding light on various forms of forms. While different forms of knowledge are operating in the festival, I have demonstrated that May Pole can be related to an embodied form of knowledge only to be obtained through growing up with the festival, if to be able to do the dances properly. Among Creole people, there is still something inalienable connected to the festival's practices, as it is entrenched in people's bodies. This differs from a new form of knowledge introduced by the non-governmental organizations and the Nicaraguan state in recent years, which can be imparted in a classroom. On one hand, the knowledge the state introduced when they appropriated the May Pole festival in late 1980s. On the other hand, one has a technical, history-characterized knowledge transferred in the classrooms in Bluefields.

The many non-governmental and governmental organizations in Bluefields can be seen as promoters of the festival in order to upgrade Creoles position in Nicaragua, by means of a school-like cultural education, through 'cognitive knowledge'. The reason why they do this is connected to people of African descent being marginalized in Nicaragua today. I have suggested that May Pole gradually is changing, from an incorporating practice, oral and narrated, to additionally embrace an inscribed practice, formal and literate. My point is that it is not a complete transition from one form of knowledge to another, but rather a slight dislocation, as it today is a combination of both. The presence of an embodied form of knowledge in the Creole neighbourhoods' show why there are some elements of 'authenticity' related to these celebrations. I have taken Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Connerton's concepts of inscribing and incorporating practices, and Scott's concepts of *mētis* and *techne*, into use to demonstrate how these forms of knowledge differ.

In short, the organizations want to make a position for Creole people within Nicaragua, but there are two factors related to this. Firstly, there is something inalienable connected to the festival. Secondly, it is rooted in the body. By appropriating the May Pole festival, the state wanted to integrate Creole people into the rest of Nicaragua. Though at first glance, most people seem to accept the change of the festival, my ethnographic material from May Pole 2011 shows that there are various reactions to this; while some acknowledge this

appropriation, others are against it. The patterns show how most people accept what is happening to the festival, as they continue to refer to Creole neighbourhoods as 'authentic', but there is still a concern over authenticity. I have suggested that forms of knowledge can be fertile to explore what constitute this authenticity.

Writing this thesis, I have been influenced by extended case method, a phenomenological perspective, and a historical approach. Structuring the thesis textually, I have been inspired by the extended case-method developed by Gluckman and the Manchester school (Evens and Handelman, 2006). I found it useful to begin with a detailed, ethnographic description of the festival, and later extract subjects from this, in the following chapters. By a long ethnographical description of the festival in chapter three, I have tried to bring the reader to the May Pole festival. I have taken a phenomenological approach into use to be able to communicate the vividness and vigour of the festival. Additionally, history is central in the thesis, as it is crucial to be able to understand the role of Creole people within Nicaragua. The May Pole festival has experienced a change during the last hundred years, and the historical role of Creole people is important to understand how Creole people are conceived in Nicaragua. In this thesis, have grounded on four historical phases, and the position of Creole people has been conclusive, and I suggest we might confront a fifth historical phase.

At the time of writing, a year has passed since the May Pole festival of 2011, and the celebrations in 2012 have just taken place. The non-governmental organizations, as well as the governmental institution INTUR, are also involved in the celebrations in 2012. When I talked to my informants in May 2012, they were busy in the process of arranging the festivities. How the neighbourhood celebrations will take form in 2012 is hard to say. Will it be celebrated in the same manner as before? Will there be more tourists? On a long-term plan, what will happen to May Pole? Will the cognitive aspect of the festival become dominating, and lead to an end of the embodied form of festivities? What will happen to the children if the festival is no longer embodied? Will people keep on practicing it even though the older generation passes away? Will the organization manage to incorporate Creole people in Nicaragua? Will it lead to people feeling a new sense of belonging? Will the transition of May Pole, into a nation-wide event, lead to creation of new forms of community among the inhabitants of Nicaragua?

The future of May pole is neither settled nor fixed. We do not know what will happen with the festival, but I suggest three possible future scenarios, twenty years from now. The

first is the collapse of May Pole. People will celebrate it less and less, until the celebrations stop all together. A greater emphasis on the commercialization and a cognitive form of information might lead to people stop practicing May Pole as an embodied, local custom. It might go over to become solely an educational knowledge, and be forgotten as something embodied that people do from childhood. The second scenario is the evolvement into two forms of festival existing side by side; a local neighbourhood celebration Creole people perform for themselves in what they consider ‘the right way to do May Pole’, versus a non-governmental, state-like event arranged and planned at a national level. The thirdly possible outcome might be a tourist-dominated show celebrated with the objective to please the tourists. It might become an increasingly commercialized event, drawing thousands of new people every year. Though Bluefields today is a poor city where poverty, disease, and drugs are severe problems, the city has an enormous potential as a tourist destination. Its strategic position as a junction for travels to the Corn Islands, and all the small communities scattered around at the Atlantic Coast magnifies this.

As mentioned earlier, the material from this thesis is obtained from an ethnographically specific place and time, from Bluefields in 2011, and though this analysis points on the tensions and ambivalence, this might only be a ‘children’s disease’, a transition before the organizations and the state of Nicaragua succeed to incorporate Creoles better into Nicaragua. In chapter two, four historical phases were described. Maybe we are today witnessing the beginning of a fifth historical phase, a future scenario where the state of Nicaragua and the organizations actually will succeed to upgrade the status of Creole people within Nicaragua.

It remains to be seen what happens to the May Pole in the future as one does not know what the next few years will bring, and we can only hope the festival and Creole people will capture the interest for further anthropological studies.

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Appendix: Autonomy law for the regions at the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua.

Unofficial translation by the Southern Autonomous Autonomy council, published in La Gaceta, no. 238 (Oct.30,1987), pp. 2833-36.

THE GOVERNMENT OF NICARAGUA PROCLAIMS
THE FOLLOWING LAW CONCERNING THE
AUTONOMOUS REGIONS OF THE ATLANTIC
COAST

other authorities, will be incorporated into their respective Autonomous Regions as soon as the circumstances allow for this incorporation. These circumstances will be defined and determined by the respective Region.

Title I *Fundamental Principles*

CHAPTER 1 *About the Autonomous Regions*

Article 1

This law establishes an autonomous regime for the Regions where the communities of the Atlantic Coast live, in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic (Art 89, 90, 180 and 181) and establishes specific rights and duties for their inhabitants.

Article 2

Nicaragua is a Unitary State, of which the communities of the Atlantic Coast are an integral part, being entitled and subject to all the rights and duties of Nicaraguans.

Article 3

The Communities of the Atlantic Coast have a common history, and it is a principle of Autonomy to promote unity, fraternity and solidarity among their inhabitants.

Article 4

The regions where the Communities of the Atlantic Coast live will benefit from a regime of Autonomy which, within the framework of national unity and faithful to the principles, policies, and judicial system established in the Constitution of the Republic, will guarantee its inhabitants and the real use of their legitimate historical rights.

Article 5

In order to ensure full use of the autonomy rights of the Atlantic Coast Communities, two Autonomous Regions will be established in what is currently known as the Department of Zelaya.

1. Autonomous Region "North Atlantic" will exercise jurisdiction over the territory of Special Zone I and the adjacent islands.
2. Autonomous Region "South Atlantic" will exercise jurisdiction over the territory of Special Zone II and the adjacent islands.
3. Other zones that have traditionally been considered part of the Atlantic Coast, while remaining at this time under the jurisdiction of

Article 6

The administrative seat for Autonomous Region "North Atlantic" will be Puerto Cabezas, while Bluefields will be the seat for Autonomous Region "South Atlantic". Under very special circumstances the administrative seat of the Autonomous Regions may be transferred to other locations in their respective territories.

Article 7

Spanish is the official language of the Nicaraguan state. The languages of the Communities of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua will be official within the Autonomous Regions.

Article 8

The Autonomous Regions established by the present law are legal entities and as such, in accordance with national policies, plans and guidelines, will have the following general functions:

1. To participate effectively in the planning process and programmes of national development within the Region.
2. To administer in coordination with the corresponding ministries, the programmes related to health, education, culture, basic goods distribution and communal services, as well as the establishment of economic, social, and cultural projects in the Region.
3. To promote the rational use of the waters, forests, and communal lands for the benefit and enjoyment of their peoples, and the overall preservation of the ecological system.
4. To promote national culture, as well as the study, preservation, promotion, development, and dissemination of the different cultures and traditions of the Atlantic Coast's Communities, including their historical, artistic, linguistic, and cultural heritage.
5. To promote the traditional exchange with the Caribbean countries in accordance with the national laws and established procedures regulated to this matter.
6. To establish regional taxes in accordance with the established laws related to this matter.

Article 9

The rational exploitation of the mining, forestry, and fishing resources as well as other natural resources in the Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic Coast, must benefit its inhabitants in just proportions, in accordance with agreement between the Regional Government and the Central Government.

CHAPTER TWO *About the internal territorial divisions of the Autonomous Regions*

Article 10

For administrative purposes, the territory of the Autonomous Regions will be divided into municipalities. These municipalities will be ruled according to established laws concerning this matter. Such administrative subdivisions will be organized and established by the corresponding Regional Councils, in accordance with the traditions of each Autonomous Region.

CHAPTER THREE *About the rights and duties of the inhabitants of the Communities in the Autonomous Regions*

Article 11

Within the territory of the Autonomous Region, all Nicaraguan citizens will benefit from the rights and guarantees granted by the Constitution and those stated in the present law.

Article 12

The inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast Communities are entitled by law:

1. To full equality of rights.
2. To promote and develop their languages, religions and cultures.
3. To use and benefit from their waters, forests, and communal lands, in accordance with national development plans.
4. To organize their social and productive activities according to their own values.
5. To be educated in their own languages, through programmes that take into account their historical heritage, their traditions and the characteristics of their environment, all within the framework of the national education system.
6. To their own forms of communal, collective, or individual ownership and transfer of land.

Article 13

The members of the Atlantic Coast communities have the right to define and to determine their own ethnic identity.

Article 14

The defense of life, homeland, justice, and peace for the integral development of the nation is an essential duty of the inhabitants of the Communities of the Autonomous Region.

Article 15

In Nicaragua, the defense of the Nation is based on the organized power of the people. In the Autonomous Regions, the Atlantic Coast Communities will hold the main responsibility for the defense of the nation within the framework of the Sandinista Popular Army, the Security Forces, and the Ministry of the Interior.

Title IV Consolidated Chapter About the patrimony of the Autonomous Regions and communal property

Article 34

The patrimony of the Autonomous Regions will be constituted by its possessions, rights and obligations acquired through any legal means as a public legal entity.

Article 35

The Autonomous Regions have the full and legal capacity to obtain, administer, and own the possessions comprising their patrimony, in accordance with the law.

Article 36

Communal property is constituted by the communal lands, waters and forests that have traditionally belonged to the Communities.

Communal property is subject to the following provisions:

1. Communal lands cannot be sold, seized, or taxed; their communal status cannot expire.
2. The inhabitants of the Communities will have the right to work on communal plots of land and are entitled to the benefits generated therefrom.

Article 37

The remaining form of property in the region are those recognized by the Constitution and the laws of the Republic.

Title V Consolidated Chapter About Law Reform

Article 38

Two thirds or more members of both Regional Councils may request that the National Assembly reform the present law through the established constitutional channels.

Title VI Consolidated Chapter Final and tentative provisions

Article 39

Once the present law has been passed, the National Assembly will call for the elections of the Regional Council in each Autonomous Region. The Supreme Electoral Council will then proceed to organize and direct the elections, to announce and publicize their results, and to give credentials to the elected Regional representatives.

Article 40

The National Assembly will set the date of investiture for each Regional Council. The President of the Supreme Electoral Council will take the oath of office and invest the regional representatives. He will also preside over the meeting where the President of the Council and the Board of Directors are elected.

Article 41

An especially appointed commission of each Regional Council will organize a solemn inaugural ceremony in the presence of the President of the Republic, or his representatives from the National Assembly and the Supreme Court of Justice.

Article 42

The present law will be widely publicized throughout Nicaragua, both in Spanish and in the languages spoken in Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast Communities.

Article 43

Those officials who are engaged in their duties at the time this law comes into force will continue in their positions until the newly elected authorities take office, in accordance with the new provisions.