

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Miskito, Misumalpan language family. Alternate names: Marquito, Miskitu, Misquito, Mosquito (1).

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): miq (1).

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Located along the Miskito Coast, which stretches along the eastern coastal plains of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. "The Miskito population is concentrated along the middle and lower Rio Coco and along the coast from Old Cape..."(5,12).

1.4 Brief history: The Miskito handled European contact relatively peacefully. They eagerly traded with them and accepted the Marovian, Christian faith quite readily with little opposition (2).

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Coastal, lowland, tropical environment, surrounded by swampy and shallow waters. "This littoral environment has a marine zone of shallow offshore waters strewn with coral cays and reefs varying from about 75 to 10 miles in width, plus a coastal lowland extending inland as far as 100 miles" (5,12).

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: Nicaraguan population is 150,400. Population total of all countries is 183,400. Ethnic population is 154,000 (1).

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Rice, beans, cassava, plantains, sweet potatoes, cocoyam, maize, manioc, and sugar cane (3,107-110).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Turtles, fish, deer, paca are hunted and lard is bought in stores (3,107). "the Miskito hunt and fish for a variety of fauna, primarily turtle, shrimp, manatee, tapir, deer, peccary, iguana, wild turkey, Muscovy duck, and a large variety of freshwater and saltwater fish" (6, 11).

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: .22 rifles and shotguns are used for hunting and harpoons are used for turtle hunting and fishing (5,154-156).

2.4 Food storage: Since the harvesting of plants occurs over a long period of time, root and tuber crops will keep if left in the ground, and protein supplies from green turtle can be preserved for a couple weeks if kept in the shade (5, 211). "If the amount of meat to be saved is small it is cut in strips and smoked over the kitchen fire. Larger quantities are often parboiled and salted or sun-dried, depending on the time of year" (5, 211). The more recent presence of markets eliminates some of the need for food storage (5, 213).

2.5 Sexual division of production: Hunting and fishing are mostly men's work, but women occasionally participate in some fishing (5, 152). "In making a plantation, men clear the site, burn the dried plant debris, hoe and dibble the fields, and help some with harvesting and transporting the crops. Women clean up the plantations after burning, help with planting, harvesting, and transport of harvested crops" (5, 133).

2.6 Land tenure: Slash-and-burn agriculture, also known as shifting cultivation, is practiced along rivers (6,11). "Their agricultural system is a seasonally and culturally regulated sequence of procedures and events involving the clearing of fields by cutting and burning, planting for 1 or 2 years, and then abandoning the fields until secondary forest cover and soil fertility have been restored" (5, 130).

2.7 Ceramics: No traditional ceramic style found. Metal and tin pots and bowls are commonly used for cooking today rather than traditional ceramics (5, 206).

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: Sharing is very important in Miskito society. "An admired Miskito behavioral trait is generosity. A Miskito would rather give food to others and be known as generous than have plenty of food in the house and be looked down upon as stingy and unfeeling for the problems of others" (5, 183). Additionally, game is distributed equally to all those participating in the hunt (5, 153).

2.9 Food taboos: Not found.

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?: Due to the swampy coastal environment, canoes and small diesel boats are frequently used for travel (5, 14).

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): Average height of 20-40 year old adults was 66.7 inches for men and 60.8 inches for women (5,53).

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): Average weight of 20-40 year old adults was 148 lbs. for men and 124 lbs. for women (5,53).

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): Not found.

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): Not found.

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): Not found.

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): 2 years (4, 94).

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): No exact numbers, but males are typically considered eligible to marry between the ages of twenty to twenty-six, while women are eligible between the ages of sixteen to twenty-three (4, 85).

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: No exact numbers found

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: No exact percentages found and polygyny is not practiced today. However, families were sometimes polygynous before missionaries arrived. Males could have as many as 4-6 wives, but having two wives was more common for polygynous males. However, polygyny was not particularly common and was mostly limited to men of higher status (4, 92).

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: No evidence.

4.9 Inheritance patterns: Patrilocal society (5).

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Not found.

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: Not found.

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Village exogamy has been the traditional norm, but village endogamy is becoming more common with the population increase of Miskito peoples (5,57).

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?: No evidence of partible paternity.

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”): No data.

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?: No.

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: No data.

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): “cross cousin marriage was the rule until approximately the early decades of the twentieth century” (4, 81).

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? Missionary influence has led to more modest views about sex all together. Females are expected to marry before engaging in intercourse, and it is considered an embarrassment to the family if they become pregnant before they are married (4, 87).

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: Not found.

4.20 If mother dies, who raises children? Children are then typically raised by their maternal grandmother, or by a mother’s sister. If neither of these women is available then another relative on the mother’s side will care for the children. The father’s family is not typically expected to care for the child (4, 97).

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: Not found.

4.22 Evidence for couvades: No evidence.

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): Not found.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?: Not found.

4.24 Joking relationships? No data.

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: Patrilineal. “The Miskito reckon decent through males, terminologically going back no more than three or four generations” (5,57).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules: Christian missionaries have imposed the rule that one shouldn't marry a relative any closer than a third cousin. "The Miskito have accepted the Christian church's marriage traditions, which follow the general rule that one should not marry any relative closer than a third cousin to an individual. This is a general rule, it is not always followed" (5,58).

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Civil ceremonies are required by the Nicaraguan government and conducted by the village headman. Church weddings are sometimes performed when both marriage candidates are confirmed and are very serious about the union (4, 89-92).

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? Patrilocal inheritance of names (5).

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?): Traditionally marriage was preferred to be outside community, but marriages within communities has become more common as Miskito population has increased (5, 57).

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Marriages are not arranged, but final permission to marry a girl is obtained by the male from the female's parents" (4, 87).

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: The suitor should obtain final permission from the woman's parents. "If there is severe opposition to the match, the couple can elope, but this runs the risk of being disowned by her family, and, should the marriage encounter difficulties, she may not be able to count on help from them" (4, 87).

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: No data.

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: No data.

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: No data.

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Relationship with most neighboring societies (5).

4.18 Cannibalism? No evidence.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: In the village of Tasbapauni, "Approximately 1000 people live in some 200 houses" (5, 17).

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Not mobile.

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): "Miskito society contains social positions or statuses in terms of which all persons are categorized. These categories are based primarily on 'age' in the sense of physiological development and the social status of parenthood, and secondarily, sometimes indicate sex" (4, 59).

5.4 Post marital residence: Matrilocal. "As part of a matrilocal society, married Miskito women locate their homes near their mother and sisters, forming a neighborhood within a village" (6, 42).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): No.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): No.

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: No data.

5.8 Village and house organization: All villages are located near at least one water source, this provides access for domestic use, transportation, and food procurement. Due to flooding, all of these settlements are located on high ground. Houses are typically spaced 10-40 yards apart (6, 36-42). "Each house usually contains three rooms, a front porch, and either an inside kitchen or one separate from the house, depending on the economics of the particular family" (5, 17).

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): No mens' houses.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Single beds made out of wood or bamboo are common. "For children, and occasionally women, bedding may be placed directly on the floor. Sheets of bark cloth are used together with purchased cotton cloth for covers. Occasionally pillows and thin mattresses are made, stuffed

with silk cotton seed fiber” (4, 49).

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Each village is politically autonomous. Pastors direct village life to some extent (2).

5.12 Trade: At present, Miskito peoples commonly sell game and other food products to English markets (5). Historically, the Indians have always been willing to participate in trade with Europeans, and they have readily adopted the ways of the English (2).

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Egalitarian society (2).

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR: Daily commitment (4).

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Traditional Miskito ideology says the shamans controlled the evil spirits and acted primarily as curer, diviner, and exorciser (4, 182). “In addition to curing and divining poisons, shamans were consulted for help in finding a lost or stolen object, furnished remedies to cure bad luck or to increase a man’s courage, provided love potions, and informed the hunter how to be sure of a good catch” (4, 184).

6.2 Stimulants: Shamans ingest excessive amounts of tobacco when performing curing rituals on the sick (4, 183).

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Traditional Christian funerals are carried out when someone passes away (4).

6.4 Other rituals: Unknown.

6.5 Myths (Creation): Traditional creation myths were not found. Information on traditional beliefs is very limited.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Traditional Miskito songs are popular (2).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: No data.

6.8 Missionary effect: Some traditional beliefs still exist, but many have died out because missionaries have been active and influential in this region for over 100 years (4, 185).

6.9 RCR revival: Most traditional Miskito beliefs have died and no recorded attempts have been made to revive traditional beliefs (4).

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Traditional ideology holds evil spirits as responsible for death (4, 182).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?: Not found.

6.12 Is there teknonymy? Yes mostly just with females in more formal conversations. “when a woman is speaking to someone about another woman, she will usually refer to her as ‘mother of so-and-so’, and when speaking of a man, as ‘father of so-and-so’. Both men and women are also referred to as ‘spouse of so-and-so’”(4, 62). However, when talking to close female friends or kin, women may use first names or nicknames when referring to other adults, and they address each other directly by kinship terms (4,62).

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): “According to the literature, traditional Miskito ideology centered upon a wide number of evil spirits (lasas) which were held responsible for natural disasters and personal misfortunes, especially illness and death” (4, 182). The significance of omens are also very widespread in Miskito society. “Dreams are one type of omen, and, as we have seen, are considered meaningful. Other signs give information on weather, provide forewarnings of death, and announce the imminent arrival of visitors” (4, 188).

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: No evidence.

7.2 Piercings: No evidence.

7.3 Haircut: No evidence.

7.4 Scarification: No evidence.

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): No evidence.

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: No.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: No.

7.8 Missionary effect: Missionaries have greatly influenced the Miskito in all cultural aspects (4).

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: No.

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: Not found.

8.2 Sororate, levirate: Not found.

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology

(Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): "Kinship is characterized by recognition of Hawaiin cousin terminology and of bifurcate and collateral relatives" (5,57).

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

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2. "Economy - Miskito." *Countries and Their Cultures*. Advameg,inc, n.d. Web. 17 May 2013. <[http://www.everyculture.com/Middle-America Caribbean/Miskito-Economy.html](http://www.everyculture.com/Middle-America%20Caribbean/Miskito-Economy.html)>.
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