

OVERSEERS OF THE CARIBBEAN

Indigenous and Afrodescendant Women in the
Struggle and Protection of Their Territories



“My dream is that we, indigenous women, continue to strengthen our leadership so that we can be more united in our fight to protect the forest in alliance with other nationalities. We are deeply connected to nature and to our children.”

Gladyz Vargas, activist and A'i Cofán artist



Presentation

Since the forced incorporation in 1894, the history of Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast has been marked by the colonization and exploitation of indigenous and Afrodescendant territories, favoring mestizo hegemony and stripping our communities of our ways of life and our relationship with Mother Land. Despite having laws protecting their lands, neocolonialism persists with mining, logging, and fishing concessions, while the government imposes its authorities and promotes neo-extractivism, all while perpetuating oppression.

This invasion affects cultural practices, livelihoods, and the territorial governance unique to the region, creating tensions with the government's policies of cohabitation between communities and invading *colonos*. Cohabitation is rejected by indigenous and Afrodescendant communities, who demand the fulfillment of their ancestral rights and condemn the massive and violent illegal invasion of their territories.

In this context, indigenous and Afrodescendant women play a crucial role in the resistance, facing not only violence and dispossession but also the patriarchal, racist, and capitalist colonization that affects our ways of life and cosmovision.

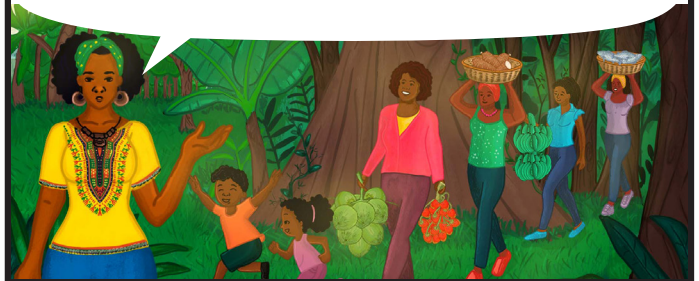
Through the experiences and voices of indigenous and Afrodescendant women in the narrative of this comic, the life stories of Wanda, Krasa, and Slilma are told, highlighting the diversity and strength of resistance in the struggle against the exploitation of their resources, the invasion of their territories, violence, and corruption that threaten their lives, heritage, and autonomy.

My home was a green paradise of trees and animals. But the greed for money, of people not from the territory destroyed everything.



Wanda, 32 years old

In our communities, the women they are guardians of the nature. The forests provide us with nourishment and a connection to Mother Land.

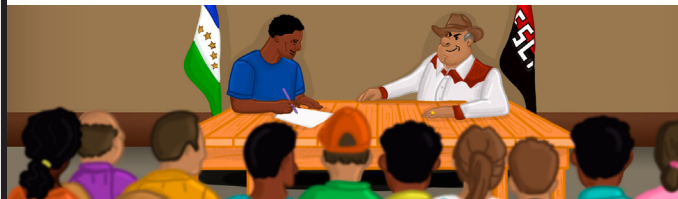


The *colonos* strip us of our lands and even violently move out entire communities, limiting access to our lands and forests, and destroying our ways of life.

In the presence of the *colonos*, we feel powerless, unprotected, and fearful. Them taking away *wi* home right in front of our eyes.



We have witnessed how the Nicaraguan state dismantled our communal governments, creating parallel governments of communal and territorial authorities, disrespecting the decisions made in community assemblies during the election of our authorities, violating what the Autonomy Law (Law 28) and the Demarcation and Titling Law (Law 445) says...



...the parallel authorities permit the destruction of the forest and the illegal sale of our lands.



No one seems to be protecting our rights.
The damages are severe...



...violence, land removal, loss of cultural identity, diseases,
and food crises in our communities.
The insecurity we experience is very hard.
It's inhuman.



Even so, we continue to help one another, we meet in the
few safe spaces we still have, we discuss our situation and
share the little we have.



The invasions affect both our territory and our bodies. Our
lives, relationships, and emotions are being harmed by so
much violence.



Some of us have months and even years that we can't go
fishing together, or farm on our land. The road to the river has
become dangerous because the *colonos* are there, exploring
our lands, threatening us, and cutting down the trees. Even the
river *wata* has become contaminated
because them pour poison into the *wata*
to catch and extract everything.



Violet, 40 years old

Since the *colonos* come in our land, a lot of saloons opened
in the communities, which are full of drunk men, who also
take the girls by force and no one does anything to stop this
serious violence.



Shandaly, 18 years old

The situation
is getting
worse and
worse.

The gold rush brought violence, vice and death to our community. Before, communal governments were the defenders of our rights, now some of them are the ones who threaten us for responding to political party interests.



Krasa, 75 years old (widow)

We were a community united by history and tradition.



The violence, a product of the invasion, has robbed us of that peace.



We used to walk freely and safely, but now there are many *colonos* around our communities and forests.



Also, they have brought sicknesses that were not present in our community. High blood pressure and diabetes issues are affecting all of us due to the concern about our future...



...because of the impact on our sons and daughters, and because we are at risk of losing our land and peace.



But it's for them, for their future, that we cannot stay like this...



...we must come together again as a community.



Let us never forget that we have laws that protect us, both Law 28 and Law 445. We must demand that the government respects the rights of our communities, for instance, that when concessions are considered, the communities should be consulted for approval. But also, that communities have the power to say NO if it doesn't benefit them or if it affects their ways of life.



We are determined to speak out about what we are experiencing and to present evidence of these violations. We cannot remain silent in the face of injustice and the violation of our rights.



Tangni, 35 years old

We will no longer allow impunity to prevail. We will take our voice to the international level to look for justice, as our own state and regional authorities are the main violators of our rights.



Our resilience and courage are acts of resistance, just as standing firm and united. We are not only fighting for ourselves and our future generations...



...but also for all the voices that are no longer here.

Uncontrolled deforestation is taking away our sources of *wata*, our medicinal plants, driving away the animals, and destroying everything we know and need to live in health and peace.

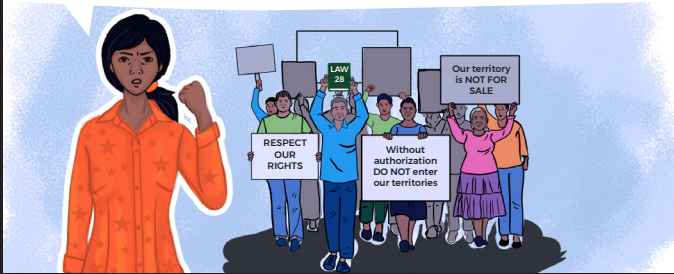


Siilma, 25 years old

We know that corruption and economic interests over our territories at all levels of government are obstacles to respecting our communal rights.



But together, we will find ways to resist and demand transparency. We must continue to demand that the laws that protect us are respected.



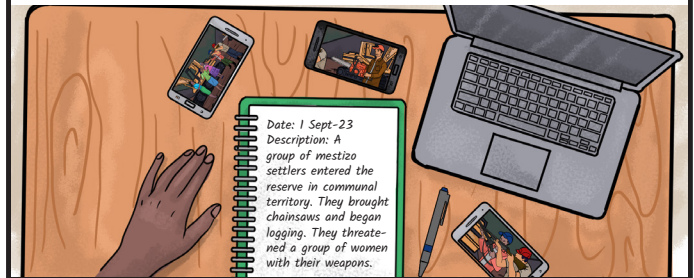
These are our territories! And we are going to defend them, organized, taking care of each other, and trusting in one another. They have no right to come in without our approval.



They threaten us, they assault us with their weapons, they are cornering us. In the face of all these violations, we must document evidence. We must not forget all these injustices and teach the next generations to continue the resistance and the fight.



Impunity will not prevail. We will expose the violence and corruption we face in our territories and demand justice.



Forced displacement separates us from our communities and places us in risky situations. Our families and lives are in danger. It's heartbreaking to see the number of families displaced by the violence caused by armed *colonos*.



We are suffering greatly.

This is happening all *ova* the Caribbean Coast, and like us, there are other women from different ethnicities experiencing these forms of violence.



We have decided to tell our story to the world, demand justice, and shed light on the human rights violations affecting our communities and lives, especially as women.



We will not allow future generations to suffer like us. It is time for the violence to stop and justice to be done.



We find ourselves exposed to human rights violations. Our local and regional governments, along with the Nicaraguan State, are involved in corrupt structures.

Coexistence with the *colonos* is increasing inequality and violence against us. We will not allow our lives and rights to continue to be violated.



Prior, free, and informed consultation is our shield to prevent decisions from being made without our consent, along with community assemblies to choose our legitimate authorities.

Let us not allow ourselves to be used; we must be guardians of our heritage and ancestral legacy.



Let us remember that our territories have legal protection, and it is our duty to ensure that they are respected and upheld.



To the international community, civil society, and community members in our region, we say that this struggle belongs to all of us. Together, we can achieve real changes.

Women are leading the fight for our territories. Some of us are in community assemblies and organizations in our territories, demanding changes and justice.



The resistance and struggle of the women of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua will not cease until all efforts are united for justice, the preservation of Mother Land according to our customs, the guarantee of prior, free, and informed consultation in our territories, as well as a genuine land demarcation process that allows us to live safely and according to our own cosmivision.



Our history and collective efforts are also pillars of resistance.



**We appreciate the voices of the
indigenous and Afro-descendant
women who shared their stories to make
visible the reality of the Caribbean Coast
of Nicaragua.**





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