



Photograph of Miskitu refugee women in Honduras
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Impact of invasions and extractivism at communal lands on the lives of Indigenous and Afro-descendant women from the Caribbean region of Nicaragua.

Colonialist, patriarchal and extractivist practices have been part of a model that generates the exploitation of natural resources, women's oppression, disrespect for communal property and racism, generating profound social, gender, ethnic and generational inequalities. In Nicaragua, this model is rooted in authoritarianism, machismo and mestizo ethnocentrism, creating tensions with the laws that recognize the rights of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, along with a persistent gap between legal regulations and their implementation, which has resulted in increased violence, territorial conflicts and an acute erosion of self-governance in indigenous and Afro-descendant territories and communities in the region.

The methodology developed for the study "The impact of neocolonialism on the lives of indigenous and Afro-descendant women from the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua" is qualitative, decolonial and collaborative, adopting a historical and community feminist perspective, to understand how the invasion

of communal lands and extractivism affect their lives by examining various forms of violence they experience and how these reconfigure their lives and relationships. This research seeks to highlight the complex intersection between colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism and the struggle for the lands on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, focusing on the experiences, resistances of indigenous and Afro-descendant women, and their daily struggles that have been invisibilized.

The study concludes and highlights the serious humanitarian crisis in which indigenous and Afro-descendant communities live due to neocolonialism, manifested through the invasion of their territories and the exploitation of their natural resources. The impact of these invasions is profound and differentiated, affecting both their territories and their bodies as well as the daily lives of the women in these communities.

The colonization and land dispossession process has been promoted by government policies, promoting the concentration of land for monoculture and agro-export, which has led to the displacement of peasants communities to the Caribbean Coast. This displacement has resulted in the illegal occupation of communal lands by *colonos* (settlers), supported by the State through agrarian reform titles and companies granted concessions for extractive activities such as mining, logging and cattle ranching.



Historically, the process of invasions into communal lands of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in Nicaragua, a territory annexed to the State of Nicaragua through the Treaty of Managua in 1860, has been developed as a result of an extractive, dominant and colonizing matrix. This matrix was established in the country and placed the Pacific region as the center of power, imposing mestizo ethnocentric hegemony and affecting the life dynamics of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.

This invasion phenomenon has generated high levels of violence against indigenous and Afro-

descendant communities with episodes of siege, murder, sexual violence and threats by *colonos* and armed actors, leaving them unprotected. The State, instead of protecting the communities, has been complicit in this violence and has taken arbitrary solutions that do not consider the rights of the communities, such as granting concessions to foreign companies, illegally granting land endorsements to third parties, impositions of parallel governments, and ignoring the laws and autonomous rights of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.

The *saneamiento*¹ process has come to a standstill, and the cohabitation or coexistence proposal proposed by the government is being debated. Some communities consider the possibility of coexistence agreements, while others reject the proposal and demand the *saneamiento* and restoration of their ancestral rights.

The situation in the indigenous and Afro-descendant territories of Nicaragua involves a complex conflict marked by invasion, dispossession, violence and the struggle for the preservation of life, culture and nature. Within this scenario, the impacts experienced by indigenous and afro-descendant women in daily life where they share similarities and differences, play a crucial role in the care of the family, the community and the church, including domestic work, food cultivation and fishing for their subsistence. Despite generational and ethnic differences, indigenous and Afro-descendant women share challenges in confronting heteropatriarchal norms and gender roles.

¹Land clearing process, which involves determining and resolving disputes that might exist with non-indigenous, non-afro-descendant parties that claim ownership over indigenous or Afro-descendant communal lands. This process is also known as “The Healing of the Land” among grassroots movements.

The invasion process on indigenous and Afro-descendant territories, as well as the differentiated impact on the lives of women from different age groups and ethnicities in these communities, are integrated by complex scenarios of unprotection.

Key points for their understanding are presented below:

TERRITORIAL INVASION

The invasion of indigenous and Afro-descendant territories is driven by unwritten policies that seek to exploit the natural resources of these territories for the benefit of minority groups and private companies. This invasion has been intensifying since 2015 and is related to the expansion of industrial mining, cattle ranching and illegal logging.

COLONOS INVADERS

Colonos or settlers are outsiders, mostly mestizos, who come to indigenous and Afro-descendant territories with different objectives, such as mining, logging or cattle ranching. Their presence creates conflicts and violence in the communities.

COHABITATION POLICY

Cohabitation with *colonos* often reinforces heteropatriarchal and interethnic relations, which can exacerbate ethnic inequality and racism.

STATE-DRIVEN INVASION

The State is also involved in the invasion of these territories by granting concessions to national and international extractive companies, which contributes to the colonization of these lands. As well as in the institutional weakness and complicity in not exercising justice for the serious violations committed against indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.

FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Families are forced to leave their communities and territories when they are no longer safe, resulting in migration to other areas, sometimes even to other countries.

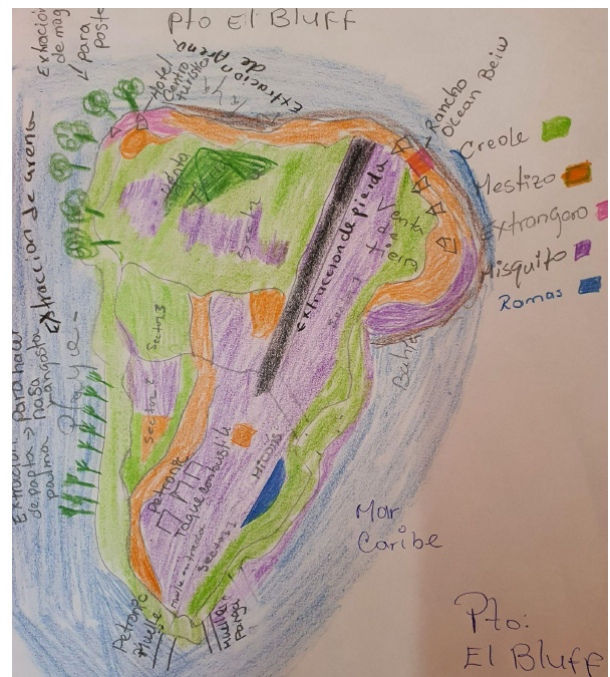


Illustration of a community woman showing the territory occupied by different groups, sites of extractivism and sale of communal land. January, 2023

The main results of the study emphasize that indigenous and Afro-descendant women face multiple risks and violence due to the invasion, including the degradation of natural resources, the loss of their lands and the presence of armed *colonos* who threaten their security, **representing at the same time, a differentiated impact among age groups.**

- **Elderly women (over 75 years old)**, experience affectations related to mobility, increased illness, concern about the future of the younger generation and feelings of sadness.
- **Older adult women (60 - 74 years old)** suffer from loss of mobility, difficulties in obtaining food, death threats, murder of community members and abandonment by their husbands.
- **Young adult women (31 - 59 years old)** experience the power of the *colonos* by preventing activities such as fishing. They are feeling intimidated, suffering displacement or running away out of fear, and feeling pain from the food scarcity for their families.
- **Young and adolescent women (15 - 30 years old)** are affected in terms of their personal physical and emotional security, risks related to sexuality, pregnancy, abandonment, drug use and constant fear because of threats. In addition, some communities hand them over to *colonos* to establish relationships in exchange for household livelihoods.

Along with this accumulation of serious impacts at the generational level, indigenous and Afro-descendant women experience changes in customs and in their traditional roles and community activities, which limits their participation in

decision-making and their mobility, face gender-based violence, including abandonment during pregnancy and lack of support from male *colonos*, mainly young women, and experience health and emotional well-being issues.

The contamination and violence have negative effects on the physical and emotional health of women and their families, including depression, stress and feelings of abandonment. They are also suffering effects on their education, due to the high level of insecurity caused by the invasion of communal lands by *colonos*, many women, young people and children have to abandon their formal education and move to other communities to protect their lives.

In general, women in these communities face several challenges resulting from the invasion, ranging from loss of access to natural resources to threats to their personal security and community cohesion.

Despite the negative and differentiated impacts they face, women do not see themselves as passive or marginalized actors. Rather, they have taken an active role in fighting against invasions and defending their communities and rights.



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Women have adopted various strategies to resist and denounce the situation, being the following some of the most important:

PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Women participate in community meetings to denounce the presence of *colonos* in their territories and express their desire to return to harmony and tranquility.

PUBLIC MANIFESTATIONS

Some women manifest in public, displaying handwritten messages at community meetings or assemblies, which gives them the moral authority to speak out against impunity and injustice.

LEGAL CLAIMS

Other women have filed legal claims at the State when they are arbitrarily denied certification for positions on territorial directive boards, seeking to set written precedents for irregularities.

MOBILIZATION AGAINST MEGAPROJECTS

Women have also spoken out against megaprojects such as the interoceanic canal and the deepwater port that threaten their territories.

Despite their courageous positioning, they often face disregard and blocking by indigenous and Afro-descendant male leadership. Nevertheless, these women continue to fight for the preservation of their lands and territorial sovereignty, facing challenges both within their communities and in the state and political system. Their resistance is fundamental to the defense of their rights and culture amid the invasion and violence they face.

Women, particularly Afro-descendant women, are actively organizing their participation in the struggle for territorial protection. They recognize the importance of being present in community governance structures and assemblies to achieve significant changes.

Emphasis is placed on the need to recognize the diversity and individuality of women rather than homogenizing them. Each woman has her own perspective, experiences and knowledge that contribute to the collective struggle.

Ultimately, it is concluded that neocolonialism seeks to force changes in the use of the territories, benefiting mainly external actors and leaving serious effects of violence, impunity, uncertainty and pain in the communities. However, resistance persists through perseverance and solidarity between communities and territories, with the contribution of indigenous and Afro-descendant women being key in the defense of life, their culture and mother earth.