

RECUERDOS DE NICARAGUA: REMEMBERING THE DRESS OF INDIGENOUS AND AFRO-
DESCENDANTS OF NICARAGUA IN GERMAN MORAVIAN PHOTOGRAPHY
BY

JASMINE HELM

In 1849, the German Moravian Church began a protestant Christian mission in Nicaragua. They built churches along the Mosquito Coast extending from southern Honduras through the eastern coastline of Nicaragua (fig. 1). The area is home to several indigenous groups including the Miskito, Mayangna (Sumo), Rama and Afro-descendant Creole and Garifuna (black-Caribe) communities. “Unlike other Europeans of that era, they [Moravians] did not come to the Caribbean Coast of Central America in search of riches,”¹ notes scholar Benjamin Tillman. Rather, the missionaries’ goal was to convert the native populations to Protestant Christianity and colonize the region. One of the methods to spread the news of their work, was photography. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Moravian missionaries and German immigrants in Nicaragua took ethnographic-style pictures of Moravian occupied Afro-descendant and indigenous communities (fig. 2,3). Many of the photographs were published and circulated as postcards for tourists entitled “Recuerdos de Nicaragua.” They, were also used internally to document Moravian conversion and were reproduced for publications or possibly for presentation (fig. 4,5). In these images, indigenous people are shown in both indigenous dress and in European-style garments. In contrast, Afro-descendant Creoles were photographed solely wearing European-style ensembles.

The Moravian missionaries established infrastructure and civic support that was welcomed by the many Miskito, indigenous and Creole groups, the missionary presence altered the material culture endemic to the communities in the coast including dress. The Moravian missionaries encouraged the indigenous Nicaraguans to wear European cotton ensembles instead of their traditional dress that included *tuno* bark cloth textiles (fig. 6). The trans-atlantic slave trade and the European colonization of Latin America and the Caribbean brought Africans and black Caribbeans to Nicaragua’s Atlantic coast where

¹ Benjamin Tillman, *Imprints on Native Lands: The Miskito-Moravian Settlement Landscape in Honduras* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2011), 1.

they were already conditioned to wear European clothing.² The missionaries' conversion of the population's native dress to Euro-style clothing was documented in the postcards and photography, which functioned as a tool of acculturation and eventual ethnocide (fig. 7, 8). As of yet, the dress of the indigenous communities and the impact of the Moravian missions on their dress and material culture has not been fully researched. In this paper, I analyze the German produced ethnographic postcards and photographs and focus on the Miskito, Mayangna and Creole populations to determine how the dress and visual identity of the indigenous changed and how the dress of the Creole functioned due to the presence of the Moravian missions.

In this paper, I will be drawing on the definitions of dress and appearance developed by Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher. Both are essential to understand the identity and the cross-over of dress elements between the diverse groups in the Mosquito coast. Eicher and Roach Higgins define it as "dress of an individual is an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body. Dress, so defined, includes a long list of possible direct modifications of the body such as coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewelry, accessories, and other categories of items added to the body as supplements." Appearance, then, differs from dress in that it includes the "...features of the undressed body such as its shape and color as well as expression through gesture and grimace."³⁴ The Creole and indigenous communities recognized differences in skin color and hair texture as signifiers of ethnic and tribal identity, in addition to the dress of an individual (fig. 9, 10). Dress functions as a medium of communication that can be used recognize and identity of an individual or a cultural group. The Miskito and the Mayangna have some overlapping dress elements including the production of their main textile, *tuno* cloth. Once dress exists it can be

² Eulanda A. Sander, "Female Slave Narratives and Appearance: Assimilation, Experience, and Escape" *Clothing & Textiles Research Journal* 2011 29:4, 267-283.

³ Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne Eicher, "Dress and Identity," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 10, (1992), 3.

⁴ Ibid. "Since we are using a symbolic interactionist perspective as we present our ideas on how dress-as a medium of communication-relates to identity, we are particularly interested in works in which aspects of both dress and identity have been discussed from this perspective." Read more about how dress and identity functions pages 3-7.

restricted by the moral and aesthetic beliefs of a society. The Moravians utilized European-style garments like long sleeve cotton dresses for women and shirts and trousers for men to impose their own social mores of modesty and “civility” to the Miskito, the Mayangna and the Creole peoples.

MISKITO, MAYANGA & CREOLES OF THE MOSQUITO

It is essential to provide a background on the Miskito and Mayagna tribal groups, and the Afro-descendant Creoles in the Mosquito coast (fig.10). The main land of Nicaragua was colonized by the Spanish. Yet, the Spanish failed to infiltrate Nicaragua’s lush eastern region along the Atlantic, known as the Mosquito coast. As a result, the Mosquito coast functioned autonomously and was a site of interest to multiple Western powers including the Great Britain and the United States, due to the region’s resources of rubber, mahogany, timber and bananas. Europeans most often interacted with the Miskitos, the largest and most dominant tribal group in the region. The history of the Miskito is layered and complex, 1600s British explorer William Dampier was one of the earliest Europeans to use the term Miskito. He explained that they were “but a small Nation or Family, not a 100 men of them in Number, inhabiting on the Main on the North-side, near Crape Gracias Dios.”⁵ The Miskitos were native to the Nicaraguan territory and had contact with Europeans by 1641 a marooned slave ship of Africans landed on the shore of Cape Gracias a Dios and were integrated into the Miskito tribe afterward they divided into two groups the Tawira and the Sambo-Miskito(fig).⁶

Appearance was an important factor in *Tawira* and the Sambo-Miskito self-identification.⁷ The name of the two Miskito groups are based on racial and appearance-based phenotypic descriptors (fig Tawira,fig Sambo). The name is *Tawari* or *Tangweeras* (a self-ascribed term) means straight or ‘heavy haired. Anthropologist, Edouard Conzemius observed that the native Miskito “call themselves Tawira ‘heavy haired’ in opposition to their curly-haired kindred of mixed blood, whom they designate derisively

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Karl Offen, *The Sambo and the Tawira Miskito: The Colonial Origins and Geography of the Intra-Miskito Differentiation in Eastern Nicaragua and Honduras*. 320

by the term *Priski*.”⁸ The term Sambo-Miskito comes from the Spanish word *zambo*, used to identify people from the racial class within the Spanish *casta* system that consisted of individuals that were of indigenous and African descent (fig). Scholar Karl Offen discusses in his essay "The Sambo and the Tawira Miskitu" that land treaties from the eighteenth century refer to the Miskito factions by name and divide the Mosquito nation between them.⁹ The Sambo-Miskito were the larger and more dominate group and developed strong relationships with British traders and the Moravians Missionaries that included trade agreements with the British often exchanging natural resources in exchange for weapons and material goods including clothes.

The Mayangna or Sumo are a smaller tribe in the Mosquito region. Tracing the history of the Mayangna is quite difficult since they are not explicitly written about in early accounts. Their remoteness aided their ability to remain independent and arguably resist most European contact until the Moravian Missionary presence. The name Sumo is how they are referred by Europeans, however in this paper I will refer to their self-ascribed identification as Mayangna, which in their language mean “us” unless the title of Sumo in quotations. The Mayangna lived in the interior areas of the Mosquito coast. In the seventeenth century, with the arrival of the British traders to the Mosquito coast, the Mayangna were pushed inland by the Miskito because they were capturing Mayangna people to sell as slaves. The Mayangna settled in Nicaragua's interior, along the Coco.¹⁰ The seventeenth-century explorer M.W. was the first European to mention the Mayangna, when he traveled 150 miles up the Coco River and makes note of their appearance: "About 45 leagues higher up this great river of Wanks . . . is a pretty large branch or rivulet [the Waspuk River?] running into the /outh /id e of i t . . . the banks wherof are inhabited by another party of Indians who are flat-headed; many of which I have /een, to their no little amazement at an [sic] European complexion.” The Mayangna's flatten heads were a result of body modifications and were a part of their dress practices and were noted in several accounts. Although the Mayangna, were a smaller tribe

⁸ Offen, 336.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰ Carey, T. Mark, "Separate but integrated: A history of isolation and market participation among Nicaragua's Mayangna Indians"(1998). Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers. Paper 5425, 40.

that was dominated by the Miskito, especially the Sambo-Miskito, they believed that they were ethnically and phenotypically superior to them because they were not mixed with African. Despite the differences in physical appearance between the Tawira, Sambo-Miskito and the Mayangna they shared a similar dress culture.

Miskito and Mayangna Dress

Despite European contact in the Mosquito coast, the Miskito and the Mayangna, seemed retained some of their traditional dress element well through the late 1800s, which included garments made of *tuno* and cotton cloth. Anthropologist Eduard Cozemius provides the most exhaustive detail on Miskito and Mayangna dress and the *tuno* cloth production process. He explains that first a *tuno* tree, a type of rubber tree, is cut down and stripped of its bark and soaked in water for a few days. The sticky gum or milk that arises on the soaked bark is scraped off bark, afterwards it is dried, which is referred to *kunsi*. In the drying or *kunsi* state the bark shrinks and then submerged in water before it is pounded. The bark is laid on a tree trunk and short thick club-like mallet called a *kahka* or a *para* is used beat the cloth where it softens and slightly stretches into a pliable brownish cloth.¹¹

Tuno bark cloth was decorated in several ways. Cozemius noted that bark cloth made from the rubber or ficus tree was called white *tuno* cloth and was painted by Miskito healers called *sukias*, using red clay, charcoal and vegetable juice.¹² British writer Charles Nappier Bell grew up in the Bluefields coast in the nineteenth century and saw a *wah wihna*, the only dress garment of the Mayagna, which had different colors and drawings and was occasionally embroidered with duck (*Clairina moshata*) and eagles feathers¹³ Missionary Karl Anton Mueller also observed that white *tuno* cloth was decorated with “characteristic” designs.¹⁴ A glass slide of a young woman captioned in the Moravian Mission archives as

¹¹ Eduard Cozemius, *Ethnographical survey of the Miskito and Sumu Indians of Honduras and Nicaragua* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, 1932), 48.

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ Arturo Castro-Frenzel and José Mejía Lacayo, *La tela de tuno*, *Revista de Temas Nicaragüenses*, 43: 4-14, Noviembre 2011, 7.

¹⁴ Karl Anton Mueller, *Among Creoles, Miskitos and Sumos. Eastern Nicaragua...*

confirms that indigenous people wore traditionally patterned fabrics in early 1900s (fig.). Her wrap skirt is decorated with an all-over vertical linear triangular pattern with horizontal stripes and side fringe.

Both Miskito and Mayangna women traditionally wore wrapped skirts made of *tuno* cloth called a *kwaluntara* in Miskito that extended from the waist to the knees. Women in both tribes were typically topless and often wore beaded necklaces and painted their bodies and faces. Olaudah Equiano, a black writer and abolitionist, noted the dress of the Miskito women (and men) that he met during his journey in the 1700s to the coast: “The women are ornamented with beads, and fond of painting themselves; the men also paint even to excess, both their faces and shirts; their favorite color is red.”¹⁵ The paint was applied to the face and neck with a stick to create designs with dots and dashes. Miskito women traditionally used red body paint that varied from yellow to brown pigment that was made from seeds of the annatto plant (achote).¹⁶

Mayangna and Miskito men and children wore loincloths made of *tuno* cloth (fig). A loincloth was wrapped around hips several times with ends of cloth hanging in the front and the back and typically a piece of barkcloth measured eight to nine feet long and 12 to 15 inches in width.¹⁷ Children either were nude or young girls wore loincloths. Mayangna men also wore a bark cloth shirt called a *khalau* or *kahlo*. It is a square shape garment with a hole for the head with a piece of fabric used to tie under the arms, the Miskito are said to have worn the shirt as well.¹⁸ Chiefs’ ensembles and festival attire were more elaborate and complex. Cozemius explains that chiefs or men of rank wore more elaborate garments in addition to the loincloth such as a cotton tunic (Miskito called it a *wupil*) that was sometimes embroidered with duck feathers and dyed with vegetable juices apparently both tribes wore the garment.¹⁹

¹⁵*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, the African* – Olaudah Equiano, 310. Necklaces were made of turtle shell, seeds, quartz, animal teeth and bone. After European contact, glass beads replaced traditional materials especially in the twentieth century. Beaded items were worn on the neck, wrists, legs and were placed on men’s hats. Cozemius, 26.

¹⁶ Cozemius, 24.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 22.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹

To complete the ensembles, chieftains also wore a long belt or sash around their waist.²⁰ Body paint was incorporated into men's dress for special occasions. Black pigment was painted all over the body and red clay was originally applied to men by women, but in the twentieth century it was self-applied.

Creole History in Nicaragua

The Creole community has a long rich history in the Mosquito coast however very little research exists. *Disparate Diasporas: Identity and Politics in an African-Nicaraguan Community* by Edmund T. Gordon presents a unique and necessary perspective on the Creole ethno-genesis. He explains "I portray Creole identity as emerging from the collision of cultures within the context of racial slavery and colonial power in the Mosquitia of the eighteenth to early twentieth century."²¹ Although, there has been an African presence in Nicaragua since the 1500s, when they accompanied European pirates visited the area, it was not until the mid-1600s that they were forced to settle in the Nicaragua.²² Other Africans and black Caribbeans were enslaved by the British to work in trading posts, timber yards for mahogany and cedar, and plantations for sugar, cotton and indigo to support British economic interests. During this period, the African and black Caribbeans in the Mosquito coast frequently worked alongside enslaved indigenous people and lived in the vicinity of other tribal groups, as a result, miscegenation between Africans, natives and Europeans was commonplace.

In the nineteenth century, a Creole identity and culture began to take shape. The word Creole refers to English-speaking people of African descent. It was used as term to differentiate lighter-skin people of mixed African-descent from those with a darker complexion and non-mixed Africans, who were referred to as Negros.²³ Gordon explains that between 1783 and 1786 the British agreed with the

²⁰ Equiano, 316. "One Ow
https://books.google.com/books?id=4GM6AAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=equiano&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewietZXCuMzaAhVNwIkKHWi_AvkQ6AEIOTAD#v=onepage&q=%20beads&f=false

²¹ Gordon, 32.

²² The earliest groups of Africans in the Mosquito Coast were shipwrecked and intermarried or settled with the Miskito adopting Miskito customs and leading to the rise of the Sambo-Miskito. Ibid, 33.

²³ Gordon 40. The term Creole is also was used to refer to English Creole speaking persons of European Amerindian descent. It originated as a term to describe slaves and Europeans born in the Americas. "The significance of the

Spanish to evacuated their Mosquito Coast settlers and many took their slaves with them. However, many enslaved individuals were left behind and the joined the already freed black populations.²⁴ Additionally, when slavery was abolished in Latin America, free Jamaicans, West Indians and Belizeans of African descent migrated to the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast, thereby contributing to growing Creole English-speaking population and many entered positions of power.²⁵ Creoles were important allies to the Moravian missionaries when they arrived. Many Creoles were receptive to Christianity and the Moravian gospel. Missionary Karl Anton Mueller expressed that the “Moravian Mission work has especially been blessed among the Creole and Negro population of the coast.”²⁶ and considered them the most advanced population in the coast. The Moravians likely respected the Creoles because they spoke English and were Anglicized, as the Creoles were forced to assimilate to British and European customs when they were enslaved. Many Creoles often self-aligned with British culture and emphasized their white ancestry, as a result able to exercise some social mobility in the Atlantic.²⁷ Although, the Creole population may have been seen as superior to the indigenous tribal groups (including the Miskito) by the British and the Moravians, they were still treated as inferior to whites by the European powers.²⁸

It is difficult to determine the dress of the Creole population pre-Moravian contact since I have only found a few descriptions. One of the earliest comes from Captain George Henderson. He visited the Mosquito coast in Honduras and noted in his 1809 publication that “negro-clothing” was imported into the coast and the enslaved population and that each slave in the Mosquito coast of Honduras was given

assumptions of “Creole” as a racial/cultural identity in large part lay in its evocation of similarities between Creole culture and the culture of the group’s former British masters.”

²⁴ Gordon, 35-37, 42. Sambo-Miskito occasionally allied and helped to protect the creole and African population.

²⁵ Melanie Y. White, *As Long as You’re a Black Wo/man You’re an African: Creole Diasporic Politics in the Age of Mestizo Nationalism*, 4. It should also be noted that some Creoles owned slaves and sometimes exploited darker people of African descent and indigenous groups. Issue of colorism, racism and mestizaje remain issues throughout Nicaragua and the Atlantic coast. Gordon, 42.

²⁶ Karl Anton Mueller, *Among Creoles, Miskitos and Sumos. Eastern Nicaragua and its...57.*

²⁷ *Ibid*, 11-12.

²⁸ Gordon further explains this concept and discusses the internal racial and social structure within the Creole community “For whites in the Mosquitia, Creoles, no matter how Anglo-cultured, were inferior because they were, at least partially, racially identified as African” on page 47.

two suits made of *osnaburg* muslin and a pair of coarse shoe.²⁹ Conversely Henry observed that the wealthy free black and Creoles that owned property had "extravagant passion for dress"³⁰ Clearly, the Creole elite participated in the fashion and luxury and purchased the European textiles, clothing and material goods that were imported into the Atlantic coast.

Based on the dress cultures of Afro-descendants in other areas of Latin America, the United States, Jamaica and the British colonies in the Caribbean combined with the descriptions from Captain Henderson and Thomas Young it is possible to make a hypothesis about Creole dress culture. Kelly Mohs Gage, researcher of Afro-Brazilian enslaved dress, asserted that the dress of enslaved black women and runaway slaves in Brazil blended African and European dress elements. She states "Slave women were clothed in dresses, bodices and skirts projecting a quasi-European appearance. This acceptance is not surprising given the proximity within the women worked with their household mistresses and masters."³¹ The mix of European and African dress of enslaved people was commonplace in most colonized areas in the Americas. In the painting, "Dancing Scene in the West Indies," Agostino Brunias painted a group of men and women of mixed-class African and mixed African-European descent dancing in a street procession. The painting gives insight into the dress of black West Indians and Creoles brought to the Mosquito coast by the British in the eighteenth century. The women in Brunia's painting wear a mix of European dress elements, including loose multi-colored cotton skirts, untied corseted bodices, chemise or dresses accessorized with fichus. The men wear breeches likely of loose wool or a loose chemise. The women and men's head wraps, which were tied and styled in a variety of ways, are an expression of their African roots. All of the figures in the paintings are barefoot which was common in many depictions of African people and in Brunia's painting and prints of the West Indies and in Hispanola. Young Thomas, a British traveler in the Mosquito Coast described Creole women originally from Belize as nice looking

²⁹ An account of the British settlement of Honduras; being a brief ... Henderson, Capt. (George), 23 and 57.

³⁰ Ibid, 24. 30-31 talks about indigo.

³¹ Kelly Mohs Gage, "Forced Crossing: The Dress of African Slave Women in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1861," *Dress* Vol 39 (2013), 130.

with clean dress and "gay handkercheifs tied round their heads"³² Young's observations of Creole women's dress and headwear closely aligns with the figures' ensembles in Brunia's paintings of the West Indies and Kelly Gage's findings of Afro-Brazilian slave dress in her essay.

An illustration entitled "creoles at sugar cane harvest in Nicaragua" in the German Moravian Archives dated from the 1850s depicts how Creoles dressed during the first year of the Moravian occupation. It shows the men wearing long sleeve collared shirts tucked into breeches rolled up at the ankle and are working barefoot. The man in the foreground, cutting down a piece of sugar cane, wears a piece of cloth wrapped around his head. The woman carrying sugar cane on her head is wearing a shirt with rolled up sleeves and an apron over a skirt. This print demonstrates that during the early years of the Moravian occupation, Creoles wore European-style clothing and head coverings as part of their work wear. Photographs in the Moravian archives also show Creole men in pants and shirts and women in cotton skirts or dresses.

Moravian and German Photography

Moravian missionaries had a significant impact on the dress and the appearance of the Miskito, the Mayangna and the Creole communities. Many Moravians noted the dress of the indigenous and the Creole groups in their journal entries and publications. The transition from traditional clothing to western, European-style dress and appearance is best documented in Moravian and German produced photography. Together, clothing and photography were key conversion tools for the Moravian Missionaries because they considered European-style clothing to be civilized and encouraged indigenous and Creole people to wear it. German and Moravian photographs of the communities in the Mosquito Coast were used in missionary published papers and presentations and reproduced as public tourist items such as the "Recuerdos or Saludes de Nicaragua" postcard series.

The Moravians used photography as a way to document and share their missionary work throughout the world. They understood the power of images as a conversion and self-promotional tool.

³² 165. Narrative of a residence on the Mosquito shore, during the years.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044024226540;view=1up;seq=181>

Archivist Hans Rollmann explains that the Moravians used illustrations since the 1650s to educate and spread news about their congregation. He further elucidates “It is not surprising that Moravians, who had depicted their missionary surroundings in drawing, watercolor, oil and engravings, would also adopt the medium of photography in the service of mission.”³³ The photographs were published and circulated in Moravian pamphlets and periodicals such as *The Moravian Missions*, *The Wachovia Moravian*, and the *Missionary Review of the World*. Photographic images on glass plates in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania were reproduced in publications and used for glass lanterns, a nineteenth-century projection machine for presentations.³⁴ Postcards were another method for Moravian missionaries to document and share their work in Nicaragua. Images of Miskito and Mayangna (Sumo) people were often used as postcards in series entitled “Recuerdos de Nicaragua,” “Recuerdos de Bluefields.” Moravians also commissioned and reproduced photos by independent European and German photographers, like William Hoffmann. At least two of the Hoffmann’s photographs originally published by F.Feldballe in the 1893 book *Views from Nicaragua* were reproduced in a Moravian publication and as postcards (fig, fig.).³⁵

Moravian and German photographers captured the Miskito and the Mayangna wearing both traditional and western-style dress. William Hoffman’s photograph “Group of Sumu Indians” published in *Views from Nicaragua*, was also circulated by the Moravians as postcards in English and German. The image of the Mayangnas, referred to as Sumu in the caption, depicts a family wearing a mix of traditional and European-style dress elements. The three central women are wearing skirts wrapped in their traditional style. The woman and the man squatting on the left have beaded jewelry, a type accessory that was worn by both the Miskito and Mayangna. All the adults in the photograph are wearing shirtwaists, while the man squatting is dressed in pants and the young children are clothed in loose smocks— these garments were likely imported from Europe or the United States. In a glass slide from the 1930s, an

³³ “The Beginnings of Moravian Missionary Photography in Labrador,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 150.

³⁴ Karl Anton Mueller, *Among Creoles, Miskitos and Sumos. Eastern Nicaragua*, 74.

³⁵ Offen, *Awakening the Coast*, 23. Offen explains William Hoffmann photographed the Karata mission compound in 1892, which was originally published by F. Feldballe most likely in Dresden, it was also reproduced in an 1894 issue of the Moravian journal *Periodical Accounts*.

indigenous girl is shown wearing a similar ensemble to the Mayangna women in Hoffmann's postcard. The accompanying caption for a Moravian slide show describes her as "A typical heathen girl (showing primitive skirt)." She wears a light-colored shirt paired with a multi-layered skirt that includes a piece of traditionally patterned fabric on top. The postcard and the glass plate document how the indigenous people in the Mosquito coast adopted western items like shirts into their wardrobe. The tops were typically made of imported cotton, sleeveless and cut open and referred to a *prak* or a frock.³⁶ Prior to European contact, the Miskito and Mayangna were traditionally topless. Shirts were adopted as a new garment for daily life and were likely reinforced by the Moravian's mores. Even though the Mayangna and the young girl photographed wear European-style garments and accessories like shirt or straw hats, their wrapped skirts, bare feet and natural hair mark them as "other." It is difficult to determine if the people in the photos are wearing *tuno* bark cloth, however Moravian Missionaries, would refer to Miskito and Mayangna people as heathens when they wore their traditional garments and textile (fig). Although the Moravians tolerated *tuno* cloth being worn during the week, it was not acceptable to wear to church since it was considered to a part of their heathen ways³⁷ (fig).

The Moravian missionaries changed the material culture of the Miskito and Mayagna and the production of *tuno* cloth. Benjamin Tillman explains that Moravian's discouraged the Miskito from using the *tuno* for clothing during the 1800s through the 1900s. Instead agricultural missionaries arranged for *tuno* cloth to be manufactured for tourist handicraft and artwork like pot holders, bags, place mats and other tourist items.³⁸ Karl Anton Mueller observed that Miskito and Mayangna men during the week wore sailor-trousers made of *tuno* cloth and women continued to wear wrapped *tuno* skirt into the 1860s. A photograph from 1959 show young children setting *tuno* cloth out to dry. This image verifies that *tuno* production did not completely disappear; however, the Moravian's set up stores that sold imported fabrics and clothing where the Miskito, Mayagna and Creole communities purchased western European materials

³⁶ Conzemius, 24.

³⁷ Mueller, 111.

³⁸ 115.

and garments. Additionally, missionary wives taught the Miskito and Mayangna women how to sew and make garments for themselves and their families while male missionaries provided shoe making and leather tanning instruction.³⁹ Moravian missionaries believed it was important to instruct the Miskito and Mayagna on how to sustain a civilized lifestyle and image.

Moravian Missionaries believed that the Miskito and the Mayangna should adopt western-style clothing and standards of cleanliness in order to become “civilized Christians.” Hermann Kluge describes the dress and the appearance of a Miskito woman who was interested in becoming Christian called Rote Kuka meaning “Red Grandmother” in a pamphlet that was published in 1895. He details the woman’s appearance “...She was still a heathen, as her appearance indicated. Her completely unkempt hair hung down to her hips; her hands and face were thick with dirt; her unclean clothes were full of holes and tears.”⁴⁰ Kluge notes that the longer “Red Grandmother” went to church the more her appearance changed: “Her hair, which by Indian custom was oiled twice weekly, was braided on her head. Her face, now freshly scrubbed, radiated joy. The torn rags were mended as well as possible. Finally, she wore a lovely red calico dress that helped give her name. As much as possible, she was always in the mission house.” In Kluge’s eyes, Red Grandmother’s clean, joyful expression and her new European-style clothes were a result of her dedication to the church.

The Moravians frequently published photos of their indigenous and Creole converts in missionary journals and in postcards. European dress and a clean appearance provided the successful acculturation and conversion of Miskito and the Mayangna by the Moravian Missionaries. This concept is reinforced by missionary Karl Anton Mueller he explained that “as the Christian community life develops, it become evident that the very primitive clothing of heathen times, must be replaced by neat and becoming garments” and believed that dress was a part of good Christian training.⁴¹ A photograph of “The Sunday School, Bluefields, Nicaragua” was published in a 1912 issue of *Periodical Accounts Relating to Moravian Missions* shows a group young Mosquito residents as an exemplary Christians. In the photo, a

³⁹ Mueller, 149-150

⁴⁰ Awakening in the Coast, 315.

⁴¹ Mueller, 148.

Sunday school class consisting of a mix of young indigenous, creole and white boys and girls are posed outside their school building. All the children wear European-style garments—the boys are clothed in button-down shirts paired with shorts or pants and the girls are dressed in long sleeve shirtwaists with long skirts or long sleeved dresses. The boys have short cropped hair and the girls' hair is neatly combed and styled. The photograph was published under a portrait of the Bluefield's Rev. G.R Heath and his wife, and was likely selected to show just how well the young Sunday school students modeled their Bluefields Reverend (fig).

In two “Saludes de Nicaragua” postcards, young Miskito people are shown happily posed in their western-imported clothes. In the postcard “Moravian girl with pedestal,” the central woman wears a cotton dress with a fashionable pointed collar (fig). Her hair is pulled back as she proudly stands with the pedestal and is surrounded by other young people also dressed in various European-style ensembles. They are photographed together in front of a thatched roof house. In another postcard, two young women concentrate on pressing sugar cane surround by a group of young children. The woman on the left wears a printed long sleeve dress and the woman on the right is clothed in a shirt and skirt ensemble. The hardworking women's combed and pinned hair shines in the sun as they press sugarcane in the traditional manner. Similarly composed photographs were taken at other Moravian missionary sites in various parts of the world including Australia (fig). There, Moravians also photographed the indigenous communities of Australia as either unconverted heathens and or as noble hardworking Christians that had successfully acculturated to Moravian morals and customs (fig). The contrast of the converted European dressed Miskito pictured with their traditional tools and surroundings is striking and indicates that the Germans and Moravians likely still perceived the converted Miskitos as inferior.

The Creole and black Caribbean population in Nicaragua were already acculturated to European-style clothing as result of enslavement by the time the Moravians began photographing their missionary work in the Miskito coast. Several black Jamaican and Creole men became some of the most successful missionaries.⁴² The three most notable Jamaican and Creole missionaries included Peter Blair, Frederic

⁴² The Awakening Coast, 6. 1890s newly arrived Jamaican women became teachers.

Smith and Pearl Lagoon Creole Benjamin Garth— together they served the Moravian Mission for 115 years.⁴³ Jamaican and Creole missionaries wore western-style ensembles and meeting the dress standards of their white Moravian colleagues. Benjamin Garth is pictured wearing a suit group photograph of Moravian missionaries at conference in Bluefields in 1904 (fig). Garth's long beard is well-shaped and he's posed in a pensive and stately manner. His ensemble consists of white shirt, with a bow tie, a dark notched lapel sack jacket, loose dark trousers and leather shoes. Garth's suit along with his colleagues align with western men's fashionable day ensembles of the early 1900s in Europe and the United States (fig).

Creoles in many photographs are shown as embracing European-style dress and clothing that a western viewer would consider stylish. In a 1905 glass plate a group of Creoles pose in front of a church (fig). All the individuals wear ensembles similar to those appearing in fashionable periodicals in Europe and the United States (fig). For example, the woman posed in the front wears a shirt-waist with pagoda sleeves paired and a check cotton skirt accessorized with straw boater hat. The men's ensembles include light cotton or linen shirts paired with pants and the young girls are wearing smock cotton dresses. This photograph shows the variety of hats that were worn in the Mosquito Coast including wide brim straw hats, boater hats, and wool caps. The ensembles worn by the Creoles in this photo capture their willingness to participate in western European fashion which visual maintained their elevated status in the eyes of the Moravian missionaries. Even though the Moravian missionaries viewed the Creole population as superior to the indigenous populations of the Mosquito coast, the Creoles, due to their black background, they encountered racism from the missionaries. When a white German missionary married a Creole woman they faced backlash from the Moravian church. When church discovered that she spoke Miskito and could be instrumental in the conversion of the Miskito population they found it in their hearts to acknowledge their marriage.⁴⁴

The Moravian missionaries became a central part of society and culture in the Mosquito coast. They implemented systems that significantly altered the dress, appearance and material culture of the

⁴³ Ibid. 10.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 85.

Miskito, the Mayangna and the Creole populations. To understand the full scope of their impact on dress of the Mosquito communities it is essential to document their perspectives by conducting oral histories and cataloging the communities' material holdings and collections. Despite the Moravian presence, in recent years the Miskito, Mayangna and the Creole have worked to reclaim their cultural dress practices. The Center for the Autonomy and Development of Indigenous Peoples (CADPI) has developed initiatives to replant *tuno* trees and reinvigorate a *tuno* cloth industry among the Mayangna and the Miskito. The Creole have an annual festivals, carnivals and pageants to honor their complex history in the Mosquito coast. These types of reclamation practices enable the Miskito, the Mayangna and the Creole to celebrate their past and preserve it for their future.