

THE CONSTRUCTION OF WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL CAPITAL AMONG
NICARAGUANS IN COSTA RICA:
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ANTHROPOLOGY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Anthropology

MAY 2009

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this thesis could not have been possible without the assistance of numerous people. I would like to thank my committee members, John Bodley and Jeannette Mageo for providing helpful suggestions and comments toward the completion of this thesis. Thank you Nancy McKee for keeping me on the right track during the initial several months of thesis writing and providing much needed motivation. I give special thanks to Marsha Quinlan for her guidance, support and invaluable contributions toward the completion of this thesis.

I am indebted to all the people I met while in Costa Rica and Nicaragua for opening their homes and sharing their lives with me. Thank you Anita for introducing me to Costa Rica and guiding my way in the country for the last few years. I am most grateful to Hilda and her family for their kindness, understanding and support throughout my explorations in the field, *gracias mucho por lo que usted hizo para mí*.

I give my most sincere gratitude to Jack McNassar for his emotional and intellectual support while in the field and in the process of completing this thesis.

Finally, I give my deepest thanks to my family, Dad, Mom, Adina, Aaron, Daniel, Ruth and Bernard for their unconditional love and support always.

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Abstract

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Well-being remains relatively unexplored anthropologically. Models of well-being by researchers in other disciplines fit poorly outside of Western society. This thesis contributes to the development of a working cultural model of well-being for a transnational population in Central America. Based on three months of field research undertaken in 2008, this thesis explores how Nicaraguan laborers in Northwestern Costa Rica subjectively conceptualize well-being in their lives.

Social Capital is found to contribute to general psychological wellness, especially in displaced populations. This thesis uses the concept of social capital to express how Nicaraguan laborers in Costa Rica use social relationships in their everyday lives. Consequently, how Nicaraguans access, establish and use social capital plays an active role in the construction of their well-being. This research supports that social capital, coupled with socioeconomic circumstances, is integral to the construction and maintenance of well-being concepts in this population.

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For Mom.
Without your initial journey to this country, all this would not exist.

ありがとうございます.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Americans might find the key to happiness on pamphlets that Christian door-to-door missionaries hand out, claiming “happiness can be found only if we take steps to fill our greatest need--our hunger for spiritual truth about God and his purpose for us” (Watch Tower Bible 2008). Northwestern Costa Ricans might spontaneously get advice on well-being by reading the back of a Central American *Fanta* bottle that reads “Eat a balanced diet and get plenty of exercise to maintain your well-being” [my translation]. Many of these lay perceptions are meant to direct an individual toward accepted notions of well-being, one that does not originate autonomously from the individual but from an institutional standpoint. Academia has also endeavored to construct, label, explain and theorize elements that define happiness, which is synonymously used with the phrases “well-being” and “quality of life.” Disciplines have established models and measures that constitute specific elements that indicate the absence or presence of well-being. This concept advocates that there is a pre-determined, innate specification among populations for obtaining well-being worldwide.

There has been difficulty imposing strict models and concepts of well-being, especially from Western theorists, onto non-Western cultures. This indicates a severe limitation of the current understanding of well-being. Cross-cultural psychologists have primarily advanced this knowledge base and, to a lesser extent, sociologists and economists. These studies have contributed to the much needed exploration of the well-being concept and yet, the methodologies of a majority of these studies deserve some criticism from anthropology. Strict questionnaire and survey instruments, fixed scale responses, and large sample populations restricted to college students in many countries have contributed to a majority of our current understanding of how

well-being is constructed. Anthropologist Neil Thin expressed an absence in ethnographic research and the possibilities ethnography can offer to supplement questionnaire surveys that have dominated the concept of well-being (2005:45). This thesis is an attempt to use anthropology as a methodological and theoretical tool to examine the concept of well-being beyond these methodological constraints.

My research focuses on a Nicaraguan population in a semi-rural community in Northwestern Costa Rica with whom I worked and lived in the summer of 2008. I gathered subjective perceptions of well-being, formal measures of well-being and information on social capital (social relationships) in the community to address individual conceptions of well-being.

The aim of this thesis is twofold. First, I intend to contribute to the diversity of well-being studies by implementing subjectivity through a population that tends to be underrepresented in research due to their transnationality. Second, I will explain how social capital plays an integral role in the construction of well-being in this population due to the context of the larger environment by utilizing grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998) as a qualitative analysis tool.

“Social capital” has gained popularity in the social sciences in the last twenty years since the seminal works of James Coleman (1988) and in the popular sector with Robert Putnam’s book, *Bowling Alone* (2000). Essentially, social capital explores how social relationships benefit an individual’s resources to acquire goods, services or anything that is desirable. Social capital has been identified as an important asset in many populations and in a variety of circumstances. Specifically, social relationships have significance on the general psychological wellness of individuals. This analysis focuses on an actor’s circumstances, presumably shaped by the combination of a larger contextual environment and individual interests, and how perceptions of

well-being are shaped by these factors. In this thesis I will explore, with ethnographic and cultural data, social capital as an element in the maintenance of subjective well-being among Nicaraguans who live in Costa Rica.

Why Costa Rica?

My interest in well-being began in the Fall of 2005 as a senior undergraduate at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas who embarked on a study abroad journey to Puntarenas, Costa Rica for five months. I went there to study Spanish and it was the first time I was away from U.S. soil for a significant length of time. After my arrival, I learned Spanish in my new environment with the help of my wonderful host family who provided an incredible support network. It was during this study abroad experience that I had my first encounter with the Costa Rican “other” through the newspaper and nightly television news. Headlines that would identify the criminals as Nicaraguan filled the violent crime news reports: "Four dead in Robbery: Nicaraguan Captured," "Nicaraguan Kills Pregnant Woman," "Bank Robbery in San Jose: Nicaraguans Blamed." I thought, "Why all this negative focus on Nicaraguans?" My host family informed me that there were a lot of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica and that the news depicted them constantly bringing crime into the country. Many people I spoke with rationalized that they are poor and the only way they can survive is through crime. Additionally, Nicaraguans were characterized as ‘different,’ ‘aggressive,’ ‘sneaky,’ and ‘untrustworthy,’ everything a Costa Rican is not. Many stated they could profile a Nicaraguan by looking at him. The xenophobia in Costa Rica results in Nicaraguans living as the ‘other,’¹ which is similar to ‘others’ found today in many other nations. I decided to revisit my interest with this population to encounter a deeper

¹ ‘Other’ or ‘otherness’ is similar to the word ‘them,’ as in the phrase, ‘us and them’. Sandoval-Garcia uses “otherness” to explain the undesirable Nicaraguan label in Costa Rica (2004:xiii)

understanding of what it is like to live as a Nicaraguan in Costa Rica.

The Atmosphere of Fieldwork with Nicaraguans

The general locality of the research was completed in barrio El Carmen, a Northwest province of Costa Rica in the city of Santo Tomás.² This area is approximately one hour from the Nicaraguan border and is considered a semi-rural, farming area. General migration patterns in Costa Rica reflect the seasonality of primary crops: mangos, coffee and melons. These migratory workers occupy towns and cities by the thousands due to the plentiful and guaranteed job opportunities during certain months of the year. When jobs are absent they move onto the next town or province where a crop is in season. Certain crops yield during different times of the year and in different locations of the country. Costa Rica has a diverse climate with high mountain ranges that surround the capital, San Jose and its sister city, Alajuela, where coffee thrives. The Pacific Northwest's temperate climate is perfect for mangos and melons and the hot tropical Caribbean climate promotes an abundance of banana plantations. A consequence of this migration is transnationality, living one life on two sides of the border. Although individuals actively seek better opportunities for themselves and their families, many family members choose to stay in Nicaragua on a long-term basis. This creates remittances and frequent mobility, to and from countries, as inevitable for those who cross the frontier to live and work.

Not all migrants follow the crops. With Costa Rica's fairly stable economy, a consistent tourism industry and abundant construction jobs, many Nicaraguans are taking advantage of other economic opportunities the country offers. In addition, many migrants eventually choose to stay and settle down with families and occupy long term jobs.

² All names that describe people and places have been altered to protect the identities of all participants of this study.

This thesis focuses on many individual decision makers who chose to cross the border, either legally or illegally, within the last fifteen to twenty years. The people who have shared their lives with me are a mixture of migrant and permanent residents of Costa Rica. Specifically, the focus population is one that commits to a better life that is found through migration. Many of the people whom I've talked with stress the importance of being able to work and earn a living. In the thesis that follows I will describe, to the best of my ability, the variables at work that promote lives that are considered most worth living by Nicaraguans in Costa Rica.

CHAPTER TWO

NICARAGUAN MIGRATION INTO COSTA RICA

Factors for Migration

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicate that social inequalities in the development process, forced population movements due to war, political instability and natural disasters within Central American countries explain current migration patterns (2001:10). The organization recognizes that seasonal workers, particularly non-documented workers, represent a large portion of the migrant population throughout Central America (2001:18). Several researchers, in the United States and Costa Rica give specific information on the demographics of migration from Nicaragua into Costa Rica (Marquette 2006; Vargas 2005; IOM 2002). The IOM pinpoints four major migration movements within the last four decades from Nicaragua into Costa Rica. 1. The December 1972 earthquake in Managua brought 10,000 migrants into Costa Rica. 2. A fleeing refugee population during the escalating civil war between the Sandinistas and the Somoza regime between 1977 and 1979 brought thousands of Nicaraguans into Costa Rica. 3. The outbreak of the Contra forces against the Sandinistas spread countrywide fear and caused migration. 4. After 1990 with the implementation of several structural and economic policies imposed during the Chomorro presidency between 1993 and 1997 and after Hurricane Mitch in October 1998, which caused an economic crisis in Nicaragua (IOM 2002:8).

Pearcy observes that in modern Central America there is a positive relationship between a stable civil government, economic development and better lives (Pearcy 2006:142). This relationship can be witnessed through the history and current economies of Nicaragua and Costa

Rica as will be described below. The CIA Fact Book emphasizes, "Immigration from Nicaragua has recently become a concern for Costa Rica. There are 300,000 to 500,000 immigrants, both legal and illegal that are an important source of (mostly unskilled) labor in the country" (CIA fact book 2009). Minimal salaries documented in 1991, 1995 and 1999 show sharp contrasts in wage labor between the two countries. In 1991 wage labor in Costa Rica was double the pay of similar work in Nicaragua. A 2000 census from the *Poblacion y Salud en Mesoamerica de Costa Rica* has documented the distribution of the Nicaraguan labor force in Costa Rica (Marquette 2006). Remittances from work in Costa Rica allow individuals to support daily expenses that their families incur in Nicaragua. The average monthly remittance sent is equivalent to sixty-eight dollars. This figure is almost seventy-three percent of the average minimum wage in Nicaragua (IOM 2001:37).

Characteristics of Nicaraguan Immigrants and Migrants

In addition to seasonal migrants, many Nicaraguans decide to permanently stay in Costa Rica. According to a June 2000 census an estimated 250,000 Nicaraguans claimed residency in the country (IOM 2001:11). However, the accuracy of this number is debatable due to many factors such as the highly migratory nature of many individuals and the criteria for permanent status being at least six months in Costa Rica (IOM 2001:11). According to a 2000 Household survey, sixty percent of the Nicaraguan population was between the ages of twenty and forty-nine (IOM 2001:13). Vargas found that the mode age of first migration to Costa Rica is twenty-one with a median age of twenty-six (2005:5).

The relative concentration of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica by region indicates that the Northern border areas have two and a half times the national average of Nicaraguans than in any

other part of the country (Marquette 2006). Additionally, a large Nicaraguan population that represents a one to two and a half times the national average is located in the metropolitan area of the capital, San Jose and the central region of the country.

Marquette documents that poverty among Nicaraguans in Costa Rica is “wider and deeper” than many Costa Ricans in the country (2006:15). The poverty line measure indicates that thirty percent of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica are considered poor compared to twenty percent of Costa Rican nationals. The Northern border areas of Chorotega, Huetar Norte and Brunca contain more poor people than other regions of the country. Agricultural workers are apt to be poorer than laborers in other industries (Marquette 2006:12). There are few welfare programs that assist Nicaraguan families, particularly migrants. The *Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social* (IMAS) is able to assist Nicaraguan migrants who are legally residing in the country. IMAS also assists students that attend school in Costa Rica with a one time financial subsidy to purchase uniforms and school supplies (IOM 2001:34). There are no institutions that assist all migrants, regardless of legal status, who are poor or in need of employment, food or housing assistance. A report by the IOM suggested that the development of a program that provides assistance to migrant arrivals would be beneficial (IOM 2002: 18). Since the document’s release there has been no effort of this kind of development, however.

Costa Rica currently has nation wide health insurance for a large proportion of the population. The country has implemented a social security system in which families pay a minimal coverage rate. If a family is unable to pay, the state pays this cost. Costa Rica’s policy that all inhabitants, regardless of their nationality, have the right to basic healthcare within the country allows migrants to receive these services as well. In addition, emergency services are performed with or without national social security. A 2000 household survey indicated that fifty-

seven percent of Nicaraguan immigrants were covered under the Social Security System (2001 IOM 31).

Marquette (2006) distinguishes educational dichotomies between Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans with Nicaraguans having significantly lower educational levels than Costa Ricans. However, Nicaraguans in Costa Rica have higher levels of education than Nicaraguans who remain in Nicaragua. The distribution of educational levels varies according to location. Migrants in the northern areas of Huetar Norte have, on average, two years of education compared to San Jose migrants who have an average education of seven years (Marquette 2006:5). Lower education levels of migrants in the North, compared to the Costa Rican average of six years, is speculated to contribute to low status and low paying occupations in the region. Particularly, this low-wage trend is seen in males. A unique gender variation occurs in education, with women attaining higher education levels than men countrywide. The children of migrants have been documented to be less likely to complete secondary level education. This trend is suspected to support the continuation of poverty in the second-generation (Marquette 2006:11).

Attitudes Toward Nicaraguans

Nicaraguans have experienced stereotyping and discrimination in Costa Rica. Biesanz et al. documents several occasions where Nicaraguans are degraded in the work place, the school system and by police (1999:117-118). Sandoval-Garcia emphasizes that being Nicaraguan or *Nica* “signifies undesirable otherness...dark skin, poverty and nondemocratic forms of government” (2004:xiii-xiv). Anthropologist Bridget Hayden, while working with Salvadorian refugees in Costa Rica commented on the situation of Nicaraguan migrants, “I had never heard a Costa Rican say anything nice about Nicaraguans, except that they are good workers” (2003:35).

She continues that a Costa Rican friend assumes that Nicaraguans are just all bad because, even if some are good, a person does not have the time to get to know them all. González-Vega and Céspedes describe the influx of refugees in the 1980's as being a problem for the country, "most are poor, uneducated, malnourished and sick, and they have not grown up sharing the traditions of respect for the law and peaceful resolution of conflict that characterize the Costa Rican social contract" (1993:17).

The reason for this discrimination, Sandoval-Garcia (2004) documents, has historical roots in European colonial lineage and Central American political endeavors where Costa Rica has consistently been referred to as "unique". This uniqueness can be compared to Bourdieu's *habitus*, "which is akin to the idea of class subculture [and] refers to a set of relatively permanent and largely unconscious ideas about one's chances of success and how society works that are common to members of a social class or status group" (Swartz 1997:197). In his book, *Threatening Others*, Sandoval-Garcia (2004) outlines the historical influences on the Costa Rican habitus against the backdrop of Central America. He also takes a modern position and examines the media's contribution to sustain these stereotypes by focusing on the Nicaraguan as a criminal. In an analysis of newspaper stories about the Nicaraguan community in two different newspapers from 1995-1996, Sandoval-Garcia found that in a majority of murder cases the nationality of Nicaraguans as either the victim, suspect or both were stressed more than any other national minority in the country (Sandoval-Garcia 2004:30).

This evidence coupled with my own personal experiences shows this migratory population living in a negatively stereotyped environment that a majority, nonetheless, call home. The 'hard working', stereotyped Nicaraguan population, which consists of both permanent and migratory laborers and domestic workers who live and work in Costa Rica, will be the

emphasis in this thesis. Many migrants, due to economic and social problems in Nicaragua, seek enhanced lives in nearby Costa Rica.

This research has ethnographic significance in the identification and documentation of how these migrants live, work and create a life that has meaning and personal significance in a seemingly unstable, stereotypic environment. In light of these data and looking beyond census and demographic materials, this thesis concludes, “there is more to the story than meets the eye” (Biswas-Diener and Diener 2001) for Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. This research contributes to the wide body of migratory research that has aimed at documenting the struggle of transnational bodies, adjustment, acculturation, and meaning of being the ‘other’ in a different local.

CHAPTER THREE
A TALE OF TWO COUNTRIES:
THE COMPARATIVE SOCIOECONOMIC HISTORY OF
COSTA RICA AND NICARAGUA

If you want to understand today, you have to search yesterday.

[Pearl Buck]

Introduction

Establishing historical, political and economic space and time in Nicaragua and Costa Rica is important in order to put into perspective and understand current trends in transnational and inter-regional migration in Central America. This historical background will provide an important context that will enrich the ethnographic analysis of the barrio that I lived and researched in and the people that have shared their lives with me. Each country's history reflects a series of political and economic policies, civil wars and coups that are entangled within the larger global system. Consequently, today these similar patterns prompt Nicaraguan migration southward into Costa Rica.

Outside the Central American isthmus, other countries have also received Nicaraguan migrants. The Nicaraguans I spoke with, however, see Costa Rica as a sister country to Nicaragua due to its close proximity, many Nicaraguan residents and the ease to migrate between the two countries. Participants stated that the added perks to Costa Rica's close proximity is the availability of plentiful jobs for labor, where working hours are less and the profit is, in some cases, triple the pay. These are considerable benefits for migrants who are temporary workers and permanent residents of Costa Rica. How did this dichotomous economic situation come about from two countries that occupy the same region, share the same national boarder, colonizer

and linguistic capabilities? A historical review of both countries is necessary in order to understand how these two countries can retain distinctive dichotomous pasts and yet, eventually, become entangled together within the larger global system.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica is located in the Southern part of Central America, between Panama's Northern boarder and Nicaragua's Southern boarder with the Pacific coast to the West and the Atlantic coast to the East. Costa Rica occupies an area of approximately 20,000 square miles (Hall 1985:1). The country is broken down into seven provinces, eighty-one *cantones* and four hundred and sixty-two districts, respectfully. Costa Rica has a diverse but small terrain, with three high mountain ranges surrounded by coastal swamps and lowlands (Hall 1985:11). The country is home to several volcanoes, of which two are highly active. Costa Rica's small area and diverse terrain are popular with tourists who are able to visit the beaches in the Northwest, cross a mountain range to sightsee the volcanoes of the central valley and then move on to more beaches in the Southeast corner in less than seven hours by car.

Many historians and political scholars praise Costa Rica on being a 'model' country in Central America. The country currently is one of the oldest successful democracies that is still working in Latina America today (González-Vega and Céspedes 1993:7). Socioeconomic indicators suggest that Costa Ricans enjoy a higher quality of life than any other country with a similar level of per capita gross domestic product (González-Vega and Céspedes 1993:4). The country eliminated its armed forces in 1948 and under the 1949 constitution prohibited its reestablishment; this act lead to more spending on social and domestic issues (González-Vega and Céspedes 1993:5). Together, economic growth, increasing equality in distribution and

sustained political stability combine to create a strong nation. However, this scenario did not magically fall together. Countless individuals fought numerous battles, physically and intellectually, within its borders; the colonization period and the landscape all play a role for the country's current high standard of living.

Early Costa Rica

The Western world was first introduced to Costa Rica when Spaniard Christopher Columbus landed in what is now called Limon on the Atlantic side of the country on September 18, 1502 (Biesanz et al. 1999:16). Columbus mistakenly thought that Cost Rica was actually the East Indies. In 1522 Captain Gil Gonzalez, also from Spain, explored and landed on the Pacific side (Western coast) of the country (Biesanz et al. 1999:16). Due to the immense amount of gold that he received from the native inhabitants, he named the country "the rich coast" and by 1539 the territory between Panama and Nicaragua was officially known as Costa Rica. Due to the territory's harsh terrain and impassable landscape, it wasn't until 1561 that the first city, *Garcimunoz*, was founded in the western central valley of the territory.

During the colonial period (roughly from 1561 until 1821), Costa Rica was ignored and isolated by many Spanish administrators who were primarily located in Leon, what is now Northern Nicaragua and Guatemala (Biesanz 1999:17). One documented reason for this isolation is the geography of the country that suspended proper settlement of the central valley. In other parts of Central and South America, the Spanish presence reduced the number of the native population significantly. Throughout Central America, Europeans attempted to establish *encomiendas*, a system where one landowner would own many slaves to work the land. However, due to Costa Rica containing few indigenous groups to use as slaves, the small

population in the central valley, which was predominantly Spanish European, maintained its relatively small size with many landowners and farmers (Pearcy 2006:42). The Nicoya peninsula to the West belonged to Nicaragua during the three centuries of colonial rule. The Nicoya peninsula had the strongest links to Meso-American indigenous tribes and would eventually annex itself to Costa Rica after independence in 1821 (Hall 1985:52).

Historians describe Costa Ricans from 1561 until 1821 as small, very poor subsistence level family farms dotting the central valley, such that, taxes to the Spanish were hard to collect (Gudmunson 1986:31; Biesanz et al. 1999:18). “Class distinctions and exploitation...came later with coffee and the country’s links to the world market” (Molina 2004:35). Due to the extensive poverty that remained in the colonial period everyone in Costa Rica worked, from the poorest to the elite and due to this work ethic, there remained an egalitarian manner that holds respect for people and their work (Hayden 2003:3).

Costa Rica, along with many of its Central American neighbors (excluding Belize) found themselves independent from Spain in 1821. Woodward identifies Costa Rica as politically and socially unique to Central America in the 19th century after independence due to the country’s relative remoteness from other countries on the isthmus, mild economic importance to Spain during colonization and lack of a large dominant class of landholders combined with a nearly nonexistent subservient non-white population (1999:213). As a result, this system allowed greater political participation from citizens that led to more democratic-like institutions, dissimilar to other countries in Central America (Woodward 1999:213).

Liberty, Coffee and Bananas

In 1824, a few years after independence, Costa Rica elected a congress, which then,

appointed a chief of state, Juan Mora Fernandez. Mora Fernandez, as many latter leaders in the country would accomplish, was the first to heavily invest in social projects that would benefit the future of the country. He invested in Costa Rica's infrastructure, paying for roads and ports to promote industry and commerce. He also facilitated the country's first newspaper that appeared in 1829 (Biesanz et al. 1999:20).

The following leader of the country, Braulio Carrillo promoted the first production of coffee, a crop that would shape the future of the country (Biesanz et al. 1999:20). The administration gave plants to the population to grow near their homes; however, many Costa Ricans had no interest in the farming of coffee due to being accustomed to drinking *aguadulce*³ (Biesanz et al. 1999:20). An export line of coffee to Chile and then onto Great Britain was developed in 1830 and was successful due to the high demand for the product in Europe (Biesanz et al. 1999:21). Costa Rica was seen as the most "prosperous nation in Central America after the country began its trade with England" (Hayden 2003:22). This was the first exportation of Central American coffee and Costa Rica became one of the wealthiest in Central America (Hayden 2003:3). Through the production and exportation of this crop, the country quickly rose out of its poor and isolated condition and became an economic model to the rest of the isthmus. Over one hundred years later coffee production has remained native owned since the first exportation, which is unusual. Other countries on the isthmus that also began to produce coffee, allowed foreign based companies to operate production (Woodward 1999:213).

Coffee production minimized large gaps of wealth within the majority of the country. Many people were needed to farm, transport and process the goods for shipping (Biesanz et al. 1999:21). Thus, a majority of the population could make a decent living by working in coffee

³ Raw sugar water. The growing of sugar cane and extracting the juice is still practiced by families on farms.

production. This practice differed in other parts of South America and the Caribbean where a ‘slave and sharecropper’ model was traditionally followed (Gudmundson 1986:153). In addition, the paucity of the population, a total of 40,000 in 1840 allowed for most of the population to be employed in coffee production. An elite group, called *cafetaleros*, emerged out of the successful coffee business. This coffee elite, entering into twentieth century politics enjoyed leveraging a majority of the elections by influencing the military (Biesanz et al 1999:23).

Colonel Tomas Guardia, dictator from 1870–1882, promoted the nation’s progress through education, public health and transportation that included the building of the Atlantic Railroad (Biesanz et al 1999:23). A new migratory wave of Chinese and Italians entered the country to assist in the building of the railroad that would decrease the transport time of coffee to Europe through the Caribbean coast instead of from the Pacific (Biesanz et al. 1999:24). The building of the railroad also increased foreign wealth in another crop, bananas. Costa Rica was the first to develop foreign owned productions of bananas in Central America (Woodward 1999:214). The banana plantations brought a new migratory wave of a black Caribbean population from the West Indies who worked in the dense, harsh climates of the Eastern Caribbean coast of the country (Hall 1985:67).

In 1878, Guardia contracted railroad builder Henry Meiggs to construct a railroad from the central highlands of Alajuela to Puerto Limon on the Caribbean coast. Meiggs appointed his nephews Minor Cooper Keith and Henry Meiggs Keith to begin construction on the railroad (Woodward 1999:177). Minor Cooper Keith began to plant bananas in small areas along the railroad that provided a staple food for the railroad laborers and a return cargo for ships that brought railroad materials from North America (Hall 1985:116). This return cargo of bananas to New Orleans proved to be profitable.

The republic of Costa Rica compensated Minor Keith for the establishment of the Atlantic railroad by awarding more than 100,000 hectares of land in the Southeastern area of the country in the concession of *Tierras Baldias* (Hall 1985:116). Hispanic settlers avoided this area due to geographical and environmental difficulties with “heavy precipitation, dense natural vegetation and disease” (Hall 1999:115). Keith cleared this land for banana cultivation and installed the proper infrastructure that included schools and hospitals that contributed to the livability of the area (Hall 1999:115). Keith contracted West Indian blacks to work the banana fields after Costa Ricans from the highlands in Alajuela refused to work in the hot, disease ridden costal area (Woodward 1999:181). These West Indians were acclimated to the wet tropical climate and further aided the development of the banana industry, along with the diverse ethnic minorities. Keith established the Tropical Trading and Transport Company, which initiated a regular trade between Costa Rica and North America (Woodward 1999:178). This foreign industry flourished and eventually formed the United Fruit Company gaining massive profits, of which Costa Rica saw relatively little (Hall 1985:115).

By 1885 the Costa Rica based Tropical Trading and Transport Company was exporting more than half a million bunches of bananas per year (Woodward 1999:178). An equally profitable banana baron in the Caribbean was Lorenzo Baker who established the Boston Fruit Company. In 1870 Baker began to transport bananas from Jamaica to Boston and by 1885 the business became immensely profitable in the Boston area (Woodward 1999:178). In 1899 Keith and Baker’s successor, Andrew Preston, merged their businesses and formed the United Fruit Company. This corporation quickly expanded to other Central American countries, establishing banana plantations, building railroads and opening up ports all over the isthmus to efficiently transport the product. Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Honduras and El Salvador all held an

intricate railroad network that swiftly allowed the United States to be closer to Central America through one high demand product.

Historians Steven Palmer and Ivan Molina state that Latin America has had “notorious difficulty establishing, maintaining and strengthening democratic institutions” (2004:139). The editors point out that this is “what makes the success story of Costa Rican democracy so important” (2004:139). However, Costa Rica had to overcome several dictatorships before true democracy established itself in the country.

Over the next fifty years, presidents who were in favor of democracy and civil issues or who were incessant about gaining absolute power and control often took office in the political administration. Despite these political issues, Costa Rica took an early interest in the public health and welfare of its citizens. The first large-scale public health project in the country occurred in 1914. The Rockefeller Foundation took over the funding and the direction of an anti-hookworm program that Costa Rican physicians began to work on before 1914. Between 1914 and 1921 field laboratories and health campaigns spread throughout the nation in both rural and urban locations. This work would eventually create the first national ministry of health in Latin America, establish preventative medicine and aid the construction of free national healthcare (Elmendorf Jr. 2004:109).

Toward a Modern Costa Rica

An honest electoral system in Costa Rica began in 1948 following a brief civil war. The development of the service sector grew, as did the foreign capital investment to industrialize the country. From 1948-1960 many improvements were made on physical and social infrastructures, that included building roads, airports, seaports, potable water, hospitals, schools, governmental

housing, electrical power and telephone services. A middle class society grew steadily with working class parents raising children who attained a middle class status. The Program of Family Assignments and the *Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social* (Mixed Institute of Social Aid; IMAS) were created to extend services to poor households in the late 1960s. In the 1950s, twelve percent were classified as middle class and by the 1970s the middle class population increased to twenty-eight percent (Biesanz et al. 1999:32-33; 102). This rise in the middle class also saw a per capita gross domestic product double between 1960 and 1969 (Baker 1994).

At the height of the country's prosperity, Costa Rica's economy took an adverse turn; the economy was negatively affected by the world financial crisis in the early 1980s. Costa Rica, dependent on its exports, saw coffee prices plummet and the price of oil steeply rise (Baker 1994). The sharp devaluation of the Costa Rican colon followed by a steep inflation that created a doubling of the poor population from 1980 to 1983. In addition, development, welfare and enterprise sectors were neglected. In order to recover from the disaster, the Costa Rican government began to privatize the economy, minimizing control over industry, business and finance sectors to foreign investment (Biesanz et al 1999:34-36). The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank assisted the country with three billion dollars between 1981 and 1984 to "slash government spending, stimulate economic diversification and sponsor competitive export industries" (Baker 1994). During this time Biesanz et al. identify that many Costa Ricans obtained a second, informal job to supplement household income in an attempt to "make ends meet" (1999:59). The authors document that the informal labor sector rose to twenty-two percent in 1995 (1999:59).

Costa Rica's natural beauty, biodiversity and surfing lead the country to tourism to assist in boosting the economy. In 1992 tourism increased twenty-eight percent in the country, totaling

over 600,000 visitors that year; this number rose to 750,000 in 1994 (Biesanz et al 1999:53).

Costa Rica in 2008

Costa Rica currently has a population of over four million people (CIA Factbook 2008). The country's present economic prosperity relies on tourism, agriculture and electronic exports. GDP per capita (PPP) as estimated in 2008 is \$11,900. In 2006, 'services' were the largest labor sector in the country at sixty-four percent, followed by 'industry' at twenty-two percent and agriculture at fourteen percent. In the same year, unemployment remained at a low five percent. Considering that schools were important in social works projects during many of the presidential administrations, education remained important for citizens and administrations; literacy rates are at 94.9%, one of the highest in the region.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America. It shares a Southern boarder with Costa Rica, a Northern boarder with Honduras, an Eastern boarder with the Caribbean Sea and the Western boarder with the Pacific Ocean. The country occupies a total of 129,494 square meters with two large lakes, the Lake of Managua and the Lake of Nicaragua in the Southwest region. The country is equivalent to the size of New York State in the United States (CIA Factbook 2008). The geography of the landscape includes lowland valleys and plateaus extending from the coasts and rising into the Northwestern mountain region. The East coast is dominated by tropical forest, while the West coast is dotted with volcanoes. The climate is tropical with average daily temperatures between eighty and ninety degrees fahrenheit (Plunkett 1999:94).

Early Nicaragua

Nicaragua was first found by the Western world in 1502 by Christopher Columbus. However, it wasn't until 1509 that Diego de Nicuesa led the first attempt by the Spaniards to colonize and establish settlements in the area (Smith 1993:52). This expedition was disastrous due to rivalries by native Indians and the Spanish's susceptibility to disease (Smith 1993:52). The first successful attempt to form an established settlement was in 1522 when Gil Gonzales Davila, then stationed in the *audencia* (audience or court) of Panama, gained the corporation of the prominent Indian chief, *Nicarao* (Foster 2007:22). Davila would eventually name the country after Nicarao by combining it with the Spanish word *agua* (water), for the two lakes that inhabit the Western region of the country. Davila also brought with him Roman Catholicism, converting many native populations within the first year of occupation (Smith 1993:39).

In 1524 Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba founded the cities of Leon and Granada. Leon would soon be the colonial capital of Nicaragua. Cordoba actively resisted the native peoples, pacified them and led further expeditions to explore and colonize the interior of the country. However, Spanish interests in this region were considerably minimal compared to the rich mines of Peru, Panama and Mexico. The beginning of this colony was supported by a large slave trade where indigenous Indians were enslaved and shipped to countries that paid the highest prices (Foster 2007:63). Shipping slaves to Panama and Peru were most common. Foster calls the Nicaraguan slave trade on the Pacific Coast, "the worst of the slave trading areas in all Central America" (2007:63). In addition to shipping indigenous slaves out of the country, indigenous peoples also worked the *encomiendas*, a system of tributes and forced labor. The indigenous population in Nicaragua fell from one million to 30,000 with forty years of Spanish occupation

(Plunkett 1999:8). A new class of offspring, *Mestizos*, formed and grew rapidly from the mixing of indigenous and European blood.

During the Eighteenth century, Nicaragua was not actively seen as a territory to develop as much as the mining territories were to the North and South. Strict Spanish mercantilist policies hindered economic growth (Burns 1991:8). Statistics during the year 1800 demonstrate that sixty-nine percent of exports out of Nicaragua went to neighboring Central American states, while only thirty-one percent was sent abroad. Nicaragua remained “virtually [a] closed subsistence economy” (Burns 1991:8).

Liberation from Spain

Nicaragua was declared free from Spanish colonial rule and independent on September 15, 1821. It would take the territory over thirty-five years to create a nation-state from a conglomeration of rural city-states (Burns 1991:17). Rivalry between the cities of Leon and Granada impeded the development of a sufficient authority figure. The economic stagnation and the social class divisions impoverished the area. The population of Nicaragua was diverse in 1823, with two-fifths comprised of Indians, more than two-fifths Mestizo and less than one-fifth European (Burns 1991:32). Burns identifies this fiery period as a state of “anarchy” (1999:35). Yet, an elaborate export-import trading system, run by British and German merchants who lent money to the Nicaraguan government and who were protected by the British government, were successfully trading cotton, indigo, cacao and tobacco overseas (Burns 1999:53).

Nicaragua began to change drastically, politically, economically and socially, with the next presidency of President Jose Santos Zelaya (1893-1909). Percy describes him as a “ruthless military dictator [that] promoted a variety of liberal initiatives” (2006:56). Zelaya

opened the nation to foreign investment, particularly from the United States and by the early twentieth century the banana, coffee, lumber and gold industries were U.S. dominated (Percy 2006:56). Zelaya encouraged the building and maintenance of the country's infrastructure to aid the foreign export industry. In addition, the president also built the infrastructure required for the advancement of education and government, such as a modern army and census archives (Booth and Walker 1999:36).

After the United States decided to build a canal in Panama instead of Nicaragua in 1909, Zelaya began a foreign competition open to countries interested in constructing a canal across Nicaragua. In response, the United States, determined to protect their investments, used military force to overthrow the dictator (Percy 2006:57). The United States sent marines into the country and convinced the Conservative party to rebel against the Liberal Zelaya administration. Zelaya resigned his post and the United States appointed the Conservative party into office and left the country. However, the Liberal-Conservative rebellion of 1912 prompted the United States to deploy marines back into Nicaragua and establish control over the government (Booth and Walker 1999:36). From 1912 to 1925 the United States ran the Nicaraguan government through a series of Conservative puppet presidents (Walker 2003:20).

U.S. occupation cultivated two opposing individuals who would have an important impact on the rest of the 20th century. The first, Anastasio Somoza Garcia, was an American educated son of a well-to-do coffee grower who joined the Liberal revolt in 1926. He gradually worked his way up the military ladder and was appointed to the prestigious positions of minister of war and minister of foreign relations. Somoza was also involved in the creation of the U.S. trained and armed *Guardia Nacional*⁴ (Walker 2003:26).

⁴ The Nicaraguan National Guard.

The second individual, Augusto C. Sandino, was the son of a moderately well-to do landowner and Indian mother. Sandino left Nicaragua at a young age to work in U.S. oil mines in Mexico. In Mexico, Sandino was exposed to the ideals of the Mexican Revolution still reminiscent from ten years earlier. He came back to Nicaragua where a U.S. owned gold mine employed him. After a brief U.S. withdrawal and the re-establishment of U.S. troops in Nicaragua and the creation of another puppet government, Sandino continued to fight against the foreign occupation. He considered himself a nationalist and an anti-imperialist. He gained the support of peasants in many of the rural regions of the country. He encouraged the development of a political party and used guerrilla tactics against U.S. troops and the Guardia Nacional after the U.S. withdrew their forces 1933 (Walker 2003:22).

The final withdrawal of U.S. troops in 1933 allowed Somoza to consolidate his control over the Guardia Nacional. He purged all officers in the Guardia who showed resistance to his authority. In February 1934 Somoza invited Sandino to the presidential palace for dinner, and then murdered him. Subsequently after Sandino's murder, Somoza ordered Sandino's followers, hundreds of men, women and children, particularly from the countryside, to be slaughtered (Walker 2003:26).

The Rise of a Family Dictatorship

In 1936 Somoza overthrew the existing president, Sarcasa, and staged elections where Somoza himself was appointed as successor and inaugurated on January 1, 1937 (Walker 2003:26). Walker documents three strategies that Somoza used to secure his position as dictator. First, Somoza made sure that there was a considerable amount of physical isolation of the Guardia Nacional from Nicaraguan citizens by encouraging Guardia troops to practice

corruption. Somoza's Guardia were not civil, law-abiding servicemen; they ran prostitution halls and controlled smuggling and gambling while receiving bribes from Nicaraguan citizens.

Second, Somoza kept Nicaragua an ally of the United States. To maintain a good relationship with the United States, Somoza essentially backed them up on all foreign policy issues and sided with them when enemies and allies with other countries were formed. Finally, Somoza controlled all domestic issues, particularly the staged presidential elections. (Walker 2003:26).

Somoza emphasized policies that grew Nicaragua's export system, created an economic infrastructure that allowed the development of public agencies such as, "the Central Bank, the Institute of National Development and the National Housing Institute" (Walker 2003:28).

However, these projects did not benefit "common" citizens. Instead, the benefits were clearly seen in Somoza's fifty million dollar fortune by 1956 (Walker 2003:28).

The assassination of Anastasio Somoza by poet Rigoberto Lopez Perez brought Somoza's son, Luis Somoza, in control of the nation. Luis Somoza primarily ruled through puppet presidents and lowered his family's direct political and social profiles to secure power. The literacy rate in 1960 remained at a low thirty-two percent as compared with other countries, such as Costa Rica at eighty-six percent and the Central American region at forty-two percent, during this time period (Walker and Booth 1999: 189).

In 1961 a resurrection of Sandino's legacy was launched, with a revitalization of armed revolts called the *Frente Sandinista Liberacion Nacional* (FSLN).⁵ The FSLN wanted to replace the current Somoza-led regime with a fair, more humane and a less corrupt system. The U.S. responded to Luis' request for assistance and "increased the [guardia's] counterinsurgency capabilities" (Walker 2003:30). The FSLN did not initially engage in many successful tactics.

⁵ The Sandinista Front of National Liberation.

Increasing supporters from the countryside and spreading political education among the peasantry and urban workers made slow progress for the FSLN (Plunkett 1999:17). Luis suffered from a fatal heart attack in 1967, passing down the Somoza dictatorship to his younger brother, Anastasio Somoza DeBayles.

Somoza Debayles succeeded a dictatorship that increasingly felt the FSLN becoming stronger with better guerilla tactics and more supporters. Somoza Debayles controlled the country with strong military rule, encouraged corruption from the Guardia and replaced highly trained governmental administrators with “unqualified cronies and political allies” (Walker 2003:30). At the beginning of his rule until 1970, the Nicaraguan GDP rose by fifty-four percent as a result of the country’s participation in the Central American Common Market and the Alliance for Progress that was initiated by his brother, Luis. Despite this increase, however, governmental policies- low wages and high consumer prices- prevented these economic benefits from reaching the lower classes (Booth and Walker 1999: 69-70).

The 1972 earthquake in Managua further disabled support for Somoza Debayles when he allowed, “the National Guard to plunder and sell international relief materials, to participate in looting the devastated commercial sector...[and] the channeling of international relief funds into their own pockets” (Walker 2003:31). Somoza Debayles put no effort into reconstructing the city; building a new marketplace to replace the destroyed one or creating emergency housing funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Instead, USAID relief money “went into the construction of luxury housing for the National Guard, while the homeless poor ...constructed wooden shacks” (Walker 2003:32). Following the devastation of the earthquake and Debayles’ inhumane practices, much support for Somoza Debayles from the Nicaraguan elite diminished (Walker 2003:32).

In 1974, The FSLN operated a guerrilla mission where they held hostage a group of Liberal elites until the Somoza Debayles government met a series of demands that included a ransom, a press release of the situation and the freedom of fourteen imprisoned FSLN members. Somoza Debayles handed over these demands and declared Marshall law that began a three- year reign of terror, where the National Guard murdered several thousand people in the countryside suspected of being FSLN supporters (Booth and Walker 1999:73; Walker 2003:32). Catholic church missionaries, stationed in the rural countryside were witness to these acts of terror and sent detailed information to their superiors. The National Guard doubled their repression on Nicaraguan citizens in 1977 targeting urban areas of the country. Somoza Debayles “stood out as one of the worst human rights violators in the Western Hemisphere” (Walker 2003:33). His practices caused much international attention and became the subject of many hearings at the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on International Relations (Walker 2003:33).

Uprisings against the Somoza Debayles regime in 1978 and 1979 lead to popular support and external funding for the FSLN. Base camps were established in Costa Rica and Honduras. Diplomatic support from France and various Latin American regimes, along with arms dealing from numerous other countries, created a strong stable military for the FSLN. Elite Somoza Debayles supporters and family fled Nicaragua into neighboring Costa Rica and Honduras. The United States announced its opposition to Somoza Debayles and cut off aid to Nicaragua in 1979. Although, the United States did not support Somoza Debayles, it also did not want the FSLN in control of the country. On July 17, 1979 Somoza Debayles fled Nicaragua for Miami, Florida with most of the national treasury and two days later the FSLN took power (Booth and Walker 1999:74-76).

The FSLN, Revolution and the United States

The FSLN inherited a country torn from the civil war and the affects of Somoza Debayles' inept and corrupt rule. Losses included \$1.5 billion in property loss, unplanted export and domestic staple food crops, and \$1.6 billion in international debts from the old regime (Booth and Walker 1999:76). In addition, public health concerns, housing, education and nutrition were worsened by the war. The FSLN had plans to "move the economy toward socialism in order to improve the lot of the lower classes, to build a participatory democracy under their own leadership and to integrate all Nicaraguans into the national social and political system" (Booth and Walker 1999:77). The Carter administration, although not enthusiastic, offered emergency relief aid, suspended loans from prior years and approved a \$75 million dollar loan in 1980 with the underlying hope of influencing Nicaraguan policies at a later date.

Subsequent to this relief, the new 1981 Reagan administration discontinued all aid for fear of a "Marxist-Sandinist" run government and feared "a second Cuba" (Walker 2003:43). The administration began to send several thousand U.S. troops into Honduras and fund Central American neighbors to provide training grounds and sanctuary to anti-Sandinista insurgents. The U.S. also pressured other countries and aid banks, such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, to cut off funding to Nicaragua, essentially aiming to isolate the country. The administration funded the CIA with \$19.8 million dollars to support, develop and train an army of anti-Sandinista forces that eventually consisted of prior party affiliates and indigenous Miskito Indians, who came to be known as the *Contras*. In 1983 guerilla tactics from the *Contras* began to occur at a rapid pace in the Southeast and Northeast of the country (Booth and Walker 1999:77-79).

Despite heavy criticism and propaganda from the U.S. government, Nicaragua, during the

eleven years of Sandinista rule, was “pragmatic” and attempted to carry out a number of successful and realistic social programs with the help of a large volunteer force (Walker 2003:43). The Sandinistas emphasized respect for the integrity of the person, civil and political rights were highlighted and social and economic rights were practiced that “was much better than that of the contemporary U.S. client regimes of Guatemala and El Salvador” (Walker 2003:55).

In 1984 democratic elections were held for the president and National Assembly, electing Sandinista Daniel Ortega as president. By 1987 a new constitution was in place that emphasized the protection of human rights, a checks and balances system and an election system that followed six-year terms (Walker and Booth 1999:82-83). However, the growing isolation of the country, the lack of exports, imports and potential loans, coupled with the war further impeded Nicaragua’s economy and the Sandinista’s economic and social successes. Beginning in 1985 Nicaragua’s need for petroleum created a relationship with the Soviet Union, which intensified the United States’ efforts against the Sandinistas (Walker 2003:49). These shortages of an import/export economy, along with the destruction of infrastructure from the Contras, created inflation and low wages, which the Nicaraguan government could not fully attend to due to its military involvement against the Contras (Walker 2003:51-52). It could be speculated that if the United States’ war against Nicaragua did not exist, the success of the Sandinistas would have been realistic.

Walker identifies the period from 1985-1990 as a decline in Sandinista rule with an economic collapse and political destabilization (2003:53). Anthropologist Roger N. Lancaster describes the economic situation in Nicaragua during the late 1980’s as a country in the midst of war that was suffering from an economic crisis with inflation at “surreal rates” (1994:xv). Lancaster documented the basic survival struggles of Nicaraguan families. Many personal

concerns centered on obtaining enough money to “feed oneself and one’s family” and how to “weather the crisis with one’s family in tact” (1994:7). One of Lancaster’s informants rationalized that crossing the boarder into the U.S. and working for a couple months is a realistic option to change his current financial situation in Nicaragua (1994:129). As a soldier in the Sandinista army, the informant complained “they work me like a slave and pay me like one too” (1994:129). The informant noted that immigration into other countries was common, where, like the United States, countries were granting political asylum to Nicaraguans who had illegally crossed into the country and were caught by immigration (1994:113). For Lancaster’s informant, migrating to the U.S. was a realistic option to change his financial circumstances.

The End of the Sandinistas

In 1989 Nicaraguan casualties totaled 39,865 people, approximately one percent of the population, were counted for both the Contras and the Sandinistas (Booth and Walker 1999:89). The economic hardship of the war remained static for the country and its people. The U.S. used the upcoming democratic elections in the country as an opportunity to successfully establish a president who worked well with U.S. interests. The National Opposition Union (UNO), ideally a U.S. entrusted operation, was involved in promoting U.S. approved candidates for the National Assembly and the presidency. The U.S. supported Violeta Barrios de Chamorro for the Liberal party candidate who ran against the current Sandinista president Daniel Ortega. Chamorro won fifty-five percent of the vote. In addition, in the National Assembly UNO supporters occupied fifty-one out of the ninety-two available positions, while Sandinista sympathizers occupied the remaining chairs (Walker and Booth 1999:89-90).

Chomorro is the widow of *La Prensa* newspaper publisher and editor, Pedro Joachim

Chomorro, who printed Sandinista literature and promoted democracy until he was captured and killed by the Somoza regime. She is the first female president ever to be elected in a Latin America Republic (Close 1999:11). Chomorro faced many challenges while occupying the role of the first elected presidency of the opposition party since the Sandinista rule. Nicaragua was ranked eighty-fifth on the Human Development Index when Chomorro was elected into the presidency and six years later the country was ranked at the one hundred and seventeenth place.⁶ There was no growth in GDP per capital for six years beginning in 1990. The poor majority became poorer with numerous social service cutbacks and the privatization of governmental businesses. The country was faced with extreme, “unemployment, underemployment, drug addiction, crime rates, homelessness...and domestic violence” increases (Booth and Walker 1999:94). Wages dropped significantly during the years 1988-1996. Infant mortality rates dropped to fifty-six deaths per one thousand births in 1993, compared to fourteen deaths per one thousand births in Costa Rica that same year (Booth and Walker 1999:189).

Chamorro included bi-partisan efforts, specifically from the Sandinista supporters, to contribute to highly sought after political and social change during her administration. Chamorro kept the Sandinista General Humberto Ortega to remain head of the military with the assurance that there would not be an uprising against the current administration and a downsizing of military troops occur (Walker 2003:61). However, the following two presidential terms, in 1997 with Arnaldo Aleman and 2001 with Enrique Bolanos, created an anti-Sandinista environment within their administrations. Daniel Ortega ran for both the 1997 and 2001 elections and lost to

⁶ The Human Development Index (HDI) combines measures of life expectancy, literacy, educational attainment and GDP per capita. These measures determine a country's rate of development compared to other countries in the world. A low index number indicates a high standard of living, high rates of literacy and long life expectancy. A high index number indicates the opposite.

each candidate. Economic improvements were also not seen with Aleman as president. The 1998 disaster of Hurricane Mitch (a category five hurricane) on the Atlantic coast of the country took 2,800 lives; and left 42,000 homes destroyed while 65,000 people were put in shelters. The response to this disaster was slow and as a consequence, left Aleman with low approval ratings and an even more devastated economy (Booth and Walker 1999:99). USAID documented in a 1998 congressional activity report while planning to disperse aid to the country that “ there is still a high level of mistrust in the society and few credible institutions through which to address social and political polarization” (USAID 1998).

Nicaragua in 2008

Despite many changes since the Sandinista revolution, the country is still experiencing hardships in its economic and public sector. The 2007 State Department profiles Nicaragua as the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and continues to attribute Nicaragua’s poor condition to the Contra war of the 1980s and the destruction of Hurricane Mitch in 1998 (State Department 2008). It is estimated that almost half (48.9%) of the population is poor (International Organization for Migration 2001:8). The 2008 GDP per capita was reported as US \$3,000, while the unemployment rate was 3.9% with an underemployment rate of 46.5%. Currently, the CIA factbook addresses that sixty-percent of employment is in the informal sector where unemployment remains high. The 2008 infant mortality rate documented twenty-six deaths per 1,000 live births, which is a significant improvement from rates in 1993 of fifty-six deaths per 1,000 live births (CIA Factbook 2009). Literacy rates in 2008 recorded a sixty-six percentage in children aged over fifteen years. This figure has drastically increased since the 1960s where the literacy rate was at thirty-two percent.

After running for office every electoral year and losing since 1990, Sandinista party member, Daniel Ortega, finally won the popular vote in the 2007 elections and was inaugurated into office on January 2008. Since his inauguration, in November 2008 the State Department sent an advisory to all travelers and Americans living in Nicaragua to use caution while traveling due to many riots after the authenticity of several municipal elections were questioned. Strikes and protests resulted in rock throwing, rubber bullets and tear gas between protesters and authorities (US Department of State Travel Advisory 2009). Additionally, concerns about the government's accusations against civil society organizations and particularly, women's groups that defend human and women's rights in the country, were questioned in October 2008 (Gozzo 2008). In the economic sector, poor property enforcement results in reluctance for international and domestic investment in real estate and tourism (US State Department 2009).

CHAPTER FOUR

WELL-BEING

[Psychology's] fatal flaw is that it's good for the lab and in the lab, but you put it on and take it off like a lab coat...it does not generate an image of man, a philosophy of life, a conception of human nature. It's not a guide to living, to values, to choices. It's a way of collecting facts upon facts about behavior, what you can see and touch and hear through the senses.

[Maslow 1970:xxxvii]

What is Well-Being?

Subjective well-being, life satisfaction, quality of life and happiness are concepts that are often applied as measures of assessment of well-being. Studies of well-being are concerned with how and why people view their lives in positive ways. Several disciplines have engaged in well-being research, and each discipline perceives the concept of well-being differently. There are many categories in Western theory of what well-being is composed of and the proper method of how to measure it (Diener 1984:542). Economist John Helliwell and political scientist Robert Putnam question if well-being can be determined and accepted cross-culturally, because the concept might mean different things in different cultures, ages, genders and in other languages (2004:1444). Anthropologist Neil Thin agrees and adds that all conceptions of well-being “are strongly linked with individual and collective aspiration[s] and purpose[s]” (2005:22). The motivation of this study is to identify a cultural working model of well-being by utilizing subjective definitions of well-being within a contextual environment.

Ed Diener et al. recognize that studies of well-being are limited by “the almost exclusive reliance on cross-sectional correlation designs with inadequate tests of causal hypothesis” (1999:277). Anthropology, as suggested by Thin (2005) can create a better understanding of the factors at work that construct well-being. Throughout this chapter, I use the phrases subjective

well-being, well-being and happiness interchangeably. This thesis is an attempt to move away from surveyed measures of wellbeing and utilize emic and etic views of wellness through ethnographic methods. In this chapter I will present how well-being is defined, constructed and measured from a cross-cultural perspective. Although the literature on the complete development of the well-being concept is significant for historical purposes, it is also vast and beyond the scope of this thesis. For purposes of length, I will focus specifically on current cross-cultural developments that have occurred since the 1980s. Further, I will limit this focus to cognitive, subjective and objective theories of happiness.⁷

Psychologists associate well-being with cognitive satisfaction and positive emotional states (Diener 1984; Diener et al. 1995; Diener et al. 2003). The term ‘happiness’ is often associated with emotional and affective states, while ‘life satisfaction’ defines cognitive states of wellness (Diener 1984). The first European Quality of Life Survey (Böhnke 2005)⁸ makes a similar distinction and identifies the difference between ‘life satisfaction’ and ‘happiness:’ “life satisfaction relates to cognitive aspects [and] happiness is emotional and mainly addresses personal aspects of life” (2005:1). Sociologists highlight social equality and social cohesion as constructs of well-being (Veenhoven 2001). Ruut Veenhoven 2001 suggests “the [phrase] ‘life-satisfaction’ denotes the same meaning and is often used interchangeably with ‘happiness.’ An advantage of the term ‘life-satisfaction’ over the word ‘happiness’ is that it emphasizes the subjective character of the concept” (Veenhoven 2001:4). David Felce and Jonathan Perry

⁷ Those inclined to review the early literature on well-being are referred to the following reviews (Diener 1984; Diener et al. 1995 and Diener et al. 1999; Eid and Larsen 2008; McMahon 2008). Information on affect is found in Kahneman et al. (1999).

⁸ The First European Quality of Life Survey, conducted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, took place in 2003. The sample size included participants in 28 European countries that completed a survey on topics that ranged from household and family composition to subjective well-being.

define 'quality of life' as

an overall general well-being, which comprises objective descriptors and subjective evaluations of physical, mental, emotional and social well-being together with the extent of personal development and purposeful activity all weighted by a personal set of values.

[Felce and Perry 1995:60]

Despite many inter-disciplinary differences in defining terms, these disciplines have developed an enormous body of literature on well-being. However, the field of anthropology has contributed relatively little to this area of study.

Many psychologists (Diener 1984; Biswas-Diener, Vitteroso and Diener 2005; Halliwell and Putnam 2004; Ryff and Keyes 1995) assess 'life satisfaction' and 'quality of life' within specific domains (i.e. relationships, the workplace, home life), which includes a survey or questionnaire. Diener et al. (1985) strongly suggest that subjective well-being can only be determined by individuals themselves, not from criteria that are important to researchers. Diener et al. (1985) assert that life satisfaction cannot be measured from rating specific domains and tallying up the mean. Although these assertions are logical to determine the subjectivity of an individual's well-being, many studies since this seminal article have not exercised them; the literature is dominated by researcher set criteria.

'Life satisfaction,' surveys prompt a cognitive assessment of current life conditions within specific domains. 'Quality of life' surveys include similar concepts. These domains are constructed by academics and are intended to represent important aspects within an individual's life that contribute to overall satisfaction. Furthermore, responses to specific domains are restricted to fixed answers such as multiple choice or Likert scale ratings. This activity impedes an individual's ability to identify domains that are important to them, yet may not be included on surveys. The only 'subjective' element of these studies is the individual's capability to assign a

Likert-type scale number to each domain.⁹ Rojas remarks that this occurrence leaves the person “of flesh and blood” outside of their “own circumstance” (2007:261).

The above definitions reveal that it is critical for an individual to communicate cognitive and emotional states in a self-report to assess their perceptions of well-being. Although self-reports can differ methodologically, the individual actor is the source of measurement. Every effort in defining well-being draws researchers closer to standardizing key psychological concepts. However, one must be cautious of the notion that any one definition of well-being can be universally applied across cultural and national borders, effectively determining what it means to be ‘well’ or not. These constructs represent only Western academic and scientific notions of what well-being is composed of, how ‘it’ can be measured, who possess ‘it’ and why.

Psychology has contributed to the majority of research in well-being. An examination of the psychological literature, provided below, reveals that the concept is theorized in different ways. Psychologist Ed Diener has collaborated with many psychologists from different cultures and suggests that a complete set of well-being measures includes judgments according to the target society itself (Diener and Suh 2000:5). Similarly, Diener and Oishi (2003) have stressed, “how people think and feel about their own society is essential for understanding well-being” (2003:405). Select studies (Adelson 2000; Lu and Gilmour 2004; Bauer, McAdams and Pals 2008; Rapport 2008) use open-ended questions and narratives that allow for greater subjectivity and flexibility of expressing wellness. Numerous studies have researched variables that contribute to happiness and the continuous consensus is that elements of happiness varies considerably across cultures (Diener et al. 1999; Diener and Suh 2000; Kitayama and Markus

⁹ A Likert scale is defined as: a three, five or seven-point scale that rates an individual’s response to a statement on one of the following continuums: agree-disagree, approve-disapprove or favor-oppose (Bernard 2006:327).

2000).

Components of Well-being in Psychology

Diener (1984) sorted definitions of well-being in the psychological literature into three different categories: external criteria, positive and negative affect and life satisfaction (Table 3.1). The first category that incorporates external criteria is the concept of Eudaimonia. Eudaimonia was developed by Herodotus circa 440 B.C.E. and utilized by Aristotle circa 350 B.C.E. (McMahon 2008). Eudaimonia is an objective concept of well-being that exemplifies Greek culture, traditions and beliefs. Diener explains that Eudaimonia as expressed by Aristotle, is achieved when an individual lives a fulfilling and virtuous life, where “virtue is the normative standard against which people’s lives can be judged” (1984:543). Thus, an individual’s well-being is not determined by his own subjective judgments, but by the individual’s reputation according to “the value framework of the observer” (1984:543). These objective theories provide a culturally constructed list of things or acts that are considered worthy in order for an individual to achieve Eudaimonia (Varelius 2004:74).

Pleasant Affect		Unpleasant Affect		Life Satisfaction	Domain Satisfaction	
Joy	Happiness	Sadness	Envy	Desire to Change Life	Family	Health
Elation	Pride	Worry	Anger	Satisfaction with Current Life	Work	Leisure
Affection	Contentment	Depression	Stress	Satisfaction with Past	Finances	Self

Table 1. Components of Well-Being. Adopted from Diener et al. 1999:277. The widely used components of subjective well-being and their corresponding ingredients.

According to Aristotle, achieving Eudaimonia was the ultimate happiness and fulfillment

that only men could achieve.¹⁰ Individuals with the potential to achieve ultimate happiness and fulfillment were, in a sense, privileged by “luck” and “fate”, similar to Greek beliefs in the gods and myths. This concept is similar to Maslow’s (1970) Hierarchy of Needs, where basic levels of needs such as physiological needs (e.g. shelter and food) must be met before one can attempt to fulfill a successive need (e.g. feelings of belonging and esteem). Thus, if an individual does not have all the basic needs met, the ultimate level of psychological well-being to Maslow, self-actualization, cannot be obtained.

The second category is the emotional experience of joy, happiness and pleasantness that is labeled as “positive affect”. The beginning of scientific well-being studies was from psychologists who became interested in measuring positive emotions and feelings of well-being. This affective category, also called *hedonia*, measures the amount of positive and negative emotions that are present within an individual. It is a continuum extending from “negative affect” (despair) to “positive affect” (euphoria). Well-being, in the hedonic sense, is achieved by enjoying more positive emotions and less negative emotions.

The third category of well-being is “life satisfaction” that “relies on the standards of the respondent to determine what is the good life” (Diener 1984:543). Consequently, the determinants of happiness are constantly shifting with time, space, culture and context. This category includes an individual’s cognitive assessment of life as a whole, within certain life domains or it may also include positive affect. This method has been used to assess life satisfaction in different countries by many researchers (Biswas-Diener and Diener 2001; Diener et al. 2003; Halliwell and Putnam 2004; Biswas-Diener et al. 2005; Rojas 2007).

¹⁰ Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics* specifically states that women, children and all those who do not possess sufficient resources that are needed to secure a life of education, leisure and independence could not obtain Eudaimonia (McMahon 2006:48)

Diener (1984) recognizes “bottom-up” and “top-down” approaches to well-being research. Bottom-up approaches focus on affective states and emotions that influence an individual’s sense of happiness. Researchers have described this type of theory as “the sum of many small pleasures” (Diener 1984:565). In other words, happiness is the result of many pleasurable moments. In contrast, the top-down approach explores an individual’s unique predisposition to experiencing positivity, such as the effects of personality. Diener describes, “that there is a global propensity to experience things in a positive way and this propensity influences the momentary interactions an individual has with the world” (1984:565). Personality factors, especially extroversion, are significantly correlated with high reports of happiness (Diener et al. 1984; Diener et al. 1995; Diener et al. 1999; Steel et al. 2008).

Empirical Studies in Well-Being

Early Western approaches to well-being included an individual’s subjective assessment of life satisfaction and domains. Diener (1984) states that Campbell et al. (1976) explored traditional demographic factors such as age, sex, income, marital status and education to explain states of subjective well-being. Additionally, W.R. Wilson concluded that a happy person is one who is “young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married with high self esteems, high job morale and of a wide range of intelligence” (1967:294). While exploring social well-being in Costa Rica, Carolyn Hall (1984) considered five criteria that is necessary to maintain well-being: income, education, health, housing and social communication (i.e. paved roads, telephone services, etc). Hall concludes that low income, low levels of education or low access to education, poor housing, low levels of health and diminished levels of infrastructure result in low levels of social well-being.

Life satisfaction and domain areas tend to better capture the complexity of well-being than general life satisfaction instruments, such as the ‘Satisfaction with Life Scale’ (Biswas-Diener and Diener 2001; Halliwell and Putnam 2004; Biswas-Diener et al. 2005; Rojas 2007). The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) is a widely used measurement in psychology that measures cognitive aspects of life satisfaction (Diener et al. 1985). This short, five-item instrument questions the overall satisfaction of an individual’s life using statements. It incorporates a seven-point likert scale that individuals use to indicate if they agree or disagree with each statement.¹¹ The Satisfaction with Life Scale is a valid and reliable tool with good psychometric properties (Pavot and Diener 1993). The instrument has been translated and used in twenty different languages. The scale has an advantage over single-item measures due to its multi-item measures of a single construct that have demonstrated high validity and reliability (Ryff 1989).

Although early correlated variables included demographic categories and life domains to define well-being, new determinants have emerged that inquire into psychological dimensions of happiness. The transition of focusing definitions of well-being from life domains to psychological domains is best exhibited by Henrik Ibsen’s play, *Hedda Gabler*. A playwright in 19th century Norway, Henrik Ibsen considered freedom to be essential for self-fulfillment and therefore happiness.

Hedda Gabbler describes a Victorian woman’s predicament between self-satisfaction, desires and societal constraints. Hedda is from a well-to-do family, married to an up and coming professor, lives in an acceptable area and is able to employ a maid. Material needs aside, however, Hedda lacks her own autonomy. This deficit, unattainable by the constraints of her

¹¹ See appendix A and B for a sample of the Satisfaction with Life Survey in English and Spanish.

lifestyle, ultimately causes her to end her life, deciding that life is not worth living in a psychological cage. Hedda Gabler lacked the ability to be autonomous, satisfy needs beyond a physiological level and obtain freedom.

Theories that incorporate the importance of autonomy, among other aspects that emphasize psychological well-being are seen in the approaches of Ryan (1995) and Ryff (1989). Ryan (1995) and Ryff (1989) both incorporate autonomy, along with several other components, as necessary for psychological health. The developments of these theories focus on dimensions where more than one psychological domain defines wellbeing.

Psychologist Carol D. Ryff argues that the current field of well-being lacks theoretical direction and offers a list of dimensions from psychological theories of mental health, life span development and clinical areas to create, “multiple converging aspects of positive functioning” (1989:1071). She introduces the multidimensional model of psychological wellbeing that is composed of six factors: personal growth, autonomy, self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery and positive relationships. A brief description of each follows: “Personal growth” signifies an individual not only living up to their fullest potential, but to “continue striving for new potentials” (1989:1073). “Autonomy” describes a person who does not cling to the “laws of the masses” and is able to exercise their own independence with an internal locus of control. Ryff comments that, “Self-actualizers are shown to have autonomous functioning and resistance to enculturation” (1989:1072).¹² “Self-acceptance” constitutes having a positive satisfaction with the self and for one’s past life. Goals, intentions and a sense of direction encompass “purpose in life”. The ability to choose or create an environment that is suitable to an

¹² The term “self-actualizers” describe people who have achieved “self-actualization,” the highest state of psychological health in Maslow’s concept of a hierarchy of needs, outlined in his book, *Motivation and Personality* (1970).

individual's psychic conditions, along with the ability to manipulate and control complex environments, defines an individual's "environmental mastery." Having "positive relations with others" is to have the capacity to feel warmth, trust, and empathy with others (Figure 1).

The multi-dimensional model is measured using a thirty-two-item scale that includes the six key dimensions. In response, an individual uses a six-item likert type scale to rate each statement, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. All responses are then placed into a scoring category that explicitly describes the low and high characteristics of each dimension. This model demonstrates favorable psychometric support of each dimension (Ryff and Keyes 1995; Ryff and Singer 1998; Ryff and Singer 2008). In addition, researchers have confirmed the factorial validity of the model that points to a unified construct (such as well-being) (Ryff and Keyes 1995; Clarke et al. 2001; Cheng and Chan 2005).

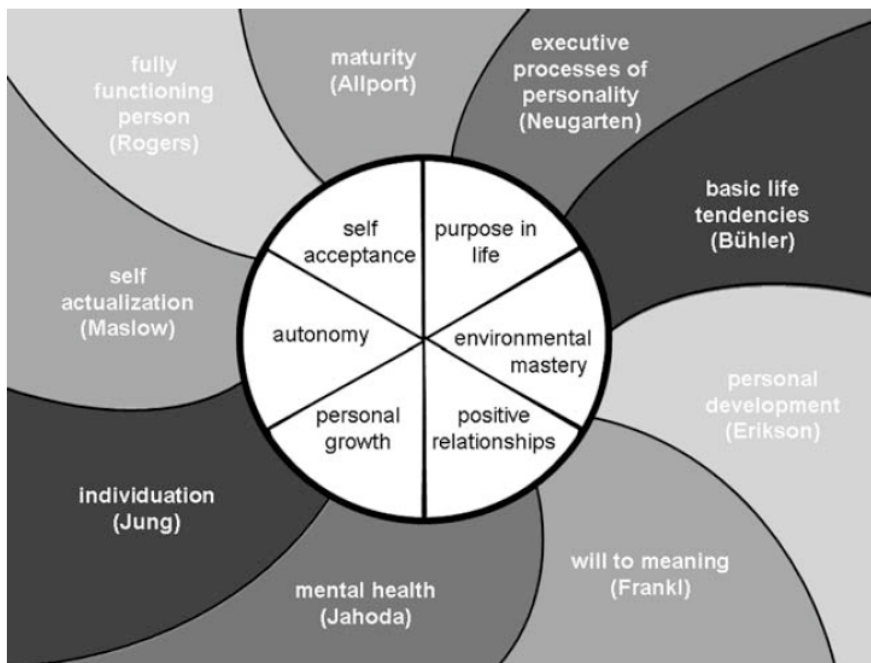


Figure 1. Carol D. Ryff's six core dimensions of psychological well-being and its corresponding theoretical foundations. An in-depth explanation of dimensions can be found in Ryff and Singer (2008). Adapted from Ryff and Singer (2008:20).

Empirical evidence in favor of the multi-dimensional model is deficient in non-Western cultures. Cheng and Chan (2004) conducted a non-Western empirical study of the multi-dimensional model that included a community sample population from Hong Kong. Ryff's three dimensions - purpose in life, personal growth and self-acceptance - were reported as awkward to understand in the sample and held "negative connotations among local Chinese culture" (2004:1310). The authors conclude that these three dimensional scales did not measure what Ryff's (1989) original scale intended to measure. An additional study that utilized African cultures also failed to properly construct a multi-dimensional view (Ryff and Singer 1998).

Deci and Ryan (1980; 2000) developed the 'Self Determination Theory' of human motivation that includes three innate fundamental psychological needs that are necessary to maintain psychological health and well-being regardless of culture: relatedness, autonomy and competence. "Relatedness" refers to the desire to be connected to others, of being loved and cared for by others. "Competence" is defined as being mindful and having a sense of awareness. "Autonomy" signifies the ability for an individual to accomplish and satisfy intrinsic needs by choice (1980:231).

Self-determination theory distinguishes between "intrinsic motivations" (e.g. companionship and love motivations) as opposed to "extrinsic motives" (e.g. making more money). These two motivational distinctions are important to understanding the variables that satisfy a deeper sense of psychological satisfaction and thus promote higher states of wellbeing. Intrinsic motivation is recognized to generate special meaning in an individual's life and, consequently, promotes well-being. In contrast, extrinsic motivations contain superficial satisfaction that does not lead to a deep sense of well-being (Deci and Ryan 1980).

There is empirical evidence for the Self Determination Theory in the United States (Bauer et al. 2008). However, evidence outside the United States is minimal and has not been successful. Ryan et al. (1999) found that a Russian student sample population, who ranked high on well-being measures, rated extrinsic motivations as more important than intrinsic motivations when compared to a controlled U.S. student population. In a similar fashion, Grouzet et al. (2005) conducted a multi-country study, which included Bulgaria, Canada, the U.S., Spain, South Korea, Romania, India, Germany, France, Egypt, Dominican Republic, China (Hong Kong and Beijing area) and Colombia. Although individual country data was not reported, poorer countries ranked financial success as important intrinsic motivations. In addition, financial success was ranked closer to the motivation category of physical health. The authors speculate that this finding can be attributed to financial success as supporting basic survival needs (physical health) in poor countries.

Although, the multi-dimensional model and self determination theory limit the exploration of certain variables that contribute to well-being, other researchers seek to expand on these fixed instruments through understanding cultural variables. Diener and Lucas (2000) caution that the distinction between culturally specific needs and universal needs must be clearly identified. Grouzet et al. (2005) found differences in rankings and motivations between poor and wealthy countries. In addition, Cheng and Chan (2004) showed that individual and personal satisfaction dimensions were not recognized in a Chinese population. The following section further illustrates the expansion of well-being studies within observations of cultural variation.

Individualism and Collectivism

Proponents of Individualism and Collectivism (I-C) may have quarrels with Ryan and

Ryff's universal needs dimensions as it is applied cross-culturally. Hofstede explains that individualist societies emphasize the conscious "I," which is closely aligned with "autonomy, emotional independence, individual initiative, right to privacy, pleasure seeking, financial security, need for specific friendship and universalism" (as cited in Kim et al. 1994:2). In contrast, collectivist societies emphasize a "we" consciousness and are identified with "collective identity, emotional dependence, group solidarity, sharing, duties and obligations, need for stable and predetermined friendship and group decision" (as cited in Kim et al. 1994:2). Markus and Kitayama (1991) identify the individual and the collective cultural construction of the self in each society as 'independent' or 'interdependent'. Individualistic actors place an importance on constructing a self that is based on individual motivations and are labeled 'independent'. In contrast, collectivist actors construct selves that are in alliance with the larger society, the family and group goals and are labeled 'interdependent'. Research has explored the variables that attribute to differences in well-being under this broad cultural dichotomy. Instruments that measure I-C include Hui's (1984, 1988) Individualism-Collectivism scale and Trandis et al. (1990).

Proponents of I-C theory indicate that autonomy is clearly a westernized notion of the self (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Christopher 1999). Although Ryff et al. (2003) identified that three nationally represented samples from the US and Canada positively fit the six-dimensional model, research from countries outside the West has not fit as clearly.

Well-being and Individualism and Collectivism

Christopher suggests that subjective well-being research has focused intensely on the variables that affect subjective well-being, such as the multi-dimensional model, self

determination theory and life domains, and less so to the nature of well-being itself (1999:141). Using Ryff 's multi-dimensional model, Christopher critiques each Western construction and it's individualistic theoretical basis. Providing evidence from the literature of collectivist cultures, he argues that cultural values and Western assumptions inflate Ryff's theoretical approach. The result is the propensity for collectivist cultures to not score high on well-being measures that ultimately creates the illusion that wellbeing is absent in these cultures, such as Diener et al. (1995) display in a multi-national study.

I-C models have influenced explanations for cross-cultural differences in wellbeing scores. Researchers have used this model when cross-cultural studies fail to provide accurate conceptions of well-being, particularly in non-Western societies. Many dimensions of well-being have been attributed to values and traditions that can be mapped on an individualist and collectivist continuum. An understanding of the I-C continuum, its theoretical base and utilization in wellbeing studies is useful for cross-cultural explanations of well-being.

Assessing Individual and Collective Frameworks

The ability to compile large survey data sets allow researchers to explore the possible variables that contribute to high levels of subjective life satisfaction across nations (Diener et al. 1995; Diener and Diener 1995; Kwan et al. 1997; Diener et al. 2000; Inglehart and Klingemann 2000; Böhnke 2005). Large surveys produce a massive amount of data, often with tens of thousands of respondents, which is useful for cross-cultural analysis. Large data sets, however, present a problem of data representativeness of each nation and, consequently, the accuracy of cross-cultural methods. Common methods in many of these large scale, multi-nation studies have been mail in questionnaires (Ryff 1989; Rojas 2007) and telephone soliciting (Ryff and Keyes

1995). In addition, ‘representative sampling’ includes a majority of college students, from the United States and other countries, as primary sample groups (Diener and Fujita 1995; Diener, Diener and Diener 1995; Lou and Gilmour 2004). Qualitative methodologies, described below, are also being considered, however, on a much smaller scale.

“Self-esteem” affects scores on measures of well-being differently in individualist and collectivist cultures. Self-esteem is similar to Ryff’s (1989) multi-dimensional “self-acceptance” dimension. Diener and Diener (1995) speculate that having high self-esteem and essentially “liking oneself” is common in Western adjustment to cultural values and that this is not necessarily the case outside the Western world where emphasis on the “self” is less salient. The authors predict that high self-esteem could even be a sign of maladjustment to collectivist values and traditions; thus, it would not be a significant predictor of life satisfaction cross-culturally. Thirty-one nations that represented individual and collective nations demonstrated significant differences between high life satisfaction and self-esteem scores.

Similarly, Kwan et al. (1997) focus on self-esteem and its correlation with life satisfaction in individualist and collectivist nations. Specifically, the authors focus on relationship harmony and its correlation with life satisfaction in collectivist societies. The authors created the Interpersonal Relationship Inventory to adequately investigate relationships within the five cardinal relations adopted from Chinese Confucian philosophy.¹³ The inventory focuses on the five most important relationships in an individual’s life as opposed to standard one-item relationship measures. A sample of American and Chinese university students completed three questionnaires: the Rosenberg Self-esteem Inventory, Interpersonal Relationship

¹³ The five cardinal relations include relationships between the following pairs: emperor and minister, father and son, husband and wife, brother and brother and friend and friend. The authors state “these relationships [in China] represent key significant relations in one’s social world” (Kwan et al. 1997:1039).

Harmony Inventory, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale; as well as the Interpersonal Relationship Inventory. Results indicate that both self-esteem and relationship harmony played an active role in both groups for high life satisfaction; however, self-esteem played a larger role in life satisfaction for American participants than for the Chinese participants.

Lu and Gilmour promote two “cultural systems of well-being” within individualistic and collectivistic societies: a socially oriented one, which is identified as primarily shared in Eastern societies; and an individually oriented one, occurring in American and Western European societies (2004:273). Individual perceptions of well-being were obtained from two groups of participants, Chinese university students who attend an American university and American university students who are born to American born parents. The authors assigned one open-ended question, “What is happiness?” Participants were asked to respond with a one-page essay. Results indicate that the two groups differ in their conceptions of wellbeing. The American students relied on independence and a sense of wellbeing through nurturance and participation of independent mastery of the environment. In contrast, Asian participants perceived wellbeing as “submerge[d] within the environment [and] the accomplishment of role obligations” (2004:281). The authors attribute this phenomenon to differences in societal norms and cultural traditions.

As discussed above, models of individual and collective societal differences in well-being show support from large quantitative studies (Diener et al. 1995; Diener and Diener 1995; Diener and Fujita 1995; Kwan et al. 1997). These studies generally find that variables exemplifying group goals explain higher life satisfaction among collectivistic societies and, in contrast, variables that emphasize individual autonomy produce higher satisfaction in individualistic societies. A specific distinction between non-Western and Western societies is evident in the literature. Further investigation of this dichotomy warrants questions on the validity of this broad

distinction.

Support against I-C models

Kim et al. found that Latin American, Asian and African countries tend to be high on collectivist values (1994:1). Considering Kim's et al. identification, I recall my first day of culture class abroad in a small city on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica. The Costa Rican instructor, like most U.S. instructors, took time out at the beginning of class for everyone to introduce and provide a description of ourselves. We began to describe ourselves in terms of what discipline we majored in, what city in the U.S. we lived in, where we worked, our favorite activities and what we hoped to do after graduating college. The instructor introduced herself and began to tell us about her family and other activities that she participates in with friends. She explicitly pointed out the difference between our statements and the focus Americans have in terms of personal aspirations and pleasures as opposed to her focus on personhood through family and friends.

Although my experiences in Costa Rica were more collective than individualistic, there are concerns about mutually exclusive categorizations of one or the other (Sinha and Tripathi 1994; Cha 1994; Devine et al. 2008). Deci and Ryan (2000, 2008) strongly support autonomy as a universal psychological need. The authors carefully note that autonomy is not parallel with notions of independence, locus of control and individualism, "autonomy is being volitional; acting from one's integrated sense of self and endorsing one's actions" (Deci and Ryan 2000:242). The authors recognize, however, that autonomy has many meanings that can vary from culture to culture (2000:247). They rationalize that the values and beliefs of culture should promote intrinsic and internalized motivations that will promote harmony. If not, that society

will result in alienation and anomie (2000:247). The authors also consider that there will be differences based on individual situations and social environment they label *causality orientations* and *regulatory styles* (2000:232).

Empirical evidence from labeled collectivist countries support Deci and Ryan's liberal definition of autonomy (Hayamizu 1997; Yamauchi and Tanaka 1998). Other researchers have also questioned the exclusivity of autonomy in Western countries (Sinha and Tripathis 1994; Cha 1994; Devine et al. 2008). These authors assert that specific Westernized concepts, such as autonomy, are contextually expressed within collectivist societies and that interdependence does not hinder degrees of autonomy. For example, Devine et al. (2008) found evidence in Bangladesh where a majority of individual autonomy is expressed within family affairs. Further work in this area is needed to lead the field toward a complete break from Individualist and Collectivist dichotomies.

Poverty: Beyond Cultural Constructions of Well-being

In addition to conflicts of measuring well-being cross-culturally, the presence of poverty further questions whether societies can be measured on the same scale of well-being when economic conditions fluctuate. Well-being measures are unreliable, especially when considering poor populations, because they learn to be content by adjusting to their living conditions (Neff 2007:320). As indicated earlier, Aristotle clearly stated that those whom did not have the capacity to support themselves with basic psychological needs could not achieve Eudaimonia, ultimate happiness and a fulfilled life. Maslow suggests a similar pattern by addressing the hierarchy of needs (1970).

Oishi et al. (1999) suggest that Maslow's hierarchy of needs can operationalize and

explain differences in levels of well-being according to economically poor or rich nations. The authors use a mix of two types of nationwide samples, a nationally representative sample and college students. In addition, a Satisfaction with the Self-instrument and an individualist and collectivist instrument were also distributed. The authors found that the fulfillment of basic biological needs is predictive of subjective well-being across diverse cultures (1999:285). Once basic biological needs, such as food, shelter and warmth have been met, leisure is more likely to become a source and condition of well-being. Rojas identifies a similar trend in five urban and rural states in Mexico. The state categorized as 'poor' had less satisfaction in their economic domain, job domain, health and family domain than the 'non-poor' category (2007:274). Rojas' results reveal that satisfaction in the family domain is important for total life satisfaction in the entire population.

Diener and Fujita (1995) examine the association between subjective well-being and resources, and hypothesize that well-being is contingent on the values, goals, and needs of every individual. Prior studies report that resources and income have no significant connection with well-being (Campbell et al. 1976; Diener et al. 1993); however, fundamental differences between poor nations and wealthy nations have raised questions about the universality of these reports. Veenhoven (1991), Diener et al. (1993), Böhnke (2005) and Diener et al. (2003) found that income and financial satisfaction are significantly related to well-being in poor nations and societies as opposed to wealthier nations.

Robert Biswas-Diener and Diener (2001) and Daniel Neff (2007) examine subjective well-being in two poor areas of the world: Calcutta, India and South Africa. Both studies indicate that basic physiological needs are highly correlated with life satisfaction. Biswas-Diener and Diener (2001) interviewed a population of Calcutta slum dwellers, sex workers and pavement

dwellers (people who live on the streets) in several life domains: positive and negative emotions and general life satisfaction. Results reveal that variables associated with high life satisfaction included those within the domains of basic needs: food, income and housing (2001:344). Utilizing a different methodology, Neff (2007) examined household survey data for over 7,000 participants in South Africa and a one-item life satisfaction question. Neff indicates that no significant correlations between ethnicity, household income and subjective well-being in South Africa were found; however, data tables that he provides identify ethnic Africans who report low income and low levels of education, show low levels of overall life satisfaction (2007:330). Moller and Saris (2001) posit that Maslow's hierarchy of needs fits the poverty model for South Africa based on well-being and life satisfaction domains.

Anthropology and Well-being

In the last several years, books that have incorporated well-being, or related terms such as happiness and life satisfaction, as major themes of interest specific to culture have emerged (Adelson 2000; Eid and Larsen 2007; Gough and McGregor 2007; McMahon 2008; Jimenez 2008;). Thin (2005, 2008) states that anthropology has been relatively "silent" on the subject and has not contributed to advancing well-being theories. He observes that Rapport and Overing's (2000) collection on key concepts within anthropology did not mention a single well-being or happiness theme. Meanwhile, the opposite of well-being, ill-being or suffering has seen a plethora of contributions (Thin 2008:138).

Anthropologists have incorporated contextual and historical factors to explain well-being. For example, Naomi Adelson constructs Cree well-being, "being alive well", *Miyupimaatisiu* in Cree, as a complex interaction between traditional Cree life ways and identity (specifically

focusing on food and interactions between the physical and spiritual landscape) and the physical feeling of warmth, physical health, strength, and the political and social struggles newly introduced to them with the creation of the Cree organizational government in 1975. Well-being, as identified by Cree adults, is something that once was the traditional way of life, and now, it is a negotiation of traditional life ways and current possibilities.

In a similar vein, Rapport (2008) explored the ways Scottish hospital porters implicitly constructed a sense of wellbeing while on the job. Specifically, “an understanding of what [gives] porters a sense of well-being, and how they accrue that sense (2008:96)” was examined through the actions of movement by porters within the hospital, the hierarchical and bureaucratic relationships with other co-workers (such as doctors and nurses) and the relationships porters formed with their co-workers. Although no formal open-ended questions or surveys were administered, Rapport offers an interpretation of well-being among this population “because the notion is an unvoiced one among these people” (2008:96). Rapport concludes that a sense of autonomy and control over movements within the hospital, outside of work and within the hierarchical structure offer a sense of well-being through an implicit moral system.

Culture change involves shifting notions of health and well-being. Harper and Maddox (2008) illustrate acculturations of concepts of wellbeing through Westernized medical models of mental pathologies in Nepal. Traditional and local ways of thinking about physical, mental and societal health have changed due to incoming Western aid organizations that promote change. The arrival of numerous mental health organizations and non-governmental organizations that work from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of mental pathologies, have reshaped local concepts of well-being.

Fieldwork conducted by Rapport (2008), Adelson (2000) and Harper and Maddox (2008)

contribute to the few ethnographies that focus on concepts of well-being. Patterns of tradition, social systems and enculturation, as identified above, serve as important lenses that support possible concepts and perceptions of well-being across cultures. Examining a society not only with questionnaires, but also through participating, observing and speaking with people, will allow for greater and more complex investigations of wellness. Evaluating these motives goes beyond describing the components that correlate or predict high ratings of wellbeing.

Operationalizing Well-Being in this Thesis

The above literature review documents a wide variety of definitions of well-being and methods for investigating it. It is important to note the working construct of well-being, which will be used throughout this thesis. Diener et al. call for future research to include interactions that will push beyond objective and survey-based data, and bring in personalized, data rich accounts (1999:276). Anthropology has contributed in this manner by employing ethnographic field methods with a focus on context. In addition, attempts from Lu and Gilmour (2004) give an example of the subjective, personalized accounts and perceptions of well-being. I favor Lu and Gilmour's (2004) open-ended, non-constructivist methodology. My scope of well-being is influenced by these subjective and contextual circumstances. I work toward a model of well-being that is based on how an individual conceptualizes her own state of health (health being a broad term that encompass mental and physical states) in positive ways by identifying the contextual influences that promote these conceptualizations.

This thesis utilizes qualitative ethnographic field methods and open-ended well-being questions to explore the well-being concept in Nicaraguans who live in Costa Rica. In addition, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985) is employed to obtain a standardized

quantitative measure to supplement ethnographic and semi-structured interviews. The applications of these qualitative and quantitative methods are the foci of a migrant community located in the Northwestern area of Costa Rica.

Well-being definitions and perceptions are only one half of what I examine in this thesis. Subjective open-ended questions on definitions of well-being are analyzed with a second construct: social capital. Social capital, as seen below, has an immense influence on an individual's well-being in different ways. The following chapter focuses on the construct, measurement and implications of social capital in the literature.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIAL CAPITAL

We gamble not only with the black chips that represent our economic capital, but also with the blue chips of our cultural capital and the red chips for our social capital.

[Pierre Bourdieu (cited in Field 2008:16)]

Social capital has “been independently invented at least six times over [in] the twentieth century, each time to call attention to the ways in which our lives are made more productive by social ties” (Putnam 2000:19). Social capital focuses on how social relationships are beneficial to individuals in their everyday lives. The concept has many definitions that are not completely agreed upon between disciplines or practitioners (Grootaert and Bastelaer 2002:2). Despite its difficulty and complication, it is an important concept to explore (Dasgupta and Serageldin 2000:6). Broadly, the impacts of social relationships are examined on many levels, between family, friends, acquaintances, communities, institutions and governments.

In this chapter I will present an overview of how researchers from a variety of disciplines define, construct and measure social capital. Additionally, I will emphasize how the concept of social capital has been connected to studies in well-being.¹⁴

Sociologist Alejandro Portes discerns social capital’s origins in Emile Durkheim’s emphasis on group life and Karl Marx’s distinction between atomized and mobilized classes (1998:2). Three contemporary contributors that have shaped the current social capital concept are James Coleman, Robert Putnam and Pierre Bourdieu. Coleman and Putnam’s approach to social capital is functionalist, where as Bourdieu uses a social or individual-strategizing approach (Healy 2005:66). Although, social capital encompasses similar concepts, each of these

¹⁴ See Farr (2004) for a historical review of social capital in the United States. The negative affects of social capital can be reviewed in Vinokur and Van Ryn (1993) and Field (2008).

contributors focus on certain critical aspects.

Partha Dasgupta and Ismail Serageldin recognize a widely accepted definition of social capital as “the shared knowledge, understandings, norms, rules and expectations about patterns of interactions that groups of individuals bring to a recurrent activity” (2000:1), in other words, it is knowing how to act. Norman Uphoff (2000) breaks down the concept into two elements. “Cognitive social capital” is a subjective construct that includes “intangible elements such as generally accepted attitudes and norms of behavior, shared values, reciprocity and trust” (Grootaert and Bastelaer 2002:3). “Structural social capital” refers to objective and externally observable social structures, such as the rules and procedures of networks, associations and institutions (Grootaert and Bastelaer 2002:3). Grootaert and Bastelaer point out that although these two concepts reinforce each other, one can exist without the other (2002:3).

Coleman assesses that social capital makes “possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (1988:S98). Individuals access social capital by using the social structure of networks as a valuable resource to achieve wants, desires or needs (1988:S100). In this sense, social capital is driven by rational choice theory that assumes individuals will pursue their own interests and goals (Field 2008:27). The attainment of valuable resources depends on how societies are organized. Important conditions and rules apply in order for this system to work. Coleman (1988) identifies social capital in three forms: (1) obligations and expectations, (2) information flow within the social structure, and (3) norms accompanied by sanctions.

Coleman (1988) acutely focuses on trustworthiness as a critical component of social capital exchanges. Establishing trust between groups and within networks is the driving force of social capital. He lists several examples, such as the one listed below, to demonstrate the

importance of trustworthiness that promotes social capital through social organization:

Wholesale diamond markets exhibit a property that to an outsider is remarkable. In the process of negotiating a sale, a merchant will hand over to another merchant a bag of stones for the latter to examine in private at his leisure with no formal insurance that the latter will not substitute one or more inferior stones of a past replica. The merchandise may be worth thousands, or hundreds of thousands, of dollars. Such free exchange of stones for inspection is important to the functioning of this market. In its absence, the market would operate in a much more cumbersome, much less efficient fashion. Observation of the wholesale diamond market indicates that these close ties, through family, community, and religious affiliation provide the insurance that is necessary to facilitate the transactions in the market. If any member of this community defected through substituting other stones or through stealing stones in his temporary possession, he would lose family, religious and community ties. The strengths of these ties make possible transactions in which trustworthiness is taken for granted and trade can occur with ease. In the absence of these ties, elaborate and extensive bonding and insurance devices would be necessary- or else the transactions could not take place.

[Coleman 1988:S98]

This example focuses on the importance of what Uphoff labels “cognitive social capital,” as a critical underlying component to the establishment of the social structuring of diamond merchants. In a sense, without the trustworthiness between merchants, these relationships would not be in place, destroying the benefits of all individuals involved.

Putnam distinguishes social capital from human capital where human capital is the property of individuals and social capital the “connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (2000:19). Human capital is the capability and expertise an individual possesses to be productive in an economic context. Coleman (1988) identifies the importance of human capital on social capital where a diverse set of human capital an individual possess that is suitable for the environment in which they live, allows for a more “valuable” social capital resource for others. Putnam (2000), like Coleman, also suggests that trust and reciprocity are important for social capital to occur. It is a trusting network between individual actors within communities that make social capital work.

In *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam recognizes two types of social capital developed by Woolcock and Narayan (2000): bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital constitutes strong in-group connections and loyalty. Putnam labels this type of relationship as “inclusive,” where groups are reinforced by homogeneity such as ethnic organizations. Bridging social capital is “exclusive,” and provides connections outside of an individual’s homogenous group. Bridging networks link groups to “external assets” that might not be available in homogenous networks (Putnam 2000:22-23).

Putnam (2000) also distinguishes between the uniqueness of “thick” or “thin” trust levels. He identifies small communities where thick capital is acquired more often than thin capital. Thick trust is, “trust that is embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent and nested in wider networks” (2000:136). Thin trust is, “trust that implicitly rests on some background of shared social networks and expectations of reciprocity” of the “generalized other” in the community (2000:136). Thin trust is seen as a general community norm where people have a certain amount of trust for each other in the neighborhood. Thick trust is based on personal experience with another person and over time becomes strengthened. Both types of trust are important to establish capital within the community. Possessing ‘social trust’ (trust in people other than formal institutions and organizations) is important to maintaining social capital (2000:137).

Berkman et al. (2000) identify several dimensions of social support that encompass an individual’s everyday social capital. Social support can be divided into subtypes: emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal. Emotional support provides sympathy, understanding, love and positive self-esteem that are available from others. Instrumental support provides assistance with daily living needs such as cooking, cleaning, getting groceries or watching

children. Berkman et al. describes this subtype as “aid in kind, money or labor” (2000:850). Appraisal support refers to help in decision-making. Finally, informational support is providing advice or information for particular needs.

The benefits of acquiring and maintaining a variety of networks have economic, psychological and biological advantages. Economic sociologists have shown that a reduction in social capital reduces economic prospects regardless of the amount of human capital an individual possesses (Putnam 2000:289). Although Coleman stresses the importance on close-knit ties between the family and church, he also cites the positive impacts of informal social resources (between friends) to obtain occupational mobility in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany (Coleman 1988:S102). The positive and negative affects of social relationships among cardiac illness patients have been explored in Holahan et al. (1997). Additionally, the positive mental health affects of social capital in a variety of contexts are emphasized in McKenzie and Harpham (2006).

Putnam’s position, particularly in *Bowling Alone* (2000), on the positive affects of social capital on individuals and communities is criticized as emphasizing a functional approach (Field 2008:44). Putnam establishes an argument on the positive effects of maintaining strong community ties through social organizations by linking domains of well-being such as education, economic prosperity, health and happiness to high levels of social capital. Methodologically, Putnam relied on civic censuses, surveys and questionnaires from earlier studies not specific to the exploration of social capital to amass an incredibly large database on social capital. This criticism has virtually been overlooked when considering the massive collection of data. Field comments, “it would be rather wasteful to ignore the findings simply because the question had not originally been designed with social capital in mind” (2008:37). In contrast to Putnam’s

methodological practices, many studies indicated below have incorporated specific social capital measures.

Bourdieu conceives of social capital as the access to resources that a person gains by being a member of a social group or network. When a person shares what they have with group members, they gain a “credential” that gives them “credit” to receive capital from members of the group. Bourdieu summarizes this interaction as “a process of investment strategies” (Bourdieu 1986:249). This process can take place in individualist and collectivist groups. Bourdieu identifies that “economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital (Bourdieu 1986:421),” including social capital, because economic capital gives one more to share with the group, thereby making one valuable, which in turn, allows for increased borrowing. Bourdieu, influenced by Marxist sociology, is concerned with the factors that create and perpetuate social hierarchy that inevitably create inequality.

Field indicates that Bourdieu understood social capital as an asset to the wealthy and privileged which secured their prestige in the social hierarchy (2008:22). Consequently, he did not recognize that less privileged populations had access to similar types of capital (Field 2008:22). However, the conceptual beginnings of social capital involved ‘less privileged populations.’

Farr attributes the applied use of social capital theory in the United States to L.J. Hanifan, the state supervisor of rural schools in West Virginia in 1916 and to the early twentieth century philosopher and educator, John Dewey (Farr 2004). Hanifan and Dewey contributed to the amelioration of rural communities and schools by promoting active community education through social capital in order to construct strong communities. Similarly, the foundations of social capital are currently used as a primary resource to establish sovereignty for disadvantaged

populations. The World Bank utilizes social capital in a variety of studies to facilitate economic development and growth (Reid and Salmen 2002; Pantoja 2002; Dudwick et al. 2006).

The Measurement of Social Capital

Ferlander (2007:119) stresses that the conceptual aspects of social capital are more developed than the tools used to measure it. Although social capital is a multidimensional concept that encompasses several categories of individual and social networks, Ferlander states that most studies only incorporate one dimension, such as membership in voluntary organizations and trust norms (2007:119).

The literature points to micro and macro-level approaches to assessing social capital (Ferlander 2007:117; Grootaert and Bastelaer 2002:3). The micro-level approach establishes contact with individuals to obtain personal constructions and perspectives on several dimensions of social capital, such as cognition and structure. The individual also identifies bridging and bonding networks that are relevant in their lives. Examining social capital at the individual micro level provides insight into what type of ‘returns’ an individual acquires through social networks (Ferlander 2007:117). In comparison, macro-level approaches focus at the community, city and government level. This level examines how social capital functions at the ‘collective’ level with reciprocity norms and collective trust among large groups.

Many measures of micro and macro-levels involve questionnaires and surveys that are tailored to a specific locale. Measuring social capital first requires understanding the norms and cultural expectations of a society. What is considered social capital in one context and in one society might not be considered social capital in another (Grootaert and Bastelaer 2000:18). The World Bank developed the Social Capital Assessment Tool (SOCAT) that incorporates micro

and macro dimensions within a degree of cultural relativism. The SOCAT contains a variety of questionnaires and surveys that identify structural and cognitive dimensions. It is specifically designed to measure policy-relevant social capital indicators used to enhance economic and civic development (Grootaert and Bastelaer 2000).

Social Capital in Context

Woolcock and Narayan (2000) identify four social capital perspectives that are dominant in economic developmental initiatives that seek to improve the quality of life. These perspectives include: the communitarian view, the networks view, the institutional view and the synergy view. Each of these perspectives distinguish social capital as either an independent, dependent or mediating variable in the development of an individual, community or nation. In addition, various levels of analysis (from individuals to nations) are emphasized in each perspective.

The communitarian view posits that organizations, associations and civic services that have large participation levels provide positive effects on the welfare of communities and its individuals. However, Woolcock and Narayan point out that there are negative effects of specific community focused participation that create “bonding only” forms of social capital, such as hindering development and growth from a particular socioeconomic class or group (2000:30). The network perspective identifies that bridging and bonding social capital are important to positive economic development. The use of close friends and neighbors in a community “enables [people] to acquire the skills and resources to participate in networks that transcend their community, thereby progressively joining the economic mainstream” (Woolcock and Narayan 2000:232). The institutional view contends that the political, legal and institutional environment dictates the dynamism of community networks on economic development. Therefore, larger

institutions, such as national policies and the structure of the government, impact the types of social capital available to individuals. The synergy view combines the network and institutional views into a dynamic combination of higher institutional levels that promote growth and bridging social capital.

Kozel and Parker (2000) found the positive and negative affects of communitarian social capital in poor communities in India. Poorer people were apt to rely on fewer and less potentially helpful contacts than people who were not poor. These networks were primarily composed of bonding social capital limited to the immediate community and family and the use of these connections to reduce risk and poverty. The poor had a tendency to seek loans of money and extra (but repayable) debts from their employers. Woolcock and Narayan (2000:227) argue that the poor lack “bridging” social capital to “get ahead,” and use “bonding” social capital to “get by”.

The World Bank Institute has developed a field manual for researchers on collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative social capital data in communities. The World Bank utilizes a multi-dimensional approach to social capital that includes an assessment of groups, networks, norms and trust within a community (Dudwick et al. 2006:5). The institute has incorporated social capital into their poverty reduction strategy for the development and amelioration of communities. The World Bank encourages social capital that promotes pro-poor institutional reform and the removal of social barriers to enhance “well-being and for achieving greater security and reduced vulnerability” (Gootaert and Bastelaer 2002:2). One of the pathways to accomplish this is to establish an environment where individuals are autonomous and able to speak out freely in a democratic fashion. To aid with these tasks, six dimensions are focused on to develop an in-depth understanding of social capital: (1) understanding groups and networks

(2) trust and solidarity (3) collective action and cooperation (4) information and communication (5) social cohesion and inclusion and (6) empowerment and political action (Dudwick et al. 2006).

Social Capital and Mental Health

The relationship of social capital to mental health includes studies investigating the link between social relationships, mental illness, economic prosperity and health (Putnam 2000; Mouw 2003; Whitley and McKenzie 2005; McKenzie and Harpham 2006; Ferlander 2007). Occasionally, an absence of physical or mental illness is used as a control variable for wellness. Few researchers link the benefits of social capital directly to positive aspects of mental health and well-being without using an ‘absence of illness’ model (Whitley 2006; Usher 2006). Furthermore, ‘correct’ measurements for social relationships have been debated (Ferlander 2007; Grootaert and Bastelaer 2000). In a systematic review, Mary De Silva (2006) examined mental health and social capital methodology in a series of mental health studies. De Silva concludes that many studies use ‘uni-dimensional’ measures of social capital that rely on invalidated tools (2006:53).

Few studies give evidence of social capital that support positive cultural models of health and wellness cross culturally. Collier et al. (2000) illustrates Highland Maya cosmology that contributes to well-being and the maintenance of harmonious relationships with members of the community and deities. Among university students Rarzlaff et al. concluded that students who sought social support (along with positive reappraisal and utilized planned problem solving), obtained better coping strategies and were associated with higher levels of subjective well-being (2000:55). Banerjee (1997) investigated slum dwellers in Calcutta and found a positive link

between thriving in the community and having social relationships and family support. Similarly, Biswas-Diener and Diener (2001) report that positive satisfaction and good social relationships (particularly with family) were predictors of high subjective well-being among the poor in Calcutta, despite poverty levels.

A distinct literature has emerged that focuses on involuntary displaced peoples (i.e. refugees) and the benefits of creating a community of social relationships that benefit individual well-being (McMichael and Manderson 2004; Gronseth 2001). Inquiries of adjustment and integration into the new host country are critical to applied practitioners and social service policies. In particular, studies of well-being and its correlation with environmental conditions is of particular importance. Researchers have found that “in-group” social relationships and social networking affects the well-being of refugees (Fadiman 1997; Gronseth 2001; McMichael and Manderson 2004). Relying on familiar behaviors, values and traditions creates strong support networks in countries where, often times, refugees are not completely integrated within the host network.

Helliwell and Putnam (2004) use national surveys to map out the social aspects that contribute to high life satisfaction and feelings of happiness. Although this study primarily examines and analyzes survey data, it broadly uncovers different avenues of social relationships that are suspected to correlate with feelings of well-being. Helliwell and Putnam’s general findings can be used as an initial step toward future ethnographic research of these independent social variables. The advantage of taking a bottom-up, individualistic approach will expand on specific dimensions of the personal milieu and provide further insight into cultural differences.

Research in psychology has found mediators for subjective well-being in the form of social relationships and social support (Sinha and Verma 1997; Kwan et al. 1997). Sinha and

Verma (1994) explored aspects of idiocentrism, allocentrism, social support and dependency in a sample population of masters-level students at an Indian university.¹⁵ Although, these students, all in their twenties, scored low levels of allocentrism in self-reports, high social support was positively correlated with psychological well-being. This study concluded that although these college students were less allocentric, social support, the availability of contributing support and its correlation with psychological well-being is positive.

Social capital studies have not included many ethnographic methods. As indicated above, past studies include questionnaires, surveys and interviews that occur over a short period of time. An exception is Whitley (2006), who incorporates traditional ethnographic methods at the community level to investigate if a lack of social capital in an English town is connected to high rates of common mental disorder (CMD). Consequently, he summarizes, that the presence of high levels of community involvement do not explain the high rates of common mental disorder.

Social Capital in this Thesis

In the chapters that follow, I will establish a “communal definition” of individual well-being among Nicaraguans in Costa Rica as it was collected in the traditional anthropological ethnographic fashion. Ethnography further enriches the anthropological knowledge base and provides a sense of locality and “place”, its *genius loci*. Low and Zuniga describe a shift in the definition of space within anthropology, from space and place used to describe “background information” to creating new meaning in the behavior of the population as being located in and constructed of space (2003:1). Transnational migrants are seen to reflect multi-locality that includes movements and changes as spaces and places constantly shift within and between

¹⁵ Allocentrism is defined as the tendency to define oneself in relation to others. Idiocentrism is defined as the tendency to define oneself through self- attributes.

family, friends and work locations. The infrastructure of the target barrio itself displays multi-locality, between Nicaraguan and Costa Rican culture in the living space.

Furthermore, I attempt to construct evidence for social capital or, more broadly, social relationships as a contributing factor for well-being. In the field I adopted Berkman's et al. (2000) multi-dimensional sub-types of social capital (emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal) to assess differences in social support. In addition, similar to Coleman's (1988) focus on trust, I inquired on individuals' feelings of trust with their neighbors. Finally, following the methodology of Whitley (2006), I employed participant observation, observation and multiple in-depth interviews at the field site. My primary unit of analysis is at the individual, micro-level.

Few studies have examined voluntary migrants and their relationship to social capital as a link to constructing notions of well-being. This thesis attempts to fill in this missing gap of knowledge.

CHAPTER SIX

THE LANDSCAPE OF BARRIO EL CARMEN: GUANACASTE, COSTA RICA

In her book, *Stranger and Friend* (1966), Hortense Powdermaker acknowledges that the anthropologist's experiences, living, working, thinking, acting and responding to a society under investigation, is largely absent from published professional work. She recommends that, "a scientific discussion of fieldwork method should include considerable detail about the observer: the roles he plays, his personality, and other relevant facts concerning his position and functioning in the society studied" (1966:9). Since this recommendation many anthropologists have followed suite, thoroughly detailing what can be called an anthropologist's 'adventure' in theses, dissertations, published books and articles. Extending this notion is an entire theoretical movement that has focused on the importance of an anthropologist's narrative of completing fieldwork. The discipline has branched out, placing importance on not only scientific data that are secured in the field, but also the personal experiences of how that data was secured.

This chapter aims to provide a personalized history of how I came to complete my fieldwork in the summer of 2008 in the Northwest province of Costa Rica. Following my experiences is a detailed overview of the barrio and its inhabitants. Unlike many anthropologists in the early 20th century, I was not sent to an area to complete fieldwork. Many individuals played a role in my quest of locating a community that was accessible, patient, and, most of all, tolerant to an anthropologist inquiring about their personal life ways. In a society that has publically outcast Nicaraguan immigrants, I was surprised that the inhabitants of barrio El Carmen still possessed all these traits and much more.

Exploring Field Site Options

I knew I wanted to head north when I arrived in Puntarenas, Costa Rica, a small port town on the Pacific coast in the Western part of the country. North was where the Nicaragua/Costa Rica border and its many migrants were. My objective was to find a small, semi-rural town or city that I could move into and begin to establish rapport with migrants from Nicaragua, eventually finding myself a nice group of people to live and work with. My host family, whom I lived with three and a half years ago as a study abroad student, was delighted that I decided to conduct work in Costa Rica, but disappointed that I wanted to find ‘*Nicas*’ and go North, away from my first Costa Rican home.¹⁶ They encouraged me to stay in Puntarenas or a nearby barrio. ‘*Es mas seguro cuando esta cerca de nosotros*’ they repeated, indicating that I, a single, *China-gringa*,¹⁷ would be safe if I stick close to the family home. I attempted to search for a population close to their home; I found what someone explained to me as approximately eighteen Nicaraguans living in a nearby town. However, I was set on exploring outside this area of Costa Rica, into a highly migratory area where the population was abundant.

Before beginning my fieldwork I had a few guidelines to abide by when choosing a location. I wanted to be in a rural or semi-rural area, away from San Jose and other major highly populated cities, because, a) I thought that it would be easier to gain rapport and meet people if I was not in a densely populated area; and b) it would be safer than a large city like San Jose for a single woman. I preferred to be in the Northern part of the country due to the close proximity to Nicaragua. I reasoned that more Nicaraguans would live closer to the border.

Before departing for my fieldwork, I had been in contact with a Costa Rican professor,

¹⁶ *Nicas* for *Ticos* (Costa Ricans) is a normal and acceptable nickname. Although, some Ticos and Nicaraguans feel it is derogatory, others do not and some Nicaraguans actually say, ‘*Soy Nica.*’

¹⁷ ‘*China*’ for Chinese or Asian-like and ‘*gringa*’ for American.

Dr. Manuel Ramirez at the Universidad de Costa Rica in the College of Social Work. Through email correspondence he had agreed to assist me in identifying a location where I could complete my fieldwork. When I arrived in the country we agreed to meet at a little café across from the university in *San Pedro*. He recommended *Los Arcos*, a small town between the capital of the Guanacaste Province and the tourist beaches of the Pacific coast. Dr. Ramirez stated that the town would serve as a good field site as long as I didn't ask questions about the water issue, which recently spurred riots. After our meeting I felt as if I had my future field site, this little town near the Pacific coast. However, over the next few days, as I finally headed North toward *Los Arcos*, I was rerouted to another location that I would eventually call my final field site.

How I Found Santo Tomás

My host family introduced me to a family friend, Rosa, who happened to be an elementary school teacher who teaches and lives in Santo Tomás, a city with many hotels for travelers and which is also close to my expected field site. My initial plan was to base myself in Santo Tomás, then take a couple bus trips to *Los Arcos* to get a feel of the area and locate permanent housing. Santo Tomás is a heavily migratory area in the Northwest of the country, roughly one hour from the Nicaraguan border. This area is known for its cattle ranches and boasts an estimated 2.2 million head of cattle in the region (Baker 1994). The population of the city is approximately 35,000 people. The city hosts a variety of shops and grocery stores in the central downtown area, along with a large cathedral and a small park. This area hosts many small festivals and gatherings both formal and informal. The city has a small airport that is mainly for tourists who use it as a fast medium to visit the Pacific beaches that are located thirty minutes by car to the West. Because of its easily accessible airport, pristine beaches and resort quality hotels,

the city hosts thousands of visitors per year. I have walked through central Santo Tomás many times and have seen tourists regularly driving through town, shopping at the grocery store, visiting the Cathedral or window-shopping.

Rosa found me a room to rent with her friend who lived down the street from her house. Rosa, an elementary school teacher, told me that the school she worked in was poor and that there were a lot of immigrants and migrants in the area. She said that a fellow co-worker at the school had lived in the area for a long time and knew many people in the neighborhood. Rosa invited me to come to her school where she would arrange for her co-worker to talk with me about the area and possibly introduce me to community members who were from Nicaragua. Rosa suggested that I shouldn't go to Los Arcos; I should stay and conduct my study in barrio El Carmen, where she teaches. I went with Rosa to the elementary school, to meet her co-worker and survey the barrio. After my first day at the elementary school and barrio I decided to stay and conduct fieldwork. This barrio had everything I was initially looking for: a semi-rural area that is located in the Northern part of the country and, as an added bonus, acquaintances that were willing to help me become incorporated into barrio life.

The Field Site and its Structure

El Carmen is one of several other barrios within the canton of Santo Tomás. The landscape is semi-rural with many small and large houses, *haciendas* (large estates), small *fincas* (farms) and plantations occupying a large portion of the barrio. El Carmen is constructed of two neighborhoods; a main one and a smaller one that is separated by a long dirt road approximately five to seven minutes by foot. This smaller area has a nickname, *Brazo de Dios*, Arm of God. Many of the *haciendas* and small *fincas* are privately owned by Costa Ricans and foreigners as

small businesses (one of my participants worked on a hacienda owned by Mexicans). Two large mango plantations occupied each end of the barrio. These plantations provided seasonal jobs for migrants and immigrants picking, packaging and maintaining the fruit and trees. Each barrio has a development committee that oversees the *salon comunal* (club house for social gatherings, see figure 2) and the maintenance of the infrastructure (roads, electricity poles) in the barrio. The president of the committee informed me that approximately 3,000 people occupied the barrio. In the early weeks, walking around the barrio constructing a map, I would never have guessed that so many people occupied this small area. However, when I considered that each house has approximately six or more people and that there are additional small rental units in the back of houses, I accepted this approximation.



Figure 2. The *salon comunal* serves as the community clubhouse for social events and the annual barrio festival. Patrons of the barrio can also rent out the building. The building has also served as an emergency evacuation shelter for victims of floods that are endemic in the area.

The main road that leads to the stretch of highway going south to Puntarenas or North to

Nicaragua is paved, but has an incredible amount of potholes. The rest of the barrio has dirt roads with medium to large rocks and large potholes scattered in every direction. There is one bus that passes every hour through the barrio and goes downtown. Most of my participants did not have cars and frequently used the bus to grocery shop downtown. Bicycles are an important means of transportation and are used by every participant and inhabitant that I came across. Generally, in all of Costa Rica bicycles are the number one transportation option for many people. Taxis, faster than the bus, are also frequently in use.

There is one elementary school for kindergarten through sixth grade. There are not enough rooms to serve as a classroom for all the children in the barrio at the same time.¹⁸ To accommodate this, there are split school sessions one commencing at 7:30 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. and the other session from 12:30 p.m. until 5:30 p.m. Classes rotate sessions every week, from morning to afternoon and vice versa so that everyone has two weeks of each session time per month. The school has a cafeteria where all children receive breakfast and lunch for free.

Two churches can be found within the barrio, Roman Catholic and “Christian”. My participants were found to be Roman Catholic, *Católico*, or Christian, *Cristiano*, with one Latter Day Saint, *Mormón*, family being the exception. Although there were places of worship within the barrio, some participants preferred to go to central Santo Tomás to attend services. The Mormon family attended a temple close to downtown. Some of my participants attended weekly Saturday services at the Catholic Church in the barrio. Twice I accompanied them to services and each time I arrived the benches were full and people stood around the open doors to hear the sermon. On select days the Catholic Church sold baked goods and traditional *Guanacasteca*¹⁹

¹⁸ There are approximately five classrooms for grades one through six, one kindergarten classroom and one special needs classroom.

¹⁹ Traditions from the Guanacaste area

food to anyone who wandered or drove by.

Houses are usually constructed in three ways (in succession according to wealth): with plywood and nails, cement or cement and stucco. The barrio boasts the full gamut of the socioeconomic scale with large “mansions” next to small cement houses (see figures 3 and 4). The barrio was home to many Costa Ricans, Nicaraguans and migrant seasonal workers. The two mango plantations and surrounding construction and farm jobs offered many opportunities for work. Often, if migrants were only coming for a couple of months or a season to work, they would rent small, temporary homes built with plywood and nails in the back of a permanent resident’s home. The permanent resident would rent out these shelters, usually consisting of only a cot and an outside wash and toilet area, for a weekly or monthly price.



Figure 3. A typical ‘mansion’ in the barrio.



Figure 4. A typical plywood and nail house with a tin roof.

Pulperías are small family owned convenience stores within the barrio (see figures 5 and

6).²⁰ *Supers* are little grocery stores, larger than *pulperías* that would sell a variety of items. Since barrio El Carmen was approximately thirty-minutes by foot to central Santo Tomás and any major supermarket, and many inhabitants were without cars, these small stores were quick and convenient. However, this convenience did come with a price, literally. Prices in both the *pulperías* and the “super” were higher than in Santo Tomás. Many participants expressed that they would try to do all their major shopping for staple items (rice, beans, sugar, coffee) at a major grocery store in Santo Tomás. Going to the *pulperías* for small items, such as milk, juice, soda, cigarettes or candy every once in a while was acceptable. There are five *pulperías* and one “super” spread throughout the barrio accordingly. Many of the *pulperías* had pinball like gambling games within their structure. One informant and *pulperia* owner stated that these games make more money than the goods they sell.



Figures 5 and 6. The outside of a *pulperia* within the barrio (left). Note the adjacent home to the left of the store. Inside the *pulperia* (right). Note that the customers do not choose desired items; the shopkeeper hands it to them.

Quien Vive Aqui? An Introduction to the Inhabitants of the Barrio

The barrio consists of a wide spectrum of socioeconomic classes and nationalities.

²⁰ *Pulperías* are family owned and are typically found in neighborhoods. Usually, *pulperias* carry essential foods and goods. In the case of Santo Tomas these goods include: rice, beans, milk, soda pop, candy, cigarettes, snacks, canned goods, baby diapers and vegetables.

Migrants come to this barrio either for the first time or repeatedly over time due to two major plantations that reside within the barrio and others surrounding the area. Many large families occupy the barrio. Often, these large families own several houses close to each other. All of the inhabitants that I met and spoke with felt that this barrio was the most peaceful compared to other barrios in San Tomas. Residents agreed that there aren't nearly as many drunken fights, drugs, robberies or suspicious people.

Some temporary migrants rent homes together, often fitting as many people into one home as possible to lower individual costs for rent. Residents of the barrio, immigrants and Costa Ricans, either rent or own their homes. The population of the barrio is a mixture of modest to wealthy families. Wealthy families live near the front entrance of the barrio or are scattered around the farms and haciendas on many acres of land. Informants told me that people built expensive houses in El Carmen because the land is much cheaper than living closer to Santo Tomás. Gloria, a *pulpería* owner²¹, had lived in the barrio for over thirty years. She came to El Carmen because the land was extremely cheap. However, the area was also undeveloped with no running water, electricity or paved roads. The families that were lucky enough to have wells didn't have to go to the city to get water. She recollected when she was only one of a handful of families in this area, that the vegetation covered lots where many houses now stood. She mentioned that several years ago only poor families lived in this area. Now it is a combination of several socioeconomic classes.

One Costa Rican woman and a Nicaraguan family that I met offer insight into the everyday socioeconomic realities of the barrio. The woman, Esmeralda, is a schoolteacher who teaches English and lives in the barrio. The Gutierrez family, from Nicaragua, also lives in the barrio.

These two sets of people display the socioeconomic spectrum in this barrio. Esmeralda and the Gutierrez family live on the same street, approximately a ten-minute walk from each other.

Esmeralda has worked at the school for six years and had lived in the barrio for the same amount of time. She mentioned to me that she doesn't know any neighbors who live in the barrio besides Claudia. She had one son and was married. She lived in a large cement and stucco house with brand new roof shingles that are enclosed in a very tall cement gate. This house was in the 'newer' part of the barrio, and was surrounded by even newer and grander homes that were constructed in the last three years. She owned a car and sent her son to private school, a luxury only the middle class could afford. In the past she had been to the United States visiting friends who relocated there.

In contrast, The Gutierrez family lives in a small, rented one room home made of plywood, a cement floor and a tin roof. There is an outhouse and shower house in the backyard. Manuel, the father and his wife, Anita, along with their daughter, Nina moved into the barrio eleven years ago from Nicaragua. Currently, Nina's boyfriend, Jose, lives with the family. The home is divided into three rooms by thick blankets and rugs that are hung on wire; two bedrooms are sealed off from the kitchen and sitting area. Manuel has an evening job at a nearby melon plantation. Anita works occasionally selling fruit to schools and other small businesses. Jose works full-time at a dairy, which supplements the family's income.

No one in the family has been to the United States. Manuel and Anita, however, have traveled to Honduras on a church sponsored trip in the past. The church has also helped the family through financial hardships. The family does not own a car, but has a battery-powered bicycle that helps Manuel, who is elderly, travel long distances. Although, they do not have a large house the family has cable TV, a desired novelty item in the barrio, and a cordless

telephone. I spent many days with the family, sitting in front of the TV watching animal programs and conversing about the peculiarities of living creatures on this planet with Manuel and Anita. Manuel always had questions about what the United States looked like and how it felt to live there. It occurred to me that, to the Gutierrez family, cable TV was an outlet from the barrio and into the rest of the world that was closed off due to economic circumstances. The monthly cost of the cable, ¢15,000 Costa Rican colones (about US\$30), was worth the expense. The difference in socioeconomic status between the Gutierrez family and Esmeralda is similar to what exists among many inhabitants of the barrio.

Many people walk to the nearest pulpería to play pinball-like games and to purchase small items. People are always walking the streets and riding their bikes. I asked informants if they knew anyone who lives in the expensive houses. “They don’t come to this end of the barrio,” “They don’t shop in the pulperias, they shop at the larger stores like *Maxi Bodega* and *Pali*” they would tell me. Informants noted a physical separation from the very wealthy in this neighborhood. This was also evident with large, iron and cement fences that surrounded their wealthy houses. From the main road leading into the central area of the barrio, one would pass these houses, displaying their green grass, large windows, cars in the driveway, playhouses for children and expensive tile work on the patio.

Employment in the Barrio

Generally, the majority of barrio El Carmen consists of working class people. The people that I met and talked with worked as farmers, janitors, construction laborers, cooks, gas station attendants and clerks. However, there were exceptions, especially for large homeowners. I met a new resident of the barrio who lived in a large two-story home in an isolated area of the barrio.

He works as a reporter for a large newspaper. I heard from other residents that his wife is a doctor at the hospital in Santo Tomás. I asked him why he lived in this barrio and he mentioned that it was tranquil and that he liked the environment. A pulpería owner informed me that two Nicaraguans who work in large resorts on the Pacific Coast own a large house that was being constructed near her store. A couple from Chile who lived in a modest home are painters. They would paint beautiful framed pictures on their front porch and then for a couple months out of the year travel to the United States and Europe to sell them.

A majority of my participants work steadily in haciendas, farms and plantations. Others, specifically temporary migrant workers, find work where they can, usually in agriculture or construction. There are many jobs that can be done on a plantation. For example, many of my participants worked in the mango plantations that are in the barrio. During the harvest season, many people are needed to cut mangos off of the branch, wash and pack them. Mangos are a very delicate fruit and bruise easily when handled roughly. The picker, washer or packer must take care not to bruise the flesh, yet also maintain a quick and steady pace. Former mango packers advise that the process of packing mangos exported to the United States is most frustrating due to having three careful inspections from managers on the quality and packing. The United States only accepts flawless, red/orange *tomí* mangos without bruises or discoloration for import. In contrast, mangos exported to Europe and other countries accept all different kinds of mangos.

I arrived in late May, after the seasonal mango harvest that runs from March to the beginning of May. During the off-season there are still temporary jobs available at the plantations. Many of my participants (both male and female) trimmed large branches off mango trees. A two person team, one person with a chainsaw that cut off branches while a second

person cleared and piled the branches in a stack, worked together to earn a little over one dollar per every tree that was properly cut.²² The total at the end of the day varied for each pair depending on how fast they worked. One day I accompanied one of my participants to the plantation and some people mentioned that thirty-two, sixty, even seventy-three trees were cut. Two of my participants (females) briefly had jobs washing boxes that mangos were hauled in earlier in the season. Another two of my participants (females) who permanently lived in the barrio had regular temporary jobs of selling and distributing mangos to small businesses such as pulperías and schools.

Usually, however, there are not enough plantation jobs to go around for everyone in the off-season. Most of my migratory participants were without work some days and eager to hear about any type of open job. When a majority of jobs are in the off-season most laborers leave for a different part of the country or go back to Nicaragua. Five of my participants were without work several times during my fieldwork. Potential job offers are usually brought up in conversations or as noteworthy bits of information while passing a friend on the street. There is a constant worry among migrant workers who are not working because they still have expenses; paying for their rent and food. Several acquaintances left the area during my fieldwork to find jobs elsewhere or to go somewhere where living was cheaper.

Many of my participants who were Nicaraguan and permanently lived in the area catered to the migrant workers in order to also earn a living. Women who had families and no job outside the house cooked and sold food for a price. Many workers who rented rooms often would pay the landlord for food, provided that the landlord made food available to their tenants. If not, workers would contract other women who lived nearby that sold meals. Three of my participants cooked

²² The plantation pays ¢600 *colones* per tree. The exchange rate during Summer 2008 was steadily at 550 colones per one USD.

food for several workers while I was conducting fieldwork and several more of my female participants had done this in the past. Usually, a typical meal was cooked, often in bulk because these women cooked for several members of their own family as well as clients. Meals often included rice and black beans, a salad made with cabbage, tomatoes and cilantro and a type of meat. Lunch was often packaged in a ‘to-go’ container and given to the client with a re-used soda bottle filled with *fresco*.²³ Dinner, depending on the cook, was usually eaten at the cook’s house. As stated earlier, permanent residents have built little shelters behind their homes, or rented rooms in their homes to accommodate migrants as another good source of income.

Two of my participants who were permanent residents worked as mechanics in two auto shops located in the barrio. One participant, Alejandro, owned his own shop on two lots of land. He has trained all of his six sons to work in his shop and employs other Nicaraguans. The other participant, Jorge, works for someone who owns the shop. He receives room and board and a small salary for his services. Another participant, Renaldo, and his family lives on the hacienda he works for in the barrio. He works as a farm hand six days a week and receives a home to live in and a regular salary with a Christmas bonus every year.

Kinship

Many people who live in the barrio are part of large families that own several houses or have one or two relatives that live in the barrio. If one of my participants did not have a relative who lived in the barrio, more than likely they had some family member somewhere in Costa Rica. Eighty-nine percent of the participants had at least one relative in Costa Rica. Over half of these participants had relatives within the barrio or the Santo Tomás vicinity. Participants who

²³ A homemade fruit juice that is typically made in a blender with real fruit, water and sugar.

were permanent residents of the barrio tended to have more immediate family members who lived in the barrio than migrant workers.

Migrant workers often leave family members in Nicaragua when working temporarily in Costa Rica. Many women migrant workers refrain from bringing children since childcare responsibilities are demanding. Many women said that they had to leave their children behind in Nicaragua with family members because it would be almost impossible to work with a child. “You can’t bring your child to work,” reported Vilma who left her two children with her mother in Nicaragua to work with her husband for a few years in Costa Rica. Vilma sends remittances to her mother every few weeks to pay for her children’s expenses and to help her mother with money. She goes back to Nicaragua once a month to see her children. Similarly, Gina left her three-year-old daughter with her mother in Nicaragua. Gina came to Costa Rica with her husband and sister to work for nine months during the slow coffee season in Nicaragua. Gina says that she can’t go back to Nicaragua to see her daughter because it would be too expensive for her. Instead she opts to call her mother and daughter every Sunday. She expresses much guilt for leaving her daughter but she knows that it is for the best. Similar to Vilma, Gina sends remittances to her mother to pay for the up keep of her daughter.

Two of my Costa Rican friends, Claudia and Esperanza, were part of large extended families who lived in houses scattered all over barrio El Carmen. Claudia invited me to her grandson’s birthday party one night early on in my fieldwork. She told me that the occasion was extra special because she bought a pig to cook. The most prized food of the pig is its skin that is used to make *chicharones*.²⁴ Chicharones are used to make *vigorones*, a dish adopted from Nicaragua, that includes shredded cabbage, diced tomatoes, boiled diced yucca, a few

²⁴ Fried pig skin.

chicharones and lime juice squeezed on top. Traditionally, this dish is eaten with fingers and it is enjoyed with a bottled soda pop. Claudia handed out the chicharones carefully and to select people throughout the night. In Costa Rica when you have a party, you have karaoke. Normally, since the climate is usually warm, the party is taken outside the house. The T.V., karaoke set, table and chairs, food and drinks are all set up outside. Then people gather in a circle around the T.V. and the microphone is passed to anyone who is willing to sing. Due to Claudia's large family, there was a lot of food and singing.

Esperanza had several brothers and sisters who lived in the barrio. Although she had no children, she helped take care of her sister's children. She lived in a house that was part of a 'compound' of houses where her family lived. A Nicaraguan participant that had several of her immediate and extended family members in Costa Rica lived similarly, in a compound of houses. A close friend, Carla, dreamed of having her children build their family houses in the backyard of her house. She specifically bought land for this purpose and divided up three lots for each child. Although-at the time her children were not planning on building houses and two of them lived at home. The third, with her own family lived in a near-by barrio and visited her mother frequently.

Kinship plays an important role in many aspects of most Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans in the barrio. This role is emphasized in the following chapters where I present my recruitment and data collection methods to explore concepts of well-being and social capital in the barrio.

Understanding Illegality

Francisco, a 19-year-old Nicaraguan, smoked a cigarette as my friend, Ana and I, spoke with him in the darkness of the night on the front porch of an old farmhouse in the middle of the

mountains in Guanacaste, Costa Rica. Ana's aunt and uncle owned and managed a farm with no electricity that kept a variety of cows and grew numerous vegetables. Ana's aunt made cheese in the kitchen and sold it on the street. It made the house smell like old gym socks; the familiar smell remains in my mind whenever I eat cheese in Costa Rica.

Francisco told us the story of how he ended up in Costa Rica working as a seasonal ranch hand. Many years ago, Ana's uncle went to Nicaragua to buy cows and a bull for the farm, and while there, recruited Francisco at the ripe age of thirteen to help him herd the animals back to Costa Rica. Since then, Francisco has been a regular ranch hand at the farm; calling this farm his 'first home' and his family home in Nicaragua second. Francisco admits to being 'illegal' and doesn't think much of it. He says, "coming into a country to travel and have fun illegally is different, but to work, it is a necessity of life". He says that you can tell who is illegal, "they have a bag with them and they look down at the ground. Their walk is different, their language. They are afraid to get caught by the police". He says that many people know how to cross the boarder secretly so that they don't have to pay for a passport. Francisco says that he has not been far from the Nicaragua/Costa Rica border. It is risky for him to travel further South toward Panama for fear of getting caught without documents.

Most of my participants who informed me of their illegal status stated that they overextended their time in Costa Rica. It wasn't that they were undocumented, they had passports and the correct documents. It was that these papers were expired. A few of my participants were cautious to go outside of their homes. They were warned by their families in Nicaragua that the more you are on the streets, the greater the chance of being caught by the police. These participants choose to come directly home after work to minimize their chances of being caught without proper documents.

Several participants, primarily male, did not stress any concern about their illegal status and did not restrict their mobility. One evening, a participant, David, did not come home for several hours after leaving to go into the city to pick up some beer. A concerned Costa Rican friend travelled by bicycle into the city to locate him. His friend hoped that the police hadn't picked him up. An hour later both friends came back. Many people were relieved that the police did not catch David.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RECRUITMENT AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS

To understand a strange society, the anthropologist has traditionally immersed [herself] in it, learning, as far as possible, to think, see, feel, and sometimes act as a member of its culture and at the same time as a trained anthropologist from another culture. This is the heart of the participant observation method-involvement and detachment. Its practice is both an art and a science.

[Hortense Powdermaker 1966:9]

I arrived in Santo Tomás on a Thursday and on Friday morning I was introduced to some of my future participants in barrio El Carmen. Establishing initial rapport with members of this community was my primary concern. I did not want to impose my study on anyone and felt that I should at least be a semi-familiar face before conducting interviews. My target population included Nicaraguan migrants and immigrants who lived in barrio El Carmen. However, I also met several Costa Ricans who lived and worked in the barrio and in surrounding barrios. This gave me the opportunity to observe and participate in the lifestyles and activities of a more representative sample of people in the barrio, not exclusively those from Nicaragua. The following chapter focuses on my experiences and methods for participant recruitment and data collection.

Recruitment Methods

Claudia initially introduced me to many Nicaraguan residents of the barrio. Because she is a long time member of the community (over thirty years) who also is an employee of the elementary school, she is an established figure in the community. I feel that because of my connection to Claudia many people were initially comfortable speaking with me. She took me to

houses and introduced me. Claudia also stated my purpose and asked if I could interview them. She seemed to know exactly where all the Nicaraguans lived, their names and all their kin who lived in the house. During the first two days she would sit with me during interviews. However, due to the lengthiness of some of the interviews she soon stopped sitting in. When people were not home or when she was tired of knocking on doors and calling out to people, she would just point to houses, identifying them as Nicaraguan. I would go back at a later date and introduce myself to the occupants of the houses and explain myself, my study, my purpose for being in their barrio and request to speak with them.

Many residents of the barrio were willing to speak with me more than once. I would make appointments with people; meet them at their own houses and at their own convenient times. Many interviews and participant observations took place outside the home, on the patio or in the backyard. Costa Rican and Nicaraguan households are traditionally made up of extended families, it is common to have many people sitting outside, conversing and passing the time with friends, neighbors and relatives when all chores are done or during breaks. Because of this, certain interviews were done in the presence of other people. However, this latter proved to be to my advantage. When I would come back for a second interview, a bystander to my first interview then, at times, became a participant.

During the day many people were working, either men at the workplace or women in the home, so I would help women wash the laundry, cook lunch or accompany them while they performed their chores. I tutored English to one of my participant's three children every Saturday. This gave me the opportunity to participate in their daily lifestyle, experiencing what it was like to be *Nicaragüense* (Nicaraguan) in Costa Rica. My participation in household chores also showed them that I was not a stereotypical North American whom several talked about; one

who did not know how to cook or clean and who hired 'people like them' to do 'this kind' of domestic work. The Guanacaste region is located in a busy tourist area where many Americans and Europeans buy houses, settle down and seek domestic help in the form of housekeepers and cooks. My informants told me that even though these foreigners live in a country that speaks Spanish, many do not care to learn the language, causing awkward situations when domestic jobs are filled due to a language barrier. Because of this occurrence many Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans that were from this barrio think of Westerners as rich and aloof from the rest of the population that populate the country.

As mentioned earlier, I began to assist the Costa Rican English teacher, Maria, three days a week at the elementary school in the barrio. I wanted to not only spend as much time in the barrio as I could, but also to invest in the success and future of the barrio and its inhabitants. At the time, my best investment was to use my native English speaking abilities to assist with pronunciation and give the students a taste of my own enthusiasm for learning a new language. My intentions were also aimed at establishing rapport within the community and since many Nicaraguan children attended the school, my odds of not only being a 'common face' in the community but also a 'contributor' to their children's education and future would be beneficial as I began to interview and establish relationships with people.

My wishful thinking proved correct and to my benefit. Walking down the dirt and stone ridden streets, many children would shout out, "Teacher!" and wave as I headed to one of my many destinations. Sometimes I would hear "Very Good!" echoing out of a house or from a group of children, a phrase I would tell students who pronounced, wrote or demonstrated an understanding of a word or phrase of the English language well. Eventually, children began to tell their parents, neighbors began to tell neighbors and as I continued to walk the streets in the

barrio and pass the same houses over and over again, many residents of the barrio would begin conversation with me in the street.

Data Collection Methods

I brought a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology into the field to construct a cultural model of well-being among Nicaraguans. However, I focused more intently on qualitative methods through participant-observation (Agar 1996) and semi-structured interviews (Bernard 2006). As described above, I recruited participants with the help of an informant, Claudia, who had extensive knowledge on the history of the community and current Nicaraguan residents of the barrio. I was first introduced to many participants through her wonderful generosity and concern for my study. She would often tell me, “*va a traer una buena historia del barrio a los estados*” (you are going to bring a good history of the barrio to the states). Later, a snowball effect occurred where some participants introduced me to friends and other family members who I could interview.

These interviews were normally conducted around the participant’s home, either outside or inside. Rarely was there a time when anthropologist and participant were alone. Many times children, family members or friends were close by, within earshot of our conversation. However, many participants did not appear shy or hesitate to answer questions due to another person’s presence. The first four initial interviews were audio recorded. I suspended audio recordings due to some people’s hesitance with the audio recorder. The atmosphere of speaking with people without the audio recorder appeared more natural and to retain the rapport I had received from initial participants, I decided to stop recording. In order to properly and accurately document all interviews and informal visits, I kept a small ‘notes’ notebook with me at all times. During the

interview I would write down as much as I could, and immediately after the interview I wrote up a final version of what was said in another ‘participant profile’ notebook.

I kept three notebooks for different kinds of documentation. The first was my ‘notes’ notebook where I initially wrote down interview answers and informal notes during the day (Bernard 2006). When I got home I would transfer all the interview notes into a second ‘participant’ notebook where I filed each participant by name and wrote down my interactions and information about that person. I would then write up what had happened that day, my interactions with random people and my general thoughts about the study in a third ‘field’ notebook.

I conducted all interviews in Spanish and translated all interview questions into Spanish. Informants who lived in the barrio double-checked all questions for language and translation competency. If a question was not understood, an explanation of the question ensued and suggestions were made to fit my intended meaning.

I first collected basic demographic data for all participants.²⁵ Basic demographic data also included what family members lived close to the participant, when the participant arrived in the host country, and how long they have lived in the barrio. These questions allowed me to obtain a certain degree of knowledge about migration habits amongst the sample population. In addition, this information helped assess social networks for migrants and contributed to the data collection for social capital.

Well-Being Measures

In Spanish, well-being is translated as *bienestar*, literally ‘to be well.’ Happiness is

²⁵ See appendix C for a complete list of questions.

translated as, '*felicidad*.' I used these two words interchangeably throughout interviews and informal conversations. However, I used *bienestar* considerably more often, perhaps 80% of the time.

Participants were first asked a series of open-ended well-being questions.²⁶ These questions included simple definitions of well-being, “How do you define well-being?” to “What is blocking your happiness”? To supplement open-ended questions, the Satisfaction with Life Scale²⁷ (SWLS; Diener et al. 1985) was given to over half of the participants. The satisfaction scale was not a main component of the study, however, it served two main purposes. The first purpose was an attempt to ‘test’ if the participants were comfortable filling out a questionnaire and using a Likert scale to express their responses to statements. The satisfaction scale is a short five-item instrument intended to measure cognitive assessments of life satisfaction. There is a strong interest in developing shorter instruments on a variety of factors to accommodate short research stays and the participant’s tolerance of time. In addition, populations who otherwise would or could not fill out a two hundred-question survey are likely to be left out of sampling procedures. However, the short time frame for completing this measure proves fruitful for future research with this population. Also, for non-literate or semi-literate populations, the instrument can be read aloud and a scale can be drawn using a one to seven continuum with smiling and frowning faces. I used this method three times with participants who were not comfortable with reading the survey on their own.

The second purpose is to expand the usage of the widely used satisfaction scale to a population that might not receive equal sampling representation in earlier studies, such as migrant workers. The SWLS has been translated into over twenty languages. However, most

²⁶ See appendix C for well-being questions.

²⁷ See appendix A for a sample of the SWLS.

sample populations exclusively include convenience populations such as college students. Expanding the population to include difficult (migratory workers) or sensitive persons (illegal migrants) could possibly identify new problems or obstacles administrating the SWLS, especially with translated versions. The population received the scale well; there were no refusals. All the questions were understood with clarity except question four, which took more time to understand and answer compared with the other four questions.²⁸

Social Capital Measures

Frequent visits with many participants allowed me to introduce a variety of questions about well-being and observe daily happenings both in their own lives and in the barrio. ‘Hanging out’ and interviewing created a unique setting to observe interactions with friends, neighbors and acquaintances. These situations also provided me with the opportunity to observe exchanges of goods, buying and selling, and caretaking within participants’ relationships. Walking the streets of the barrio also provided insight into social capital, since construction work took place outside, so did the selling of food and conversation. Through these interactions, interviews and observations, I listed important goods or services that are relevant and of concern to the participants. I then created a tool to assess the availability of informal social capital and who provides it. The tool allows for limited knowledge of social networking, however the importance of the assessment is not to identify networks but a ‘who relies on whom’ for what purpose and if every need on the assessment tool has the potential to be fulfilled.

There are five questions that explore three of the four categories of social capital as

²⁸ Question four in English reads, “So far I have gotten the important things in life.” The translated Spanish version is, “*Hasta ahora, he conseguido las cosas que para mí son importantes en la vida.*”

identified by Berkman et al. (2000): emotional, instrumental and informational.²⁹ The categories range from instrumental to informational and emotional. Question number one is instrumental, addressing if an item, not of high importance, can be borrowed from someone. The second question asks for information for temporary work. The third question addresses if someone can be trusted to watch his or her small children while away on an emergency trip. The fourth questions if any money can be borrowed. The final question seeks to understand who they can trust with their own feelings and concerns.

I divided social capital into two realms, formal and informal. Formal social capital was defined as any organization or group funded by outside sources (the government, non-governmental organizations, private donors) to provide services to the public. For example, the social service agency, *Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social*, assisted families to buy new school uniforms for their children; or, the psychologist and social worker, provided by the national board of education, would find assistance from different institutions to give to families during difficult times. Initially, participants were asked if they used any social service organizations or centers. Then, participants were generally questioned if they knew of any organizations or community groups that people could join.

In contrast, informal social capital is initiated by social relationships that an individual or a group of individuals form that meet a specific need or goal. For example, a working mother's support group put together by a group of friends who cooperate with childcare or friends who provide emotional support for divorced spouses. Informal social capital is not associated with organizations or services that are funded by either an outside agency or governmental agency. Informality, thus, suggests an unofficial process, plan or system based on trust of reciprocity.

²⁹ See appendix C for the full list of questions.

Questions that were sought after combining both the well-being and social capital methods include: Is there a connection between social capital and well-being in this population? Does this relationship alter or influence perceptions and definitions of well-being? Do the characteristics of this society perpetuate the perception of well-being as being closely identified with agents of social capital? If so, how do we explain this relationship? If not, then what is the relationship between well-being and social capital? The ultimate concern in measuring social capital in this study is its connection with local subjective perceptions and definitions of well-being. The following chapter describes the informants who participated in the study, their circumstances and the results of the obtained data.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RESULTS

I didn't say that I know the secret of happiness. I only said that my mind works on problems whose solutions foster the happiness of humankind. It will take a long time before that can be accomplished, and neither you nor I will ever see the results. Many generations will brood about these difficult questions for years to come!

[Herman Hesse 1995:221]

Several people who took part in this study played numerous roles. I conducted eighteen initial semi-informal interviews. These interviews were not always exclusive one-on-one conversations with anthropologist and interviewee. A minority of the time I conducted interviews with husbands and wives and/or friends present. Following initial interviews and their permission to see them again, I visited participants in their homes and began informal conversations with them, which further provided me with data. Usually, conversations elicited dialogue that led to more information about an individual and their personal experiences. Typically, most data was collected in unstructured and semi-structured conversations with an individual or group of people every one to two weeks. A total of thirteen females aged twenty-one to fifty-eight and five males aged twenty to sixty-six spoke with me several times during my three-month stay. Fifteen other participants contributed to this study in a lesser manner.

Most of my sample population came to Costa Rica in the mid 1990's, when the Nicaraguan economy was recovering from Sandinista rule and entering a more democratically based form of political rule. Some arrived within the last couple of years; the majority of these people are temporary migrants, going back to Nicaragua during the slow season and coming to

Costa Rica during the work season. Interviews revealed that most chose to come to Costa Rica because of better and more stable work opportunities that gave them a chance to earn more money. More than half of the sample population sent remittances home to a family member in Nicaragua. Almost all of the population had at least one family member in Costa Rica and over half had a family member who lived in the barrio. The majority of permanent participants lived in multiple generation households with an average household occupancy of five people.

Subjective Well-Being Responses

My main goal is to find out how Nicaraguans individually express, perceive and construct ideas about well-being. As stated earlier in the methods section, two methods of obtaining well-being concepts were collected: 1) the completion of a standard five-item translated measurement of cognitive well-being; and 2) several open-ended interviews. Strauss and Corbin suggest that, “theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the “reality” than is theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation” (1998:12). All narratives and conversations were searched and coded for relevant themes that exhibited similar characteristics between participants. A total of thirty-five responses were retrieved with four salient categories. The four major categories that constructed well-being were extracted from participants’ conversations and interviews include: 1) work and financial concerns; 2) health; 3) the church and God; and 4) family and friends (see figure seven).

Fourteen responses showed that closeness to family and friends is important to states of well-being. Particularly, harmonious relationships are emphasized, where the family is “united” and living in “calmness,” “serenity,” and “tranquility”. One participant stated, “My friends bring me happiness”. The next salient category is recognized as being economically well.

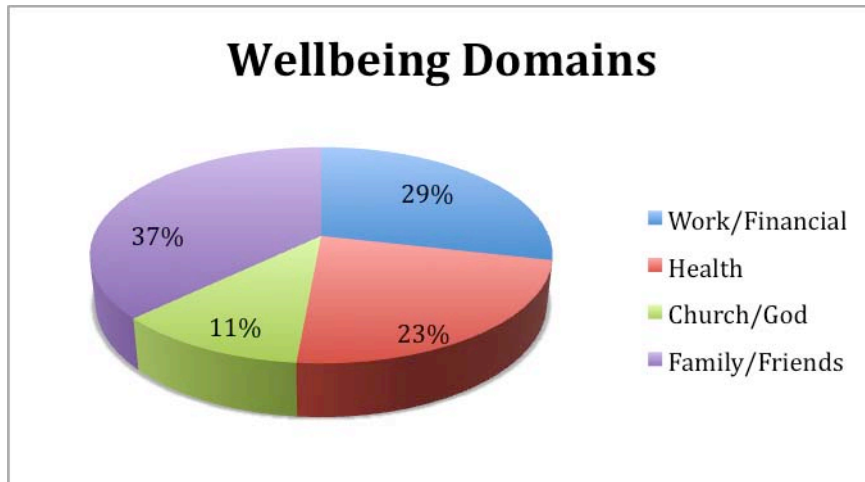


Figure 7. The distribution of well-being perceptions for Nicaraguans. The percentage of responses are indicated inside each color coded category.

Many participants (A total of 11 responses) focused on the ability (opportunistically and physically) to work and financially provide for oneself and one’s family. The attractive factor that motivates Nicaraguans to come to Costa Rica is to work. The economic realities of Nicaragua that led this population to migrate are still embedded in their determination to make a living. Many participants brought up the importance of maintaining the family unit through working. Having the faculty to work in order to ideally maintain the family is especially important for males. However, many females also identified the general importance of work. Identifying the importance of work also recognized the importance of food and being able to “eat enough” or “well”. Three individuals specifically pointed out the ability to eat and to have food determines an individual’s well-being.

The ability to be “working” and “with a job” not only identifies the ability to “eat enough” but also affects the next category, physical health. Nine responses contributed to having oneself and family be physically healthy or “in good health”. Logically, the three latter categories are connected: if you do not have good health, you cannot work, if you cannot work,

you cannot eat well. The final category (five responses) is the importance of attending church and an individual’s relationship with God. One participant rationalized, “Because I go to church I am content with all things”. He also mentioned that he “has a lot of friends at church.” Another participant stated that she “maintains [her] well-being through [her] belief in God”. Both of these participants attended church, although different ones, on a weekly basis.

Satisfaction with Life Scale Results

Eleven participants (seven females and four males) completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). Two participant’s scores indicated slightly below average life satisfaction, four participants scored average, three participants scored in the high satisfaction range and two held very high scores (see figure eight).

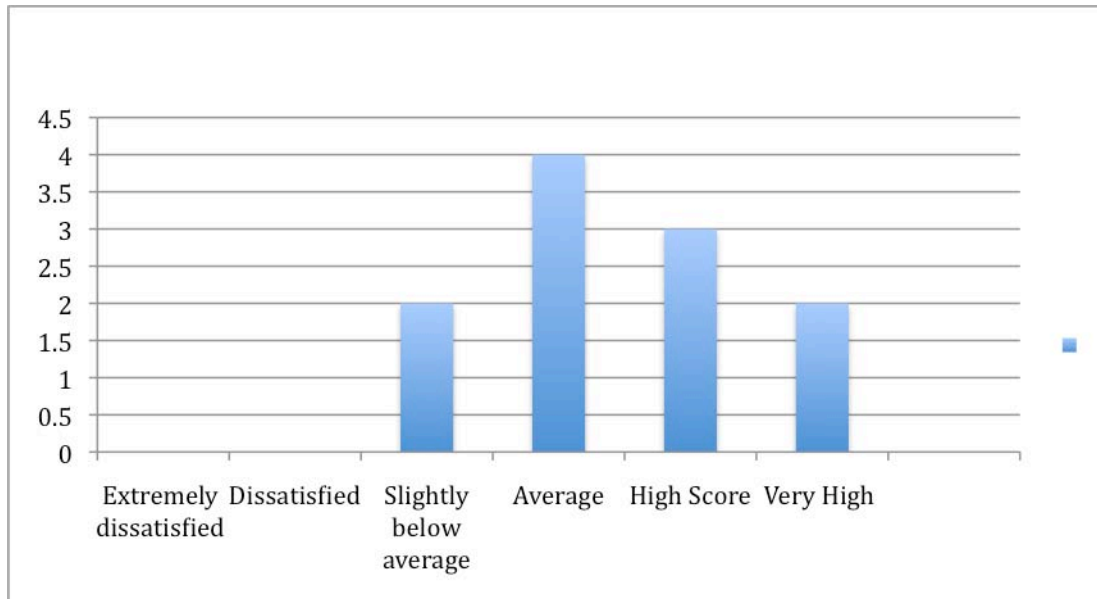


Figure 8. The graphic display of the distribution of SWLS scores (N=11). The vertical axis indicates the number of people who have scored in each well-being range indicated by the horizontal axis.

Overall, per question, each participant scored an average of five on the Likert scale, indicating that almost all of the participants who completed the life satisfaction scale are satisfied with their

lives. Two questions, number one and five, had the largest score gap between all the questions. Question one, “In most ways my life is close to my ideal” had an average score of 5.7 per participant. This means that on average almost all of the participants agree that their lives are close to their ideal. Question five, “If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing” had an average score of 3.6 per participant. This means that on average almost all participants disagree with this statement, indicating that if they could live their lives over, they would change something.

Social Capital

The participants answered a series of questions that included trust, exchange of goods or services, organizational participation, social relationships and the proximity of social relationships (specifically family members). These factors, as discussed in chapter four, are the basis for building and maintaining access to critical services.

Exchange of Goods and Services

Participants answered a five-question social capital situation scenario that I developed while in the barrio.³⁰ The focus of this scenario is to identify from whom an individual would seek help, which will determine a support base for the individual, where his needs are being met and lastly, who are the people that are most likely relied on in this community. The questions are focused on three categories that were developed after several weeks of participant observation at the field site. The three categories include, instrumental, informational and emotional support that other people are able to provide to the individual. Participants answered all scenarios openly,

³⁰ See appendix C for a complete list of questions used for the social capital scenario.

without the assistance of fixed choices.

The first question fulfills the borrowing of a small item. Almost all of the participants stated they would ask a family member who lives either with them or nearby, a few would ask their boss and one would ask a neighbor or friend in the barrio to borrow a small item. The second question identifies who a participant can go to if they need a temporary job. Several of my participants stated they do not need a job because they are stay-at-home spouses or already have secured a full-time job. Several other participants stated friends in the barrio serve as good leads to obtaining a job. A few female participants note their trust with the social worker from the school and would turn to her for help. Almost half of the participants would go to a previous or current boss that has reliable connections.

The third question identifies who the participant would rely on to watch their children overnight in an emergency. Most of the participants stated family members who live close and one would leave her children with a neighbor who she trusts. The fourth question asks if there is anyone that can loan the participant money in an emergency situation. Almost half of the participants identified family members that can loan them money, several participants relied on friends, and one participant identified that his current boss would lend him money. A few participants stated that they would not have to borrow money from anyone; they have enough 'emergency' money to assist themselves. A few participants explained that if they needed anything, the church would provide it for them and they would not need to pay it back. The fifth question asked whom participants were likely to go to if they were depressed, worried and needed to talk. Most participants would speak with family members, several participants chose friends and a few participants would go to the president of their church for assistance.

Trust and Formal–Informal Social Capital

An important aspect of social capital is the amount of trust that people have for others, especially ones that live in their community. I gathered participant's perceptions of how they feel about trusting their neighbors and the people who live in the barrio. A majority of participants feel that the barrio is "excellent," "calm," "a good place to live" and that they feel "very safe". Participants commented on how their barrio doesn't have a problem with drugs and violence like other barrios of Santo Tomás. Most of the participants specifically point out that they have trust in their family and friends who they know in the barrio. For most, they place their trust in the people who they know. One Nicaraguan stated,

I do not know my neighbors but I know they are all from Nicaragua. I talk to them when I am outside and say hi to them to avoid problems and to be friendly. I feel sincere toward my neighbors. But, I do not trust that they will help me if I need help. My family would help more than the neighbors would help me.

In contrast to the above participant, others favored to get to know their neighbors and develop trusting relationships. A Nicaraguan young women with two children stated, "I have stress not having family here. Family support is much different from having friend support". She states that she has close relationships with her immediate neighbors who help each other with favors and the giving of food.

Several participants did not know of any organizations to join in the barrio. They knew of no clubs or associations where one could be an active and participating member. Although several individuals were involved in the church, no one mentioned extra church activities that they were active in. One participant, who is a long time member of the community, knew about the barrio development organization that held meetings and another committee that planned a yearly party in the salon comunal that was sponsored by the Santo Tomás government.

I asked all participants if they received help when they first arrived in Costa Rica from any organization. All participants stated that they did not. Many people received help from friends or family already in Costa Rica. This assistance included: a place to stay, food and help with finding employment. However, a few participants received help from national social service organizations for particular problems that they have encountered while living in Costa Rica. One participant, a mother of four, received help from an organization after her divorce from her husband a few years ago. She said that she had no money and no way to buy her children's school uniforms. The organization found her a temporary job and a place to stay with her children while she earned money. A second participant currently receives a small amount of money every month from the government for her six children who have serious health concerns. Two other participants received relief assistance when their homes were flooded during the seasonal rains. One of these families received supplies to prevent water from coming into their home. Another received food, clothes and other supplies after the floods caused damage to their home.

Family Relationships

Fourteen participants have families that live either in barrio El Carmen or in other barrios in Santo Tomás. Eleven of these fourteen participants have family that live in the barrio. Of these eleven participants, nine live in the same house or next door to their families. Families are characterized by having some kind of kinship relation. As stated above, several participants arrived in Costa Rica with family or met family or friends who were already settled in the country. Several participants stated that they had friends or family come from Nicaragua and stay with them temporarily. These family members and friends find temporary jobs then return to

Nicaragua. According to the social capital scenarios described above, a majority of assistance with everyday tasks and emergency situations came from family members. In addition, as seen in the trust section, family members tend to have the most trust from participants.

CHAPTER NINE
MAKING SENSE OF MANY RESPONSES:
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Lambek rationalizes that the concept of well-being,

is culturally constituted, so well-being only makes sense with respect to the contours of a particular way of life; particular structures of persons, relations, feeling, place, cosmos, work and leisure...Wellbeing must include guides and orientations in the making of choice or the exercise of judgment, ones that affirm people's intuitions.

[2008:125]

Individuals are surrounded by contexts. Subjectivity operates within this milieu. Many of the well-being studies mentioned in chapter four begin with a predetermined measure or definition of well-being prior to data collection. Most well-being surveys or questionnaires are forms that limit an individual's view, vocabulary and expression of themselves and the world around them. Survey and questionnaire research in studies of well-being confine the concept of happiness and restrict definitions of well-being, which are broad among and between human populations. In this thesis, I move away from methodologies that restrict an individual's subjectivity and expression of wellness by employing ethnographic methods.

Through these methods, a relationship emerges between well-being, social capital and environmental factors. Open-ended well-being responses were generally answered in two ways: with an emphasis on the importance of select individuals who play key roles, namely, family and friends, and financial security. In addition, responses to the social capital scenarios reflect a reliance on family and friends that support current lifestyles. An everyday needs assessment revealed that family and close friends form a support system where individuals benefit from the resources that other people provide.

Well-Being and Socioeconomic Conditions

Several studies outlined in chapters four and five found links between life satisfaction, subjective well-being and income in populations of low wealth (Oishi et al. 1999; Inglehart and Klingemann 2000; Biswas-Diener and Diener 2001; Neff 2007; Rojas 2007). In barrio El Carmen, similar to wellbeing studies in communities of low wealth, the sample population's socioeconomic status contributes to how well-being is constructed. All of the participants are laborers from Nicaragua who seek increased financial stability through higher paid jobs in Costa Rica. Most of the Nicaraguans I spoke with work on farms, in construction or as domestic laborers. To the majority of Costa Ricans, these jobs are not particularly sought after due to the relative low pay and hard work. However, to these Nicaraguans, the conditions and pay of labor jobs are considered a favorable alternative to employment found in Nicaragua, where pay is even lower and the work hours longer. Many definitions of well-being include the importance of employment. Consequently, this response is closely related to three other definitions of well-being that were mentioned by Nicaraguans: having enough food to eat, the importance of physical health, and family and friends.

Employment, due to many temporary and seasonal positions, is an important component to Nicaraguans' survival, whether they are immigrants or temporary workers. In order to be physically healthy to work, food must be consumed. If an individual cannot work, food cannot be purchased or consumed to maintain physical health. This process is cyclical. These three components are important to Nicaraguans, because their migration began in order to work, increase their income and obtain better life circumstances for themselves and their families. High rates of remittances sent to families in Nicaragua provide another reason for the importance of

employment. These definitions of well-being are not only tied to life circumstances, but also how social relationships are valued to individuals.

In almost all participants, open-ended well-being definitions reveal that social relationships (family and friends) are an important component to perceptions of well-being. This category was the most salient of well-being definitions. Furthermore, the social capital scenarios, described in the methods chapter, identify what resources are available from a specific individual. In these scenarios, social capital responses illustrate that almost all Nicaraguan participants relied on family and friends to meet needs that are essential for daily living. Financial stability, maintaining physical health and support in emergencies cannot be achieved without at least some social capital derived from family and friends. This indicates that people maintain relationships, either consciously or unconsciously, to allocate at least some kind of specific resource that supports their way of life.

The church also provides social contacts that contribute to an individual's social capital. This social capital might benefit an individual's worldly experience, as seen in two Nicaraguan church members who were able to travel to different countries with their church group. One participant, Flora, stated that she would need to pay half of what it would cost to travel to the Caribbean with her church group. Another participant, David, stated that he and his wife did not need to pay to visit the Honduras cathedrals with their church group. Additionally, the church can also be seen as providing financial and emotional capital by helping members with financial emergencies and psychological support. The lives of Nicaraguans who live in Costa Rica contribute to understanding how less wealthy populations use their environment to elicit social capital to their advantage, and as indicated by this ethnographic study, how this is related to constructing well-being.

The social environment of the barrio provides an adequate basis for establishing ‘thin trust’ between community members and ‘thick trust’ between friends. All participants felt safe in the barrio and described the area as “excellent,” “tranquil,” and “calm” as opposed to other less desirable barrios. The absence of drugs, violence and the calm nature in the barrio promotes ‘thin’ trust within the majority of the community.³¹ This environment provides an excellent opportunity to secure bonding relationships that are initially based on a type of ‘thin’ trust that is built into the barrio, which attract people who seek this type of lifestyle.

Satisfaction with Life Scale Scores

The majority of participants who took the Satisfaction with Life Scale fell into the category of an ‘average score’ or above. An average score indicates that the individual is generally satisfied with their life, but would like improvements in some areas (Diener 2006). Diener (2006) suggests that, generally, individuals who score average would like to improve their lives in order to obtain a higher SWLS score. Individuals who score a ‘very high score’ are ‘highly satisfied’ and “feel that things are about as good as lives get...that life is enjoyable and the major domains of life are going well” (Diener 2006). To put these scores and their definitions into perspective, I highlight two individuals who scored ‘very high’ on the SWLS, Maria and Jesús.

One day, while conversing with Maria, she pointed out that her family is poor and considered this a reason why her landlord charge too much for rent. Maria has lived in Costa Rica for the last seven years with her husband and five children. When I first met her she lived in

³¹ This conclusion can be identified in the sample population, mostly identified as laborers. A future in-depth study of all socioeconomic classes within the barrio is needed to generalize this conclusion.

a home with a dirt floor and used sheets as curtains in the doorways. Toward the end of my research she put in a new cement floor saying, “When we can afford it we fix up the house little by little.” She stated that income is sometimes a factor that blocks her happiness; sometimes the family has a steady income, other times they don’t. They buy what they need when they do have the money. She indicated that if she needed anything at all, her siblings who were her neighbors were always there to help. Maria cooks and sells food to about eight to twelve migrant workers, which supplements the family’s income.³² Her husband has been sick for years, and considering his physical health, is only able to work “here and there.” Maria is extremely proud of her children; one who is considering college and another who is a mechanic. There are legal issues with her youngest children concerning residency and she is currently seeking affordable legal assistance. Maria scored ‘very high’ on the SWLS despite her neutral agreement with the second question, “The conditions of my life are excellent.”

Jesús has been in Costa Rica since the early 1980s. His wife is Costa Rican and they have four children. He has a steady, full-time job in one of the melon plantations close to the barrio. He states that he has worked at the melon plantation for three years and it is the best-paid job he has had since coming to Costa Rica. He does not have any family that lives in the barrio, but he has one brother who lives in San Jose. Most of his wife’s family is in the barrio and they recently moved into a newly constructed house near her father. Jesús denies having any money problems; his salary is sufficient for his family to live on and they are able to buy anything they need. At the time, Jesús was considering the purchase of a used truck. Jesús scored ‘very high’ on the SWLS; a ‘perfect’ score if all available points are counted.

³² Maria cooks outside in the backyard over a fire to reduce electrical energy and gas costs since she needs to cook a large amount of food, both for her own family of seven people and her clients.

These two participants live different lives with very different circumstances and, yet are able to obtain similar scores on a life satisfaction survey. This illustrates how survey measures alone are not able to capture the significance of what it means to be ‘satisfied’ with one’s life. Despite Maria’s constant struggle to maintain financial satisfaction, her search for legal help with documents and the failing physical health of her husband, she succinctly defines well-being as living in her house with her family and husband. The unity of her family is the most important factor in her life. Maria strongly agrees with four out of the five SWLS statements; however, she is undecided if the conditions in her life are excellent. In a similar vein, Jesús defines well-being where he and his family are healthy and that he is working, maintaining the family income. Although, both participants have drastically different life circumstances, their subjective definitions of well-being have a similar focus. Life satisfaction scores by themselves cannot determine an individual’s well-being. Although both Maria and Jesús scored high on a standard life satisfaction survey, ultimately the reasons for this would have remained largely unknown without the qualitative context of their life circumstances and personal narratives of well-being. In the case of Maria, concerns with a low score on life conditions would be the only indicator that something was ‘not satisfactory’ in her life.

Additionally, the results of Maria, Jesús and many other participants’ emphasis on the importance of family and home life points to the consideration of well-being as influenced by individual or collective paradigms. Costa Rica is classified as a collectivist culture, which is “less individualistic than European American cultures (Neuliep 2009:43). Nicaragua has not been categorized into either category; however, ignoring the country classification, the subjective well-being definitions by themselves, as outlined in this thesis, can be classified in a collectivist framework. Although, the environmental circumstances and lifeways of these individuals permit

a more complex relationship when constructing well-being. The average SWLS scores displayed in this population reveal that although for most participants socioeconomic conditions were not ideal, this did not negatively affect SWLS scores.

Autonomy in the Lives of Nicaraguans

Harper and Madox (2008) assert that critical to well-being is the notion of agency and degrees of control over one's life course (2008:36). The importance of autonomy is also highlighted in Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory (1980) and Ryff's Multi-dimensional Model (1989). Autonomy appears to play an important role in this group. While conducting fieldwork I met undocumented Nicaraguan migrants who risked their freedom to cross the Nicaragua–Costa Rica national border in order to seek better work opportunities. The ability to move freely and independently is critical for these individuals in their search for a better life. One participant rationalized, “it doesn't matter that there are borders that keep me on one side or the other. If there are more opportunities on one side and I am on the other, I go to the other side. It is about survival.”

When decision-making and subsequent action, whether legal or illegal, is an option for a better life, autonomy is a key ingredient to obtain happiness. Another example comes from Ana, a migrant worker who is a documented permanent resident of Costa Rica. During a three-week work ‘drought’ in the barrio, Ana was offered a domestic job. She turned it down because she stated that with a domestic job, there is the possibility that she would work from early morning until late in the evening and would not have her evenings free. She pointed out that domestic work entails being confined in a house without set work hours; the work is endless until the boss says it's over. She would rather perform hard laborious work for a set amount of time, then

return home to relax. Some migrant laborers could not afford to pass up job opportunities; however, due to Ana's strong social capital, she was able to exercise her autonomy, turn down the domestic job offer and still be able to keep her small rented room and eat while searching for more favorable employment.³³

Although models that promote specific categories as essential for well-being cross-culturally are limited in value, the above examples illustrate the importance of autonomy in maintaining a sense of well-being in the lives of Nicaraguans. Ethnography produces narratives that are more rich and complex than structured questions and answers found on surveys. In addition to the importance of autonomy in Nicaraguans, the context in which that autonomy is used in their motivations and everyday lives is important to capture the experience and situations of Nicaraguan labor workers in Costa Rica.

Implications for Migration Policy in Costa Rica

The use of formal and informal social capital as it is identified among the Nicaraguan sample population can be used as a tool in social policy reform for immigrants in the country. Due to the limited assistance from formal organizations, formal social capital (social services received from institutions) is rarely to moderately used among Nicaraguans. Participants were willing to use eligible social services after being introduced to them through the school social worker. Most Nicaraguan participants received services for their children: school outfits and supplies once a year, and, for one family, assistance with their children's disability. Emergency flood services in the neighborhood were available to anyone, regardless of nationality. Despite

³³ At the time Ana lived with a good friend in the barrio who ran several rented dwellings in the back of her home. Ana's friend provided Ana a discounted rate on rent and food when work was slow.

these services, Nicaraguans used more informal social capital in their everyday lives and maintained their relationships at an individual level. For example, individuals are more inclined to initiate relationships with neighbors and maintain family relationships as opposed to initiate and maintain relationships with people through community activities and organizations. The exception to this is participation in church activities. In this case, the church is characterized as a formal institution.

Nicaraguans use informal social capital to meet their everyday and emergency needs. Everyday and emergency needs, as described in the results chapter, illustrates the importance of family and friends who fulfill needs that cannot be fulfilled by outside agencies. The limited availability of formal social services to help Nicaraguans with immediate everyday needs have resulted in an informal strategy to meet the direct needs of this population. The impacts that this research has on social policy for Nicaraguans in the future relates to how formal social services will be received, and in what contexts formal services will benefit Nicaraguans.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study isolates individuals and identifies whom they rely on to fulfill everyday needs. Future work with this population includes the mapping of social networks of members in the barrio in a longitudinal study. As there are many work opportunities within the barrio (found on two large melon plantations) and many room rental options, individuals' social networks may be similar to one another. Mapping social networks and identifying which types of social relationships are used, for what purposes, and how they change over a period of time can identify the impacts of social relationships on an individual's life and consequently, if perceptions of well-being shift as well. Xavier de Souza Briggs describes 'social leverage' as "getting ahead"

where social relationships improve an individual's access to opportunities that change their life circumstances, and 'social support' as "getting by" where social relationships help individuals to cope with current situations, but do not improve future opportunities (1998:178). Bonding social capital is the dominant form of acquiring resources, which in Briggs' terms are considered mechanisms for 'getting by'. Participants also exercise bridging social capital that would be classified as 'getting ahead'. Relationships are established with former and current bosses from work who provide opportunities for additional employment and, in some cases, lend money. Longitudinal social networking will provide information on individuals who are key actors in social leveraging, providing opportunities to advance in socioeconomic status.

Conclusion

This thesis has focused on two primary bodies of literature, well-being and social capital. In this chapter I construct evidence for social capital or, more broadly, social relationships as an important contributing factor in the well-being of Nicaraguans who live in Costa Rica. I argue that social capital coupled with socioeconomic circumstances contributes heavily to the construction and maintenance of well-being in this population. This research provides initial qualitative, ethnographic evidence to formulate a model of subjective well-being that, consequently, enhances prior studies of well-being in psychology and demonstrates how transnational populations benefit from social capital.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Satisfaction With Life Scale

English Version

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

_____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

_____ The conditions of my life are excellent.

_____ I am satisfied with my life.

_____ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

_____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

- 31 - 35 Extremely satisfied
- 26 - 30 Satisfied
- 21 - 25 Slightly satisfied
- 20 Neutral
- 15 - 19 Slightly dissatisfied
- 10 - 14 Dissatisfied
- 5 - 9 Extremely dissatisfied

APPENDIX B

Satisfaction With Life Scale Spanish Version

Más abajo hay cinco afirmaciones con las que usted puede estar de acuerdo o en desacuerdo. Utilizando la siguiente escala de 1 a 7, indique su acuerdo con cada una poniendo el número apropiado en la línea anterior al número de cada afirmación. Por favor, responda a las preguntas abierta y sinceramente.

- 7 – Completamente de acuerdo
- 6 – De acuerdo
- 5 – Más bien de acuerdo
- 4 – Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
- 3 – Más bien en desacuerdo
- 2 – En desacuerdo
- 1 – Completamente en desacuerdo

- ____ 1. En la mayoría de las cosas, mi vida está cerca de mi ideal.
- ____ 2. Las condiciones de vida son excelentes.
- ____ 3. Estoy satisfecho con mi vida.
- ____ 4. Hasta ahora, he conseguido las cosas que para mí son importantes en la vida.
- ____ 5. Si volviese a nacer, no cambiaría casi nada de mi vida.

APPENDIX C

Summary of Questions for Well-Being and Social Capital

Well-being

Participants answered a series of questions:

A. Questions

1. Para usted, que significa bienestar?

For you, what is the definition of well-being?

2. En su vida en este momento cual cosas que le hacen contento en su vida?

In your life at this moment what things make you content in your life?

3. Considerar todas las cosas en su vida ahora, hay cualquier cosa falta que esta bloqueando su felicidad?

Considering all the things in your life right now, is there anything that you is blocking your happiness?

4. Tiene dificultades económicamente en un específico tiempo del año?

Do you have difficulties financially in a specific time of the year?

The SWL (Satisfaction with Life) survey, Spanish version was given to participants. This survey supplemented well-being questions and other life factors that were observed and interviewed on.

Social Capital

The participant answered a series of questions that included trust, exchange of goods or services, organizational participation, social relationships and proximity of social relationships aspects of social capital.

A. Scenario Questions

Voy a decirle una lista de situaciones que encuentro posiblemente en su vida ahorlita.Me Gustaria saber a quien puede pedir para ayuda en cada situacion. Es posible que hay mas que una person que puede pedir. Por favor, toma su tiempo para pensar sobre cada situacion.

I am going to say a list of situations that you may possibly encounter in your life right now. I would like to know to who you are able to ask for help in each situation. It is possible that there is more than one person that you are able to ask. Please, take your time to think about each situation.

1a. Va a empezar lavadora cuando se di cuenta de que no hay jabon. Necesita lavar un uniforme para su hijo que esta en colegio para manana. Pero, no tiene plata para comprar jabon. A quien puede pedir para jabon?

You are going to start the laundry when you find out that there is no soap. You need to wash a uniform for your son (or a daughter depending on the person) that is in high school for tomorrow. But, you don't have any money to buy soap. Who are you able to ask for soap?

b. Va a arreglar algo en la casa pero, falta una herramienta. A quien puede pedir para esa herramienta?

You are going to fix something in the house but you lack a tool. Who are you able to ask for that tool?

2. Esta buscando para trabaja temporada, a quien va a pedir?

You are looking for temporary work. Who are you able to ask?

3. Hay una emergencia de un miembro de su familia en Nicaragua y necesita ir aya por un dia. Necesita salir muy temprano y regressa muy tarde en el noche. A quien puede piderle para vigilar sus hijos?

There is an emergency with a member of the family in Nicaragua and you need to go there for one day. You need to leave very early and you will return very late in the night. Who are you able to ask to watch your children?

4. Necesita plata para una emergencia. A quien puede pedir para un prestamo?

You need money for an emergency. Who are you able to ask for a loan?

5. Esta disgustado y deprimido sobre cosas en su vida. Quiere hablar a alguien. A quien va a hablar con?

You are feeling depressed about things in your life. You want to speak with someone. Who are you going to talk with?

B. Trust Questions

Tiene confianza con sus vecinos?

Do you have trust in your neighbors?

Cuantos personas podria tener confianza en su vida ahora? En este barrio? En general?

How many people are you able to have trust en your life right now? In this barrio? In general?

For families with children who attended the elementary school:

Conoce el psicologo y trabajadora social en la escuela? Se siente que ellos pueden ayudarle si necesite ayuda?

Do you know the psychologist and the social worker at the elementary school? Do you feel that they are able to help you if you need help?

C. Social Relationship Questions

1. Cuando Vino a Costa Rica? Vino Solo o con alguien?
When did you come to Costa Rica? Did you come alone or with someone?
2. Conocio alguien cuando vino a Costa Rica?
Did you know anyone when you came to Costa Rica?
3. Cuanto tiempo vivia en este barrio?
How long did you live in this barrio?
4. Como supo sobre este barrio? Porque mudo aqui?
How did you know about this barrio? Why did you move here?
5. Recibio ayuda de alguien para encontrar su trabaja cuando vino aqui?
Did you receive help from someone to find a job when you came here?
6. Tiene familia aqui, en Costa Rica? Cuantos veces por semana ve ellos?
Do you have family here in Costa Rica? How many times per week do you see them?
(Note: this question usually led to where they live in the country and how many members reside in this country in other countries (other than Nicaragua))
7. Piensa que tiene mas oportunidades en este pais que Nicaragua?
Do you think that you have more opportunity in this country than Nicaragua?
8. En Cual aspectos se siente que hay mas oportunidad?
In what aspects do you feel that there is more opportunity?
9. Cuando vino, recibio ayuda de un organizacion cuando llego? O de un miembro de su familia?
When you came did you receive help from an organization when you arrived? Or from a member of your family?
10. Como se siente sobre el barrio donde vive ahora?
How do you feel about the neighborhood that you live in now?
11. Va a la Iglesia?
Do you go to church?
12. Regressa a Nicaragua? Cuantos veces al ano?
Do you return to Nicaragua? How many times a year?
13. Manda ayuda a Nicaragua?
Do you send help to Nicaragua?