

WANNA BUY A BASKET?: KEKCHI MAYA WOMEN AND CASH ECONOMY IN
SAN MIGUEL, BELIZE

A project by

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Master of Arts

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AND CASH ECONOMY IN SAN MIGUEL, BELIZE**

I have examined the final copy of this project for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Cultural Anthropology.

Dr. Robert Lawless, Committee Chair

We have read this project and recommend its acceptance

Dr. Clayton Robarchek, Committee Member

Dr. Jay Price, Committee Member

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my husband, children, grandchildren, parents, and other family members, the Department of Anthropology at Wichita State University and Cloud Community College and to the families and friends that assisted me in Belize, especially those in San Miguel.

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ABSTRACT

Global economy has had a tremendous effect on subsistence societies. A need for cash seems to touch people even in remote places. San Miguel is a poverty-stricken Kekchi Maya village in the Toledo District of southern Belize. The Kekchi Maya women of this village sell handcrafted items to supplement their household income. The cash income gained from craft sales may be improving the economic situation of many San Miguel households; however, not all households are showing economic improvement. The degree to which a woman can participate in selling handicrafts is dependent on her duties as a traditional wife and mother. These constraints might be one factor influencing economic success. Envy between those who have or have not is most likely a problem in the small village, and perceptions of an *Image of Limited Good* may enshroud the villagers. The problem under investigation pertains to the effect of craft sales on the household economy, when the constraints that control a traditional San Miguel Kekchi Maya woman are taken into consideration. Envy and a variety of constraints factor in, possibly perpetuate an *Image of Limited Good*, which probably influence the Kekchi women's economic success from handicraft sales.

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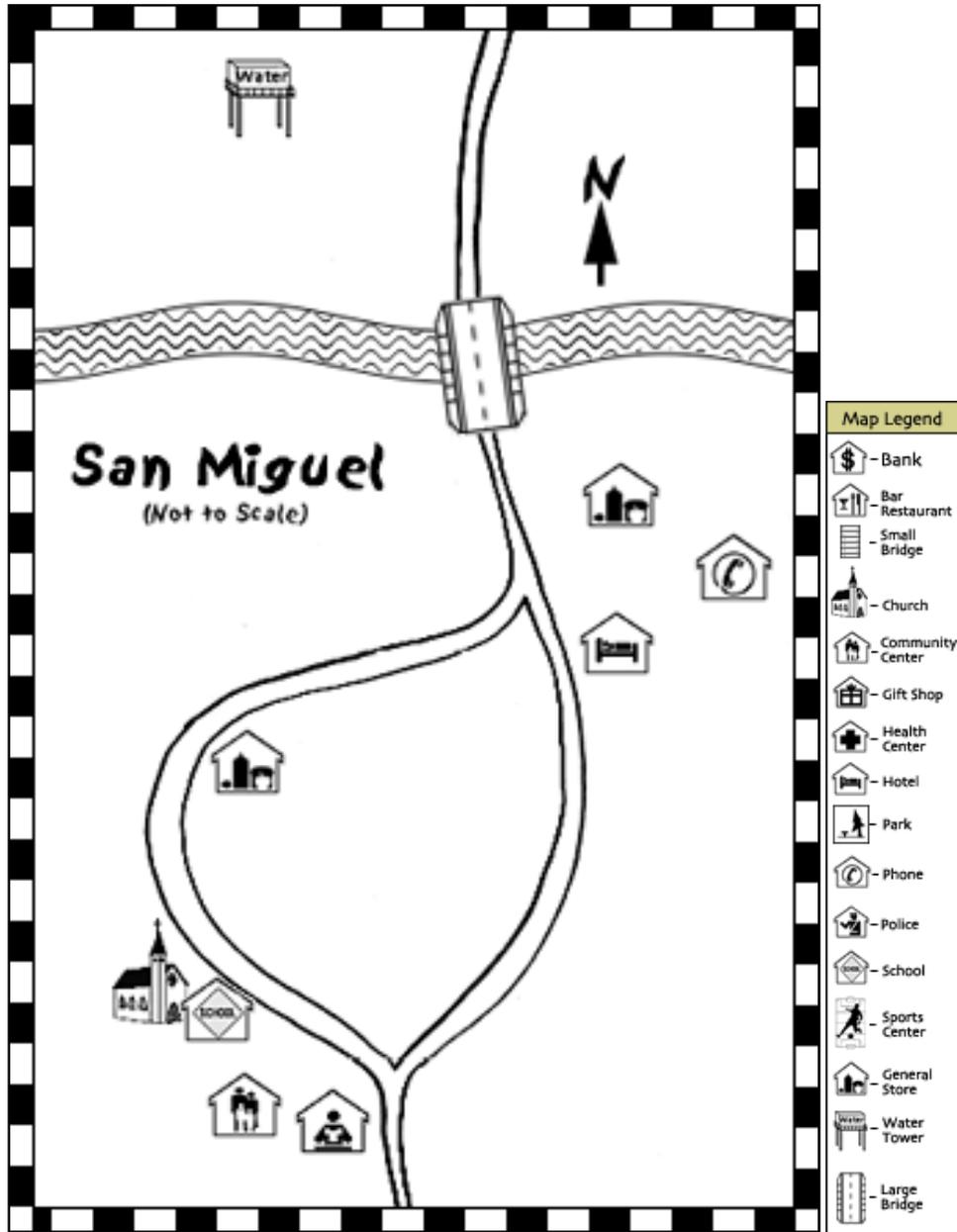
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www.travelbelize.org/map.html

Figure 1 Map of Belize showing the Toledo District



<http://www.southernbelize.com/tea.html>

Figure 2 San Miguel Village (The building designated, as a hotel is the T.E.A. guest house.)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

San Miguel is a poverty-stricken Kekchi Maya village in the Toledo District, the poorest district, of southern Belize. The Kekchi women of San Miguel Village seem to be initiating positive economic change in their households. The Kekchi Maya women of San Miguel sell handcrafted items to supplement their household income. The cash income gained from craft sales may be improving the economic situation of many San Miguel households.

However, not all households are showing economic improvement. The degree to which a woman can participate in selling handicrafts is dependent on her duties as a traditional wife and mother. These constraints might be one factor influencing economic success. Envy between those who have or have not is most likely a problem in the small village and perceptions of an *Image of Limited Good* may enshroud the villagers.

The problem under investigation pertains to the effect of craft sales on the household economy, when the constraints that control a traditional San Miguel Kekchi Maya woman are taken into consideration. Is the household economy in San Miguel gradually improving, and is the cash income brought in by the women selling handicrafts a contributing factor? Are the Kekchi women of this village helping to bring about positive economic change in their households?

Theoretical Background and Research Methods

George M. Foster's model, the *Image of Limited Good* (Foster 1988:123), may offer some insight into what is occurring in San Miguel Village. The major premise in Foster's, *Image of Limited Good* model is that behavior is patterned in such a way that a

society views desired things as existing in limited quantities (Foster 1988:123). “An individual or family can improve a position only at the expense of others,” (Foster in Potter; 1967:305). An improvement in position “is viewed as a threat to the entire community...any significant improvement is perceived, not as a threat to an individual or family alone, but a threat to *all* individuals and families” (Foster in Potter; 1967:305). Foster’s model seems appropriate for describing situations in San Miguel.

Most San Miguel Kekchi Maya women continue to fill traditional roles, which includes gathering water, bathing, and washing laundry at the Rio Grande River, cooking in their thatched roof kitchens on clay stoves, and making handicrafts. The women seem to make an effort not to stand out from each other, which may simply be an effort to reduce envy. The illusion of equilibrium in the village makes it difficult to determine which women are profiting from handicraft sales. However, the village members know which of the women of the village entertain tourists, sell crafts outside of the village and have received aid.

Some of the Kekchi families in the village seem to be subtly improving financially from handicrafts sales, while others show little change. In 1990, a Toledo Ecotourism Association Programme (T.E.A.) was organized in nine villages, including San Miguel, to help reduce poverty in the region. The program provides an opportunity for the participating local families to benefit from the tourism industry. The success of the T.E.A. program in San Miguel is not possible without participation from the Kekchi women. In 1997, the building of Southern Highway was approved and the Toledo District became more easily accessible, which helped the T.E.A. program and brought more potential customers to San Miguel.

Furthermore, some of the women of San Miguel take day trips to tourist areas, such as Placencia or Punta Gorda to sell their handcrafted items. It is common in these towns to hear the Maya women say, “Wanna buy a basket?” Cash income gained from handicraft sales supplements the household income, enables families to visit the health clinic, and pays for schooling, purchases soap, cloth, and more. In the past, only wealthier families could have educated children, afforded electricity, purchased food at the local grocery store; this may be changing because of the tourism industry.

Hurricane Iris hit San Miguel in 2001, causing great devastation. Assistance from governmental and non-governmental aid programs increased, and modern conveniences such as electricity, water pumps, cement block homes, radios, refrigerators and modern cooking stoves, became part of many households. Following Hurricane Iris, T.E.A. participants and some families received aid. Interviews conducted during past visits to San Miguel revealed that many of the people in the village think that the T.E.A. participants, the women selling crafts outside of the home, and the families that receive aid, have advantages that not everyone has. This may or may not be the case.

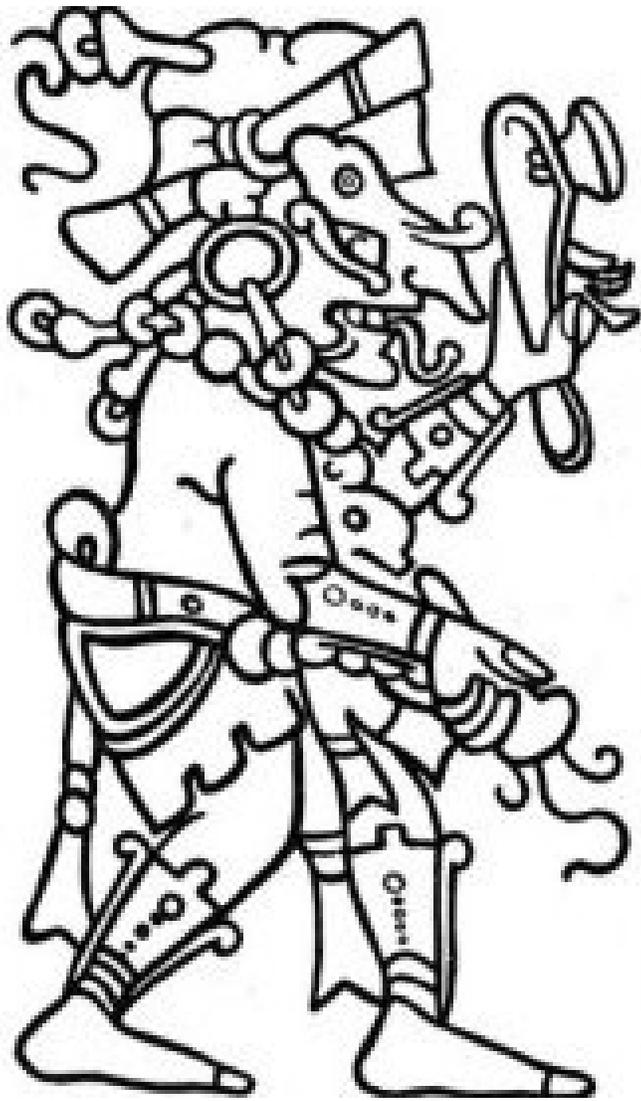
A variety of constraints dictates handicraft sales, how, when, and where crafts are sold, their quantity, quality, and economic success. Some women have large families and do not have the time to make or sell handicrafts. Other women may have a patriarchal husband who would not approve of his wife providing cash income for the household. Motherhood, the duties of one’s role as a wife, and household duties may monopolize a woman’s time. Some of the women may be more individually motivated to sell handicrafts than others. For many families in San Miguel, the cash income resulting from handicraft sales seems to have improved household economics at some level; for

others, excruciating poverty continues and this can be attributed to the variety of constraints.

In 2008, I made my third trip to San Miguel, Belize, staying for two months. I conducted semi-formal interviews by asking the Kekchi women a series of questions when I visited their homes. I conducted informal interviews during general conversation when I went down to the Rio Grande River with the women to bathe and wash laundry and dishes. Most women of San Miguel tended to make their craft items in family groups during the afternoon when I observed them. I accompanied some of the women on their day trips when they traveled to Placencia, Punta Gorda, and other villages to sell handicrafts. This provided an opportunity to interview Kekchi and Mopan Maya women from outside the village for a comparative point of view. In addition, I conducted library research here and combined the information.

Interviews and observations conducted in San Miguel Village, combined with library research provided enough information to formulate a conclusion. In subsequent chapters, I will discuss how the household economy in San Miguel is affected by women's handicraft sales. I will take into consideration some of the constraints that the Kekchi Maya women of San Miguel might be under producing and selling their crafts. I will address various questions pertaining to the problem under investigation. Do the families participating in the T.E.A. program earn larger profits from craft sales than others do? Do the women who leave the village to sell handicraft items have a higher profit level than those who stay home? Is the cash income gained from Kekchi Maya women craft sales slowly and steadily improving the economic situation of many of the San Miguel households? Are the Kekchi women helping bring about positive economic

change in their village? Envy and a variety of constraints factor in, possibly perpetuate an *Image of Limited Good*, and probably influence the Kekchi women's economic success from craft sales.



<http://atheism.about.com/od/mayangodsgoddesses/p/ChacMayanRain.html>

Figure 3 Chac

CHAPTER TWO

THE RESILIENT AND FLEXIBLE MAYA

Ancient Mayan religion slowly converted into Christianity during the sixteenth century after the Spanish arrived in Mesoamerica. Beliefs in simple gods of nature, the Chacs, and rain gods of fertility survived despite the introduction of Christianity (Brainerd 1963:186). In the codices, Chac, the God of Rain, is seen with curled fangs, a headdress with a knotted band; his name glyph has a T-shape, which may represent tears streaming from the eye, a symbol of pouring rain and fertility (Brainerd 1963:196). Chac was the most important universal deity. He was regarded not only as a single god but also as four gods, one for each of the cardinal points (Brainerd 1963:196). “The common man, whose toil made possible the whole complicated governmental, social, and religious structure, turned most frequently to Chac, the rain god, since by Chac’s good will he lived, and by Chac’s wrath he was undone” (Brainerd 1963:226). Ancient Mayan people sought Chac’s intervention more often than all the other Maya gods did (Brainerd 1963:197).

Fertility, large families, and a successful crop resulting from pouring rain are still important to the Maya people today. The ancient Maya lived by the god Chac’s good will or wrath. With Chac’s good will they prospered, and with his wrath constraints abounded, and the people suffered. Today, the Maya may or may not believe in Chac, his good will or wrath, but they do conceptualize a hostile world where they struggle to survive.

The Ancient Maya and the Maya of Southern Belize

The Maya have a history filled with economical hardship, distress, and infinite challenges. However, the Maya are resilient and flexible people. “The Kekchi have, in

fact, endured cultural disruptions, drastic economic changes, religious proselytizing, political domination, forced migration, and loss of basic economic resources repeatedly and continually for over 400 years!” (Netting 1984: xxvii). The earliest evidence of constraint shows in archaeological record in southern Belize at the Mayan sites Lubaantun, Uxbenka, and Nim Li Punit. The ruling class conducted their business at the center, and the peasants lived out in the periphery. Sacrificial evidence is present; ball games were played that resulted in death for the losing opponent; dentistry was practiced, and there was a working class.

When the Spanish arrived in the area during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Chol-speaking Maya presumably occupied the area. In 1689, a Spanish military expedition began forcibly removing the Maya, and by 1695, the southern region of Belize became unoccupied (Howard 1975:1-2).

In the early nineteenth century, reoccupation of the Toledo District and adjacent areas of Belize began. Political and economic changes were occurring in Guatemala during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, which attracted many of the Maya back into the southern Belize area. Many Maya left Guatemala and came to Belize to work as laborers at a German-owned plantation. After the plantation was abandoned around 1914, many of the Maya stayed in the area, reverting to subsistence agriculture (Howard 1975:1-2; Wilk in Netting 1984:220).

There was further political and economic unrest in Guatemala during the twentieth century. A second exodus brought a smaller number of additional Maya into the area (Howard 1975:1-2). Since moving back to Belize, the Maya have predominantly lived in isolation. In the 1950s, efforts were made by the government to reduce the

isolation of the Indian communities of the Toledo District. The physical, social, and cultural isolation of the Maya continues to vary today (Howard 1975:1-2). Currently, most Maya villages have electricity available, and some households can afford to use it. Most villages have a community bus that comes to their village three or more days a week.

Richard R. Wilk discusses how there have been many times when the Maya have been faced with two choices, oppression or flight. Historically, many of the Maya chose to flee. They continually moved to a new location in search of an “ideal combination of access to land, freedom from oppression, and access to markets, roads, schools, and other amenities” (Wilk 1997:73). They seek better living conditions for their families. Wilk also says (1997:73), “Although the Kekchi in Toledo District appear to be forest Indians emerging from primeval economy into a developed one, they are actually survivors of an exodus, emerging from the waters into what they hope is a promised land.” The Kekchi have never lived completely outside of some type of market economy and they have always had difficulties trying to find a balance between subsistence needs and wage labor (Wilk 1997:73). Wilk says (1997:73),

The basic dilemma, however, is the contradiction between using labor to produce subsistence crops and selling labor or the products of labor. The ways in which this dilemma has been solved or accommodated have varied widely through time, including petty trade, tenant farming, small-scale cash crop production, complex combinations of waged work and subsistence farming, large-scale cash crop production, community and household redistribution of cash in exchange for subsistence products and so forth. The kinds of strategies adopted are a product of the local ecological situation (e.g., human-to-land ratios, potential for agricultural intensification, seasonality of production) and the fluctuating forces of the colonial and then capitalist economies (e.g., prices of commodities, wage rates, market monopolies).

Numerous and diverse strategies have been tried in the past and are still tried today by the

Kekchi in an effort to find a balance between subsistence needs and the need for cash. The only real constant in the Kekchi settlement pattern has been flexibility (Wilk 1997:73). In fact at one point in time, “Early documents say the Kekchi used intensive fixed-plot horticulture or infield-outfield mixed systems...rather than slash and burn” (Netting 1984:xxvii). Furthermore, “Classic Maya agriculturalists do not demonstrate the gendered division of labor characteristic of the present, where men are responsible for the *milpa* and women are responsible for the home” (Ardren 2002:409). Documentation shows that the Kekchi people did not always live the way they do today. The Kekchi have not been afraid to try new strategies, and they have changed their agriculture system and more in an effort to meet their needs. Tradition has allowed the Kekchi people to be resilient in their plight for survival.

Traditional crop planting has played a role in Maya survival and economics. Crops that are considered sacred serve as a buffer to reduce the impact of fluctuating market cycles. “Kekchi culture and values lead the Kekchi farmer to respond to fluctuations in the market differently than” other cultural groups in the region, such as the Garifuna or Kriol peoples (Wilk 1997:141). “Tradition becomes a pervasive tool for survival that ensures its own reproduction in the context of peripheral capitalism” (Wilk 1997:141). When a Maya farmer raises his standards of consumption it is because he is bringing in a higher income because he grew and sold a lucrative crop. The Kekchi people prosper when the market is good and prosperity reflects in the household economy. When the market changes and the farmer’s income begins to dwindle, he returns to tradition (Wilk 1997:141). The Kekchi revert to conducting daily affairs to the way they did prior to the market setback. Sometimes the Kekchi are caught in a setback,

such as when the banana boom ended in the 1930s, which caused some financial hardship. However, the Kekchi usually do not over-commit to selling one particular main crop, and because they do not commit to one crop, they are not devastated by market setbacks. For example, many other farmers in Belize were financially ruined in the mid-1980s, when the government eradicated cash crop marijuana fields, but not the Kekchi. “The sacred nature of corn production and the weight of tradition kept them partially out of this trap” (Wilk 1997:140-141). The Kekchi plant a diverse variety of crops, such as annatto, cacao, corn, beans, rice, and more, for subsistence and as cash crops. Like their ancestors, the resilient Kekchi plant diverse crops, and their tradition and ability to be flexible ensure survival.

The Birth of San Miguel Village

Most of the villagers living in San Miguel are Kekchi Maya. “The Kekchi are a Mayan-speaking people who were confined to the broken upland region of Alta Verapaz in Guatemala from prehistoric times to the nineteenth century” (Wilk in Netting 1984:218). They moved to Belize during the nineteenth century Maya exodus. Rather than face oppression, they took flight.

During the mid-twentieth century, another big shift occurred among the Kekchi Maya population of Belize. Economic crisis and difficulties with transporting cash crops to market led many Kekchi Maya from isolated villages to a new location (Wilk 1997:69). As in the nineteenth century, rather than face hardship, they took flight again. By 1951, “All but three households left Santa Theresa to start San Miguel...Laguna was founded by migrants from San Miguel in 1958...Big Falls was established in 1962 by people from Laguna, then came Silver Creek about 1968, Indian Creek in 1972, and

Golden Stream in 1974” (Wilk 1997:70). Ten new Kekchi villages were established from 1960 to 1990 and the population grew by 246% (Emch 2003:118). The facts make it appear that San Miguel was born overnight and expanded outward to establish another village rather quickly, which in turn spurred a spectacular growth rate causing the birth of numerous Kekchi villages in a short frame of time.

If you ask a Kekchi Maya from San Miguel, how and when their relatives established San Miguel, many will tell you that the establishment of their village did not happen quickly. One informant shared a folk model of the birth of San Miguel. She said, “In 1918 some people came from Guatemala to Santa Theresa. At that time, Guatemalan soldiers were taking 16-18 year old men against their will and many young people ran away from Guatemala to save their own lives. Different groups of people came to the area at different times. Pedro Cus and Nicholas Shol founded San Miguel Village and they were the first people to settle here, early on. They were farmers, this was a big forest, and no one was here. They cut out trees and planted crops. They built houses. They picked this area because of the Rio Grande River. They were here by themselves for a long time. Then, a couple of families at a time, other people began to come to the area from Santa Theresa. Some of the people were Mopan and some were Kekchi. Some were family and some were friends. Then, there were enough people here that San Miguel became a village.” This informant felt that political unrest and a desire for specific environmental conditions led to the birth of San Miguel. It seems reasonable to assume that migrants began settling in the area much earlier than the late 1950s. A group of people with similar goals and a shared view of the world would probably start settling in a particular area, and when their population became large, they would establish a village.

Concerning the birth of San Miguel another informant said, “San Miguel became a village sometime in the 1940s to 1950s. The school was built in 1952. Other people were already here the previous five or six years beforehand. The founder of San Miguel was Francisco Shol. He was a priest and in the 1950s an education officer. The local people view Catholicism and Christianity in a different light. Shol gave up Catholicism to become a Christian, which caused him to lose his relationship with the Catholic priests. Most of the original founding families of San Miguel passed away in the 1980s to 1990s. Most came from Santa Theresa. We are a full Kekchi community. The families came from Guatemala before they moved to Santa Theresa. They kept on looking at the rivers until they found one that they liked and finally settled and founded San Miguel. Through all the moves, they carried a statue they had brought from Guatemala. Before they got here, they said they would name their village San Miguel after the saint. The statue they carried was a statue of San Miguel. They said they would name their church St. Michael and they did. The statue still sits in Saint Michael’s Catholic Church. The Nazarene Church has been here around three years. The House of Prayer has been here for thirty-three years. Our family goes to this church because more of our prayers are answered. San Miguel has a total of three churches.” It is this particular informant opinion that environment preferences and religious motivation is the reason for the Maya exodus into Belize and the reason why the Kekchi founders decided to establish San Miguel.

The informants state that political unrest, a desire for specific environmental conditions, and religious motivation led to the birth of San Miguel. None of the informants discussed economics as a motivating force for the establishment of the village of San Miguel in their folk models. However, the sixteenth century Spanish invasion,

religious conversion, political turmoil, persecution, economic challenges, and pattern of constant flight are part of the factual factors that led to their settlement next to the Rio Grande River in southern Belize. Why did these resilient and flexible people adopt an *Image of Limited Good*? To gain insight into this question, an overview of George M. Foster's model the *Image of Limited Good* is helpful.

A Kekchi woman “visiting” through the window of a house.



At center is an 18 month old uncle and his nephews are at his sides. San Miguel Village is a patriarchal society.



Plate 1

Photographs taken in San Miguel Village

CHAPTER THREE

LONG-HAIRED MAN WITH A MACHETE

Late January 2008, the Kekchi women of San Miguel became alarmed and found it necessary to go down to the river in large groups. It became extremely important to not wander around the village or go to the river alone. There was a long-haired man with a machete down at the river and he was watching the women from the bush. The bush as they call it lines both sides of the river. The women go to their favorite wash place by following a narrow cleared path that cuts through the bush. The women were not sure if the long-haired man with the machete would begin slipping into the village any time soon and how would they know if he did. He rarely made a sound. When at the river, the women found it necessary to concentrate on watching for small signs of vegetation movement in the bush. They listened to the birds and watched wild animals for any signs of disruption. The women discussed how the dogs would surely show alarm if the long-haired man with the machete wandered into the village. They would ask each other questions, such as, who is he, where did he come from and what does this long-haired man with a machete want?

The Kekchi women in the village follow a routine while they are at the river. First, they put highly-stained clothing in a plastic, five-gallon bucket to soak. Second, they wash the dishes. Third, they wash the family's clothes. After all the washing is finished, then, the women remove the clothes they are wearing, except for their underskirt, for washing. Finally, they bathe their children and then their selves. The women would catch sight of the long-haired man with the machete watching them as they bathed. It was quite alarming to them. The Kekchi women are never without an

underskirt; they wear an underskirt at all times; this is a part of their tradition. The Kekchi men always bathe in their shorts or briefs. After the women tolerated the leering glances of the long-haired man with the machete for about two weeks, things suddenly changed. The long-haired man with the machete became brave. He came out of the bush, walked towards them, and the women saw he was naked. A proper Kekchi man never allows his hair to grow long and he certainly is never seen without his pants on. The Kekchi women said, this man is different, frightening, he does not belong, and he is not Kekchi. The women ran away from the river. They talked amongst themselves and asked who is he, where did he come from and what does he want? They decided that perhaps this matter should be addressed by the local alcalde, and he could round up the men. The village men could flush the stranger out of the bush and put an end to the fear that the long-haired man with the machete was causing.

To answer the questions, who is he, where did he come from and what does this long-haired man with a machete want, required some speculation on the women's part. The women commented that long ago it used to be that wild men such as this man would wander out of the bush from time to time. Perhaps the women were speaking about an ancient Chichimeca, an individual from a tribe of ancient peoples that were considered semi-barbaric. The Chichimeca lived in north-central Mesoamerica, predominantly in the Mexico region, long ago (Coe 2002:151). Accounts of Chichimeca appear in early chronicles and records. Michael D. Coe says, "In the account recorded by Father Sahagún, the truly nomadic, "wild" people were called "Teochichimeca," the "real" Chichimeca, who lived in caves and clothed themselves in animal skins and yucca-fiber sandals, subsisting on wild fruits, roots, and seeds, and on the meat of humble animals

like the rabbit” (Coe 2002:151). Bands of Chichimeca lived during the Archaic period, had descendants invaded by the Spanish during the sixteenth century invasion, and probably have descendants who survived and are alive today. Most likely, it was not a Chichimeca watching the women at the river. The women speculated that since much of the land is farmed today that it would be rare to see a real wild bush man. Furthermore, one of the Kekchi men would have noticed a wild man if he were to walk past the farms. The women decided that the wild man could not have come from any other direction than the river. They retorted that he must have come up the river from San Pedro Columbia Village (Columbia) or from further down river. The women did not hear anything about a wild man from any of their relatives up the river, but family members in Columbia had seen a wild looking man a few weeks earlier. Finally, the women of San Miguel concluded that the long-haired man with the machete was one of the drug addicts from the city that they hear about when they go to Punta Gorda Town (PG).

Did the long-haired man with the machete really exist? Wild men from the bush, or Chichimeca, have existed in Maya folk models for over seven-hundred years. Perhaps the wild man can be symbolic of the eminent danger of an invader of a larger dominant culture. A dominant culture could invade, threaten tradition and put an end to the sense of stability and safety that the local Maya preserve. An invader could change things and possibly make conditions worse. The ancient Maya people were invaded and forced out of Belize by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, and political unrest along with laborer positions opening up in southern Belize, led the Maya back into the region in the nineteenth century. A more positive economical future and other ideals led to the establishment of San Miguel. The focus of the next section is on peasant societies, how

they conceptualize the world, and an overview of the model the *Image of Limited Good* will follow.

Peasant Societies in a Changing World

It is a common belief around the world that peasants are agricultural people who share a cultural tradition, that they are impoverished, and farmers that are dependent on non-mechanized agriculture for stability, security and survival. The Mayan peasants of southern Belize are usually milpa farmers, producing corn, beans, rice and other vegetables and fruits for subsistence and as cash crops. Villagers in San Miguel refer to the rainforest or jungle covered Maya Mountains, where the farmers plant their crops, as the bush. A variety of crops such as corn, beans, cacao, annatto, fruit trees and more are planted in a small compact area, normally on the slope of a mountain. Richard R. Wilk (1997:79) says,

Differences in the forest cover are important because they are clues to how the local environment will respond to cultivation. This in turn constrains Kekchi agriculture techniques and settlement. Researchers of shifting cultivation have tended to see it as essentially independent of local soil, topography, and drainage characteristics...nearly all the nutrients in the tropical forest are tied up in the vegetation.

The soil lacks nutrients and the local farmers interplant what they call *wakona beans* between the corn plants in an effort to add nutrients into the soil. The *wakona beans* are not edible and are planted specifically for their fertilizing properties. Any surplus crops are sold at market or are sold by contract to a group or individual that the San Miguel villagers refer to as the buyers for cash income.

Crops such as cacao are usually sold through the Toledo Cacao Growers Association (TCGA) in Punta Gorda Town. The TCGA is a cooperative that was formed

in 1997 and it is Fair Trade Certified by the Fair Trade Labeling Organization (Fair 2008:1). The cacao cooperative members use organic compost to nourish the soil (Fair 2008:1). In the 1980s, cacao farming began, which introduced a new farming system that was “subject to forces at local, regional, and international scales” (Emch 2003:112). Michael Emch describes the expansion of cacao farming, why it took place, and says that it “involves the interaction of several forces including population growth, the Belizean land acquisition and tenure system, a new market for Cacao beans, and international development projects” (Emch 2003:112). Population density led to land shortages and land use increase. There was confusion and disputes over land ownership, which eventually led to the Maya gaining rights to national land (Emch 2003:121). Markets for the cacao opened up, beginning with the Hershey Corporation (Emch 2003:112). The San Miguel villagers state that cacao is their most profitable cash crop today.

George M. Foster states that even though agriculture is a part of peasantry, what the peasants produce is not as important as how they produce and how they dispose of what they produce, that is of consequence (Foster 1979:7). The farmers of San Miguel are producing crops for consumption and crops for cash in an extremely competitive regional and global market. They grow their own food to meet subsistence needs; however, they are dependent on cultures that are more powerful. They are highly affected by global economics for cash income.

Peasant communities remain a problem today not because they are ignored by their governments and not because other peoples are not concerned, but because of a combination of factors that relate to change and isolation (Foster 1979:5). Foster comments that “the problem is that change does not come rapidly enough to narrow the

gap between town and country, to meet the rising aspirations of people who are still, in spite of everything, psychologically separated from the modern world that they are a part of” (Foster 1979:5). Peasants tend to be isolated from larger cultures that are more dominant. Slowly, over a long time, a peasant tends to incorporate and imitate the customs and behaviors of the wider society, but since they do not always have a clear comprehension of those societies, urban-inspired elements are misunderstood and become oversimplified by the peasant. Because the process of adopting new urban-inspired elements is slow, by the time they are incorporated into the village, urban life has progressed, and the peasant continues to remain behind the times. As a result, the peasant communities habitually reflect city forms of earlier generations and centuries (Foster 1979:5).

Foster stresses that peasants do not make major decisions, or command; they obey; they are passive acceptors, and they lack the power and knowledge to be any other way (Foster1979:8). Foster continues his discussion on peasants and says (1979:10),

Peasants have not understood, and they do not understand, the rules of the game of living that prevails in cities, to which they are bound, and for this ignorance, they are at the mercy of personal and impersonal urban controls. They lack the ability to understand how the greater world works, are unable to take direct action against these forces, and have had to be content with their local rules, their culture, which provides them with a stability that protects them from a world that they cannot understand and see as hostile and threatening.

For example, the Kekchi women in San Miguel do not have a clear understanding of drug addiction, yet, they decided that the long-haired man with the machete was a drug addict from the city. Although they have heard about addiction, they do not comprehend the physical and emotional qualities that go along with the affliction. The Kekchi women of San Miguel express that using tobacco, alcohol, or a drug is always a choice. To the

women in San Miguel, the long-haired man with the machete was a threat, not because he was an addict, but because he was unpredictable; they thought that he was probably crazy. The topic of addiction will be discussed further in chapter five.

Most peasant communities subsist at the poverty level. “Poverty is a harsh fact of peasant life...they must struggle desperately for their small share of the economic and other good that is available in their villages. They are economically and socially and culturally deprived peoples” (Foster in Potter 1967:297). They are a smaller society that must compete with larger, dominant cultures and survive in a big world.

An Introduction to the Image of Limited Good Model

George M. Foster presented the *Image of Limited Good* model during the mid-1960s and the model continues to be useful today. Foster discusses the importance of theoretical models that are testable. A good model is not descriptive; it is explanatory, heuristic, and has predictive value (Foster 1965:294). Although Foster’s model was conceived in the mid-1960s, it continues to be a good model today because it continues to allow explanation, is heuristic, and has predictive value four decades later.

Foster believes there to be characteristic behavior and a dominant theme in the cognitive orientation of peasant societies. Foster says, “the members of every society share a common cognitive orientation which is, in effect and un verbalized, implicit expression of their understanding of the “rules of the game” of living imposed upon them by their social, natural, and supernatural universes” (Foster 1965:293). This common cognitive orientation provides the members of the society with basic premises and sets of assumptions that are not recognized or questioned, and they structure and guide behavior (Foster 1965:293). Foster’s model is a conceptual tool, and he explains his model as

follows (1965:296):

By “Image of Limited Good” I mean that broad areas of peasant behavior are patterned in such a fashion as to suggest that peasants view their social, economic, and natural universes – their total environment – as one in which all desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honor, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, *exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply...there is no way directly within the peasants power to increase the available quantities...An individual or family can improve a position only at the expense of others.*

Everything an individual or community may want or need is only available in limited quantities.

Foster divides his model into a closed system and an open system. In a closed system, a peasant sees his existence as determined and limited by the social and natural resources in his immediate area (Foster in Potter 1967:305). The closed aspect applies to the local level where individuals and families live. It is the peasants’ own society. There is a sense of solidarity; the people live together under similar circumstances, and they conduct business with each other. Oftentimes they are in the closed system because of economic or social hardships, and they are often exploited or dominated by a larger culture. Concerning economics Foster says, “An image of a static economy is the subprinciple of the model” (Foster 1988:126). If the system is closed and good is limited, a peasant can only improve his position at the expense of others (Foster 1967:305). “Someone’s advantage implies someone else’s disadvantage seems to me to be the key to understanding the image of limited good” (Foster 1988:124). In the closed peasant society, good exists in finite quantities and one person’s success is another person’s loss (Foster 1988:124). If one person in the community improves, he becomes a threat to all individuals and families in the community (Foster 1988:124). An individual who falls

behind the rest of the community is also a threat, because he will become envious of those he perceives as getting ahead. Foster stresses that no society actually exists within a totally closed system (Foster in Potter 1967:315). In an open system, peasants do recognize that success can be achieved outside of their village or immediate area (Foster in Potter 1967:315). There is always some kind of interaction occurring between peasant villagers and a more dominant culture. The open system deals with life outside the village. Peasants usually conduct some economical business outside of their own community at varying levels.

Foster offered four headings--economic behavior, friendship, health, and manliness and honor, to explain the closed system of his model. He concluded that peasant societies are not usually economically productive (Foster in Potter 1967:305). A peasant does not see a relationship between work and production techniques leading towards gaining wealth (Foster in Potter 1967:306-307). Wealth like land is limited, "One works to eat, but not to create wealth" (Foster in Potter 1967:307). Friendship and health are also limited. A peasant may hoard a visitor's time, which in turn alienates others around him who are left feeling deprived (Foster in Potter 1967:307). Peasants do not usually build trust relationships with others. Some of the villagers can afford modern medicine and others cannot. Folk medicine does not provide the same protection as modern, scientific medicine (Foster in Potter 1967:309). Lack of sanitation, good hygiene, and in some cases immunization aggravates the situation (Foster in Potter 1967:309). Masculinity controls the domestic arena, the household and economic decisions, and in some instances makes it okay to abuse a woman (Foster 1967:309). A woman must perform her household duties, never be lazy, and never seek a relationship

outside of the marriage. In a peasant society, a good man is “a man who works to feed and clothe his family, who fulfills his community ceremonial obligations, who minds his own business and who does not try to take advantage of others, who does not seek to be outstanding, but who knows how to protect his rights” (Foster 1988:142). He “must also avoid the appearance of presumption, lest this be interpreted as trying to take something that belongs to another” (Foster 1988:142). He is fair, strong, tough, but not a bully and he inspires respect (Foster in Potter 1967:310).

To account for behavior as a function of the model, Foster discusses how good and desired things are limited, that personal gain is only achieved at the expense of others, then “we must assume that social institutions, personal behavior, values, and personality will all display patterns that can be viewed as functions of the cognitive orientation” (Foster in Potter 1967:310). A peasant must maximize security by preserving a relative position in the “traditional order of things” and if threatened will react in one of two ways (Foster in Potter 1967:310). He or she might react with maximum cooperation, sometimes communism or bury individual differences (Foster in Potter 1967:311). Action is seen as a potential threat. Economical activities in peasant societies require limited cooperation, and there is some level of independence. The real power lies outside the village. Peasant societies usually avoid leadership roles. More often than not, the peasant society will take the second route and react by placing sanctions against individualism or extreme individualism (Foster in Potter 1967:311). Peasants are usually individualist (Foster in Potter 1967:311). Peasants are reluctant to reveal their true strength or position, which “encourages suspicion and mutual distrust” because things may not necessarily be the way they appear. For example, one family may appear to be poverty-stricken when in

actuality they have a savings account at a bank. A male self image as a strong, tough, valiant individual that commands respect is encouraged and this makes him “less attractive as a target than a weakling” (Foster in Potter 1967:311). Mutual distrust is widespread.

Concerning the notion that one man can gain only at the expense of another, Foster reasons that a peasant society generally has two mechanisms to maintain stability. The two mechanisms pertain to those people who get ahead and those people who fall behind and the mechanisms are “agreed-upon, socially acceptable, preferred norm of behavior” with “sanctions and rewards” (Foster in Potter 1967:311-312). If one person in the community improves, he becomes a threat to all individuals and families in the community (Foster 1988:124). They have violated norms, caused others to fall behind or lose, and this stimulates cultural mechanisms to reduce imbalance (Foster 1967:312). They no longer appear to be the same as everyone else in the village. An individual who falls behind the rest of the community is also a threat because they have created a different kind of imbalance. Their “envy, jealousy, or anger may result in overt or hidden aggression toward more fortunate people” (Foster in Potter 1967:312). Because they have fallen behind, they become a threat to others in the community. Self-correcting mechanisms are in place to restore equilibrium.

Foster expands and goes on to say that the two self-correcting mechanisms that protect community balance operate on three levels, the individual and family behavior level, the informal and usually unorganized group behavior level, and an institutionalized behavior level (Foster in Potter 1967:312). On the individual level, it is important to not show evidence of material improvement, conceal any evidence, neutralize any envy

through ritual expenditure, avoid leadership and never fall behind or lose relative position (Foster 1967:312). On the informal level of the self-correcting mechanism, it is paramount to strive for moderation and equality in behavior, and if you stand out know that there will be negative sanctions such as backbiting or character assassination, and sometimes physical aggression or accusations of witchcraft (Foster in Potter 1967:314). “It was said that when good things happen to a villager, the other villagers express their envy in gossip, criticism, and calumny...villagers described their life together as an uneasy one, with each family feeling competitive and jealous toward any other that might achieve success or happiness” (Foster in Potter 1967:297). On the institutionalized behavior level, “A person who improves his position is encouraged – to restore balance through conspicuous consumption in the form of ritual extravagance” (Foster in Potter 1967:315). This person is rewarded with prestige when they restore balance (Foster in Potter 1967:315). The institutional behavior level is a redistribution mechanism that equalizes wealth and inhibits class distinction (Foster 1967:315).

When conducting economical business outside the village, in the open system, peasants must still explain their success, although their success may not necessarily be a direct threat to villagers and may not inspire envy (Foster in Potter 1967:315). Seasonal migration for work, migrating to the United States on a work visa, or working in the country on a shrimp or fruit farm, or tourism industry jobs are all positions that allow a peasant to account for economic success.

Foster says that peasant cognitive orientation and the resulting behavior has an impact on economic growth of developing countries. Heavy ritual expenditures bring about equilibrium in the village, but they prevent capital accumulation, which is seen as a

threat to the peasants and not as “a precondition to economic improvement” (Foster in Potter 1967:317).

Peasant Economy

Historically, other cultural groups have dominated peasant societies. Peasant societies are powerless economically, because members of other classes make the decisions beyond their local boundaries (Foster 1979:8). Foster describes the economic position of peasant societies when he says a peasant society (Foster 1979:7-8),

represents the rural expression of national, class-structure, economically complex preindustrial civilizations, in which craft specialization as well as agricultural production stimulate trade and commerce, and in which market disposition is the goal behind a significant part of the producer’s efforts...the peasant is essentially powerless in large areas of life, because the basic decisions affecting villagers are made by members of other classes...major control is exercised from national or provincial centers. Economically, peasants are dependent on forces that operate well beyond their local boundaries...peasants obey; they do not command...They are at the end of the lines of communication and authority that radiate from cities. Before injustice, the arbitrary, and the incomprehensible they must be passive acceptors, for they lack the power and knowledge to be otherwise.

Cognitively, a peasant’s existence is seen “as determined and limited by the natural and social resources of his village and immediate area” (Foster in Potter 1967:304-305). A peasant’s economic system is circumscribed by the social values of his community, by his economic resources, his limited control over production, and more (Diaz in Potter 1967:54). Peasant societies are economically and politically disadvantaged, are without sufficient capital, and they have no illusions about their position (Diaz in Potter 1967:56).

In the closed system, unconformity is seen as a threat to the cohesion of the whole, and an individual must maintain relationships with fellow villagers, so he must play economic games according to the local rules (Diaz in Potter 1967:50). One individual might think that another person took more than his fair share. “Conspicuous

consumption arouses envy, as it does the modern communities, but rather than awakening increased competition in order to surpass the Joneses, it calls up negative sanctions – distrust, gossip, ostracism, and witchcraft” (Diaz in Potter 1967:54).

The peasant is dependent on family and friends for assistance. Work groups are organized through dyadic contract. Diaz says, “The dyadic contract – fictive-kin, friend, and neighborhood ties – is established and reinforced with gift-giving and the exchange of favors and services, thus increasing the flow and magnitude of the local economy just as Christmas gift-giving spurs on distribution in the United States” (Diaz in Potter 1967:53). Diversification increases with gift-giving in a peasant community. For example, fruits can be traded for eggs; “the total inventory of goods and services available to any family is increased” (Diaz in Potter 1967:53). Reciprocal gift-giving allows an individual some discretion with the choice of resource he might use; for example, labor can be exchanged for a material good (Diaz in Potter 1967:53).

In the open system, to gain cash income the peasants must become active outside of his locale in the larger society. Diaz says, “He is tied into a system of distribution and taxation in which his goods and services become part of a regional and national network of economic exchanges” (Diaz in Potter 1967:51). When a peasant is conducting business outside of his locale, he does not have his friends or relatives to depend on. The insecurity created by the situation could lead the peasant to set up a fictive-kin relationship with a town merchant (Diaz in Potter 1967:55). “Whether or not a Kekchi family owns imported goods – be they traditional cloth, or modern wristwatches – depends on how much money the family has to spend, not on how traditional or modern the household is” (Wilk 1997:xxviii). Cash crops compete for land with subsistence

crops. Where the Kekchi excel in planting varieties of crops, they are limited by land shortages. Land is a major constraint and a worry to some Maya farmers (Wilk 1997:172). Land shortages have been increasing as the population rises. Some households have a difficult time meeting their subsistence needs and producing crops for market too. This is increasing the need for heads of households to seek wage labor positions outside of the village (Wilk in Netting 1984:238). Richard R. Wilk argues that Kekchi households adapt to local economic and ecological situations and not to global (Wilk 1997:9). This may have been true in 1997; however, the Kekchi are highly affected by global economics today. For example, ever increasing gas prices result in increased bus fare for the peasants in Belize. If the people cannot afford to ride the bus to Punta Gorda, they cannot conduct business for cash income at the market. They cannot ride the bus to other regions for labor positions because transportation costs get too expensive. Belize imports many necessities, such as canned goods and flour, and when these items rise in value in the global market, it has an effect on the local economy. The peasants of San Miguel are economically affected by their local, regional, national, and global economy like many other peasant societies.

The *Image of Limited Good* model, open and closed systems, economics, and more will be expanded on further in the following three chapters with a focus on the Kekchi Maya women of San Miguel.

4 and 9 year old little mothers and the children in their care in San Miguel Village



9 and 12 year old little mothers and the children in their care in San Miguel Village.



Plate 2 Little Mothers in San Miguel Village

CHAPTER FOUR

LITTLE MOTHERS: GROWING UP KEKCHI

During Early, Middle, and Late Classic times in Mesoamerica, the ancient Maya elite traveled on raised white roads or causeways made from limestone slabs called *sacbeob* (Coe 2002:133). Today, the village roads are white limestone gravel; they are not raised, and they are traveled by anyone. The sparse remaining *sacbeob* of Mesoamerica have become archaeological remains of ancient Maya history. Although many changes have occurred over the past hundreds and thousands of years, many Kekchi Maya cultural practices remain similar today. In the evening, right after the sun sets, Kekchi Maya women can be seen standing to the side of the white gravel roads swaying back and forth, with a *lepop* or tumpline, attached to the top of their head, rocking their babies or younger siblings to sleep. One thing that has remained the same throughout time is that Kekchi Maya girls become adult women quickly at an early age.

An Overview of the Life of a San Miguel Kekchi Woman

In ancient times, the Maya people were peasants, ruled by emperors that they believed were man-gods, half man and half god. Today, the Maya people of southern Belize live in a democratic nation. Each village has an administrator called an *alcalde*. His duties include judicial and administrative functions; however, the people conduct their daily lives much the same way as their ancestors did. The Kekchi people of San Miguel continue to live like peasants today. George Foster discusses peasant communities in his book, *Tzintzuntzan: Mexican Peasants in a Changing World*, saying (1988:3):

It is a paradox of our century that, at a time when some men confidently reach

through outer space, others live in small, isolated communities where the way of life is only now beginning to change from that of Christ. For half the world's people are peasant villagers who eke out a bare subsistence from exhausted soils, uneconomic handicrafts, or from fishing or tending scrub cattle. Envious of the more fortunate peoples they see and hear about, they are nonetheless bound up in a cocoon of custom where the traditions and values of earlier generations still are seen as the safest guideposts in life.

Foster provides an accurate description of San Miguel Village. He was describing a peasant society in the twentieth century, and conditions remain similar today in the twenty-first century. Survival of the family is dependent on each individual in a household making a contribution of some type; even the young girls must help.

While conducting fieldwork in San Miguel, I observed four-year-old girls doing a tremendous amount of household labor. The young girls were extremely responsible for their young age, and it seems as though learning responsibility at a young age could have an effect on how an adult woman handles household economics in her adult life. Because of this observation, while I conducted semi-formal interviews in the homes and at the river, I extended my line of questions beyond those dealing with the cash income gained through tourism to include questions about responsibility and young Maya women. Most of the following paragraphs in this section contain information gathered during the interviews. I will be using the terminology "little mothers," when referring to the responsible young women of San Miguel; this is my phrase; the Kekchi women never used the terminology "little mothers."

Kekchi girls become young women and little mothers long before they marry. Parents begin teaching their children to be responsible at an early age. All the female informants said that when a Kekchi girl is about four-years-old, she begins her duties as a little mother. They believe that when a girl is about four-years-old, she is at the right age

to learn how to do things. This is the age when a young girl can learn the most.

According to the women in San Miguel, a little mother cares for her younger siblings, nieces and nephews. It is common to observe her scurrying around the village with a baby resting on her hip. When four, she also begins doing kitchen work, which encompasses a broad number of household chores, and she runs errands. She will shop at the small local grocery stores and take corn to the mill to get ground. A four-year-old girl can borrow or barter for food and other items with her relatives and neighbors. She can start the fire at the clay stove. She will help harvest, gather, and prepare foods for cooking. She can boil water and see that a pot of food does not boil over or burn. She will help carry dishes and laundry to the river for washing. At the age of four, she is doing these things with supervision and guidance from her mother or another female relative.

Informants say that when a little mother is around nine-years-old, she is a competent kitchen worker and childcare giver. Because her body has grown, she will begin hauling water into the house from the outdoor house spigot, or as they call it, the pipe. If the family is not able to pay a water bill, the water must be carried some distance to the house from a community water pump, which must be pumped by hand. She will begin learning complex skills such as baking. A nine-year-old will begin making corn and flour tortillas and breads, such as fry jacks. She will scrub the laundry, clean, and sweep the floors, walls, and rafters of the thatched roof kitchen and tin roof home with a baby resting on her hip. Baking and proper laundry care is supervised chores and any previously learned duties become unsupervised.

By the time a little mother turns about twelve-years-old, the Kekchi women think she should have mastered kitchen work, housekeeping, childcare responsibilities, and

they consider her ready to learn how to make handicrafts. Some of the San Miguel women, over thirty years of age say that about twenty years ago a young woman could begin courting a young man and was considered ready for marriage at the age of twelve or thirteen. Several informants commented that bride service continues to be part of the Kekchi culture. The young groom might perform farm duties for the bride's father for a designated amount of time, such as one year, or pay a specific sum of money to the bride's family, in a marriage agreement.

The Kekchi Maya of San Miguel are a patrilineal society. Typically, land is passed down from father to son. Usually, the land goes to the son or sons that work the farm with the father. Additional land is sometimes purchased if available and affordable. Some sons leave the village to seek work as a laborer rather than work on the farm, and they send money home to the family as long as they remain unmarried. A married man working as a laborer supports his wife and children and usually does not continue to make financial contributions to his parent's household. However, sometimes a married laborer builds a house for his wife near his parents' home. In this case, his wife becomes an extension of the birth family unit, contributes domestic labor, food, and her husband may make financial contributions to his parents' household. If a father and son (sometimes a daughter) live in homes that are side-by-side, each house in the household cluster is considered a separate household, even though they tend to work together.

The people of San Miguel live in family clusters that fan outward from the Rio Grande River. They are a soft spoken and gentle people. An observer can hear the babies being told "shh shh" on the day they are born. Like their ancestors, the Kekchi men are predominantly subsistence milpa farmers. According to the men in San Miguel, currently

cacao is their most profitable cash crop. Today, the Kekchi women supplement the household income mainly by selling handcrafted items, although their primary duties are still in the home.

A marriage between a Kekchi man and woman may be either legal or common law. The women in San Miguel say that most marriages work, regardless of the legal status. One informant said that if the young couple dates for at least one year, the marriage is sure to last. A married Kekchi couple works together as a team, with each having separate responsibilities, and both providing income for the household at some level. “Like elsewhere in the Maya area, marriage is seen as a complementary union, an economic dyad in which men and women, each living in separate spheres (the worlds inside and outside the house, respectively), serve each other and practice thereby what, to some extent, could be called an equal partnership” (Hostettler 2004:443). In San Miguel, a couple is highly dependent on each other, and they say it takes both of them working together to survive.

The Kekchi women in San Miguel say that approximately ten years ago, the women tended to marry at the age of thirteen to fifteen and gave birth to approximately eight to thirteen children. Today, most women marry when they are around sixteen years old, and they usually have about four to eight children. Irma McClaurin says, “‘The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has traditionally been high in Belize,’ reports the government, ‘from around 7.0 children per woman in the 1960s, to about 6.0 in 1980’” (McClaurin 1996:116). The Kekchi women attributed the differences in age and birth number to two different factors. They say it has become too expensive to have a large family and girls are beginning to stay in school longer. In 1999, Karen L. Kramer says that the Maya have

large families and that families are going to become larger as physiological restraints on female fertility begin to relax (Kramer 1999:515-516). She claims that because the women are beginning to use laborsaving technology that efficiency will increase (Kramer 1999:500). The women will not have to work as hard. “A change in labor efficiency introduces a potential shift in how women spend their time...if women spend their time in different kinds of activities, their physiological energy balance can be affected” (Kramer 1999:502-503). The women will be able to begin having babies earlier in life and the length of birth intervals will differ, and this will have an effect on family size (Kramer 1999:500). Kramer considered the physical and biological outcome of the adoption of laborsaving technology.

However, in 1999, Kramer failed to take into consideration household economy and factors such as education or the fact that some women do work outside the village. In San Miguel, one thing that has not changed is that a woman may have one or more of her own children that are the same age or younger than a grandchild or several grandchildren. Kramer did not include ratios of same age children and grandchildren in her study or her article.

In 2006, Kramer offers an alternate perspective and begins to tackle the decline in mortality and fertility rates in Yucatan Maya villages. Kramer says, “Most of the world’s subsistence populations...are beginning to undergo economic changes as they move toward inclusion in the labor market and a national economy” (Kramer 2006: 166). She now says, “Economic development is often linked to fertility reduction because the increase in the cost of children leads to a decline in the demand for them” (Kramer 2006: 166). Kramer’s studies now link “the interaction between labor-saving technology,

economic development, and fertility patterns...the introduction of modern labor-saving technology significantly lowered the age of the first birth sufficiently to allow women, if they choose, to bear an additional child over the course of their reproductive careers” (Kramer 2006:166). Nevertheless, this does not change the situation that Kekchi girls become young women and little mothers long before they marry.

A young woman moves into her mother-in-law’s house on her wedding day where she begins learning how to be a good wife. Usually, she will move into her own home, built near her mother-in-law’s house, after her first child is born. “Childbirth marks the end or at least a lessening of the watchful relationship between mother-in-law and newlywed bride in Mayan society” (McClusky 2001:85). One San Miguel informant expressed how her wonderful relationship was with her mother-in-law before the elder passed away. She said they were great companions. They helped each other; they enjoyed each other’s company and she misses her mother-in-law very much since her passing. However, a good relationship with a mother-in-law is probably not always the case.

Envy and the San Miguel Kekchi Women

Distrust and envy dominate daily life in San Miguel. The Kekchi women listen to every sound outside their home. They keep track of what is going on in the village by peering through the cracks between the boards of their homes. Typically, both the men and the women in the village tend to gossip.

However, usually the women are at home, and they are better able to monitor who is receiving new household goods, such as a refrigerator, television or radio, (items that a family may or may not be able to afford to use) and the quantity of store-purchased grocery items that the neighbor might bring home. Foster says, “Where people have so

little and where life is so uncertain, the good fortune of fellow villagers seems bound to arouse envy” (Foster 1988:153). The women listen for the buses and they watch the buses go by their homes. They observe their neighbors, watching to see who gets on and off the bus.

The buses have a driver and a conductor. The bus driver mainly drives the bus. The conductor collects bus fare and maintains orderliness on the bus. He helps the elderly, handicapped, and young mothers with infant and toddlers to get on and off the bus. He assists with loading and unloading of boxes and packages. The women try to sit at the front of the bus as much as possible, simply because it is easier to get on and off the bus with purchases and children. The men usually will move towards the back of the bus to take a seat. They try to leave the front seats open for the women. It is common for the bus to have more passengers than seats. When this happens, the men give their seats to the women. Children will stand between women within one seating area. Sometimes there may be three women holding infants, with an additional two or three small child crammed into one seating area, and the aisle may be lined front to back with people who are standing.

Generally, the people riding the bus keep to themselves. They do not visit amongst themselves unless they are sitting with a relative. The material goods that the Kekchi purchase usually come into San Miguel from Punta Gorda Town (PG) on the bus. Usually the passengers do not make eye contact, but they do quickly glance around and take note of any parcels that the other women might be holding. They pay attention to how plump the backpacks are and if they appear to be a heavy burden for the carrier. The women quickly observe the overhead rack to see if a passenger has placed a purchase up

above. If the parcels are small, the women clinch them tightly to their chest. They do their best to conceal their purchases. If the material goods are large, such as a bicycle or a large sack of flour or five-gallon bucket of lard, the conductor will place the items in the back of the bus through the back door. Sometimes he puts large buckets or grain sacks at the front of the bus. Plastic five-gallon buckets and large grain sacks are common containers for carrying any type of material good. Foster states that a fear of consequences of envy of others causes peasants to conceal things (Foster 1988:154). It is impossible to make any assumptions on the contents of a plastic five-gallon bucket or determine what is being concealed in a large grain sack.

The women in the village take notice of what other individuals might be carrying as they get off the bus. From the cracks between the boards of their houses, they watch as passengers depart the bus and take notice of what they are carrying. The Kekchi women watch the homes around their house to see who might be waving at the bus driver. The villagers sometimes have the driver deliver items, which came from PG. For example, the bus might deliver a can of kerosene or gasoline. The driver will wave or honk when near the house to let the individual know that the conductor is placing their material good at the side of the road. Usually the Kekchi woman, daughter, or relative will wait until the bus proceeds and then will quickly run to the side of the road, snatch up the material good and scurry back into the house. The village women will also stand at the side of the road and wait for the bus for reasons other than to board the bus. When the driver stops, they might whisper something into the conductor's ear. She is placing an order. Usually the next day, the bus will honk or the driver or conductor will wave and a parcel will be placed at the side of the road near this woman's house.

In addition to keeping a watchful eye on the bus, the women pay attention to whose young daughter is out running errands. They watch to see where the girls are going. They want to see if she is visiting the grocery store or another house. There are seamstresses, bush doctors, midwives, and people of other professions that live and work in the village. When an individual goes to the small local grocery store, the village women pay attention to the size of a bag or dish (for one pound lard, flour, or sugar purchases) that is carried home. Food does not keep well in the tropics, so the Kekchi women in San Miguel make their grocery store purchases daily. The other women pay attention to how many times a day someone in a particular family visits the grocery store. Foster says, “Envy...reflects feelings of hostility, and sometimes is an implicit threat of aggression, it threatens the stability of group life unless it can be controlled” (Foster 1988:155). No one in the village can do anything without someone watching. The Kekchi women of San Miguel are exercising level one of the self-correcting mechanisms, the individual and family behavior mechanism, and they are concealing any evidence of material improvement. They are controlling the situation by not revealing their purchases.

Reciprocity and the San Miguel Kekchi Women

Reciprocity is extremely important to the Kekchi Maya in San Miguel. Reciprocation of an item or labor exchange is expected. Goods and services are exchanged between individuals, families, and neighbors in varying degree. In a dyadic relationship, the people are bound in reciprocity relationships (Wilk in Netting 1984:223). Concerning household clusters, Wilk says, “It is common to find groups that eat together, work together, share child rearing and other obviously domestic activities

but live in separate houses” (Wilk in Netting 1984:223). The relationships within the family cluster tend to be stronger than those outside of the cluster which are weaker (Wilk in Netting 1984:225). Variation is dependent on the strength or weakness of the reciprocal relationship, and is determined by the following (Wilk in Netting 1984:226):

(1) the frequency of exchange of food and resources by members, (2) the frequency with which members associate together in work groups, (3) the quantity of crops, property, and goods held in common, and (4) the degree to which the activities of the group are planned and directed by the head of the unit.

For example, a local woman ran out of laundry soap and did not have cash to buy any at the small local grocery store. When she requested laundry soap from her neighbor, she showed up with a large plate, mounded with fried fish and offered the food with her request for laundry soap. The fish may have been a gesture to let her neighbor know that she did not want to take advantage of her. The laundry soap is solid and it comes in sections of three; one of three sections was given to the local woman. The woman will have to reciprocate by replacing the single section of laundry soap later, despite her giving a plate of fried fish.

Reciprocity is practiced in the home as well as with others in the community. For example, if a wife had to take time out of her daily schedule to cut down a tree because her husband did not have time to do it, her husband or sons, or all of them may have to reciprocate later. To reciprocate, her husband or sons might do some type of kitchen work, such as shuck corn, or do a household chore, such as put sheets on a bed. This works both ways, a man may need assistance at the farm, such as when the annatto is ready for harvest. The women and the children might go to the field to help harvest the annatto. A husband and wife team is a reciprocal relationship, “a complementary union,

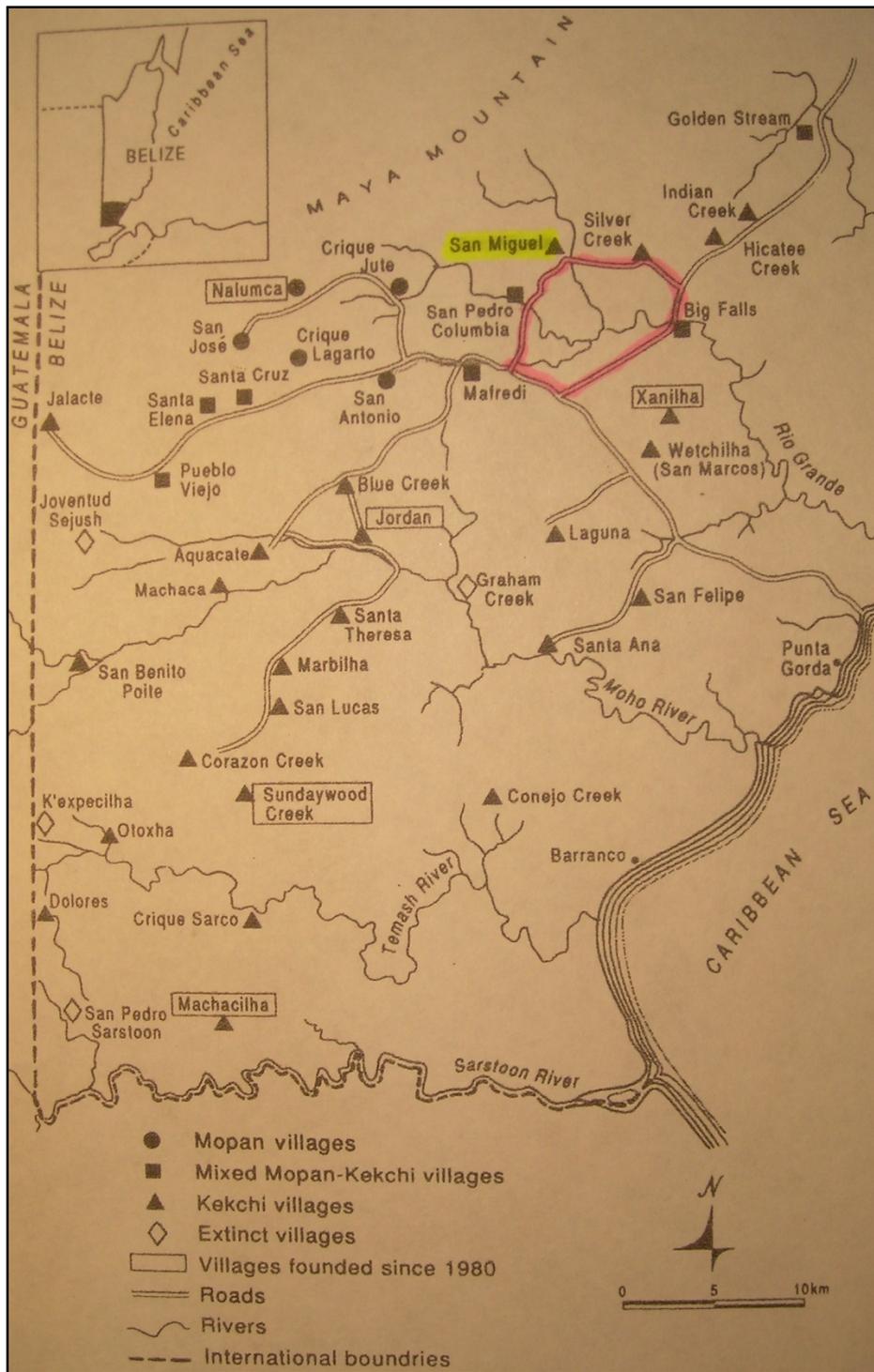
an economic dyad...the worlds inside and outside the house...serve each other and practice an equal partnership,” as mentioned earlier in this chapter (Hostettler 2004:443).

The Kekchi women work together in extended family groups. They wash dishes, laundry, and bathe at the river in extended family groups on family wash stones. The women softly call out to each other from their windows. They let their neighbor, a family member, know that they are thinking about them and that they are at home. If they need help, they call out the window to the other to request assistance. If one woman provides assistance to another, she will have to return the favor sometime in the future. The women make handicrafts together during the afternoon. If one woman sells crafts for another woman, the seller will be reciprocated for her time. She may receive a percentage of the sale or provide another service for the seller. The time the women spend together at the river and making crafts provides an opportunity for the women to visit, joke, tease, and gossip with each other. The women peer through the cracks in the walls of their homes and discuss the affairs of the village together as they make crafts in the afternoon, not just when they are home alone. Foster calls the principle of reciprocity the “dyadic contract” (Foster 1988:214).

Foster says that dyadic contracts, “bind *pairs* of contractants, rather than groups” (Foster 1988:215). He says there are two types of contracts, the “Colleague” contracts and “Patron-client” contracts (Foster 1988:217). “Colleague” contracts usually occur between villagers and “Patron-client” contracts are usually between villagers and non-villagers (Foster 1988:217). The distinction between the two contracts deals with socio-economical similarities and differences (Foster 1988:217). The people within the closed system inside the village are most often involved in “Colleague” contracts and any

reciprocal relationships outside of the village or in the open system are “Patron-client” contracts (Foster 1988:217). “Colleague” contracts are usually short-term or non-continuing (Foster 1988:229). With the “Patron-client” contract, one of the two individuals is in a higher position and he or she has the power that allows him or her to be a patron (Foster 1988:227-228). Patrons can be human beings or supernatural beings (Foster 1988:228). The reciprocal relations occurring between the women of San Miguel are “Colleague” contracts. The bus driver and conductor are being reciprocated in some way for the extra services that they provide, through a “Patron-client” contract of a sort. They not only receive a salary from their employer, they are compensated by the Maya for the extra services they provide with, for example, a bag of fruit, a plate of food, a dollar or two. Foster says, “Between colleagues, reciprocity is expressed in *continuing* exchanges of goods and services” and “a very important functional requirement of the system is that *an exactly even balance between two partners never be struck*” (Foster 1988:218-219). The women of San Miguel, family and community members within the village are locked into a never-ending cycle of reciprocal give and take that allows them to maintain a state of equilibrium where no one gets too far ahead or falls too far behind economically and socially.

To the Kekchi women, the goods might be limited; therefore, envy, jealousy, and reciprocity are typical. However, they will tell you that they are happy in their homes with their husbands and children. They enjoy standing at the side of the road at dusk swaying back and forth with their baby or sibling tucked into the *lepop* attached to the top of their head, and the traditions and values of earlier generations continue to be the safest guideposts in life, despite any changes that are occurring (Foster; 1988:3).



(Wilk 1997:58)

Figure 4 Map of the Maya villages in southern Belize (The *big block* bus route in area outlined in pink. The entire region is the *big block* area.)

Kekchi women processing annatto in San Miguel Village.



A Kekchi woman and her 4 year old daughter making tortillas in San Miguel Village.



Plate 3 Kekchi women doing kitchen work.

CHAPTER FIVE

AROUND THE BIG BLOCK: KEKCHI WOMEN'S CONSTRAINTS

The *big block* is terminology used by some of the Kekchi Maya women in San Miguel. When the women refer to the *big block* in general, they are symbolically referring to all the indigenous villages and villagers in the Toledo District. Villagers in San Miguel consider all the indigenous people, such as the Kekchi Maya, Mopan Maya or Garifuna as *big block* people.

When the Kekchi from San Miguel say they are going for a ride around the *big block* on the bus, they are referring to a specific physical region. The *big block* bus route is a big circular bus route with specific stopping points in the Maya Mountains, physically located in the heart of the Toledo District. The bus stops at all the villages and junctions along the circular route. Refer to Figure 4 on page 47. These are the places where villagers from inside and outside the *big block* bus route, get on (or off) the bus. For example, the bus might during its travels stop at San Pedro Columbia Village (Columbia) junction, proceed to San Miguel Village, then go to Silver Creek Junction, Big Falls, on to the town of Dump, and back to Columbia junction, through the region in a big circle. People often stand along the road between the villages and junctions and the bus will stop and pick them up, too. At any point along the route, the bus will stop to pick up (or drop off) passengers.

I had the opportunity to ride on the *big block* bus route five times while I was conducting field study this past winter. Two times when I rode around the *big block* on the bus, the bus was privately hired by a specific family to pick up villagers so they could attend a wedding. Three times when I rode the bus that followed the *big block* bus route,

it was to attend events that were related to the February 8, 2008, political election.

Both of the weddings were Catholic. After the wedding, a reception was held at the groom's parent's house. The house had been converted into a reception area. The bride and groom sat at a table, and their parents and other direct family members sat on chairs that circled the room. In one corner, a wedding cake sat on a table, surrounded by fresh tropical flowers and fruits, and people placed gifts, such as dishes, pots and pans, under the table. Smoke from copal incense billowed out the doors and windows.

The yard was decorated with a multitude of flowers and ribbons. To the side of the reception area where the men in the family had built an arbor were rows of makeshift benches in a line where people could sit while they ate a celebration meal. The women of the family had spent much time the day before the wedding cooking the food. The men served guests pork *caldo* (a soup), *potch*, and juice or a soft drink. *Potch* is a heavy, unsweetened corn bread. The corn is ground and wrapped in a corn husk prior to cooking. *Potch* is only served at special events.

One woman at the wedding stated that her parents paid for her wedding. The Kekchi have no strict rule on who pays for the wedding. Either the bride or the groom's family might foot the bill. The families financing the wedding and the men serving the meal to the guests are a good example of Foster's institutionalized behavior self correcting mechanism which restores balance (Foster in Potter 1967:313). The parents financing the weddings had improved their economic position in the community and conspicuous consumption through hosting the extravagant weddings that fed the community, and others in the region allowed the families to create a balance. Their reward was prestige. The family of the bride or groom chartered the bus that picked up and took

home residents from around the *big block* so they would have transportation and be able to attend the festive event. People came and went; there was not a specific wedding guest list. Anyone who showed up to the wedding was welcome. Even if a person only came for the meal, the individual could tell their neighbors that they went to the wedding. The further a guest traveled in order to attend the wedding the better. A young bride and groom and their families take great pride in announcing that they have a guest from Belize City, Europe, Canada, or the United States. Guests who wanted to dance and drink were invited to stay for the evening and the *big block* bus took the rest of the folks back to their village or junction wherever on the *big block* route that the people needed to get off.

The first of the three bus rides related to the political election was so that everyone who wanted to could have the opportunity to attend a political rally that was held in Columbia. The rally occurred approximately one week before Election Day. It seemed as though most of the *big block* residents were present. It was very crowded; politicians rallied, and a meal that the *big block* women had prepared ahead of time was served. Political affiliates chartered a string of approximately thirty-two buses that transported *big block* residents to and from Columbia for the rally. Additional pickup trucks, one with a Garifuna band, led the line of buses. It was important that all the residents arrived in Columbia at about the same time. Some of the “higher up” politicians from Belize City and the country would be present and speak. Rumors spread wildly after the rally; hotheaded people from the competing political party had an altercation with people on one of the buses, and a boy about ten to twelve years old fell out of the bed of a pickup and died while another child was injured. One of the young wives in San Miguel

living in a different village had her house burned to the ground, because her husband was politically active with the competing political party.

The second bus ride was on Election Day. The voters were picked up along the route and taken to Columbia where they voted. People with a last name beginning with A to C stood in one line and D through Z stood in a second line. Line A to C consistently had about 50 to 100 people standing in line, in the hot sun, all day. Line D through Z usually had around 3 to 12 people standing in line throughout the day. Police stood around the voting area to prevent any possible trouble and to prevent anyone from taking photographs.

The Kekchi men from San Miguel said they already knew which way the vote would go by how much food the women prepared. There were approximately fifty to sixty women cooking in a rotation. Throughout the day, women came and went, and they prepared food for the next day event. The night before the election, the women were concerned that they had not prepared enough food. Each of the women who remained at the end of the day decided that each family should cook an additional fifty pounds of rice and have their husbands deliver the food to Columbia first thing in the morning. After each individual votes, they dip their finger in a container of ink, which dyes their finger purple. Everyone is provided with a meal after voting. Each village has a particular location where their villagers go to receive a meal. The meal consisted of either chicken or pork *caldo* and tortillas, or pork or chicken with rice, plus a can of soft drink or juice. Various villagers donate all the food and the juice (each extended family commits to donating specific food items), and the soft drink was provided by a governmental affiliate. During the election, water was passed out to voters as they stood in line.

Containers of water were provided by the government. After eating a meal, most villagers boarded the bus, which took the *big block* route and went home. On voting day, the government provides buses.

Young, old, male, and female voters were present. People helped the elderly, sick, and handicapped get on and off the bus. It seemed that the only people not present on this voting day were the people who were too sick or infirmed to go to Columbia. The turnout for Election Day in the Toledo District was spectacular. It seemed as though the majority of the southern Belize population went to the poll. The results of the vote would be announced on the radio around midnight, and for the people without access to a radio, a string of truck and buses would drive through every Toledo District village and shout out the winning party in an announcement from their window. The caravan of pickups and busses passed through San Miguel about 4:00 in the morning. Some of the villagers had waited up all night to hear the results. Other villagers went to bed early so they could get up early the next morning. Many San Miguel men stayed up all night to guard their families, homes, and possessions. Like the other villages around the *big block*, they were afraid that if the “wrong” party won, there might be trouble. “At the level of individual membership, the tenacity of party affiliation has been known to divide families and split up relationships...generates envy” (McClaurin 1996:161). There were members from the competing political party living in the village. No one in the village wanted their house burned down or their family harmed. They did not want to lose any of the few material possessions they own.

The third time the bus drove the circular route to pick up people was to celebrate the election results. The *big block* men yelled out there is too much corruption during

each of the *big block* political events. “It is taken for granted that officials and employees at all levels – national, state, and municipio – have an ulterior motive that underlies their interest in what they do” (Foster 1988:355). However, when the election results were announced most of the villagers were pleased that the United Democratic Party was voted into office.

Belize is a democratic nation; they have a governor-general who is the head of the government (under Queen Elizabeth II). There are both legislative and executive offices. The two political parties that were highly competitive during the 2008 election were the United Democratic Party (UDP) and the People’s United Party (PUP). Irma McClaurin says, “Belize operates under a patron client system. In effect, votes are used to elicit favors from politicians and often resources are distributed along party lines. When a party is out of favor, one may find oneself jobless or without access to certain resources until the next election” (McClaurin 1996:159). Nevertheless, the winner of the election can have an effect on what occurs in a Kekchi Maya village or home. The amount of money allocated to a particular district for roads, civic buildings, tourism, and other amenities is dependent on which political party is in office (Howard 1975:11). Most *big block* people in southern Belize exist at poverty level. Their economic situation is dependent on regional, national, and global economics and the *big block* people want the political party in office who will represent them the best.

Occurrences in the political arena of a country have an effect on all the residents and not just on one cultural group or one gender, and constraints can be the result. In San Miguel, the women experience constraints from multiple levels. There are constraints in the home, in the village, in the region, in the country and the women are affected by what

occurs politically and globally. Keeping in mind that a closed system does not really exist, there are shared constraints that occur outside San Miguel Village as well as inside. Some of the constraints that affect a Kekchi Maya woman from San Miguel inside the village in the closed system and outside of the village in the open system will be covered in this chapter.

However, many of the constraints do not pertain to only women from San Miguel, but are constraints for most *big block* women from any of the villages in southern Belize. On rally day, Election Day, election celebration day, and at weddings the women of the *big block* came together to cook and feed the people. They fed everyone present, not only the people from their locale or region. Politicians came from the cities and other visitors were present. For the events, the women combined their labor and efforts in order to provide food for everyone at the special occasion. While they did this, their duties and responsibilities at home were set aside, and they would have much to do later that evening or the next day. McClaurin says, “The day is divided into three segments, organized around meals” (McClaurin 1996:44). Political events and special events such as a wedding create extra chores that are constraining and they must be squeezed into an already heavy daily work schedule.

The women in San Miguel are sticklers to their schedules. They perform household tasks such as laundry or sweeping at relatively the same time each day unless special circumstances, such as the political events, interfere with their schedule. Circumstances are most likely the same or similar in the other *big block* villages. The Kekchi women from San Miguel share many of the same or similar constraints as many other *big block* women of southern Belize living in the villages. The women from around

the *big block* also share a cognitive perception of an *Image of Limited Good*.

Women's Constraints inside San Miguel and outside around the *Big Block*

Varieties of constraints affect the *big block* woman, and these constraints most likely determine whether a *big block* woman, or a Kekchi woman in San Miguel, is able to boost her household economy or not. The *Image of Limited Good (limited good)* cognitive orientation accounts for behavior (Foster in Potter 1967:303). In San Miguel, many constraints are related to a *limited good* cognitive orientation and its related behavior.

In the closed system, the woman's existence is determined and limited by the natural and social resources in her village and immediate area (Foster in Potter 1967:304). She cannot do anything to increase her resources without being viewed as a threat to others in the village. Because the woman does not want to be a threat to others and does not want to experience negative sanctions, she has limited options. She has no choice but to meet the expectations of the villager's ideas on what a good Maya woman is. One constraint after another is the result.

Foster offered four headings--economic behavior, friendship, health, manliness and honor, to make his point that in the closed system of the *limited good* cognitive orientation, peasant societies view all things as limited. I will offer four similar headings in an effort to show that the *limited good* cognitive orientation not only causes peasants to view all things as limited, but that the point of view also dictates the constraints.

Constraints Relating to Womanliness and Honor

San Miguel is a patriarchal peasant society. Masculinity controls decision making, the domestic and more (Foster in Potter 1967:309). Peasant societies have ideas on what

a good Maya woman is. In the following, Laura J. McClusky provides a description of a “good Mayan woman” and “a bad Mayan woman” (McClusky 2001:84):

A good Mayan woman works constantly, cooking dishes her mother and mother-in-law taught her to make. She quickly responds to her children’s needs, sweeps her house daily, and keeps her appearance tidy, with her hair tightly wrapped in a ponytail twisted into a bun and secured behind her head. Although she cooks over a wood fire, her pots sparkle clean with no dull soot covering the bottom. She grinds corn for tortillas at least once a day, and occasionally goes into “the bush” with a female companion to collect wild foods and sometimes medicines. A good woman might also be active in women’s groups, making baskets and embroidery to sell for tourists, foreign and domestic alike or raising chickens for making tamales. If so, she spends spare moments making crafts. If not, she will find something else to occupy her time, perhaps tending livestock or growing flowers. Good women wouldn’t think of relaxing.

A bad woman is lazy. She spends her day in her hammock, finding her daily chores too taxing. Her laziness makes her family suffer.

Kekchi women are hard working people. Kekchi Maya families are large and the women have many children.

Many of a Kekchi woman’s constraints relate to the large family size. A woman is extremely constrained by the household duties or work load, and motherhood duties add on more constraint, which can further monopolize her time, depending on how many infants, toddlers, and the total number of children a woman has.

There is a population sign painted on a board in San Miguel Village which says there are 536 people in the community. One informant said that the sign is misleading and the village population can be estimated at about ninety families, each with approximately eight or ten members. The Statistical Units office located in Punta Gorda Town estimated the population of San Miguel to be 439 total individuals in 2006, of which there were 209 males, 230 females, the average household size was 6.2 people, and there were about 71 households in the village. The last actual physical census was taken

in 2000 and it is taken every ten years. It will be taken again in 2010. The growth rate has been estimated at 2.5% each year since the last physical census. The census shows that the family size in San Miguel is not as large as it used to be. Informants in the thirty to forty-year-old age group say that most of their parents came from families that had between ten to fourteen children. They themselves say most of them had around eight children per family. The average number of children in the household today is about 4.2 children. However, it seems reasonable to assume that a house with parents in their thirties may have eight children at home; a house with young parents in their teens may have one or two children, and a house with senior citizens may no longer have children still living in the home. Senior citizens continue to work the farm and tend to the house, although they may also be dependent on the assistance of their adult children.

Large families are needed for subsistence farming. Sons are needed to work on the farm, and daughters are needed to help with kitchen work. The villagers say that the families lacking a sufficient number of children do not have an adequate number of hands to accomplish tasks. Without the help of sons and daughters, the family could starve. With this *limited good* point of view, no family is too large. It makes no difference that more crops must be planted to feed extra mouths. Crops that might have been sold at market must be used in the house. The additional expense that is required to support a large family does not outweigh the cultural construction that a family should be large. A viril masculine man produces many offspring, and a good Maya woman is fertile and bears numerous children.

Even more constraining is the lack of a spouse. McClusky says, "Central to Mayan thought on womanhood and manhood is the idea that marriage forms a man and

woman into an economic team...Without a man, a woman suffers. She must do ‘a man’s work,’ clearing fields, planting, and harvesting corn. Likewise, a man without a woman also suffers. He cannot make his tortillas, his food. He cannot have clean clothes” (McClusky 2001:82). Without a spouse a woman not only lacks having a man as part of an economic team, she may also be childless. Fertility, motherhood, and bearing numerous children are important in Kekchi society. Unmarried women are encouraged to find a husband or the result will be gossip.

In San Miguel, there are no single mother households. If a woman is without a spouse, or is a single mother, she has no resort but to live with her parents. She remains her mother’s kitchen helper or she becomes her mother’s kitchen helper once again. If she has children, they become farm hands and kitchen workers for her mother and father.

A married woman in her childbearing years who does not produce children is seen in a negative light. Her fertility is in question. Women who do not give the appearance of a good fertile Maya woman are subject to gossip. She is not producing additional family members that will help the economic team that is supporting her. It makes no difference that there will be another mouth to feed, additional work, or expense.

With one constraint after another, there are never enough hands to assist on the farm or with the kitchen work and there are never enough funds to get by. Large families and fertile women are a part of the San Miguel *Image of Limited Good* cognitive orientation and the result are numerous constraints for a good Kekchi Maya woman.

Constraints Relating to Uneven Gender Balance

Foster discussed the heading friendship, which included love and affection, which is only available in limited quantities. He said that peasants covet a visitor, which

alienates others in the village. Love and affection are limited with only so much to go around, which causes jealousy and sibling rivalry (Foster in Potter 1967:306-309). Foster did not discuss family dynamics, a generous number of children or uneven gender balance in a household in his discussion on the *Image of Limited Good*.

Household duties, chores, laundry, dishes, bathing the children once in the morning and again in the evening, feeding the pigs and chickens, and running errands absorb a woman's day quickly. Then, if a Kekchi woman is not too constrained for time she will make handicrafts during spare moments in the afternoon or evening. During one moment here and another second there, a Kekchi mother shows affection to her husband and children. There is never enough time and never enough energy to show sufficient amount of affection towards everyone in the household. Usually the youngest children receive the most attention and the older children and husband make do or do without. To the Kekchi women, there are too many tasks that need completed in one day and quite often the amount of tasks that need accomplished during one day require more than one pair of hands. The female offspring in the household are expected to give a hand with the kitchen work and the male offspring assist at the farm. Many of the Kekchi families in San Miguel prefer to have an equal number of males and females within each household. They say this evens out the odds and provides enough hands to work the farm and enough hands to do the kitchen work. For every male working the farm, one female is needed at the house. Gender shortages create major constraint in San Miguel.

When a family has all or mostly children of one sex, the subsistence and survival system is out of balance. Sometimes there are no daughters in the household and because the women do not want to suffer because her constraints have become too heavy, special

measures are taken to acquire help. McClusky says, “A viable solution is to take advantage of ‘traditional’ forms of adoption...regalado, in Spanish, is ‘given,’ prestada ‘loaned’” (McClusky 2001:135). Children are adopted children in San Miguel, but it is also common for a child to get loaned. Usually a mother seeks this type of help from a relative. For example, one informant has a husband and three sons and they all work at the family farm. She has no daughters to help her with the kitchen work. She was unable to keep up with her daily tasks, which caused suffering and neglect for everyone in the household. Her sister lives in a nearby village and they visit together at least once a week. (Visiting usually involves assisting each other in some type of work.) Her sister is a single mother living with her parents and she has three daughters; she has more than enough female hands to provide assistance in her parent’s home. In an open arrangement, the sister agreed to allow the informant to borrow her three-year-old daughter who turned four years old this year. The informant is teaching the child responsibility and in turn has some assistance with the kitchen work. This was not an adoption or fosterage. The sister loaned her daughter to the informant for an indefinite period. The informant says that the child’s birth mother may never ask that her daughter to be returned or she could request to have her daughter back anytime. At least once a week, the child’s birth mother and sisters come to visit (which usually involves assisting in some type of work). However, the child acknowledges and treats her birth mother and sisters as if they were a close aunt and cousins. The birth mother still treats her loaned out daughter like a daughter. Mother and daughter emotions are shared between the loaned daughter and the informant. Both the informant and the birth mother want undivided attention from the child. The birth mother asks the child to do something and the child looks to the informant for permission

before she follows through. Cold stares and awkwardness exist between the informant and her sister. With a *limited good* perspective, there is minimal love and affection that can be shared.

Children are also fostered or adopted in San Miguel in an effort to balance gender numbers in the household. In another household in San Miguel, the family has four daughters and one son still at home and the son has recently married. The son will be establishing his own household within one year and he will quit working on the farm belonging to his father and begin working on his own farm. To ease the constraints resulting from male gender shortage and female gender surplus, their solution was to adopt a son from their eldest daughter who lives in another village. In another household, a granddaughter was fostered to ease the burden in the kitchen. The granddaughter became a daughter to her grandmother and she works as a kitchen worker in her grandmother's home. She will stay in her grandmother's home until she marries.

Unwanted children are also fostered, adopted, or loaned, to family members. For instance, one informant has one adopted daughter and one fostered son. The adopted daughter is actually a granddaughter, the child of an older daughter living in a nearby village. The couple's daughter married, gave birth to three children, and then became pregnant with a fourth child by a lover. Her husband is not obligated to support the love child. In a patriarchal society, the children belong to the men. Mothers do not make enough money to support a child on their own and the parents cannot always afford to support another child. The lover did not want a child. The husband refused to support the child. The grandparents needed an extra hand to help with kitchen work, so they adopted the girl. They fostered a grandson because his drunken father was physically abusing him

and their home was a safer place for the child to live, in addition to the grandparents needing an extra pair of hands at the farm. The family already had four children in the home and married children living next door on both sides who assisted and still they needed additional help on the farm and in the kitchen. To them, there were not enough hands to help on the farm or in the kitchen and the grandchildren were needed.

The Kekchi women tell the children to behave or they will be lashed with a stick. They seem to remember the threat throughout their childhood and like any other child, do not want to find out if it is an idle threat or not. Most Kekchi children hear this threat at least once before he or she can walk, even the good children. Children who behave in an unruly fashion are inclined to hear the threat more often. Although unruly children are rare in San Miguel, there are a couple of them around who seem to be a challenge. Sometimes the children, who have been adopted, fostered, or loaned, come into the village with behavior problems. As much as these children provide extra hands that can help at the house and farm, they can come to the village with their own set of problems that create additional constraint. A threat to lash the child with a stick seems to be the solution to the problem for unruly or unacceptable behavior. Affection, love and tenderness are limited and sometimes withheld, not wasted on an unruly child. Scare tactics are powerful when it comes to learning the ropes and most likely, no child has ever been lashed with a stick in San Miguel, because the Kekchi are gentle people.

Children who have tantrums are treated quite differently in San Miguel compared to unruly children. A mother may not acknowledge that a child belongs to her if the child is throwing a tantrum. She might yell out one harsh word in the Kekchi language and then totally ignore the child if they persist with their tantrum. Usually the tantrum throwing

child is ignored. A small, three-year-old boy stomped down the main gravel road in San Miguel and he was screaming and crying. He did this once a day for about one week. He seemed to walk to the crossroad, stop, shake his fist, yell, throw a rock or two, stand and cry for about an hour, and then calmly walk back home. It was difficult to determine how far away his house was from the junction, but it was outside of visual distance. The mother of the three year old never followed him or looked for him to make sure he was okay. Perhaps she was busy with her daily chores or nursing an infant. Maybe the young boy was jealous of a new baby in the house monopolizing his mother's time. There is no way to tell exactly what was going on. Regardless, the boy's tantrum could be heard from one end of the village to the other, so there was no guessing about where he was. No concern was shown to the young boy by anyone; all the villagers ignored his tantrum and his presence. However, the message was clear; at an early age, the boy was learning that if he does not behave correctly, he simply does not exist in the home or in the community; there will be no attention paid to him. This child was the only child seen publically throwing a tantrum during the months of January through March 2008. Most of the children of San Miguel are well behaved; they seem extremely responsible for their young age and they rarely need disciplining. Love and affection are limited and the well behaved children receive it.

Some of the younger women in San Miguel remark that it is hard to take care of babies and small children who are not their own. They say that there is a special bond between a mother and her child and that same bond does not exist between sisters, brothers, nieces and nephews. Sometimes the young women must be responsible for younger siblings and cousins as if they were their own children. To them it is difficult to

express a sufficient amount of love or express love at all, to a child that is not their own.

A parent or sibling might find work outside of the village and have a child or young children in the home. It is up to a family member to watch the child or children so their parents can work, and the siblings wind up with the duty by default. Job opportunities are slim for the Kekchi Maya, so when an opportunity to work for income surfaces the family assists. A job may require the employee to be away from home a week, month, or longer. Informants say that many times the employed family member can make more money in one month's time than the family can make from selling cash crops or handicrafts over a six to twelve month period. The employed family member usually contributes cash to his parents' household income. If the family is caring for the employee's child, more cash income is expected. The income goes into the parent's household and not into the hands of the sibling that is primarily caring for the child. Many young Kekchi women end up being temporary parents for their nieces and nephews. The motherhood responsibility prevents the young girls from attending school and causes them additional kitchen work. The duty of caring for someone else's child prevents them from having their own life, and they have no choice. The young women find it difficult to love the children as if they were own.

In San Miguel there is always a need for another set of hands to accomplish all the work that needs completed each day, and there is little time or energy to express love and affection other than in passing. Usually Kekchi families like to spend family time together in the evening before going to bed. Oftentimes, the family members are too tired from their long work day to spend the quality time together that they would like to. For the Kekchi, acquiring more children through fosterage, adoption, or loan is one solution

to the problem. Additional children allow the Kekchi to try to bring gender numbers into balance and to divide the work load. Smaller families and families with uneven gender distribution do become envious of the gender balanced large families. They think that the larger families with an equal number of males and females may have things easier, because there are more people to provide assistance, which in turn frees up the evenings for rest and quality family time. In reality, few households have a balanced male to female ratio, and since the families in the village share a *limited good* cognitive orientation, and are hard working subsistence farmers, they experience similar constraints in most of the homes.

Constraints Relating to Health

In Belize, half of the year is rainy season and the other half is dry season. During the dry season, the greatest fear is fire. During the rainy season, high humidity makes it nearly impossible to get clothing to dry. Ropes are lined with clothes under the eaves of the house and around the perimeter inside. In a pinch when dry clothes are needed, a woman may have to use electricity she normally would not have used, to plug in an electric clothes iron, so she can iron the clothes dry. Having dry clothes can be hard work and get expensive. In addition, sometimes water can come into a kitchen or house from older thatched roofing and leave the clay floors slick, muddy, and hazardous. Free-roaming chickens, pigs, cats and dogs sometimes try to seek refuge in the family house during the heavy rains. The women try to shoo them out before they leave droppings. With the rainy season, the work load increases and accidents occur more often.

Uncooperative weather increases a woman's work load. It is more difficult to do chores and many tasks cannot be accomplished during uncooperative weather conditions.

The Rio Grande River usually rises after a heavy rain. This causes the women to have to carry heavy wash stones from the center of the shallow river up to the higher bank. One Maya woman dropped her wash stone while trying to move it and she injured her wrist and foot badly. She still had to continue with her work, even though her wrist was scraped and swollen and she limped from her injured foot.

The laundry must be washed daily rain or shine. If the river current becomes too strong the woman might have to wash laundry in a large pan under an eave of the house, which requires carrying five-gallon buckets of water from the spigot, unless she collected water from runoff from the roof of the house. Carrying heavy loads of water is hard on a woman's back, neck, shoulders and knees. Most of the women keenly balance the heavy load on top of their head.

Uncooperative weather during the rainy season also increases health risks. When the mosquito population rises during the rainy season, so does malaria. Some of the villagers have been immunized and some have not. People get colds, the flu, and if a family can afford aspirin or cough syrup, they might use it. A woman may concoct a naturopathic medicine to give to an ailing family member. For instance, an infant in San Miguel caught a cold, and the baby was too congested to nurse. The infant's grandmother made a cough syrup from water, sugar and a jungle herb. The baby experienced some relief about half an hour later and was able to breathe somewhat easier. However, the cough continued to persist.

More accidents occur during the rainy season when ground surfaces are slick. Walking through the bush on the way to the farm to retrieve food that will be brought home becomes extremely dangerous. One mother tended to a wound on the bottom of her

son's foot. To cauterize and seal the large puncture wound she applied a hot roasted garlic bulb.

The women of San Miguel go to bush doctors, midwives, make home remedies and have cure-alls like *Vick's Vapor Rub*, which is used for insect bites, cuts, abrasions and other ailments. Betty Faust says, "Economic and language changes are part of a broader pattern of modernization that includes primary reliance for health care on government clinics with doctors trained in national schools of modern medicine. Most people, combine new and old ways, going to both the clinic and the traditional healer. Some abandon the old ways for the new; a few cling to the old" (Faust 1998:610). The villagers have a free clinic in the village that is open once and sometimes twice a month. It takes approximately five minutes for most of the local women to line up at the clinic after the nurses and aides arrive in their ambulance. Healthy babies suddenly contract high fevers when the clinic door opens. The clinic provides free antibiotics, aspirin, cough syrup, and the medical team monitors the health of babies and children. The women like to keep medicines on hand for the times when the clinic is not open. They try to stock up as much as they can. They try to have their babies checked by the medical team as often as they can. It is usually the young mothers and their children who go to the clinic. Women over thirty do not seem to visit the local clinic as much as the younger women even though they are welcome.

Another clinic is open at a neighboring village on a daily basis; however, some payment and bus fare are required. Even farther away is a pay clinic in PG where villagers can go if they have bus fare and feel well enough to make the three hour round trip. The patient may wait half a day to a full day to see the doctor.

Visiting doctors, surgeons, and their teams come from outside of the country at least once a year and provide health services that are not normally available. The visiting physicians and their teams usually carry special equipment and they are able to do specialized surgeries, such as laser surgery. For example, a PG doctor diagnosed a woman in her mid-twenties in San Miguel with kidney stones. The physician told her she could have surgery in PG or wait three months for the American doctors to come with their modern equipment. The American doctors could do laser surgery and she would heal quicker. She has an infant child to tend to and must help in her mother-in-law's kitchen, as well as accomplish her own tasks at her home. She had been in pain for over one month and would have to wait another three months if she wanted to have a quicker recovery. She decided it would be better to suffer through the horrid pain and wait for the American doctors.

Many of the local women who need surgery either go without the surgery or wait for the visiting doctors with their progressive medical machinery. Any surgeries performed in the neighboring village or in PG are potentially dangerous for the villagers. They are not dangerous because the doctor lacks skill or because the equipment and procedures are too ancient. They are dangerous because the living conditions in the village are not suitable for healing. It takes a long time to heal from a wound or surgery when daily tasks and duties, such as cleaning house, cooking, and washing at the river are still on the woman's agenda. The women have a greater risk of infection because of their living conditions. Furthermore, the women must carry heavy loads of laundry and buckets of water several times a day. They have a family to feed and housework to do. They cannot afford a long recuperation. From the Kekchi women's perspective, they

work hard in a harsh environment; it is difficult for wounds to heal, and getting good medical attention is difficult, time consuming, and expensive. To them, in many cases, it is better to seek the aid of the bush doctor, midwife or make naturopathic medicine themselves rather than go to the clinic in PG. Many women feel the only good doctors are the visiting doctors who come from outside the country because they have better medical equipment. There is not enough good medical equipment and specialists to use the equipment in their village, region, or country.

Many of the women in San Miguel have difficulty comprehending modern medicine. They ask visitors that come into the village things like what is a digestive system. In addition, the PG clinic offers more services than the village clinic does. The doctors working at the PG clinic are from Cuba, and the Kekchi women have difficulty understanding their use of English. Faust (1998:612) shares the following interview that she had with an informant:

The regional clinic doctor had added that if the *ataques* did not stop, the family might eventually want to take Maria to a neurologist in the city...But that was too far, too much money, they did not know how to find a neurologist, and besides they were afraid he might open her skull and remove her brain to look at it under a microscope.

The people in the Maya villages have difficulty understanding modern medical procedures and testing. Additionally, many times instructions are given that do not make sense to the Kekchi women. Foster mentions an incident that occurred while he was conducting field work in Tzintzuntzan, which involved a woman who had taken a child for a visit to the doctor's office. Foster says, "Faced with a physician's instructions which to me seemed crystal clear, she couldn't make out what she was to do, and without my chance visit it is hard to say what she would have done" (Foster 1988:355). Incidents

similar to what Faust and Foster describe occur regularly in San Miguel. One middle-aged woman needed to have a large cyst located on top of her wrist joint drained. The cyst was limiting her range of motion; it was painful, and the pain was keeping her up at night. She thought the doctor said that surgery was necessary and that she would bleed excessively because one of her veins was on top of the cyst. She misunderstood the doctor and she would not let him drain the cyst because she was afraid she would bleed to death. A young mother in the village did not want the doctor to treat her eighteen month old child who had been suffering with diarrhea since the day he was born. She did not understand that the doctor wanted to do tests and thought he was talking about a treatment. She thought the doctor wanted to disembowel her child, and she did not want her baby to die. An inability to understand modern medicine and other constraints such as language confusion prevent many Kekchi women from seeking proper medical attention.

Trash disposal is a problem in San Miguel. Packaged items have only been in San Miguel for a few years. The plastics and paper came with the outsiders and with the material goods. Visitors bring trash into the village and leave it behind when they depart. The village women recycle water jugs, containers, zip lock bags, and bars of soap, but most wrappers and paper products cannot be reused. A villager could pay bus fair to get to a dump, which is not really a dump, but rather a place on the side of the road between the village and PG where people drop garbage at the side of the road, or they can burn or bury the refuse. Usually the women select one location near their family cluster where they burn trash. Some families never have trash. The women pay attention to the wind, weather conditions, take note on whether the smoke would bother a neighbor, and they keep the fire small as they burn their trash on top of the ground. Most of the trash is

usually thrown to the ground and it blows around the village, or it is carried around the village by the animals and children. Some trash becomes toys for the children, such as a single sandal, the arm of a doll, half a book, or a handle from a tourist's razor.

Some of the unexpected donations coming into San Miguel might be considered trash. Good intentions are not always useful or a good thing. Visitors leave donated items behind when they leave, things that the Maya in San Miguel do not know how to use, or cannot use, or have no way of repairing, for example things such as broken computers, monitors or broken printers. Items such as sample sizes of shampoo and conditioner are donated to villagers. Most villagers are illiterate and they have no idea what they are to do with the products. The villagers that can read do not understand the instructions. Many do not realize that the backside of the package has instructions. Things that smell good are sometimes tasted if no one is around to explain what the product is and this is dangerous. The packaging is discarded and the small plastic wrapping may become a child's toy somewhere down the line. Small children can be seen picking up plastic bags that have been blowing in the wind and place them over their heads. The village women have no idea that this can cause death. Items such as tooth brushes or toothpaste are needed and are not donated in adequate quantities. Many families share one toothbrush among the entire family. Material goods from the outside come into the village without comprehensible instructions or means of repair, and good intentions become a health risk. Items that are needed are in short supply. The material goods coming into the village that are donated or discarded help to reinforce the idea that the goods are limited. Items that are needed are in short supply and the people have no idea what to do with the broken or useless objects, which become a problem.

No food is wasted by any Kekchi Maya in San Miguel so there are no edibles going into the trash. Food is eaten until it is gone or is no longer edible, which it then becomes animal feed. Tortillas are usually only edible for a day or so, and it is common to see free-roaming pigs and chickens with the leftover tortillas hanging out of their mouths. Bones and inedible scraps are thrown out to an array of cats and dogs. The five-second rule seems to apply in San Miguel; if it is edible and falls to the ground, it can still be eaten if it is picked up quickly. A child dropped food to the floor of a bus; it rolled to the seat directly behind the child and the mother sitting in that seat picked it up and plucked it into her mouth. When all things are perceived as in shortage, food does not go to waste.

Lard and sugar go into many of the foods in San Miguel. Lard flavors the soups, caldo, corn or flour tortillas, is used to cook eggs and more. Sugar is used in the juices, coffee, tea, and cacao drinks. Eggs are the main protein staple in San Miguel. Chicken is usually served for one meal when visitors are present, and a family might have chicken once a week at most, but more likely families eat chicken once or twice a month. A hog is slaughtered and pork is eaten for special occasions such as at a wedding or on Election Day. The people also hunt, fish, and gather jungle or wild bush vegetables and fruits, in addition to farming crops. Overall, there is a protein shortage in the Kekchi diet. The ability to serve meat on a regular basis is limited.

In a study conducted in 1994, on the growth status of school-age Mayan children in southern Belize, a relationship was found between nutritional status and school achievement (Crooks 1994:217-218). “A variety of data were collected, including anthropometric measurements, health records, school grades, and parental and home

characteristics...age, height, weight, and arm circumference” (Crooks 1994:218). The results of the study confirmed that schoolchildren in southern Belize were nutritionally deficient. 24.5% of the Belizean children showed signs of stunting (Crooks 1994:223). The entire region was considered a poor environment with inadequate resources, poor sanitation and questionable nutrition (Crooks 1994:217). Deborah L. Crooks says that the early deficits in nutrition will continue to constrain functional abilities throughout the individual’s adult life (Crooks 1994:226). The household income has improved for many families in San Miguel since 1994 when Crooks did her study.

However, rather than introducing more protein into the diet with the increased income, things like, lard, sugar, chips, and candy have risen in the average diet of many San Miguel households. The local grocery store is very small and only offers main staples such as lard, flour, sugar, rice and items such as soap, laundry soap, bleach, and clothesline, sometimes a few medicines like aspirin or cold tablets and few basic school supplies. Canned goods, such as *duke* (a *Spam*-like meat) and *Vienna sausages* are few, and jars are not present. In the last three years, a new section in the small store has become popular which contains soft drinks, bags of chips, containers of gum and hard candy. The ice cream man serves rum-raison, corn, vanilla and other flavors of ice cream every Sunday afternoon when most families are at home. With the increased income, some mothers have begun offering their children rewards for their hard work in the way of sweets, rather than using the money to purchase and serve more meat. The women pay attention to whose children are eating treats and note if they are able to reward their children with the same amount of special snacks. The children who are doing without treats sometimes quarrel with the children who get snacks. A shortage of protein

continues for most San Miguel families, only some children get treats, and jealousy grows.

Alcohol has served a role in Maya culture in various ways. Alcohol has been used in rituals, is sometimes served as of token of reciprocity, and in ancient times was used when giving blood offerings to the gods (Thrasher 1995:336). Social change has had an effect on drinking practices with a shift from independence to dependence (Thrasher 1995:336). “Because of women’s increased involvement in the cash economy, external labour markets, craft cooperatives, and the strong presences of liberation theology activists, Eber argues that women are now speaking out about alcohol” (Stephen 1997:626). This is not the case in San Miguel. The Maya women in San Miguel do not see a problem with alcohol usage.

A drunken man walked up the San Miguel road on the day of the political rally and was shouting in the Kekchi language. Rather than peer through the cracks of their homes, the women grabbed their five-gallon wash buckets, went outside, turned the buckets upside-down and sat down on them under the eaves of their houses to listen to the drunk man speak his mind. They said they felt the man had something important to say. When asked if the drunken man’s wife and children will be embarrassed about his behavior, an informant responded that his family would want to hear what he has to say as much as the rest of the villagers do. He was vocalizing his view point concerning the upcoming election and past political endeavors. In the Toledo District, it is common to hear a drunken Maya man threaten to stick another with a machete for one reason or another. Sometimes a man gets drunk and beats up his son-in-law who continually abuses his daughter. This was the case with one San Miguel informant’s husband. After beating

his son-in-law, he was arrested; his family brought him plates of food while he was in jail, and they were proud of him for standing up to his daughter's abusive husband. Local author, school principal, and the pride of southern Belize, Geraldo Baltazar wrote a book concerning a relationship between a young Garifuna school teacher and a Maya girl. In his book *Broken Dreams*, Baltazar says, "There were comments about the inability of some men to control themselves when they drank fermented beverages. It was also mentioned that sometimes they use this drunken excuse to get even with someone whom they deem had done them wrong" (Baltazar 2003:55). Baltazar's observation describes alcohol related behavior in San Miguel. McClusky says, "For Maya, drinking seems to remove inhibitions against violence" (McClusky 2001:133). This seems to be fair statement; the alcohol removed the inhibitions, so a Maya man might get revenge from the individual doing him, his family, or his community wrong. A drunken man was walking on the road ranting and raving about how the government was doing the people of the village wrong; a drunken father beat his abusive son-in-law, and drunken men regularly threaten to stick another man with a machete if he does him wrong.

Laura J. McClusky did field study with the Mopan Maya of Belize and in her book, she remarked, "everybody is responsible for her own actions" (McClusky 2001:77). She was referring to an incident when she wanted to follow an informant around for a day and the informant helped her to remember that the decision to follow or not follow was up to McClusky and not the informant. McClusky said, "She won't tell me what I can or cannot do" (McClusky 2001:77). This is a Maya concept that also applies to drinking and smoking cigarettes inside San Miguel from their perspective.

One of the four small local grocery stores in San Miguel is the only bar in the

village and the only business that sells cigarettes. The owner says there are a few men in the village that drink because they like to drink. Usually, they might drink for a few days or weeks and then quit. It is expensive to drink; most people cannot afford to buy the beer. However, many local men drink because they have an agenda in mind, for example, to get even, or they drink to share information. In other words, according to the informant, drinking is sometimes a socially acceptable tool for bringing attention to a situation, such as the drunken man walking up the road on rally day. He was not only letting the people know that the government was doing the Kekchi people wrong, he was also sharing political information that he felt the people might not know about. He was bringing information to light and the people listened. The store owner talked about how some people smoke cigarettes in San Miguel, but like beer, it is expensive. When asked about addiction, the store owner responded by saying that Kekchi Maya have and make a choice. He said, they could drink or smoke if they have the money and want to, but they do not have to. The store owner said that the older women sometimes grow tobacco by their door and in the afternoon, they like to roll a big fat cigarette and lie in a hammock and smoke it and sometimes the women buy cigarettes if they do not want to go to the trouble of planting tobacco. He added, but if they do not want to grow tobacco or buy cigarettes, they just do not smoke. It is the person's choice. A father chose to get drunk, beat up his abusive son-in-law, which resulted in his sitting in jail, and his family was proud of him. It was his choice. Some women smoke when they want to and when they do not want to, they do not, and it is their choice. When asked about cravings for alcohol or cigarettes, the informant said, the Kekchi Maya in San Miguel do not crave such things; smoking and drinking are things people do by choice not because they have to.

The villagers either do not comprehend addiction or do not believe in it. An individual exercising a choice makes it acceptable to get drunk or smoke. The Kekchi Maya in San Miguel have not adopted western notions on addiction.

Foster makes a reference to masculinity controlling the domestic and decisions that it becomes okay to beat a wife (Foster in Potter 1967:308). It is part of the peasant beliefs on machismo and valor where the man is viewed as being strong, tough, and fair, not a bully, never dodging a fight, a winner, and inspiring respect (Foster in Potter 1967:308). Maya gender relationships are usually hierarchical and the men dominate the women (Hostettler 2004:443). The two most common reasons a man uses for beating his wife are adultery and laziness (Hostettler 2004:443). McClusky says (2001:85, 130):

Families usually support their daughter's decisions to leave abusive partners...When circumstances are right, abused Mayan women can temporarily return to their family of origin...Once a woman returned home, her husband might initiate a 'reconciliation'...may involve not just the husband and his wife, but her parents also...Mayan legal systems, run exclusively by men, work on harmony ideology...Mayan wives facing alcalde court therefore usually return to their husbands...Most settled their cases at home, with their families, often with their father acting as judge.

An informant in San Miguel remarked that although divorces are rare in San Miguel, they do occasionally occur. Much of the time a marriage was not a legal binding to begin with and she said keep in mind that most marriages work. Concerning common-law marriages McClaurin says, "Multiple consensual relationships (also called common law or visiting) are the most frequent type in Belize" (McClaurin 1996:113). Since a couple is in an economic partnership, it is not always feasible to leave a husband, and a second husband most likely would not want to support the child of another man. Recently, a few young men in San Miguel have begun dating women and marrying young women who have

children fathered by other men. To the older Kekchi women, a young man dating or marrying a woman with children fathered by another man is unheard of and the relationship should not happen. The informant says that the parents of such a couple may feel awkward about the relationship, but parents usually remain quiet. She said it is too soon to tell what will happen with these new types of relationships; they may not work.

While attending a wedding reception in a village that neighbors San Miguel, a thatched roof kitchen, which sat approximately three feet from the house burned to the ground in a matter of minutes. All of the men that were present formed a line and attempted to save all material items from the house. The possessions in the kitchen were beyond saving. The west side of the house and the roof were on fire. The women and children huddled in a group on the dirt road in front of the house and watched. The couple that lived in the house was not home. They had recently moved to Belize and were renting the house. The husband was out working on his farm. The wife and children had gone to the wedding and had not gotten home yet. The property owner paced back and forth and yelled out to the men to work harder to put out the fire. When the man arrived home he shouted, cried, and blamed his wife for the fire. He thought that she had probably left hot coals in the mud stove and then left the house. When the wife arrived home, she cried and begged the village women to help her. She told the women that her husband was holding her responsible for the fire and that he would beat her later. The property owner was holding the husband and the wife both accountable and said they must pay for the home. One month after the fire, informants in that village said that the Guatemalan couple was doing well. They were living in a make-shift shelter next to the burned house. The people of the village would help the couple rebuild the house. The

husband's clothing was spared from the fire because they were in the house, but the wife and children lost all their clothes, which were in the kitchen. All the pots, pans, and dishes were gone. The people in the village helped the couple. Each family donated kitchen items and clothing. The husband never did beat his wife. Authorities had come to the village and determined that the cause of the fire could not be determined. The neighbor had burned trash a couple hours before the fire; the wife had cooked at the clay stove at about four in the morning, and there was no way to know who to blame for the fire. With an *Image of Limited Good* cognitive perception, the villagers had no choice but to help the couple. The cultural mechanism in peasant societies dealing with those who fall behind applies to this situation (Foster in Potter 1967:312). The couple may become envious, jealous, or angry towards the more fortunate people. Because the villagers stepped in to assist the family and the authorities ruled the fire as undetermined in origin, a possible volatile situation was corrected before anything further could go wrong. Eileen Anderson-Fye paraphrases McClaurin's observation and says, "The most potent media message regarding abuse seems to be that it should not occur. This message is in opposition to an unspoken norm of quiet and unpleasant tolerance" (Anderson-Fye 2003:81). The wife was not beaten; abuse did not happen because a mechanism to maintain stability was quickly put into action.

Abuse can go the other way too. McClusky says, "Mayan women do talk about others who abuse their husbands. Some women...refuse to cook for their husbands, or to perform the duties required by traditional gender roles...verbally abuse...slander their husbands. These are all common topics of gossip" (McClusky 2001:131). "One woman in her sixties told me she threatened her son-in-law with a machete because he 'went with

the next lady” (McClusky 2001:132). Behavior like this is rare in San Miguel. However, it most likely does occur in other villages in southern Belize.

If you ask villagers in San Miguel if they know anything about sexual exploitation they will tell you, yes it is terrible. They say women do not always have the same job or education opportunities as men in Belize. If you ask the Garifuna people in southern Belize if they know anything about sexual exploitation and the Maya women in Belize, they will tell you the location of two different houses of prostitution in PG. However, they will add that it is more common to find a Maya woman in the park or in a restroom selling sex for \$5.00. A Belizean author tells the story of a young southern Belize woman and says, “A mother has to feed her children...what could she do? She had been to bed with a man who gave her five dollars and a sixth child. She could not do that again” (Castillo in Wilentz 2005:27). The villagers in San Miguel state that none of their good Maya women participates in prostitution; the men provide for their women in the patriarchal society.

Many constraints concerning health issues affect a Kekchi Maya woman. The environment makes extra work that wears down a woman’s body and causes her fatigue. The weather conditions can cause accidents and illnesses and so does the excessive trash and lack of protein in the diet. In addition, medical care is complicated by difficulty in comprehension and language barriers. Alcoholism, abuse, and sexual exploitation exist, yet they are accepted as a choice, a right, or are seen as non-existent. The Kekchi Maya in San Miguel are looking at health issues from an insider’s perspective, from the closed system, because that is where they live. Most assistance is found outside of the village in the open system and with potential for improved economics.

Constraints Relating to Economics

Comprehension difficulties and illiteracy have already been mentioned; they, in addition to isolation and language barriers greatly constrain the economy in San Miguel. Physical location, household duties, and family responsibilities keep the Kekchi Maya women somewhat isolated from the outside world, which makes it difficult to achieve financial improvement. In addition to isolation and language barriers, modern technology, limited employment opportunities and inadequate education cause constraints that affect the household economy.

The Maya villages are predominantly located in or near the Maya Mountains, and the market towns are located near the ocean. Oftentimes, the Kekchi women do not have the time or the funds to leave the village. Household duties and responsibilities usually keep them near home. It is common for a village woman to walk ten miles to a nearby village to visit a family member or go to a clinic, but to walk to a market town is too far. McClaurin says, "I watched women, men, and children arrive from the remote Maya villages by bus. It took several hours to travel from these areas because of poor roads, made worse and sometimes impassable during the rainy season" (McClaurin 1996:41). The expense of the bus fare limits their visits outside of the village. A fare of \$5.00 Belize must be paid to and from the village. A total of \$10.00 Belize (\$5.00 U.S.) is a lot of money to a Kekchi family. A woman may spend \$10.00 during a month (more or less) for her grocery purchases at the local store. One bus ride can make the difference on how many groceries can be purchased. If a needed item is not available at a local grocery store, it may be cheaper and more practical temporally to arrange with the bus driver to deliver the item.

Language barriers are constraining for the Kekchi women of San Miguel. McClaurin says (1996:43),

I was told by one of the shopkeepers...that Maya men keep women isolated by telling outsiders that the women do not understand or speak English. Any questions must therefore be directed to women through a male interpreter. The cultural practice of discouraging women from communicating across cultural boundaries can be a major barrier to their continuing their education, working, or forming friendships.

Furthermore, McClaurin observed a woman's group meeting and wrote about her experience. McClaurin said, "They carried on conversations around me in their own language – despite the fact that many Maya women attended primary school, which is conducted in English" (McClaurin 1996:43). I believe the informant McClaurin interviewed may have led her astray, and she is making an assumption that because English is used in classrooms today that it was in years past.

In recent years, the Kekchi children of San Miguel have begun to receive their school lessons in three languages, Kekchi, Spanish, and English. Women who are in the upper-thirties in San Miguel say that back when they were in school the lessons were taught in the Kekchi language. Many of the women in San Miguel have had little opportunity to use the English language. Any English language they may have learned may have been forgotten from lack of use. Most people in the village speak the Kekchi language. The women who are in a position to interact with visitors and tourists tend to speak more of the English language than other women in the village, and some of the women of the village do not know the English language at all. However, of the women who speak in English, the language is broken and the women have difficulty understanding English language concepts and have difficulty translating Kekchi concepts into

English. Many of the women in San Miguel are insecure about their ability to correctly speak the English language. An informant said Maya people are shy around English speaking people because they are afraid the people will speak to them and their English will not be good enough. Mark Moberg adds that, “The Mopan are more often literate and fluent in English than the Kekchi, many of whom grew up in remote hamlets where schooling is rudimentary” (Moberg 1996:318). As a result of not knowing the language or not having an opportunity to speak the language regularly, most Kekchi men and women of San Miguel are somewhat shy about speaking English. It is difficult to conduct business and economically improve because of isolation and the language barriers that result.

In addition, in some cases, modern technology can be impractical and create more work rather than save time. For example, one informant has a husband that works outside of the village. Because he has a good income, he was able to purchase a modern appliance for his wife. He bought his wife an electric wringer washing machine, and he thought it would save his wife work and time. The first time the woman used her washing machine, she let family members and the neighbors living closest to her bring over a few clothing items for laundering. This was an effort to prevent envy. She quickly found out that using the modern washing machine did not save her time. Although she had access to electricity inside her home, the piped water was a short distance from the house. She had to carry five-gallon buckets of water from the spigot to the washing machine inside the house. With each wash and rinse cycle, she had to carry used water outside and bring clean water inside. By the time she was ready to wash a third load of laundry, she was exhausted. She resorted to carrying the remaining laundry—hers and the items her family

and neighbors brought over, to the river and finished washing the laundry there. She decided it was easier and quicker to do laundry at the river than it was to carry the water for the electric washing machine. Furthermore, she would not have to pay for using additional electricity. A garden hose might have made the woman's laundering encounter a positive experience. Because modern technology is new to the Kekchi, the woman's husband did not think about how his wife would get the water to the washing machine. He spent a lot of money on an appliance that she will not be able to use until her husband saves up more money so he can acquire a hose. In the meantime, if she gets into a financial pinch, she may have to sell her washing machine to one of the other villagers, and that person may duplicate her laundering experience.

Another constraint to consider is that although many of the people of San Miguel have some modern conveniences, such as lighting, using electricity is expensive. Although some women own refrigerators, they may not be able to afford to use the electricity to run the refrigerator. As a result, women make grocery purchases on a daily basis. They only purchase the items that they will use that particular day. The women of San Miguel are careful to distribute their purchases among four small grocery stores in the village in an effort to prevent envy. They must be careful to not accidentally spend too much money at one store and cause another store owner to experience jealousy. Having modern technology available does not mean it is used or that it has created additional free time for rest or making handicrafts for these Maya women and jealousy must always be prevented.

Employment opportunities inside the village are almost nonexistent. A woman can make a few dollars mending clothes or sewing pants. She could sell a few vegetables

or fruits if another villager had a failing crop. If a man's wife was seriously injured and unable to work or passes away, he might hire a village woman for a few days or an extended period to do kitchen work, if he can afford the expense. One informant said she was hired by a local family to do kitchen work and tend to their "adult retarded child." She says she is not sure if her employer will pay her; she must wait one month before receiving her first pay. The family told her they would pay her \$60.00 Belize, and this is a lot of money in San Miguel. She will work one month, and if she is paid, she will continue at her job. However, if the family, her employer, does not pay her she will quit the job and go back to being her mother's kitchen worker.

Work outside the village is not much better. McClusky says, "Employment for Mayan women outside of the village is limited to working as a domestic, in a factory, or in the tourist trade. Employers pay too little for employees to afford child-care and rent. None allow children on the job site" (McClusky 2001:134). Oftentimes a mother might have to leave her child with a family member if she gains employment outside the village. Working in the tourism industry allows a mother to take her child to work with her. As the Kekchi women wander the streets in PG asking tourists if they "Wanna buy a basket," many times the women have several children in tow. The tourism industry seems to provide an opportunity for the women to earn income with fewer constraints. However, the tourism industry does have constraints too, which will be addressed in further detail in chapter six.

Lack of an adequate education is a constraint, which highly affects economics in San Miguel. McClusky interviewed informants in Belize and she asked them why so many girls dropped out of school. One of her informants replied, "Because, here, our

culture is hard” (McClusky 2001:186). Many young women must quit school and stay home to assist their mother with kitchen work. Families must pay tuitions, pay for books and purchase school uniforms for each child that attends school. There is a newer program in the villages called the “Sustainable Scholarship Program” that is enabling more young women to continue with their education.

However, just because a young woman has continued her education, it does not mean her life circumstance will improve. For instance, one informant finished high school, went on to community college, and received her associate’s degree. She was hired to work at the local school and became a teacher. She had a good job. One year later, she entered into a common-law marriage and later gave birth to a child. The school fired the informant. She lost her teaching job, because her husband was not a member of the church she belongs to and does not practice the same religion. She worked for a church school. The informant had no choice but to become her mother-in-law’s kitchen helper. Furthermore, because a woman has landed a good paying job does not mean that she will be able to keep the job. If something went wrong in her parent’s house or her in-law’s home, she may have to quit her job to help the family.

High School graduates can become school teachers, and even if a student drops out they can still take a teaching exam and become a teacher (McClusky 2001:190). McClusky says that “Parents tend to encourage their younger children of both sexes, to attend school...older children in a family, both male and female, often drop out of school because their family needs their labor at home” (McClusky 2001:202). The number of children and duties at home also make it difficult for a woman to leave the house. Education is expensive and an economic drain for most families in San Miguel and, “The

drain is both in cash and labor” (McClusky 2001:202). Lack of an adequate education makes it difficult to get a job and oftentimes, the job opportunities that are available for a Kekchi woman do not provide an adequate income.

In the open system, aid programs, clinics, school scholarship programs, women’s groups, and cooperatives exist inside the wider region and country, and from organizations, groups, and individuals from outside of the country, to offer alternatives and assistance. Yet, oftentimes many of these options and offers are avoided, ignored, or minimally used, because the constraints at home, in the closed system, within San Miguel, interfere or prevent the woman from participating in the programs or keep them from seeking assistance.

The *limited good* cognitive orientation keeps the woman bound to the village expectations of what a good Maya woman is. With uneven gender balance and a full work load, the resulting fatigue makes it hard to think about leaving the house to acquire a paying job. One informant was so tired that she overslept one morning and the other village women made fun of her. They teased her relentlessly for several weeks. She was not out of bed in time to serve breakfast to her husband and children. The other women know when and how often another woman may oversleep by watching the cook-smoke that rises from the roof of the kitchen.

Teasing and gossip help the village retain the image of a good Maya woman. McClusky noted, “Belize is a small country, with a large gossip network... Although some of the ‘back’ villages may seem isolated, their isolation is limited” (McClusky 2001:136-137). Most villagers have family in other villages. The women visit with their families and their in-laws families. The men congregate together in PG after conducting

business. McClaurin says, “In such as environment it is prudent to be cautious with criticism, because people who share virtually no resemblance to one another may be related” (McClaurin 1996:26). One must be careful not to say the wrong thing to an individual in the event that they are speaking to a relative. People in southern Belize share relatives and a cognitive perception of an *Image of Limited Good*. They are always economically strapped for cash, and things like health, wealth, and happiness are limited. In the closed system, a good Kekchi Maya woman has a hard life filled with endless constraints; in the past, she has had few options. In the open system, the tourism industry has opened the door for economic change enabling Kekchi women to boost the household economy and possibly relieve some of her constraints in the future.



Plate 4

Kekchi women selling crafts at the San Miguel T.E.A. guest house

CHAPTER SIX

WANNA BUY A BASKET: TOURISM INDUSTRY IN SAN MIGUEL

Ix Chel was the ancient Mayan's moon goddess, patroness of pregnancy, and inventor of weaving (Brainerd 1963:202). Ix Chel was also known as "Lady Rainbow" and she is pictured with snakes in her hair, and with claw-tipped hands and feet (Coe 1999:205). The ancient Maya loved their children deeply and children were greatly desired. "No event held greater significance for the average Maya than the birth of a child. Not only were children considered a measure of personal wealth and good fortune, they also implied the direct sanction of the gods, especially Ix Chel" (Gallenkamp 1985:125-126). "In order to induce pregnancy, a woman placed under her bed an image of Ix Chel, goddess of pregnancy and childbirth" (Brainerd 1963:163). The women of San Miguel still love Ix Chel today.

Women in San Miguel say that Ix Chel is a goddess and protector of women and children. She watches over all people to make sure they are in good health and safe. Ix Chel is the most popular ancient Maya goddess to be portrayed in San Miguel handicrafts. The women of San Miguel say if they embroider the image of Ix Chel, the handiwork will sell quickly. They say that even if people know nothing about Ix Chel, the people will still choose the handicraft with her image before choosing anything else. Ix Chel is a popular figure and the theme of many craft items throughout southern Belize.

Maya Women and the Tourism Industry

The Maya were self-sufficient people and they needed little cash until after World War II (Howard 1975:6). They subsisted by using slash-and-burn or milpa farming systems. Maya women that are living throughout much of Central America "have

traditionally practiced economic strategies to fulfill the economic needs of their household, and increase the flow of goods and cash into their domestic unit” (Kintz 1998:592). They were skilled gardeners, seamstresses, weavers, and artisans who produced craft items; they raised fowl and pigs for the family economy (Kintz 1998:592). Regarding Maya women and their economic future Ellen R. Kintz says that the women “were in the past isolated from money economy” and they “have now become the managers of cash, which flows into their household from a variety of sources” (Kintz 1998:597). Kintz asserts the following (1998:597):

...the tourist industry offers expanding opportunities for women to add cash to the household economy...Women produce crafts and prepare foods to sell to tourists...It is this system of *penny capitalism*, practiced by women, which has increased the occurrence of female-initiated economic enterprise...In the future, this economic transformation will produce dramatic long-term effects.

In 1992, the Central American governments Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico united to sponsor a large-scale Maya tourist promotion in a signed agreement. “The countries joined forces in a historical act of cooperation and collaboration to standardize and disseminate information on the Mundo Maya or *Maya World*...The five-nation Maya World tourism project builds upon the perceived interests, demands, and market potential of the international tourist to construct, package, and sell a product” (Brown 1999:296). Political representation or participation is not a part of any of the Maya World projects (Brown 1999:304).

The tourism industry in southern Belize focuses on Maya identity. “Indigenous identity has been a successful tourist commodity with important possibilities for the future” (Davis 2005:480-483). In San Miguel, families are making handicrafts that they hope to sell to the tourists who come to learn about them or see how they live and the

Kekchi are encouraging visitors to come into their village and into some homes.

The Tourism Industry in San Miguel Village

Wilk discusses how ecotourism developed in the late 1980s in southern Belize, which provided the Kekchi people with an opportunity to begin making a small amount of money by selling handicrafts and by hosting and guiding visitors to the local caves and ruins (Wilk 1997: xv-xvi). The tourism industry did not begin in San Miguel until around 1993, when ten local families joined the Toledo Ecotourism Association (T.E.A.), according to local informants. Currently, ten different villages participate in the T.E.A. program (Toledo 2007:1). All the T.E.A. participants were required to take classes. L. Mastny says, “All of Belize’s tour guides are required by law to take a series of 12 set courses to gain basic knowledge of subjects like guiding, first aid, environmental law, Maya culture, marine biology, and local flora and fauna” (Mastny 2001:34). After becoming certified in the required courses, the families participating in the program formed a committee in each of their perspective villages. Visitors could then come to the village, stay in the thatched roof guest houses, eat in the homes, and have a variety of entertainment or learning options that they could experience for a minimal fee.

The San Miguel T.E.A. guest house was built around the year 2000; before that, visitors stayed in the T.E.A. member’s homes. Ten families were participating in the program when it first began and now there are only four on the committee. Informants say that three of the families dropped out of the program because they did not realize they would have to dedicate large amounts of time and work to the program. Participating in the program was causing too much constraint on the farm and in the home. Three other families dropped out of the program in the village because they acquired jobs and no

longer had time available to dedicate to the program. Additional families would like to join the T.E.A. program in San Miguel. However, the remaining four families that form the committee say that the business has been “slow moving and there is not enough money to split” as it is. The program started very well and was profitable. Then, in 2001, Hurricane Iris hit and there have not been many visitors. Last year, 2007, was the worst, only one small group of visitors came to stay at the guest house. During previous years, usually two or three groups or seven to nine people and a solitary individual here and there came to the village. Business was so slow in 2007 that the T.E.A. committee added on a new service to their program in an effort to attract more tourists. They began offering people the opportunity to come to San Miguel for lunch. The T.E.A. families hope that if the visitors come for lunch, they may like what they see and experience and maybe the people will come back later to stay in the guest house.

Every village in the T.E.A. program offers visitors a variety of services or tours for a small fee. A small percentage of the proceeds are distributed to each committee member to cover the expenses of groceries and other costs incurred, and they receive an hourly pay for any activity they orchestrate. Most of the income goes into a maintenance fund, which covers repairs or roof replacement at the two guest houses, the guest wash house and outhouse. In addition, program members can apply for small loans from the T.E.A. committee during emergencies. For example, if a man was injured and he could not work his farm, he could acquire a loan to pay another individual to work his farm until he recuperated. Informants say that most emergencies occur during the rainy season, which is when the least amount of money is available and when most things are going wrong. Any loans that are given are short term and they must be paid in a timely fashion.

The committee members say that they have provided a few loans, but not many; usually the family tries to make due because it is too hard to pay back a loan and people are afraid that they will get themselves into trouble.

In San Miguel, tourists can go on a village tour, milpa farm tour, jungle walk, see and participate in a music, dance, craft lesson, rice or corn grinding demonstration, listen to a storyteller, or go to Tiger Cave or to Lubaantun Archaeology site. The cost of each service varies depending on how time consuming the activity is or if transportation fees are involved. In the past, the committee has also offered clothes washing lessons at the Rio Grande River. This year the committee began offering a short trip to a gibbon reserve, which is located at another village. The committee tries to add new services to their T.E.A. program each year in an effort to attract future visitors or keep past visitors interested and coming back. However, they never know when or if guests are going to come. The business is unpredictable and guests usually only come during the dry season, November to May.

Each of the villages participating in the T.E.A. program reserves one specified time for the women to display handicrafts that the women hope to sell. To make and sell handicrafts for a profit did not occur to the women of San Miguel until the initiation of T.E.A. program in the village. Before the T.E.A. program, female informants in San Miguel say that they had no idea that selling handicrafts could be profitable. Other village women not in the program are encouraged to bring their craft items to a committee member so their items can be included at the craft sale. The women on the T.E.A. committee organize and run the craft sale. There is only one woman on the committee who is able to write, and she keeps track of who makes a sale and the money that is

collected. She sees that the income is correctly divided and given to the correct individuals who made a sale, after the sale. The T.E.A. committee keeps 10% of all the proceeds, and the income is used to purchase cleaning supplies and toilet paper for the guest house.

Thirty-six women in San Miguel make handicrafts for the tourism industry. Of the thirty-six women, four are teenagers, thirteen are in their twenties, nine are in their thirties, seven are in their forties, and three of the women are fifty or older. Many of the women making handicrafts attended school up to Standard four or five, when around twelve years of age. (All children must pass a test before they proceed on to a higher Standard at school and many are not promoted). As a result, a student can be ten to fourteen years old when they complete Standard four. Only one of the thirty-six crafts women went on to complete the fourth Form in high school. A majority of the women making handicrafts are illiterate. A few can read and a couple can write, and most struggle while speaking English. Most girls begin making handicrafts when they are around twelve years old.

In addition to selling handicrafts at the T.E.A. craft sale, occasionally when a special group is visiting, a craft sale is organized by the teachers and held at the local grade school. Occasionally, one man in the village brings a group of people to the community building in the village and the women display their handicrafts for sale for his guests. It is rare, but sometimes tourists will wander into the village, and many of the women will run out of their houses with craft items for sale. More often, when a woman is going to Punta Gorda (PG) to shop or visit the clinic, she will fill a small backpack with handicrafts that she will try to sell in town. She will approach anyone who “looks”

like a tourist and usually say, “Wanna buy a basket, some embroidery, jewelry, a calabash carving, I have Ix Chel.”

Maya Bags, a for-profit business located in PG, purchases handicrafts from nine women and two men from San Miguel. The owner comes to Belize from the United States twice a year and brings fabric and other supplies that will be used for making bags or baskets that will fill orders. More than fifty Maya women in southern Belize embroider and sew bags and weave baskets that *Maya Bags* sells in shops and on the internet. The men usually make natural rope handles and other similar items. Instructions are given to the Maya women and men, and they have a few days, maybe a week or so, to produce a completed inventory. Then, the owner packs up the finished products and takes them back to the United States with her on the airplane. She markets the products as Maya made, although some of the designs that she has the women embroider resemble Southwest Native American icons remarkably. The women in San Miguel usually make about \$50.00 to \$80.00 Belize (BZ; \$25.00 to \$40.00 U.S. dollars) for the year from *Maya Bags*.

One PG coffee shop owned by a woman from the United States sells a limited number of Maya woven baskets, and she hires one man from San Miguel to purchase fresh picked coffee beans and four women from San Miguel to hand roast coffee beans on the comal of their clay stoves. It takes approximately four hours to dark roast a five-gallon-bucket of coffee beans, and the women make \$6.00 Belize per pound. The coffee beans are roasted about once every two weeks, and the women of San Miguel usually work in a rotation. Each of the four women roasts beans about once every two months. The women do not know how many pounds of coffee beans fit into a five-gallon-bucket,

and they must rely on the business owner's word on the total weight for correct payment. The four women feel that they are being paid fairly for their time and would like to be able to roast the coffee beans more often. Tourists are the primary customers of this business.

Fajina Craft Center is located in PG on Front Street and it is a Maya women's cooperative. The center was organized in 1995 and provides the village women with a place to sell their handicrafts for profit. Members can join *Fajina* as an individual or as a group. There is a first time membership fee of \$65.00 BZ, and following years, the fee is \$15.00 BZ per year. To restart a past membership, a membership that has expired, there is a fee of \$35.00 BZ. *Fajina* keeps twenty-five percent of all sales to cover expenses. There are Maya women from thirteen villages who display handicrafts for sale at the *Fajina Craft Center*. Each woman must fasten a tag with her own person code and an item number so sales and craft items can be monitored. Each village represented at *Fajina* has one designated month with specific days, which each women belonging to the group must work. For instance, one informant from San Miguel had to work every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning for the month of March. The business displays flyers at the small PG airport, at the immigration office, bus station, and around PG to attract tourists.

There are two businesses in Placencia that cater to tourists that allow Maya women to leave craft items on consignment in their shops. However, they only allow each woman to leave about five items and the entire Maya display must fit into a small area of one corner in the building.

Less than one dozen Kekchi women from San Miguel who were interviewed work

a paying job outside the village. One woman works a governmental job, one teaches school in another village, and the rest work jobs that pertain to the tourist industry. McClaurin says, "Most women spend the greater part of their life performing home duties, when they do seek outside work; they tend to turn to familiar employment, building upon existing skills" (McClaurin 1996:112). One woman from San Miguel cleans house, cooks and does laundry for a minister and his wife, who live about a two hour bus ride north of the village. She rides the bus to and from work each day. Her mother watches her children while she is at work. Other Kekchi women earn an income by doing laundry, ironing, working as a seamstress, making alterations, or by making baked goods such as bread or tamales to sell in PG. Motels, hotels, shops, and restaurants need women to clean, waitress, cook, and wait on customers. Some of the women take annatto, vegetable, and fruits to PG to sell to restaurants or sell them at the market. Cash income can be made from making men's pants and sewing school uniforms. A woman can teach another how to sew and make a few dollars.

The Kekchi women of San Miguel say that every bit of money they bring into the house helps. One informant said that her family suffers when she does not sell crafts. She is one of the two women that leave San Miguel to sell crafts on a regularly scheduled basis. This woman leaves the village three or four times a week to sell handicrafts. Before 2001, she sold tomatoes, cabbage, and cilantro. Then disease killed her plants. When she needs "quick money," she sells tamales, bread, and coconut crusts, which are the inside of the coconut, baked, ground into flour, and mixed with sugar. Selling these items provides her with quick "pocket-money." Her husband has a failing crop this year, and they are dependent on the money she earns, even though it is expensive for her to travel.

Although the villagers of San Miguel say that none of the women in their community has resorted to prostitution, quick “pocket-money” is acquired in southern Belize through this profession. The local women did make reference to a couple of Kekchi women with children who have fathers that are United States citizens. Desperate people sometimes act or react contrary to their better judgment when they need a dollar.

Central American Maya Women and the Tourism Industry

The tourism industry in other parts of Central America is much more progressive than in southern Belize. Using Maya identity has been a successful tourist commodity and the women have changed their future (Davis 2005:480-483). In some homes, the families have created a place to enact their culture through performances and exhibitions for the tourists (Little 2000:163). In Guatemala, the Kaqchikel women assume a passive position while tourists gaze at them. “By accommodating tourists, letting them watch, and then offering...items for sale, women become part of a global economy of handicraft sales” (Little: 2000:165). In highland communities, the Maya weave, make crafts, play music, dance, tell stories, demonstrate ancient rituals, carry out domestic tasks, and care for their children as the tourists watch (Little: 2000:167). The Maya recognize the potential for the tourism market. Some indigenous are beginning to establish museums or combination store-restaurants in order to attract more tourists (Little 2000:167).

In other parts of Central America, hopeful entrepreneurs in the tourism industry are beginning to construct sophisticated performances that play on a tourist’s beliefs, practices, and desires (Little 2000:172). Walter Little says, “They play on the concepts of tradition illustrated in tourism materials to attract tourists looking for a certain type of Maya” (Little 2004:532). Furthermore, Little says, “They try to use the interests, desires,

and curiosities of tourists to draw them into the performance and to confirm their beliefs about the exotic, different Other” (Little 2000:172). They will speak in their own language when they are around tourists to ensure that difference is maintained (Little 2000:172). They may even ask a visitor, such as a visiting anthropologist, to act as an interpreter for them, in front of the tourists (Little 2000:173). This provides credibility for the entrepreneurs. Little asserts that “They explain that the success of their co-operative helps them maintain traditions such as weaving... showing...that Maya culture is aesthetically and economically viable” (Little 2000:172). Little stresses that the Maya “engage in numerous tactics to camouflage their economic intentions” (Little 2004:532). The least obvious seller sells more merchandise to tourists (Little 2004:532).

Some homes are transformed into a “theatre-in-the-round” by partitioning off portions of a house, removing electrical appliances and devices, and any other signs of non-Maya material culture (Little 2000:171). At best, the entrepreneurs try to make anything electrical as inconspicuous as possible (Little 2000:171). “Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1988:72-74) discusses the intricacies of *staging culture* where, when the performance become a spectacle, authenticity is called into question. The issue facing producers is ‘to present rather than represent that life’” (Little 2000:168).

In Guatemala, in public performances at churches, in the plazas, at the marketplaces, and on the streets, the Maya are inventing spectacular strategies to make sales (Little 2004:528). For example, a vendor does not address a tourist until eye contact occurs, and then builds a rapport by making small talk rather than presenting a sales pitch (Little 2004:528-529). Little expands on Maya performances as a sales strategy and says (2004:530):

Performances cater to each perspective tourist. Some are teased. Some are given advice-how to avoid thieves, where the best restaurants are, what bus companies are the most reliable. Some are engaged in discussions of politics. And some are even invited into vendor's homes to see what Kaqchikel Maya life is like. Vendors share local food specialties, demonstrate weaving, and tell stories about traditions. They offer to help tourists practice Spanish and learn words in Kaqchikel. Many vendors encourage reciprocal language-learning relationships... All of these activities minimize the economic goals and emphasize that the vendors are the bearers of traditional Maya culture that contrasts with the tourists' culture.

They are using their Maya identity as a commodity.

In San Miguel, there is only one woman who is called a "real entrepreneur," by T.E.A. guests. She is just beginning to turn her home into a "theatre in the round." The income she brings in from traveling to tourist towns, selling crafts has made her the primary income provider for her family. She owns three houses. One house is for her children, she and her husband occupy the second house and the third house is where she takes T.E.A. guests to eat and see demonstrations.

This Kekchi woman is on the verge of becoming the head of the household if her handicraft sales continue to bring prosperity, and she is in a traditional Kekchi patrilineal marriage. Concerning female heads of Maya households in other parts of Central America Ellen R. Kintz says (1998:598),

The increasing contribution of the cash economy specifically to women's lives, as well as the increase in male migration, has turned the spotlight on women's economic viability...women chose to establish their own household in order to gain decision-making independence, to escape male violence, or to avoid economic reliance on an irresponsible man. These independent female-headed households established autonomy and, despite suffering from stigmatization as deviant lifestyles, many functioned successfully both socially and economically. Many of these independent female-headed households were operated by women who were outstanding craft producers and entrepreneurs.

The San Miguel Kekchi woman prospering from craft sales uses her Maya identity as a

sales tool. She brings customers into her home to show them how Kekchi live.

While conducting demonstrations, she cooks on the clay stove, but when the visitors leave, she has her teenage daughter cook the family's food on the propane stove in the children's house. Two of her houses have a propane stove, refrigerator, radio and compact disk player. The parent's house has a microwave, television, computer, freezer, nice wood furniture and a linoleum covered floor. The third house is filthy, has the clay stove, a dirty wobbly wooden table, several stools, two torn hammocks, odds and ends, and chickens laying eggs on two sides of the single room; this is where she takes guests. The family is prospering from her craft sales and the T.E.A. program, and she is becoming more autonomous.

She keeps the house where her husband and her live closed so that the neighbors cannot see inside. When she leaves the village the three or four times a week to sell her handicrafts she locks the house. She does not always come home in the evening after selling crafts all day. Sometimes she decides that sales are good and she is not going to quit and go home. Other times, she decides sales are bad and she should stay to continue to try to sell more. When she does not come home, because she has not provided her husband with a house key, her husband cannot get into the house. When locked out, her husband has no choice, but to stay in the staged house and live like a traditional Maya. Little says, "The performance is staged, stylized, and simplified. One of the problems...of their house as a home and stage is that they do not always live, or even want to live, in the ways that they portray themselves" (Little 2000:173).

Indigenous women in other parts of Central America are beginning to take part in other types of production, such as in the trade and cottage industries. The second-hand

clothing industry is a booming business in Guatemala. Some women have started a new profession in Guatemala as well. They are smuggling household products from Mexico into Guatemala (Delany-Barmann 2004:305-311). Maya women in San Miguel and other villages in southern Belize have not reached this level of entrepreneurship yet. In San Miguel, there is only one woman who seems to display aggressive ambition outwardly.

Exploitation, Constraints and the Tourism Industry

Money-making schemes and an ugly side of tourism probably exist in some form anywhere that cash is needed or cash is around to be made. Exploitation can go two ways, the exploiter or the exploited. Sometimes people from other cultures exploit the Kekchi living in San Miguel. In at least one instance, some Kekchi can be the exploiter, an individual who is seeking a profit with a possibly untrue marketing tool.

In San Miguel, the women and men are beginning to use the term “organic” as a marketing tool. The men sell their cash crops as organic crops. Some of the crops are organic, but many are sprayed with pesticide or herbicide. The women sell “organic” roasted cacao and coffee beans. The beans may or may not be organic. Furthermore, one Kekchi woman inside San Miguel as well as many Maya outside the village is beginning to use the terminology “poverty-stricken” as a marketing tool. These individuals can be heard saying, “please help me, my family is poverty-stricken, I have a sick child, my husband is injured” and so forth. Poverty is sometimes simulated. For instance, the house that is being staged for tourists in San Miguel is probably in poorer condition, filthier, lacking modern material goods, such as a radio and propane stove, more so than most other houses in the village. In this house, poverty is being simulated as a sales pitch to promote handicraft sales. A Maya acting as the exploiter is rare. It is more common for a

Mayan to be exploited.

Belize has become one of the world's top ecotourism destinations (Mastny 2001:32). "Critics complain that tourist operations owned by expatriates are squelching indigenous efforts at ecotourism" (Mastny 2001:32). For example, individuals cannot own caves. However, an individual can own the land where the entrance to a cave is and they can charge admittance into the cave (Mastny 2001:33). Foreign investors are capitalizing Belize's tourism potential, "90 percent of the country's coastal development is in foreign hands" (Mastny 2001:34). U.S. citizens or East Indians own many of the businesses in PG where the Kekchi Maya from San Miguel conduct business.

A tour guide contacted a San Miguel informant on February 27, 2008 and asked if he could bring guests to her house the next day. (This guide contacts at least four San Miguel households in a rotation and asks if he can bring his guests.) The guests came the next day; they wanted to see the informant's kitchen and they wanted her to demonstrate the processing of annatto. She, her daughters and daughter-in-law were agreeable to his request. The woman normally would have gone out that day to sell crafts; two of the daughters would have gone to school; the daughter-in-law would have gone to work her house cleaning job, and they all stayed home to accommodate the guide and his guest's request. The guests stayed in their home half a day, ate a meal, and watched the women process annatto. Then the guide and his guests left without paying. Furthermore, they refused to allow the women to show their handicrafts.

The four informants that conduct business with this particular guide say that when he started bringing guests into their homes he would pay them. Later, he would tell his guests that it would be nice if the guests provide a donation for the Maya women for their

trouble, instead of paying them. For the past year, the guide has not paid the women, and he does not ask his guests to make a donation anymore. All four of the women have heard the guide instruct his guests to tell the women no when they offer to display their handicrafts for sale. This eliminates any opportunity for income from craft sales. The Maya women are essentially working at their own expense for the tour guide and his guests. The women say they cannot tell this man to quit coming, because he is influential in PG, and it would hurt the business they conduct in town.

To make matters worse, the informants say that the guide bringing his guests to their houses causes trouble for their families in the village. The other villagers think they are “making money,” being paid by the guide and selling handicrafts to his guests and they are not. The other village women become terribly jealous and resentful.

A PG business ordered craft items, such as natural rope, from several of the villagers in San Miguel. In the beginning, the business paid the Maya well for their time and materials. After a few months, the business owner began to act confused about what he normally pays for the merchandise and began paying the San Miguel Maya one quarter of the original amount. This is one example of a frequently occurring negative business encounter that many of the Kekchi Maya in San Miguel experience. Usually, the villagers remain quiet, walk away, and they do not go back to the people who “rip them off.” Distrust and envy go hand in hand. With an *Image of Limited Good* cognitive perception, all things are limited and there is always someone who will take advantage of a person or someone who will “rip them off.”

A number of constraints prevent a Kekchi woman from working outside the home or from making handicrafts that she could sell. In a patriarchal society, not all husbands

will permit their wife to make and sell crafts. Some men think a good Maya woman's place is strictly in the home. Some men think it is too dangerous for a woman to be conducting business outside the house or village. However, in San Miguel when some of the men are not busy at the farm, they sometimes make handicrafts for their wife to sell. They like the income resulting from craft sales and realize their wife is constrained for time and cannot always keep up with making crafts due to her household duties.

Women with excessively large families and women who do not have girls to help with the kitchen work seldom have time to make or sell handicrafts. If a woman with a large family or no kitchen help does make handicrafts; she usually must stay up extremely late in the evening to make the crafts, which results in fatigue.

The biggest concern and constraint for women in San Miguel is where to sell handcrafted items. Many of the older women do not like to go out of the village to sell crafts and they sometimes ask another woman to sell their handicrafts for them. Several informants commented, "Sometimes she sells hers, her daughters, and sometimes other women's crafts." The other women pay her \$5.00BZ for doing this.

Most women in San Miguel say they do not know how to get to Placencia, a peninsula that attracts many tourists, and they have no idea how much it would cost to go there. They are aware that two of the women in the village go to Placencia to sell crafts, and they know that the women make a good income. The village women say that it upsets them that the two women have not told them "how to get to Placencia, or how much it costs to go there." Additionally, the two women have not asked them to go along with them. The informants also say that it is probably too expensive to go to Placencia and they have a baby to take care of and duties at home anyway. They seem to be envious of

the two women, yet they do not really want to leave the home.

San Miguel is a small village, thirty-six women compete with each other to sell crafts, and there are a minimal number of tourists coming into the village. In addition, some of the women in the village are concerned because the school is teaching the children arts and crafts now. The women are afraid that the local competition is going to get worse. In reality, the arts and crafts that the school is teaching will not produce any competitors, because they are not teaching handicrafts. The women are envious because there is too much competition within the village to sell handicrafts.

Furthermore, the women in San Miguel express that too many women are making the same kind of crafts. Most Kekchi women try to divide the different types of crafts up between the women in the household, so they are not all making the same thing. Most of the women prefer to do embroidery, which can be done in the afternoon from the comfort of a hammock. Ix Chel is the most popular figure that the women embroider. Handicrafts are usually made during rest time in the afternoon. Ix Chel is the most popular figure to be carved on the calabash, too, and carving calabash is extremely strenuous and time consuming. A jaguar and a toucan, the national bird of Belize are popular figures as well. Although the women make jewelry from local clay turned into beads and small figures, and from jungle seeds, the women are limited on variation in design because they do not always have the funds to purchase jewelry making supplies, such as glass beads or wire. The women try to invent new craft items, but the available natural materials in their region limit them, and they usually can only purchase minimal supplies. The baskets are made from jippy joppa; the inner part of the jippy joppa is food and the outer part provides the women with basket weaving material.

Basket weaving is hard on the hands, but many of the Kekchi women of San Miguel continue to make them because they feel they are a sure sell. McClaurin says, “Although the baskets are generally made individually, in a few villages, some of the women have joined the Belize Rural Women’s Association. In some villages, the women meet in groups to weave baskets...test out new ideas or patterns...Unfortunately, the market for crafts...is limited, and there are too many women producing the same things. Thus, though labor intensive, basket weaving is not very lucrative” (McClaurin 1996:41). The smallest baskets sell at a starting price of around \$2.50 to \$3.00 BZ.

The women usually try to invent a new basket style each year. For example, in San Miguel this year the women are making baskets with tiered lids that represent the Maya ruins. This is an old style of basket. The women brought back the style because they think it may become popular again. They also began making baskets in the shape of a turtle this year. Last year the women were weaving ducks and the year before chickens, in addition to the classic round basket with a domed or flat lid that they always make. The women prefer to make the smaller and cheaper basket because they can weave them in about four hours and they sell quickly. The women say that tourists do not seem to mind buying multiple inexpensive baskets to take home as gifts.

The co-owner of the coffee shop in PG that sells Maya baskets says that she thinks the little baskets that the Maya make are useless. “There is nothing practical or useful about them; they can only hold trinkets and nonsense,” is what she says. The Maya women do have to deal with negative commentary made towards their merchandise, about their sales strategies, and their indigenous way of life. Tourists do not always like it when a Maya woman approaches them and says, “Wanna buy a basket.” Men of

other ethnic backgrounds do verbalize snide remarks to Mayan men who only drink one beer occasionally or who have never drank alcohol. It seems it has become a stereotype that “all” Maya men are drunkards or alcoholics. Other ethnic groups in southern Belize, for example some Garifuna people, express jealousy towards the Maya, and they comment that all the aid groups come to see and help the Maya and they ignore the needs of other ethnic groups in southern Belize.

Nine women from San Miguel started a handicraft cooperative, which they named *Tizamna Women’s Group*. The women organized themselves, appointed a chairperson, purchased bags and had labels made for packaging roasted coffee and cacao beans. Each of the women invested money and time. Then the group went defunct. All but one woman agree about what went wrong with their group. They say that the chairperson was not working with the group; she had her own financial interests in mind, and she was using the other group members to promote her own business. The chairperson leaves the village to sell handicrafts and agreed to take all the women’s group member’s handicrafts and food items with her. The chairperson would receive a percentage of profits each time one of the women made a sale as payment for her efforts. She was to sell items and place items on consignment in shops in PG and Placencia. The packaging and labels made the craft and food items appealing to the eye, which the women felt could make items more attractive to a tourist and the shop owners. Another woman from the village who also leaves the village to sell craft items observed the chairperson selling her personal craft and food items in Placencia, which were packaged in the *Tizamna Women’s Group* bags and labels, and she was not displaying or offering any of the other women’s group’s items for sale. The other women in the organized group confronted the chairperson and

asked if this was true and she said yes. She told them she could make more money if she concentrated on selling only her items. The other women requested that the chairperson discontinue using the group's labels and packaging materials, and they thought that she had honored their request. They asked her to return the *Tizamna Women's Group* packaging materials to the other group members. The women were angered by what the chairperson had done, did not have anyone else to take their handcrafted items out of the village, and voted to disband the group. In February of 2008, roasted coffee and cacao beans began showing up in PG and Placencia that was packaged in *Tizamna Women's Group* bags and labels. Gossip brought the chairperson's actions to the attention of the defunct women's group.

The defunct women's group members expressed that the chairperson took advantage of them again, and she profited at their expense, because the craft and food items did sell better with the attractive packaging. Gossip and hidden aggression grew. To make a long story short, the chairperson did not take any actions to correct the situation or reduce the imbalance that she caused by letting the other women fall behind financially, and the chairperson was compelled to move her wash stone down the river away from the other women. The women usually visit and gossip together while they are washing and the chairperson is no longer welcome to socialize with the group, and the situation has not yet been resolved today.

The women from San Miguel also had problems at the *Fajina Craft Center*. The same women that organized the *Tizamna Women's Group* joined the *Fajina Craft Center* together in an organized group. The same woman that was elected as the chairperson of the *Tizamna Women's Group* was also voted in as their group's chairperson at the *Fajina*

Craft Center. Joining the center and organizing the cooperative in the village occurred around the same time. The result was the same. The chairperson took her own items to the center and stored the other women's items at her home. The result was the same; the women quit the group; the situation remains unresolved, and eventually, the chairperson will have to neutralize the situation by making a generous expenditure; she imposed on the other women to get more than what she was entitled.

Difficulties can go beyond that experienced by the women in San Miguel. McClaurin says, "The money the group made from a collective project further divides the group. Some members favor taking their individual share; others want to use the money on a project...More women leave the group who are unable to agree" (McClaurin 1996:161). Often times, the women are disagreeable amongst themselves on how to disburse the resulting income.

By selling handicrafts, baked goods, vegetables, fruits, roasted coffee and cacao beans, sewing and any of the other economical endeavors that the Maya women attempt to do from their house is essentially a woman acting as the owner and operator of a home based business. Expenses and overhead must be kept down if there is going to be profit. Maya women keep the cost of materials and supplies down by collecting or growing many of the materials. However, some of supplies must be purchased, for instance, fabric, thread, embroidery floss, and minimal jewelry supplies. The greatest expenditure a Maya woman has pertaining to her business is transportation costs. She can relieve some of the expense of transportation costs by paying someone else a percentage to sell her craft items for her.

To go and sell craft items in Placencia a woman from San Miguel must hire the

driver of a pickup truck to give her a ride to a junction to catch a bus and the taxi service will cost the woman about \$20.00 to \$25.00 BZ. The bus fee that will take the woman from the junction to another village to catch a water taxi will cost the woman \$10.00 BZ. Then, the woman will pay \$5.00 BZ to ride the water taxi, just to get to where the tourists are in Placencia. Each morning three water taxis leave the dock with approximately 58 to 60 individuals, mostly women, who will work for the tourism industry in some capacity. Some of the people will work in the restaurants, bars, motels, hotels, and many will sell handicrafts.

The Maya woman's greatest source of competition comes from the numerous tourist oriented gift shops. She will also compete with other Maya women as she walks long distances up and down the sidewalk and beach selling her handicrafts. A Mopan Maya woman expressed the competitiveness of the trade, and her jealousy and resentment towards a San Miguel woman who was selling crafts along the beach. The Mopan woman said, "Look at that woman she is too fat to be selling crafts. That woman from San Miguel, she is no good, she tell the tourists that she is poverty and needs food at home to make a sell. Look at her; she is too fat to be selling crafts on the beach." The woman from San Miguel paid \$35.00 to \$40.00 BZ transportation costs for the one-way trip to Placencia to sell her handicrafts. Because of the weighty competition, she will utilize any sales pitch that she thinks will work.

If the Kekchi woman from San Miguel chooses to go to PG to sell her handicrafts, the transportation expenses will be less, \$5.00 BZ one way. The destination is closer; it is cheaper to get there, and the trip is less time consuming. However, the number of tourists is limited and there is more competition. PG is predominantly a market village, not a

tourist center. The owner of a PG coffee bar says, “The only tourists who come down here are the adventurers with a lot of guts.” In PG, there are Kekchi and Mopan women trying to sell handicrafts present from over thirty other Maya villages. Often times it is more lucrative to pay a percentage to another Maya woman who is agreeable to selling other people’s handicrafts.

There are Maya women in Placencia who are willing to consign other women’s handicrafts. Some of these women set up tables or blankets along the sidewalk and on the beach. They put in many hours of work and they no longer have the time to make a sufficient number of craft items to sell. They depend on the handicrafts that other women make, so that they can continue to make a profit. One Maya informant who consigns other women’s craft items has developed many sales strategies. She is one of the few women that brings a big table with her to Placencia. She says, “People buy more from me because they do not have to bend over. The other women display their handicrafts from the ground.” If sales are good, she does not go home. During the day, she moves her table up and down the sidewalk and sets it up in the shade. She looks for a place where the tourists seem to be congregating. At night, she sets up the table directly under a street light. She brings her small children with her while she works. Since her older children are in grade school, she has enrolled them in the local grade school because she spends more time on the peninsula than at home. Many times her children and she have stayed all night in Placencia at a family member’s house or with a friend. Sometimes she rents a tent and they stay on the beach, which costs her \$10.00 BZ. She says she has to work long hours and stay in Placencia as much as possible because she has to pay a fee to set up her table along the sidewalk. If she did not pay the fee, she could not use her table and

she would have to always keep moving, walking long distances up and down the beach and the sidewalk like the other Maya women. She pays \$400.00 BZ a month to set up a table along the sidewalk and she must sell a lot. The other Maya women pay \$5.00 BZ a month and cannot display their crafts anywhere but on the ground.

Another option a Maya woman might resort to is to send her child or children out to sell her handicrafts for her. This prevents some children from attending school. Usually a mother sends her child or children out to sell crafts on days when there is no school. Many women have discovered that it is difficult for tourists to tell a young, attractive child no.

Rain hampers sales in Placencia. The tourists stay at their motels and hotels and it is difficult for the Maya women selling crafts to find a dry place to take refuge. The rain hurts sales and often times on rainy days a woman cannot make enough money to cover her travel expenses. Sand flies are pesky, a health risk and they also hamper craft sales. The Maya women avoid going to Maya Beach to sell crafts because the sand fly population has become extreme.

Restrooms are also a constraint for women when they are out selling handicrafts. Many businesses only allow paying customers use of their restroom. Many Maya women bring food from home and cannot afford to make purchases of any sort. Sometimes a fee is charged for the use of a restroom. Businesses charge between .50 to \$1.00 BZ for restroom usage and bringing toilet paper along is a must.

Tourists from the United States have a tendency to say things like, “maybe later,” “not right now,” “not today” or “on another day,” rather than telling a Maya woman no thank you, when they are approached by women selling crafts. Many Maya women do

not comprehend that the tourist is saying they do not want to buy anything. The Maya woman may come back to that particular individual later that day or the next day because that person said, “maybe later.” Sometimes a Maya woman will skip taking the last water taxi of the day out of Placencia, so she can stay to sell the person who said “not right now” crafts. She will have to find a place to stay for the night at an expense and her family may worry because she did not come home. She does not want to miss out on a good opportunity to make a sale. At other times, a woman who normally can only afford to come to Placencia once a week may come back to Placencia the next day, because a tourist told her “on another day” or “not today.” She believed she had a sure sale. With a *limited good* perspective, only a few tourists can make purchases and a limited amount of money can be earned. Competition is atrocious and envy is widespread.

Constraints Relating to T.E.A. Program and Envy in San Miguel

When large groups come to San Miguel, sometimes the T.E.A. committee needs assistance and must ask other women in the village to cook and serve meals in their homes. Some of the women want to do this and others do not. If they do not want to cook, the T.E.A. committee women go on to the next house and ask her if she wants to assist. All the women around the guest house will be asked first and then the committee begins asking the women across the river. The people in the houses closest to the T.E.A. guest houses know how many guests come and how often. They are the villagers who will become envious first. The people living across the river may be unaware of guest house visitors and they are less likely to become jealous or envious.

In the future, the San Miguel T.E.A. committee has a group coming that is so large that they will not have enough beds or hammocks between both of their guest

houses to accommodate all the visitors in the group. They will build and add additional bunks to the existing two guest houses and hang a couple hammocks in the storage building that adjoins the outhouse and bathhouse building, essentially converting it into a third guest house. Then, they will have to find other places for the remaining people to stay. A nearby house is currently sitting empty; the woman who used to live there is currently living with a daughter in another village. A T.E.A. committee member will go ask her if the T.E.A. can rent her home for a couple of days. The committee will probably have to find additional homes where the people will welcome guests. In this instance, the committee is seeking out a solution before the problem occurs, which is not always the case.

This year, 2008, has been a good year at the T.E.A. guest houses in San Miguel. It has been the best year since 1999 or 2000. The T.E.A. committee members would never turn a single guest away. They have had too many years where too few guests came. During March of 2008, too many guests were in the village at one time and the committee members knew all the people were coming ahead of time. They had two separate groups, each staying in a separate guest house, and the committee would have to provide meals, demonstrations and tours. In addition, they had another seventeen guests coming for lunch at the same time both guest houses were full and these lunch guests would stay in the village for the afternoon for a demonstration and a tour. The T.E.A. committee hired other village women to cook and feed guests in their homes. Still, there was not enough assistance. The committee members could not be in two places at once or doing two things at the same time. There was no one left in the village to watch over the smaller group of guests staying in one of the T.E.A. guest houses. The smaller group ate

lunch, but did not get to have all the demonstrations or tours during the afternoon that they had anticipated; the day was too busy and the result was unhappy customers. There was not enough help to go around.

Events that involve assistance from other families in the village, outside of the T.E.A. program, offer an opportunity for the T.E.A. committee members to reduce envy generated towards them. Many people in the village profit, not just a few families. However, often times, a daughter may have to stay home from school to help prepare the T.E.A. guest houses, washroom, outhouse, the home and help prepare meals for the guests. Education is becoming more important to the Kekchi people in the village today and the neighbors do gossip when daughters are kept home from school to help.

Most handicrafts that are sold in San Miguel are sold at a T.E.A. craft sale when guests are visiting. Most of the women involved with the T.E.A. program in San Miguel say, "Jealousy is bad in the village, in PG too, and selling crafts at the guest house is very competitive...Yes, the village women gossip and sometimes it is very hurtful gossip. Over thirty women in the village sell crafts. T.E.A. has welcomed all the women to bring their crafts when it is time to display crafts. However, the women do not bring their crafts too much." The female T.E.A. committee members were in consensus with their belief that the other village women do not understand how the T.E.A. crafts sales works. They said that the other village women see the guests come into the village. The other village women keep track of what the guests are doing and where they are going. The other village women know they have provided handicrafts for the T.E.A. craft sale and sometimes they have sold an item or two and sometimes they do not sell anything. The other village women think that "all" of the handicrafts they brought to the sale should

have sold. The other village women think the guests are rich, they do not realize that the visitors saved up money to come to Belize, or that Belize is an economical country to visit. The committee members say, “The other village women do not understand why all of their craft items do not sell and they think we are to blame.”

Two of the female T.E.A. committee members say they “know that in all of Toledo (District) everyone knows that selling crafts brings in money and everyone needs the money. It is good to share craft ideas with others because all of them are in the same situation. Everybody has it rough.” The other two disagree, like the other women in the village, it is better to keep your ideas to yourself. Competition is already bad; sharing ideas makes the competition worse. As a result, mutual distrust is widespread. Some women worry that other women may try to steal their ideas and get ahead at their expense.

Envy and distrust occurs between the T.E.A. committee members, too. One committee member said that another committee member was giving the San Miguel T.E.A. a bad name. They think the woman is setting out too many crafts at the T.E.A. craft sale in an effort to make the most money. He said,

They have tried setting a limit on how many crafts one individual can place out in front of guests in an effort to balance things and she tells them she will do as she pleases. She has upset the other women in the village, who sometimes send some of their crafts out for the sale. She sets her price triple that of everyone else and does not tell the other women that she has upped the price. Then she brags on how much she made. She does not compete fairly. If she is carrying another woman’s crafts from the village, sometimes she does not put it out. She has accused guests of stealing these crafts, and said that is why they are not out. Down the road, she sets one of the “stolen” items out for sale. She tries to sell crafts out of her home when guests come for meals, which is not permitted and more. Businesses from in town (PG) have had too many problems from her and do not want to do business with her anymore. Everyone has had trouble with her.

Aware of what the other committee member thinks about her, she speaks out against the male committee member and says, “He is holding out on us and he emails back and forth with guests regularly.” She is accusing him of over-stepping his boundaries in an attempt to take what is not his to take. The other T.E.A. committee members think that the woman is holding out on them. They say, “They see her receive packages that came from previous guests at the guest house.” She builds a rapport with the guests and asks them to send her things and the other committee members think she is getting ahead. They are envious of the boxes she receives. The other women are fed up with this female T.E.A. committee member. They have complained about her and they say “her husband objects to any complaints that they make.” He says, “They are trying to gang up on her; she does not break the TEA rules with the things that she does.” The committee member in question is a very ambitious woman, a motivated seller, and the primary financial contributor in her household.

The village women gossip about her because she spends much time outside of the village selling crafts. Her sixteen-year-old daughter had to quit school to run the house, do kitchen work, and be the primary caregiver of two adopted children. This woman no longer fits the picture of a good Maya woman; she is cognitively stepping outside of an *Image of Limited Good*. She knows there is money outside the village that can be earned and she has the ambition to go obtain it.



Plate 5 Kekchi women in who are in their twenties.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SHE DROP DEAD: EQUILIBRIUM, CHANGE, AND THE ECONOMY

Not only do the Kekchi people of San Miguel have trouble comprehending new ideas from visitors that come from places that seem like other worlds to them and language barriers can make concepts difficult to understand, sometimes guests come into San Miguel and they have problems comprehending what the Kekchi are trying to express verbally.

There is a beautiful young Kekchi girl in San Miguel whose company everyone enjoys, villagers and guests alike. Guests always seem to warm up to the four-year-old child and they photograph her all of the time. She stops by the guest house as she runs errands for her mother. The visitors cannot help themselves; the child is cute, and they feel compelled to take numerous pictures of her.

One day, the child did not appear anywhere in the village and the guests became concerned and when her mother walked by they asked her, “where is your little girl and why has she not come by today.” Her mother responded by say, “My little girl, she drop dead.” Of course, the guests were shocked. The child’s mother spoke frankly, and she did not seem to show remorse. Perhaps the visitors were missing something. The child’s mother walked away and the guests sat and discussed the sweet child’s death.

Late in the afternoon, the mother came past the guest house once again and walking directly behind her, carrying a dish containing one pound of lard, was the adorable child that the guests thought had died. The guests said to the child’s mother, “There she is, our pretty little friend, where has she been all day?” The child’s mother responded, “She drop dead, she got hurt when she drop to the ground.” The sweet child

had fallen down. Comprehension is sometimes skewed or lost, when one language is translated into another language. Furthermore, people from outside the village seldom understand where the Kekchi women are coming from when they talk about their life. People from the outside mainly tend to see the harshness of the Kekchi reality. Foster says, "If we wish to help...to know the ways in which village people understand the universe about them, the manner in which they perceive change, the psychological motivations that stimulate them to take new steps, the barriers that hold them back, and the social and economic relationships that both bind them to and separate them from towns and cities" (Foster 1988:349). Without some understanding of peasant societies and the cognitive perception *Image of Limited Good*, outsiders are not able to assist at an optimum level because it becomes too difficult to determine the best way to help.

It Works; Life is Hard and the Women Would Not Have it Any Other Way

The Kekchi Maya women of San Miguel are somewhat aware of the outside world. They hear the radio and occasionally see television. They visit with tourists, missionaries, relief organizations, Peace Corp Workers, and any other outsiders that come to their village. However, they do not always comprehend what they are seeing or hearing. For instance, an aid group from the United States came to the village and they stayed at the T.E.A. guest house. They donated about 150 books to the community. The people from the aid group must not have realized that most of the people in the community were illiterate. The Kekchi people that they gave the books to asked the aid group what they were supposed to do with the books. The aid group people did not know the best way to respond, and one of them finally told a villager that maybe other visitors that come to the village would like to read the books when they are here. The books have

sat in storage untouched for about three years. The Kekchi are waiting for a guest to come visit who might want to read a book. Most of the donated books were written for an adult audience and many of the village children can read; however, the books are above their reading level. Many of the books are science fiction or the storyline takes place in the United States and the children cannot comprehend exactly what the authors are trying to say. Children living in the jungle in thatched roof homes have difficulty grasping topics such as little grey aliens from outer space landing in a snow covered forest. Some of the books describe various lifestyles that the Kekchi people in San Miguel cannot quite fathom because the lifestyles are alien. Many of the guests talk to the Kekchi about people and places that the villagers cannot imagine. The visitors describe lifestyles that most Kekchi people feel they will probably never know.

Some of the female Kekchi informants shared their ideas on women in other nations and many said that they “feel bad for many women in other countries. It costs so much to live that both the men and the women have to work (for income). Women have no choice but to find jobs outside of their home.” Another informant said, “even if a woman in another country wanted to stay in her comfortable home and take care of it and her family, she could not.” Most Kekchi women say it is “enjoyable and comforting to be in the home” and “they would not want to work outside of the home regularly to bring in income.” To a Kekchi woman, life is not complete unless you have a husband, children, and a home of your own. Working outside of the house could jeopardize the stability and security of a home life that the Kekchi Maya women find fulfilling. A *limited good* cognitive orientation allows a good Maya woman to enjoy the stability and security of her home and it enables the villagers to maintain equilibrium.

The Maya have a history filled with turmoil and strife. Stability and security are important to them. They have been defeated, displaced, and exploited by other cultures. The environmental conditions that they live in are challenging. Foster says, “The good society...therefore conforms to an equilibrium mode; security and safety are achieved within the village by maintaining the status quo, by permitting no significant changes in the traditional allocations of Good. Behaviors that upset these traditional allocations, or that merely suggests the possibility of an upset, is viewed as threatening to the community at large” (Foster 1988:136). Equilibrium equals “shared poverty” and “spells a healthy organism” (Foster 1988:137). Economic improvement causes a stimulation of corrective cultural and social mechanisms that restore balance or equilibrium (Foster 1988:137). The ancient god Chac may not be a part of Maya belief system today, but equilibrium still is. For over four-hundred years, it seems like the Maya have tried to find equilibrium between the good-will and wrath of Chac.

Foster expands his model to include societies outside of peasantry and says in a footnote, “I do not believe the Image of Limited Good is characteristic only of peasant societies. Quite the contrary, it is found, in one degree or another, in most or all socio-economic levels in newly developing countries” (Foster in Potter; 1967:300). The Maya moved out of the Belize area in the 1600s; they came back into the region in the 1800s, and the Kekchi Maya of San Miguel established their village in the 1950’s. The country of Belize has only been an independent democratic nation since 1981. Belize is a newly developing country and San Miguel is a newly developing village. San Miguel has only had electricity for eight years or so.

Today, the women of San Miguel cannot imagine a life for themselves that would

be much different than what they already have. A twelve-year-old informant in the village says, “Here everything is just the way it is, so be it, and there is nothing that can be done that they have not already tried.” Wilk says, the Kekchi, “Are less integrated into Belizean society as a whole than are the more acculturated Mopan” (Wilk in Moberg 1996:318). However, most southern Belize societies do have a subsistence economy, are peasant societies, and they share a *limited good* cognitive perception. The Kekchi people are not so different from other societies in the region. About the Maya, Howard says, “Despite numerous changes in their culture in recent years, the people still remain satisfied with many elements of their traditional culture. Significant aspects of their culture are tied into economic activities; and as long as these (e.g., growing maize) are maintained, an important element of continuity remains” (Howard 1975:15). An indicator of more change that may interrupt continuity for the Kekchi of San Miguel may be coming in the future, and the Kekchi women are concerned.

Economic Change for Maya Women in Central America

Today, many young Kekchi women continue to marry while in their latter teens; some are beginning to stay in school if their parents can afford the expense and a few work. However, a new problem is becoming more prevalent, and it causes the women of San Miguel to worry. Many of the women express that each year the people become more dependent on items that require cash. They need propane and bus fare. They must pay fees, buy books, and uniforms, so their children can attend school. They buy grocery items such as lard, flour, sugar, and more from the local grocery store. Their needs are usually greater than their cash income. Some of the young people are leaving the village to work jobs in construction, with the service industry, or with tourism. Each household

and the families that have local businesses continue to depend on their daughters for labor.

Women in San Miguel say there are not enough young women available to help with the heavy workload in the house. Furthermore, the work level has increased dramatically for the young women who dropped out of school to work at home. Sisters who are in school or who have left the village for work are not available to help. Some of the young women who are needed at home miss school regularly to do kitchen work, babysit, or work in the family mill or grocery store. Typically, most girls make it to Standard six in school, which is equivalent to the eighth grade in the United States. Today, it seems that for each young woman who goes on to high school or on to work a job, one sister must drop out of school to help at home. Like many of their grandmothers, some of the young women are only able to attend school until Standard 3, 4, or 5. These young women are not marrying, are not in school, and are not working for an income.

Young women who are not marrying, not in school, and not working for income are in a predicament. The San Miguel women say that these young women do not have the opportunity to meet or court young men. Their family is dependent on them as kitchen workers, housekeepers, and childcare givers. The problem that concerns San Miguel women today is that there are an increasing number of young women in their early and mid-twenties that may never have a life of their own.

The Kekchi women of San Miguel say that having a husband, children, and home is important, fulfilling, and it makes them happy. McClusky says, "It is difficult for Mayan woman who do not marry or have children to reach adult status...An unmarried woman may be 'locked in the category of childhood,'" (McClusky 2001:167). The

women of San Miguel worry that the unmarried young women may never get to experience fulfillment and happiness in their lifetime, and they may permanently be children in their parent's house.

Laura J. McClusky made an observation that pertains to unmarried women. McClusky says, "Leaving the village to find work lets young women achieve adult status without bearing children" (McClusky 2001:167). The unmarried woman can support herself economically and may be able to offer financial assistance to her family in the village (McClusky 2001:167). Women working outside the village create a new status system that it is more flexible (McClusky 2001:167). The Maya women can achieve adult status before bearing children.

However, only a few of the young women leave the village to work. Marriage and motherhood remain important. Job opportunities are limited for Maya women in southern Belize. The Maya women lack sufficient education, which makes it difficult for them to acquire a job with adequate pay. The *Sustainable Scholarship Program* that has begun in San Miguel and neighboring Maya villages may change this situation in the future.

It is the goal of the scholarship committee, which consists of a few Maya villagers and mostly professors from various universities in the United States, to double the number of students graduating each year. The scholarship pays for tuition, books, fees, and some supplies such as "t-rulers." A parent pays about \$370.00 to \$400.00 per student, so the child can attend school. It remains the parent's responsibility to pay for school uniforms, transportation and lunches; some households and many families cannot afford this expense. However, the scholarship program will enable more young women to attend high school and community college than was ever possible before in San Miguel.

More of the young women are choosing to continue their education and go on to high school or community college because they now have the scholarship option available; whereas, before they had nothing. Wilk says, “The Kekchi face little external pressure to change their productive system. Their access to markets is limited...They also face increasing shortages of land...despite the pressures of government policy and markets, change is mainly motivated by their own desires for greater cash income, education for their children, and more consumer goods” (Wilk 1997:86). The Kekchi realize that an education could bring economic improvement for the household and they encourage their children to continue in school when they can afford to send them. With land shortages, obtaining more consumer goods is not always a desire, but a necessity. Land shortages and a need for consumer goods are prompting changes in the household economy. The solution to the problem is more education and the acquisition of higher paying jobs.

The cash economy is changing in other parts of Central America. Virginia Davis did field study in Guatemala and says the following (2005:482-483):

The shift from a subsistence agricultural system to a money-based, consumer, commercial market economy has resulted in a shift in gender roles... Communication and contact via a road system and technology – the telephone, television, and the Internet – provide contact with the broader world. More schools and a university branch have widened horizons. A cash economy and the remittances sent by emigrants have enabled economic life well beyond subsistence levels, much as the commoditization of textiles has empowered women.

Conditions are improving in San Miguel, but not to the degree Davis observed in Guatemala, and the ability for students in San Miguel to continue an education is in a beginning stage.

In San Miguel, the villagers are still consumers and producers. The food they grow is not only for their subsistence; some of it flows into larger urban settings to the markets as a cash crop. The need for cash becomes greater with each passing year and selling crops for cash does not always work out. This year in San Miguel, the annatto buyers offered 40 cents per pound for the crop, but the villagers needed at least 50-65 cents per pound. Annatto is used as a red food coloring or additive in foods and in women's beauty products. The men from San Miguel voted that they would not harvest or sell their crop to the buyers this year. Many of the Kekchi men walk about ten miles to and from their field each day. They harvest their crops with their hands and a machete. They carry the harvested crop back to the village on their backs in large grain sacks, unless they can afford a pack horse. The Kekchi men voted that the offer of 40 cents per pound for the annatto would not pay for their labor. Without an income from the annatto crop, some of the men were forced to seek temporary or permanent employment outside the village.

When funds are low, often times, a family member in San Miguel may migrate to a city to work as a laborer and send cash home. Furthermore, as family members gain employment outside the village, they generally tend to purchase and bring back home more and more technology, such as televisions and compact disk players. Three years ago in San Miguel a few families had radios and they took turns broadcasting throughout the village, so everyone could hear the music and the news. Today, most families have a radio. Two years ago, only a few families had television and a few more are in the village this year. This year one family has a flush toilet and several families have gas powered weed-eaters to mow their lawns. The people of San Miguel are beginning to want a

greater variety of material items that is only available outside the village. They have a desire for the types of things that could make life easier. The women want linoleum floors and a refrigerator that they can use. In other parts of Central America, this desire has led to migration, changes in agriculture methods, and improvement in the household economy.

Rebecca Tolen studied women, ethnicity, and religion, in the Yucatan and she concluded that there are many parallels elsewhere in Central America (Tolen 1998: 644). Increasing numbers of rural men are migrating for wage labor employment. The women are beginning to assume “a large part of the responsibility for agriculture production, in addition to engaging in small-scale commerce and craft production, some of it oriented toward the tourist market...women migrate as well, and some men remain in the countryside. There are two groups of migrants, temporary and permanent” (Tolen 1998:645). The women are taking over the agriculture production in the Yucatan because the men have left the region to gain temporary or permanent employment. In addition, the women are not just farming; they are starting small businesses or home-based businesses in an effort to increase the household income, and the tourism industry offers an avenue for income. As a result of migration and changes in the female role, a redefinition of Maya ethnicity, with links between ethnicity and gender, appear “in the context of contemporary social, political and economic transformation” (Tolen 1998:645). Migrating for work instigated much of this change in the Yucatan.

In San Miguel, some husbands and sons have begun leaving the village to work in other parts of the country in the tourism industry, on shrimp farms, or at factories. The women have not yet begun to assume the farm duties. Usually a son leaves to go work a

job and sends money home, or a husband might leave and a son assumes his father's duties while he is gone. Some of the younger husbands and single men are now leaving the country and going to the United States (U.S.) to work. There are representatives from various U.S. hotel industries, that come from large U.S. cities such as Chicago, Saint Louis, or Kansas City, to Belize in search of employees and they usually leave Belize with twenty or thirty young Maya men. Many of these young Maya men have wives and children who will stay at home. The men will send home pay and when they come home, they will probably bring back new ideas on how people should live. New desires may prompt further changes in San Miguel Village.

In some cases, a man may bring his family to the United States in the future.

Eileen P. Anderson-Fye studied women in Belize and she said (2003:63),

Belize, a Central American and Caribbean nation about the size of Massachusetts, has a population of only 240,000 (Government of Belize 2001) made up of at least eight distinct ethnic groups. Recently postcolonial from Great Britain (1981), Belize is highly regionalized and multicultural country with a population of peoples approximately 50 percent Mestizo...25 percent Creole, 10 percent Mayan, 6 percent Garifuna, and 9 percent other ethnicities such as Chinese, Mennonite, East Indian, Middle Eastern, and Anglo-Americans...Appaduri's observation that 'a few persons in the world today do not have a friend, relative, or coworker who is not on the road to somewhere else or already coming back, bearing stories and possibilities' (1996:4) certainly holds true in Belize considering that a group of Belizeans equal to a third of the Belizean resident population resides in the United States (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2001).

Many young Kekchi in San Miguel dream of living in the U.S. and some of the young unmarried women dream of finding an American husband. The younger people in San Miguel are beginning to look at the world somewhat differently than their parents do.

In the Yucatan, Alicia Re Cruz studied Maya women and said that the country was "a region undergoing rapid change due to massive penetration of global economic

trends, particularly involving the increase of migration and the incorporation of women into wage-labor employment,” and this is transforming the role of a Maya woman and gender relationships (Re Cruz 1998:574). Re Cruz discusses how the patriarchal system and ancestral attachment to the milpa system of farming and the gender roles of the male as being the farmer and the female working in the home are changing (Re Cruz 1998: 577-585). Re Cruz adds the following (1998:578).

Male and female relations within the household, life ways, and world views are transformed from the traditional peasant system among migrant families, and female income becomes a complement to the men’s wages. The migrant world view stresses the importance of investing time in ‘worthwhile activities,’ such as economic production rather than in traditional ritual performances and celebrations (which, in addition, demand expenditure of money).

Ellen R. Kintz also studied women in the Yucatan and discusses male absence from the household. The migration of Maya men to work as wage-laborers has resulted in the creation of “female household cooperatives” which may consist of women from three generations, grandmothers, mothers, and female children (Kintz 1998:599). The three generations of women are running the household, the agriculture production, and are bringing in income while their husbands are gone working jobs outside of the region or country. The Yucatan Maya women are consistently enhancing their household economy, which has become predominantly cash oriented (Kintz 1998:600). Kintz says (1998:599-600):

The new international division of labor and unprecedented expansion of capitalist institutions in rural and urban areas have offered women expanded opportunities...women are operating as an integral and critical part of socio-cultural transformation...However, it is the increase in ‘penny capitalism,’ practiced by the women...that will determine by and large the extent to which their traditional culture will be preserved or transformed.

Much of the “penny capitalism” began with the tourism industry in the Yucatan. Re Cruz refers to Maya women as promoters of change and attributes this change to the migration of the husbands and fathers. Maya women are entering into the work force and are beginning to become active in the political arena, which is spurring a change in identity (Re Cruz 1998:580-585). Maybe this is what is in store for the Kekchi women of San Miguel in the future.

In the Yucatan, the economic changes sometimes involve government agencies and other organizations. Rebecca Tolen says, “Developmental strategies in which state and nongovernmental organizations have sometimes encouraged claims to rights and resources made in the name of ethnic groups have also been a factor in these new modes of organization” (Tolen 1998:648). Furthermore, Tolen says, “The tourist-oriented promotion of the Yucatan as an exotic and ethnically indigenous region had an influence on how people in Maya communities view themselves...these shifts need not be seen only as a matter of choice between continuing or abandoning traditional patterns; they may represent a reinterpretation of Mayaness itself” (Tolen 1998:648). The cognitive perception of an *Image of Limited Good* no longer monopolizes the Yucatan Maya thought or behavior and the result is a reinterpretation of what it means to be Maya.

In Guatemala, the tourism industry instigated opportunity for the Maya women to begin supporting themselves. Because the women can support themselves, gender relations are changing. The Maya women are able to support their children without the aid of men (Little 2000:175). The Maya women are becoming more economically independent and are becoming more powerful in their communities (Little 2000:175). Maya women in Guatemala are experiencing many similar changes as the Maya women

in the Yucatan. The cash economy is improving in other parts of Central America.

In San Miguel, the Kekchi women discuss that it is becoming more difficult to tell who is poor and who is wealthy in the village. Informants said, “It used to be you could tell if a Maya was poor or rich by the things they had in their house.” Poor people do not have radios, televisions, or refrigerators and they use little electricity to light their house. Some of the Kekchi informants said, “Today, some of the people in San Miguel appear to be the poorest and they are the richest because they keep their wealth in the bank.” Some Kekchi in San Miguel are becoming wealthy, and they continue to conceal their wealth from other people in the village. This well hidden wealth will not be disbursed through a social self-correcting mechanism, which maintains equilibrium, and the households that hide money in the bank will become wealthier. New economic opportunities from selling cash crops, gaining employment outside of the village, and from the tourism industry are changing behavior in the village, yet the cognitive orientation remains the same.

The economy in San Miguel is improving, and this change is coming about because of the tourism industry, and behaviors are beginning to change. The cash crops sold by the Maya men account for only a drop in the household economic bucket, and the additional income brought in by the women’s craft sales has made it possible for families to begin hiding money in the bank.

The tourism industry allows uneducated, illiterate women to make economic improvements in the household. The Kekchi women from San Miguel and other Maya women who are outside the village selling handicrafts in Placencia and in PG, and the Maya women who are providing inventory or services for a business, such as the women roasting coffee beans for the coffee shop or those making handbags for the internet

business and shop, call themselves hustlers. They offer a product and are trying to make an income. They say, “I am a hustler.” They promote coffee and cacao beans as organic products, though the products may or may not be organic; they use poverty as a sales tool when necessary, and bringing in an income is a priority. The Maya women say, “I have to go out and hustle, we need the money at home.” A woman bringing cash into the household has become important to some San Miguel families. At least one family in San Miguel is supported almost entirely by money the wife earns through the tourism industry.

Other employment opportunities for Maya women in Belize do exist that do not require literacy. Women can get jobs on shrimp farms, at commercial citrus farms and at other places. However, the women are usually only employed as part-time workers (Moberg 1996:318). Mark Moberg says, “Managers are quick to rationalize their use of female labor in the packing sheds, often claiming that women can better evaluate the quality of fruit better than men...Today fully 50 percent of packing shed employees on the region’s farms are immigrant women” (Moberg 1996:318-319). The women usually do have to leave their region and migrate north to obtain employment. Job opportunities in southern Belize are limited to those with an education.

Eileen Anderson-Fye examined Maya girls, identity, abuse and change in Belize. Anderson-Fye says, “In a cyclic process driven by tourism economy and by girls’ accumulating acculturating attitudes, more and more girls are becoming educated and entering the labor force...This option dramatically shapes their personal choices” (Anderson-Fye 2003:77). Maya girls are beginning to watch television and use other media sources, and this is having an impact; the girls are beginning to reinvent

themselves and changing their image (Anderson-Fye 2003:79). McClaurin conducted fieldwork in Belize and focused on women and violence and says, “It seems reasonable to suggest that one of the underlying tenets of Belize’s culture of gender is an acceptance of domestic violence” (McClaurin 1996:81). Anderson-Fye expands McClaurin’s views and says that the acceptance of domestic violence “becomes less reasonable as the girls set new standards” (Anderson-Fye 2003:81). The Maya girls are changing their beliefs; they are not accepting ill treatment and are no longer tolerating abuse. Anderson-Fye adds “In addition to being the first generation of females with the potential to access material resources to escape or avoid maltreatment, the meaningful correspondence of media messages with ethnopsychological practice organized the girls’ agency to access their potential for educational and economic gain leading to possible independence from situations of maltreatment” (Anderson-Fye 2003:81). With the introduction of various media sources and the ability to continue an education, Maya girls are beginning to reinvent themselves. They are leaving behind the *Image of Limited Good*. They are becoming autonomous, ambitious, and they want to improve the household economy or economically support themselves.

The young women in San Miguel in their early and mid-twenties who are not marrying, not working, are not in school, that may never have a life of their own, that the older Kekchi women worry about, affirm that cognitive changes are beginning to occur in the village. These young women did not pursue romantic relationships when they were younger. They may have been busy doing household chores, babysitting, and doing the wash down at the river, but young men bathe at the river also. In addition, young men go to the local grocery store, attend weddings, rallies and other social events, ride the bus to

PG, play football (soccer) and visit friends who may be a brother to the young woman. If the young women were interested in a specific young man, she most likely would have flirted with him at some point in time. These particular young women were not particularly looking for a husband.

The mother of one of the young San Miguel women says she wants her daughter to meet and marry a U.S. tourist. She says, “The Kekchi men marry girls when they are very young. Men from the States like their girlfriends and brides to be older.” The daughter is not worried about being unmarried while in her twenties. In February, this young woman accepted a full time job, as the kitchen worker and babysitter of another village woman that works a full-time job, which resulted in her nine-year-old sister having to stay home from school to help their mother with kitchen work.

A second Kekchi woman in her twenties asked her father to teach her how to drive a pickup truck. She acquired a driver’s license and works for her family’s business as a taxi driver, transporting villagers and tourists from the village to the junction. Four women in San Miguel drive vehicles and three have obtained driver’s licenses. This young woman also works in her family’s local grocery store. She is not worried about being single and in her twenties. She has the opportunity to meet single men every day, either while she is driving the pickup or working at the store. She is proud that her aunt married a man from Europe. She thinks that someday maybe she will marry a man from a Maya village or maybe she will marry a foreigner. A third young Kekchi woman in her twenties wanted to stay in school. However, she had to drop out of school because her mother began working outside the village. She would like to get married, but no young man has shown interest in her. She does not know what she will do in the future. In

March, this young woman began taking turns with her mother to go to Placencia to sell handicrafts. Her mother goes to Placencia on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and she goes on Tuesday and Thursday.

Marriage is still important to the young Kekchi women. However, the women in their twenties are not concerned that they are not married. They do say that they have opportunities that their mothers and grandmothers did not have. They feel they have a life, but not the life that their mothers had or hoped they would have. They do not share their mother's attitude.

Tourists, visitors, and the media coming to San Miguel have opened the local villagers' minds to similarities and differences that exist around the world. There are some things that the Kekchi women think sound good, such as having a washing machine or owning a car. However, the women also hear about strife and struggle in the outside world, women working long, hard hours outside the house, and they know progress comes with a price. The Kekchi are flexible people and promote change in small, slow increments, which allows them to continue to maintain equilibrium. The *limited good* cognitive orientation and cultural and social mechanisms that keep things in balance for the Kekchi still tend to hold the villagers of San Miguel inside the closed system, and prevent or slow down change. However, the villagers do know that to improve household economics the girls must begin staying in school; the women must sell handicrafts and seek employment outside the village in the open system. The cognitive orientation of an *Image of Limited Good* is slowly beginning to change in San Miguel.

Maya women selling vegetables at the market in Punta Gorda Town.



A Maya woman sewing for her employer. Her child comes to work with her.



Plate 6 Maya women hard at work at their jobs in Punta Gorda Town

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

The Kekchi Maya have a history filled with domination and strife. They have had to move multiple times over the past few centuries because of political unrest or a desire for better living conditions. In Belize, physical, cultural, and social isolation separated the Maya from the rest of the nation (Howard 1975:14). Physical isolation has been lessened by the construction of roads and improved transportation. Buses are available in most of the villages at least three days a week and five days a week in others. Social relationships have not developed across ethnic boundaries as well as they could have (Howard 1975:14). However, the Maya do encounter individuals from the various ethnic groups in the region more today than they used to. In 1975, Michael C. Howard said, “Although cultural differences between ethnic units have to some degree been lessened through education and economic development, and physical isolation has also been reduced, there has been no substantial breakdown in the social boundaries between ethnic units” (Howard 1975:15). Howard made this comment in 1975, and there is still some truth to it today. Howard says, “Increasing interaction with non-Indians has produced a feeling that Indians as a whole are discriminated against by members of other ethnic units” (Howard 1975:15). This could be considered part of the *limited good* cognitive perception shared by the various ethnic units in southern Belize, where good is limited; other people have more advantages, and some people are taking more than their fair share.

Maya peoples continue to migrate from other parts of Central America to Belize. Moberg says, “Since 1980 thousands of immigrants have fled to Belize from political and

economic crises elsewhere in Central America” (Moberg 1996:311). The Maya from other parts of Central America come to Belize and integrate into existing Maya villages and their economical system. In Belize, cash-cropping has integrated the Maya into the national economy (Howard 1975:7). Wilk says, “Households engaged in large-scale cash crop production use different social means of motivating and organizing labor than those in subsistence farming” (Wilk 1997:10). Because “the dynamics of the system, looking at consumption and consumer goods” show “that social and economic inequality – between households, genders, and age groups – is a fundamental and causative aspect of changes in Kekchi production...and as the systems of production change, they place new constraints on, and afford new opportunities for, households” (Wilk 1997:10). Change has led to the “emergence of increased wealth differences within the villages as well as to different means of acquiring an income” (Howard 1975:9). The tourism industry is a newer and different means of acquiring an income, and it promotes tremendous income opportunity for the Kekchi.

The tourism industry has had an impact on Maya identity. Howard says, “Ethnicity has possibly increased in importance” (Howard 1975:15). Ethnicity is becoming an important sales tool in the tourism industry and for economic growth. “The true Maya cultural identity is changing with the ever increasing modernization brought on by road-network expansion, penetration of radio and television, and the extension of the cash economy. This has positively contributed to modern conveniences...Many Maya families now have modern gas stoves alongside the traditional comal. “The traditional” thatched roof home “with beaten dirt floors are being replaced with zinc roof and cement floors. In recent years, the government of Belize has provided a central water system for

most villages. Electricity and community phones are also accessible in many villages” (Toledo 2007:7).

The Maya bring tourists into their villages and homes so people can experience Maya culture. Many Maya women are illiterate, they cannot obtain jobs in many sectors, and the tourism industry offers them an avenue to generate income. The Kekchi women are active in the tourism industry, and because they are generating an income, and husbands are migrating to other regions and countries to work cash jobs, the women are becoming autonomous. However, regarding the women of southern Belize, McClaurin says, “No one has yet documented the actual size or complete impact of Belize’s small informal sector. This makes it impossible to determine how much of the work women engage in – which is often quite labor intensive with minimal economic return – directly contributes to their livelihood or to the country’s economic growth and development” (McClaurin 1996:109). Conditions in the villages and households seem to be improving; this can be attributed largely to the tourism industry, which has opened up opportunities for the women to acquire cash from handicraft sales and tourist related jobs. Whether a Kekchi woman profits from the tourism industry is dependent on her constraints.

Everyone experiences constraint at one level or another; excessive and extravagant constraint is a different matter. In San Miguel, many constraints are related to the villagers *Image of Limited Good* cognitive orientation and the *limited good* cognitive orientation accounts for many of the behaviors in the village (Foster in Potter 1967:303).

In the idealized construct of the closed system, a woman’s existence is determined and limited by the natural and social resources in her village and immediate area (Foster in Potter 1967:304). If a Kekchi woman increases her resources, she is viewed as a threat

to others in the village. Because an extraordinary amount of envy and jealousy exists in the village and is part of the *limited good* cognitive orientation, a Kekchi woman does not want to be a threat to others and does not want to experience negative sanctions; she has limited options. Teasing and gossip help the village retain the image of a good Maya woman, and she has no choice but to meet the expectations of the villagers' ideas on what a good Maya woman is. One constraint after another is the result. Constraints related to being a wife and mother in the patriarchal society, to household duties, to uneven gender balance, the environment, health and economics are tremendous. Constraints do have an effect on whether a Kekchi woman does or does not achieve economic success.

In the open system, outside of San Miguel Village, aid programs, clinics, school scholarship programs, women's groups and cooperatives exist and offer assistance, alternatives, and opportunities. Stability and security are important to peasant societies with a turbulent history, and equilibrium is a goal.

The behaviors that result from the *Image of Limited Good* cognitive perception, such as the individual, informal, and institutionalized levels of self-correcting mechanisms with negative sanctions or a gain of positive status, enables villagers to maintain equilibrium.

In a discussion on equilibrium models, Foster talks about how world views can and do change. He says that nothing remains static (Foster 1979:175). When views on the world begin to change, a model that seemed appropriate at one time may no longer apply (Foster 1979:175). A model is usually good for one particular place at one particular time. The kinds of evidence that lead to an initial formulation become less obvious and modify as time passes, but many of the manifestations survive, "changes in behavior, in

attitudes, and above all in relations with the outside world – due partly to radio and television, education, and emigration” change a *limited good* outlook given enough time (Foster 1979:175). Although the model *Image of Limited Good* seems appropriate for describing and explaining behavior in San Miguel today, given enough passage of time, interaction between the villagers and other cultures, education, and improved household economy, more than likely the model will no longer be sufficient in the future.

Models are also useful. Foster says, “Cultural models, which explain and predict dynamic processes with some accuracy are, of course, enormously useful in planning specific developmental strategies” (Foster 1979:5). An effective model may be useful towards understanding cultures that seem to be behind the times, or are impoverished (Foster 1979:5). Foster puts forth that, “If the model is sound it will enable us to better understand contemporary change processes and modifications in traditional behavior and attitudes...Like other models. an anthropological model is timeless: it is designed to account for the new variables, but in no way does it become a ‘bad’ model...A model must be evaluated on the basis of the variables that it specifies, not on the basis of a time scale” (Foster 1988: 123, 386). Foster’s *Image of Limited Good* model was good in the mid-1960s and it continues to be useful in 2008. The model offers insight to what is occurring in San Miguel Village in years past and still today.

The Kekchi are flexible people and they promote change in small slow increments, which allows them to maintain equilibrium. The *limited good* cognitive orientation and cultural and social mechanisms that have kept things in balance for the Kekchi, that held them inside the closed system, and prevented or slowed down change, is evolving. Many of the villagers know that the girls must begin staying in school; the

women must sell handicrafts or seek employment outside the village so the household economy can improve. The cognitive orientation of an *Image of Limited Good* is slowly beginning to change in San Miguel in some households and this is evident in the fact that some Kekchi Maya are hiding money in the bank (in a savings account). These villagers seem to want to leave the reality of a shared-poverty behind. Slowly and gradually, the families are changing their cognitive perception and positive improvement in the household economy is beginning to occur. Foster says, “Change the economic rules of the game and change the cognitive orientation of a peasant society...try to change the peasants view of his social and economic universe, away from an image of limited good toward that of expanding opportunity in an open system, *so he can feel safe* in displaying initiative... change is less psychological than social... Show that initiative is profitable and will not be met with negative sanctions... local entrepreneurs arise in response to increasing opportunities... change cognitive orientation through changing access to opportunity” (Foster in Potter 1967:320-321). This is what is occurring today in San Miguel. The tourism industry is expanding economic opportunities.

Many San Miguel households are showing economic improvement. Constraints that are stimulated by the *Image of Limited Good* cognitive perception continue to be a factor influencing economic success for some of the households. Various constraints and negative sanctions are maintained in the village, and they prevent some of the women from achieving economic success. Envy between those who have or have not is still a problem in the small village for many of the families. However, the Kekchi women in San Miguel who are actively working with the tourism industry are bringing about positive economic change in their households. These women are ambitious and driven to

improve their household conditions. They tolerate gossip, backstabbing, and some days are afraid others in the community will display aggression. In other households, where the women are not involved with the tourism industry, conditions remain at the shared poverty level and envy continues to grow because these families still share an *Image of Limited Good* cognitive orientation.

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