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Pearl Lagoon's White Lobster: The Societal, Economic, Political and Autonomous Effects

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Pearl Lagoon's White Lobster: The Societal, Economic,
Political and Autonomous Effects.

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Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Nicaragua: Youth
Culture, Literacy and Media, SIT Study Abroad

Spring 2018

Abstract

The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua is home to the greatest number of impoverished individuals in the country. However, the people of Pearl Lagoon - a municipality in the South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region – have found a way to escape their poor economic situations.

Due to the municipality's close proximity to drug routes utilized by Colombian cartels and to the country itself, community members have turned to the drug trade in hopes of pursuing financial security. With the introduction of the "white lobster" or cocaine packets, the community as a whole has transformed its social, economic, and political spheres. In addition, the area has been militarized by Nicaraguan officers, which may be seen as a threat to the region's already minimal autonomy.

Abstracto

La Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua es el hogar de la mayor cantidad de personas empobrecidas en el país. Sin embargo, la gente de Pearl Lagoon, un municipio en la Región Autónoma de la Costa del Caribe Sur, ha encontrado una forma de escapar de su pobre situación económica.

Debido a la proximidad del municipio a las rutas de drogas utilizadas por los cárteles colombianos y al propio país, los miembros de la comunidad han recurrido al tráfico de drogas con la esperanza de buscar la seguridad financiera. Con la introducción de la "langosta blanca" o los paquetes de cocaína, la comunidad en su conjunto ha transformado sus esferas social, económica y política. Además, el área ha sido militarizada por oficiales nicaragüenses, lo que puede ser visto como una amenaza a la ya mínima autonomía de la región.

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to all interview participants. Without the information you provided me with, this project would not have been possible.

Acknowledgements

This paper is dedicated to all the residents of Pearl Lagoon who made this project possible. To Ms. Ana for her kind hospitality and Mr. Wesley for arranging all my interviews. I would also like to dedicate this paper to the kind community members who made me laugh and genuinely enjoy my time in this Caribbean community. Thank you to all my interview participants for giving me their time and for discussing such a sensitive topic with me.

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Introduction

Globally, the multi-billion-dollar industry of drugs has resulted in a myriad of both positive and negative effects that have shaped the culture of societies. Such effects can be observed in the social, economic, and political spheres of communities. In the negative realm, the production and selling of illegal drugs, such as cocaine, may result in the militarization of populations, an increase in violence and corruption, undermining the rule of law, heightened levels of drugs abuse, as well as the introduction of undesirable societal practices. On the other hand, while not commonly discussed, the selling and transportation of drugs can alleviate the necessities of economically-deprived communities by allowing for the circulation of previously-absent money, social advancement, and community cohesiveness. Regardless of its benign or malignant classification, the Caribbean drug trade has completely transformed the society of Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua in such a way that a culture of drugs has been integrated into the most inner-workings of the municipality.

The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis on the social, economic, and political effects the drug trade has had on this Caribbean region. Secondly, this study aims to further examine how the militarization of Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua, has affected the autonomy of the region. My study is organized in 5 sections. In the first section, I provide basic information about my case study and research location. In the subsequent section, I review previous literature while in the third section, I present my findings. In the fourth part of the paper, an analysis of the findings is offered while the last section is dedicated to a discussion.

Case Study and Background Information

Located in Nicaragua's Southern Autonomous Atlantic Region (RAAS), Pearl Lagoon is the country's largest coastal lagoon. Approximately 40 miles north of the capital, Bluefields, this small community has both benefited and suffered from the international drug trade which, in Nicaragua's case, stems from Colombia. This Caribbean municipality rests on the Atlantic region of Nicaragua, alienated from the Pacific Coast where the capital, Managua, is located.

Comprised of mainly rain forests, savannahs, and rivers, both the Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) and Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) aggregate to half of Nicaragua's total land. However, this land is only occupied by roughly 10% of the country's population (Brunnegger, 2007). This scarcely populated territory provides an advantageous setting for the movement of international drug organizations.

The people living on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua heavily depend on their access to the natural resources in the area for income. Pearl Lagoon, part of the RAAS, is a known fishing town in which the vast majority of men fish and/or dive for shrimp, lobster, crab, and fish in the lagoon or nearby Caribbean Sea. Other types of employment are rare; however, a handful of community members have resorted to opening up small shops called *pulperias*, which are usually an extension of their homes. Seeing as how the municipal government can only employ a select few, only a small number of Pearl Lagoon inhabitants receive a steady government income. Therefore, when kilos of drugs began to appear in the waters of the country's largest lagoon, people in the municipality viewed the cocaine packets (later commonly accepted as "white lobster") as an opportunistic way to escape their extreme poverty.

Since the 1970's, international drug organizations have both increased the number of routes and instances in which they transport multiple illicit drugs such as, but not limited to: cannabis, opioid, cocaine, or amphetamines throughout Central America and the Caribbean (King, 2016). However, for the purposes of this study, only the trafficking of cocaine and its impact on the autonomy and society of Pearl Lagoon will be analyzed.

Merely 571 miles from Cartagena, Colombia, Pearl Lagoon stands as a primary transit channel for international drug trafficking. Given the close proximity of both countries, the region's high unemployment rate, and elevated crime statistics – in comparison to the rest of the country – an auspicious environment for the transportation of contraband has been generated in Pearl Lagoon.

Being the poorest country in Central America, “the poverty headcount stands at 42 percent and one in seven Nicaraguans live in extreme poverty” (Country partnership strategy for the period FY13-FY17, 2012). Most of the county's poorest inhabitants, however, reside in the remote areas of the Caribbean coast; areas, which, at times, lack access to clean water and electricity (Brunnegger, 2007). Despite the country's efforts to diminish its excessive unemployment rate – which was reported at an all-time high at 46.5% in 2008 –, approximately 7% of Nicaraguans find themselves without occupations today (Nicaragua Economy Profile 2018 , 2018). In the case of the Atlantic Coast, the six ethnic minorities living in the area experience the country's unemployment at an exponentially higher rate – roughly 50 to 80% more (Government of Nicaragua, 2001). The lack of employment opportunities, which are key to

economical self-advancement, places the people of Pearl Lagoon in a critical condition as they seek for alternative means of acquiring steady income.

Although Nicaragua has the lowest reported crime rate in all of Central America, the rates at which these crimes occur, such as homicide, are disparate when comparing the Pacific to the Atlantic coast of the country. In 2017, “according to the government of Nicaragua’ most recent official statistics of reported crimes, the overall homicide rate was 8/100,000 inhabitants. The homicide rate in the Southern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region was 33/100,000 inhabitants, four times the national average” (United States Department of State, 2017). Further disaggregation of data is needed as the country’s overall crime statistics are not representative of whole regions — as Nicaragua most commonly referred to being divided in two. Even though there may be multiple factors influencing the greater yearly count of homicides in the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, it is important to note that the region has been deemed “vulnerable” as it finds itself located on one of the “primary routes for international drug trafficking.” (United States Department of State, 2016).

The United Nation’s Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has been reporting annual drug seizures in Nicaragua since 1987. The amount of kilograms confiscated in the country did not reach the thousands until 1994. After the new Sandinista government was elected into power in 2007, there was an exponential increase in seizures. For example, in 2008, 19,500 kilograms were seized and in the year 2010, the unit of measure changed from kilos to tons (17.5 tons were found in 2010). Previously, the amounts found of this illegal drug never surpassed 10,000 kilograms (United Nations Office on Drugs

and Crime, 2016). Unfortunately, the UNODC does not specify the region(s) in which cocaine confiscations occurred. Thus, the kilograms or tons collected cannot be solely traced back to the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua as the trafficking of drugs occurs all over the country. It is true, however, that the majority of the drugs do pass through the Atlantic and not the Pacific coast.

Literature Review

Located in the poorest country in all of Central America, the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua is home to a population that lives in conditions classified as 'under extreme poverty' (Government of Nicaragua, 2001). The 17,000 inhabitants living in the municipality of Pearl Lagoon possess job opportunities limited to fishing and owning small businesses. Given the town's close proximity to Colombia and Colombian cartels' drug routes, members of this community have turned to alternative means by which to secure financial security.

The international drug trade has managed to not only prevail in societies where there is a high economic incentive to participate, but it has also succeeded in integrating itself in the most inner-workings of communities. Becoming involved in the drug trade, especially in small communities like Pearl Lagoon where both the consumption and selling of drugs has been normalized— although classified deviant in other communities – is viewed as any other occupation. Given that each cocaine packet is sold at \$7,000-\$8,000 (US dollars), the fishermen who frequent these packets in the water have discovered a new path to escape their economic situations.

Currently, “73.6% y el 75.06% de la población de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense vive en situaciones de pobreza y extrema pobreza. Los habitantes que

han logrado conseguir un empleo reciben ingresos muy bajos que apenas les permiten cubrir un 50% de la canasta basta” (Fundación para la Autonomía y el Desarrollo de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua, n.d.). Extreme poverty has been classified as living “on an average of US \$1.25 or less a day” (International, n.d.). The astoundingly low income of the municipality serves as evidence to demonstrate the minimalistic efforts by the Nicaraguan government to better the lives of Costeños, or people who live on the coast. However, by participating in the trade of cocaine, these impoverished people are now able to earn more than their yearly income in just one day.

As a response to the lack of social and financial opportunities, this small Caribbean community has reinvented its social structure and completely transformed the definition of the social functions of drugs. Outlined in Chart 1, the four essential functions in Emile Durkheim’s sociological theory of deviance serve to further explain the social structure present in the municipality of Pearl Lagoon. The first function of the theory states that a society employs deviant acts to help define and affirm its cultural norms and values. This affirmation is accomplished when community members visibly witness what is socially accepted in the form of appraisals and awards. Meanwhile, such members are also reminded of what is frowned upon by seeing others receive punishments for their deviant acts (Garfield, 1987).

A Structural-Functionalist Understanding of Deviance.

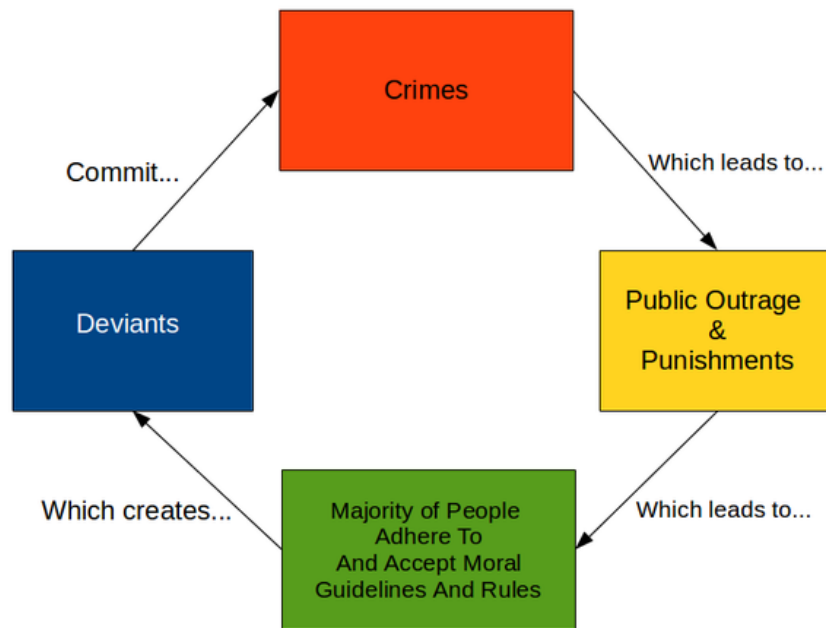


Figure 1: A Structural-Functionalist Understanding of Deviance (Wikibooks)

Following Durkheim's first theory function, it is anticipated for the community members of Pearl Lagoon to value any and all forms of acquiring wealth as the vast majority of its population does not have steady income. Because of this, the creation of a culture of drugs is also expected. Within that culture, certain norms and rules are probable to be followed. Appraisals of participation in the drug trade may come in the form of verbal compliments and one's accessibility to a reaching high status level in this society.

A case study performed in a small Nicaraguan town demonstrates the relationship between the first function of Durkheim's theory with that of normalizing the drug trade. In the *barrio* Luis Hernandez, drug gangs have received support from non-gang members. "A large number of *barrio* inhabitants [are] also indirectly involved in the drug economy by acting as '*bodegueros*',

stashing drugs in their house for the *narco* or for *pushers* in exchange of payment, generally between US \$15 and \$70, depending on the quantity and the length of time it [is] stored” (Rodgers, 2018). By offering to store the gang’s drugs in their homes — regardless of the monetary payment — the *barrio* community members accepted and awarded other members’ involvement by doing so.

The second function of deviance theory is used to classify what is right and wrong based on a society’s response. Therefore, a reaction to an act committed by an individual or group, draws a line. If that line is crossed, then sanctions can and must be imposed. In Pearl Lagoon, because the participation in the drug trade for the purpose of improving one’s economic situation has been accepted, any further involvement in the world of drugs will be seen as deviant. Actions such as becoming involved in cartels, gangs, excessively consuming drugs and becoming violent, and committing theft or murder will instigate negative societal reactions. Those who surpass basic participation in the drug trade will be subject to punishment by the rule of law.

The imposing of these “deserved” sanctions, defined in this deviance typology can be observed in Philip A. Dennis’ case study of Awastra’s drug trade -which is located in the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. When drug-related crime started to become a foremost problem in this Miskito village, members of the community responded to acts of theft — which they classified as deviant — by writing accusations in “Miskito on pieces of notebook paper [and taking them to] the local headman with demands for restitution.” The headman would then “[rail] at the accused person and [threatened] to bring the National Guard to arrest him” (Dennis, 2003).

Deviance theory's third rule states that shared reactions to both deviant and non-deviant behaviors unify a society. Apart from the high percentage of individuals participating in the drug trade, it is predicted that the people of Pearl Lagoon intensify their community cohesiveness by sharing profits of the drug trade with one another. If this cohesiveness is threatened in the form of imprisonment or social shaming, then it is also expected that the community will, as a whole, respond to such threats. Lastly, it is also probable that if a member of the municipality reaches a very high level of wealth, social changes that benefit the community — such as the betterment of schools and architecture — will be visibly present.

These shared reactions, which Durkheim describes as responses to an act, have unified multiple indigenous groups whose property or very existence has been threatened. For the indigenous Miskitu group, deviance amalgamates activists who “say that if the government continues to allow their ancestral lands to be colonized and invaded, they will take matters into their own hands to remove the *colonos* through *auto-saneamiento*” (Herlihy, 2016). Thus, outsiders who deviate from the Miskitu's already internalized norms of private property provoke a unification of activists who see themselves as forced to apprehend violators.

Durkheim's fourth and final function for his theory of deviance is the promotion of social change which creates a space in which a society can re-visit their already established norms in order to consider alternative values. For this particular case study, it is predicted that after witnessing how wealth generated by the drug trade can positively impact the society as a whole, community members will accept the participation of other members. However, this acceptance and

participation may result in unwanted negative effects. Repercussions such as the militarization — which may lead to the threatening of autonomy — of the area serve as an example. As Ross uncovers in his study of civil conflicts, “the presence of resource wealth might turn low-intensity conflicts into higher-intensity conflicts without influencing the total number of conflicts” (Ross, 2004). Based on his findings, it is predicted that although the region now counts with a heightened presence of naval and military officers, the number of conflicts with authorities will not increase. However, the relationship between the municipality and the aforementioned authoritative figures may worsen.

Rooted in Durkheim’s functionalist perspective on deviance, Robert Merton developed the strain theory of deviance to further explain the imbalance between cultural goals and institutionalized means. Merton explains that societies are comprised of two key aspects: culture and social structure. As a response to the established structure of society, people respond by creating goals, values, beliefs, and identities. Based on his typology, people may elect one of five ways to adapt if they ever encounter a disjunction between “socially prescribed aspirations and socially structured avenues for realizing these aspirations” (Garfield, 1987).

As Figure 2 reveals, the first option that members of a society may choose is *conformity* through which they aim to achieve cultural goals by following a socially approved path. Secondly, people may opt for culturally approved targets by following unconventional means which is branded as *innovation*. In turn, *ritualism* is adopting socially approved means to reach humbler objectives. *Retreatism* is classified as the rejection of both the institutionalized means and cultural goals. Lastly, *rebellion* takes place when a large faction of society takes

it upon themselves to create new cultural goals as well as new means through which to achieve them. Following Merton’s theoretical framework, it is predicted that people from Pearl Lagoon may employ innovation as a means of achieving economic and social advancement. Since many community members possess minimal job opportunities, or, in other words, conventional means by which to attain some wealth, they will reject conformity. This rejection has transcended into a creation of a new culture of innovation by the means of selling drugs.

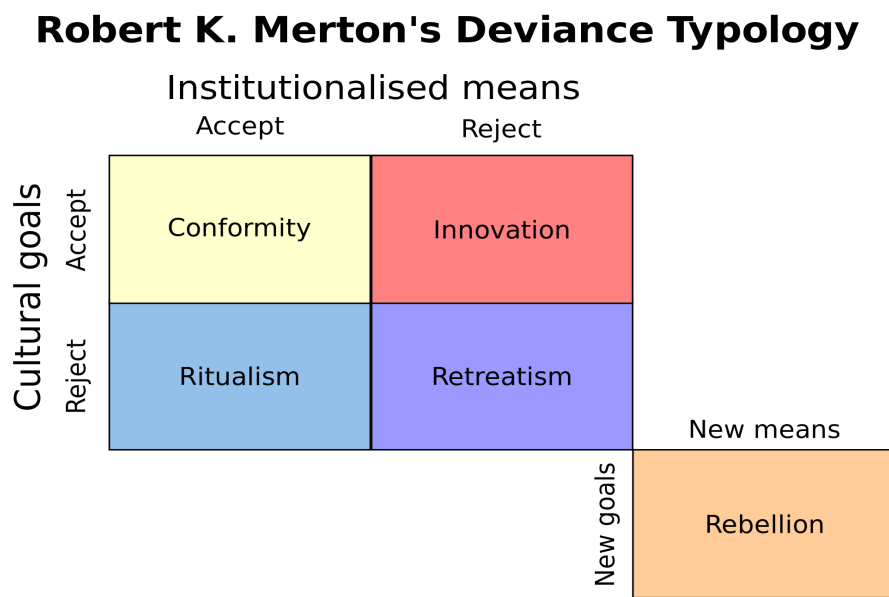


Figure 2: Robert K. Merton’s Deviance Typology (ReverseSociology)

Previous research reveals an overlap between Merton’s theoretical framework and the drug trade. For example, in the case of Buenavista, Michoacán, Mexico, “as Lomnitz-Adler (1993) aptly points out *rancheros* create a culture or individual dominance packaged in populist rhetoric. They are self-

made and have conquered their once isolated, inhospitable and marginal region” (McDonald). Just like the Mexican *rancheros* who conquered their land, the municipality of Pearl Lagoon is expected to have learned to use the Caribbean drug route in their favor.

Parallel to the balloon effect, as Peceny and Durnan state: “as cultivation is eradicated in one country or region, it merely reappears in another country or region. As some trafficking routes are closed down, new ones are opened up” (Peceny & Durnan). Based on this theory, it is predicted that the people of Pearl Lagoon will seek alternative ways to secure the continuation of the selling of drugs. Ways to prolong the benefits, resulting from this trade, may take the form of bribing the authorities or by inventing substitute routes for the transportation of cocaine. However, as the balloon effect suggests, despite the short term benefits, it is probable that income from this source will become inconsistent over time.

Methodology

During the month of April, specifically during the dates of April 4th to April 22nd, I resided in the community of Pearl Lagoon, located on the Caribbean coast of the Central American country of Nicaragua. During my stay, I conducted several interviews as well as field observations for research purposes.

Prior to selecting the community in which to conduct the research, I performed preliminary research on the community and its drug phenomenon. Additionally, I spent a week in Pearl Lagoon — approximately one month before the research period — in which I was first introduced to the community and its culture.

I selected the municipality of Pearl Lagoon as the ideal municipality to conduct my research due to its location and history with drugs. Although not much research has been conducted in this particular town, there are a few online news articles that provide some information on the cocaine phenomenon that is colloquially known as the “white lobster.” Even though the neighboring municipality of Tasbapaunie is famous for the amount of cocaine circulating in the area, there were no established relationships with any of its community members. In Pearl Lagoon, however, I had access to resources through established connections held by the School of International Training (SIT).

Before beginning my research in the community, I believed that I would only access very few individuals who would be willing to share information about the drug trade with me. Although I did not believe that every individual I would interview was involved in the drug trade, I was under the impression that everyone would possess strong opinions on the white lobster.

When drafting interview guides, I made sure that I did not ask any leading questions as an effort to diminish the quantity of biases in the interviews. For example, instead of asking, “how is the autonomy of the area threatened by police and naval presence?” I first asked the participant for their personal definition of autonomy and then proceeded to ask questions about the police and naval presence before asking the above-mentioned question.

Throughout the 14 days I conducted my research (the remaining time was spent traveling), a total of 12 interviews were completed. Prior to my arrival, I possessed only one research question: “How has the militarization of Pearl Lagoon, a result of the international drug trade, affected the autonomy of the

region?” In addition, a project proposal was submitted to SIT’s human subject’s review board and was approved.

Participants for the study were selected based on their relationship with my academic advisor, Mr. Wesley Williams. My study abroad program, SIT Nicaragua, had pre-established connections with community members, which allowed me to establish a relationship with him as my advisor. Mr. Williams is the owner of the Green Lodge, a hotel located at the entrance of Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua. A native from the area and well-known and respected community leader, Mr. Williams’s knowledge about the community and its residents allowed me to attain a well-rounded group of individuals from many social sectors.

Although I was not present every time he recruited an interview participant, Mr. Williams revealed to me that not every participant knew the interview would consist of some questions that pertained to the international drug trade. His reasoning behind this recruitment tactic was to not scare people away from speaking to me because the topic of drugs is a very sensitive theme and they may believe I was there to investigate their personal involvement in the trade. He, however, informed participants that they did not have to share their name if they did not wish to do so. However, when it came time to physically sit down with participants and hold conversations with them in order to answer my research question, I gave more detail on the purpose of the study. I informed them that I was hoping to better understand the society of Pearl Lagoon, its economy, autonomy, and how the “white lobster” has managed to become part of people’s lives. No individual backed out of the interview.

The interview questions for each individual were similar in the sense that basic information such as age, occupation, place of birth, where they had lived,

and how they would describe the economy of Pearl Lagoon were asked. Questions such as their perceptions and thoughts of the drug trade and its social, economic, and political impact, and whether or not they classified the act of finding packets of “the white lobster” a blessing were also common amongst all participants. Questions then differed based on the participant’s occupation. For example, when interviewing small business owners, questions on what the process of starting their business was like and how money generated from the drug trade affects their business, if at all, were only requested of them. For participants who were government employees, such as the ex-mayor of Pearl Lagoon, questions pertaining to government efforts implemented to combat the drug trade were asked. Additionally, for these employees, questions of corruption and knowledge of the militarization and autonomy of the area were also assigned to them. Other participants, such as voters and fishermen, were asked questions regarding the fishing in the area and problems they faced as seasonal workers. These community members also received questions pertaining to the violence and criminal activity in the area.

Before starting the interview, all participants were asked to fill out a consent form provided by the School of International Training Study Abroad program. The form included a brief description of the purpose of the study as well as a rights notice in which the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of each participant was promised. The interviewer’s name, and signature were already filled out so all that was required of participants was their printed name, signature, and date. Over half of the consent forms provided were in the English language as most people in the area prefer to speak English. A handful of consent forms were given in Spanish. Regardless of the language of the consent form, I

asked the participants for their preferred language and reviewed the consent form with them to ensure that they understood that their identity and all the information they shared was to be respected and kept confidential.

All participants asked to be interviewed in English and gave me their personal consent to use my cellular device to record our conversation. The voice recordings served as a way to save conversations in order to ensure access to the interview at a later time if needed and for transcription purposes as well. After completion of the project, all voice recordings will undergo deletion.

After the successful completion of written and verbal consent, the participants and I sat down for varying amounts of time in order to discuss the topics at hand. The shortest interview held was 18 minutes long while the longest was 57 minutes. On average, the interviews lasted 34 minutes. A total of 8 men and 4 women were interviewed for the project — totaling 12 participants. Participants held varying occupations ranging from fishermen to small shop owners to holding a position with the current municipal government (See Table 2 for the full list of participants).

In order to foster rapport with my interviewees, I did not mention the drug trade unless participants displayed a certain level of comfortableness. This was measured by the length and details of their answers. In addition, after four interviews, I opted out of using an interview guide during interviews as I found this decision made participants feel more comfortable.

The completion of the remaining interviews with navy personnel and the secretary of state were not accomplished due to being evacuated from the research site for security purposes (ongoing civil protests throughout the country had turned violent in 2018).

List of Interview Participants

Participant Name*	Age	Gender	Occupation
Derek Long	47	Male	Gas Station Owner
Jayvon Wells	42	Male	Tourism Business Owner
Oscar Hernandez	61	Male	Ex-Mayor
Michael Smith	40	Male	Municipality Inspector
Joe Daniels*	34	Male	Fisherman
Richmond Durst	47	Male	Fisherman
Fernando Rosas	33	Male	Tour Guide
Yolanda Davila	50	Female	Store Owner
Esther Medina	N/A	Female	Hotel Owner
Luz Herrera	30	Female	Crab Exporting Owner
Miguel Ortiz	54	Male	Fisherman
Casey Cervantes	43	Female	Autonomy Council Member

Table 2: Full list of interview participants including their age, gender, and occupation.

* Pseudonym assigned to all participants to protect identity

**Bolded names are used to signal direct participation in the international drug trade

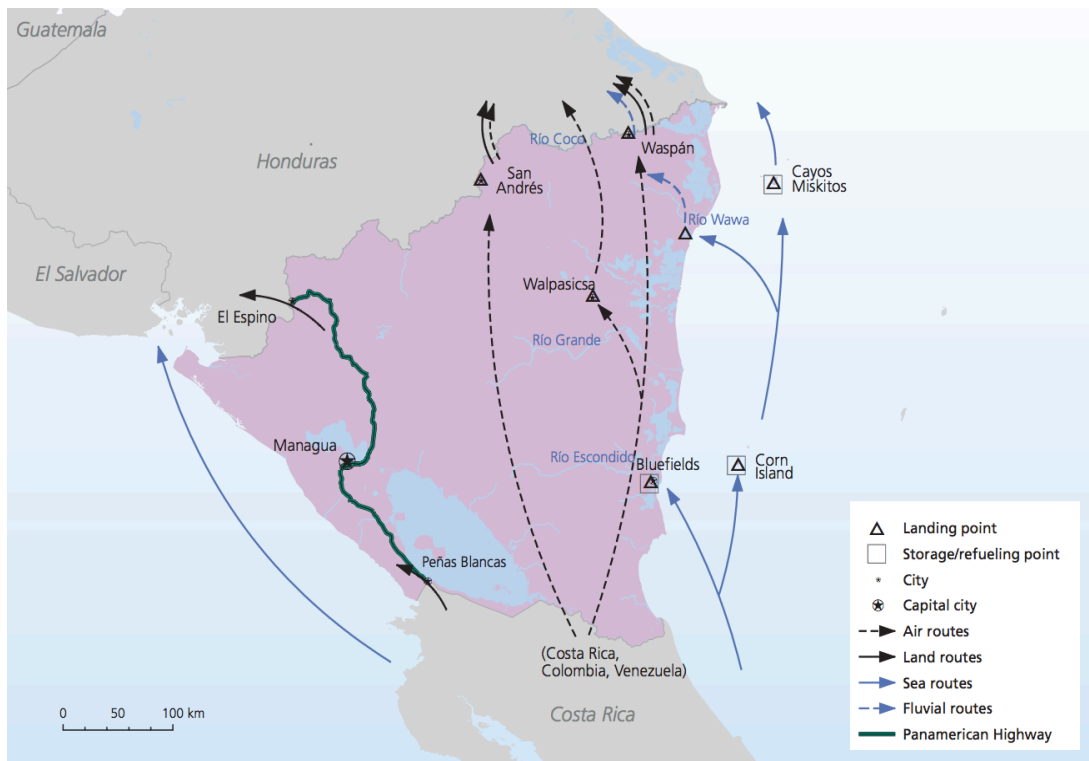
Research Findings

The small fishing town of Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua is home to approximately 17,000 inhabitants who are either Creole, Mestizo, or who belong to any of the Caribbean indigenous groups (Fundación para la Autonomía y el Desarrollo de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua, n.d.). An overwhelming amount of the population depends on the fishing of shrimp, crabs, fish, and lobster to purchase the basic necessities to survive. The very limited job opportunities have

encouraged the people of Pearl Lagoon to seek alternative means of acquiring monetary income.

The international drug trade, which stems from Colombia, merely a 5 to 6-hour boat ride away, has allowed Pearl Lagoon community members a way to better their economical situations. From Colombia, international drug smugglers transport sacks of cocaine hoping to reach their destinations in Honduras. From there, the drug is transported to Mexico in hopes of one day reaching the hands of consumers in the United States. However, a straight, one-way trip from Colombia to Honduras is virtually impossible without undergoing security check-points and stopping for fuel. Therefore, stop points between countries are crucial for the success of these transportation missions.

Nicaragua has become a key player in the international drug game. Located directly beneath Honduras and possessing over 20 small and isolated islands, this country offers multiple ideal “pit-stop” locations. Drug smugglers may choose from various routes, including by water (see Figure 3 for a full list of known drug routes). When traveling by water, however, smugglers undergo the risk of encountering the Nicaraguan Navy. If chased by the authorities, caught in the middle of a storm, or if they simply do not have enough fuel to continue the trip, smugglers are forced to dump the packets of cocaine into the water as they risk being caught red-handed with packets of cocaine. However, the drug may manage to end up in the hands of others.



Source: UNODC, elaborated from interviews in the region

Figure 3: Known drug trafficking routes through Nicaragua (Crime)

While out in the water, the fishermen of Pearl Lagoon may come across the *langosta blanca* or white lobster. This term has been coined by the people of Pearl Lagoon to refer to the white, water-proof packets of cocaine that float in the waters of the Lagoon or The Caribbean Sea — which is an hour boat ride from Pearl Lagoon. The packets appear in the water and, in some cases, wash up on the shores of the community.

Once found, the very same drug smugglers who threw the packets of cocaine into the water return to the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua to reclaim their property. They accomplish this by personally purchasing the drugs back from the finder. The introduction of the cocaine itself and the income generated from the selling of the product, have transformed the culture of the Pearl Lagoon basin.

The following research questions were asked throughout the entirety of the project: “How has the drug trade affected the society, economy, and politics

of Pearl Lagoon?” and “How has the militarization of Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua, affected the autonomy of the region?” The findings of the aforementioned questions will be separated by the following categories: Social Effects of the Drug Trade, Economic Effects of the Drug Trade, Political Effects of the Drug Trade and lastly, Militarization Impacts on Autonomy.

Social Effects of the Drug Trade

The community of Pearl Lagoon has experienced various societal changes due to the amount of community involvement with the white lobster. Such effects range from a belief in a direct correlation between teen pregnancy and the trade to the fostering of a culture of drugs to the shaping of racial relations between creoles and mestizos. The social effects of the drug trade will be presented in the following sections: Culture of drugs, teen pregnancy, demographic effects and racial relations.

Model: ‘Societal Culture of Drugs’

The high percentage of Pearl Lagoon community members who use the income generated from selling cocaine has resulted in the creation of a ‘culture of drugs.’ Such culture is cultivated through the social acceptance of selling drugs. The continuance of this acceptance has transcended into a societal normalization of the trade. Now, those who form part of this society perceive the drug trade as simply another way to generate income. This normalization has even encouraged community members to submit to the trade by personally participating. The lack of authoritative efforts to actively combat this illicit trade of contraband also contributes and, mostly importantly, plays a protagonist role in maintaining this culture.

Through my interviews, participants have shown attitudes of normalization with the drug trade. Upon asking questions about the origin of the trade, its introduction to the community, reactions from community members, and general perceptions, participants revealed to conceptualize this unique phenomenon in the same manner.

I have created a model which I will use to explain how a ‘culture of drugs’ has been fostered in Pearl Lagoon. As revealed in the figure below, I posit 9 criteria for the ‘societal culture of drugs’.

Criteria for ‘Societal Culture of Drugs’

1. A community is deprived of conventional ways in which to attain financial security.
2. A number of community members become directly involved with the drug trade.
3. Those who do not participate in the trade witnesses the material goods and monetary benefits which result directly from involvement.
4. Regardless of the percentage of those directly involved with the drug trade, the community as a whole enjoys economic advancement.
5. Drug trade participants share their profits, which simultaneously disseminates economic incentives for the participation of others.
6. Non-participants do not shame those involved in the drug trade if they benefit in some way or understand the economic incentives for others’ participation.
7. Authorities permit for the continuation of the selling drugs by abstaining from imposing sanctions.
8. All societal constituents adopt an ideology in which they perceive the drug trade, including its negative consequences, as a part of their everyday life. Community cohesiveness is witnessed.
9. The society becomes dependent on the drug trade.

Figure 4: *List of Criteria for a society to have an ongoing culture of drugs*

Pearl Lagoon's society underwent a multi-faceted process during its creation of a 'societal culture of drugs'. Following the model above, the municipality of Pearl Lagoon lacked institutionalized means by which to achieve economic prosperity. As the owner of his tourism business, Jayvon Wells, 62, states that "the economy in Pearl Lagoon is very, very low. There are no jobs from 1979. After this government took over, all investors back[ed] out... we have no jobs but [the] upper [class] (wealthy) get[s the] money" (Wells, 2018). The economy of Pearl Lagoon heavily depends on the sales that stem from the fishing expeditions carried out by men in society. However, the lagoon's natural resources (fish, shrimp, crab, etc.) are seasonal and when everyone — including international boats — "[are] out in the water, there is a decrease in product and sales. This results in a need for money for many families" (Wells, 2018).

In accordance to Mr. Wells' statements, the municipal government's inspector, Michael Smith claimed that "the backbone of Pearl Lagoon", which is the fishing industry, is going down. His reasoning for this is attributed to the increasing population. "You [have] more people... you fish more and our culture is not much of a farming people culture" (Smith, 2018). However, the population of Pearl Lagoon has turned to other forms of employment in order to make up for the shortage of income, due to deteriorating fishing industry, which include but are not limited to: training baseball, becoming a construction worker or boat mechanic. For Miguel Ortiz, president of Pearl Lagoon's fishermen cooperative, the Nicaraguan government — although cognizant of the economic situation of the region — "takes (natural resources) from the coast and give them[selves] big houses in Managua." Or in other words, the national government has exploited

the Caribbean and left the people on the Coast behind. They are “destroying and they are taking the last little that we have” (Ortiz, 2018). Furthermore, Ortiz stated that the communities on the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast consistently have to fight for their survival because no one, especially the Nicaraguan government, protects the inhabitants (Ortiz, 2018).

Since abundant conventional means to obtain steady income in Pearl Lagoon ceased to exist, a number of community members have turned to unusual ways of procuring income. According to Derek Long, Pearl Lagoon’s only fuel station owner, the community’s involvement in the drug trade can be described as one in which:

“almost everybody here does it — that works outside” (in reference to the fishermen). “They don’t go looking to see [who is] doing it, they go outside and find it because it is something that happens very regular. That happen a lot of time and everybody find it, they going to sell it. From when you see people building house, you see they start, you know, doing things where is unusual, you know exactly. That’s exactly what happened” (Long, 2018)

Long, who has owned his gas station since 2010, personally knows all those involved in the trade — including ones who have been deemed as the most powerful *narcos* in the Caribbean. To facilitate a trip to Colombia to pick up cocaine packets, or to complete a “mission”, traffickers must first stop by Long’s gas station to purchase barrels of fuel. The business owner specified that the 5 to 6-hour boat ride to Colombia requires “normally like 4 or 5 barrels” (Long, 2018). Throughout my interview with Long at his gas station, I witnessed his large clientele – and the amount of fuel they purchased. Additionally, Long revealed that various customers who purchase the most fuel are known

for their deep involvement with Colombian cartels. These specific *narcos* are also perceived as those with the most wealth in the community. Member participation has, thus, followed Robert Merton's theory of innovation as the society of Pearl Lagoon has turned to the drug trade as a way to escape poverty.

Since those who directly participate in the drug trade are able to enjoy luxuries in the form of material goods, those who do not participate witness the economic benefits from others' involvement. The vast majority of those whose paths cross with cocaine packets spend their money on the betterment of their homes. As someone who personally spent time in the Colombian cocaine labs and smuggled drugs for cartels, Durst estimates that around "60% of people (who have sold their white lobster) been traveling around and try to get in the system of these concrete building. And people build a nice home like that" (Durst, 2018). Other material goods such as fancy boats and cars from the city can also be spotted in the community.

Large sums of money can be enjoyed by those who participate in the trade on a regular basis. After conferring with Joe Daniels, a drug trafficker who obtained over one million dollars by becoming personally involved in the drug trade, he confessed that the economic benefits are many. Daniels grew up in a low-income household. His parents could not financially support his dream of attending maritime school, so he began working on a lobster boat. After his family members became involved in the drug trade and showed him how much money they acquired, Daniels did not hesitate to join.

"The economic incentives are plenty" (Daniels, 2018). Therefore, those who do not reap the economic benefits and personally witness the rewards that come with personal involvement may consider participating as well. This follows Durkheim's third function of deviance which contributes to the unification of a

society as an understanding for the reasoning behind participation is formulated.

Although not all Pearl Lagoon constituents are personally involved in the drug trade, the municipality, all together, benefits from the profits. Community members, such as business owners, indirectly support the trade even if they may not agree with the means by which people attain their new wealth. For example, business owner Yolanda Davila does not like that community members participate in the selling of drugs. However, she admits that:

“I don’t think it (drug money) affects me (negatively). That help me... if they don’t catch nothing then I feel bad because I am not going to sell... Well, if you do that, that’s your problem. You bring your money here to my shop, I got to take your money” (Davila, 2018).

With the influx of new money in the economy, restaurant, shops and small business owners, in general, sell more. Thus, although not everyone may be willing to participate in the white lobster trade, they hope that when the real lobster is low, the more valuable lobster can generate some income for them.

Aside from small business owners, the social sector of the community also benefits from the welfare of those who are involved with the white lobster. After earning a substantial amount of money from a Colombian cartel, Durst explained how he helped his community:

“The 50% that involved with this thing looked like it changed the situation after seeing the money. For instance, I do things, I can do this because I have the money. The money can do anything, you know?”

Then you take other people, other people do good things; like let's say maybe building home and go off the community and looking to build a home in the next community. Looking for the betterment of the education of the children, you know? That's why I say that people take it and do good" (Durst, 2018).

Those who acquire money from the trade donate a percentage of that profit for the well-being of the community. The reasoning behind their charity is attributed to the lack of resources provided by the national government to this Caribbean community.

Besides perhaps donating money to social sectors inside Pearl Lagoon, those who deal or have dealt with the white lobster share their wealth directly with other community members. Sharing profits may come in the form of buying multiple people food or drinks at restaurants, helping others with their home improvements, or lending money. Esther Medina, an entrepreneur and owner of the King Crab hotel and restaurant stated that she used to receive a handful of customers who spent their share of the white lobster money on her food and drinks:

"They would come in later like maybe 11, 12'oclock and say maybe 'give food to everyone. I'm covering that. It's on my bill.' That's how it used to be or 'give beers to everyone.' Or they'll come with a big group of young people and say 'I'm covering everything.'"And you serving, you serving. 'Okay, how much is the bill?' They don't even look at anything. They just go to the bars and the same thing happens" (Medina, 2018).

The act of purchasing goods for large groups of people conveys a social message by the purchasing individual. He or she is transmitting that they have the economic means to not only provide for themselves, but for many. This is something that is largely craved in the Pearl Lagoon municipality as many families struggle to provide for each member of their family. This act, then, disperses the thought of numerous benefits deriving from participation in the trade.

Those not personally participating in the selling or distribution of drugs will not paint those involved in a negative light if they personally benefit from the trade or if they empathize with participatory individuals. The majority of individuals living in the tight-knit community of Pearl Lagoon experience poverty in some way. Although the drug trade has improved the economy situation of many, not every fisherman will find packets or sacks of cocaine. The men who do find the white lobster, however, are seen as “lucky men” as Durst points out. Therefore, some, instead of turning the “lucky” person over to the authorities, wait for the day in which they, hopefully, encounter the white packets wrapped in tight plastic (Durst, 2018).

Some believe that the only way to effectively halt the drug trade is for the government to create many institutionalized means by which people may secure income. Such ways may come from the formation of occupational opportunities and/or by improving the accessibility to higher education. For gas station owner, Derek Long, the people of Pearl Lagoon have turned to the drug trade because many believe the following: “The only thing I can think to do is go and run drugs to feed my family because there is no work” (Long, 2018). Besides extending his understanding for the participation of others, Long stated that he has personally

benefited from the trade due to his increase in sales. Throughout his interview, Long did not shame anyone for the participation in the drug trade. This acceptance has translated onto community perceptions of the trade. The selling of cocaine thus becomes valuable and follows Durkheim's first function from his theory of deviance.

Following the sixth function of this model, without the support of the local government, however, the benefits of the drug trade may not be enjoyed by many or for an extended period of time. In the case of Pearl Lagoon, almost all interviewees maintained the involvement of both police and naval personnel in the international drug trade. Durst and Daniels, both who have personally smuggled drugs internationally, stated that all naval and police officers are corrupt and that they have personally had "them on [their] payroll" (Durst, 2018) (Daniels, 2018). As Daniels put it, "they are the biggest mafia because they throw the stone and hide their hand... When things (drugs) move, they (traffickers) always have somebody in the police, from the mafia, dealing with the dealers and all the patrol boats... We call this a little wet hand" (Daniels, 2018). Daniels went on to explain that the naval officers, including the Nicaragua chief in charge of the Caribbean navy is personally involved in the trade because, when a drug boat passes by, they ask their workers to look the other way" (Daniels, 2018).

In another instance, Davila retold the story of how he was caught by Nicaraguan police while attempting to deliver drugs from Colombia to Honduras. After being transported to Chinandega, a municipality on the opposite side of the country, Davila waited 366 days for his trial before being released by a judge. The judge, whose identity was not revealed, asked Davila to pay him a substantial amount of money for his release. After doing so, Davila became a free man (Davila, 2018). These examples serve to further understand the level of

involvement by Nicaraguan officials in the drug international trade.

Much like the people of Pearl Lagoon, those in the Nicaraguan public service sector do not earn a considerable amount of money. A police officer in this Central American country earns merely \$120 U.S. dollars per month (Luxner, 2012). It is estimated that a naval officer also earns around that amount. Therefore, when presented with an opportunity to procure around US \$40,000 in a couple of hours, even high-ranking naval officers will submit to the trade. As this trade caters to the need of multiple groups, the presence of passiveness from authorities allows for the continuation of this trade.

With the transportation, selling, and consumption of this illicit contraband comes negative societal consequences. Although such consequences are experienced by many, the number in which they occur has led to the normalization of all effects of the drug trade — including those classified as benign. Casey Cervantes, a lab technician and current member of Pearl Lagoon’s municipal autonomy committee, lost her son to drugs. After he began dealing, Cervantes was able to witness the violence, corruption, increase in drug abuse, and insecurity that has become a part of everyday lives of community members. Cervantes admitted that she does not feel safe walking outside at times due to the reported violence in the area. She states the following:

“I prefer being inside at times because the drugs it comes like something normal inside of our community. All of us know where the drugs sell and people feel so good doing it, and feel so free... they are involving the small children, they are the ones carrying the drug boats and it is a very critical

situation that we living here in Pearl Lagoon and who should say about that, it is should be the law (authorities). But when you go to them (the authorities), this law set up that you have to have witnesses and all kinds of different things they ask for so sometimes you just have to live things like that” (Cervantes, 2018).

Due to the high percentage of Pearl Lagoon members who are either directly or indirectly involved in the drug trade, who have thus normalized every segment of the trade, those who do not share any form of participation have learned to still become a member of this ‘societal culture of drugs’. However, any further involvement in the trade is seen as deviant.

Community members who are involved in the drug trade and contribute to the growing violence of the municipality or drug use, including that of small children, are not welcome. For Cervantes, whose son was involved in the drug trade, the negative consequences of the white lobster have impacted the lack of security she feels in her own community. Therefore, when asked about her thoughts on the trade, Cervantes passionately answered that she does not agree with others’ involvement. Similarly, those who threaten the drug trade, such as the authorities, are viewed as enemies. The ex-mayor of Pearl Lagoon, Oscar Hernandez, described that during his time as mayor, he personally witnessed the people calling policemen oppressors because they had imprisoned a family member due to their involvement with the white lobster (Hernandez, 2018). The creation of community standards in relation to the drug trade fall in line with Durkheim’s second theory of deviance which states that the community uses deviant acts to classify what is right and wrong.

Lastly, in order for a society to cultivate a ‘culture of drugs’, the community must become dependent on the drug trade for income. As a municipality located on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, impoverished community members have developed a reliance for the selling of the drugs they find or transport. When talking about his family members and friends who participated in the drug trade, Durst alluded to a culture of dependency within the drug trade, as “some people feel like that can’t live without that” (Durst, 2018). Such dependency has also motivated people to create alternative routes through the Pacific Ocean and by land (Durst, 2018). This alternative drug route creation follows the balloon effect as new paths for the transportation of drugs are being created. This dependency, therefore, has completely transformed the economy and society of Pearl Lagoon. For these reasons, the community of Pearl Lagoon has meet all nine criteria for the ‘societal culture of drugs’ model.

Teen Pregnancy

Nicaragua is known for its title of having the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in all of Latin America (Plan Internacional, n.d.). Of those women, 28% give birth before the age of 18. Meanwhile, 4.4% gave birth before turning 15. In 2013, 6,069 of these young women were victims of sexual violence. A shocking 88% of those victims were girls (Plan Internacional, n.d.). In addition, the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua reports a higher number of teenage pregnancies in comparison to the rest of the country. The World Bank’s 2008 study, *Teenage Pregnancy and Opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean: On Teenage Fertility Decisions, Poverty and Economic Attainment* records that “the Atlantico is the region with the highest percentage of teenagers giving birth (23.4%) while the Pacifico (13.5%) presents the lowest one" (World Bank, 2008). As one of the

poorest communities on the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast, Pearl Lagoon is no exception to this epidemic.

Although many explanations may serve to further understand this social phenomenon, community members in Pearl Lagoon believe the drug trade has played an influential role in the high percentage of young, impregnated women. After gaining money from selling cocaine, men now possess the ability to offer women — regardless of their age — an economic incentive to become sexually involved with them. One of the negative consequences of the drug trade, according to Durst, is older men pursuing young women. Durst explains that the profits men produce from selling the white lobster provokes a craving for acquiring inaccessible goods. Durst provides the example of acquiring a gun, the government does not allow citizens to purchase guns easily. In turn, men feel the need to receive something they may not get with such facility. What men may do, if they possess the right amount of money, is solicit sex in exchange for money.

Classified as violence for some of the basin's members, men take advantage of women's low-economic statuses and offer them money to have sex, and, often times, without a condom. As Durst puts it:

“the girl was there for years before, and not having the money and not approaching her and then you can't convince her (to have sex) you know by that and maybe the girl has (economic) needs and then you approach her and she will sigh and say ‘not for your money.’” If that woman turns out pregnant then men say “no, I paid you for that term and that's your problem... they (men) take it and abuse the situation because I couldn't get it before and

couldn't get it fair and so I get it my way. That's why I call it violence" (Durst, 2018).

The economic motivation to participate in sex with those directly profiting from the drug trade may, thus, associate with the teenage pregnancy in this municipality.

Demographic Effects & Racial Relations

The economic incentives provided by the drug trade in Pearl Lagoon play a role in the migration of the region. The population census carried out by the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, Nicaragua reveals that, over the course of the three censuses, there has been a significant increase in population. In the year 2000, only 6,253 people resided in Pearl Lagoon while, in 2005 that number rose to 10,676. In 2016, however, the population increased to 16,949 (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2017). Although various reasons may be attributed to people's decision to move to this Caribbean town, such as the area's rich natural resources, those interviewed believe that a large influx of migrants relocate in Pearl Lagoon in hopes of encountering the white lobster.

These migrants are not welcomed by Pearl Lagoon natives. Often moving from the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua, mestizos or "Spaniards" as they are colloquially referred to by creoles, hope to "get lucky." The president of Pearl Lagoon's fishermen cooperative describes the migration situation as one that is crowding the community. "They want to make some money like we do" (Ortiz, 2018). Even though the racial relations between creoles and mestizos are already intense due to discrimination, racism, etc. most creoles believe that those from the Pacific are slowly taking the drug trade from them. As Durst points out, "people come from all around. And some people come to a place and see

something that attract them (drugs)” (Durst, 2018). Several participants also revealed that mestizos are known for frequenting with Colombian cartels. Mestizos are also perceived in a negative light due to their rising presence in the business sector.

The racial relations between community natives and migrants have worsened due to the rising number of mestizos owning small shops. Natives’ reasoning for why those from the Pacific have thrived in establishing a presence as entrepreneurs reveals the severity of the groups’ perceptions of one another. Esther Medina, a native of Pearl Lagoon hypothesizes that:

“They are very busy people and they also come from a business background. The mestizos are the native indigenous people that were on the Pacific side that joined with the Spanish – that came and colonized Nicaragua, you know, Latin America. So they have that business thing in them versus or people no. So I think your history and your background have a lot of things to do with it”
(Medina, 2018).

Additionally, the municipality of Pearl Lagoon does not possess bank and the majority of the creole population did not complete or continue their educational careers and therefore, have no knowledge on how to properly run a business or take a loan out (Medina, 2018). In comparison, those from the Pacific have access to the aforementioned resources.

The existing disparities between resources allocated to the Pacific and Atlantic Coasts proved to be most apparent between small business owners. Luz Herrera, a teacher, marine biologist and proud inheritor of her father’s blue crab exporting business, explains how although she owns her own business, she

has to teach at the local school in order to make ends meet. Even though the exportation of blue crab meat is only possible if her business is running, she does not benefit nearly as much as the Pacific business — where her meat is canned (Herrera, 2018). Herrera, along with other participants, stated that she hopes the national government would do more because, after all, the government is benefiting from the taxes she pays. Because of the formerly mentioned reasons, the drug trade, along with other factors, have shaped the relationships between both ethnic groups.

Economic Effects of the Drug Trade: The Impact on Small Businesses and the Dutch Theory Explained

Packets of cocaine are sold at approximately US \$7,000-\$8,000 while sacks are worth over US \$25,000 (Daniels, 2018). The introduction and circulation of these large sums of money into a community in which the majority of its population experiences extreme poverty, has created both optimistic and harmful effects on the economy of this Caribbean municipality.

Positive effects on small businesses have allowed for the increase of sales experienced by owners. However, the seasonal presence of drugs has created an economic phenomenon similar to that of the Dutch Disease. This term is used to define a resource boom a country may experience. While this boom increases the economic development of a specific sector, others experience a decline (International Competitiveness of the Russian Federation). Therefore, a false dependency on the white lobster trade has been created.

The discovery of the white lobster has negatively impacted businesses that heavily depend on their employees for the success of the business itself. In order

for crab exporting business owner, Luz Herrera to ensure the continuance of her business, Herrera requires at least 20 fishermen to fishing for blue crabs on a daily basis. However, if any of her fishermen encounter packets of cocaine in the waters of the Lagoon, her business scrapes by. “I don’t know how but it’s (white lobster) dispersed and so its more likely that three or four fishermen is going to find the white lobster. And so, they start fishing immediately” (Herrera, 2018). When asked the lowest amount of active fishermen working for her was, Herrera responded “eight.” As more packets of cocaine “boom” in the region, businesses , like that of Herrera, takes a hit.

Political Effects of the Drug Trade: Political Appointees

Due to the high migration pattern of mestizos moving to the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, an increase in political positions assigned to mestizos is observed by Pearl Lagoon natives. As explained in the demographics and racial relations section of this paper, many natives believe that the drug trade has played an important role in mestizos’ decision to move to the Caribbean Coast. According to the life-long residents of Pearl Lagoon, the majority, if not all, positions in the municipal, territorial, and regional government should be held by those of creole decadence. However, due to the increasing number of mestizos in the area, the number of creoles who obtain positions in any level of government is diminishing.

The change in government demographics has incited strong opinions from Pearl Lagoon’s creole population. As a current member of the regional government’s autonomy commission and creole woman herself, Casey Cervantes states:

“We just passed a municipal government (Pearl Lagoon held elections this past January) and through the mestizo, them, they are the majority and I couldn’t show you this but we have the vice-president is a mestizo. When this territory should be by indigenous and afro-descendants but through the population and everyone have their own interest then these people getting in really good positions and this is real dangerous for the ethnic minorities” (Cervantes, 2018).

Cervantes' thoughts are not uncommon throughout the community. As a matter of fact, such feelings toward mestizos in governmental positions has transcended into the way in which creoles in Pearl Lagoon interact with authoritative personnel.

Militarization effects on Autonomy

The term autonomy is defined as an idea referring to the capacity to be “one’s own person, to live one’s life according to reasons and motives that are taken as one’s own” (Stanford Encyclopedia, 2013) In 1987, the Autonomy statute for the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua – known as law 28 –, and the 1987 Amendments to the Constitutions, were enacted for the region (Brunnegger, 2007). However, many Caribbean Coast constituents have made argued that although these acts were passed, the coast to date is not fully autonomous due to the governmental neglect it endures. A study conducted on the history of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast and its autonomy states that:

“After being granted 80 per cent debt relief in 2004, in 2005 Nicaragua presented its development plan to the IMF and World Bank. The plan has ben

criticized as significantly ‘flawed’ in failing to address the needs of the country’s most marginalized inhabitants” (Brunnegger, 2007)

Similarly, corrupt officials have also been accused in both illegally trafficking and selling indigenous land for profit (Herlihy, 2016). This act is in direct violation of the region’s property law 445 which the 29 articles state “that the State of Nicaragua is to respond to “the claim for the titling of the lands and territories of the indigenous people and ethnic communities of the former Mosquitia of Nicaragua” (Nicaragua). Given the low development financing and lack of social service reforms, the Coast of Nicaragua has turned to non-institutionalized means in order to address its social and economical needs.

The presence of narcotics has resulted in the militarization of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. On August 1st, 2013, Nicaragua’s National Police Chief, Aminta Granera presented a special security plan for the Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region. After giving this statement, the government militarized both Northern and Southern Caribbean regions. Such security measures occasioned in the positioning of naval posts in the Southern region of the Caribbean coast (Shaw, 2013). Today, a total of three naval posts can be found in the area. One post is located in Bluefields, the second in Pearl Lagoon, while the third is situated in Tasbapaunie. Additionally, when fishermen or tour guides travel out to the Caribbean Sea, they must undergo a naval security checkpoint in which they show their identification, permit, and boat license to the corresponding personnel. Those carrying out rescue missions must also carry a special government license in order to not be mistaken as drug traffickers. Those

purchasing fuel from gas stations in the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua are also required to show identification when purchasing boat fuel.

However, the militarization of the area has not resulted in the safekeeping of Pearl Lagoon. As mentioned earlier in this study, according to community residents – almost all naval and police officers work directly with those involved in the drug trade. However, drug busts of crack houses in Pearl Lagoon or in neighboring communities do occur. In fact, community members are convinced that that's all the authorities in the municipality care about. According to life-long resident, Jayvon Wells, “the government knows about every crack house” (Wells, 2018). After explaining to me how he had submitted a case to the police after his brother had cut off his part of his finger a few days prior to our interview, Wells stated that the police had not reached out to him. Authoritative inaction, by the current eight police officers serving the area, can also be witnessed by their response time. Businesses owners who became intolerant of this came up with the idea of community volunteer police. Esther Medina, a restaurant and hotel owner describes the ideology adopted by business owners as: “if we want these people to protect us we have to pay them... maybe US \$75 a month” (Medina, 2018). Medina also stated that volunteer police only possess a stick as weaponry. In addition to having to contract security personnel in the event that these owners encounter a rowdy customer or fear for their safety or that of their customers, people from Pearl Lagoon have purchased guns for personal protection.

Pearl Lagoon inhabitants have been forced to seek substitute means to protect themselves from the increasing crime in the area. Medina shared that as a woman and business owner, she does not feel safe at times. Besides resorting to contracting volunteer police, Medina has purchased a gun and, in once occasion,

had to pull it out during a violent physical fight between a rowdy customer and her husband (Medina, 2018). Besides not responding to pleas for help from the local police, Medina has also experienced the navy's unwillingness to aid in the securement of the area.

Corrupt Nicaraguan naval officers who do not complete thorough security checks negatively impact those in the business sector of Pearl Lagoon. Although required to check for licenses, permits, and appropriate traveling gear (i.e. life vests) for those navigating the waters of the Lagoon/Caribbean Sea, naval officers do not always do so. According to Medina, there have been instances where tour guides pay naval officers money to let the guide and their group of tourists pass through the security point with expired licenses. Letters from tourists have even been sent to the regional board of tourism after a driver without a permit flipped the boat over (Medina, 2018).

Furthermore, the naval and police corruption of Pearl Lagoon has intensified the racial perceptions and relations between that of mestizos and creoles. Municipality inspector, Michael Smith — a creole man — provides insight on his views of mestizos holding authoritative positions in the following quote:

“The navy they got a gun and ammunition. That’s even better than food when you’re in the military life. You don’t worry about food; you prefer to have your equipment. If you need to make an operation, you need to have that” Smith explained naval officers’ thoughts as “I don’t need food, I need bullet and gun to do my job” (Smith, 2018).

Ortiz, the current president of the community's fishing cooperative also claims that the mestizo police and navy officers – and this race in general – is racist towards black creoles (Ortiz, 2018). Such thoughts serve to better understand the existing relationship between both groups. These thoughts and perceptions between mestizos and creoles have, in turn, created tensions between community members and those – of the other race – holding authoritative positions.

Although the militarization of the area may affect the autonomy of the region due to army presence, the relationship between these two variable is not great. In fact, inactivity from navy and police personnel has resulted in community members welcoming an increase of security personnel in the area due to the rising crime in the area. Even though the militarization of the area has intensified the racial relations between creoles and mestizos, the increased presence of security personnel has not affected the autonomy of the area.

Conclusion

The Nicaraguan Caribbean municipality of Pearl Lagoon has undergone changes in its social, economical, and political sectors due to its close proximity to Colombian drug routes. Socially, the community has created - what I pose as - a 'societal culture of drugs' and a belief of an existing correlation between the drug trade and teenage pregnancy. In addition, the drug trade has played a role in shaping migration and intensified the racial relations between that of the mestizos and black creoles.

The 'societal culture of drugs' model requires nine criteria, which relate to the sociological deviance theories of both Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton. This model is used to better understand the formation of a normalization

of the international drug trade and the sociological effects it perpetuates. The changing of groups' attitudes toward the drug trade serve as examples for the social acceptance of this community. Even for those who do not agree with the acts of selling, transporting, and/or consumption of drugs, the economic benefits stemming from such acts are ones that benefit the community as a whole. However, repercussions are also faced by the society. Community members believe the drug trade persuades the migration of people from the Pacific side of Nicaragua to the Atlantic Coast. Politically, the demographic effects of this pattern has allowed for an increase in political positions in the Caribbean municipal, regional, and territorial government held by mestizos – something that is viewed negatively by black creoles.

The economic effects perpetuated by the drug trade have also resulted in a culture of dependency for Pearl Lagoon inhabitants. Following the balloon effect, this “natural resource” has negatively impacted small businesses who depend on their employees for the prosperity of their industry. When found, this seasonal product allows for an introduction of an influx of money in the economy. Those who directly benefit from the profits generated from the selling of cocaine do not report to their jobs as they focus on enjoying the earnings they reap. The reporting of Colombian cocaine packets found in the waters of the Lagoon have also affected the number of security personnel in this municipality.

Known for its highly impoverished community, the autonomy of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua is constantly questioned by many. With the introduction of white lobster, the Nicaraguan government had militarized the area by increasing the number of police officers in the area. Additionally, three naval posts have been positioned in 3 separate locations throughout the coast. However,

as the findings yielded, there is no direct effect between the militarization of the area with its autonomy. The societal effects of the militarization, however, are not welcomed by community members who believe the increase in mestizo naval officers has only worsened the racial relations between mestizos and creoles.

The qualitative research conducted in the Caribbean municipality of Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua, aids in the understanding of societal, economic, and political effects of the international drug trade. The creation of a ‘societal model of drugs’ serves as a tool of measurement for towns who may, too, be affected by this phenomenon.

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