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Emergency State Cultural Imagination and Expression among Afro-descendant Youth in Pearl Lagoon

Jennifer Lunceford
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Emergency State

Cultural Imagination and Expression among Afro- descendant Youth in Pearl Lagoon

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Psychology B.A. Spring 2014**

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Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua RAAS**

“The teachers come to us with Christopher Columbus or discovering, but I would like to learn about our region. It’s really heartbreaking, do you understand? Who is the first person to dance the Maypole, and we really don’t know where it started.”

Mihaele Leiva, Pearl Lagoon

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Abstract

Various societal factors demonstrate that Pearl Lagoon is in state of emergency. The youth today live in a Pearl Lagoon that is gradually losing cultural ground. However, the young people are not silent witnesses to this decline. The youth desire to learn more about their cultural traditions. Many of them romanticize their community's past and emphasize the importance of their traditions, even though others are breaking away from their customs. The younger generation also critiques their community. This is hopeful because Pearl Lagoon needs cultural rescue. Technology is increasing the youth's exposure to the outside world, which is not necessarily negative. However, the weakening Afro-descendant cultural identity leaves the youth vulnerable to these outside images, which can become adopted behaviors. There are many warning signs to Pearl Lagoon's diminishing cultural expression: the youth's disinterest in their traditions, increasing substance abuse, decreasing numbers of youth returning after college, growing health problems, and increasing incidents of teen pregnancy. However, it is not too late for cultural rescue. The challenge presented to community leaders is to decide what to do now that Pearl Lagoon has been identified as an emergency state.

Keywords: Identity, Youth Culture, Creole, Pearl Lagoon, Afro-descendants

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Introduction

Latin Americans are narrowly represented in the media. In Nicaragua, this stereotype contrasts with the Afro-descendants who live along the Caribbean coast, where historical events have influenced a separate culture, different languages, and unique traditions. The Caribbean Coast is divided into the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) and the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS). The town of Pearl Lagoon is located in this region. It is the center for nine other villages in the Pearl Lagoon Basin, which has a population of 10,676 people.¹ Understanding Afro-Nicaraguan culture is essential to understanding Nicaragua's cultural diversity. This research paper explores Afro-descendant youth's cultural identity in Pearl Lagoon.

Pearl Lagoon has experienced many changes in just the last fifteen years. Claro, an internet, cell phone, and cable television provider, came to Pearl Lagoon in 2000 under the Arnaldo Alemán presidency. Additionally, the Pearl Lagoon Academy of Excellence (PLACE) was founded in 2004. Today's teenagers were born during and after these changes. The younger generation's Pearl Lagoon is more open than the generations before them. They can download music from foreign artists, surf a number of websites, and watch television shows from around the world. While technological advancement and community development broaden the youth's perspective, they also threaten Pearl Lagoon's cultural traditions. Foreign influences cause the youth to question their traditions. Community development, such as PLACE, helps students succeed academically. However, academic pursuits sometimes cause the youth to leave their home community for other opportunities. The possibility for cultural abandonment leaves Pearl Lagoon's Black culture in an emergency state.

¹ Instituto Nicaragüense de Censo (INEC) 2005. 21.

Methodology

I conducted this research over a four-week period in Pearl Lagoon. Interviews, focus groups, church observations, and a school observation served as research methods. I interviewed community leaders and community members about Pearl Lagoon's history, cultural traditions, youth culture, religion, and community challenges. My advisor, Mr. Wesley Williams Sr., scheduled the majority of the interviews. I also coordinated a couple interviews through my daily interactions in Pearl Lagoon. Some youth in Pearl Lagoon participated in focus groups. One was organized through Yobeth Hebbert at the Moravian church and other was coordinated through Donna Hammond at the *Acción Médica Cristiana (Medical Christian Action)* building. The Moravian Church focus group consisted of ten young people who stayed behind one Friday night after their weekly worship service. The second focus group met on a Wednesday afternoon and consisted of five Pearl Lagoon teens. Additionally, I observed religious services at the Moravian Church. Finally, I gathered information about the education system from a school observation at the Pearl Lagoon Academy of Excellence (PLACE), interviews with PLACE faculty, and interviews at Pearl Lagoon's Ministry of Education.

Researcher's Lens

I am an Afro-descendant from the United States of America. My ethnicity at times aided in the gathering of this research, because community members could relate to me. Additionally, I am personally invested in this research because of my interest in pan-Africanism. There are many differences between Black culture in the United States and Pearl Lagoon and I worked carefully to expel my assumptions and allow Pearl Lagoon's voices to compose this work. I would like this essay to illuminate an Afro-descendant community that many people do not know

exists.

History

Pearl Lagoon was founded in the early 1600s.² During this time, it was a British protectorate and was controlled by Miskito kings who had Creole local advisors. Creole in this context refers to someone of European descent who was born in the Americas.³ The Creoles had higher social standing because of their European ancestry and they made decisions that were in Britain's interests. "In the first half of the nineteenth century, the emerging Creole population began to exercise considerable economic, political, and social power in the Mosquitia. An elite group of Creoles, composed predominantly of lighter-skinned 'colored' recent immigrants and the mixed descendants of former white masters...filled the vacated positions of the British settlers."⁴ The British remained in the Mosquitia until 1816. "By the terms of the 1787 Treaty of Versailles, the British relinquished their claims on the Mosquito coast to settle losses of wars on European soil."⁵ They officially gave up their claims to the Coast in 1860 with the Treaty of Managua.

President José Santos Zelaya re-incorporated the Caribbean Coast into Nicaragua in 1894. People on the Caribbean Coast did not welcome this change, because non-Spanish speakers were forced to learn Spanish."⁶ They viewed this imposition as a threat to their independence. Also during this time the United States was able to establish businesses and extract natural resources, such as banana, pine, and fish and lobster.⁷ Zelaya appointed two regional governors to the

² Downs, Socorro Woods (2002). "I've Never Shared this with Anybody": Creole Women's Experience of Racial and Sexual Discrimination and their Need for Self-Discovery. 53.

³ Robb-Taylor, Deborah (2005). *The times & Life of Bluefields: An Intergenerational Dialogue*. 41-43.

⁴ Gordon (1998). *Disparate Diasporas*. 40.

⁵ Robb-Taylor. *The Times & Life of Bluefields*. 38.

⁶ Downs. "I've Never Shared this with Anybody." 42.

⁷ Robb-Taylor. *The Times & Life of Bluefields*. 40.

Caribbean Coast, Juan Pablo Reyes and Juan Jose Estrada, both of whom opposed Zelaya's policies. Zelaya responded to the resistance with military intervention in 1909, but was removed from power when the United States military intervened. Afterward, the Somozas were able to gain power in 1937 and would remain in power until 1979.⁸

The Somozas' influence on the Caribbean Coast was mainly felt through country-wide modernization.⁹ For example, the Managua-Rama highway was built between the 1940s and 1960s. However, the Somozas' policies on the Pacific Coast were so unpopular that they inspired the Sandinista Revolution and the Sandinistas came to power in 1979. Most people on the Atlantic Coast did not relate to the same problems as people on the Pacific Coast, especially regarding the anti-imperialist sentiment, since the Caribbean Coast had a history of protection from Britain and the United States.¹⁰ The Sandinista government eventually recognized the Atlantic Coast's autonomy with the Autonomy Statute.

Ethnic Context

Six different ethnic groups make up the Caribbean Coast. "Multiculturalism and multilingualism is basically felt on this side of the country, where the diverse ethnic groups live. These groups are: Mestizos, Creoles, Sumus, Miskitos, Garifunas, and Ramas."¹¹ Even though the Caribbean Coast has a significantly stronger Afro-descendant presence than the Pacific Coast, "the Mestizos (or the Ladino population) have been the predominant group for about the last thirty years..." on the Caribbean Coast. As a result, Afro-descendant youth are exposed to many different cultures.

⁸ Robb-Taylor. *The Times & Life of Bluefields*. 49.

⁹ Robb-Taylor. *The Times & Life of Bluefields*. 55.

¹⁰ Robb-Taylor. *The Times & Life of Bluefields*. 60-61.

¹¹ Gordon, Edmund T. (1998). *The African Diaspora: Toward an Ethnography of African Identification*. 52.

In Pearl Lagoon, these different cultural traditions mix in interesting ways. Nowadays, Creole means that a person is of mixed African descent.¹² Yobeth Hebbert, a Moravian Church elder explained, “We might look like Black, but we are mixed, we are very mixed up. So my youth group is from all different ethnic groups, but still all define themselves as Black Creole. We are very proud to be Creole and very proud to be Black people.”¹³ [Author’s Translation] Nicaraguan Creole culture includes elements of British and African culture. Nicaragua also has Garifuna communities. “The Garinagu, commonly known as the Garifuna, are a people of West African and Amerindian descent who live along the Caribbean coast of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua and who share a common language, system of customs and beliefs, series of ancestor veneration rituals, and repertoire of music and dance.”¹⁴ In Nicaragua, these communities are concentrated in Orinoco, La Fe, and San Vicente, but some Garifuna also live in Pearl Lagoon, such as Mayor Oswaldo Morales. Alexia Brockman, the director of the Pearl Lagoon Cultural Center, shared that her youth group performs dances from a variety of cultures. “They dance Maypole and also dance the Punta.”¹⁵ [Author’s Translation] The Punta is a Garifuna dance, which “features rapid movement of the buttocks and hips and a motionless upper torso, to the accompaniment of songs performed responsorially, membranophones, rattles, and occasionally, hollow turtle shells that are struck with a mallet and conch shell trumpets.”¹⁶

¹² Robb-Taylor. *The Times & Life of Bluefields*. 41-43.

¹³ Hebbert, Yobeth. 11 April 2014. “We might look like Black, but we mixed, we mixed, we are very mixed up, so, we have in my group I have youth from all different, different ethnic groups, but still all define themselves as Black creole. Ya know we are very proud to be Creole, very proud to be Black people.”

¹⁴ Greene, Oliver N. (2002). "Ethnicity, modernity, and retention in the Garifuna punta." *Black Music Research Journal*. 189.

¹⁵ Brockman, Alexia. 21 April 2014. “Them dance Maypole and also dance Punta.”

¹⁶ Greene. “Ethnicity, modernity, and retention in the Garifuna punta.” 190.

Whose History?

Pearl Lagoon has rich ethnic diversity that carries its own history. However, the school curriculum consists mostly of information from the Pacific Coast. For instance, the Moravian Church youth group complained that they learn about Augusto Sandino¹⁷ and Rubén Darío¹⁸, men whose legacies are more important in the Pacific Coast than the Caribbean Coast. Other Pearl Lagoon youth share this sentiment. “The teachers come to us with Christopher Columbus or discovering, but I would like to learn about our region. It’s really heartbreaking, do you understand? Who is the first person to dance the Maypole, and we really don’t know where it started.”¹⁹ [Author’s Translation]

Presently, the public education system in the Pearl Lagoon Basin has initiatives for cultural learning. However, these initiatives are fairly recent. For example, communal governments have instituted cultural recovery programs to send Garifuna youth to Honduras to rescue their language. This is mostly in communities with higher Garifuna populations in the Pearl Lagoon Basin, such as Orinoco or La Fe, but other cultural initiatives have also been implemented in Pearl Lagoon’s schools. For example, some young people learn agricultural methods in school. Janina Cuthbert, who works in the Pearl Lagoon Basin’s Ministry of Education, shared that community volunteers are teaching students how to grow certain plants.²⁰ This is important in a cultural context, because the student’s ancestors were subsistence farmers. Leaving the family farm is a recent trend that negatively impacts many aspects of

¹⁷ Augusto Sandino was a guerilla warrior who opposed United States imperialism in Nicaragua. He was murdered in 1934 after achieving his goal of ejecting the United States Marines from Nicaragua. The Sandinista Liberation Front took on his name.

¹⁸ Rubén Darío is an international, award-winning poet who is from Nicaragua.

¹⁹ Leiva, Mihaele. Focus Group Two. 23 April 2014. “The teachers really come to us with Christopher Columbus or discovering...I would like our region...it’s really heartbreaking, do you understand? Who sis the first person to dance the Maypole, and we really don’t know where it start.” ²⁰ Cuthbert, Janina. 14 April 2014.

Afrodescendants' lives. This topic is discussed further under Community Health, but changing agricultural practices illustrate the detrimental effects of losing one's cultural knowledge. If the youth remain unaware of their cultural practices, Pearl Lagoon could become an entirely different place, devoid of Afro-descendant traditions. This danger puts Pearl Lagoon in an emergency state.

Emergency State

Pearl Lagoon is in a critical state, because the youth's understanding of their ethnicity and traditions is changing. This is partly due to a gap between the younger generation and their parents, which widens as the younger generation continues to have more access to technology. The generation gap is also fueled by new parental practices. Janina Cuthbert described Pearl Lagoon's family dynamics.

“These days, we have what we call modernism. So parents feel like the word modernism means liberation. Children have rights, children have this, children have the other...but children have responsibility also. And parents have to guide them through the whole process, but some parents say my teenager, he can think for himself. So it's like, you practically leaving children to raise themselves now.”²⁰ [Author's Translation]

Even some young people expressed concern about changing family dynamics. “I can have a child and still be in her home and she is still taking care of me. She's still giving me food, clothing, and so forth. So okay, parents have the right over their children. But, these days parents

²⁰ Cuthbert, Janina. 14 April 2014. “To the day we have what we call modernism. So parents feel like the word modernism means liberation. Children have right, children have this, children have the other...but children have responsibility also we learn with it. And parents have to be, to guide them through the whole process, but some parents they get to them, them ask them like, my teenager...he can think for himself. So it's like, you practically leaving children to raise theyself now”

are giving their children bad clothes to wear. Clothes that expose their body.”²¹ [Author’s Translation]

Another reason for the generation gap could be the community’s lack of elders. Alexia Brockman estimated that there are about ten elders in the community now, because the others have died off.²³ The community’s lack of elders may be due to an overall trend that shows increasing youth populations in Nicaragua. Out of the total population of 306,510 people in the RAAS, there are 64,736 people from 15-24 years of age, while there are 9,546 people who are 65 and older.²² This shift to higher numbers of young people is not unusual in a country that prohibits abortion. President Bolaños signed the anti-abortion law into effect in 2006. Even “President-elect Daniel Ortega, who once favoured abortion rights, changed his stance and supported the law after strongly embracing Roman Catholic values and winning over voters in a country with a conservative religious tradition.”²³ The Nicaraguan government does not even allow therapeutic abortions. “Of the 193 countries that make up the UN, only five nations (all but one in Latin America) prohibit abortion when the mother's life is in danger—The Vatican, Chile, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.”²⁶ The result is that more babies are being born. At the same time, increasing health problems are decreasing the life expectancy. Basically, people are having more children and are also dying earlier. The critical elderly population that would usually pass on the traditions is dying off.

²¹ Sambola, Marileth. Focus Group 2. 23 April 2014. “I can have child and still be in her home and she still minding me. She still giving me food, clothing, and so forth. So okay, parents have right over their children. Now these days parents fiving they children bad suit to wear, to expose their body.” ²³ Brockman, Alexia. 21 April 2014.

²² INIDE (2005). 92.

²³ Frazier, Joseph (2006). “Nicaraguan Leader Signs Abortion Law” *The Guardian*. 1. ²⁶

Ropogle, Jill (2007). "Abortion debate heats up in Latin America." *The Lancet*. 1.

In many cases, technology threatens or replaces parent influence. One youth reported watching up to nine hours of television on school days.²⁴ Besides prohibiting other activities, such as studying or exercising, technology may encourage the youth to adopt other cultures' practices. Janina Cuthbert explained technology's impact on the youth.

Once it was much easier to raise youth in Pearl Lagoon because we didn't have what you call this cable TV. We didn't have information from the other world, so it's like what we believe in, what we think, and what we see is our life. These days, we have the big tv and the cable networks. These children have access to the internet now. They see something on tv and they say, "I don't have to dress this way, I want to dress like that girl."²⁵

[Author's Translation]

Cultural traditions remain, but youth do not understand the meaning behind them. This is dangerous, because it puts the traditions in a fragile place. If the young people do not understand why they practice their traditions, they may stop practicing them altogether. It is also possible that a lack of knowledge could cause the youth to change the traditions. Yet another possibility is that the youth retain the traditions, but devalue them. Principal Marlene Hebbert shared her view of the youth's relationship with their traditions.

"Somehow they are ashamed of the culture... Especially when we have the different presentations, like dancing, poetry, and singing, we are trying to get the kids to understand that we need to bring back those things. We want them to practice our culture. But we noticed if we just tell them we want them to do a presentation in dancing, they would prefer do a dance from the Mestizos or another culture. We would have to tell them the type of dance that we want them to present from and they would do it."²⁶

²⁴ Focus Group Two. 23 April 2014.

²⁵ Cuthbert, Janina. 14 April 2014. "Once it was much more easier to raise youth in Pearl Lagoon because we didn't have what you call this cable TV. We didn't have no information from the other world, so it's like what we believe in, what we think, and what we see is that we feel like was that, that was our life. To the day, we have a big concept on the big tv, the cable network. These children have access to these internet now. Them see thing on tv and them like, 'Hey, I don't have to dress this way, I want to dress like that girl.'"

²⁶ Hebbert, Marlene. 24 April 2014. "Somehow they are ashamed of, of the culture... especially when we have the different...things we have presentation, like dancing, and poem, and singing and we are trying to get into the kids that we need to bring back those things, those kinds and practice our culture. But we noticed if we just have the kids and we tell them we want them to do a presentation in dancing, they would prefer do a dancing from the Mestizos or other culture. We would have to tell them the type of dance that we want them to present from and they would do it."

[Author's Translation]

Other Afro-descendant communities are also in a state of emergency. Some communities have engaged in cultural rescue, such as Orinoco's Garifuna community. They send young people to Garifuna communities in Honduras to learn the language and traditional dances. However, such a solution for Pearl Lagoon's Creole youth does not exist. One reason for this is the difference between the origins of Garifuna culture, which is not native to Nicaragua, and the Creole culture, which emerged as a mix of cultures. Still, community members have ideas for cultural rescue. Principal Hebbert thinks a possible solution is "making them [the youth] more conscious about who we are and what our identity is. They could have more fun and play games so that they could feel part of it. And when they leave and go to other places or other countries,

they would not be ashamed of the culture.”²⁷ [Author’s Translation] Another potential solution for cultural rescue is autonomy.

Autonomy

“The 1987 Autonomy Statute (Law 28), was designed to resolve the concerns of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean Coast. The Statute formally recognized the rights of the peoples of the Caribbean Coast to self-determination, control of access to natural resources, and education in indigenous languages.”³¹ However, Law 28’s present-day realities do not uphold the original intentions. For example, “52% of Regional Council Members in the RAAS have been Mestizo while 25% have been Creole.”²⁸ This statistic contrasts with the aim of selfdetermination. Instead, policy decisions are made by people who do not identify with the ethnic groups that have historically populated the Caribbean Coast.

In fact, it seems that autonomy has made the Caribbean Coast even less distinctive than before. Perhaps this is due to a steady increase of the Mestizo population on the Caribbean Coast. “In 1894, Nicaragua annexed the Mosquito Coast and this, coupled with the region’s early twentieth century economic boom, opened the gates for an influx of the Mestizos to slowly, but surely assume predominance throughout most of the new century.”²⁹ Then, Mestizo migration increased in the 1950s and 1960s. Nowadays Mestizo populations in cities such as Bluefields have changed the dominant Creole culture. The 2005 census reported that among 74,213 people in the RAAS, 44,590 identified as Mestizo, 16,607 as Creole, 1,095 as Garifuna, and 7,398 as

²⁷ Hebbert, Marlene. 24 April 2014. “Making them more conscious about who we are, what is our identity and eh, they have more fun, game activity towards that so that they could feel part of it. And eh, that when they leave and go to other places or other countries, they would not be ashamed of the culture.” ³¹ Robb-Taylor. *The Times & Life of Bluefields*. 63.

²⁸ González-Pérez, Miguel (2008). “Governing Multiethnic Societies in Latin America: Regional Autonomy, Democracy, and the State in Nicaragua. 1987-2007.” 226-228.

²⁹ Robb-Taylor. *The Times & Life of Bluefields*. 17.

Miskito.³⁰ Thus, the Creole population makes up 22.4% of the population while Mestizos make up 60.1% of the population.

The effects of this lack of representation are visible in economic and social policies, such as the Caribbean Coast's deforestation. The companies that cut down trees on the Caribbean Coast are not owned by Costeños, who are people from the Caribbean Coast. Therefore, people from the outside are making decisions that have negative impacts for Costeños. During the second focus group, the youth pointed out lumber that was sitting in the harbor, waiting to be shipped. Seventeen-year-old Yeelsin Benwell referred to this as "exploiting [their] natural resources."³¹

The issue with autonomy is that the law does not translate to true control in the region. Sixteen-year-old Michelle Cayasso expressed, "We have a law, we have everything, but we don't have autonomy."³⁶ She also shared that real autonomy would mean controlling the production of the goods they consume in Pearl Lagoon. "You know at first the Coast had a banana factory. We had all kind of different factories on the Coast. We used to produce our own, develop our community, and profit from it."³² [Author's Translation] As Miss Cayasso expressed, autonomy by law does not amount to anything if people are powerless in reality. Pearl Lagoon natives have other sources of cultural expression, since autonomy does not provide representation.

The Church

Pearl Lagoon has four religious denominations: Moravian, Adventist, Tabernacle, and

³⁰ INIDE (2005). 185

³¹ Focus Group Two. 23 April 2014. ³⁶
Focus Group Two. 23 April 2014.

³² Cayasso, Michelle. Focus Group Two. 23 April 2014. "You know first the coast had like banana factory, all kind of different factory we had on the coast. We used to produce our own, and like develop our community and after that make it our riches."

Anglican. The British brought along their religious influence early in the community's history.

“Early contact with the British settlers and their missionaries influenced and changed the traditional Caribbean way of life. The first to arrive with the mandate of spreading the Christian faith were Anglican Church community health workers in 1833.”³³ Although the Anglican were the first, the Moravians became the most prominent. “By the early decades of the 20th century, the Moravian Church had become the single most important influence in the region, introducing schools and health programs.”³⁹ Furthermore, the Moravians were “the only organized European religious institution in the Mosquito Reserve. The Moravians instituted a strong Sunday school program, held regular prayer meetings during the week, organized choirs, and started Bible study groups for young people.”⁴⁰ The Moravian church paired religion with community needs, an accomplishment which helps explain religion's continuing influence in Pearl Lagoon.

Today, religion is so strong that one youth described Pearl Lagoon as having too much religion, meaning that there is competition between the denominations. “Now it's a lot of religion and the people don't really know what they want.”³⁴ [Author's Translation] Historically, the church provided education as well as religious instruction. This practice continues in Pearl Lagoon. For example, Pastor Ken Berry of the Tabernacle Church is also a science teacher at PLACE. In addition to preaching at the church, he delivers sermons at the school. PLACE has weekly religious services which are led by the community's various religious leaders. Principal Hebbert explained the origins of this practice. “...the youth today are not like before. The kids

³³ Robb-Taylor. *The Times & Life of Bluefields*. 45 ³⁹
Robb-Taylor. *The Times & Life of Bluefields*. 47-48. ⁴⁰
Gordon. *Disparate Diasporas*. 55.

³⁴ Hebbert, Yasira. 15 April 2014. “Now it's a lot of religion and it, now the people are, they really don't know what them want to like, them get confused.”

are more modern and more violent. Parents did not know what else to do and were looking to us for help. Then we decided to bring worship inside the school and to talk to them more about the Bible and pray with them and that might be able to change some of their attitudes...”³⁵ [Author’s Translation]

The church even helps the youth with their university education. In April 2014 the Moravian Church supported three youth members with their theology studies. Nineteen-year-old Yasira Hebbert explained that the Moravian Church was partially funding her studies and travel to Puerto Cabezas, Bilwi, which is a community in the Northern Autonomous Region of Nicaragua.⁴³ Beyond financial support, the church is active in the young people’s daily lives. Yobeth Hebbert explained the weekend activities the Moravian Church hosts for the youth.

“On the first Friday in every month we discuss a social thing, such as self-esteem, sex, gender, things to help them learn skills as young people. Then, we study the Bible on Thursday and have a Bible quiz. Also on that Thursday, we would have somebody from the health center to talk mostly about sex...and transmitted disease. Then, the last Friday, we always have something social, like games. We have this famous covered dish. It’s when everyone brings a dish with something in it. So it’s always fun, because we never know what the other person is bringing.”³⁶ [Author’s Translation]

³⁵ Hebbert, Marlene. 24 April 2014. “...with the youth today is not like before. The kids are more, eh, they use the word to say like they are more modern...And them kids are more violent, and parents do not know what else to do and looking for us to help them. Then we decide...bringing in worship inside the school and talking to them more about the Bible and pray with them probably that might be able to change some of the attitude...”⁴³ Hebbert, Yasira. 15 April 2014.

³⁶ Hebbert, Yobeth. 11 April 2014. “We have first Friday in every month so one of the Friday we take to do like just to study social thing like about self-esteem, about sex, about, umm gender, with the things concerning to create skills as a young people, young person. Then, we would have that Thursday just study the Bible, to have Bible quiz. Then that Thursday, would have to just somebody from the health center to talk mostly about sex... transmitted disease. Then, the last Friday, we’d always have social, like games. We have this famous covered dish, it’s like when we have this covered dish, it’s everyone bring a dish with something in it. So it’s always fun, cause we never know what the other person bringing.”

Nonetheless, other young people think that religious participation is decreasing among the youth population. Seventeen-year-old Marileth Sambola shared, “First our ancestors used to have a lot to do with God, but now our young people think that God things are boring.”³⁷

[Author’s Translation] If the youth are indeed withdrawing from the church, this could result in significant changes in the community, especially since the church is so involved in education and social services. Moreover, the church’s integral role in the community makes it a part of the cultural identity. If the youth do not identify with the church, they must have other sources of identification.

Outside Influences

Cultural traditions are losing their meaning among Pearl Lagoon’s younger generation. The youth replace their cultural traditions with images they receive through the media. The danger lies in what the youth mimic from the outside, especially when these behaviors are crimelated. Besides tradition, culture carries sources of identity, which is especially vital for Afrodescendant youth in a country where the majority of the population identifies as Mestizo. When the youth’s sense of identity is weakened, they are more likely to devalue their culture and themselves. It is important to understand which values the youth have adopted from external sources and how they practice them in Pearl Lagoon.

Dangers

The number one problem Pearl Lagoon community members identify is the rate of substance abuse among the youth. This includes cocaine, crack cocaine, marijuana, and alcohol. The availability of drugs along the Caribbean Coast is higher than in other parts of Nicaragua

³⁷ Sambola, Marileth 23 April 2014. “First our ancestors used to have a lot to do with God...Now our young people...think that God things boring.”

because of its geographical location. The Caribbean Coast is between South America, where the drugs are produced, and North America, where the drugs are consumed. Pearl Lagoon Police Officer Ronaldo Ojeda identified Colombia, Honduras, and Costa Rica as countries that exacerbate the drug issue in Nicaragua.³⁸ Drugs reach coastal communities through drug traffickers and may even be found floating in the water. The youth, therefore, grow up in communities where drugs are readily available.

Community members credit weakening family structures for the increase in substance abuse among the younger generation. Seventeen-year-old Mihaele Leiva thinks “the problem is in the families... They don’t find peace from the love inside the home so they go outside looking for it and end up in drugs... drinking, pregnant or some other thing.”³⁹ In fact, a 2013 study found that increased rates of child maltreatment positively correlated with high rates of substance abuse.⁴⁰ The researchers, Longman-Mills et al., administered questionnaires to college students in various Latin American and Caribbean countries to gauge how much physical or emotional maltreatment they received from their parents. They then asked the students to report how often they’d used alcohol and/or cannabis in the past twelve months.

They found that both measures of maltreatment were strongly associated with drinking and that physical abuse was strongly associated with cannabis use. Interestingly, they found that students who identified as being more religiously active also reported lower rates of alcohol and cannabis use.⁴¹ As previously discussed, the church is an important resource in the Pearl Lagoon

³⁸ Ojeda, Ronaldo. 11 April 2014.

³⁹ Focus Group Two. 23 April 2014.

⁴⁰ Longman-Mills, S. et al. (2013). "Exploring child maltreatment and its relationship to alcohol and cannabis use in selected Latin American and Caribbean countries." *Child abuse & neglect*. 80.

⁴¹ Longman-Mills et al. "Exploring child maltreatment and its relationship to alcohol and cannabis use in selected Latin American and Caribbean countries." 82-83.

community. This study exhibits how religion can serve as a protective factor for the youth. These findings also pinpoint maltreatment, and not just parental withdrawal, as a risk factor for substance abuse. Perhaps substance abuse goes behind the youth not finding love in the home, as Miss Leiva stated. Parental withdrawal characterizes a home that is devoid of something, but for parents to exercise maltreatment, the parental support has then been replaced by hostility.

Identity

Outside influences also pose a threat to identity, especially when they shape standards of beauty. The youth in Pearl Lagoon think that colorism is not a factor in their community. Participants in the first focus group at the Moravian Church seemed confused by questions about skin color and other physical preferences. The young people ranged in age from 16 years to 21 years and they responded that they do not think about skin color and hair texture. Yasira Hebbert echoed this sentiment when she shared, “I don’t discriminate based on color, races, or language, because in my community work with the young people...we work on no discrimination based on ethnicity...For me, there is no difference.”⁴² [Author’s translation]

However, Janina Cuthbert revealed that ‘shade-ocracy’ is present in Pearl Lagoon. Shadeocracy is a term Morena Vega employs in *Women Warriors of the Afro-Latina Diaspora* to describe tension within Afro-descendant populations based on skin tone. She writes, “The discussion of ‘shade-ocracy’ a term I created to address our preoccupation with skin color and skin tones, too often neglects the importance of how African-derived traditional philosophies, belief systems and sacred practices that are historically grounded in the heritages of West and

⁴² Hebbert, Yasira. 15 April 2014. “Eh, in my aspect, I don’t make no different in color, races, language, nothing because in the community work with my Young people, which is Municipal Adolescentes Jóvenes, there we have, one of the thing that we working on is no discrimination, totally would be in ethnic group, nothing. So for me, I don’t find no different with that.”

Central Africa, affect contemporary society and our lives.”⁴³ Cuthbert spoke about how the Black population tries to conform to a certain standard of beauty. “We believe that that hair is not good. So what do we do? We put in straighteners and we try to get it out. We iron it...because it’s like, having afro hair is a disgrace. We believed that once...Because it’s like your hair has to be loose or curly.”⁴⁴ [Author’s Translation]

These conflicting accounts about the same community may be due to an age difference. Cuthbert is 35-years-old, while the Moravian church youth are teenagers and young adults. However, Cuthbert also explained that her daughter, who is in college, still experiences discrimination because of her dark skin. Another explanation for the difference may be range of physical features among Pearl Lagoon residents. Since Creole culture represents a mix, the Creoles in Pearl Lagoon range in skin tone, hair texture, and language. Most of the youth in the Moravian church focus group were lighter-skinned while Cuthbert is a darker-skinned Creole woman. This difference may have contributed to the discrimination Cuthbert faced.

Cuthbert also mentioned straightening her hair as a way to conform to beauty standards. However, such conformity goes beyond concepts of beauty. “The blackness of our skin, the kinkiness of our hair, the width of our nose and the thickness of our lips have meanings that go beyond aesthetics; they also have economic, political, and social implications.”⁴⁵ Therefore, Cuthbert’s decision to mask her hair’s kinkiness is not only an attempt to appear more beautiful, it’s also a method of communicating a higher social and possibly economic position. Even if the youth do not express that they or others in Pearl Lagoon discriminate based on aesthetics, Pearl

⁴³ Vega, Marta Moreno (2012). *Women Warriors of the Afro-Latina Diaspora*. 94.

⁴⁴ Cuthbert, Janina. 14 April 2014. “We believe that, hey that hair is not good. So we, what we do? We put in straighten and we try to get it out, we iron it...cause it’s like, having afro hair is like disgrace. We believed that once...cause it’s like, hey you have...to be loose or curly.”

⁴⁵ Lassén, Rivera Ana Irma (2012). *Women Warriors of the Afro-Latina Diaspora*. 68.

Lagoon native Socorro Woods Downs points out, “Women who have kinky hair or Black skin are not accepted the same. Even though no one would say this directly, you would just be treated differently.”⁴⁶

The de-valuation of African heritage contributes to self-discrimination among Afrodescendants in Pearl Lagoon. Morena Vega’s last point about shade-ocracy illustrates one of the main problems with Black people’s identity conflicts. The disdain for darker skin tones and coarser hair textures demonstrates larger issues with African heritage, which also shows a desire to identify with Euro-centric values. Young people’s responses about decreasing discrimination toward African heritage may reflect a cultural trend that is more inclusive. However, all Pearl Lagoon’s ethnic groups may not view African heritage in the same regard.

Cultural Conflict

Increasing Mestizo migration to the Atlantic Coast has, in some cases, increased tensions in Pearl Lagoon. Mestizo migration started with Zelaya’s re-incorporation of the Caribbean Coast into Nicaragua. “...after the 1894 Zelaya invasion the region’s English-speaking Creole elite rapidly lost its political, social, and economic dominance in the area to North Americans—who arrived to make their fortunes in the booming banana industry—and to Nicaraguan Mestizos, who took most of the top political positions.”⁴⁷ The political positions that were taken over by the new Mestizo population had once been held by Afro-descendants. “In fact, though they [Africans] were initially brought as slaves by the English, they [had] occupied outstanding political, economic, and cultural positions in society.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Downs. “*I’ve Never Shared this with Anybody.*” 56.

⁴⁷ Robb-Taylor. *The Times & Life of Bluefields.* 49.

⁴⁸ Gordon. (2003) *Rights, Resources, and the Social Memory of Struggle.* 37.

The relationship between Mestizos on the Pacific Coast and Creoles on the Atlantic Coast carries a legacy of discrimination that was instilled by Spanish colonizers. Anthropologist Roger Lancaster has described racial attitudes between the Pacific Coast and the Atlantic Coast as reflecting a legacy of colorism that was instilled in the Mestizo population from Spanish colonizers early in the country's history.

“...prejudice against the Atlantic coast minorities is scarcely the most pervasive form of ‘racism’ in Nicaragua. Indeed, apart from the cultural and political tensions that clearly exist between the western majority and the eastern minority, it seems to me that whatever racism exists toward the Atlantic coast minorities is but an extension of a much deeper seated pattern internal to Mestizo culture, not external to it. A more apposite term for this pattern might be colorism rather than racism.”⁴⁹

The support for this claim is Nicaragua's past as a Spanish colony. During this time people could gain higher social standing through Mestizaje or “purifying” their blood. This consisted of having the correct number of European ancestors to reverse the effects of any Black ancestry. Nicaragua's racial history affects current-day relationships between Pearl Lagoon's Creoles and the growing Mestizo population.

Police

Conflict with Pearl Lagoon's Mestizo population is apparent in the police department's relationship with the community. The police officers are predominantly Mestizo, possibly because Pearl Lagoon community members lack interest in the profession. The result is a barrier between police officers and community members. This is both culturally and linguistically, because most of the police officers only speak Spanish. Journalist Audra Burch observed that “the racial climate in Nicaragua is exacerbated by the language diversity on the Atlantic coast”.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Lancaster, Roger (1992). *Life is Hard*. 215-216.

⁵⁰ Burch, Audra (2007). “‘Afro-Latin Americans: A Rising Voice.’” *Miami Herald*. 3.

One community member described the language diversity as confusion. “Because it’s better for you to communicate with them [the police] and once you have that Spanish and you have that Creole or Miskito...no one understands each other. Then that barrier is there...”⁵¹ [Author’s Translation]

Pearl Lagoon’s primary and secondary schools teach Spanish, but this was not always the case. A community elder named Caroline Cuthbert explained that English Creole was the only language of instruction while she was in primary school, which was in the 1940s.⁶⁰ Thus, while younger generations can speak Spanish, some community elders cannot. The Ley de Lenguas, Law 162, was established in 1993 and grants Nicaraguan citizens the right to converse in their mother tongues. This is especially important in the justice system, because if citizens need assistance, it is vital that they can speak in the way that is most comfortable for them. Even when Pearl Lagoon residents can comfortably converse in Spanish, the legacy of Mestizo dominance is sometimes a deterrent. One community member who does not like to converse in Spanish shared, “And you know from the history... Our Black people were in slavery. They [Mestizos] always felt like they had more knowledge than us.”⁵² [Author’s Translation]

Tension resulting from cultural differences has led some community members to question the police’s actions.

“Um hmm. And then we had a boy that they just beat and beat...every minute you will hear somebody is buying drugs. The people that work on the sea, that fish, if they hear someone found drugs they will go behind that person. Crazy. And if you go to put in a case, for example, your husband is beating you and mistreating you...it doesn’t matter. But as long as they hear there are drugs, they act crazy. Because you see once they get the

⁵¹ Anonymous. 12 April 2014. “Because it’s better for you to communicate with them and once you have that Spanish and you have that Creole or Miskito...no one understand each other, then that barrier is there...” ⁶⁰ Cuthbert, Caroline.

⁵² Anonymous. 12 April 2014. “And you know from in, in the history... Our Black people was in slavery. They always, they feel like they have more knowledge than we.”

drugs, they go to them. And they let the people believe that they burn it.”⁵³ [Author’s Translation]

Indeed an incident that occurred during the PLACE observation seemed to verify the police’s absence on non-drug-related matters. On Tuesday April 22nd, the teaching staff at PLACE warned the students not to wander around the campus, because there was an unidentified man hiding in the bush. The faculty also said they had contacted the police about the situation. However, the police never arrived to investigate. Situations such as this support community members’ negative notions about the police department.

Some of the youth in Pearl Lagoon harbor distrust for the police. One young person shared, “Sometimes people call in and ask for help and the police do not come. Sometimes you have a problem in your home and they do not come...One time, I think it was in Haulover, they called them and said, we have a problem here... We have a lot of drugs and in 20 minutes the police were right there.”⁵⁴ [Author’s Translation] However, other community members have expressed that the younger generation’s impressions of the police are shaped by their parents’ beliefs. Janina Cuthbert explained, “We as parents sometimes give the children the wrong account about the police, saying the police are there to abuse and not to protect.”⁶⁴ Police Officer Ronaldo Ojeda shared that the younger generation’s relationship with the police department is lacking because the youth distrust the police. However, he has ideas for improving this

⁵³ Anonymous. 12 April 2014. “Um hmm. And then we had a boy that they just beat and beat...every minute you will hear somebody buying drugs, the people that work on the sea, that fishing. If they heard or they hear someone find drugs they go behind that person. Crazy. And if you go to put in a case, example, your husband is beating you entreating you...it doesn’t matter. But as long as they hear there is drug, act crazy. Cause you see once they get the drug, that go to them. And they, let the people believe that they burn it.”

⁵⁴ Anonymous. 14 April 2014. “Sometime people call in and ask for help and they does not reach. Sometime maybe you have problem in your home. They does not reach...One time, I think it’s in Haulover, they call them and say, um here... We have a lot of drugs and in 20 minutes the police was right there.” ⁶⁴ Cuthbert, Janina. 21 April 2014. ⁶⁵ Ojeda, Ronaldo. 11 April 2014.

relationship, such as creating more sports programs for the youth.⁶⁵ The tension with the police is unproductive, especially with the community's substance abuse problem. Cooperation between community members and police officers is vital if they want to find solutions.

Cultural Appropriation

Another point of conflict between the Mestizo population and Afro-descendants is the community's businesses. There was a meeting of community leaders in March 2014 about Mestizos' right to conduct business in Pearl Lagoon. One of the most contested issues is cultural appropriation for profit. Cultural commodification is exacerbated by tourists who will pay for cultural displays, but who are also ignorant of the traditions' origins. Janina Cuthbert explained how she feels when other ethnic groups in Pearl Lagoon perform the Maypole for pay.

“...they take the Maypole dance as a business. If you get on that thing and dance a lot of vulgarity they will pay you...There are plenty of them doing that and the Maypole is not a disrespectful dance. It's a nice dance. It represents that we are Creole. I tell them, hey you are disrespecting me. You are telling the world I'm a vulgar person.”⁵⁵ [Author's Translation]

Bakery owner, Byron Theophile also spoke about the dangers of conforming for tourists. “If we don't mind, we could lose our identity. It could happen, because...if the people come in, we might find ourselves giving them what they want and forget who we are....That's what I notice is happening in most small places with tourism.”⁵⁶ [Author's Translation]

⁵⁵ Cuthbert, Janina. 14 April 2014. “...them taking Maypole, this Maypole dance as a business. If you get on that thing and dance a lot of vulgarity they gon pay you....There's plenty of them doing that and Maypole no disrespectful dance....it's a nice dance...we represent, we Creole. I tell them, hey you disrespecting me. You telling the world I'm a vulgar person.”

⁵⁶ Theophile, Byron. 29 April 2014. “If we don't mind, we would lost our identity. It could happen, because...if the people them come in and we might find ourself giving them what they want and forget who we are....That's what I notice is happening in most small places with tourism.”

However, Mestizo businesses do not always engage in cultural appropriation. There are Mestizo businesses in Pearl Lagoon that do not sell products that are culturally Creole. This highlights a larger issue some Pearl Lagoon Creoles have with the growing Mestizo population.

“Bluefields was a Creole community...Creole city and these days you cannot see that it’s a Creole city because they have been pushed out of Bluefields. Where do you find the Creoles? In the worst barrios...The head of Bluefields now is Mestizo...Same thing that happened to Bluefields is happening to Pearl Lagoon. Because if you take a look around at Pearl Lagoon right now, the Blacks are losing their neighborhoods, but the principal street in Pearl Lagoon is being used by the Mestizos.”⁵⁷ [Author’s Translation]

Professor Edmund T. Gordon from the University of Texas observed the same trend of changing demographics in Bluefields.

“Bluefields has changed so much since the day in 1981 when I arrived that it is difficult for me to remember how it was like during the early 1980s. The Contra war that raged in the area during the mid-1980s triggered a massive emigration of Mestizo campesinos from the hinterland, doubling the town’s population from around sixteen thousand when I first arrived to over thirty thousand by the time I left. This demographic revolution transformed the town from a compact, genteel Creole port and administrative center to a sprawling provincial Mestizo market town in a decade.”⁶⁹

The growing Mestizo population presents a threat to community members, especially because Creole cultural expression is declining. The youth have the capacity to revive the culture, which is especially vital in Pearl Lagoon because the ethnic composition is changing. Rather than suppress the Mestizo migration, however, the community should investigate how to increase knowledge of their traditions.

⁵⁷ Anonymous. 14 April 2014. ““Bluefields was a Creole community...Creole city and to the day you cannot see that it’s a Creole city because them have been pushed out of Bluefields. Where find Creole them? In the worst barrios...The head of Bluefields now is Mestizo...Same thing that happened to Bluefields happen to Pearl Lagoon. Cause if you take a look around at Pearl Lagoon right now, the Black them are slipping the barrio, but the principal street in Pearl Lagoon are being used by the Mestizo them.” ⁶⁹ Gordon. *Disparate Diasporas*. 14.

Education and Career Challenges

Before the Autonomy Statute, the Nicaraguan government ignored the cultural differences between the coasts, including the language. The effects of these practices are evident today, because even the two universities on the Caribbean Coast, the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URUCCAN) and the Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU), conduct classes in Spanish. This could be problematic for Creole students, because “Creole students became insecure at an early age, due to the fact that they were forced to speak an unknown language.”⁵⁸ Additionally, the universities’ locations in more populous areas on the Caribbean coast require many young people to leave their home communities. However, the recent addition of a BICU extension in Pearl Lagoon has alleviated this problem. Pastor Ken Berry explained, Right now...there is an extension of a university here right in town. But, it’s not a complete university with all the careers...” One of the careers the extension does have is forestry, which is very important along the Caribbean Coast because of deforestation by large corporations. However, the brain drain still affects Pearl Lagoon, because the extension does not have as many careers as the other branches.

The “brain drain” is a phenomenon that occurs when the youth leave for university and do not return to the community. There are many reasons for this phenomenon. Many times the home communities do not have employment positions for the careers the students have studied. Pearl Lagoon’s communal government’s solution is to provide loans to university students for certain career tracks. Along with the loans, the students and their parents sign contracts stating that the student will pay back the money and return to the community upon graduation.⁵⁹ Other

⁵⁸ Downs. “I’ve Never Shared this with Anybody.” 62.

⁵⁹ Velázquez, Shelton. 11 April 2014.

Pearl Lagoon natives think about how they can improve their community before they pursue their university education. Wesley Williams Jr. is a pediatrician who decided that he would return to work in the healthcare field in Pearl Lagoon if he had the opportunity to study in Cuba. He shared, "...I would always come back and give my community service, because we never had our own doctors. And there were never doctors who spoke English or Creole. They were always Mestizos that speak Spanish."⁶⁰

Despite these measures, there are still many youth who cannot find work in Pearl Lagoon after graduating. The careers that are in demand are tourism, medical studies, business administration, and culinary arts. On the other hand, many youth want to study English. Furthermore, there is conflict between which careers the community supports and which careers the community needs. For example, many community members want more psychologists, because of increasing problems within families and drug and alcohol abuse. The community's desire for more psychologists draws attention to the conflict between the communal government's focus on profit versus the resident's needs. The communal government provides loans for students who want to study culinary arts, because tourism is profitable in Pearl Lagoon. Restaurant owner Eva Hebbert explained that tourists come from China, Italy, Germany, and Spain, among other countries, and help Pearl Lagoon because they spend their money.⁶¹ However, this financial focus does not improve the community's social problems.

The youth can enrich their communities, depending on the type of education they pursue. However, the community has to work with the young people to ensure that they can return after college graduation. The brain drain not only takes away young minds in the intellectual sense,

⁶⁰ Williams, Wesley Dr. 28 April 2014.

⁶¹ Hebbert, Eva. 18 April 2014.

but also in the cultural sense. The youth who are able to attain a college degree are role models for the community's children. If they leave the community, the children have no examples. It is clear to see how youth can identify with harmful behaviors when they do not have examples to the contrary.

Community Health

Pearl Lagoon's emergency state culminates in the physical manifestation of a lost culture. Community lifestyle changes and risky youth behaviors have resulted in harmful health effects. A community trend started in the 1990s, which consisted of families leaving their farms and moving to more urban areas. Nowadays, people consume food that is shipped from the Pacific Coast and prepare the food less healthily. The unhealthy diet is worsened by a lack of exercise. Exercising can be difficult in Pearl Lagoon because there is no park or gym complex. Yet another health concern is an increase in teenage pregnancies. Babies now suffer from protein deficiencies due to their mother's diets during pregnancy and the low quality of the food the babies consume after birth. The most alarming prospect is that the youth will pass on these unhealthy habits to future generations.

Lifestyle Changes

The 2005 census reported that 7, 346 people from the RAAS were out of the country:⁶² This number reflect a trend that some community members say started in the 1990s with the boom of the international economy. At that time, people from the Coast left Nicaragua for jobs in the United States and the Caribbean islands. Those who did not leave changed their agricultural practices.

The reasons for the move from agriculture to fishing are multiple, and this pattern differs among the communities studied. The impacts of this move are felt in decreased

⁶² INIDE (2005). 179.

production of food for use in the community, and increased exploitation of the fisheries resource. More importantly, change plays a role in undermining the local subsistence economy by decreasing the ability of these communities to re-engage in subsistence agriculture in the event of an economic downturn.⁶³

This economic downturn did occur. As stated above, coastal communities such as Pearl Lagoon that no longer had the family farms to rely on for foodstuffs had to find alternative solutions. Now the foods that families buy are not as energy-rich and the diets are high in carbohydrates.⁷⁶ Additionally, the food preparation has changed, because families are opting to fry the food more often than before. Mihaele Leiva explained, “Seven days of the week, five would be rundown. Now it’s chicken, chicken, chicken, and fried food.”⁶⁴ Unhealthy food preparation and the lack of proteins and vitamins have led to increases in high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity.⁶⁵ These health problems are fairly recent in Pearl Lagoon as Janina Cuthbert explained, “...like two old people had pressure [high blood pressure] in Pearl Lagoon. So we used to run and go see what pressure was, because we didn’t know... These days because of our bad eating habits, children are born, babies are born with pressure.”⁶⁶ [Author’s Translation]

Unhealthy diets are made worse by the community’s exercise habits. Since Pearl Lagoon does not have a park or exercise facility, adults usually take an evening walk in order to exercise. Young people occasionally exercise through organized sports, because Pearl Lagoon has a basketball court and a baseball field. However, there is little exercise outside of these planned

⁶³ Hostetler, Mark (1998). "Local reactions to capitalist change in the fisheries of Pearl Lagoon on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua." Master's thesis. ⁶⁸ ⁷⁶ Williams, Wesley Dr. 28 April 2014.

⁶⁴ Focus Group Two. 23 April 2014.

⁶⁵ Williams, Wesley Dr. 28 April 2014.

⁶⁶ Cuthbert, Janina. 14 April 2014. “...like two old people had pressure in Pearl Lagoon. So we used to run and go see what is pressure, and we not know what pressure was... To the day because of our bad eating habits, children born, baby born with pressure.”

activities. Additionally, many youth have adapted to sedentary lifestyles as many have expressed that they watch many hours of television per day. Dr. Williams has explained that the excess of carbohydrates in the human body without the release of that energy can result in high blood pressure and even diabetes.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the only dietician in the Southern Autonomous Region works in Bluefields.⁸¹ Therefore, perhaps there is an education problem. If the only people in the community engaging in healthy exercise habits are adults, the community's future health is in jeopardy.

Recent government initiatives have encouraged the return to the family farm. Programs such as Hambre Cero, which donates livestock to Nicaraguans, have encouraged many people on the Coast to work on family farms for fresh produce. Additionally, some doctors at Pearl Lagoon's health center make monthly visits to the community's schools to educate the children about healthy diets, but the children do not control what the family consumes. If parents teach their children unhealthy eating habits, there is not much hope for improving health conditions in the community.

Teen Pregnancy

Another health consideration is the increase in teen pregnancies in Pearl Lagoon. This is not only a problem in the town of Pearl Lagoon, but also throughout the Pearl Lagoon Basin. "It's [teen pregnancy] very high...The last information we had was that over 180 girls between 14 and 17 years old were pregnant in the region."⁶⁸ [Author's Translation] Principal Hebbert shared how PLACE reacted to the phenomenon.

⁶⁷ Williams, Wesley Dr. 28 April 2014. ⁸¹
Williams, Wesley Dr. 28 April 2014

⁶⁸ Williams, Wesley Dr. 28 April 2014. "It's [teen pregnancy] very high...The last information we had up that we had over 180 girls between 14 and 17 years pregnant in the region."

“...two years ago, we had probably like 6 girls who left the school because of pregnancy and that was like a shock to us. It was like a breakdown because...we invite the people from MINSA [*Ministry of Health*], we invite the people from...one of the organizations called Acción Médica to talk to them about these types of things and we feel a breakdown when this happens because...all that we’ve been doing all these years was in vain...”⁶⁹
[Author’s Translation]

Infant disease is on the rise with increasing teen pregnancies. Lifestyle changes have resulted in more health problems in Pearl Lagoon and teen mothers pass these health problems on to their babies. Now babies are born with high blood pressure and are more prone to become obese. Marasmus and Kwashiorkor are two childhood disorders that Pearl Lagoon babies have presented with at the health center. Babies with Marasmus present with slim bodies and enlarged bellies, while babies with Kwashiorkor just appear overweight.⁷⁰ The two disorders result from a lack of proteins and vitamins.

A 2012 study identified pregnancy as a vital period for the baby’s health outcomes. Forrester et al. examined health records at the University Hospital of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica to research the effects of undernourishment during pregnancy. They accessed birth records from 1962 to 1992 to research why Kwashiorkor patients have a higher mortality rate than Marasmus patients. They found that the womb pre-programs the babies’ bodies based on the type of food the mother consumes during pregnancy. For example, babies who later developed Marasmus were born with lower birth weights. Their bodies had adapted to an energy-poor environment, which enabled them to derive energy from their energy-poor environments after birth. On the other hand, babies who were born with a high birth, who later

⁶⁹ Hebbert, Marlene. 24 April 2014. “...two years ago, we had uh, probably like 6 girls who left the school because of pregnancy and that was like a shock to us. It was like a breakdown because...we invite the people from MINSA, we invite the people from...one of the organizations called Acción Médica to talk to them about em, these types of things and uh, we feel breakdown when this happen because...all what you’ve been doing all these years was in vain...”

⁷⁰ Williams, Wesley Dr. 28 April 2014.

developed Kwashiorkor, had not developed the ability to derive energy for an energy-poor environment.⁷¹

These findings demonstrate the importance of the mother's nutrition during pregnancy.

Doctor Williams, however, explained that teenage girls tend to make unhealthy decisions while they are pregnant. "They eat any type of food, don't practice any type of exercise, and [don't] rest."⁷² This is harmful because the nutrition babies receive in utero is just as influential as the nutrition they receive after birth. Increasing teen pregnancies threaten infants' health outcomes, because the young mothers do not take the proper precautions. As a result, the community's babies are born in worse health conditions than in the past.

Pastor Berry explained that the Las Perlas Institute's schedule may be a contributing factor to the increase in adolescent risky behaviors. "...if the public school would extend on their schedules...their time is from 7-12, so only 5 hours the children have to be in class. Then they have the whole evening free...That time is when they're bored and try to find something to do and the energy have to burn in some way and many times they go and find the drug."⁷³ Similarly, this idle time could contribute to the increase in teenage pregnancies. Another potential factor is the decline in cultural values. No matter the reason, lifestyle changes and young pregnancies negatively affect Pearl Lagoon's community health, which links the community's cultural suffering to its physical suffering.

⁷¹ Forrester et al. (2012). "Prenatal factors contribute to the emergence of kwashiorkor or marasmus in severe undernutrition: evidence for the predictive adaptation model." 3.

⁷² Williams, Wesley Dr., 28 April 2014.

⁷³ Berry, Ken. 23 April 2014.

Conclusion

Various societal factors demonstrate that Pearl Lagoon is in state of emergency. The youth today live in a Pearl Lagoon that is gradually losing cultural ground. However, the young people are not silent witnesses to this decline. In both focus groups, the youth expressed the desire to learn more about their cultural traditions. Many of the youth romanticize their community's past and emphasize the importance of their traditions, even though others are breaking away from their customs. The younger generation has also demonstrated that they are critical of their community, which is hopeful because Pearl Lagoon is in need of cultural rescue. Technology increases the youth's exposure to the outside world, which is not necessarily negative. However, the weakening of Afro-descendant cultural identity leaves the younger generation vulnerable to these outside images, which can become adopted behaviors. There are many warning signs to Pearl Lagoon's diminishing cultural expression: the youth's disinterest in their traditions, increasing substance abuse, decreasing numbers of youth returning after college, growing health problems, and increasing incidents of teen pregnancy. However, it is not too late for cultural rescue. The challenge presented to community leaders is to decide what to do now that Pearl Lagoon has been identified as an emergency state.

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