TOURISM AND CHANGE IN COSTA RICA:

PURA VIDA, POWER AND PLACE

IN A SMALL BEACH COMMUNITY

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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A vast majority of tourism development in Guanacaste has occurred in the northern coastal region along the Pacific coast (Honey, Vargas and Durham 2010). However, recent development is beginning to move south as developers visualize big returns on early investments. As new tourism development continues to expand in the southern region of the Nicoya Peninsula, small communities are being transformed from small fishing and farming communities to communities heavily reliant on tourism. Playa Azul, a small beach town in the southern region of the Nicoya Peninsula, is one such community.

This dissertation utilizes ethnographic fieldwork to examine the impacts of tourism on the daily lives of residents of Playa Azul, particularly looking at how local residents cope with perceived changes to the norms and values of the community as tourism development continues to expand in the area. The penetration of foreign capital into the community is having a transformative effect on community relations, particularly challenging community norms and values. It is my contention that as Playa Azul continues to develop as a primary tourist destination and development continues to expand, the rifts within the community between existing community members (*Azuleños*,

foreign *Ticos* and lifestyle migrants) and newly arriving "business-oriented" members will continue to grow with it. I argue this has led to subtle forms of resistance among community members as they work to maintain the *pura vida* "vibe" of the town and the values that support a multicultural community based on humility, cultural acceptance and mutual respect.

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For the residents of Playa Azul

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Playa Azul is still a Costa Rican little town on the beach. Unfortunately, I have to say, it's going to change. It's going to get bigger. For example, we still have a soccer field right in the middle of town. We still have a school for kids right in the middle of town. So it's not like it is a 100% tourist town, you know what I mean? We still have a community that lives here. You know, local people live here. We still live here, you know what I mean? That's one of the things you cannot find in too many beaches in Costa Rica. But you can still find a lot of Costa Ricans with businesses here in town. So I would say, right now, it's still a Costa Rican town...[1]

~ Antonio[2]

The vibe of Playa Azul is 'pura vida' and the new foreigners coming in with new businesses want to change the structure of the town and take over!

~ Foreign resident attendee of a community meeting
addressing noise complaints in Playa Azul[3]

The meeting was supposed to begin at 4 o'clock in the afternoon but like most things in this small beach town, the start time was a little behind schedule. The meeting was organized by Lucía, an Italian business owner in the community, via paper pamphlets handed out door-to-door in the "center" of Playa Azul, a Facebook post on the local community page and word-of-mouth (this is how most information is disseminated in this small community). The community meeting was set to address the recent noise complaints about music at night in the town center. The complaints were being issued by new businesses and vacation rentals that wanted the center of Playa Azul quiet at night for the benefit of the tourists staying in the town center. Despite being a very small town,

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[1] Playa Azul is the pseudonym for a small beach town in the southern region of Guanacaste, Costa Rica. The town was subsequently named because the southern Nicoya Peninsula has been identified as one of the five "Blue Zones" on the planet where inhabitants commonly live beyond 100 years.

[2] Antonio is a 36 year old life-long resident of Playa Azul.

[3] This comment was made during a community meeting addressing noise complaints to live music in town at night. Although not stated directly by the organizers of the meeting, this sentiment appeared to represent the underlying tone of the meeting.

Playa Azul has a vibrant live music scene and most nights, it is possible to see a local act play in one of the bars or restaurants in the tourist area of town.

There were approximately 24 people in attendance when the meeting started with more trickling in afterward. At the outset, all of the attendees were foreign residents who owned or operated an existing business in town. Several *Ticos* from the community as well as others representing businesses arrived after the meeting started.[4] There was also a lawyer present from the municipality in Nicoya to provide legal advice on how the community should deal with the complaints. The concern for business operators was the complaints threatened to shut down live music in the center of Playa Azul. As small business operators catering to tourists, they saw the elimination of live music as a direct threat to their businesses and livelihoods. The noise complaints were coming from vacation home owners in the center of town near the beach and near the bars and restaurants hosting the music who claimed the noise was a disruption to the guests staying in these vacation rentals.

The meeting was held on the patio of one of the bars at the center of the complaints. The meeting participants argued the shutdown of music would not only affect the bars and restaurants but would also have a rippling effect throughout Playa Azul to other businesses in the community. Manny, 55, a horseback riding *Azuleño* tour guide, explained that the town not only needed the music as a means to attract tourists but it was also a key characteristic of the vibe of the town.[5] The music offered tourists something to

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[4] *Tico* is a term Costa Ricans use to refer to themselves. For example, it is quite common for Costa Ricans to say "I am *Tico*" as opposed to "I am Costa Rican." In fact, one of the largest newspapers in the country (published in Spanish and English) is called *The Tico Times*.

[5] An *Azuleño* is someone born in Playa Azul. The suffix "*eño*" in Spanish means "to be from somewhere or belonging to something," similar to the suffix "ian" in English as a descriptor for someone from Oregon or California (Oregonian or Californian). This is also a key characteristic of "being local" in Playa Azul and carries with it certain social advantages.

do at night and kept them in town beyond a day or two which opened the possibilities for more work for local business operators. Frank, a proprietor of a small hostel in town, expressed this sentiment saying "younger tourists leave after a day or two if they don't have options of things to do at night." For the attendees of the meeting, the music scene in Playa Azul provided an added incentive to stay in Playa Azul beyond the beach and surrounding environmental attractions.

Although numerous bars and restaurants would be affected by the shutdown, the complaints thus far were focused primarily on two bars located in the center of town. Over the previous few weeks, one of the bars had been temporarily closed down by the municipality in Nicoya because they did not possess the necessary permits for live music. The shutdown drew the attention from other bar and restaurant operators that also held live music for fears that they would be targeted next. But the concerns extended beyond the economic for many at the meeting. There was also a clear sentiment that the complaints were a direct challenge to the existing vibe of the community. Many of the foreign residents who moved to Playa Azul were drawn by the vibe of the community and the kind of lifestyle the community offered.

As the lawyer explained the legal requirements for permits and options for businesses hosting live music, each attendee was given the opportunity to express their concerns. Many of the attendees expressed frustration with their legal options but also expressed anger at the perceived social intrusions by newcomers on the community. One of the attendees, a foreign resident operating a local business, angrily stated "The vibe of Playa Azul is *pura vida* and the new foreigners coming in with new businesses want to change the structure of the town and take over!"

The previous year, similar frustrations over perceived offenses to community standards were expressed in town by a community group of local *Ticos* and foreign residents. A newly arrived restaurant owner had "claimed" ownership of the area in front of the restaurant by placing dining tables on the beach under the mangrove. The owner then attempted to limit access to this area of the beach to restaurant patrons only. This drew the ire of some in the local community angered not only by the legal issue that allows for public use of the beach but also the perceived offense against the local *pura vida* vibe of the community. Legally, under Costa Rican law 6043 (The Maritime Zone Law), all land extending 200 yards from the point of high tide is government owned and thus legally accessible for public use (Miller 2012). Rallying around this law, local community members organized an "action" against the restaurant. The action called on members of the community to bring beach towels and hang-out in the middle of the dining area on the beach. Many of the participants in the action brought radios and coolers filled with beer and wine and mingled in the middle of the dining area. Approximately 40 *Ticos*, foreign residents and even some tourists participated in the action as dining tourists tried to make sense of what was happening. During the action, the organizers visited with dining tourists and apologized for disrupting their dining experience. They explained the reasoning for the disruption by explaining the law as well as the local vibe of the community.

Although the meeting was held to address the noise issue and the possibility of limiting live music in Playa Azul, the complaints about the noise and the need to call a meeting to address those complaints are indicative of larger issues facing the community. Playa Azul is in the midst of a tourism development boom, the second in a span of 15

years. As tourism continues to expand in the area, so too does the influence of foreign residents in the community. It should be understood that the issue facing the community is not the mere presence of foreign residents (who often share similar community values as the local *Ticos*) but rather the perceived challenges to the existing norms and values of the community by *newly* arriving "outsiders" exerting their will through economic force. The perception within the community is that outsiders (primarily real estate investors and developers), drawn to Playa Azul by the prospect of tourist development and the potential for profits, operate with no vested interest in the community at-large beyond how the community might impact their long-term investments.

Many of the foreign residents in the community are lifestyle migrants who chose to move to Playa Azul as a way to experience a better life than they had in their home country (this is discussed in detail in chapter 4). I contend the character of Playa Azul, shaped heavily by a local form of *pura vida*, incentivized many of the foreign residents (lifestyle migrants) to move to Playa Azul because it offered an alternative value system than a system based on accumulation and profit. But as Playa Azul continues to grow and become more popular as a primary tourist destination, outside influences are beginning to transform the local economy and value system to one that places profits over people. And this transformation, although subtle, is having noticeable effects on social relations within the community.

In addition to the examples of community action above among foreigners and *Ticos*, the influx of outside economic pressures into the community has also fostered subtle emphases of an *Azuleño* collective identity in Playa Azul in response to perceived changes to local norms and values of the community brought on by outside foreign

influences. The emphasis on the *Azuleño* is very subtle. During my time in Playa Azul, no one ever explicitly explained what it meant to be *Azuleño*, but as time went on, I became aware that being *Azuleño* was a distinct identity with unique characteristics within the community. This *Azuleño* collective identity is shaped and characterized by the cultural memory (Assman 1996) of ancestral norms and values from previous generations. I contend the construction and emphasis of this oppositional collective identity represents a push back or form of resistance against outside influences entering the community. It is not my assertion that an acculturation process is not already taking place within the community with the increased presence of lifestyle migrants. However, I am contending the lifestyle migrants that have chosen to move to Playa Azul and foreign *Ticos* are actively resisting, alongside the local *Ticos*, pressures from outside the community and are working to maintain the local value system and *pura vida* vibe of the community. This is clearly evidenced by the examples provided above and by the numerous subtle examples that take place daily in Playa Azul.

The community meeting explicitly illustrates the philosophical divisions emerging within the community about how Playa Azul should develop going forward. On one side of the divide are many in the local community, *Ticos* and foreign residents. This group wants to maintain a vibrant music scene, the *pura vida* vibe of the town and a strong sense of community. Many of the supporters of this perspective live in the community and work directly or indirectly in the tourist industry as language instructors, taxi drivers, local tour guides, sales people in local shops, surf instructors and owners and employees of bars, hostels and restaurants that hold live music. These would be the most affected if live music was limited or stopped altogether. The other side tends to consist of recent

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arrivals not fully integrated in the community or investors from outside of the community Their business interests tend to be vacation rentals and newly acquired hotels and *cabinas* (small sleeping quarters with limited amenities).

One of the points stressed at the meeting was the need to maintain a community where local *Ticos* have a voice in their own community. The emerging rift within the community stands between many existing community members and a growing sector of investors, developers and real estate buyers coming into the area as the real estate market continues to expand aimed at foreign buyers (Honey, Vargas and Durham 2010). Jordi, a 52 year old foreign resident from Spain who has been living in Playa Azul for 9 years, stressed the need to maintain a community where local *Ticos* do not become alienated and can continue to live comfortably and not be forced out by rising costs.

The key issue facing the community is the rise of absentee ownership (Veblen 2001) or what Honey, Vargas and Durham (2010) call "residential tourism." Honey, Vargas and Durham note that following the expansion of the international airport in Liberia in 2002, the real estate market exploded in the northern coastal region of Guanacaste with a rise in "non-traditional purchases of housing, land, condominiums, villas, and commercial premises owned by foreigners" (2010:47). This is clearly apparent in Playa Azul where three real estate companies operate within 100 yards of each other and a fourth can be found a block away, all with real estate postings advertised in English.

The popularity of internet sites listing vacation rentals has opened the door for foreign investors to enter and reshape the real estate market in Playa Azul by purchasing land with existing homes or building new homes for purposes of renting to vacation

seekers. Honey, Vargas and Durham (2010) note this same process occurred in the northern region of Guanacaste and functioned as one of "the main drivers behind and beneficiaries of the fast paced coastal development" (47) in the region. Many of the locals in Playa Azul believe the noise complaints in town are being made by vacationers staying in short-term rental properties. For many residents in Playa Azul, the complaints represent a challenge to the identity and vibe of the town and more importantly, raises questions about sustainability, the future development of the community and who has the power over decision-making processes in Playa Azul.

Over the last two or three decades, the economic base of Playa Azul has transformed from subsistence fishing and farming to one heavily reliant on tourism. As a development strategy, tourism and particularly ecotourism, has been promoted as a viable development vehicle for increasing foreign investment, improving infrastructure, generating foreign capital, increasing employment all while enhancing the experience of the tourist (Telfer 2002; Honey 2008). However, many have also drawn attention to the issues associated with ecotourism development, such as increased levels of waste and pollution, increased alcohol and drug use, the emergence of black markets, the alienation of local residents and the degradation of local cultures and communities (Weaver 2001b; Simpson 2009). Within this framework, this dissertation examines how tourism development is impacting the daily lives of local residents of Playa Azul. In doing so, I examine how residents make sense of and cope with perceived changes to the community in the midst of tourism expansion. The analysis focuses on two primary impacts of tourism development in Playa Azul; the influence of place character (Paulsen 2004; Harrison 2017) on lifestyle migrants (Benson and O'Reilly 2009) decisions to move to

Playa Azul and the construction of a collective identity by local *Tico* residents as a form of resistance to perceived challenges to the cultural values of the local community. In addition, I argue foreign residents, drawn to Playa Azul by the *pura vida* vibe of the community, also work as allies to the locals to maintain the local value system. As a foreign *Tico* in his late 20s living in Playa Azul explained –

> You know, in those places like Jaco and tamarindo, its dominated, its more for the international people than for the local people. And that is what makes Playa Azul so special. We would like to see the village keeping like it is. You know, a place where people don't come just for the parties. We want people to come because they love the place, you know, it's not babylonia with big buildings… that's why I consider it here, one of the best places [in Costa Rica].

Although outside the scope of this dissertation, the last point touches on Butler's (2006) Tourism Area Life Cycle model (TALC) by situating Playa Azul in this current historical moment within Butler's model of tourism development. Butler argued tourism destinations develop through a series of six stages, beginning with the "exploration" stage and developing over time toward a "stagnation" stage and ultimately a "decline" stage where the destination exceeds carrying capacity and falls out of fashion amongst tourists. Although the model focuses on limits to carrying capacity and the decline of the destination, Butler's model does briefly address local involvement in the tourist trade at the site. Once situated within the model, the data from this study can be useful in understanding how local communities perceive tourism and address social issues at different stages of development.

The analysis within the pages that follow calls into question the sustainability of tourism development in Playa Azul in relation to community social cohesion. The literature on sustainable tourism development demonstrates conventional thinking on the

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subject frames small-scale tourism development as a sustainable model but as Weaver (2004) points out, the question is less about scale or more about how the development is managed. In the case of Playa Azul, the penetration of foreign capital into the community is having a transformative effect on community relations. It is my contention that as Playa Azul continues to develop as a primary tourist destination and development continues to expand, the rifts within the community between existing community members (*Azuleños*, foreign *Ticos* and lifestyle migrants) and newly arriving "business-oriented" members will continue to grow with it. I argue that what is currently happening in Playa Azul is the convergence of different groups within the community working together to maintain the *pura vida* "vibe" of the town and the values that support a multicultural community based on humility, acceptance and mutual respect.

Evolution of Sustainable Tourism

The idea of "sustainability" emerged in the literature in 1987 with the release of the Brundtland Report (Weaver 2001a). Since then, the term has been used in a wide variety of contexts (Sharpley 2000), in large part because the term itself is so ambiguous (Butler 1998; Weaver 2004; Gould and Lewis 2009; Mowforth and Munt 2009), and today "has been hijacked by many to give moral rectitude and 'green' credentials to tourist activities" (Mowforth and Munt 2009:83). Indeed, Wall (1997) argues the term has been reduced to a buzzword or "catchphrase" devoid of meaning and substance and can be applied to any number of contradictory and conflicting social phenomena (Weaver 2004; Wall 2009).

A primary issue with the term, beyond the inherent contradictions, is the argument that "sustainability" is framed within a western construct with "a built-in western bias"

(Wall 1997; Weaver 2001; Cater 2006; Mowforth and Munt 2009). Some critics of the sustainability movement within the development literature and sustainable tourism literature have highlighted the inherent disparities in power when determining what should be sustained and who gets to decide (Wall 1997; Gould and Lewis 2009; Mowforth and Munt 2009, Schellhorn 2010). Weaver (2004) makes a similar claim calling the idea of sustainable tourism an ideologically amendable term that can "be used to represent and support just about any model of development" (518). Willers (1994, cited in Weaver 2001a) refers to the idea of sustainable development as "one of the most insidious and manipulative ideas to appear in decades" (302).

Within the tourism literature, the term "sustainable" has become an essential component of tourism when discussing travel in the 21st century. Although the idea of "sustainable tourism" emerged in the last decade of the 20th century, the concept of "sustainable tourism" can be traced back to the Brundtland Report. Loosely defined as "tourism that meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Weaver 2001a:300), the term appears to challenge characteristics and practices (scale and waste) associated with mass tourism. This is precisely because the term is a product of its historical moment.

Jafari (2001) argues that tourism, following the conclusion of the Second World War, can be traced through an evolutionary series of phases or "platforms" with each platform building on the previous platform. Weaver (2004), in his review of Jafari's model, notes that each platform coincides with and is heavily influenced by the dominant development ideology of the time. In the 1960s, the "advocacy platform," mass tourism was heavily influenced by ideas associated with modernization theory (Rostow 1960), the

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dominant development ideology in the 1960s. Telfer (2002) notes that within the advocacy platform framework, mass tourism was viewed as instrumental to national and international development and promoted international mass tourism in the form of large-scale resort travel (Sharpley 2002; Weaver 2004). Thurot (1973, cited in Telfer 2002) suggests technological innovation and the emergence of jet passenger plane facilitated in the rise of international travel and enabled tourist to visit new "exotic" locales. Fitting with the logic of modernization theory, it was conceived that tourism functioned as a form of capital redistribution based on a "trickle-down" logic with relatively wealthy first-world tourists spending money and thus facilitating job growth in less developed areas (Sharpley 2002). But mass tourism and the ideology that supported it fell out of favor as critics began to note the negative impacts on developing nations.

In the 1970s, as modernization theory fell out of favor, dependency theory began to shape the tourism landscape. With ideas influenced by theorists like Andre Gunder Frank (1967), the "cautionary platform" of tourism emerged as the dominant development paradigm within tourism studies (Weaver 2004). Whereas tourism was viewed as a vehicle for development under the advocacy platform, tourism was now viewed as "a new type of plantation economy" (Telfer 2002:54) under the cautionary platform. The cautionary platform highlighted processes of exploitation, relationships of unequal exchange and the "rich/poor dichotomy within and between underdeveloped and developed countries (Sharpley 2002:323). Weaver (2004) argues the emergence of the "cautionary platform" came as a reaction to the negative impacts associated with mass tourism. The vehicle of tourism that was once thought to deliver prosperity and redistribute wealth was now seen as a vehicle for systematic exploitation of peripheral

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zones by core nations. Similar to the theories that influenced them, the advocacy and cautionary platforms stood in direct opposition to each other and would work as theoretical bookends in shaping tourism as it continued to develop into the 21st century (Weaver 2004).

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the pendulum was once again swinging back in the other direction. Around this time, Butler (1980) produced the destination life-cycle model (popularly referred to as the Tourism Area Life Cycle or TALC). Although less overtly critical than other critiques of mass tourism, Butler argued that as tourism development continues to expand, it inevitably exceeds carrying-capacity and ultimately faces "stagnation" and "decline". Weaver and Lawton (1999, cited in Weaver 2004) considered Butler's model "the culmination of the cautionary platform because of its core assertion that continued laissez-faire tourism development eventually results in the breaching of any destination's economic, environmental, and sociocultural carrying-capacities, and eventual 'decline'" (511). Weaver notes that despite the idea of "sustainability" yet being introduced, Butler's model challenges the idea that tourism represents a sustainable activity in any location.

Although dependency theory and the cautionary platform of tourism development were highly critical of mass tourism, proponents of the cautionary platform failed to produce solutions that might alleviate the issues caused by it. Sharpley (2002) notes the emergence of the "adaptancy platform" attempted "to bridge the ideological gulf between the preceding antithetical positions" (323). The adaptancy platform, also called the alternative platform, worked to produce alternative forms of tourism and in the process, produced two fundamental ideas. One of the dominant ideas to emerge out of the

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adaptancy platform as the solution to mass tourism development was small-scale tourism development (Weaver 2004; Mowforth and Munt 2009). Small-scale tourism was hailed as the Holy Grail of tourism development and viewed as a sustainable form of tourism. Although not directly linked, the idea of small-scale tourism legitimized notions of "sustainable tourism" and alternative forms of nature-based tourism like ecotourism.

But the adaptancy platform, because it promoted small-scale and alternative forms of nature-based tourism, had some inherent contradictions (Weaver 2004). With regards to ecotourism, the environmental and social paradoxes that undermine the sustainability premise associated with the adaptancy platform have been well documented (Gould 1999; Weaver 2001b; Roberts and Thanos 2003; Cater 2006; Durham 2008; Honey 2008; Gould and Lewis 2009; Simpson 2009). Generally speaking, from an environmental and industry standpoint, the development of ecotourism itself challenges the existing logic of sustainable tourism (Gould and Lewis 2009). By definition, ecotourism promotes visits to pristine, undisturbed areas in order to see nature as it actually happens (Iveniuk 2006). But visiting these areas initiates an encroachment process that "accelerate[s] the pace of social and environmental degradation" of the "untouched" area (Honey 2008:101), ultimately destroying the wonder that attracts visitors in the first place. Similarly, as with the development paradox, a paradox of scale challenges the sustainability claims of the industry as a whole, calling into question the ability to maintain ecological integrity in the face of increased development coupled with increased human and vehicle traffic. Roberts and Thanos contend "the more successful an ecotourism establishment is, the more likely it is to destroy the very resource on which it was built" (2003:85). Stem, Lassoie, Lee, Deshler and Schelhas make a similar point, arguing success does not always lead to

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sustainability. In the case of ecotourism, "success might actually lead to demise" (2003:388). In fact, increases in scale can create a situation in which ecotourism begins to resemble mass tourism (Weaver 2001; Simpson 2009). In addition, Weaver (2004) notes visitor intrusions into previously "untouched" destinations can "expose such destinations to more intensive forms of tourism development (2004:512).

Jafari (2001) argues the "knowledge-based platform" emerged in the last decade of the 20th century, in large part, due to the inability of the previous platforms to adequately address the changing dynamics of the tourism industry as a whole. Primarily comprised of the academic/research community, Jafari contends the knowledge-based platform of tourism development moving into the 21st century has not replaced previous platforms but has maintained "bridges with the other three platforms" in an attempt "to contribute to a holistic treatment of tourism – not just its impacts and forms" – for the purpose of forming "a scientific body of knowledge on tourism" (32). In this sense, proponents of the knowledge-based platform have moved away from dogmatic arguments for or against tourism and have moved toward building a framework that explains tourism as a process of convergence between aspects of mass tourism and alternative forms of tourism. Weaver (2004) makes this point by arguing proponents of the knowledge-based platform acknowledge that characteristics of both mass tourism and alternative forms of tourism now converge "within a single tourist system."

As the knowledge-based platform has continued to develop, new ideas about tourism and tourism development have been introduced to try to explain the changing dynamics of tourism in the 21st century. Poon (1989; 1994) was the first to introduce the idea of "new tourism" as a way to identify some of those changes in tourism development

that claimed to have achieved a model of sustainability (Broad and Spincer 2008). But Mowforth and Munt (2009) argue that despite the frequency of "new tourism" in the literature in recent years, there remains a general lack of consensus of what "new tourism" actually means. Mowforth and Munt suggest "new tourism" can be conceptualized as a discursive integration of numerous forms of tourism that manifest in different ways depending on the setting. Butler (2008) argues that the rise of new tourism is not so much due to "new" forms for tourism but rather the growth of the tourism industry overall. He suggests the increased scale has brought these types of tourism, which were once in the background, to the foreground and into mainstream tourism discourse. In the end, Butler (1998) argues the confusion of the term "sustainable tourism development" has led to misleading applications. Furthermore, he argues the success and failure of "sustainability" can only be determined by future generations and any attempt to make those determinations now is "at best premature and in many cases not only misleading but often wildly optimistic" (31).

Ecotourism

There has been considerable debate as to how to properly define "ecotourism" (Honey 1999; Weaver 2001b; Duffy 2002; Gale and Hill 2009; Gould and Lewis 2009; Mowforth and Munt 2009; Simpson 2009; Fennel 2015). Part of the issue of defining ecotourism stems from the core tenets embedded within the framework of ecotourism that are often at odds with each other in regards to sustainability. Gould and Lewis (2009) argue the term "ecotourism" is a contested label based on how the definitional requirements are operationalized. One of the earliest definitions and one that has stood the test of time was proposed by Hector Lascurain in 1983. Lascurain suggested that

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ecotourism should involve the study and admiration of "relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas … as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas" (cited in Fennell 2015:9). In this sense, Lascurain conceptualized ecotourism as not simply a niche market in the global economy but rather as a set of principles engaged in by the tourists themselves.

In an attempt to address the definitional issues with ecotourism, Weaver (1999) proposed a loose framework consisting of three core criteria: the impetus for travel should focus on nature and culture, there should be an appreciation for the local environment and culture, and tourist activities should be "benign" with respect to the impact on the local environment and culture. Honey (1999; 2008) in her seminal work on ecotourism development and sustainable tourism, proposes a more expansive framework for ecotourism, outlining seven conditions for ecotourism: travel to natural destinations, minimizes impact, builds environmental awareness, provides direct financial benefits for conservation, provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people, respects local culture, and supports human rights and democratic movements. Notably, Honey identifies benefits to the local communities as a necessary component of "real ecotourism" (2008). The International Ecotourism Society broadly defines ecotourism as 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of the local people' (cited in Koens, Dieperink, and Miranda 2009:1225). While there is still no consensus on one definition of ecotourism, the literature reveals a central concern with addressing cultural and ecological sustainability and conservation (Mowforth and Munt 2009; Fennell 2015). The implementation of ecotourism, and its use

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in marketing and promotion within the tourism industry, raises different, but related, kinds of questions and concerns.

The ecotourism industry is firmly embedded within the logic of neoliberal "green capitalism" (Duffy 2002; Cater 2006; Mowforth and Munt 2009; Miller 2012; Nost 2013). Ecotourism, despite ideological claims of community sustainability and environmental conservation, is ultimately driven by "the bottom line" and the accumulation of profits through the sale of nature as a "non-consumptive" resource (Duffy 2002; Weinberg, Bellows, and Ekster 2002; Mowforth and Munt 2009). This is best exemplified by the transformation of small, subsistence-based communities to market-based communities heavily reliant on tourism profits for their well-being (Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler 2003). These communities become tethered to market forces in their continual pursuit of profits on a grand scale (Place 2001). The viability of ecotourism functioning as a sustainable alternative to extractive industries (logging, mining, oil drilling) exists only so long as it can continue to generate enough capital to off-set the lure of those more potentially profitable, yet environmentally destructive, export enterprises (Gould 1999; Honey 1999; Gould and Lewis 2009).

Benefits and Drawbacks of Ecotourism Development

The benefits and drawbacks to tourism development have been thoroughly documented throughout the tourism literature (Nuñez 1989; Weaver 2001b; Honey 2008; Stronza 2008; Stronza and Gordillo 2008; Simpson 2009). The brief review here will primarily focus on the benefits and drawbacks associated with ecotourism development at the local level. What is important to recognize with benefits and drawbacks in relation to ecotourism development is that benefits tend to be experienced earlier in the development

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process and as social relations begin to change and new values become more entrenched in the community, those benefits begin to diminish and the drawbacks begin to overshadow any positive aspects of tourism development (Butler 2004; 2006).

Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler (2003) suggest ecotourism is capable of delivering a wide range of social and economic benefits. Locally, ecotourism can provide benefits in the form of employment opportunities, improved infrastructure to local community, and increased business and revenue for local stores. Ecotourism can also provide an economic boost local communities by facilitating participation in local markets (Stem et al. 2003; Horton 2009; Koens, Dieperink, and Miranda 2009). Environmentally, nature-based tourism promotes environmental awareness among local communities (Horton 2009) and a sense of pride in the community and the surrounding environment (Stronza 2008). Tourism, in a more general form (as this is true of mass tourism as well) also promotes informal language training for host community members through interactions with tourists leading to many community members speaking multiple languages (Nuñez 1989).

Yet despite the numerous potential benefits, ecotourism is nevertheless an intrusive force and ultimately produces numerous drawbacks. Locally, Simpson (2009) and Stem et al. (2003) argue high rates of "leakage" prevent a large portion of revenue generated from ecotourism to reach local communities. In addition, the influx of tourist activity can lead to a disintegration of cultural and social ties within families and the community (Duffy 2002; Koens, Dieperink, and Miranda 2009; Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler 2003). Successful ecotourism can also negatively impact the local environment

with increases in solid waste, disturbances to natural habitats, and trail erosion (Stem et al. 2003) as well as sewage issues (Koens et al. 2009).

Increases in tourist activity can also impact the wildlife surrounding ecotourism sites. Duffy (2002), in her study of ecotourism development in Belize, found that tourists feeding dolphins on tours has impacted the local food as dolphins no are no longer hunting local fish but are rather relying on tourists for food. Van Tassell and Daniel (2006) discuss a similar situation in Manuel Antonio National Park in Costa Rica where resident monkeys no longer forage for food in nature but now rely on tourist hand-outs and scavenge food from garbage cans. As Weaver (2001b) has argued, these are issues of scale. Increases in scale of ecotourism development can fuel increased demand for development of facilities and amenities in ways that resemble mass tourism (Weaver 2001b; 2004; Simpson 2009). This drive to expand can then undermine the sustainability goals of ecotourism and increase the likelihood for more direct disturbances to local communities, wildlife, and ecosystems (Duffy 2002; Van Tassell and Daniel 2006; Stronza and Gordillo 2008; Gould and Lewis 2009).

Horton (2009) challenges the assertion that ecotourism can possibly provide economic benefits to local communities and simultaneously promote environmental conservation while functioning within a market-driven framework. Instead, Horton suggests ecotourism reproduces "preexisting patterns of stratification," perpetuating "historical economic inequalities and further disempower[ing] local peoples" (2009:104). When success is measured in terms of economic exchange, environmental and social sustainability are often de-emphasized or simply overlooked.

Ecotourism and Community

The literature on local community development generally reflects the conclusion that local involvement in decision-making is a necessary component for "successful" ecotourism initiatives, with the needs and interests of local communities having priority (Campbell 1999; Scheyvens 1999; Van Tassell and Daniel 2006). However, Roberts and Thanos contend "local people continue to feel excluded from key decisions regarding protected areas in Central America" and "are often among the last to be consulted about new protection initiatives" in particular (2003:83). Indeed, Honey (2008) notes that tens of millions of indigenous peoples have been forcibly expelled from their lands in the process of making protected zones, effectively creating "conservation refugees." She contends these people "are largely invisible [and] often live in squalid conditions around protected areas" (Honey 2008:98). This practice devalues the input and lives of indigenous communities that, in fact, may have maintained the forests as a component of their subsistence and survival for generations. Particularly when protected zones are also sites of tourist development designed for generating revenue, dynamics of power and inequality – globally and locally – may shape these processes in contradictory ways.

Even where local communities may play a small role in the decision-making, Honey (2008) argues most indigenous peoples maintain a "comparative disadvantage" when dealing with national governments and particularly with international capital, as large ecotourism companies too often package "local people as smiling and welcoming faces for international visitors," ultimately serving the interests of local and global elites (Duffy 2002:103). Due to the power and influence of foreign investment, indigenous and non-elite local peoples are largely absent in early stages of decision-making related to

tourist or ecotourist development, and over time their labor value is extracted as they are virtually transformed from "dignified loggers or fishermen … into busboys" (Homero Aridjis, cited in Roberts and Thanos 2003:86).

In additional tension within ecotourism development is the issue of cultural commodification in which the very culture of the local community can become a commodity for sale (Simpson 2009). Iveniuk (2006) contends local people themselves become "aesthetic labourers" for consumption, there to meet the needs and, more importantly, the expectations of ecotourists, rather than the beneficiaries of or partners empowered through ecotourism development.

For many of these reasons, Campbell (1999) argues that more inclusive participation of communities only addresses part of the challenge of building successful, socially just ecotourism. She suggests governmental oversight and regulation is also required if real benefits are going to be absorbed into local communities investing in ecotourism. This suggests that any benefits to the local community stemming from ecotourism will be limited, at best, "in the absence of formalized planning and intervention" (1999:534).

Mass Ecotourism – Old Wine in New Bottles?

The notion of high-value ecotourism, versus high-volume, suggests that scale does indeed matter (CREST 2014). High-volume tourism is similar to mass tourism in its orientation toward facilitating a large number of tourist experiences, with little emphasis on engagement or connection with local communities and people. High-value tourism, by contrast, is marked by activities or experiences and resembles an ecotourism framework

that engage tourists with local people or communities in ways that facilitate engagement or learning, and allow local communities to accrue the benefits of tourist development.

Ecotourism is framed as a form of low-impact travel, greener and more sustainable than other forms of mass tourism. While the label of ecotourism stands in opposition to mass tourism, many scholars argue ecotourism can better be understood as simply a variant of mass tourism or what has been referred to as "mass ecotourism" (Weaver 2001b; Sharma 2005; Mowforth and Munt 2009; Simpson 2009). Weaver identifies the characteristics of mass tourism as "large-scale, externally controlled, high leakage and concentrated in high-density tourist [areas]" (2001b:107) and claims ecotourism can be traced within this same framework. Similarly, Simpson (2009) contends the "concept of ecotourism has been largely hijacked by the tourism industry" in an attempt to exploit a growing "green" tourism market.

Some scholars have classified ecotourism within different levels or degrees. Acott, La Trobe and Howard (1998), associating ecotourism with principles of deep ecology, conceptualized ecotourism within a "deep" and "shallow" framework with deep ecotourism focused on community, small-scale and nature's intrinsic value whereas shallow ecotourism tends to follow market logics. Using a similar framework, Weaver (2001b) conceptualizes ecotourism as a continuum from "hard" to "soft", with most ecotourism falling under a "soft" form, which Weaver argues looks very similar, if not identical, to mass tourism (Weaver 1998; 2005). He argues "hard" ecotourism is extremely rare and involves "small number[s] of environmentally aware participants who embark on relatively long specialized trips" with expectations for few, if any, amenities or services. These ecotourists actively engage with the natural environment in a form of

Table 1

Characteristics of Hard and Soft Ecotourism as Ideal Types

Hard	The Ecotourism Spectrum	Soft
(Active)	⟷	(Passive)

Strong Environmental Commitment	⟷	Moderate Environmental Commitment
Enhanced Sustainability	⟷	Steady-State Sustainability
Specialized Trips	⟷	Multi-Purpose Trips
Long Trips	⟷	Short Trips
Small Groups	⟷	Large Groups
Physically active	⟷	Physically Passive
Few If Any Services Expected	⟷	Services Expected
Emphasis on Personal Experience	⟷	Emphasis on Interpretation

Source: David Bruce Weaver. 2001. "Ecotourism as Mass Tourism: Contradiction or Reality?" *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* 42(2):104-112.

"enhancement sustainability", meaning they intend to improve the condition of the environment through various forms of volunteer work or activities. "Soft" ecotourism, on the other hand, involves larger numbers of people who take short nature-based excursions as part of larger, multi-purpose trips. These ecotourists expect services and amenities and rely on interpretation from guides as an engagement process with the environment. This is a more passive approach, what Weaver calls "steady-state sustainability", meaning "leaving an area in the same condition as when they arrived" as opposed to actively "improving the condition of the physical environment through donations and volunteer activity" (2001b:106). Weaver concludes that there is a type of symbiotic relationship between soft ecotourism and mass tourism in that each benefits from the other as "mass tourism indirectly supports protected areas, through the revenues generated from mass tourists' engaging in soft ecotourism" (2001b:110). Honey, despite her optimistic hopes

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for the ecotourism industry, echoes this sentiment, asserting "real ecotourism is indeed rare and usually imperfect" (2008:32). Duffy (2002) suggests most ecotourists replicate the same problems they are supposed to replace and "just like mass tourists, [ecotourists] are motivated by self-indulgence; for them, their travel acts as a marker of social position, which separates them from conventional tourists" (2002:46).

I argue the tourism practiced in Playa Azul falls under Weaver's notion of "soft" ecotourism but can be more accurately classified as "mass ecotourism" (Weaver 2001b; Duffy 2002; Sharma 2005; Simpson 2009; Mowforth and Munt 2009), a form of tourism that conceptualizes ecotourism as encompassing a range of conventional, consumer-based, high-volume tourism practices while couched within a conservationist eco-friendly philosophy. Weaver (2004), in his discussion of the development of tourism frameworks, argues that regardless of how tourism is framed, we must acknowledge that "mass tourism is here to stay" and therefore should be a component of any framework. Mowforth and Munt (2009) echo Weaver's assertion in their discussion of "new tourism," claiming there appears to be integration between new forms of tourism (ecotourism, sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, nature-based tourism, pro-poor tourism, and fair-trade and ethical tourism) and mass tourism that has morphed into a kind of mass ecotourism that employs characteristics of each. As the above review makes clear, there is no one defining threshold for 'ecotourism', yet the term is clearly meant to signal attention to the consequences for the environment, broadly conceived, and to the well-being of local people. As the industry continues to expand, ecotourism has experienced a kind of discursive integration, blurring the lines between eco-friendly,

socially-conscious tourism and mass tourism (Weaver 2001; Weaver and Lawton 2007; Mowforth and Munt 2009).

Historical Development of Tourism in Costa Rica

Tourism, and particularly nature-based tourism, development emerged in Costa Rica as a by-product of the economic and environmental crises of the 1970s and 1980s (Campbell 2002; Honey 2008; Miller 2012). The "second" global oil crisis of 1979 and the subsequent global recession in the early 1980s hit Costa Rica particularly hard as the country's traditional exports of bananas, coffee and beef lost their demand on the global market (Carnoy and Torres 1992; Clark 2001). Rising global oil prices coupled with the inability to generate foreign capital from exports created an economic crisis in Costa Rica and by the end of 1980, the Costa Rican economy was spiraling out of control. In an attempt to stave off economic collapse, the government continued to borrow heavily from private banking institutions but this strategy only led to further debt resulting in Costa Rica having one of the world's highest debt per capita levels in the world (Hansen-Kuhn 1993). Rising interest rates, sky-rocketing inflation and a stagnating GDP from the global economic slowdown exacerbated the economic crisis for Costa Rica and on 18 September 1981, the Central Bank of Costa Rica was no longer capable of managing its national debt and suspended "all payments on the foreign debt held by commercial banks" (Clark 2001).

Unable to continue to secure loans from commercial banking institutions, Costa Rica was forced to turn to international financial institutions (IFI) for capital. In December of 1982, after two previous failed loan negotiations in 1980 and again in 1981, the Costa Rican government accepted the first of two "bridge" loans from the

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International Monetary Fund (IMF) in an effort to stimulate the economy (Carnoy and Torres 1992). Despite a concerted effort from the public and private spheres, however, these initial "loans" failed to stimulate the necessary growth Costa Rica needed to escape from the growing debt burden and economic instability underfoot. In April of 1985, in a renewed effort to stabilize the economy after the failure of the first attempt, the Costa Rican government reached terms with the World Bank and "became the first country in Central America to undergo a process of structural adjustment" (Hansen-Kuhn 1993:5). The development loans (SAL I) were designed to diversify the economy with an emphasis on foreign direct investment (FDI) and "nontraditional" exports (Miller 2012). Administered by the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the loans came with "conditionalities" that the Costa Rican government was forced to accept in order to receive the funds. In return for the aid, the "conditionalities" forced the Costa Rican government to institute a series of austerity programs designed to reduce trade tariffs, increase "non-traditional" exports, reduce public expenditures, devalue their currency and promote private enterprise.

Structural adjustment, designed to pave "the road to a new era of rapid and balanced development" in developing nations, had disastrous impacts throughout Latin America (Raymond 1992). In Costa Rica, the austerity programs hit hardest in rural and already impoverished areas. Spending in public health and education fell dramatically, virtually eliminating any investment in human capital for the Costa Rican people (Carnoy and Torres 1992; Clark 2001). In addition, under the conditions stipulated under SAL I, the primary lender, USAID, prepared a list of "nontraditional" export crops (pineapples, plants and flowers, shrimp, and fish) for the Costa Rican government that would generate

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capital from sales primarily in U.S. markets (Hansen-Kuhn 1993; Clark 2001; Miller 2012). Costa Rican farmers that chose to grow these crops were thus provided incentives of little or no export taxes and exemption from the taxes tied to the income generated from the sale of those crops. But for the small independent farmer with few resources, these incentives had disastrous consequences. In the promotion of foreign investment and private enterprise, large foreign commercial firms established "agri-business" farms and began growing crops not only for export but for local markets as well. As a result, smaller subsistence farmers were pushed into a hopeless situation, unable to compete globally or locally. Simply based on economics of scale, those who sold their crops at the local markets were unable to compete with the larger corporate enterprises. In addition, the smaller subsistence farmers and fisherman who also depended on a portion of their food production to feed their families were unable to follow the path of commercial export because the initial investment required to produce the export commodities was beyond their reach. Due to overwhelming penetration of market forces into the social relations of Costa Rican farming and fishing communities, many small producers were forced to sell their land holdings to foreign investors and become wage earners for large corporate enterprises or move altogether to another sector of the economy.

The success of the tourism industry in Costa Rica has been fueled, in large part, by the development and popularity of "ecotourism," a form of nature-based tourism that emphasizes environmental conservation, tourist education and benefits to the host community. Ecotourism experienced a "boom" in Costa Rica in 1989 as the economy began to shift from agriculture to tourism (Weinberg, Bellows and Ekster 2002). Framed as a "win-win," ecotourism promises to promote economic growth in rural impoverished

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communities while conserving the integrity of the local ecosystem and culture (Honey 2008; Horton 2009; Fennell 2015). The implementation of a development strategy focused on nature-based tourism as a "non-traditional" export (Miller 2012) enabled Costa Rica to achieve a multitude of positive changes and benefits for its citizens throughout the country. These benefits included a conservationist ethic that now permeates throughout Costa Rican culture leading to the start of recycling programs, more jobs, better training and higher incomes, an improved standard of living, and a large segment of the population being bilingual (Weinberg, Bellows and Ekster 2002:374) in addition to having "the highest literacy rate in Latin America" (Honey 2008).

Miller (2012) and Honey (2008) have suggested the ecotourism industry in Costa Rica experienced a kind of "cross-fertilization" from economic and environmental forces and galvanized as a development strategy in July of 1985 with the passing of Law No. 6990 (The Law of Incentives for Tourism Development). Although several decrees had already been passed in the 1960s and 1970s to establish tourism as an "industry" in Costa Rica (Campbell 2002), Law No. 6990 bolstered existing referendums to facilitate the continued growth of the tourism industry. Similar to laws mandated by the World Bank and USAID for the purposes of promoting and subsidizing import and export markets, this law worked to incentivize the tourism sector as a viable "nontraditional" export (Miller 2012) and as a legitimate means to generate foreign capital. The law specifically subsidized hotels, national and international air transport of tourists, aquatic transport of tourists, and vehicle rentals for tourists (Honey 2008; Miller 2012).

The tourism industry was further strengthened the following year when the Costa Rican government passed the Forest Credit Certificate as part of the Payments for

Environmental Services Program. Pressured, in part, from the conservation movement, the certificate provided "payments to farmers and landowners" for actions that facilitated the regrowth of forest land in Costa Rica (IIED, ND). By the early part of the 1980s, despite having a global reputation for progressive environmental policies passed in the 1960s, Costa Rica maintained "the highest rate of deforestation in Latin America" (Honey 2008:173). The deforestation was due, in large part, to Costa Rica's reliance on its two primary export crops at the time; coffee and beef production. Since the passing of this certificate program (and the subsequent "schemes" that followed), "forest cover has returned to over 50 per cent of the country's land area, from a low of just over 20 per cent in the 1980s" (Barton 2013).

Tourism Development in Guanacaste

Since the middle of the 1990s, Costa Rica has had an international reputation as the bastion of eco-friendly nature-based tourism development (Honey 2008; Honey, Vargas and Durham 2010; Miller 2012) and is internationally recognized as an "oasis of peace" in a region of the world that has been plagued by social and political instability over the last half century. Following the economic crisis of the 1980s that crippled national economies throughout Latin America (Schaeffer 2003), Costa Rica adopted tourism as a primary development strategy to avert further debt crisis and has since managed to reach a modest level of social and economic prosperity relative to its neighbors.

By the mid-1990s, tourism had become the dominant industry in Costa Rica and the country's largest source of foreign capital, surpassing traditional exports like coffee and bananas (Minca and Linda 2000; Iveniuk 2006; Honey 2008). Since then, the

industry has continued to prosper and expand every year in Costa Rica. In fact, the Costa Rican Tourism Board (ICT) reported record numbers of tourists in 2015, a staggering 2.66 million visitors from around the world (Dyer 2016). That figure becomes even more incredible when put into context that the total population of the country is only 4.8 million and the entire country is roughly the size of the state of West Virginia.

Due to its success, Costa Rica became the poster child for sustainable tourism development packaged within a conservationist framework. By the late 1990s, as ecotourism continued to grow in popularity and spread throughout the central and southern regions of the country, the Costa Rican government and the ICT were quick to promote ecotourism as a viable development strategy. But despite the success of ecotourism development in the central and southern areas of the country, tourism development in the north was sluggish, in part due to accessibility to the region. In an effort to address this issue, "a small group of private owners [established] a $3 million trust fund to convince the first international carrier, Delta Airlines, to begin regular service" from U.S. markets to the Daniel Oduber Quirós International Airport in Liberia in 2002 (Honey, Vargas and Durham 2010:7). With new direct access to the northern region from U.S. markets, the northern coastal region of Guanacaste exploded with surf-and-sun mass tourism and residential tourism development. As opposed to the small-scale, locally-owned tourism that had proliferated throughout the rest of Costa Rica, much of the development in the northern region of Guanacaste was driven by North American developers and investors offering resort-style hotels and all-inclusive package deals (Honey, Vargas and Durham 2010).

Tourism Development in Playa Azul

Playa Azul is a small beach community located in the southern region of Guanacaste on the Nicoya Peninsula. Like many of the communities in the northern coastal region over the last two decades, this small beach community has undergone an economic and social transformation from a small, self-reliant fishing and farming community to one that now relies almost exclusively on tourism development. Despite experiencing an explosion of recent tourist development, Guanacaste and particularly the southern region of the Nicoya Peninsula, remains one of the poorest and least developed regions in Costa Rica (CREST 2014). A vast majority of that development in Guanacaste has occurred in the northern coastal region along the Pacific coast (Honey, Vargas and Durham 2010). However, recent development is beginning to move south once again as developers visualize big returns on early investments. One of the areas in the southern end of the Nicoya Peninsula experiencing a recent boom in tourism development is Playa Azul.

Although not developed like the northern region of Guanacaste, tourism is not new to Playa Azul. This small beach town was already a popular tourist destination in the late 1990s for backpackers, surfers and other tourists who wanted an authentic "off the beaten path" experience. As development exploded in the north following the expansion of the international airport in Liberia, Playa Azul began to experience some of the residual effects of northern development as investors looking to turn a profit began to move their money south. By the mid-2000s, Playa Azul was in the midst of its own relative "boom" as small-scale development began with the construction of lodges, small villa hotels, and bars and restaurants that catered to a tourist clientele. But the global

recession of 2009-2010 brought everything to a grinding halt in Playa Azul. The lack of foreign capital due to the global crisis caused much of the tourism development to stop (Honey, Vargas and Durham 2010). By 2011, many buildings stood half built throughout the outlying neighborhoods that surround Playa Azul and "*se vende*" signs could be seen throughout the community.

As the recovery from the recession began, construction began with it, although much more slowly than before due to nervous investors unsure how long the recovery might last. In some ways, the global recession prevented this small beach community from being completely overrun by foreign investment and new tourism development. The recession and lack of pressure from foreign investors allowed Playa Azul to grow much slower than communities in the north and thus enabled Playa Azul to maintain its local culture and identity as a Costa Rican town. This slow-growth also enabled foreign residents to gradually and smoothly integrate into the community without causing major disruptions to the existing norms and values of the community. But the building and development has once again ramped up as new construction of businesses and homes has intensified over the last four years. The increase in recent development can be attributed to the "success" in the north where foreign business interests now control much of the development in the region (Honey, Vargas and Durham 2010). This dissertation examines how new tourism expansion in Playa Azul is impacting the daily lives of local community members, for better or for worse.

Purpose of Study

Playa Azul faces an uncertain future. Despite the recent growth of the tourism sector in Playa Azul and the number of foreign residents (lifestyle migrants) moving into

the community, this small beach community has maintained a reputation for being a *Tico* town. However, this community identity is facilitating the expansion of tourism development in the area as more international tourists seek to avoid the large resort experiences in the northern coastal region of Guanacaste in favor of a more "authentic" Costa Rican experience.

The natural beauty of the surrounding nature and the warm ocean surf combined with the laid back vibe of the community offers a unique opportunity for tourists to experience a slice of Costa Rican life on the beach. As a small beach community and developing tourist hotspot, the town has been successful so far in coping with the changes and challenges brought on by tourism development and the growth of foreign residents moving to Playa Azul in search of "a better way of life" (Benson and O'Reilly). However, despite being known as a laid-back, *pura vida* stress-free town, increased pressures from outside economic forces are now threatening to unravel the norms and values embedded in the social fabric of the community.

This dissertation examines the impact of tourism development on the daily lives of the residents of this small beach community. As the community continues to change under the weight of tourism development, the norms and values of the community are coming under threat as newly arriving foreign-owned business interests exert their will through economic force. This has invigorated a subtle form of resistance to develop among the local *Tico*s and the foreign residents (lifestyle migrants) in the community. For the local *Ticos,* they have begun to emphasize an *Azuleño* collective identity characterized by the cultural memory (Assman 1996) of ancestral norms and values from previous generations. I argue this collective identity not only represents a push back or

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form of resistance against economic influences challenging the existing norms and values of the community but also works to preserve the existing value system and character of the community. Moreover, the lifestyle migrants, drawn by the *pura vida* vibe and strong sense of community in Playa Azul rooted in those local values, actively engage in resistance, alongside the local *Ticos*, to maintain an existing local value system and *pura vida* vibe of the community. I contend the value system rooted in a *pura vida* mindset works to reinforce the foundation of a multicultural community based on humility, acceptance and mutual respect.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND DATA

Well, brother, sometimes you just have to put it in the wind.
~ Carlos[6]

Prior to this research, I had never been to Costa Rica. When I arrived in August 2015 and stepped out of the airport for the first time into the sea of taxi drivers and shuttle busses in the loading and unloading area, I realized very quickly I had no idea what to do next. Although I was confident that I could find my way around with not much issue, I worried my lack of practical fieldwork experience would ultimately prevent the research from being finished. As I reflect on my early experiences in the field and how I came to "discover" Playa Azul and the wonderful people that make up that community, I am forced to acknowledge the bit of "dumb luck" I experienced along the way. The stories are too numerous to share here but I cannot overlook the fact that I was, on several occasions, the beneficiary of that old saying, "being in the right place at the right time" or experiencing what Nuñez (1989) refers to as "accidental discoveries." Whether it was a casual conversation with a friend or taxi driver or missing a bus or noting a particular happening, what appeared to be insignificant in the moment turned out to be pivotal moments in the research.

This research follows a flexible ethnographic research design whereby the design, data collection and analysis are interconnected and overlapping (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). To segment or differentiate aspects of the research is to trivialize the research and the ethnographic process. Atkinson (2015) situates ethnography within

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[6] Carlos is a 36 year old *Azuleño*. He is fluent in three languages and lived in Europe for five years prior to returning to Playa Azul. Today, he works as a surf instructor, tour guide and occasionally as a bartender.

engagement and participation of a particular social setting in order to understand the "modes of order and action" embedded within that setting. To achieve this end, the setting, as an active agent, must be allowed to dictate the flow and direction of the research and the researcher must adapt to any unforeseen issues the setting might present (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Atkinson 2015; Hammersley 2018). It is in this sense then that ethnographic research design, data collection and analysis occur almost simultaneously as the research process follows the ebbs and flows of the setting. The writing component and analysis of this study, most closely understood as "public ethnography" (Adler 2008), utilizes personal experience to inform the research *process* (Berg 2007) and expresses that through a language and style accessible beyond the academy.

"Sometimes, You Just Have to Put It in the Wind" – Choosing the Research Site

In many ways, the decision to make Playa Azul was one of being in the right place at the right time. I had enrolled in a language school there and after several mishaps and fortuitous accidents (Nuñez1989), I decided to extend my stay in Playa Azul to determine the plausibility of conducting my research there. Playa Azul ultimately presented the unique opportunity to study the impacts of tourism on members of the community in the early stages of development as the site continues to transition from a small tourist destination to one almost wholly reliant on tourism development. In particular, Playa Azul offered the opportunity to understand how perceived changes in the social relations of the community affect or activate collective identity construction and boundary processes, areas of research Pachucki, Pendergrass and Lamont (2007) suggest need to be extended within the collective identity literature. In addition, these

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same processes of early development and changing social dynamics also provided an opportunity to understand the importance of place and the motivations for lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). Both of these research goals provide contributions to the literature. But in the end, the most important aspect of the research and the reason this site was chosen for research was because it provided the opportunity to understand how community members make sense of and cope with early stages of tourism development.

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Carlos was one of the first people I had met in Playa Azul and acted as an unofficial "sponsor" (Adler and Adler 2002) in the early stages of the research. Over the first couple of months, he introduced me to people in the community and recommended other people I should seek out for the research. We had met during my first week in Playa Azul. I had taken a surf lesson with Carlos and we shared a few laughs discussing some of my early experiences in Costa Rica and some of my difficulties with adjusting to life there. He worked as a surf instructor at one of the "surf schools" on the beach and every morning before he started work, which entailed sitting on a large wooden bench with friends in the shade of the mangrove and waiting for tourists wanting a surf lesson, he would arrive at the beachfront restaurants next to the surf school and have a cup of coffee. During my first couple of months in Playa Azul, I made it a point to go to the beach early in the morning a few times a week to have a cup of coffee and talk with him. We would talk about mundane happenings around town and joke about the slow pace of daily life in Playa Azul compared to the stress and on-the-go lifestyle common in "first-world" countries (he had lived in Europe for about 5 years). These morning conversations

not only helped to gain a general understanding of daily life in Playa Azul but they also helped to establish friendships with members of the local community working in tourism on the beach.

One morning, I was sitting with a few of the surf instructors on the bench drinking coffee and talking about surfing and the changing surf conditions along the beach. A couple of the guys were pointing to the ocean and explaining how much the surf had changed since the "big earthquake" of 2012. On September 5, a large 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck the southern region of the Nicoya peninsula and pushed a section of the sea floor out of the water inside the bay directly in front of town. A long, rocky jetty (what the locals refer to as "the reef") now shoots out of the water about a half mile out during low-tide. The jetty runs at a 45 degree angle away from the beach on the northern end and runs about a mile into the bay, pocketing Playa Azul inside a crescent shaped cove.

As they explained the changes to the local geography and the impact of those changes on the local surf conditions, they began telling stories of big waves and long rides along surf breaks that no longer existed. They explained that the earthquake pushed the sea floor up and "the reef" now prevents large swell from entering the bay, thus limiting large waves for surfing. The stories of changing surf conditions soon turned to stories from their childhood in Playa Azul as they pointed to restaurants where houses once stood and told stories about people they knew who once lived there. As they continued to reminisce about their childhood and tell stories of change and development in the community, I wondered what Playa Azul might look like twenty years into the future or more importantly for them, how they would fit into that future world. "Where

will the first big resort be built here?" I asked jokingly, pointing to the neighboring community sitting on the beach and suggesting a potential tear-down was imminent. They debated for a moment, taking turns explaining why a big resort would never be built in Playa Azul. Despite having minor disagreements on some of the details, they all agreed that Playa Azul was not the kind of town that would permit a resort to be built there. A few tourists arrived to inquire about lessons and Sergio stepped up to answer questions and try to secure a lesson. Carlos, Victor and I continued to sip our coffee and stare out at the ocean. As the group of tourists walked away, opting for one of the other surf schools on the beach, they were overheard discussing price disparities between schools. As they walked away, Carlos shook his head and commented under his breath, "The prices are all the same." They explained this kind of thing happened all the time as tourists looked for the best deals on the beach.

At the time, there were four surf schools on the beach but two more were opening soon and a fishing and kayaking rental business was expanding and adding surfing to the list of tourist services they provided. That would make seven surf schools in the span of 300 yards. I asked the guys if they worried about saturation on the beach or the possibility of not having enough tourists to stay in business. Carlos looked over at the bars and restaurants for a moment, then turned his gaze down the beach toward the palm trees that lined the beach at the north end of town and then turned back to the ocean. Leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, he took a sip from his coffee and watched the waves roll in and crash onto the beach in front of us. After thinking about the question for a moment, he smiled, leaned back against the bench and said calmly, "Well, brother, sometimes you just have to put it in the wind."

I thought a lot about that statement in the following days and how it related to the research. It reminded me of Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) approach to ethnographic research in terms of allowing the setting to determine the course of the research. As time passed and my integration into the community increased, I learned to worry less about "the research process" and simply went where the field took me and "put it in the wind."

Why Ethnography

There is a long-standing debate concerning what qualifies as ethnography (for full discussion, see Adler 2008) and how ethnography should be conducted (Goffman 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Wolcott 1995; Brewer 2000; Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011; Atkinson 2015; Hammersley 2018). The general agreement throughout the literature is that ethnography ultimately attempts to gain an understanding of social reality and the everyday lives and experiences of actors operating within a particular community or setting through the active engagement and participation of the researcher. With the focus of this research trying to understand how residents of Playa Azul make sense of their world in the face of an expanding tourism market and how they coped with perceived changes to the community, I chose to employ an ethnographic approach for this research.

Utilizing an ethnographic research approach afforded the research the ability to address some of the discrepancies in the first-hand accounts given through the interview process. The participant observation aspect of the research provided a separate lens by which to analyze the happenings in the community. In addition, because I wanted to understand how residents made sense of daily life in Playa Azul, I saw it as imperative I

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experience daily life as well as best I could from the perspective of someone who lives in the community. I do not dismiss interview data although I was aware of the limited scope of understanding a reliance on interviews only would provide given my research endeavor. Atkinson argues that interviews only provide a limited understanding of community dynamics because they tend to rely on a few, more boisterous members of the community and deny "any chance of real attention to social action and social organization" (2015:54). Emerson, Fretz and Shaw suggest full immersion into a particular community enables the ethnographer to learn "what is required to become a member of that world and to experience events and meanings in ways that approximate *members' experiences*" (emphasis in original) (2011:3). Ethnography, as a practice of immersion and engagement, enabled me to understand the nuances of everyday life from the perspective of the residents living in Playa Azul and provided a more thorough understanding of the social relations, social order, routines and rituals embedded within the community (Snow, Morrill and Andersen 2003; Atkinson 2015). In a similar vein, Berg (2007) argues an ethnographic approach provides an experiential understanding of the norms and values of a particular research site and provides insight into how members of a community navigate their daily lives.

The Research Design

The study of tourism and its impacts on host communities is not new. The study of tourism has been a central theme in anthropology since the 1950s although it is only recently that the "field" has become "respectable" as an area of study (Nuñez 1989). Within the field of sociology however, there is a glaring lack of research on tourism and the effect of tourism on local communities and social relations within those communities.

Early studies in the study of tourism examining the impacts of tourism on host communities focused the investigation and analysis solely on members of the host community (Nuñez 1989). More recently, however, scholars have suggested that failing to take into account the tourists as an active agent in this process produces a limited understanding of the phenomenon (Nuñez 1989; Stronza 2001; Gmelch 2010). The design of this study addresses this challenge of tourism research incorporating a portion of the research to understanding tourists' motivations, behaviors and perceptions during their stay in Playa Azul.

This study employed an ethnographic research design carried out over three distinct stages of research. At its core, the design of the research required an active engagement and participation in the day-to-day affairs in Playa Azul over the course of 17 months in order to understand how an expanding tourist market in the area is impacting community cohesion and the day-to-day lives of the residents of Playa Azul. But the "design" for this research or how it would be executed was not fully developed until several weeks after my arrival in the Playa Azul and the site was chosen. When I landed in Costa Rica, I entered the field with what I called "an open research design" that avoided "predetermined" courses of action based on the idea that "the very nature of ethnographic fieldwork changes" over the course of the research (Hammersley 2018:3). Because each social setting is unique and presents its own sets of challenges and issues, I felt it was important to remain flexible with my approach. Therefore, developing a detailed research plan prior to my arrival seemed somewhat "superfluous" and unnecessary (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Brewer 2000; Atkinson 2015).

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Regardless of the kind of research design I would ultimately implement, I felt my lack of fluency in Spanish stood as a major obstacle in successfully completing the research. Despite having taken several Spanish language courses during my undergraduate study, I still felt I lacked the command of the language necessary to conduct this type of research without the use of a translator. So following the recommendation of a member of my dissertation committee, I enrolled in the Spanish language immersion program located in Playa Azul. As it turned out, enrolling in the language program had a profound effect on the research. For starters, networking through contacts made in the language school offered numerous entry points into the neighboring communities. In addition, not only did the program provide the language training necessary to conduct the research but equally as important, it enabled me to "case" the area in and around Playa Azul by allowing research questions to develop through conversations and experiences in the site that ultimately determined "the feasibility of carrying out research there" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:38). So, in this sense, not yet having a predetermined research site upon my arrival and selecting the site afterward was, in essence, part of the design for ethnographic research (Ragin 1994; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Atkinson 2015).

The Language School

I enrolled in a 9-week Spanish language immersion program in Playa Azul with the intention of taking the language classes prior to engaging in any formal research. The program consisted of 4 hours of language training Monday through Friday and a "home-stay" component where I stayed with a host family. The home-stay came with an additional charge on top of the base tuition cost but provided a unique opportunity to

practice Spanish within a natural, everyday conversational setting in addition to learn some of the norms and customs of local Costa Rican culture.

Because it was late August when I enrolled, what is considered the low season (also called the "rainy season" or "green season") for tourist travel throughout Guanacaste due to the almost continuous rain, the language school, Playa Azul International Language School (PAILS), was offering its yearly "low-season" enrollment special. Every year during the low-season, between July – November, in an effort to entice students to travel to Playa Azul, PAILS has a sign up special offering three weeks of language instruction for the cost of two weeks with the home-stay option. Having limited funds to conduct this research, I viewed the opportunity to further develop my language skills as an enormous benefit to the research at the time. I strategized that more extensive language training might potentially off-set my time in the field and thus, alleviate some of the stress on my already stretched budget.

The Three Stages of Research

The fieldwork for this dissertation was conducted over 17 months (505 days), a process that included working and living in the community and participating in the community action events. As a general rule, Pereiro (2010) suggests spending "at least 1 year" in the "field' provides ample opportunity to document and gain a general understanding of the rituals and customs of a local community. The general design was a three stage approach designed to illuminate unique processes, perspectives and behaviors within different segments of the community. The first stage (exploratory or tourist stage) focused on tourists behaviors and perceptions, the second (immersion or resident stage) focused on understanding the day-to-day lives within the larger community and the third

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stage (triangulation or research stage) functioned as the triangulation component whereby I discussed my findings with members of the community for clarification purposes. In an effort to overcome obvious obstacles of being viewed as a tourist and "outsider" (the role I occupied during the exploratory stage of the research), I moved into one of the surrounding neighborhoods (the largest of the surrounding neighborhoods and where many of the local community lived). This research design was purposeful and constructed as I reflected on my fieldnotes and experiences during what became the first stage of fieldwork.

The general strategy of the design was to overcome the issue of being viewed as a tourist. After reflecting on my experiences and observations (during what became stage 1 or the exploratory stage), I realized the analysis to that point was flawed, partial, and incomplete. In order to fully understand life in Playa Azul, I needed to fully immerse myself in the life of the local community as best I could. The second stage was developed to facilitate full participation throughout the community. The design worked to establish more than mere presence in the field by promoting a level of engagement and participation that allowed me to observe and experience (physically, intellectually and emotionally) the full range of senses "that everyday social actors [use] to make sense of themselves, others and the world about them" (Atkinson 2015:35). The third stage of the research worked to verify claims and validate conclusions drawn from the research (Brewer 2000).

The Exploratory Stage (Tourist Stage)

The exploratory stage or "tourist" stage of the research was conducted over a 7 month period between August 2015 and March 2016 and functioned as the initial

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"casing" process in the early stages of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). By "casing" the town, I was able to determine "the feasibility of carrying out research there" by allowing research questions to develop through conversations and experiences with community members in the site (1995:38). During the casing stage of the research, I took detailed notes and worked to establish relationships and develop rapport with local residents in order to identify key informants and "gain entry" into the community. Moreover, this process allowed social patterns and behaviors within the town to become evident and facilitated in identifying issues for purposes of study.

In terms of "positionality" within this stage of the research, my identity or role occupied within the research was that of a "tourist." As a tourist, all of my observations and participation within the community occurred in or near the "center" of town and I participated in activities and behaviors normally engaged in by tourists. During this stage of the research, I also lived in a local hostel, interacting daily with tourists and having daily discussions with tourists about their experiences in Playa Azul and other parts of Costa Rica during their travel.

This stage of the research enabled full immersion into the tourist community as I was able to experience Playa Azul as a tourist. I was also viewed as a tourist and an "outsider" by members of the local community, especially the *Ticos*, which provided additional insight into community relationships between local members of the community and tourists. Nuñez (1989) contends being viewed as a tourist is a problem all ethnographers (who research tourism) deal with as they enter the field. Although I was taking detailed notes throughout this time, my focus was on establishing relationships with local members of the community. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest establishing

more personal relationships beyond simply interviewer/interviewee relationships can lead to more rich interviews.

It was during this time that I also participated in the language training at PAILS. The language school experience was invaluable to the research beyond the language training. During the 9 weeks of language instruction at the school, I was able to establish numerous contacts throughout the community (instructors and other community members) as well as participate in numerous community events/activities organized by the school (beach clean-up, community soccer matches, cultural cooking classes, dance classes, etc.). My host family, being from Playa Azul, also provided invaluable information and detailed stories about the history and development of Playa Azul.

The exploratory stage also enabled me to get a better understanding of the tourist experience over a long period of time. Goffman (1990) contends social life can be reduced to performances played by actors for the benefit of an audience within a particular setting. The exploratory stage provided the opportunity to witness the frontstage performances of the host community. The frontstage performances were played out by *Ticos* and foreign residents alike (this process will be discussed in detail in the next chapter) for the benefit of the tourists and other members of the community. In addition, as a "long-term" tourist (what the locals call tourists that stay for a long period of time, usually beyond a month, but have no intention of staying permanently), I had the opportunity to watch the "setting" repeatedly reset as new tourists entered the community.

Toward the end of this stage of the research, I took the opportunity to manage a local hostel for two months while the owners traveled. This experience of working in

Playa Azul functioned as my first steps toward immersion into the community as locals began to see me more a working resident and less as a tourist. This stage of the research ended in March 2015 when I returned to the United States. Leaving at this stage of the research offered some clarity in the research and allowed for reflection on what direction the research should take, what needed to be reworked and what new techniques could be incorporated to generate new data.

The Immersion Stage (Resident Stage)

The immersion stage or "resident stage" of the research was conducted over a period of 10 months between August 2016 and June 2017 and functioned as the participation and engagement stage of the research. During the exploratory stage, I recognized my observations and participation were limited to the tourist sector of town and my engagement was primarily with tourists. To address the issue, I modified the research slightly and developed a new strategy that would foster direct engagement with members within the community. Upon my return to Playa Azul in August 2016, I moved with three friends from the community to one of the nearby neighborhoods as opposed to moving back to the hostel in the center of town. The neighborhood was the largest of the five neighborhoods that made up Playa Azul and the closest of the three on the north end of town. Walking from my front door to the center of town took about 15 minutes. Of the four neighborhoods outside of the center, this neighborhood was the most diverse (possibly because it was the closest to town). Much of the new housing development in Playa Azul was occurring in this neighborhood, which was leading to changing community dynamics and aesthetics in the neighborhood.

During this stage of the research, as my presence and visibility in the community increased, my status changed from an "outsider" position as a tourist to one that Naples (2003) refers to as a "conditional insider" (foreign resident). The subtle change in social status provided access to the informal "backstage" (Goffman 1990), where community members spoke and behaved more freely about their feelings and attitudes about tourism and the issues associated with tourism development. Getting "backstage" was vital to the research and provided insight that would not have been possible otherwise (Nuñez 1989). In addition to being present for candid conversations, part of the "backstage" experience was also being granted access to community meetings among business owners in Playa Azul concerning how the community should develop going forward. As mentioned above, Playa Azul is developing quickly and the community is split about how they would like to see Playa Azul grow in the future.

During this stage of the research, I also got a job working in a small sandwich shop in the center of town. The sandwich shop catered primarily to tourists and other residents working in tourism businesses in the center of town. Following my experience of managing a hostel, this experience reinforced my status as a resident in the community. In addition, this work experience coupled with living in one of the surrounding neighborhoods provided unique opportunities to experience life beyond a tourist experience and helped gain a deeper understanding of "the cultural codings and representations that are attached to places, and the cultural practices that are used to accomplish those values and meanings" (Atkinson 2015:133).

The Triangulation Stage (Reflection Stage)

The triangulation stage or "reflection stage" lasted 10 days. I returned to Playa Azul in March of 2018 for the purposes of respondent verification or clarification of some of the details that emerged in the research. I thought it was important to cross-check some of the claims made during the research with trusted individuals in the community, not only for verification of claims but also some validation on my findings. Although Hammersley and Atkinson acknowledge there are always possibilities the verification process can lead to further obfuscation and misleading claims, they nevertheless argue triangulating or verifying data ultimately "gives added depth to the description of the social meanings involved in the setting" (1995:231). In addition, I wanted maintain a certain level of transparency with key informants and some residents of Playa Azul concerning the conclusions drawn from my study. They had been honest and open with the sharing of their experiences in the community. I felt the least I could do was to be honest and open about my findings.

Data Collection

The research for this dissertation was conducted over a span of 32 months from beginning to end between August 2015 and March 2018. The fieldwork was conducted in three stages totaling 17 months living and working in Playa Azul and utilized participant observation field methods including engagement in local community activities and maintaining a job in the community, detailed field notes, 67 semi-structured interviews and countless hours of "unofficial" interviews and conversations with residents and tourists visiting Playa Azul. In order to avoid ethical issues (Li 2008) concerning the small population of the town and threat that members of the community might talk to

each other based on perceived gossip (Bell 1994; Li 2008), I disclosed early in my field work that I was there to conduct research on the impacts of tourism on the day-to-day lives of people in the community. In addition to the fieldwork, the research also utilized a triangulation component (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Brewer 2000) whereby I returned to Costa Rica following the conclusion of fieldwork and shared my initial analysis of the data with key informants and several other residents of Playa Azul. The sharing of the analysis served two primary objectives; to remain transparent with key informants and residents of Playa Azul concerning the conclusions drawn from my study and to get "respondent validation" (Brewer 2000) in the form of verification of details and accounts within the data.

Participant Observation and Community Engagement

Similar to DeLyser (1999), many of the insights produced in this dissertation are the result of being intimately connected to the community I studied. Participant observation is an essential component of ethnographic research (Atkinson 2015; Hammersley 2018) and an effective strategy for gaining an understanding of community life on a day-today basis. Indeed, Atkinson (2015) argues without participatory engagement with the research setting, the research entirely misses the point of the ethnographic endeavor. The real benefit of participant observation that sets this kind of research apart from other forms of social research is the experiential understanding of a particular setting beyond the narratives provided by interview participants. As a participant in the community, I volunteered in community sponsored events like beach clean-ups and a fund-raising event for the local public elementary school and participated in social activities in the community like beach soccer and volleyball games. I also

participated in community functions like attending local soccer matches and local concerts, hanging out with friends in local restaurants and bars and lounging at one of the organized bonfires on the beach. I also took a job in a sandwich shop in the center of town (owned by two expats from the United States) during the high season (November 2016 – March 2017). These experiences allowed me to "enter into [the] world" of the resident and experience that world by using my "full range of senses" to better understand the norms and values, and ultimately the social order, embedded within this particular community.

Interviews

I conducted 67 "official" interviews with residents and tourists of Playa Azul. The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 2 hours and the general structure of the interviews was casual and conversational in tone. The semi-structured conversational tone of the interviews allowed the interview participants freedom to elaborate of their responses and in many ways, dictate the flow of the interviews. Allowing the respondent to dictate the flow and direction of the interview offered the opportunity for digressions which provided significant insight into the experiences of the interview participants and daily life in Playa Azul. Questions centered around life in Playa Azul, changes in the community, work and home life and their thoughts about tourism development.

For purposes of comfort, I suggested the interview participants determine where the interviews took place. Most of the interviews were conducted in a restaurant or beach bar over a cup of coffee. Some of the resident interviews (*Ticos* and foreigners) were also conducted in their homes. Others were conducted at their place of employment (because

the town is so small, some of the interviews were conducted in one of the beach bars or restaurants that doubled as their place of employment).

The interviews focused on everyday happenings and life in Playa Azul. Although I wanted to know about life in Playa Azul, I started each interview with "throw-away questions" (Berg 2007) to ease any tension or stress the respondent might have been experiencing. The throw-away questions were designed to establish a certain level of comfort and rapport with the respondent and to assuage any nervousness that might have been present prior to the initiation of the interview (Berg 2007). An example of a throw-away question was asking how the respondent spent their day prior to the interview or where I might get a good plate of *gallo pinto* in town.[7] Despite being "throw-away" questions, they often provided valuable information about community life and daily experiences in Playa Azul. In fact, one throw-away question in particular, ("What is the essence of *pura vida*?") turned out to be instrumental to the research. In addition, by approaching the interview as a casual conversation rather than a formal interview (despite there being an audio recorder clearly visible), over the course of the interview, the interview participants appeared to become more relaxed and open with their answers and stories. Throughout the interview, throw-away questions were mixed with essential questions in order to maintain a general energy level conducive to talking casually.

Of the 67 interviews, 54 were recorded on an Olympus audio recorder and 3 were recorded using an iPhone recording app. Of the 10 unrecorded interviews, 7 interview respondents specifically requested not to be recorded and 3 interviews were conducted

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[7] *Gallo pinto* is a traditional Costa Rican breakfast dish consisting of rice, black beans tossed with onions and red peppers, a fried egg and tortilla (or toast). The dish is called *gallo pinto* (spotted rooster) because of the color scheme of the dish.

TABLE 2 – Age and Gender Characteristics of Interview Participants

	Total	Male	Average Age	Age Range	Female	Average Age	Age Range
Azuleños	16	13	36	21-55	3	45	28-68
Foreign Ticos	13	11	30	20-68	2	29	28-30
Foreign Residents	26	15	45	24-66	11	32	22-42
Long-Term Tourists	3	1	24	24	2	21	21-21
Tourists	9	7	39	25-32	2	23	23-23
Totals	**67**	**47**			**20**		

spontaneously and unscheduled (I did not have a recording device with me). Of the 7 interviews that requested not to be recorded, 4 were *Azuleños* (2 men and 2 women) and 3 (all 3 were men) were foreign residents of Playa Azul. Although only one person said directly why they did not want to be recorded during the interview (claimed to be shy), I suspect the requests were made due to fears that something they said might be linked back to them or taken out of context. Several people who agreed to be recorded did express some concern about issues of anonymity and issues associated with privacy in a town this size. In addition, 59 of the 67 the interviews were conducted in English. The other 8 interviews were conducted in Spanish (in each case, the interview respondent brought a friend to the interview to act as the translator).

In addition, of the 67 interviews, 16 were Azuleños, 13 were foreign *Tico* residents, 26 were foreign residents, 3 were long-term seasonal tourists and 9 were tourists. Of the 67 interviews, 47 were male with an overall average age of about 35 years old. The 20 female interview respondents who participated in this study had an average age of 30 years old. Of the 9 tourists, 8 were tourists with stays in Playa Azul longer than 15 days (the one outlier requested to be interviewed after his friend participated in an interview).

Field Notes

Detailed fieldnotes were recorded throughout the fieldwork process. Notes were also taken before and after each interview describing the location of the interview as well as the respondent's demeanor and behavior during the interview. These notes were not intended to be included in this document but were used to gauge how well or poorly the interview went depending on location. Relating back to the above discussion of "thick description", the purpose was not to provide "descriptive detail" for purposes of aesthetics but rather to describe the "modes of order and action" to better understand the "process of becoming" embedded in the place (Atkinson 2015) (this discussion of place and its influence on behavior will be discussed further in chapter 4).

Interview Sample

I used a "loose" snowball sample to acquire the interviews for this research. Through contacts I made in town as well as through the language school, I was able to "gain entry" into the community and secure interviews through their "sponsorship" (Adler and Adler 2002). During the second stage of the research (immersion stage), interviews also came easier as I became acquainted with more people in the community. The move from the center to the neighborhood increased the success rate of "cold" walk-up interviews.

Institutional Review Board

I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Oregon on 14 August, 2015 and followed the research protocols mandated by the university and the IRB. This included acquiring consent and providing full disclosure of

the research prior to conducting interviews, changing the names of research interviewees and the name of the town in order to maintain anonymity and protect the identity of research participants and storing audio recorded interviews on a password-protected external hard-drive.

Issues and Bias

I encountered several obstacles early in the research process. An initial problem that forced me to rethink my approach (and ultimately develop a three tiered approach) was simply getting locals to talk with me about their feelings and experiences. Initially, people were stand-offish because they assumed I was another developer from the U.S. there to collect data for future use in a business venture. In fact, my notes indicated several occasions when I was asked what kind of business I was going to open.

Cultural obstacles of how Costa Ricans conceptualize time also created issues early in the research. At the language school, new students were encouraged to attend an orientation on the Sunday evening before their first class Monday morning. As part of the orientation, students were given a physical tour of Playa Azul and a "social" or "cultural" tour of the community. One of the first things were told was "not to get angry or have hurt feelings if someone shows up to a meeting late." They went on to explain that time is viewed differently in Costa Rica, so if we had a set time "to meet at 6, the other person (if they were *Tico*) would arrive sometime around 6:30 or 7." The instructor then explained the idea of *pura vida* and really tried to convey that time moves slower in Costa Rica (within social settings). This created several early setbacks because people would show up very late to an interview or not arrive at all because "the waves were too good" that day.

I was also warned by a faculty member at the language school that I needed to remain vigilant with my research when interviewing people in town, especially *Ticos*. He told me that *Ticos* might be more apt to provide information and answers to questions that they thought I might want to hear. He explained that the motivation was not to deceive or mislead but rather to be helpful and supportive. He explained that in areas like Playa Azul where the idea of *pura vida* is such a big part of the social fabric, contradiction and confrontation is avoided at all costs. He explained it was only in extreme circumstances that *Ticos* publicly display feelings of anger or confrontation. He explained it this way, "Suppose you want to open a store here that sells only big jackets, socks and other warm clothes and you asked a local what they thought about that. They would tell you it is a great idea because to tell you it's a stupid idea would not be very *pura vida*."

On the flip-side of that dynamic, there were also several people (*Ticos*) who refused to talk with me at all about the research. This group of individuals was small but almost hostile toward me once they found out my purpose in Playa Azul. On one occasion, a friend suggested I find a woman named "Lisa" to speak with because she would "have a lot to say" about tourism in Playa Azul. My friend told me she was a bartender at one of the bars, so I went to see her there. When I arrived, I introduced myself and told her the purpose of my visit. She immediately responded, "I know who you are and I know why you're here. I'm interested to speaking with you." When I asked why she did not want to speak with me, mostly from shock, she responded, "You can ask. But I don't want to be in your study. *Pura vida*." And with that, I left. The situation was

explained to me later that some *Ticos* in the community saw me as a rich *gringo* down there to study and further exploit Costa Ricans.

There was also the possibility of becoming too engaged with the community, what is commonly referred to as "going native." The idea is that the researcher becomes so immersed in the field site that the research process becomes abandoned or "flawed." I recognized this as possibility early in the research and I think that early recognition allowed for a certain level of detachment during the early stages of the research. As the research continued to develop and I moved to the neighborhood, there were also constant reminders that despite feeling comfortable and "at home" in the community, not speaking Spanish fluently and some community members refusing to talk with me at all to avoid "the sneaky interview" worked to remind me of my "outsider" status.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Study

At its core, ethnographic research should attempt to get backstage, beyond the "constructed" performances of social actors to better understand "how people lead their lives, how they carry out their daily rounds of activities" and how they find meaningful experiences in their lives (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011). In addition to getting backstage, Nuñez (1989) suggests it is equally important to understand the perspectives and experiences of the "audience" to understand the full spectrum of the setting. This aspect represents its primary strength of the research. In both stages of the fieldwork, I established a relative level of rapport within each community that enabled a level of engagement beyond the superficial, providing a general understanding of everyday life in Playa Azul. In my stay, I was able to participate in the lives of residents and tourists, *Ticos* and foreign residents, to hear their stories and observe life as it happened. I saw the

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good, the bad and the ugly and saw life in paradise for what it was; people simply living their lives and trying to make sense of the world as it changed around them. I shared in the beauty of Playa Azul, I participated in the construction of that beauty (beach clean-ups, community meetings and social interactions) and I saw and heard things tourists rarely, if ever, see or hear.

The primary limitation of this research was my lack of fluency in the language. Despite gaining access to numerous social circles throughout the community, my inability to converse fluently in Spanish limited the participant pool to those primarily working in the tourist sector. I was able to interview others in the community through the contacts I established but, by and large, those interviews were more difficult to secure and even more difficult to conduct. I can only speculate here but this might explain why, on several occasions, interview appointments were ignored or disregarded by a potential interview respondent.

My lack of fluency on Spanish also hindered my ability to fully grasp the cultural connotations of many expressions throughout the course of the day. My lack of fluency in Spanish (and particularly *Tico* Spanish) at times prevented a full and nuanced understanding of particular social situations and perspective thus limiting the potential richness of the analysis.

Future Research

Future research might build on this project by situating these findings within the Tourism Area Life Cycle model (TALC) proposed by Richard Butler (2004; 2006). Originally developed in 1980, Butler's model is highly influenced by cautionary platform thinking, challenging existing modernization theory development models promoting mass

tourism as a key or "trigger" for successful development and growth. Butler argues tourist destinations develop through a series of stages similar to Rostow's (1960) modernization theory stages-of-growth model. However, instead of successful development, Butler contends tourist destinations experience growth until a point of "stagnation" (stagnation stage) before ultimately reaching the "decline stage". Because the model is designed to measure the impact of tourism development in relation to the carrying-capacity of a determined tourist site, applications of TALC have been overwhelmingly statistical analyses using large data sets looking at tourist numbers, resource use, ecological degradation, and other diagnostic research (Lagiewski 2006). Future research in this area could use qualitative data to understand how local populations understand their lived experience within different stages of the model, an area of research in need of attention and a new application for a model utilized across several disciplines.

Summary

This dissertation attempts to understand how the increased presence of tourism development and outside influences are impacting the day-to-day lives of residents living in this small beach community. Through participant observation, in-depth interviews, detailed field notes and extensive fieldwork consisting of living and working in the community over a period of 17 months, I was able to gain a general understanding of the community from the perspective of a resident and better understand the norms and values, and ultimately the social order, embedded within this community. In the analysis that follows, I will show how the existence of a strong collective conscience rooted in a

localized form of *pura vida* has worked to galvanize the community in resistance against

challenges to the existing social order and values of the community.

CHAPTER III

BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT:
PURA VIDA AND PERFORMANCE IN PLAYA AZUL

Pura vida means for me, like…OK, November, you know, when the winter starts changing to summer. Pura vida is that summer breeze you feel on your face when you just wake up and you feel the sunshine. Fuck, man. You put on your flip flops, board shorts, t-shirt if you want and if not, nah, going to the beach and climbing a tree for a coconut, watching horses run on the beach, you watch dogs and cows and horses everywhere. Pura vida means you are free, even the animals are free. Everybody is smiling and everybody is happy. Pura vida is Playa Azul.
~ Rodrigo[8]

Pure life (pura vida) doesn't mean anything in English or Spanish. It doesn't mean anything! But for us (Ticos), Pura vida means the way we live. It means the way Costa Ricans feel life.
~ Antonio[9]

Introduction

This chapter examines the influence of *pura vida*, a cultural colloquialism in Costa Rica, on daily life in Playa Azul. In particular, I examine how *pura vida* is performed by locals and foreign residents and how those performances work to shape the local culture and codes of conduct in Playa Azul and ultimately maintain community bonds. In doing so, this chapter attempts to provide a glimpse of daily life in Playa Azul by illustrating how deeply the idea of *pura vida* is ingrained into the local culture.

Breathe In, Breathe Out…

We had already been walking for about an hour and although it was late in the day, the afternoon was still hot. Our biggest concern, other than the heat and mosquitos, was that we didn't have any water and the bike was getting heavy. Max and I had rented

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[8] Rodrigo is a 29 year old *Azuleño*. Although he was born in San Jose, he has lived in Playa Azul since he was 4 years old. He owns a bar popular with tourist and *Ticos* in Playa Azul.
[9] Antonio is a 36 year old *Azuleño*. He is has lived in Playa Azul his entire life. He owns a small business in Playa Azul.

some bikes in town and spent the day at a nearby beach known for its waves, white sand, crystal blue water and the fact that a famous American movie star owned a very large mansion overlooking the beach. It was one of those kinds of uninhabited beaches a person might see on a postcard in an airport or a souvenir shop. With the exception of the palm trees, the beach was empty and buttressed on both ends by rocky cliffs, giving the beach the feel of complete isolation.

We had left early that morning in order to beat the afternoon heat on our long ride to the beach. Although the beach was commonly described as "8 kilometers" from town, the roads getting there snaked through a labyrinth of open farmland and thick jungle that added another 6 kilometers to the trek. The roads were dirt and at times, treacherous, due to the holes and thousands of baseball sized stones that covered the roads. When passing through the farmland areas, the roads were wide and lined with trees running down the side of the road giving the appearance of fencing and providing an occasional oasis of shade. But when passing through the jungle areas, however, the foliage was thick and overgrown causing the road to narrow at some points no wider than a small car, the holes in the road got deeper and the mosquitoes seemed more aggressive. At these times, under the canopy of the trees, there was a reprieve from the sun but the pace was slow and the mosquitoes were swarming.

A large part of the beauty of this beach is the fact that it is so secluded. There is no easy way to get there. In fact, on my first trip to this beach a couple of months prior, I was given quick instructions by a local friend on how to get there and what I should expect on the way. "After you cross the river, you're going to be on a little dirt road in the jungle," he told me. "There's a river? What river?" I asked. "Yeah but it's pretty

shallow and the crocs are only there at night. Don't worry about them anyway. They're small. After you cross the river, the road will have three big hills. On the last hill, there will be a large rope that crosses over the road. If you don't see the rope, you crossed the river at the wrong spot. That's how you know you're on the right road. When you pass the rope, there's a small house to the right side. Go fast right there because there's lots of big dogs" he said laughing. The house was a small farmhouse overlooking the field below and like all the houses in secluded areas like this, there were several large dogs on the property. By his demeanor, I understood they were like most dogs in the area. They tend to charge out to the road, snarling with teeth showing and barking. They very rarely bite but it can be quite scary. "Ride down that road until you see the pochote tree on the left (the pochote tree is common in this area of Costa Rica and unmistakable because of the large spikes that grow up the trunk of the tree). Turn left on that road. You're going to feel like you're lost but that's the right way."

Max was visiting a friend who had recently moved to Playa Azul from Germany. Max had arrived from Germany just a few days prior and like most new arrivals at this time of the year, he was having difficulty adjusting to the heat and constant harassment from mosquitos. We stayed at the beach until the afternoon sun relented, then jumped on the bikes and started on our long ride back to Playa Azul. We had ridden about a kilometer when we came to the first of three hills near the farmhouse. There were no dogs, so we crossed the over the hill as quickly as we could manage. As we started down the backside of the hill, I yelled "Peddle! Peddle! Use the momentum down the hill to build up some speed! It's the only breeze we're going to get out here!" Soon, we were

zig-zagging down the hill with the wind in our faces and trying to avoid the hundreds of rocks and small holes that peppered the road.

We were still gliding down the hill when we swung around a bend in the road and I heard the boom from over my shoulder. It was loud and I knew immediately what had happened. I managed to bring the bike to a stop and when I looked back, I saw Max hunched over the bike looking at the back tire. "What happened?" I yelled. As I rode my bike back up the hill toward Max, he turned the bike so I could see the broken rim. "Look at this piece of shit!" The rim was still in one piece but was bent in a sideways direction making it impossible to turn the wheel. Several spokes had broken free from the rim and were pointing in all directions, giving it a look of an old mangled hair brush.

After about an hour of walking, we started to get concerned about the limited daylight and the fact that we didn't have any water or lights. We also wanted to get across the river before it got dark. We had considered one of us riding ahead into town to get water, then returning to finish the walk together but because the sun was beginning to set behind the mountain, we thought it best to stick together. Eventually, a small older model SUV came slowly up the road from behind us. The SUV was a light blue and judging by all the dings and the amount of dried dirt all over it, I guessed it had spent most of its time out on these rural jungle roads. Max tossed the bike off his shoulder and turned toward the SUV with his hands in the air. "We're stuck. Our bike is broken. Can you give us a ride?" Max yelled toward the SUV then pointed to the broken red bike on the side of the road.

The SUV had stopped about twenty feet away. I thought to myself how strange this must be for the driver. We were just two guys wearing only shorts, flip-flops and

small backpacks walking down the center of an isolated jungle road taking turns carrying a broken red bike over our shoulders while the other pushed a fully functional bicycle. A guy in his mid-to-late 30s with long, dark curly hair climbed out of the driver side. He was smiling and wearing the usual Playa Azul surfer uniform of board-shorts and flip-flops with a blue and white striped collared shirt that once had sleeves and now displayed the tribal tattoos that covered parts of both arms. The shirt was unbuttoned and even though the sun was setting, he was still wearing his dark sunglasses. "Español? Inglés?" he asked with a smile from behind the open door. It had to be an amusing moment for him. Max and I were both sweating profusely and covered in a thin layer of dirt and dust. "English, porfa" I responded from behind Max, using both English and Spanish to let the driver know we could try Spanish but English would be easier for all of us. He stood next to his vehicle for a moment smiling, almost laughing, before asking in English, "What are you guys *doing* out here?" We explained the situation as the driver laughed and shook his head in disbelief. "These roads are tough, man" he said laughing, looking down at the road with what appeared to be some pride. He then told us he had room for the bikes in his vehicle and offered to give us a ride to Playa Azul.

His name was Ignacio and he lived most of his life in this area of the Nicoya Peninsula. He explained that his father was from the States and he had spent some time there but preferred the simple living of Costa Rica. For him, that meant surfing and trying to enjoy every moment of every day. He opened the back of the small SUV so we could shove the bikes in but because the spare tire of the SUV was in the back along with my bike, Max's bike would not fit with the rim bent in a sideways angle. After trying several different configurations, Ignacio finally suggested we just take off the back rim. He

fetched a wrench from a small toolbox in the SUV and handed it to Max. I could see the frustration welling up on Max's face, first because the tire had exploded and now because the bike would not fit in the small SUV. Max tried to apply the wrench but in his frustration, the wrench would not catch the bolt and would slide off. This happened several times before Max finally stood up and yelled "Fuck!" as loud as his lungs would allow.

Throughout this ordeal, I sat on the back bumper of the SUV and shifted my vision back and forth between Max and Ignacio, watching as Max slowly lost all his patience with the wrench. Ignacio stood watching with his hands on his hips as Max wrestled with the wrench. When Max finally stood up and yelled, Ignacio reached out and put his hand on his shoulder and said very calmly, "Hey man, breath in… breath out… you need to relax." Then with a smile, he continued "*Puuuura viiiiiida.* This is Costa Rica. Look around you, man. Take a deep breath. Playa Azul will be there when we get there. It's not going annnnnywhere." Max took a deep breath, then took the tire off and placed the bike and broken rim in the back of the SUV. As we all climbed into the SUV, we thanked Ignacio for picking us up. He smiled and said calmly, "*Pura vida.* You guys can relax now."

The story I just described exemplifies how this cultural colloquialism, *pura vida*, works to shape the attitudes and behaviors of everyday life in Playa Azul. More than simply a cultural expression, the phrase embodies the laid-back approach to life that permeates throughout Costa Rican culture. Translated literally, *pura vida* means "pure life" and in the most general way, the expression can simply be understood as something akin to "life is good" or "everything is good." But the expression, as a social construct

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reflecting the norms and values of a particular locale, can mean different things to different people in different places depending on the social and economic relations embedded within that particular community. And this is certainly true in Playa Azul where *pura vida* means far more than simply "life is good" or "everything is good." In the case of Playa Azul, the *pura vida* that has developed there embodies the norms and values of a community not yet corrupted by large-scale capital penetration as opposed to other more touristy locations where the *pura vida* and the overall culture might embody a more commercial character (Ateljevic and Doorne 2004). For the residents of Playa Azul, *pura vida* embodies the philosophical foundations of a way of life that manifests through an interconnected matrix of community, cooperation and respect.

Although Playa Azul is a burgeoning tourist destination, it is still a small beach community largely governed by local interests and shaped by local cultural values. Unlike the northwestern region of Guanacaste that has become saturated with large-scale tourism development and dominated by foreign interests (Honey, Vargas and Durham 2010), this area of the Pacific coast has yet to experience that level of intense capital penetration in the form of large-scale tourism development. It is my contention that the lack of this kind of tourism development enabled a local form of *pura vida* to develop differently in Playa Azul than in other beach communities with higher levels of tourism development. Without the intensified pressures of individualism and competition inherent in capitalist practice, Playa Azul has been able to maintain its local value system of cooperation and community rather than succumbing to market pressures of competition and profit. This chapter demonstrates how a lack of large-scale tourism development has contributed to the maintenance of the localized form of *pura vida* and how characteristics

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embodied within the localized form of *pura vida* manifest in the cultivation of a multicultural community based on humility, acceptance and mutual respect.

The Town of Playa Azul

Playa Azul is a small beach town that sits at the base of the mountains that separate the coast from the interior of the Nicoya Peninsula. Seemingly carved out of the jungle, Playa Azul is a small beach town tucked in the northern end of a two and a half mile crescent-shaped beach on the southern coast of the Nicoya Peninsula. The town is pretty remote with the closest town with more than 4,000 people is about an hour away.

The road coming over the mountains from the east descends gently down the hill and leads directly into the center of town, sloping downward and running into the Pacific Ocean. This is "Main Street" (also called *Calle Centro*) and easily the busiest of the four principal streets in Playa Azul.[10] Aside from the beach, Main Street most likely dominates the tourists' experience in town. Lined on both sides with bars, restaurants, souvenir shops and other businesses that cater to tourists, Main Street offers a variety of activities for tourist consumption.

As towns go, Playa Azul is not particularly awe-inspiring. It has its small town charm but there is nothing that sets Playa Azul apart from other small, rural beach towns in Costa Rica. The four principal roads are paved but are in poor condition and as beautiful as the beach may be, it is no more beautiful than other beaches in small coastal towns. In fact, the uninhabited beaches to the north and south are picturesque. But I

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[10] Similar to many communities throughout Costa Rica, the streets of Playa Azul do not have official names and the residences and businesses do not have numbers. However, many of the streets in town do have unofficial names bearing reference to a landmark on that street which provides enough information for mail delivery or directions. For example, having a package sent to a location might read "Casa Paraíso, 25 *metros oeste,* 50 *sur de edificio del ICE,* Playa Azul (Paradise House – 25 meters east, 50 south of ICE building, Playa Azul). "Main Street" is so named because it is the busiest street and signifies the center of town.

would argue most tourists are attracted to Playa Azul for other reasons. Situated against the backdrop of thick jungle and mountains, this sleepy beach community has become somewhat famous for its *pura vida* vibe and relaxed character.[11]

Prior to the explosion of tourism development in this region of Guanacaste, Playa Azul was a small fishing and farming community on a beach mostly popular with Costa Rican tourists who wanted to escape life in the interior of Costa Rica. As the town developed into a tourist destination over the two last decades, it was able to maintain that laid-back "vibe" and avoided the trappings of large development and foreign ownership popular in the northern region of Guanacaste. Unlike those beach communities in the northern region of Guanacaste that have earned a reputation in recent years of being foreign owned, Playa Azul is still considered by many to be a "*Tico* town".[12] Although many of the businesses are operated by foreign residents, there are is still a strong local presence in Playa Azul and much of the property throughout Playa Azul is still owned by Costa Ricans. But as the popularity of the town continues to grow, so do the number of tourists and more importantly, the number of foreign residents (lifestyle migrants) who now call Playa Azul home.

The official number of residents in Playa Azul is difficult to determine but most in the community estimate that number to be under 3,000, with foreign residents consisting of about a quarter. Part of the difficulty stems from a general lack of agreement on the boundaries of Playa Azul, even amongst *Azuleños*. Depending on who you ask, there are

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[11] There are several travel blogs and websites that specifically discuss the "vibe" of Playa Azul as being unique to this town.

[12] Honey, Vargas and Durham (2010) found that the northwest region of is dominated by tourism development tied to U.S. markets and investment. Tamarindo, the hub of tourism in that area of Guanacaste, has earned a reputation for being a foreign-owned town and popular destination for U.S. tourists. In fact, Tamarindo is commonly referred to as "Tama-gringo" by Costa Ricans in the southern part of Guanacaste.

several smaller nearby communities that are sometimes included as being a part of Playa Azul which can create some confusion about the number of residents. The other part of that difficulty in determining the number of residents is the fact that the population of Playa Azul fluctuates tremendously with the seasons.

In many ways, Playa Azul is a tale of two cities, or in this case, two sectors of town. One sector of town is the tourist sector and the other is the local sector. Depending on the season, the populations of each as well as the activities that take place there change. During the "low season" or "rainy season" (sometimes referred to as the "green season") between May and early December, the number of people in Playa Azul drops considerably. It can rain every day for hours causing many businesses to close for the season because there is simply not enough business to justify staying open. It is common for many residents (*Ticos* and foreign residents alike) to leave town to travel or find work elsewhere during this time of the year. At its lowest point in late August and early September, locals estimate the population can drop to about 1,500 persons (mostly *Ticos*).

However, during the "high season" or "dry season" between December and April, the population of Playa Azul can easily double. The high season is generally considered to begin with Christmas and end with Easter (*Semana Santa*). Most of the high-season growth can be attributed to "long-term" tourists or seasonal tourists who work and live in Playa Azul during the tourist season. Long-term tourists tend to be younger international travelers working through the season to earn enough money to extend their travel abroad. Adler and Adler (1999) refer to these kinds of seasonal employees as "seekers" who

travel the world who work service industry jobs in tourism while seeking adventure and paradise.

Playa Azul consists of a town center focused around four principal streets and four outlying neighborhoods. Although there were a few houses and apartments scattered near the southern edge of the town center, the vast majority of residents live in the surrounding neighborhoods. There are no large department stores, no traffic lights or much traffic of any kind and no large billboards instructing consumers what to purchase or how to live their lives. The only real connection to "modern" life outside Playa Azul are two national banks (for tourists) and a Palí (a large Costa Rican chain-superstore) but the Palí is also very small, not much bigger than a small neighborhood grocery store in the United States.

Each of the four surrounding neighborhoods, once independent small towns, has its own unique character and demographic identity. The neighborhoods range in size from two dozen houses to approximately 40 houses. The neighborhood to the south of town is inhabited almost exclusively by *Tico* families that have lived in the area for generations. To the north, there are three more small neighborhoods and similar to the southern neighborhood, the two northerly neighborhoods are inhabited by *Ticos* who have lived in the area for generations. The closest neighborhood to the town center, also the largest, has a mixed population. This is also the neighborhood experiencing the most change as more foreign residents move into the neighborhood and build larger, more modern houses.

The houses in Playa Azul tend to be small and without many amenities. In fact, the average *Tico* home is about 800 square feet (about the size of a large apartment or flat

in the United States or Europe).Generally speaking, the houses have corrugated rooftops and consist of two (sometimes three) small bedrooms, a large room that functions as the living room and dining area, a bathroom and a kitchen. Kitchens tend to be small and generally have propane-fueled countertop stoves as opposed to electric or gas ranges. In addition, very few houses have water heaters or hot water. The houses that do have hot water usually only have it in the shower and these are generally equipped with electric heating units attached to the showerhead. These are usually referred to as "suicide showers" because electrical wires are sometimes exposed and can give quite a shock.

The water is safe for consumption but there is no sewage system in this part of Costa Rica, so houses are equipped with septic tanks.[13] Most homes also do not have air-conditioning and are cooled with fans and open doors and windows. It is very common to see front doors open throughout the day to allow air to flow freely throughout the houses. And because it is so hot most of the day, it is common to see hammocks under the overhang on porches of many houses. However, this tends to only be true of *Tico* households. Foreign occupied homes tend to have a different look. Generally speaking, foreign owned or occupied homes tend to have large fences or walls with barb-wire around the property, giving the appearance of a compound. Rarely, if ever, is there direct access to the front door and the front doors of the homes tend to be closed at all times (this could be explained if the houses are equipped with air-conditioning). Foreign owned homes also appear to be structurally different, appearing to have insulated walls and rooftops made of materials other than corrugated metal sheeting.

Outside of the four principal roads in the center of town, the roads throughout Playa Azul and the surrounding neighborhoods are dirt and peppered with stones and

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[13] This is common throughout the country.

large holes. During the rainy season, the roads can be quite treacherous when the holes fill with water because it is impossible to know the depth of the holes. During my study at the language school, it was common to hear stories of bicycle accidents by foreigners who misjudged a puddle of water. In fact, these occurrences are so common that an *Azuleño* friend used the example of a bicycle accident to demonstrate how the idea of *pura vida* might influence the response. When I explained to him I had actually seen this scenario play out, having watched someone crash on their bicycle, he laughed and said "Man, everyone has seen this happen. This is Playa Azul!"

The Social Organization of Playa Azul

Despite becoming a popular tourist destination, elements of its farming and fishing past continue to shape the identity and local culture of Playa Azul. Known throughout Costa Rica for farming and cattle ranches, Guanacaste's cultural heritage is one strongly connected to the land and hard work. This is clearly seen in the surrounding countryside where small farms dot the landscape. This is also true in Playa Azul where a connection to the land and the sea remains an integral part of daily life. Although social organization and productive relationships with the land and sea may have changed, *Ticos* in Playa Azul remain heavily dependent on the land and sea for their survival. Whereas the land and sea once produced crops and fish for subsistence, the land and sea now function as primary arenas in the tourist trade that provides jobs and foreign currencies as well as new international contacts and informal language training. The knowledge of the land and the horses used to work the land are now used to provide horseback riding and hiking tours for visitors, one of the main tourist activities in and around Playa Azul. Similarly, the knowledge of the sea is no longer used for subsistence fishing but is now

used for guided fishing trips and dolphin tours as well as surfing, kayaking, snorkeling and other guided aquatic tourist activities.

Indeed, Playa Azul has experienced significant growth in the last few years but despite its growth, it is still a small town shaped by traditional norms and values. For example, smiling and extending a greeting (*hola*, hello, *como esta?, pura vida, buenos dias, buenas noches*, etc.) to strangers on the street or helping a neighbor with something is completely normal is Playa Azul. Engaging in this kind of behavior indicates being part of the community. Within sociological thought, several prominent theories might help explain social cohesion and social organization in Playa Azul. However, most relevant to this discussion are Tönnies' notions of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* and Durkheim's concepts of mechanical, organic solidarity and the collective conscience.

Tönnies (1940, cited in Bell 1994) developed a dichotomy of ideal types he referred to as *gemeinschaft* (community) and *gesellschaft* (society) in order to distinguish between different types of social organization. At the community end of the spectrum is *gemeinschaft*, a kind of social organization represented by preindustrial, small-scale community development and organized around a highly-integrated matrix of "friendship, neighborliness, and kinship" that emphasizes a close connection to land and place (Bell 1994:87). For Tönnies, the idea of *gemeinschaft* is shaped by notions of sentiment, permanence and tradition (Bell 1994). At the other end of the spectrum is *gesellschaft*, a more modern kind of social organization represented by industrial development and organized around association and contractual relationships (Nollmann 2005). For Tönnies, *gesellschaft* is predicated on rational thinking like law, business and science. Tönnies suggested communities began to decay as they became more modern.

Following Tönnies, Emile Durkheim developed similar ideas of social organization but challenged Tönnies assertion that community, and thus social cohesion and moral obligation, was reduced to personal and tightly integrated relationships in traditional societies or communities (Durkheim 1997). Durkheim argued social cohesion, and thus aspects of community, could also be achieved or maintained in modern "organic" systems as well through a complexed division of labor that promoted individualism and the interdependent relationships between specialized social institutions (Durkheim 1997). However, with concerns to Durkheim, I want to focus the discussion on his framework of mechanical and organic solidarity and his idea of the collective conscience.

Similar to Tönnies distinction between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* to explain social organization, Durkheim developed a similar framework distinguishing between "mechanical" and "organic" solidarity to explain social cohesion and the maintenance of social systems. Similar to *gemeinschaft*, mechanical solidarity or "solidarity by similarities" (Durkheim 1997:31) is generally characterized by traditional societies with small-scale development, a low level of division of labor, low levels of social differentiation between members of the community and high levels of social and moral integration between members of the community. Durkheim argued within mechanical systems, social cohesion is maintained by a rigid and dominant collective conscience that shapes the "totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society" (Durkheim 1997:38-39).

Front Stage/Back Stage and Performance in Everyday Life

Erving Goffman (1959) suggests daily life occurs in much the same way a stage play might be performed in a theater in front of an audience. Framed within front and back "regions," social life plays out in a series of performances where we, as social actors, live out and manage our formal identities. For Goffman, the front region or stage represents the formal setting where actors engage in performances for a viewing audience. This is often thought of in terms of public spaces although the front region is actually dependent on the context of the performance. The back region, on the other hand, represents the informal setting where those performances are conceived, planned, practiced and perfected. Each setting can require a different code of conduct and range of behaviors and the back stage is where those behaviors are worked out in accordance with existing social norms (Edensor 2001). The back stage is also where performers can relax and not concern themselves with performing. Bell (1994), in his ethnographic study of a small country village in the English countryside, found the back stage to be "where people tell off-color jokes, put their feet on the table, belch and yell at each other" (54). Similar to a stage play in a theater, the audience rarely, if ever, gets to see the preparation for the performance or the scenery (setting) behind the curtain. Goffman argues the roles people play determines the social spaces they occupy in that "performers appear in the front and back regions [but] audiences appear only in the front region" (1959:145).

Within this framework, Goffman suggests the performances work to impress upon the viewing audience a constructed identity and perception of daily reality. He argues these performances influence the audience through a process of "impression management" whereby performances help shape codes of conduct and proper etiquette.

Formal performances also facilitate in the process of in-group/out-group dynamics. This is certainly true in Playa Azul where *Ticos* perform *pura vida* for resident expats and tourists who in turn, adopt and reproduce the codes of conduct and perform *pura vida* for tourists and other expats. Expat performances of *pura vida* are also intended for *Ticos*, although the performances are less about shaping codes of conduct and more about demonstrating successfully internalized of codes of conduct and displaying the appropriate behaviors as a means of achieving a certain social standing and acceptance in the community.

Within the tourism literature, Goffman's idea of front and back regions has shaped how theorists conceptualize tourist sites. MacCannell extends Goffman's framework, arguing the front – back distinction should be viewed as extremes on a continuum as opposed to distinct opposites. At the root of MacCannell's thesis is the assertion that the modern tourist is motivated by a search for the "authentic," something he contends is unattainable in modern society. If the front region represents a contextualized space where actors conduct their performances for audience consumption and therefore shape perceptions about lived reality in that particular setting, then MacCannell argues the same front region framework can be applied directly to tourist destinations where host community members "stage" or construct notions of authenticity to meet or satisfy tourists' expectations of daily life in those settings (Stronza 2001; Simpson 2009; Hannam and Knox 2010). This is sometimes referred to as "toying" with tourists (Stronza 2001). Nicholson-Lord (2002, cited in Simpson 2009) exemplifies this process by describing the annual flower festival in Chiang Mai being framed in tourist brochures as "rooted in history" despite being created as a tourist attraction in the 1980s.

For MacCannell, real life can only occur "behind the scenes" in the back regions of the community away from tourists (Hannam and Knox 2010).

Minca and Oakes (2006) argue a kind of introspection is common in tourist sites where "authentic" performances are viewed as integral to the survival of the destination. Drawing on Turner's (1986) concept of "performative reflexivity," Minca and Oakes argue "locals become self-conscious place-packagers or guides" (2006:9) for tourists, leading them from performance to performance and demonstrating proper behavior. Turner defines performative reflexivity as when members of a social group "turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public 'selves'" (24). Similarly, Urry (1990) developed the idea of "the tourist gaze" as a way to conceptualize how power disparities manifest between tourists and hosts explain motivations for hosts wanting to meet tourists expectations. Urry argued tourists "see" the world through culturally framed lenses and these lenses shape the interactions between tourists and the host community. For example, Hannam and Knox (2010) contend Chinese tourists have adopted a tourist style based on photographing as many different sites as possible within a single tour whereas "Western-paced visits" may take whole days in order to experience a single museum. But the gaze works both ways whereby the hosts also gaze upon tourists, creating "moments of intersubjective encounters between travelers and locals, when both find themselves to be the objects of the other's contemplation and gaze" (Minca and Oakes 2006:9).

A Brief History of *Pura Vida*

The expression, *pura vida*, is ubiquitous in Costa Rica and can be used in a variety of situations. Trester (2003), in her study on the significance of *pura vida* in Costa Rican Spanish, points out that it is commonly used as a salutation ("hello" and "goodbye") and as an expression of gratitude ("thank you" and "you're welcome"). But the versatility of the expression allows for several other discursive uses including expressing positive feelings about one's state of being (How are you? *Pura vida*), the state of being of someone else (How is your daughter feeling today? *Pura vida*) and one's feelings about an inanimate object like breakfast or a cup of coffee (How is the coffee this morning? *Pura vida*!). The expression can also be used sarcastically in a way that signifies despite the current situation, everything is good.

As tourists, we are introduced to the expression almost immediately upon arrival in Costa Rica. While standing in line waiting to officially enter the country, the walls of the customs lobby are lined by a series of giant posters displaying beautiful beaches, volcanoes, sea turtles and exotic birds with "*pura vida*" and "Costa Rica" stamped across them. And after discussing the reasons for the visit with a Costa Rican customs agent, he or she might officially welcome the traveler to Costa Rica with something like "*Bienvenidos*! Enjoy your stay in Costa Rica. *Pura vida*!" Indeed, travelers will continue to encounter the expression dozens, if not hundreds, of times throughout their stay (depending on length of stay, of course).

The ICT (Costa Rican Institute of Tourism) adopted the advertising campaign "*Costa Rica es Pura Vida*" in the early 2000s (Trester 2003) and as a newly arrived tourist, I viewed the expression as just that; a clever marketing slogan promoted by ICT

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for tourists to consume and take home along with the *pura vida* towels, t-shirts and hats purchased during their vacation in Costa Rica. But the phrase was not the product of an advertising campaign. For *Ticos*, the expression was already part of the cultural lexicon of Costa Rica prior to its adoption as a tourist slogan. Today, the expression transcends tourism and has come to symbolize Costa Rica's national identity and way of life. In fact, the expression functions as the perfect cultural signifier for a country ranked first on the New Economics Foundation's (NEF) Happy Planet Index as the "happiest" country in the world in 2009, 2012 and again in 2015.

Yet despite being unique to Costa Rica, the expression did not originate in Costa Rica. The expression originates from a 1956 Mexican film by the same title. The film stars Antonio Espino y Mora "Clavillazo", a Mexican comedic actor famous in the 1950s, who plays a clumsy and hapless yet good-natured optimist similar to the types of characters Charlie Chaplin made famous in films like *The Tramp* (1915) and *Modern Times* (1936). The film maintains an optimistic tone throughout as the story follows Melquiades Ledezma, played by Clavillazo, through a series of clumsy encounters and misadventures.

Viewed as the source of bad luck, the film opens with Ledezma being expelled from his home town by the mayor and other city officials. As the bus leaves, the residents of the town can be seen celebrating his departure as a band plays in the town square. The following scene shows the bus being pulled into another town by a tow-truck after being involved in an accident. The driver climbs out of the bus, clothes torn and burned with bandaging around his head while Ledezma exits the bus without a scratch, somewhat frustrated by the perceived incompetence of the driver. Throughout the film, Ledezma

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repeatedly experiences similar situations. Following each event, as accidents and chaos befall those nearest to the incident, Ledezma manages to walk away unscathed and completely unaware that he might have caused the issue. As he walks away from each situation, he utters the phrase "*pura vida*" (a total of 13 times throughout the film) as an indication of how lucky he was to avoid any trouble. The final scene concludes with Ledezma breaking the fourth wall, uttering the phrase *pura vida* one last time to the viewing audience after winning a large sum of money and having celebratory cake smashed in his face. Although the film was only released in Costa Rican theaters for two weeks (Corella V. 2013), the expression reflected the social climate of peace at the time and embodied the philosophical foundations of optimism that would shape life in Costa Rica for generations.

Following the civil war of 1948, the Costa Rican government adopted a new progressive constitution in 1949 that would define social and cultural development in Costa Rica throughout the second half of the twentieth century. In addition to the abolition of the army, the new constitution also granted women the right to vote and citizenship rights to anyone born within Costa Rica's legal boundaries (Helmuth 2000). These developments, along with the reinvestment in human capital and the reallocation of military funding into new social programs, resulted in an expanding economy and reaffirmed the underlying optimism guiding the new government and the future of Costa Rica. By the time of the film's release, the expression of "*pura vida*" seemed to reflect the optimism of peace and tranquility embedded in the new government programs. Trester (2003) notes that the expression was originally used as a form of "informal"

speech or slang by the "*pachucos*" but by the 1970s had gained acceptance and popularity throughout mainstream Costa Rica.

Although the expression is relatively new to the Costa Rican lexicon, having emerged as a cultural colloquialism in the late 1950s, the ideas of humility and optimism embedded within the construct long pre-date its emergence and popular usage. Prior to the tourism boom of the 1990s, Costa Rica's economic base relied heavily on farming and agricultural exports to first-world countries as the country wallowed in international debt (Clarke 2001; Molina and Palmer 2012). By Western standards, Costa Rica remains a very poor country despite the number of tourists that visit each year. Outside of the major tourist areas, this is plainly visible, especially in central and southern Guanacaste where an estimated "25% or more of Costa Rican families live in poverty – despite the common perception that foreign residents residing in these communities have brought wealth and a higher standard of living" (CREST 2011:8). Yet despite the high levels of poverty that persist throughout the country, the idea of *pura vida* continues to provide a sense of optimism and shapes a worldview based on the idea that no matter how bad conditions might be, things can always be worse, so be thankful for what you have while you have it. This legacy of optimism and humility can be traced back to the emergence of the term in Costa Rica and continues to shape the worldview of *Ticos* today. This is especially true in Playa Azul where the idea of *pura vida* shapes how *Ticos* understand life. This is best exemplified by Javier, a 30 year-old instructor at the language school in Playa Azul, who explained *pura vida* this way –

> I tell my students *pura vida* is a state of mind, you know … [and]
> language is like sort of thinking, you know, you express your thoughts
> through language. And, well, thank God *Ticos* have this phrase and we
> don't have…I don't know, 'fuck it', for example [laughing]. So instead of

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'fuck it', we say *'pura vida'*. Because *'pura vida'* … means everything is OK. Like, everything is fine. This phrase was given to me since the moment I was born. You know, these words and this idea that everything is fine and everything is going to be OK. You know, thank God, just if you hit your knee when you fall off your bike, it's *'pura vida'* because that's nothing compared to other things, you know, to what other people are suffering. You know, the mindset of the *Tico* is always like comparing to the poorer more humble families because *Ticos* have, maybe not my generation but my mother's generation and my grandparent's generation, they use to live in a land which was not so prosperous as right now. You know, they had to eat rice and beans and sometimes there was no more (pause) …eggs maybe but nothing else. So these people were used to the more humble conditions you can ever imagine, like compared to United States standards, right? And so they, these words that they have given us [inaudible] have helped us understand that we live a nice life. That we live a life of prosperity and we have a lot to be thankful for. So the *'pura vida'* is one of those words that is in my mind always going to make me think positive about life, you know?

Enrique, a 35 year-old *Azuleño*, explained *pura vida* in a similar way, underlying a certain humility in his approach to life and emphasizing it is how Ticos "live life.". When I asked Enrique to explain what he meant by "live life," he said –

We are fine with ourselves, whatever life we have. We are *tranquilo*. For me, it's waking up every day and seeing the people in your life, you know. You wake up and live. I'm happy to wake up, you know. I'm happy to work and I know I am not going to make much, you know. But I'm sticking around another day, you know (laughing).

In a similar vein, I was also told numerous times to think of *pura vida* as simply a guiding principle that shapes how *Ticos* approach their daily lives. Rodrigo (who provides one of the quotes to begin this chapter) explained that *pura vida* was unique to Costa Rica by associating it to Costa Rica's legacy of peace in the region and suggested that this philosophy of peace and cooperation extended to all aspects of daily life in Costa Rica. When I asked if something similar existed in any of the neighboring countries, he said –

I don't think they are going to have the same *pura vida* like we have because we never have army and we never have wars…we never have those things. They are used to growing up in different *circumstancias*, we say it like that, because they even have like kind of weird governments when it's just low-class and high-class and that's it. So, you know, when you grow up like that, you think about you and just you. And that's it. But it's different in Cost Rica. People here like to help, even if you're from another country or whatever. We are open to everybody.

Today, the expression is an integral part of daily life throughout the country and particularly in Playa Azul. In fact, many *Ticos* have internalized the concept so deeply that they define their relationship with the expression within an essentialist framework by explaining *pura vida* as an innate *Tico* characteristic. When I asked Nemecio, a 23 year-old *Azuleño*, how he first learned *pura vida* as a child, he laughed at the thought of having to learn what is, in his mind, an inherent characteristic of simply being *Tico*, saying *"Pura vida* is *Tico*! When babies first learn to talk, the first word is *pura vida*!" Rodrigo gave me a very similar answer when I asked him the same question, saying, "We're born with that here, man! It's part of our blood. If you're Tico, you are born with *pura vida* in your blood! In your first month [of life], you know what is *pura vida*. If you are *Tico*, then you are *pura vida*!" This essentialist explanation of *pura vida* as an innate characteristic reflects how deeply ingrained it has become in Costa Rican culture and national identity.

The Performance of *Pura Vida* in Daily Life

The story at the beginning of this chapter exemplifies one way *pura vida* is performed in Playa Azul (laid-back, no need to worry, everything will be OK). But *pura vida* manifests in a variety of performances throughout Playa Azul by locals and foreigners alike. Urry and Larson (2011) suggest this is part of the "tourist gaze" whereby

performances by locals and tourists organize social life in that destination. For locals, the performances of *pura vida* reinforce pre-existing notions of reality carried by tourists (and foreign residents) while simultaneously instructing tourists and foreign residents about proper etiquette. Those performances generally manifest, in one way or another, in demonstrations of a care-free approach to daily life and a positive, no stress attitude. But performances of *pura vida* are not limited to locals. Lifestyle migrants (foreign residents) and tourists also perform *pura vida* and engage in social practices that reinforce characteristics of place while establishing position within the social structure of the community (the social structure of the community will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5).

The performances of *pura vida* are rooted in the processes of socialization and internalization of norms and values bound in Costa Rican culture. For *Ticos*, and particularly *Azuleños*, the *pura vida* performances come as "natural" responses to social stimuli because they have been socialized since birth to understand these behaviors within a local cultural context or what ethnomethodologists refer to as the common sense knowledge or understanding of everyday life. These performances by *Ticos* do not require a formal thought process that conjures an appropriate behavioral response to external stimuli. For tourists, however, the performances are more contrived. Borrowing from Turner (1986) and his notion of "performative reflexivity" whereby members of a social group "turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public 'selves'" (24), tourists

performances are in many ways a "voluntary work of art" that attempts to display an appropriate cultural response.

The performances of *pura vida* usually embody the "everything is good" approach to life that dominates social life in Playa Azul. For example, one afternoon as I walked down Main Street, I saw a *Tico* crash in the street on his bicycle. He was carrying a large box of eggs on his lap and as he fell, several eggs were thrown from the box and broke in the street. I rushed over to help him up and noticed his knee, elbow and shoulder were bleeding as a consequence of the fall. When he got to his feet, he surveyed the broken eggs strewn around the bicycle, then counted the remaining unbroken eggs in the box. When I asked if he was OK, he responded only with *"pura vida,"* jumped back on the bicycle and continued on his way. I used this story as an example when I asked interview interview participants to explain *pura vida* in this context. Every *Tico* explained his response to the situation the same way, saying the accident could have been much worse, so he was just thankful to be OK. Manuel, a 33 year-old *Azuleño*, explained it like this –

> When he crash on his bicycle, he stand up and shake off all the dirt …and when you ask him if he is OK, he say '*pura vida*' and keep going, bro. Life is good, even after he crash and cut his hands or legs or whatever, life is good. Life is good because he can still get back on his bike and keep going. Everything is '*pura vida*'.

Victoria, a 28 year-old *Tica* from San Jose living in Playa Azul, explained the situation very similarly, saying –

> It's '*pura vida*' because it doesn't matter…OK, like something bad happens, it's '*pura vida*' … because you have your life, you have a lot of things to be thankful and grateful for, so if something bad happens, just focus on what's good in your life. So yeah, something bad just happened but yeah, I'm walking, I'm breathing.

Another way *pura vida* is performed is through a general display of a "no-worries" attitude toward things outside of one's control. This kind of "take life as it comes" performance lies at the heart of *pura vida* and emphasizes the "life is good" and "no stress" qualities that ultimately work to shape the character of Playa Azul and the people who live there. These qualities are clearly present in the following example. I asked Carlos, a 36 year-old *Azuleño*, to explain some of the big differences between Playa Azul and Playa Roja, a wealthy neighboring beach community to the north. He responded with some sarcasm by saying –

> Well, Playa Azul, I don't know why … I'm going to say infrastructure, the road is very shitty and beautiful, the electricity company is almost non-existent, the water company is almost non-existent,[and] the cellphone tower collapses every few weeks (laughter) … stuff like that.

This performance not only exemplifies the take-it-easy no-stress approach to life that shapes patterns of behavior in Playa Azul but it also highlights some of the development issues facing Playa Azul as it continues to grow. These development issues, in addition to demonstrating how *pura vida* is performed in these kinds of situations, also reinforce notions of "authenticity" that work to shape tourist and lifestyle migrant perceptions about daily life in Playa Azul.

But these kinds of performances are not limited to *Ticos*. Foreign residents and tourists learn to properly perform *pura vida* by observing and mimicking *Tico* (and other foreign resident) performances in the course of their time in Playa Azul. Because *pura vida* is a feeling or attitude, these performances often manifest in the way a certain situation is handled. Paulo, a 24 year old tourist from Portugal who had spent 10 days in Playa Azul, adopted a very *pura vida* approach when his backpack and camera were

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stolen off the beach one evening. After initially being angry about losing the pictures on the camera more than the camera itself, he found closure with the experience by concluding that despite losing the pictures, he still had his passport and he could continue on his travels. Similarly, Louise, a 31 year-old foreign resident from Germany, displayed this take-it-easy attitude when she discussed stress and explained an experience of losing a job in Playa Azul. She explained the situation this way –

> I don't have stress here (laughter). I mean, from time to time, for sure, something happens. Like, for example, I lost my job. One day I was stressed and then the next, I was like, meh, everything will be fine. You know, in Playa Azul, it's always like everything will be fine. Everything will work out. And yeah, I was quite relaxed about it. In Germany, I would freak out if I would lose my job! But here, I don't worry about it. I thought, I will just find another job.

As opposed to how *Ticos* perform *pura vida* and display a worry-free attitude in relation to being socialized in Costa Rica and shaped by the norms, rituals and values embedded within Costa Rican culture and the lived reality of Playa Azul, foreign resident performances tend to be situated within and contrasted against modern life in their home countries. This is clearly visible in the above example where Louise uses her lived experience in Germany as a reference point to explain her transcendence of that life to her new life in Playa Azul. Examples like this one support claims made by Benson and O'Reilly who contend lifestyle migrants present "life after migration … as the antithesis of life before migration, not only generally, but also on a more personal level" (2009:610).

As the story at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates, tourists and lifestyle migrants can also be instructed how to properly perform *pura vida*. One evening, while sitting with a group of friends at a bonfire on the beach, Joe and Alison, a lifestyle

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migrant couple, started arguing. What started as light bickering soon turned more serious leading to Alison leaving angrily. After Alison walked away, Elizabeth, a local *Tica* friend explained to Joe that he should have let Alison say what she had to say and think what she wanted to think. But Joe disagreed, arguing that if he had done that, Alison would think she was right and he refused to let that go if he felt she was wrong. They discussed the conversation a bit more when Elizabeth finally replied, "That's not very *pura vida.*" This interaction not only demonstrates how *pura vida* can be taught to foreign residents but it also demonstrates how the idea of *pura vida* works as a behavioral guiding principle.

Conclusion

This chapter explained the historical legacy of *pura vida* in Costa Rican culture and demonstrated how embedded the idea has become in the local culture and identity of Playa Azul. I contend the form of *pura vida* that developed in Playa Azul exemplifies the traditional norms and values of a community not yet corrupted by large-scale capital penetration as opposed to other more touristy locations where the *pura vida* and the overall culture might embody a more commercial character (Ateljevic and Doorne 2004). This chapter also lays the groundwork for the chapters that follow by demonstrating how the performance of *pura vida* not only shapes the behaviors of the actors in their daily lives but also shapes the character of the community.

CHAPTER IV

THE TIES THAT BIND:
LIFESTYLE MIGRATION AND THE POWER OF PLACE

Playa Azul is a mixture of expats and locals and everybody is equal here. I can sit here and see three people standing at the bar right over there [pointing to one of the open-air beach bars not far from where we are siting] and they're all dressed exactly alike; board-shorts, flip flops and a t-shirt. One guy is a multi-millionaire and businessman, the other guy is retired and the other one is a local [Tico] and what they're talking about is the sunset yesterday. They aren't talking about the big watch that he has on. You know, there's an equalizer here. Nobody cares that you have a Land Rover. Nobody gives a shit!

~ Charles[14]

There are many micro communities here, I don't know if you have noticed that there is a French community, there's an Italian community, there's a Costa Rican community, there's even a German community and they ... you'll see them here having a good time, even getting drunk with other nationalities. That's something very special here from people. You know, they come here and they find themselves in a place that is paradise, they don't have to bring all those, all that stuff [problems from their home country] here. It's not necessary.

~ Ricardo[15]

Introduction

Being a beach town, many of the activities revolve around the beach, whether it is surfing, kayaking, swimming, volleyball, fishing or just lounging. However, during the day and particularly during the hottest part of the day between 10am and 4pm, the entire beach is generally vacant with the exception of surfers and a few tourists who are determined to get a tan while on vacation. The beach, like the town itself, is split by Main Street with 150 yards of beach stretching in each direction away from where the road meets the sand.

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[14] Charles is a 49 year old resident of Playa Azul. He is originally from Canada and has been living in Playa Azul for 12 years.

[15] Ricardo is a 28 year old *Tico* from San Jose. After finishing college at UCR, he moved to Playa Azul in 2012 to "get away from life in the city." He works as a bartender and waiter at one the restaurants along the beach.

The northern side of the beach is lined with palm trees that shade the small footpath that connects the beachfront businesses. As opposed to the other side of the beach, this end tends to be populated throughout most of the day by beach-goers relaxing under the palms in hammocks and beach towels. The three bars on this side of the beach tend to be relatively empty until the late afternoon. The south end of the beach, however, tends to stay relatively until the late afternoon but the two bars on the beach are relatively full all day with tourists and locals eating and drinking. Six of the eight surf schools are also on this end of the beach.

As the day turns to late afternoon, the temperature cools significantly and starts the end of the day cycle on the beach and run-up to the sunset. Around 4 o'clock every afternoon, the beach volleyball courts begin to buzz with activity and tourists and residents of Playa Azul start to settle on the beach. For residents and tourists, this is a family event and beach is filled with children and pets running in all directions. By 5 o'clock, there can be several hundred people on both ends of the beach. There is also the nightly soccer game played on the beach each night drawing dozens of *Ticos*, foreigners and tourists. At both ends of the beach, the bars are also full with tourists and locals together mixing and socializing.

Playa Azul has a reputation for cultural acceptance and community that is rooted in a worldview and code of conduct shaped by a *pura vida* mindset. Although this evening beach scene is played out in many beach communities, it nevertheless functions as an integral component in maintenance and reinforcement of existing bonds throughout the community and the mutual respect and acceptance embedded in a town mixed with *Ticos* and foreign residents. In what follows, I review the lifestyle migration literature

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and examine the interconnection between the narratives of place and the motivations of lifestyle migrants to relocate to Playa Azul. It is my contention that narratives of daily reality in Playa Azul shared by lifestyle migrants are conceptualized through a *pura vida* framework that stands in direct contrast to conditions found in their home country and suggest that a desire to "escape" from the constraints of modern life lie at the core of lifestyle migration.

Today, approximately 9% of the population of Costa Rica is foreign-born (Arias 2014). Although a majority of those immigrants are from Nicaragua, there are a large number of migrants to Costa Rica that come from first-world countries. The exact number of expats living in Costa Rica is impossible to determine but the U.S. State Department estimates approximately 120,000 of those migrants are from the U.S. alone. In Playa Azul, local estimates of expats living in the area range from 25% to as much as 40%. This increasing population of foreign residents is beginning to impact the social dynamics of the community (this will be discussed in the next chapter).

In this chapter, I examine the impacts of place on the decision-making process for lifestyle migrants relocating to Playa Azul. I contend the lack of capitalist penetration into the community coupled with the localized form of *pura vida* (discussed in the previous chapter) work to shape the character of Playa Azul and factor greatly into the decisions of many tourists-turned-residents (lifestyle migrants) to pick up their lives abroad and relocate to Playa Azul. Following Benson and O'Reilly (2009), I find that lifestyle migrants who participated in this study were motivated by feelings of community and a general desire to escape the constraints of modern life in their homes countries.

It is also my contention that, in addition to fostering the development of a culturally diverse community rooted in cultural practices of peace and harmony, the lack of large-scale tourism development also gives this small beach town the appearance of being "underdeveloped" and thus, an "authentic" Costa Rican town. Indeed, the very lack of development, perceived as authentic by tourists, functions "as a central selling point" for tourist destinations (Nost 2013; Minca and Oakes 2006). This was especially true in Playa Azul where the lack of development is somewhat romanticized by lifestyle migrants who frame a lack of amenities as a simpler way of life (DeLyser 1999). MacCannell (1999) suggests the quest for the authentic has become an integral component of modern tourism, particularly for tourists from first-world countries in North America and Europe who are searching for an escape from the constraints of modernity. MacCannell argues the modern tourist, overwhelmed by feelings of alienation from modern society, yearns to experience the truly authentic. Cohen, summarizing MaCannell's thesis, writes "The alienated modern tourist in quest for authenticity looks for the pristine, the primitive, the natural, that which is as yet untouched by modernity" (2004:103).

Although MacCannell's discussion focuses on tourism as a temporary "escape" from modern life, this dissertation extends MacCannell's thesis and situates it within the lifestyle migration literature (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Benson 2012; Torkington 2012; Spalding 2013). Following Benson and O'Reilly (2009), this research demonstrates lifestyle migrants perceived that escape in place-specific ways, particularly motivated by the social relations embedded within the community. Similar to Harrison's (2017) work on the pull of place and return migration to a deindustrialized city in Ohio following the

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decline of the steel industry, this chapter suggests decisions made by lifestyle migrants to leave their lives abroad and move to Playa Azul are rooted in a search for a higher quality life shaped by meanings attached to Playa Azul. Using Paulsen's (2004) work on place character, I show how characteristics embodied within the localized colloquialism of *pura vida* manifest in different ways to create this tropical "paradise" that works to attract lifestyle migrants. I contend the result has been the cultivation of a multicultural community based on humility, acceptance and mutual respect.

Lifestyle Migration

Lifestyle migration can be understood as a migratory phenomenon of the 21st century where relatively affluent or privileged people from the first-world migrate in search of a better life they believe can be found elsewhere (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Torkington 2012). As opposed to traditional migration practices motivated by political and economic incentives, lifestyle migration is motivated by a desire to achieve "a better quality of life through a change in lifestyle" (Torkington 2012; see also Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Hoey 2014; Benson and Osbaldiston 2016). Benson and O'Reilly (2009) contend the reasoning for lifestyle migration is commonly conceptualized in direct contrast to conditions found in their home country. They argue this generally means lifestyle migrants search for places that offer a slower pace of life and a more leisurely everyday existence. In addition, Akerlund and Sandberg (2015) contend migrants also search for places where they can experience a genuine sense of community that allows for "a new meaningful existence."

Lifestyle migration can be framed within a "counter-urbanization" paradigm whereby lifestyle migrants search for the "the rural idyll" (Benson and O'Reilly 2009),

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imagining life in this kind of environment to be "a better way of life" than life in an urban

setting (Benson 2012). Rural locations, whether in the countryside, the mountains or on a

beach somewhere are generally perceived as simpler and closer to nature (Bell 1994).

This was a dominant narrative among the foreign residents of Playa Azul who spoke of

leaving or not wanting to return to their home countries due to the issues associated with

modern life (crime, pollution, drug use, lack of community, long hours spent at work). In

her study of lifestyle migration in Bocas del Toro, Spalding (2013) also found "the rural

idyll" to be the dominant narrative among lifestyle migrants that flocked to Panama in

search of a life filled with leisure. In this sense, I contend the "rural idyll" can be

conceptualized as a "paradise narrative" whereby lifestyle migrants leave their lives in

first-world countries in search of an imagined life of leisure.

Benson and O'Reilly acknowledge a clear overlap exists between lifestyle

migration and tourism, suggesting each seeks to escape "the drudgery of the routine…in

[the] search [for] community, security, leisure and tranquility" (2009: 614). Similarly,

MacCannell (1999) contends the modern tourist, burdened and overwhelmed by the

constraints of an artificially constructed modern world, is driven by a desire to experience

an "authentic life" devoid of modern intrusions in far-away destinations. Referring to

what Williams and Hall (2002) called "tourism-informed mobility," Benson and O'Reilly

suggest some lifestyle migrants use their experiences as tourists to choose their

destinations, using those experiences to construct an imagined reality of daily life in those

sites. Lifestyle migrants also use media imagery to choose their destinations. Urry and

Larson (2011), in their discussion of tourism and the "tourist gaze" in the 21st century,

contend ideas of utopian destinations and the anticipation of pleasurable experiences by

tourists-turned-residents are not by accident but are shaped by popular media imagery. This assertion is supported by Spalding (2013) who found that many lifestyle migrants to Bocas del Toro used imagery in popular media to create imaginings of daily reality prior to their arrival, imagining that reality within a lifestyle of perpetual leisure in an idealized tropical paradise.

Although not all lifestyle migration crosses international borders (Hoey2014), much of the research focuses specifically on first-world migrants moving internationally in search of a simpler life abroad (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Benson 2012; Torkington 2012; Spalding 2013; Akerlund and Sandberg 2015). As mentioned above, the idea of "escapism" appears to be at the heart of lifestyle migration. Therefore, it stands to reason that lifestyle migrants would cross international borders in the belief that a better life might exist elsewhere, particularly if that "elsewhere" practiced different cultural norms and maintained contrasting values in the shaping of their daily existence.

Benson and O'Reilly contend "lifestyle migration can only be fully understood…by examining the decision to migrate within the context of the migrants' lives before migration…[and] by taking into account the particularities of their lives following migration" (2009:620). Understanding a migrants' life prior to moving offers insight into understanding motivations for the move, something scholars (Benson 2012; Benson and Osbaldiston 2016) argue is lacking in the lifestyle migration literature. As will become apparent later, the "escapism" narrative was a dominant theme in the decision-making process that motivated individuals to sell their belongings, pick up their lives and move to Playa Azul.

The interconnection between lifestyle migration and the concept of place should be obvious. Lifestyle migrants are motivated to move to distant locales in search of a better way of life that is often dissimilar to their normal daily existence. Most often, that dissimilarity is found in cultural differences and how daily life is organized (Benson and O'Reilly 2009).

Place and Place Character

The study of place is a prominent feature in the social sciences and particularly in the study of tourism. Within the tourism literature, place has been utilized to study sustainable development (Nost 2013), narratives of tourist spaces (Delyser 1999; Meethan 2006; Minca and Oakes 2006), representations of tourist landscapes (Su 2010), the creation of tourist spaces (Minca 2006; Voase 2006) and how tourists understand tourist spaces (Crouch 2000; 2002). This can be expected being that tourism, at its core, is reliant on the existence of geographic places. Beyond the tourism literature, place has been used to study redevelopment (Colocousis 2012), migration (Harrison 2017), place attachment (Bell 1997) and the dynamics of social cohesion and social action (Bell 1994).

Thomas Gieryn (2000), in his call to action for sociologists to engage in a place-sensitive sociology, highlights the importance of the role of place in our analysis of social action. He contends places are comprised of three defining and interconnected characteristics – geographic location, material form and investment in meaning and value – that work together to construct meaning and mediate social life. Therefore, place should not simply be understood as background or setting where action occurs but rather understood as an active agent that has direct effects on social life and social action. This can be seen in DeLyser's (1999) study where she found tourists' experiences with the

ghost town were shaped by a lack of commercialism that nurtures perceived notions of authenticity and romanticized narratives of the past. Similarly, Harrison (2017) demonstrated how social and economic factors intertwine with place specific constructs to draw young professionals back to an economically depressed "legacy city" in Ohio.

Utilizing this framework, Playa Azul becomes more than simply a beach community in Cost Rica. Rather, it is a community "brought into being" through the narratives attached to it by the locals who live there and the tourists who visit. Indeed, the community becomes a place attached with meanings that influence the actions (performances) of locals and tourists alike. But the meanings attached to Play Azul are not static. They must be continually reworked through the daily performances of those actors operating in that particular setting (Crouch 2000; Gieryn 2000; Urry 2006; Nost 2013; Harrison 2017) to give a Playa Azul its character. Paulsen argues it is these meanings and "the routine practices they engender [that] work to distinguish places from one another." The result of these practices produces what she calls a distinct *place character*, revealing "a set of patterns in meaning and action that are specific to [that] distinct locale" (2004:245).

Paulsen argues to truly understand a place and the lives of the people that live there, we must look beyond the adjectives used to describe the setting and work to understand "how qualities of place combine and influence local patterns in meaning and action" (2004:243). In the simplest terms, place is defined by what people do there (Crouch 2000; Gieryn 2000; Paulsen 2004; Harrison 2017). But to understand how place influences action, Paulsen insists we should first "uncover just *what* constitutes a place's character by identifying" how people understand or interpret "the social and material

realities that provide the bases for these understandings." Second, we should then "examine just *how* a place's character matters" in influencing action (2004:246). Harrison suggests utilizing place character as a conceptual tool to analyze "the narratives of place provided by locals" to understand how meanings of place are constructed and how those meanings influence action (2017:267). Torkington (2012) used this same framework in her study of the lifestyle migration patterns and identity construction of northern Europeans migrating south. Following a similar framework, I contend lifestyle migrants to Playa Azul base their decisions to move on constructed narratives about place framed within an "escapism" paradigm. In addition, I argue that the local embodiment of *pura vida* works in combination with a Western understanding of authenticity to influence how those narratives are constructed.

Authenticity

Authenticity and place are unique concepts within the sociological literature but they are closely connected. In fact, the idea of authenticity works to shape the character of place (Delyser 1999), particularly in Playa Azul. The importance of place lies beyond simply its geographic location in the world. Within the sociology literature, place is generally defined by the structured meanings embedded in that place that influence patterns of human practices (Crouch 2000; Gieryn 2000; Paulsen 2004; Harrison 2017). The concept of "authenticity," however, has a more "contentious history" (Cohen 2004; Nost 2013). Similar to the lack of consensus within the development literature on the concept of "sustainable development" (Weaver 2004; Gould and Lewis 2009; Mowforth and Munt 2009), the concept of "authenticity" has varying definitions, degrees and categorizations (for full discussion, see Cohen 2004). But within the notions of place and

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place character (Paulsen 2004; Harrison 2017), authenticity functions as a component of place in that authenticity shapes how tourists understand and interact with destinations and the people who live there. For purposes of this analysis, authenticity will be measured within a development construct or level of development, particularly understanding authenticity as a lack of development (Nuñez 1989; DeLyser 1999; MacCannell 1999; Minca and Oakes 2006; Nost 2013). Following DeLsyer (1999), in her study of a California ghost town, I contend authenticity functions as a "vehicle" that tourists use to construct narratives of Playa Azul and shape their understandings of daily life within that place.

For travelers, the value associated with a particular destination is often measured by its perceived "authenticity" (DeLyser 1999; Minca and Oakes 2006; Nost 2013). This is supported by interview interview participants about how they discussed Playa Azul in relation to their experiences in other, more developed, tourist destinations in Guanacaste like Tamarindo and Playa Flamingo. Scholars argue tourist ideas about the "authentic" are often shaped by popular media (MacCannell 1999; Su 2010; Urry and Larson 2011), leading tourists to conceptualize authenticity as a general lack of development (DeLyser 1999; Cohen 2004; Nost 2013). These ideas are then imposed on destinations and shape tourist behaviors.

In the case of Playa Azul, the lack of development (by first-world standards) is clearly visible in the unpaved roads surrounding the community and the lack of sidewalks throughout much of the town (this is changing as a sidewalk was recently built on Main Street and in front of the public school). In addition, many of the houses in Playa Azul have corrugated metal roofing and high fences with barb wire along the top that can give

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the appearance of underdevelopment. (The fencing and barb-wire are typical throughout Costa Rica and can be seen in both small towns and big cities). There are also no buildings standing above three-stories throughout the town. However, there is a large five-story condominium building on the hillside leading out of town that is plainly visible from the beach but many locals do not consider it to be "Playa Azul." These expectations of authenticity, rooted in perceptions of underdevelopment, are further reinforced with the almost daily disruptions of water and utility services for short periods of time, particularly during the high season when the systems experience stress from overuse.

Authenticity can also be viewed as performance, whereby the local residents create and recreate notions of authenticity through their daily actions and behaviors. In this sense, the locals become guides and place-packagers of the authentic, educating the tourists on the local norms and values while indirectly instructing them how to conduct themselves under those particular conditions (Minca and Oakes 2006). Simply put, authenticity is performed by locals and interpreted by tourists within the framework of place. In Playa Azul, this is particularly true in the performance of *pura vida*, whereby locals demonstrate through their actions how to properly respond to authentic conditions embedded in the local community.

Tourist Motivations to Visit Playa Azul

The Pacific Coast of Costa Rica differs greatly from the Caribbean coast in numerous ways. The climate on the Caribbean coast tends to be wet and humid throughout the year without a real "dry season." Culturally, there is a strong Afro-Caribbean influence centered around Limón (McCoy-Torres 2016), the largest city on the Caribbean coast. And the tourism on the Caribbean coast tends to be more nature-

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oriented and smaller in scale (Nost 2013) than that on the Pacific coast. The Pacific coast, on the other hand, tends to be a bit drier, particularly in the dry season when it can go days and even weeks without rain. Culturally, the Pacific coast tends to have a Latino influence (although many outside of the northern region of Guanacaste would argue this is changing). The biggest difference is the kind of tourism that each coast fosters. Due to climate differences, the Pacific coast is more conducive to sand, surf and sun mass tourism development (Honey 2008; Honey et al. 2010).

Many of the tourists and migrant residents I spoke with for this research explained to me they first heard about Playa Azul from someone who had previously visited, either in their home country or along their travels. This is understandable being that travel guides give very little print space to the discussion of Playa Azul in relation to the more popular large-scale tourist towns and wildlife sanctuaries situated along the coast of the Nicoya Peninsula.

One of the things that appealed greatly to tourist and lifestyle migrants I spoke with was the kind of tourist activities offered in and around Playa Azul. Although not explicitly marketed as ecotourism, many of the activities fall under the umbrella of ecotourism tourism. Not wanting to engage in resort-style experiences, tourists tend to be drawn to Playa Azul because of the *pura vida* vibe of the town as well as the ability to interact with locals in the community and the surrounding nature. Mirroring findings by Braun, Dreiling, Eddy and Dominguez (2015) in their study of conservation and development in Brasilito, a general consensus among tourists and *Ticos* was interactions between the two groups on a personal level tends not to happen in places with large-scale tourist development.

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The Place Character of Playa Azul

A central theme of previous research on lifestyle migration has focused on the lives of migrants after they made their move abroad (Torkington 2012; Spalding 2013; Van Noorloos and Steel 2016). Benson and Osbaldiston (2016) argue that there has been limited research conducted to expand on the lifestyle migration literature beyond conceptualizations proposed in the foundational paper published by Benson and O'Reilly (2009). In particular, Benson and Osbaldiston suggest future research expand on existing concepts by examining how imaginations of a better life are shaped by other actors beyond the imaginations conceived prior to migration. This research attempts to address this limitation by examining how place specific factors shape meaning and influence decisions to move. Furthermore, this research adds nuance to the existing literature on lifestyle migration by expanding on Williams and Hall's (2002) notion of "tourism-informed-mobility" by reframing the migrant in Playa Azul from someone "searching" for a better life to someone who has "found" a potential better life and decided to move.

This section addresses the *what* and the *how* proposed by Paulsen (2004) by examining *what* constitutes the place character of Playa Azul and *how* that place character factors into migrant decisions to stay in Playa Azul. To do so, this analysis follows Paulsen's (2004) suggestion to use "local accounts" of place to understand how locals and lifestyle migrants understand daily life in Playa Azul. In the process of conducting this research and through my daily interactions and conversations with residents and tourists in Playa Azul, I identified several place specific themes used by lifestyle migrants that worked to influence them to stay or move back to Playa Azul. The three primary narratives were a strong sense of community, wanting live a more simple

life (a sense of freedom) and a return to or connection with nature (rural idyllic). These narratives are by no means mutually exclusive. As will become apparent in the analysis below, there is a great deal of overlap between them.

Narratives constructed by lifestyle migrants in Playa Azul were heavily influenced by the beauty of the surrounding environment and the calm, relaxing vibe of the town. In the previous chapter, I illustrated how the local construct of *pura vida* shapes the vibe of Playa Azul and influences local codes of conduct. In this section, I show how values embedded within a local form of *pura vida* work to shape the place character of Playa Azul and ultimately work to influence lifestyle migrants to move to Playa Azul.

The Feeling of Community

The biggest motivation for lifestyle migrants to move to Playa Azul in this study was a strong sense of community. Most of the migrants I spoke with were not actively searching for a new place to live when they visited Playa Azul but during their visit, they were impressed by the sense of community, comradery and genuine kindness extended by the locals. A big part of the community feeling in Playa Azul derives from the fact that this is still a "Tico town" and the vibe of the town is shaped by a localized form of *pura vida* that structures community life in Playa Azul. As the excerpts below will demonstrate, family and togetherness are tightly woven into the social fabric of the community. This idea of community and family will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter when I discuss collective identity but for now, it works to demonstrate how residents understand community and daily life in Playa Azul. In what follows, I will first illustrate how *Ticos* conceptualize community in Playa Azul and then show how that

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conceptualization of community worked to influence lifestyle migrants to move to Playa Azul.

When I asked Alejandro, a 31 year old *Tico* from San Jose, to explain local life and community in Playa Azul, he said –

> Everything in Costa Rica is about family but it is especially like that in Playa Azul… In Costa Rica, we've been raised with a Catholic mentality and a family oriented type of living, you know? So, I think that's the key for Playa Azul, man. That has made Playa Azul what it is. It is like a family around the beach, you know? You go to any family here and they will open up their door and they will share their meal with you, even if they have to take a little bit of rice and a little bit beans off their plate to give to you, they will do that for you. You go to most foreigners and they won't do that for you because they come with a making money mentality, they have a business mentality. To them, giving something for free is losing money. And for people here, it's not giving something for free, it's just giving.

In his explanation of community in Playa Azul, Alejandro also touched on the "escapism" frame that was common in how lifestyle migrants discussed life in Playa Azul, often comparing life in European and North America societies as less desirable and filled with anxiety. In fact, as I will discuss below, this is the core reason many of the lifestyle migrants chose to leave their lives abroad and start anew in Playa Azul. Beyond explaining community in Playa Azul, Alejandro also touched on a growing sentiment in Playa Azul concerning recent changes in the community with reference to new foreign residents in Playa Azul shaping their lives around "a business mentality".

Of course, there is also a bit of hyperbole in Alejandro's explanation of food but the sentiment is certainly true in Playa Azul. For example, during the time I lived in Barrio Delfin (one of the surrounding neighborhoods), one of my housemates was in the front yard trying to make a small temporary BBQ pit using bricks. A passing neighbor in

his 60s stopped on his bike and asked what she was doing. When she told him she was making a BBQ pit to prepare dinner, he laughed and told her stop, then got on his bike and rode home. A few minutes later, he returned with a rolling BBQ pit and simply told her to return it the following day. Although she ultimately refused the kindness for fear of destroying his property and not being able to replace it, the gesture was clear.

This kind of community sentiment can also be seen when walking to town from one of the surrounding neighborhoods or walking home. It is quite common for strangers to stop and offer a ride. Although the walk is not terribly far, it is often hot and rides, no matter how short, are always appreciated. On several occasions on my way to work, passersby stopped and offered a ride into town. Part of the reason is the fact that the town is so small and in one way or another, everyone is connected. Enrique reiterated this feeling what by saying "Everybody knows everybody here, maybe not like formal but like seeing every day. We are a small town. We try to help each other."

Similar to Alejandro, Rodrigo, a 29 year old *Azuleño*, also discussed the community in Playa Azul within a family framework and stressed a communal desire to help others when someone is in need, saying –

> We are like a big family. And at the same time, we are friendly with people from other towns. You know, we have a lot of people that moved here from San Jose, Heredia, Cartago, because, you know, Playa Azul traps you when you get here. You know, the vibe of the town and of the people, you know, you feel like you are free. You can walk on the beach and you can do whatever and everybody knows you. If you need help, everybody is gonna help you and things like that. That's Playa Azul.

These same constructs appear in the narratives of lifestyle migrants as well, shaping for them a version of local life and reality that ultimately influenced their move. Louise, a 32 year old migrant from Germany, had been traveling for several months

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before arriving in Playa Azul. After visiting and leaving, she returned the following year and stayed. She explained her decision to move to Playa Azul this way –

> To me, I don't know, it's super special. It's the mix of, I mean it's beautiful, the nature, the animals and everything, I love that but it's the people here. The people here are super special. I love the mix of the people, like with the Ticos and the foreigners, you know, the tourists living here, the foreigners living here…everybody is most of the time happy in this town.

Louise continued by explaining the difference between life in Playa Azul and her life in Frankfurt where she had been living most of her adult life prior to moving to Playa Azul. One of the things she excitedly pointed out about life in Playa Azul was that she knew her neighbors and when she saw them in town, they would talk to each other or "at least say hello." This was something she said was not a part of her reality in Frankfurt where she only knew one neighbor in her four-story building. She explained that despite living in the building for almost 5 years, many of her neighbors were strangers. Cathy, a 32 year old woman from the United States, provided a similar answer as to why she decided to move to Playa Azul, also focusing her explanation on the people of the community. Cathy had initially attended the massage school and had no intention of staying beyond her study but she said that changed after she arrived. She said she "fell in love with the people immediately! Everyone was really nice and welcoming and it was really easy to make friends here." She continued by saying "integration [into the community] wasn't hard at all. And the longer I've stayed, the more I feel like I'm part of the community here." Thomas, a 55 year old from Canada and business operator in Playa Azul, also referenced the community when he explained why he decided to pick up his life and move to Playa Azul. He explained his move this way –

I came here, one of the last towns, I guess, before I was heading home and I just fell in love with the town itself. Prior to looking for a business, I fell in love with the town. And the reason I did was because it had a nice mix of tourists, local ex-pats and Ticos or locals. And it seemed to somehow encourage participation from everyone, from all those three groups.

Thomas' explanation of Playa Azul and the community highlights the general theme from most of the people I met during my research there. Most migrants I met talked about the feeling of community within a framework of Tönnies' (1940, cited in Bell 1994:87) *gemeinschaft* that stressed "friendship, neighborliness and kinship … all closely tied to land and place" and often contrasted this reality with their previous lives back in their home countries, often at the expense of those former lives.

The foundation of the community narrative is the idea that class does not exist in Playa Azul. The underlying theme of this narrative can be heard in all of the examples provided thus far, most obviously in the quote provided by Charles to start this chapter. A characteristic embedded within the construct of *pura vida* is the idea of togetherness and "we are all in this together." The idea of *pura vida* works well to establish a kind of "imagined community" in the sense that those using the expression share common experiences and thus share a similar worldview. For lifestyle migrants coming from first-world countries where class is a focal point of one's identity, the idea of a truly classless community is inviting and comforting. And for lifestyle migrants possessing a worldview shaped by their home cultures (where consumerism plays a big part of one's lived reality), seeing people not care about labels and in many ways reject consumer ideology can be refreshing and inviting.

A Sense of Freedom

Another popular theme pertaining to the character of Playa Azul was the sense of freedom narrative. This narrative appeared in numerous different contexts but ultimately reinforced Benson and O'Reilly's (2009) assertion that lifestyle migrants decisions to move are in an effort to escape the "constraints" of modern life.

When I asked Jerry, a retired welder in his 60s, why he decided to move to Playa Azul, he told me he was "tired of all the bullshit" going on in U.S. politics. Jerry was a staunch conservative but had moved to Costa Rica in 2001 during the early Bush years, so I was a bit confused what "bullshit" he was talking about. When I asked him to explain what he meant, he explained away the comment by saying "they're all a bunch of crooks!" For Jerry, moving to Costa Rica enabled him to maintain some of his freedoms that were being eroded in the United States. This same theme appeared on another occasion one afternoon on the beach. I was with some friends at one of the beach bars when an older gentleman walking his dog and wearing a red MAGA hat walked over to the table next to us. There was an older couple sitting at the table. Their dogs, like all dogs in Playa Azul, were running loose on the beach without a leash. The gentleman in the MAGA hat said jokingly to the couple, "You better put your dogs on a leash." "This is Costa Rica," the seated gentleman replied. "It's why we moved down here. So we wouldn't have to deal with all those stupid laws," he continued sarcastically. "You ain't seen nothin' yet!" said the MAGA gentleman. "Wait 'til Hilary gets in there! We're not going to be able to go outside without paying a tax!" he continued. Similar to Jerry's comment about "crooks," these two gentlemen viewed Costa Rica as a method of escape from the oppressive legal system in the United States.

A few foreign residents viewed Playa Azul within a framework of "the Wild West." In fact, Playa Azul was framed in this way by three different people. Craig, a 35 year old business operator from the United States who has been living in Playa Azul for three years, described Playa Azul as "the Wild West" and a "free-for-all" when it comes to building and development. He spoke of some of the advantages of being able to "do what you want" but he also thought that kind of community-wide approach to development would be the town's undoing. When I asked him if he was concerned this "Wild West" approach would change the vibe of Playa Azul, he said –

> I wouldn't like to see it here. I like the small town vibe, you know. I like it just the way it is. As a business owner, of course it would make more business, you know, I'd make more money but I didn't come here to make money. I came here to surf and chill and have a decent life. You know, I run a business just so I can maintain that life. If it does build up bigger, I'll end up selling the business and moving someplace else, someplace small and start over.

Despite Craig's reservations about the potential for the town to grow and change into something else, Craig's comment highlights his decision to move to Playa Azul. Jim, another business owner from the United States who had been living in Playa Azul for almost 15 years, explained Playa Azul in a very similar way. When I asked Jim about a "tree-line ordinance" prohibiting the construction of buildings taller than the tree-line, he laughed and said he had heard talk of this as well but explained local building codes (he used air-quotes when he said "codes") were determined by how much money someone had, saying, "this [is] Costa Rica. There isn't a lot of enforcement here. This place is like the Wild West. If you have the money, you can [build] whatever you want." And similar to Craig, Jim explained this kind of freedom as a kind of double-edge sword. On one side, people in Playa Azul were pretty free to do whatever they wanted as long as they

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did not cause harm to other people. This was a huge positive in Jim's eyes and one of the main reasons he chose to move to Playa Azul. He gave the example of the bonfires on the beach which he said were actually illegal in Costa Rica but here in Playa Azul, where there is a bonfire almost every night, no one cares and they are permitted as long as they do not cause any issues. He explained Playa Azul as a town that, in many ways, was outside of any formal "legality". But he also recognized the potential problems associated with this kind of structure. He pointed out that the lack of enforcement would eventually change the structure of tourism in Playa Azul and the community vibe that maintained the character of the town. Tony, a 26 year old from Europe who has been living in Playa Azul for about a year, also explained Playa Azul within a Wild West framework, saying this "is a Wild West beach town, man. I mean, yeah, I can basically do whatever I want here…It's why I am still here." Tony, like many others, decided to move to Playa Azul because of the sense of freedom he experienced while there. But Tony, being a seasoned traveler, also stressed the limits to freedom in Playa Azul. He was adamant about respecting the collective conscience of the local community and the residents who lived there.

Place narratives of freedom also appeared in slight variations in the form of freedom from the constraints of modern life. For example, whereas the above discussion refers to freedom to pursue a particular action or set of actions or to avoid an action, other place narratives of a sense of freedom refer to a kind of escapism from pressures or constraints of modern life or living a more simple life. For example, Cathy (mentioned above) discussed feeling relieved of the pressures to consume when she is in Playa Azul, saying –

> I will also say when I'm in the States, I feel like I need to buy things all
> the time, you know, consume, consume, consume and, you know, thinking
> to myself, oh, I'm going to need this or that and then when I get here, I'm
> like, why did I buy that? I wear like five things (laughing). There's no
> reason for me to have bought that.

Emma, a 29 year old woman from Germany who only recently moved to Playa Azul,

shared similar feelings of relief from the pressures of home. In fact, Emma told me the

reason she moved to Playa Azul was because she had gotten really stressed about work

and had experienced a serious bout of depression. When I asked to explain how her life is

different in Playa Azul from her previous life in Germany, she explained it this way –

> At home, the whole day was packed with something. There was lots of
> stress at work. Lots! And because you have lots of stuff at home, you
> know, you have like a nice car, you have a nice apartment, TV, whatever,
> so to keep all the stuff working or whatever, you have to insure everything
> and I don't know, it was, to me, it's super stressful to have lots of stuff.
> Like here, I'm relaxed. I don't have anything what could break. So you
> don't have to care all the time. I mean, I have a bicycle but it's shitty
> anyway, so if someone steals it, they will regret stealing it (laughing). But
> in Germany, you have to take care of all your stuff and watch all your
> stuff. It's stressful.

Like many other lifestyle migrants in Playa Azul, Emma first came to Playa Azul

as a tourist looking for some leisure time away from the stresses of work in her home

country. After visiting and returning home, she realized the slower pace of life she had

experienced in Playa Azul was what she needed. So she sold her belongings and moved

to Playa Azul. Louise (mentioned above) also discussed a slower pace of life as one of

the reasons she decided to move to Playa Azul, explaining her thoughts this way –

> In Germany, it's probably the same in the States. You have your 5 day a
> week or 6 days, you're working a lot, a lot, a lot, you're earning money to
> buy more stuff to, I don't know, just to have it. You know, it's normal.
> [But] here, it's different. You go to work. At the end of the day, you get
> your salary. You use it for fun stuff, maybe some food as well (laughing).

And that's it. You do live day by day here but it's more about living than working.

This is a very common story in Playa Azul and one that can be retold over and over. Angela, a 32 year old woman from New York, moved to Playa Azul after returning to work from vacation and realizing she was not happy in her career. Steve, a 43 year old software engineer, moved to Playa Azul after realizing he did not want to work in computers for the rest of his life. Isabella, a 32 year old woman from Italy, decided not to return home at all from her vacation after she determined she would be happier in Playa Azul than at home in Italy pursuing a career as a child psychologist. All of these examples highlight a slower pace of life narrative common in the lifestyle migration literature (Benson 2009; Spalding 2013; Hoey 2014).

This narrative also appears in the *Tico* community as well. Being a tourist town, many *Ticos* in the community have established networks in other countries. There were a few *Ticos* that moved for a while or spent extended holidays in Europe or North America but returned after realizing life in those places was too hectic and stressful. One of my favorite stories was the experience Carlos had in Europe.

Carlos had met a woman in Playa Azul while she was on vacation. The woman was European and after returning home, decided to return to Playa Azul to pursue a relationship with Carlos. They eventually married in Costa Rica and after three years, agreed Europe offered more opportunity, so they returned to her home country and started a new life there. After five years, however, Carlos told me the pull of life at the beach started to weigh heavy on him. He felt trapped in a cycle of work and spend, working long hours and buying things they did not need. He told me he felt like he was

dying a little more each day and jokingly described putting on a tie each morning for work felt like tying a noose around his neck. He contrasted the two worlds in this way –

> You know what I learned between living in a first-world country or in a very happy bubble in the middle of nowhere in a third-world country? That's where I learned the difference between having quality of life or having life with quality… People [there] believe that having commodities equals having quality of life and this is a big, big illusion because quality of life [has] to do with the amount of happiness and joy that you get from your life…regardless of your commodities.

Carlos eventually returned to Playa Azul with only the things he could carry, leaving behind his life in Europe in favor of a more simple life in Playa Azul. Similar to the place specific narratives provided by lifestyle migrants who chose to move to Playa Azul, Carlos' story can be understood as a *return* to a slower pace of life narrative (Benson and "O'Reilly 2009).

The Rural Idyllic

The "rural idyllic" narrative draws on place specific notions within a counter-urbanization framework and a desire to establish or re-establish a connection to nature. The ideas of authenticity and development fit well within this narrative and shape for many how they understand and interact with the community and environment. Part of the beauty of Playa Azul is the fact that locals still work and live there, something hard to find in other tourist beach communities (Honey 2008). Amanda, a 35 year old woman from the United States, expressed this position when I asked her to describe the town. Amanda answered the question this way –

> This town is different from other towns because there's such a mix of people that come here because Costa Ricans still own the land here. And I think it really adds to the magic of the place …

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Although this can also be applied to the community narrative, the fact that Costa Ricans still own land in the community and the surrounding area implies a sense of authenticity and frames Playa Azul as an authentic Costa Rican town. Notions of authenticity are further reinforced by the fact that Playa Azul regularly experiences disruptions to power and water services. For many, this is just another part of the experience living in or visiting Playa Azul. *Pura vida!* But for others, these disruptions can be an annoyance and a sign that Playa Azul is still a bit too far "off the beaten path." On several occasions during my time managing a local hostel, I spoke with or overheard visitors to Playa Azul complain that there was no hot water, that the electricity would go out at random times, that there was no cellphone service sometimes during the day and that there was no air-conditioning. These were common complaints and although not positive in these cases, they nevertheless reinforced notions of authenticity in Playa Azul.

Many lifestyle migrants expressed feeling more connected to nature while in Playa Azul. Being a tourist town that utilizes the surrounding nature as a non-consumptive resource, nature and having a respectful relationship with it is a big part of daily reality. In Playa Azul, it is a common community perspective that human society and the surrounding environment are equals, as part of the same symbiotic system. For example, crocodiles are a reality in this part of the world and especially in this area of Guanacaste. On the northern end of town, but well within town, is an estuary that catches the run-off from the rains in the mountains. The estuary forms a small lagoon before running off into the ocean. Every once in a while, crocodiles will be seen in the lagoon and on rare occasions (very rarely but it does happen), someone's dog will be eaten. One afternoon while sitting under the palms on the beach with some friends, someone

mentioned that a dog had recently been killed by a crocodile there. I asked Enrique, an *Azuleño*, why no one has killed the crocodile to prevent further animal attacks and before the crocodile kills a person. Enrique stared at me with a puzzled look before asking, "Why do people from the States always want to kill things? Why is that always the answer?" For a moment, I thought about what he asked, then suggested more forcefully that something should be done before a person gets hurt. Enrique smiled and said, "That crocodile was here before we got here and that crocodile will be here after we are gone. We can't punish a crocodile for being a crocodile." After this incident, I asked several other community members the same question and surprisingly, I got a similar answer from all of them, each suggesting in their own way the crocodile had every right to be in that lagoon or rather, we, as humans, did not have the right to remove it.

Many of the foreign residents that moved to Playa Azul explained part of the beauty of Playa Azul and their desire to live there was the healthy relationship with nature embedded throughout the community. Kelsey, a 23 year old woman from the United States, explained to me that she felt "more in-tune with nature" and felt a closer connection with the earth in Playa Azul. Similarly, Sarah, a 28 year old woman from Canada, said while sitting on the beach, "it's funny… I can sit here all day. I don't feel bored. But if I went back to Canada and just sat somewhere for a long time, I'd lose my mind."

I contend tourism development can be partly measured, not by buildings or infrastructure, but by the types of tourists that come to visit the site. Tourists in need of certain amenities like hot water and air-conditioning may find parts of life in Playa Azul difficult to deal with and would probably not go home, sell their belongings and move

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back. But this is my point. The kinds of tourists that turn into residents already fit the character of this small rural beach town and add to an already established community of like-minded people that respect each other, share with each other and support each other. I asked Carlos what kinds of people stay in Playa Azul. He answered the question by saying the people that stay in Playa Azul are the people…

> …pursuing the goal of being happy. These are people that are happy to live in a place in Costa Rica where they were so in touch with nature, where they were so in touch with the ocean, where they were so in touch with their own inner-self more than, again, the outside world… in a village in the middle of nowhere in the Pacific ocean where people just hang out and surf and walk in bikinis and have frisbee sessions in the afternoon…A place where people walk with their dogs or climb trees to eat a mango or coconut or grab a kayak and go out and swim…

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued the lack of capitalist penetration into the community coupled with the localized form of *pura vida* have worked to shape the character of Playa Azul and has factor greatly into the decisions of many tourists-turned-residents (lifestyle migrants) to pick up their lives abroad and relocate to Playa Azul. Using Paulsen (2004) and Harrison's (2017) work on place character, I show how the idea of *pura vida* shapes the character of Playa Azul through place-specific narratives used by lifestyle migrants to construct understandings of daily life in Playa Azul. Many of the lifestyle migrants who I spoke with and interacted with during my stay in Playa Azul explained they were drawn to move to Playa Azul primarily because of the sense of community, feelings of freedom and a slower pace of life that enabled them to live happier and fuller lives. I argued that these findings support previous claims in the literature that lifestyle migrants' decisions to move were motivated by search for community (Ackerlund and Sandberg 2015) and a

general desire to escape the constraints of modern life in their homes countries (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). I contend the result has been the cultivation of a multicultural community of *Ticos* and foreign residents based on humility, acceptance and mutual respect.

CHAPTER V

REACHING INTO THE PAST:
CULTURAL MEMORY AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

"You might not be fluent but at least try to learn something. You are not in your home country anymore, gringo! You are in Costa Rica! We speak Spanish here!
~ Esteban[16]

Introduction

The previous chapter explained how the lack of large-scale tourism development in Playa Azul has fostered a unique form of *pura vida* to develop in the area that shapes the character of Playa Azul. In addition, the lack of large-scale tourism development has also enabled Playa Azul to maintain traditional norms and values and the image of an authentic Costa Rican beach community. Over the last decade, as Playa Azul has become a more popular tourist destination, it has also become more enticing for lifestyle migrants searching for a better way of life. The result has been the development of a multicultural community based on acceptance, humility and mutual respect. However, as more lifestyle migrants flock to Playa Azul and the surrounding area and the town continues to develop as a tourist destination, the local culture will inevitably be affected as the social relations begin to reflect the new material conditions that shape it (Marx 1978).

This chapter examines how locals in Playa Azul express their own patterns of distinction in the face of an emerging class structure looking particularly at the identity work local *Ticos* engage in to maintain a sense of dignity and control in their community. Bourdieu (1984) contends systems of social distinction emerge in class based systems as the result of economic elite efforts to distinguish themselves from non-elite members of

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[16] Esteban, a 24 year old *Azuleño,* shared his frustrations with me about tourists and resident expats who expect him to speak their language, often English, when interacting in town. He recognized many have not learned to speak Spanish but the fact that they do not try to learn the language bothered him because they expected him to learn their language.

society. One of the ways this is achieved is through the use of non-economic markers reflecting tastes and other socially managed criteria. However, in an effort to combat the economic power of foreign residents, the local *Tico* community (*Azuleños*) has managed to establish a criterion rooted in a kind of localism, emphasizing an *Azuleño* identity rooted in a shared "collective memory" (Olick 1999) of ancestral norms, values that shape codes of conduct within the community. Although the idea of being an "*Azuleño,*" in and of itself, is not unique to Playa Azul (in the sense that people from Nicoya refer to themselves as *Nicoyeños* and so on), the meanings embedded within this localized identity functions as a subtle criterion that distinguishes *Azuleños* from other *Ticos* and community members and works to maintain the existing social structure based on ancestral norms and values independent of class based criteria.

Pachucki, Pendergrass and Lamont (2007) have suggested there is a need for more research on the formation of collective identity to better understand "the mechanisms that activate boundary processes" (333-334). This chapter addresses that point by examining collective identity formation in Playa Azul. I contend the local *Tico* community has constructed a particular collective identity as a tool for maintaining social status in the face of perceived threats to the existing social order brought on by a shifting economic base. Although far from the saturation point or "stagnation" stage that Butler (2004; 2006) discusses in his model of tourism development and decline, I contend the identity work, nevertheless, represents initial signs of community-wide frustrations among some in the *Azuleño* community and foreign residents over the recent challenges to the existing social relations of the community.

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They were near the base of the hill in the middle of the street in front of the bakery standing chest to chest. Carlos, a normally mild-mannered *Azuleño* and the embodiment of the *pura vida* vibe, was now standing with his finger pointed directly in Ken's face. "You need to treat people with respect, Ken!" he yelled. He continued yelling at Ken, telling him his money and business did not give him the right to treat people in town "like shit." Ken was from Europe, in his mid-50s and had been living in Playa Azul for many years. He also owned a local business that catered exclusively to tourists, renting quads and providing tours into the surrounding mountains and jungle. Although I did not know Ken, I knew him by reputation. Many in town, expats and *Azuleños* alike, described him as a nice guy until he had a few drinks, and then his mood often changed.

It was the middle of the afternoon and Main Street was busy with tourists and locals. I stopped near the fruit stand, sat on my bike and made small talk with a tourist and like everyone else that was standing around pretending not watch, I watched but pretended not to. Carlos was a popular figure in town and seeing him act aggressively like this was out of character. That was enough to tell me that whatever had happened between them had to be serious to push him to act in this way. "Carlos, you're going to pay for this!" Ken yelled and shoved his finger in Carlos' chest. At that, Carlos stepped back, took off his work shirt and threw it at Ken. The shirt hit Ken in the chest but he made no attempt to catch it. The shirt fell to his feet. "You're fired, Carlos! And I'm not paying you for today!" yelled Ken. Ken continued to yell and point his finger as Carlos turned to walk away, telling Carlos he owed him money and one way or another, he was going to get it.

Carlos had only taken a few steps when a white 4-door police truck turned the corner and slowly approached the two men. There were four policemen inside the truck, two in the front and two sitting in the backseat of the cab. They stopped next to Carlos and Ken and the driver began asking questions through the window. None of the police got out of the truck. Carlos was pointing at Ken and explaining to the police what had happened. Ken, not able to speak or understand Spanish, protested that he didn't understand what was being said and accused Carlos of lying. This angered Carlos who yelled at Ken "That's your fault, asshole! You've lived here for 10 years! You should speak Spanish by now!" After a few moments, the police drove away and Carlos started walking down Main Street toward the beach. As Carlos was walking away, Ken once again reminded Carlos that he would not be paying him for his work that day. Carlos turned and told Ken to "keep it" and that he did not want his money.

Carlos and I were friends, so I felt comfortable enough to ask what had happened. I rode up behind Carlos as he walked down the street toward the beach and jokingly said "*pura vida, maje*." He turned and smiled and asked if I had seen what had just happened. I explained that not only had I seen what had happened but several people in town had witnessed the altercation and jokingly reminded him that they were in the middle of Main Street. As we spoke, several locals who witnessed the incident came over to shake his hand and offer encouragement and emotional support. When I asked what had happened, Carlos explained the sequence of events this way; there had been an accident on the quad tour he had given earlier that day to a group of tourists. The accident had caused some minor damage to one of the quads but Carlos told the adults in the tour not to worry about it and they would deal with it when the tour returned to Playa Azul. But after returning to

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town, an argument broke out between Ken and one of the adults in the tour over the costs of the damage. The tourists had challenged Ken's assessment of the damages and had refused to pay. Carlos agreed with the tourists that the costs were too high and encouraged Ken to lower the cost. The accident caused a broken tail light and a cracked rear fender but Ken wanted the tourists to pay $400 in damages, a price Carlos agreed far exceeded the cost of the damages. After a long argument over the costs and threats from Ken to call the police, the tourists grew more angry and left without paying anything. It was at this point that Carlos said Ken turned his anger on him. Ken began yelling at Carlos for getting involved in his business (in reference to the charges and Carlos agreeing with the tourists about the excessive costs) and accused him of being responsible for encouraging the tourists to leave without paying. Ken then demanded Carlos go to the hotel where the tourists were staying and get the money. Carlos refused, telling Ken that was not his job and more than that, he wasn't his dog to order around. This is when Carlos said the confrontation moved from the side of the road where the quads are parked to the middle of the street. As Carlos began to walk away, Ken followed after him, demanding Carlos get the money. Ken was insisting that Carlos either get the money from the tourists or he would be responsible for the damages to the quad. The police arrived soon after.

Although this was an isolated incident between two individuals in the community, it nevertheless highlights the growing frustrations felt by local residents of Playa Azul as the community continues to change under the weight of tourism and development. In particular, I contend some local residents (*Azuleños* who do not own a business or land) are beginning to feel less in control of their future as more money continues to pour into

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the community and more businesses fall under foreign control. In what follows, I demonstrate how the oppositional collective identity of *Azuleño* is constructed and how it works to maintain the existing social structure based on ancestral norms and values independent of class based criteria. The conclusions drawn were based on conversations, notes, interviews and observations during my time in Playa Azul.

The Identity Framework of Playa Azul

The status structure in Playa Azul, one that puts *Azuleños* at the center, is primarily maintained by the younger generation of locals in Playa Azul. Although the older generation is aware of its existence as a signifier of status within the community, I did not observe older *Azuleños* drawing power from it or using it as a position of status in the community. But there might be a simple explanation for this; the younger generation feels they are losing what has traditionally belonged to them for generations. In an effort to maintain a level of respect in the community, I contend the younger members of Playa Azul have emphasized an oppositional collective identity within the community that stands outside of class based hierarchies based on economic power and access to resources.

Locals, Foreign Residents and Tourists

The social structure I observed in Playa Azul was broken into three large groupings with each grouping being further broken down into smaller sub-groups. The first group is the local *Azuleño* group. This group is broken into two sub-groups determined primarily by age. The second tier is the foreigner resident group. This resident group is further broken down into three sub-groups; foreigner *Ticos*, foreigner

locals, and long-term seasonal workers. The long-term season workers are sometimes referred to as long-term tourists because they have no intention of staying in the community once the tourist season ends. Adler and Adler (1999) refer to these kinds of travelers as "seekers". The third group is the tourist group. The tourist group is broken into 2 sub-groups determined primarily by integration into the community. The sub-groups for this group are tourists and resident expats who have no desire to integrate into the local community.

At the core of this identity structured is level of integration into the town. Integration is often determined by behaviors and engagement with the local community. It is also determined, in part, by one's respect for the local culture. This often boils down to one's willingness to learn Spanish or speak Spanish when necessary. Several *Azuleños* explained this iswhy "long-term tourists" garner more respect in the community than some ex-pats foreign residents (level of integration into the local community and culture) despite not officially "living" in the community and having no intention of staying.

At the center of the structure are the local *Ticos* (*Azuleños*). *Azuleños* define what it means to "be local" in Playa Azul and act in subtle ways to reinforce the structure in daily life. The tourists, in turn, then further reinforce and legitimize the structure as they seek an "authentic" experience in Playa Azul and thus validate *Azuleno* identity and status.

The Locals – Ambassadors and Elders

The *Azuleño* identity is primarily defined by a direct relationship to the land and the town with only *Azuleños* truly being considered "local". According to the locals I spoke with for this research and throughout my stay in Playa Azul, to be an

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Azuleño/Azuleña meant the person had to be born in Playa Azul and has lived in or near the area for most or all of their life. Many of the *Azuleños* have an ancestral connection to the town and the land in the area (mentioned above) going back generations and when discussing the town and their childhood, many often explained happenings in their life in relation to experiences with parents or grandparents and in relation to geographic locations in town or the nearby area. But this is not to say this group is homogeneous in their thinking about tourism and tourism development in the community. The *Azuleño* group is broken into two sub-groups primarily dependent on age (as this is usually the foundation that influences their perspective on tourism and the development of Playa Azul).

I refer to the first sub-group as "the Elders". This group tends to be less visible of the two groups and tends to be older than the other *Azuleño* sub-group. As the older group, members of this group tend to be 60 years old and older although this is not an absolute. This group tends to speak only Spanish (although some may speak limited English) primarily because their interactions with tourists are less frequent. In a social sense, members of this group tend to associate primarily with other members of this social circle although, again, this is not an absolute and could be explained by the language barrier. Because this group primarily consists of members from the original families that settled this area of the Nicoya Peninsula in the 1950s, they tend to own land and homes throughout the community. A large majority of the Elder group earn money from rental properties and hosting students from one of the language schools as part of the home-stay component of those programs.[17]

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[17] The primary language school in town (PAILS) is a non-profit that subsidizes community members' incomes with the home-stay component of their language programs. According to Olivia, the Executive

This *Azuleño* group is generally split on their perspective of tourism and its impact on the community. Members of the Elder group have lived experiences in Playa Azul prior to the development of tourism and can remember life in Playa Azul when it was still a small farming and fishing community. Similar to Bell's (1997) discussion of "ghosts" of places long forgotten, their lived experiences and memories of Playa Azul survive beyond the current tourist development and still shape their concept of "home" and their identity in Playa Azul. These *Azuleños* see Playa Azul as more than simply a town but rather as their "home" in a sacred sense. Maria, a 68 year old *Azuleña* who has lived her entire life in Playa Azul and spoke fondly and proudly of her childhood in Playa Azul, felt many tourists do not respect the local community when they come to Playa Azul and act in ways they would not act in their home country. She explained that the ocean and the beach were places she played as a child but are now filled with tourists running around drunk and naked (at night). She said with frustration, "When tourists come here, they are coming into my home" and they need to respect it.[18]

Although Maria acknowledged some of the benefits tourism has brought to the community, she nevertheless saw those benefits overshadowed by the increases in trash, crime and drugs that come with tourism development. During another interview with Victor, a town Elder, his Elder neighbor came over and joined our discussion and shared a more critical view of tourism, referring to tourism development as "tourist colonialism" and explaining it as "colonialism with a smile." Similar to Maria, he recognized some of the benefits of tourism but ultimately saw tourism as another way for foreigners to further

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Director of PAILS, all the money the students pay for the home-stay component of the program goes directly to the family. Olivia explained the purpose was to help local families deal with rising costs in Playa Azul associated with tourism development.

[18] With the exception of the quote "When tourists come here…" with Maria, this is paraphrased from our conversation. Maria requested not to be recorded during our first interview, so this is taken from notes.

exploit *Ticos* with the promises of money. Although I did encounter this critical perspective on a couple of occasions, this perspective was in the minority.

The other sub-group of the *Azuleños* identity is the "Ambassador" group. I refer to this group as Ambassadors because this group is more visible, more active in the community and when tourists visit Playa Azul, there is a good chance the tourists will encounter and interact with a member of this group during their stay. The Ambassador group ranges in age from 18 to 45 with a majority being in their late 20s and early to mid-30s. Members of this group are the decedents of the Elder group. Nearly all of the members of this group are bilingual, speaking Spanish and English and several are multilingual speaking German, French, Italian or Dutch in addition to Spanish and English. The vast majority of this group works directly in the tourism industry as guides, surf instructors, bartenders, waiters, hotel clerks or any number of other jobs that deal directly with tourists.

Members of this group also appear more open to forming friendships and relationships with foreigners (*Ticos* and *gringos*).[19] Similar to the Elder group, this may also be directly related to language and the ability to effectively communicate with those that do not speak Spanish. As opposed to the Elder group, members of this sub-group are enthusiastic about tourism development and see tourism as a personal and social benefit. Many saw tourism as providing jobs, bringing new ideas into the community, enabling locals to establish relationships with people from all over the world and learn about other cultures without having to leave Playa Azul and providing locals the opportunity to learn foreign languages without formal training.

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[19] *Gringo* is a general term used for all foreigners from North America and Europe.

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Foreign Residents – Foreigner Ticos, Foreigner Locals and Long-Term Tourists

"Foreigner *Ticos*" are *Ticos* born outside of Playa Azul. They enjoy many of the same social advantages in Playa Azul as *Azuleños* but do not have the same social capital within the community. Similar to the Ambassadors in the local group, foreigner *Ticos* tend to be younger (18-40) and associated with beach life in some way. Members of this group also tend to work directly in tourism and similar to the Ambassadors, there is a good chance tourists will interact with members of this group during their stay in Playa Azul.

Many in this group tend to have a college education and come from one of the larger cities in Costa Rica (several I spoke with are from San Jose or one of the outlying areas of San Jose). In addition to other similarities with the Ambassadors, members of this group are also bilingual and multilingual. However, because many are college educated, many have formal language training in second and third languages in addition to the informal language training received through work experience in the tourism industry. Members of this group were also more apt to establish genuine friendships with other foreigners and tourists. Friendship here is being defined as a relationship not characterized by exploitation of tourists normally associated with tourism development (Nuñez 1989). In addition, foreigner *Ticos* tend to pay less attention to the socially constructed identities than the locals. When I asked Gonzalo, a foreign *Tico* in his late 20s, to explain what it means to be local in Playa Azul, he explained it this way –

> Well, I see locals as people who are living here. You, you are living here, you are local because you are living here. You are using the same system that we use, you go to the same market, you are following the same routine that we follow, you know, so it means like that. To see a person every day and they …the person is from Italy, for example, they can be from where ever, but the person lives here, the person is local. You know,

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the person knows the place, people know the person, they are local here, man.

"Foreigner locals" are foreigners that now reside in Playa Azul. This group is essentially made up of the lifestyle migrants discussed in chapter 4. They tend to be younger (21-45) and more socially integrated than the "resident expat" community (discussed below). They are also more active in the community, taking part in community events like fund-raisers and other community sponsored events. Members of this group also act on behalf on the community, organizing events like the community meeting to address noise complaints, the sit-in "action" against a local restaurant preventing local residents from using a section of the beach, beach clean-ups, and other community events designed to more fully integrate the community. Several members of this group own small businesses in Playa Azul. Nearly all of the foreigner locals I met during this research arrived in Playa Azul as tourists and moved back after returning to their home country. Enticed by the laid-back vibe and the welcoming nature of the community, nearly all of the foreign residents that participate in this research returned home, quit their jobs and sold most or all of their belongings and moved back to Playa Azul.

Most of the members of this group are from European countries like France, Italy, Spain and Germany. However, there is also a large Canadian contingency and recently more migrants from the United States have begun to arrive. Many members of this group are multilingual, speaking Spanish and English in addition to the language from their home country (if not English or Spanish). These language skills give this group an enormous advantage in the local job market in large part because they tend to be from the same countries as most of the visitors to Playa Azul. Because of their language skills,

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many members of this group work directly in the tourism industry in positions that deal directly with tourists. However, nearly all of the members of this group work illegally in Costa Rica. Although many members of the Ambassadors claim this s not a problem (there is always work if you want to work, one *Azuleño* told me), many of the foreign *Ticos* see it as a problem because businesses can hire illegal labor without having to pay taxes (whereas they would have to pay taxes if a *Tico* was on payroll), which many do at the expense of the *Tico* workforce.

Long-term seasonal tourists are similar to foreign locals with the primary exception they have no intention of staying in Playa Azul beyond the end of the high season. Members of this group work through the "high-season" to make enough money to continue their travelling abroad. Some work as voluntaries in local hotels or hostels but many work in restaurants and bars, relying on tips on top of their wages to fund or extend their travel.

Similar to Adler and Adler's (1999) "seekers" who work in tourist resorts to pay for their travel, this group travels throughout Latin America and South America (and sometimes the planet) working seasonally and searching for adventure. Members of this group tend to travel alone, are usually well under 30 years of age (18-25) and many are recent college graduates. Kelsey, a 23 year old woman from the United States who had been traveling for several months working her way through Central America prior to coming to Playa Azul, told me she had recently finished college and wanted "an adventure" before going home and starting her career. Marcelo, a 24 year old from Spain, told a similar story after having worked in Panama the previous season prior to coming to

Playa Azul, saying he wanted to see the world but did not have the money, so he planned to work his way around the world "one adventure at a time."

Members of this group begin arriving in Playa Azul in late-October and early-November and work through the high season (end of April), earning enough money to continue on their travels. Some stay beyond the conclusion of the high-season but most leave. Many of this group also return year-after-year if they can continue to earn enough money to travel during the low-season winter months in Central and South America.

Members of this group are also highly integrated into the community. Because they work in restaurants and bars, motivated by tips and fast money, they tend to work with *Ticos* who work in the "back of the house". These working relationships establish bonding friendships, quickly allowing long-term tourists to integrate more intimately and personally into the community. In Playa Azul, it is common to have several long-term tourists living in one small, unfurnished apartment. Because they have no intention of staying, they buy no furniture or anything too big to take with them when they leave. Similar to Steward's (2017) and Adler and Adler's (1999) findings, long-term tourists tend to come from upper-middle class backgrounds with no fear of hardship.

Tourists – Disinterested Resident Expats and Tourists

Beyond simply being tourists, the tourist group is characterized by their general lack of community integration. This can be expected from tourists being they probably have no connection to Playa Azul, are only be in town a short while and do not engage in any community activities other than tourist activities on the beach or in one of the local bars. For the *Azuleños, Ticos*, foreign locals and long-term seasonal tourists, this group is there to spend money.

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The resident expat community also fits into this group. Although this sub-group lives in or near Playa Azul, they differ from resident locals in their level of integration into the community. This group is characterized by living away from the community or in gated-communities and viewed as offering little in the way of community contribution. This group tends to keep to themselves, only venturing into town for groceries and other needed supplies. When they do go into town, they tend to visit businesses where other expats congregate. The primary knock against this group is that they are unwilling to learn Spanish. This might also explain why they tend to associate primarily with other members of this group and congregate in businesses where speaking English is not only acceptable but encouraged.

Playa Azul and Collective Identity

Pachucki, Pendergrass and Lamont (2007:333-334) suggest there is a need "to better isolate the mechanisms that activate boundary processes" (333-334). In this section, I attempt to identify this mechanism in the changing social dynamics of Playa Azul. I contend that identity work and the establishment of symbolic boundaries (Bourdieu 1984) originates as a response to changing community values brought on by the intensification of capitalist social relations into the community. The changes are perceived as directly related to the increase in pressures from external economic forces that require changes in the local norms and vales for purposes of more efficient capital accumulation by outside investors. What has resulted is the construction of an oppositional collective identity rooted in a kind of "localism" that draws upon ancestral norms, values and codes of behavior in order to maintain the existing social order. Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004:81) argue that collective identity is "first

and foremost a statement about categorical membership…that is shared with a group of others who have (or are believed to have) some characteristics in common." Assman (1995:130) suggests these kinds of categorical memberships are supported by a kind of "cultural memory" that shapes an "identificatory" structure that "preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity." In this sense, this kind of framework works to establish insider/outsider status of "who we are" and "where we come from" in the form of the *Azuleño* construct.

On the surface, the term *Azuleño* is simply an indicator of where someone was born in the same way someone might be a Californian or an Oregonian or a Panamanian. But as the norms and values begin to change in Playa Azul and locals begin to feel the pressure of that change, determining where someone is from works as the first criterion of distinction that establishes an "us" and "them" insider/outsider framework. Edgell and Tranby (2010:177) suggest these kinds of distinctions enable "social actors [to] understand themselves as similar to or different from one another."

The locals have constructed an identity of what it means to "be local" that draws on ancestral norms and values by romanticizing previous generations codes of conduct and thus providing a kind of idealized social framework for the continued development of Playa Azul. Although Schwartz (2000) was discussing Lincoln's legacy in relation to collective memory as a political tool, he alludes to the idea that collective memory can function like a model for social order. In this case, a romanticized image of Lincoln galvanizes and orders a set of values that shape culture and codes of conduct. In a similar vein, Bell (1997) discusses the power of "ghosts" that provide a sense of meaning to place and in turn, influence behavior and action.

Azuleños – Who We Are

Taylor and Whittier define collective identity as the "shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences and solidarity" (1999:170, cited in Owens, Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2010:490). In this section, I examine this "shared definition" of "we-ness" that unites local members of Playa Azul to demonstrate the framework used to construct the collective identity of the *Azuleño*. I have identified 4 themes rooted in cultural memory embedded in the narratives that shape the construction of collective identity in Playa Azul: ancestral attachment to the land; need to be tough; community as family; and local sense of pride and honor. Each of these narratives work to complement each other and construct and uphold what it means to be local by emphasizing traditional values associated with a small fishing and farming community.

Ancestral Attachment to the Land

Despite Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst's (2005) claim that being born and raised somewhere no longer plays a major factor in place attachment or identity construction, I found place attachment to be an integral part of how locals in Playa Azul constructed their collective identity. One of the primary criteria for establishing what it means to be a local in Playa Azul was the need to be born there or in one of the nearby neighborhoods. Several locals explained that being born somewhere else and moving to Playa Azul instantly made it impossible to be local. Nemecio, a 22 year old local, jokingly explained away the fact that he was actually born in Nicoya, saying, "Well, I was born in Nicoya … but I was only in Nicoya for one day!" Although he was laughing when he told me this, there is some truth in the anxiety of being perceived as an outsider. However, I found being born in Nicoya generally gets a pass if the family resides in Playa Azul (Nicoya has

the only hospital within 2 hours of Playa Azul). This is actually true of several of the locals I spoke with. Miguel, 34, was born in San Jose and did not move permanently to Playa Azul until he was 14 but he had been visiting Playa Azul since he was a very young child. His father and grandfather are *Azuleños*, so this connection enabled Miguel to be accepted as a local despite being raised in San Jose. When I asked how this is possible, to be born somewhere else but still be considered an *Azuleño*, Rodrigo, 29, explained that despite Miguel being born in San Jose and not moving to Playa Azul permanently until his teens, that he had been visiting frequently enough as a child to understand and internalize the local values of the community.

Some of the locals I spoke with could point to the houses they were born in with pride, explaining how they were born in the kitchen or in a bath tub. David, 42, explained with pride how he was born in a bath tub in a house overlooking Playa Azul, saying "I [was born] here in Playa Azul. Not in the hospital. My mom [have] me in [her] house, in the bath… she almost die[d], she tell me. She was so sick." In addition to having been born in Playa Azul, David's story of his mother's sickness and almost dying during childbirth also draws on the "tough" narrative in a kind of familial osmosis, in this case passed from mother to son. Fernando, 38, told a similar story, explaining how he was born in the kitchen of his grandmother's house that once stood on the beachfront where a restaurant now stands.

The ancestral connection to the land is not limited to childbirth, however. The connection to the land can also be expressed with childhood stories that involved showing appreciation or respect for the surrounding environment. Angelo, 33, demonstrated this in our conversation about changes to the community. Angelo and I sat

on the surf school bench one afternoon and he told me stories of fishing with his grandfather when he was a child. He explained that when he and his grandfather fished at the end of the beach near the rocky cliff, there were so many fish, all they needed was a spear or sharp stick. They would return to his grandfather's home and his grandfather would instruct him to give some of the day's catch to the neighbors. "That's how life was back then," he explained. He continued by explaining how in those days, everyone helped everyone and that was just how life was. "But now," he said, "It's all about money, money, money and how fast can I get it." He continued by telling me how no one cared about their neighbors anymore, it was just about making money. He shook his head with disappointment as he told me how things had changed in Playa Azul. Angelo's story rings of several of the narratives associated with ancestral norms and values that now shape contemporary constructs of being local in response to changes for the worse in Playa Azul. The connection and respect for the land is clear in this story as is the connection to the community with sharing food with the neighbors. It is a reminder that a core value in Playa Azul is the emphasis on community and family (and the community being one big family).

This narrative also lives on in the actions and attitudes of the locals in Playa Azul. Fishing, for example, is still held in high regard among the locals despite the fact that few locals actually spend much time fishing anymore. For some locals, they feel it is a part of their heritage and a culturally significant skill that they want to pass to their children something like an heirloom. Antonio, 36, spoke of wanting to teach his son how to fish, not for any practical reasons but simply because they came from a "family of fishermen" and it was a sense of pride to know how to fish.

Resilience

Similar to having an ancestral connection to the land and emphasizing that connection to the land with childhood stories of experiences shared with grandparents, the need to be tough narrative also relies somewhat upon stories from the past to create a reality in the present (Assman 1995). Stories of hard work were usually told in reference to town Elders who worked the land and sea to survive. Similar to stories of connections to the land, stories of needing to be tough to survive in Playa Azul were told with a sense of pride. This is exemplified with Antonio, 36, when he explained the difficulties his family faced when they arrived in Playa Azul.

> My family get here about 45 years ago. We were the third family to get into this town. When my family arrived to Playa Azul, there was no streets, there was only single-tracks to get to this beach. It was a very small community. There were only like three houses. They just fished for survival and there was no access. There were no buses, nothing. If they want to go, for example, shopping, they only go shopping for example for specific things like salt or those things. No rice or corn or beans because they grow all of these things. But when they wanted to go shopping, they had to go to Nicoya, which is the closest town from here and that took about 7 hours from here to Nicoya by horse.

The story that begins chapter 3 of this dissertation is another example of locals taking pride in the toughness associated with Playa Azul. When we told Ignacio the wheel of the bicycle we had rented had broken because of the holes and rocks on the road, he looked down at the road with a sense of pride and said, "These roads are tough, man." This not only indicated the roads were tough but people having to deal with those roads also needed to be tough.

This "tough" narrative is actually part of the legacy of Playa Azul. In fact, the founder of Playa Azul, don Pedro, was the embodiment of this toughness. As the story

goes, don Pedro was not a terribly large man but was known for his toughness, work ethic and determination to get things done. These traits earned him the nickname "Tuco" after a tiny, resilient sand-fly known for its painful bite. Many in the town still see don Pedro as a figure of toughness and emulation.

Part of this narrative is also maintained by the difficulties associated with a reliance on tourist development for survival. Enrique, 35, explained how in the low season when tourism is at the lowest, he sometimes needs to live on bananas, mangos, rice and an occasional fish, if he can catch one, for subsistence until the season begins again. As he told me the story, he related it back to when some members of the community were reliant on fishing for subsistence prior to tourism development and explained that life can be hard sometimes in Playa Azul and you need to be mentally and physically tough to survive.

Community as Family

This section will be brief as much of the discussion on family and community has been covered at length in the previous two chapters. As I mentioned in chapter 4, family and community are core values in Playa Azul as is the idea of sharing food or extending a helping hand to someone in need. Bell (1994) found similar relationships in his study of Childerley and suggested these kinds of relationships develop within communities of people with similar life experiences and worldviews. Angelo's story of fishing with his grandfather and giving fish to the neighbors is a perfect example of this kind of approach to community. Eric, 26, tells a similar story of community bonding in a nearby neighborhood –

In December, normally people make *tamaladas*, well one family will make like two hundred tamales and everyone would go to that house to eat some tamales and it was pretty fun because there were like five houses in the neighborhood, so everyone would go around that house and eat some tamales. It was nice. But now, we don't, no, maybe one family. But they would do it for free for the neighbors…but now, they are doing that just for their family.

My gratitude with the helpfulness and graciousness of the Playa Azul community cannot be overstated. On one occasion, as I passed a neighbor's house on my way to work, Juan, a 55 year old *Azuleño*, stepped off his porch to greet me, "David! *Pura Vida! Como esta?"* Juan and I talked briefly in the street but I was running late to work, so I told him I had to go to work. He nodded and told me to wait, then turned and walked back to his house. I stood in the street waiting although I was not sure why. Juan returned a few minutes later from the side of his house with two of his horses. I stood there looking at Juan, confused but Juan just laughed and said, "*Venga!*" I jumped on one of the horses and we rode into town. I mention this here as another example of the community spirit that dominates the social terrain of Playa Azul.

Sense of Honor and Pride

Azuleños have a strong sense of pride when it comes to work. This is directly related back to the early days of this community when locals had to work hard to make ends meet. Today, this is part of the local culture and shapes the collective moral compass of the community. When I asked Esteban (provides quote to begin this chapter) what it means to be a local, he explained local identity within a framework of work and honor, saying –

A local is … locals of Playa Azul are people working hard or people helping the town. I'm not saying everybody is the same but these people

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have those values of being nice and being open and being hard workers, you know. … These are people that won't do bad to you. If you lose 10 thousand colones, they will say hey, this is your money. You know, they work hard, they aren't going to steal your stuff. You know, the people of Playa Azul have strong values.

Esteban's explanation plays on a couple of the narratives listed above. Not only does this highlight a sense of honor in that locals will not steal or "do bad to you" but it also highlights the community aspect of people helping other people in the community. The idea of community and the collective conscience (Durkheim 1997) rooted in sameness can also be applied here to explain Esteban's assertion that *Azuleños,* as a collective body, are an honorable collective. However, Esteban's claims can also be understood within the context of Maria's assertions in chapter 3 that Playa Azul is more than a beach; it is her "home". The idea of Playa Azul being more than a beach town is popular among locals in the community that remember life in Playa Azul prior to tourism. For *Azuleños*, the home is a place of sharing and a place of respect. Carlos, 36, explained the etiquette in the home in the form of sharing this way –

> When you come to my house and I'm drinking coffee, I will cut half of my coffee to give you because here, we're sharing. It's not like I have coffee and I call you and tell you, 'no, you cannot come [to my] home until I finish my coffee.' We will tell you, 'yeah, come [to my] home. Have a half a coffee with me.' So sharing is very important to live in abundance. It is because we are willing to share everything that we are so happy.

I mention this here as an exemplary of how *Azuleños* generally conceptualize "home" and how guests are treated when they enter someone's home. *Azuleños*, as proud people that make up a large part of this community, treat their guests with respect. So when tourists come into the town (i.e. "home" to many *Azuleños*), locals treat the tourists with a general level of respect. This is the way Esteban was discussing the idea of strong

values and a general disdain for thievery. To push my argument to its logical end, Esteban's explanation can also be understood within a value system that pre-dates tourism and one that locals utilize as part of their *Azuleño* collective identity to distinguish themselves from other *Ticos* and foreign residents.

Perceived Changes to the Community

The identity work engaged in by locals in Playa Azul represents a subtle kind of collective resistance (Scott 1985) against the perceived changes to the local social relations brought about by expanding tourism development. Scott (1985) and Snow and Anderson (1987) argue individuals at the fringes of the social structure engage in behaviors or activities that generate identities that work to maintain an acceptable level of self-worth and dignity. Although this is not exactly the case in Playa Azul as locals still occupy the center of the social structure, I do nevertheless contend the *Azuleño* collective identity, and more specifically the values it embodies, have emerged in response to perceived changes to the values of the community. Moreover, I argue the emphasis on ancestral cultural values works to reassert a sense of control and dignity on the part of the local *Tico* population.[20]

Cultural Changes in Playa Azul

It has been well documented that tourism can have detrimental effects on local cultures when left unchecked (Nuñez 1989; Stronza 2001; Weaver 2004; Stronza and Gordillo 2008; Mowforth and Munt 2009). In some ways, Playa Azul has reached a critical juncture in its development as the community continues to experience changes

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[20] The Azuleño construct being conceived as an emphasis of historically coded behaviors, norms and values in pre-tourist Playa Azul

under the weight of tourism development. Although the community has worked to maintain many of its cultural traditions, pressure from foreign investors and foreign cultural values have begun to transform some of the norms and values of Playa Azul. Through a process of acculturation, Nuñez suggests host communities are more likely to adopt tourists attitudes and values that precipitates "a chain of change in the host community" (1989:266). This is primarily attributed to host communities bending to the will of tourist pressures to meet their needs and expectations. This is certainly true in Playa Azul where the default language in the center of the town is transitioning to English. This is also apparent with the example of the noise complaints (discussed in chapter 1) and the local community being expected to change their behaviors to meet the demands of tourists and foreign investors.

Playa Azul is currently experiencing a deterioration of cultural traditions and practices. For example, *las Fiestas de la Virgen del Mar*, a celebration and blessing of the sea held each 16 July, is slowly becoming a thing of the past. Stocker (2013) witnessed the celebration in 2009 that consisted of a procession of "120 oxen" and a beach full of people. However, as time has passed, fewer and fewer people are participating each year. When I asked Becca, an *Azuleña* in her 20s, about the celebration, she told me it still happens but not many people participate anymore. Another example of deteriorating cultural traditions in this region of Guanacaste might be the story Eric shared above. Eric explained in years past, several families participated in a Christmas celebration at a neighbor's house that focused on the sharing of food but now, "they are doing it just for their family." This is reminiscent of Angelo's story as well about the changing cultural values shifting from an emphasis on community to an emphasis on money. What this

demonstrates beyond these specific cases is the deterioration of community and the atomization of society where members of the community no longer consider the needs of others.

Another cultural tradition losing popularity in Playa Azul is the annual rodeo. Rodeos are very popular throughout Guanacaste and are usually held every year around Christmas. In Playa Azul, the rodeo happens during the week between Christmas and New Year and draws fans from all over the Nicoya Peninsula. Recently, however, the rodeo has become somewhat less of an event in Playa Azul as many foreign residents see the treatment of the animals (particularly the bulls) as a form of animal cruelty. The rodeo still attracts large crowds but in Playa Azul, there are murmurs every year among many foreign residents that it should be stopped.

There are also new traditions emerging in this region of Guanacaste that have no place in Costa Rican culture. One is Black Friday. Although not a big event in Playa Azul (yet), I did meet a few foreign *Ticos* living in Playa Azul who took advantage of cheaper prices by making special trips to Nicoya, Liberia and San Jose to shop. Black Friday is uniquely "American" being that the Friday follows a uniquely "American" holiday; Thanksgiving. Esteban, 24, discussed changing cultural traditions and feelings of losing control in this way –

> So, for starters, the town is becoming more international, so businesses we used to own is owned by international people, not national people, and they started to show the super bowl, that's not in our culture. Or Black Friday is not inside of our culture. And so things like this, we had to adapt ourselves to different things. Like Halloween. Halloween is not inside of our culture. You will see Halloween here, it's crazy. And *Ticos* like it, so it's not a problem but when it comes to a celebration like our rodeo, they don't like it, the international people, and they are having more control of things like this.

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Esteban's comments illustrate some of the concern emerging in the community with regards to power over local decisions. A similar sentiment was voiced at a local meeting regarding noise issues in the center of Playa Azul. Many in the community attribute the growing issues in Playa Azul to an expanding tourism sector and new foreign residents moving in that have no connection to the community and are only in Playa Azul to turn a profit.

Economic Changes in Playa Azul

Although more subtle than the cultural changes, I contend the economic changes are at the heart of the emergence or emphasis of the *Azuleño* collective identity. Years ago, before Playa Azul became a primary tourist destination, most of the local businesses were owned and operated by locals. But as Playa Azul grew in popularity, local operators and owners began selling their businesses and leasing their buildings. As the process continued with more lifestyle migrants moving into the community and more businesses switching hands, a subtle shift began to occur in the pricing schemes in the community. Prices were becoming standardized, a common occurrence within a capitalist framework. The issue is that the prices are being standardized at the tourist rate, not the *Tico* rate that existed prior to the transition. This shift in the prices has created an economic squeeze on many local *Ticos* in the community, forcing some to leave Playa Azul because they could no longer afford to stay in the community. Javier, a 30 year old *Tico*, explained the situation this way –

> Yeah. Yeah, that's the thing. The more foreigners, most foreigners that come to live here, it's more expensive that (inaudible) becomes. Somehow, everything becomes more expensive because now it's, it's a *gringo* owned business and you know, traditionally people, you know,

> *Tico* owners and *Tico* businesses have always made a difference between the things that *Ticos* can buy and the things that foreigners can buy, you know? There were always like two different prices, (inaudible) as you were in the supermarket, which now, the prices are becoming more standardized, you know, like the prices for *Tico* and… it's becoming more standardized but before it was like, you want to buy uh, you want a surf lesson, OK, Ticos pay this, foreigners pay this. You want to go get a massage, OK, Ticos pay this, foreigners pay this. But it becomes, as more and more foreigners live here, the prices are becoming more standardized and now, it's becoming for *Ticos* harder to afford those prices, you know?

The perceived cultural and economic changes in the community have fostered a subtle form of collective resistance (Scott 1985) to develop in Playa Azul among *Azuleños*, foreign *Ticos* and lifestyle migrants who want to maintain the existing social order that produces values of community and cohesion. Together, these resident groups of Playa Azul have fought against newly arriving "outsiders" to the community exerting their will through economic force. The perception within the community is that outsiders (primarily real estate investors and developers), drawn to Playa Azul by the prospect of tourist development and the potential for profits, have pushed the expansion of tourist development with little or no regard for the existing community. It is my contention that this process represents the initial stages of strife in a community that has been, until recently, fairly harmonious.[21] The question becomes what will happen to the community as Playa Azul continues to develop and grow in popularity as a primary tourist destination?

Conclusion

Pachucki, Pendergrass and Lamont (2007) have suggested there is a need for more research on the formation of collective identity to better understand "the

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[21] The community faced some issues a few years ago with drugs but has since been cleaned up.

mechanisms that activate boundary processes" (333-334). This chapter addressed this need by examining the social dynamics in Playa Azul that facilitated the emergence of the *Azuleño* collective identity as a subtle form of collective resistance (Scott 1985) against an expanding tourist sector in the community. I argued the construction of the *Azuleño* collective identity was in response to a shifting economic base and in turn, a subsequent change to the social relations in the community. The perceived changes within the community fostered the development of an oppositional collective identity that drew on a cultural memory of idealized ancestral norms, values and codes of conduct (Assman 1995) that work to preserve the traditional social structure of the community based on ancestral norms and values independent of class based criteria. These ancestral values (attachment and respect for the local environment, needing to be tough [resilient], seeing the community as family, and a strong sense of honor and pride) then work to shape contemporary codes of conduct that creates a community of acceptance and mutual respect.

I also argued that the struggle to maintain the existing social order and value system has become a community-wide resistance, evidenced by repeated examples of non-local groups organizing actions against perceived threats to the community and its values. Similar to Scott's (1985) example of peasant groups attempting to delay "the complete transition to capitalist relations of production" in agrarian societies, community members of Playa Azul have become galvanized in their convictions that Playa Azul should not relent to the pressures of tourism development.

CHAPTER VI

WEATHERING THE STORM:
TOURISM, CHANGE AND THE PERSEVERANCE OF COMMUNITY

Hopefully, Playa Azul will not lose its identity of a beautiful pura vida place. I don't want to welcome the big resorts. I don't want to welcome the big business. I want to welcome happy people ... the people with fantasies and emotions and ideas. I don't want to welcome the spring break people that only come to get wasted at the hotel. No, no, no! Let's not lose our identity ... we have to be an example for the future generations that this beautiful identity that we have, we have to keep it.
~ Carlos

[Being part of this community] No, it's not about time. It's about values. You know, you need to care about the town ...the people of the town. Because you can be here five years but we don't know if you care about the town. If you want to make some money, you create a hotel between here and the water, you have no values to care about what others are going to think. You just want to make some money and that is not our values.
~ Monica[22]

Playa Azul is a small beach town on the southern coast of the Nicoya Peninsula in Costa Rica. Beginning as a small fishing and farming village in the mid-1950s, the economic base of the town has shifted over the last decade and a half to one that relies heavily on the tourism trade. The establishment of tourism as a development strategy in Costa Rica was facilitated in the 1990s, in large part, by the development of ecotourism, a form of nature-based tourism that promises sustainability to both local communities and the surrounding environment. By the mid-1990s, ecotourism had become the dominant industry in Costa Rica and the country's largest source of foreign capital, surpassing traditional exports like coffee and bananas (Minca and Linda 2000; Iveniuk 2006; Honey 2008). However, due to less suitable environmental conditions of the land, ecotourism development failed to take hold in the northern region of Costa Rica, particularly in Guanacaste.

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[22] Monica is a 29 year old *Azuleña*

This changed in 2002 with the expansion of the international airport in Liberia. Offering direct flights from the United States, tourism and development exploded in the northern coastal region of Guanacaste. However, what developed in the north was not ecotourism but mass tourism; sun and surf mass tourism driven by North American developers and investors offering resort-style hotels and all-inclusive package deals (Honey, Vargas and Durham 2010). By the mid-2000s, tourism development was in full-swing and moving south down the coast of the Nicoya peninsula and by 2007, had reached Playa Azul. Despite experiencing a development slow-down in 2009-2010, tourism development is once again underway as investors and developers visualize big returns on early investments.

This dissertation is a case study that examines the effects of the second tourism development boom on the daily lived experiences of the residents of Playa Azul. I set out with three research goals: the first was to gain an understanding of how place-specific factors impacted the decision of lifestyle migrants to move to Playa Azul; the second goal of the research was then to examine the response of the local community to perceived changes in Playa Azul brought on by increased tourism development; and the last goal of the research was really the foundation of the entire research project which was to gain a general understanding of daily life in Playa Azul from both a tourist and a resident perspective as tourism development continues to expand in the area.

The lifestyle migration literature frames lifestyle migrants as individuals in search of "a better way of life" (Benson and O'Reilly 2009), often leaving their lives in first-world countries in search of something better in third-world or lesser-developed countries. Utilizing "place character" as an analytic tool to explore how place-specific

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factors influence behavior and action, I identified three place-specific narratives that worked to influence lifestyle migrant decisions to stay in Playa Azul after visiting as tourists. I discovered that lifestyle migrants that chose to move to Playa Azul based their decisions heavily on the sense of community they encountered while visiting Playa Azul. In addition, the ability to live a more simple life and the ability to live a life connected with nature were also major influences in their decisions In the end, I found their motivation to move grounded in a kind of escapism in that they were able to find happiness within a completely different cultural mindset than they had been accustomed. Beyond wanting to escape from the stress and constraints of their daily lives at home, they also found comfort in integrating into a community that maintained a worldview not focused on commodities and status but rather one that prioritized human connection and community.

Today, a large segment of the population in Playa Azul is made up of lifestyle migrants and this is beginning to highlight some of the underlying issues that face the community as tourism continues to expand in the area. But the issues facing the future of Playa Azul are not the lifestyle migrants, per se, but rather the pressures associated with tourism development and the influx of foreign capital transforming the local social relations in the community.

Despite Playa Azul having a reputation as a "*Tico* town" and local *Ticos* having developed an oppositional collective identity that emphasizes ancestral norms and values in the community, the groundwork for resistance against the transformative forces of tourism in the community has been fostered primarily by the foreign members (*Tico* foreigners and lifestyle migrants) of the community. It was mentioned earlier that the

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younger generation of *Azuleños* tend to embrace tourism development for a variety of reasons and because of this, until very recently, have been less critical of the changes to the community. Lifestyle migrants and foreign *Ticos*, on the other hand, have made the conscious decision to pick up their lives and relocate to a community based on values shaped by a *pura vida* mentality and strong community bonds. I argue this is cause for foreign residents to take a vested interest in the *development* of the community, having already abandoned the pursuit of profit as a primary motivation of daily life.

The examples provided here and the numerous other examples that happen daily in Playa Azul provide a model for understanding resistance in communities undergoing early tourism development. Playa Azul, in the early stages of tourism development, offers a unique opportunity to understand the motivations of resistance in the early stages of development as well as the processes that set the resistance to motion. Only time will tell how effective the community can be in resisting large-scale tourism development and surely there will be compromises as time goes on but at the moment, it appears the *Azuleños* and foreign residents of Playa Azul have managed to find common ground in preserving the *pura vida* "vibe" of the town and the values that support a multicultural community based on humility, acceptance and mutual respect.

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