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Re-Touring Guatemala:

A Novel Way of Picturing Tourism and Tourists from an Anthropological Perspective

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis travels the blurred border between tourists and anthropologists. The mainspring of the thesis derives from the juxtaposition of written records of the two times I have lived Guatemala: extracts from a personal journal which I kept as a tourist in 1990 and field observations of my second visit in 1995 in the role of anthropological fieldworker. Further juxtaposition and textual triangulation, consisting of parallel writings drawn from professional ethnographers, tourists, and indigenous authors also illuminate the text. This genre juggling is meant to persuade the reader – as my own experiences in the field taught me – that the ‘ways of knowing’ of scientific ethnographers and, at least a certain class of tourists, may be neither as clear nor as significant as often implied.

## **PREFACE - DEPARTURE**

It was June 1995 and I had come to Guatemala to study tourists. I had been to Guatemala before in 1990, not as an anthropologist but as a tourist on a six month adventure which extended from Calgary to Ecuador. I didn't realise then that my experiences in Guatemala would be so profound that they would inspire me to study anthropology and return five years later to do research for my Master's degree.

The first time I visited Guatemala, I knew next to nothing about the country except that it was cheaper to travel in than both Mexico and Belize - a point that was important to my companion and me since we were intent on travelling as long as money, and our backpacks held out. Our Guatemala guidebook painted a picture of an enticing country concealing mysteriously abandoned Maya ruins and Indians wearing colourful hand-woven clothes.

During my two months there, I went to a Spanish language school in the bustling colonial town of Antigua, travelled to the ruins of Tikal in the jungle, followed the 'gringo trail', and also ventured out to more remote regions. I came to find the excruciating 24 hour bus rides and sleepless nights in flea-ridden hotels adventuresome and rewarding.

As I journeyed the countryside, I read Ronald Wright's book *Time Among the Maya* (1989). I discovered there had been a civil war raging in Guatemala for thirty-five years and that Guatemala had the infamous reputation of being the worst human rights offender in the Western hemisphere. Wright's book had an indelible effect on me and changed my perception of the Guatemalan landscape. I was left feeling embarrassed,

angry, and guilty: embarrassed because I had been ignorant of these facts before I came; angry because I felt helpless to do anything about the shocking situation; and guilty because I was vacationing among people whose lives had been filled with unimaginable hardship.

Later, through my studies, it was impressed upon me that anthropology is not tourism. This distinction was made not so much through explicit discussions of tourism and anthropology's relations to it but through silent dismissal. I noticed the derogatory tone directed towards tourists in academic literature echoed Western society's similar malaise towards tourists. The negative tone was often accompanied by descriptions or characterisations of tourists that did not fit with my own personal experiences of travelling in Latin America. It was this discrepancy between theory and experience that led me to the 'field' and back to Guatemala.

I wanted to examine the discrepancy between the anthropological constructs of the tourist and tourists' conceptions of themselves. I focused my study by using Guatemala's Spanish language schools as sites where I "observed my participation" (Tedlock 1991) amongst tourists who attended these schools. I did a comparative study of two schools: one in Antigua and the other in Todos Santos Cuchumatán.

I found the discrepancy between theory and experience arises because anthropologists have stereotyped tourists while failing to recognise they too are a type of tourist. Researchers often depict tourists in ways that simultaneously paint the tourist as superficial and ignorant and the researcher as intelligent and 'authentic': tourist as wandering dope and researcher as all-knowing scientist (Clifford 1997). This perspective

inhibits explanations of how tourists create meaning out of their travel experiences because tourist experiences are deemed as relatively meaningless from the outset.

A change in perspective towards the 'research subjects' produces different explanations of the tourist experience. This shift requires that anthropologists consider themselves as a type of tourist and, in so doing, avoid the tendency to differentiate and claim themselves as the more 'authentic' observer. The conclusions regarding the tourist experience that arise can be compared against previous findings in the following ways.

While some categorisations have evolved that are useful for generalising about what kinds of tourists are out there, tourists move about and cross between these categories. These categorisations would best be replaced, or at least modified, by Adler's concept of 'travel style' which places tourists in a historical context without privileging one type over another (Alder 1989).

Unlike what many researchers believe, I found that there is a difference between the meaning of 'authenticity' as used by tourists and anthropologists. This finding is also supported in recent work by Bruner (1994). Tourists find their experiences genuine and it is unproductive to ironize tourist behaviour/experiences/world views since every tourist has their knowledge set altered in some way. We must transcend the dichotomy often produced between "...original/copy and authentic/inauthentic." (ibid).

Other findings and questions include; the connection between the representations of Guatemala and the 'types' of tourists who go there is significant; why are the changes tourism brings seen as necessarily negative by anthropologists? What is the future of tourism in Guatemala considering the increasing dangers to tourists there?



Before embarking on the voyage of reading this thesis, I will provide a summary of each chapter and its structure. In Chapter One – Arrival, we enter Guatemala and are introduced to the anthropology of tourism. A brief orientation to the present theories surrounding tourists and tourism, my choice of methodology and theoretical framework, and research questions will be discussed including a description of my research project. A short description of Guatemala and why I chose to study tourists there is also necessary since Guatemala may not appear like a suitable laboratory in which to carry out my project.

Chapter One – Arrival closes with a section entitled ‘Postcard’. This is the first of four ‘experimental’ sections I have integrated into each chapter that re-present my experience of the tourist Guatemala using/subverting/inventing/echoing/analysing genres that are commonly used among and by tourists. I paid close attention to how Guatemala was presented to tourists through tourist publications including brochures, magazines, and newspapers; postcards for sale; non-fiction and fictional books about Guatemala; news articles and chat groups on the Internet; films and documentaries; guidebooks; and tourist information as it was passed on from tourist to tourist. Each of these sections reflects issues discussed in the chapter where the section appears.

‘Postcard’ is a representation of the lens and context through which I interpreted tourist experience while in Guatemala. Taking photographs and sending postcards are activities common to tourists and the literary version here includes many images that are often left out of the picture. While the tableau described in ‘Postcard’ stopped me in my tracks that day, it went unnoticed to the majority of people who passed it by that

afternoon. For me, this random grouping of people was at once a portrait and a metaphor of tourism in Guatemala.

If I had actually taken the picture I describe in 'Postcard', I would have used my camera's self-timer to include myself in it. I was as much a part of the scene as the people who were unknowingly posed in front of me. The photograph I never snapped tells a story of the different worlds simultaneously present in Guatemala. Much like the weavings that Guatemala is famous for, I will bring the threads of these worlds together to create a tapestry that is at once about Guatemala, Tourism, and Anthropology.

With our course now set, Chapter Two takes us to Antigua: the tourist capital of Guatemala. Antigua is also the centre for Spanish language study in the country. Compared with much of the country, luxuries abound in this town and the beauty and charm of the colonial architecture is host to a myriad of tourists and expatriates. Antigua is somewhat atypical from the rest of the country, but it caters to tourists better than anywhere else and therefore informs many of the tourist perceptions of Guatemala.

The history and structure of the Spanish language school industry in Guatemala is discussed in this chapter paying specific attention to the school in which I studied: Proyecto Linguistico Francisco Marroquin (PLFM). We meet some of the families that board students and the teachers who teach them. We also meet the tourists I interviewed from PLFM. These tourists have come with a very specific purpose in mind - to learn Spanish. Most have fixed itineraries and do not have much time outside of their studies to travel much beyond Antigua. Many are unaware of the political situation in the country.

Chapter Two concludes with '(Un) Guided Tour'. The purpose of this section is twofold : to demonstrate the close relationship between tourism and violence in Guatemala and to do so in a way that upsets the conventions associated with texts of this kind. Many students who study in Antigua situate themselves mainly in the town and day trips to nearby towns are a common weekend activity. '(Un) Guided Tour' is based around one of these trips. I have juxtaposed a 'Travel and Lodging' tourist magazine article, which suggests a pleasant day trip to a small town outside Antigua, against my field note account of my visit to this same town during which I was robbed at gun point in the middle of the day. What emerges shows us that Antigua's colonial facades mask the poverty that exists elsewhere in the country and betrays Guatemala's pervasive culture of violence (Green 1995). Tourism is not supposed to be life threatening, but in Guatemala it can be.

Being robbed, while not something I would ever wish upon anyone brings up many relevant issues concerning being a field worker, being a tourist, and being anyone in Guatemala. The risks of what I was doing in Guatemala both personally and academically were made crystal clear. This event during my second week of fieldwork was a blessing and a curse. A blessing because I was left physically unharmed and didn't lose a substantial amount of field notes. But it left me with a lasting fear which hung over me and directed many of my actions throughout the rest of my field research. I would never pretend to understand the level of fear that goes along with witnessing a massacre or having a loved one disappeared, but the insights gained through the experience of feeling as vulnerable and as close to death as I have ever felt cannot be

disregarded. I knew the worlds of leisure and violence existed side by side in Guatemala, I saw them collide that day.

The transition from harrowing to breathtaking may seem slightly jarring as Chapter Three begins with a 'Travel Log' of words selected from writers who have all travelled to Todos Santos Cuchumatán: a guidebook writer; a tourist; an anthropologist; and a fiction writer. The beginning of this chapter reflects the importance of 'getting there' as equal to 'being there' - a theme often expressed by the tourists who I met in Todos Santos. 'Travel Log' is about the personal sense of discovery, exploration, and accomplishment that is important to many tourists. I have blended different genres together to make a 'new sense' which emphasizes that we all travel and which blurs the strict boundaries that often exist between these genres.

Todos Santos is very different than Antigua but is also host to many tourists. Experiencing the traditional Maya culture is the focus of tourists in Todos Santos who are often in search of what they call the 'real' Guatemala. The tourists here, who prefer to call themselves travellers, shun places like Antigua and despise the commercialism and materialism associated with the tourism industry. Enduring the lack of amenities and seeing the poverty in Todos Santos is interpreted as a political act by some tourists here. The hope is that they are helping the community by 'roughing it'. But beneath the tranquillity and the simple lives of Todos Santos there also hides a history of fear and oppression.

The small language school in Todos Santos is operated by an indigenous collective. Teaching the students about government repression and '*la violencia*' of the

highlands is as important to this school as teaching the Spanish language. Since the school is not for profit and the proceeds from the school go towards community development projects tourists are actually providing aid to the community by studying. The students who come to the school are interested in learning Spanish, not as a tool to necessarily use in their own countries, but as a tool that can bring them closer to the local population and to the problems that many Guatemalans share.

In Chapter Four - Return - we go home. The chapter opens with a 'Letter' from a tourist I interviewed. Chris' travel stories and his reflections on his trip are rich demonstrations of his reflexivity that underline the personal significance of travelling to the traveller. There are no 'superficial' reflections or conclusions made in this letter and there is a hint of the effects that his trip has had on him. 'Letter' is representative of the 'ways of knowing' of many of the tourists that I came to know and many of his reflections were mirrored in other letters I received from tourists.

Throughout the thesis, I have interspersed comments and reflections from the tourists/students/friends/gringos/Guatemalans/informants that I interviewed. Whenever I refer to these individuals, I have used their first names to maintain confidentiality but stress these are "...interactions with named, idiosyncratic individuals rather than anonymous, representative informants." (Clifford 1997:67). It may appear I am maintaining tourists' individuality within the confines of a curious generic model in which tourists are regarded as a "... transient super-ethny, merging into a temporary melting pot, only to resume their separate ethnic identities when they return home." (Van den Berghe 1994:16). This model strips the tourists of many individual and identifying

features such as nationality, age, educational level, and class but I have included a chart with these pertinent demographic details for the tourists I interviewed and will discuss these separately (please see Appendix A). When referring to Guatemalans, I have used very few real names for reasons of confidentiality. Transient tourists easily remain anonymous whereas the relative permanence of many Guatemalans identifies them.

My choice to use various different genres has been conscious throughout the thesis. The techniques used to create '(Un) Guided Tour' in Chapter Two and 'Travel Log' in Chapter Three resemble Clifford's use of 'collage'.

The purpose of my collage is not to blur, but rather to juxtapose, distinct forms of evocation and analysis. The method of collage asserts a relationship among heterogeneous elements in a meaningful ensemble. It brings its parts together while sustaining a tension among them. (Clifford 1997:12)

I have used this approach because it simultaneously represents and re-presents and enforces the fractured, conflicting, and multiple 'realities' that exist within and among tourists and their experiences. 'Postcard' in Chapter One and 'Letter' in Chapter Four have been modelled after important texts that tourists use frequently and which simultaneously inform and represent the tourist experience.

The Guatemalas presented here may be unrecognisable to many Guatemalans<sup>1</sup>. "*Guatemala no existe*." (Goldman 1992:13). 'Guatemala' as a unified concept or construct does not exist. There are so many texts that make up Guatemala and so many

---

<sup>1</sup> Similar to Hutnyk's statement that tourist representations of Calcutta are not recognized as Calcutta to those living in the city itself (1996:24).

people reading them that consensus is difficult, if not impossible. Once you add the element of government 'dis-information' and 'mis-information' combined with the tourism industry's skilful marketing strategies to the mix, you are dealing with a multitude of Guatemalas which become harder and harder to recognise as referring to the same place.

These interludes are meant to provide a flavour of the travel styles present in the different tourist Guatemalas. I have purposely placed disparate sources and forms together in a conscious effort to not give one type of representation any priority or privilege over the other since they are all representative of the Guatemala that I, and many others, have come to know. It is hoped that through these texts, the reader will be able to localise 'Guatemala' and the contradictory representations used to inform *all* those who travel there.

Writing about tourism and travel in an academic thesis while sometimes employing genres that resemble 'travel writing' may be considered inappropriate by some. But the travel writing genre is an important representation of the people I was studying.

Indeed, one way to understand the current 'experimentalism' of ethnographic writing is as a renegotiation of the boundary, agonistically defined in the late nineteenth century, with 'travel writing'. (Clifford 1997: 66).

This thesis is an exploration of that boundary.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is difficult to know whom to single out for thanks in helping me complete this thesis because the process has included many people. First, I thank my mother, Gillian, for sitting with me on the couch one afternoon and convincing me to do this research and be true to the strong pull drawing me back to Guatemala. Without her encouragement and support, which included coming to visit me during my fieldwork, I would not have started or completed this project.

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**This thesis is for Mom and Terry**

**For introducing me to the land of the Ceiba tree.**

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## EPIGRAPH

**Retour** [retu:r], *s.m.* 1. (*a*) Twisting, winding. **Tours et retours**, twists and turns. **Faire un retour sur soi-même**, to indulge in serious reflections on one's conduct. **Faire un retour sur le passé**, to look back upon the past. (*b*) Recurrence 2. Return, going back, coming back...

HARRAP'S NEW SHORTER FRENCH AND  
ENGLISH DICTIONARY

## CHAPTER ONE

### ARRIVAL



Two popular Guatemalan postcards  
Left, an elite *Kaibil* commando  
Right, Nobel Peace prize winner, Rigoberta Menchu

## TOURISTS AND TOURISM

Judging by the smirk which the mere mention of tourism brings to the face of my colleagues, most social scientists do not take tourism seriously. Anthropologists are perhaps a little less ready to dismiss the topic as frivolous than are sociologists, and some economists recognize it as the massive worldwide industry that it is. Nonetheless, most of my colleagues strongly imply that a professed interest in tourism constitutes little more than a clever ploy to pass off one's vacations as work. (van den Berghe 1994:3)

‘Western’ culture has set up a very unfavourable picture of what it is to be a tourist despite the rapid growth of the tourism industry and the numbers of tourists travelling the globe. Indeed it seems that the more we travel, the more we hate ourselves for it. The World Tourism Organization’s statistics reveal that “International tourist arrivals reached nearly 593 million in 1996, while receipts from international travel, excluding airfares, climbed to US\$ 423 billion - both new and record highs.” (WTO Information and Statistics 1997). Tourism is a US\$ 3.5 trillion industry and employs approximately 211 million people worldwide. “If all the people employed by the travel and tourism industry lived in one country, that country would rank 10th in population, just behind Japan.”(ibid).

Much attention has been given to the seriousness of tourism as a major global force that has initiated processes of cultural, economic, and environmental change in the communities where tourism has become an important industry (Smith 1989) and yet the tourists who visit these communities are often left out of the picture. Obviously tourists cannot be discussed out of the context of the tourism industry but many discussions concerning the tourism industry have taken place without paying specific attention to the

tourist. “Few authors attempt to explore the vacationer’s own perspectives on the nature of a vacation.” (Gottlieb 1982: 166). Perhaps the absence of inquiry is due to the prevalent attitude within the social sciences that tourists are not a subject worthy of serious academic attention. This attitude may stem from the general dislike of tourists or it may lie within the prevalent perception amongst researchers that tourist experiences are largely ‘unauthentic’. These inauthentic journeys clash with the researcher’s quest for the ‘truth’ and are therefore discarded as irrelevant.

Much of the literature which focuses on the Tourist has been generated by Sociologists. During the development of my research proposal the growing field of tourism research, had been regarded as important by only a few anthropologists (see Bruner 1991; Crick 1989 and 1991; Errington and Gewertz 1989 and 1992; Graburn 1983; MacCannell 1976, 1977 and 1992; Nash and Smith 1991; and Smith 1989).

This literature can be divided into two sets. The first is largely concerned with devising classification systems for tourists. “... [A]long with indulging in cute definitional exercises, students of tourism delight in taxonomy.” (van den Berghe 1994:7). There are almost as many definitions and classifications of tourists as researchers writing about the subject.

Various tourist classifications have been generated which organize tourists into different types according to different criteria (see Cohen 1972 and 1979; MacCannell 1973, 1976, 1984, and 1992; Redfoot 1984; and van den Berghe 1980 and 1994). The criteria commonly used to classify tourists and create tourist categories involve observed differences in behaviour as observed by the researcher. Quantifiable questions such as;



how much money do they spend? How long do they travel for? What kinds of clothes do they wear? What kinds of hotels do they stay in (van den Berghe 1994)? The answers to these questions often form the basis by which tourists are put in one category or another.

Broadly speaking, these classifications put tourists into one of two broad types. (Redfoot 1984: 293). Tourists are either seen as taking part in a “pseudo-event” (Boorstin 1961) wrought with superficial and frivolous tendencies or they are engaged in “an earnest quest for the authentic, the pilgrimage of modern man.” (Cohen 1979:179).

Much of this classification is useful for recognizing *some* of the different ways ‘touristness’ can be expressed, but the research fails, in most cases, to provide details of *how* tourists make sense of their travels. Since many of the tourist characterizations are created without specific reference to material gathered from tourists themselves, it is also not apparent how these researchers arrived at their conclusions or if they in any way resemble those of the tourists themselves.

The second set of literature focuses on the impacts of tourism. This field of study often paints tourists as unknowing actors in neocolonialist ventures and as individuals whose actions are directly contributing to the processes of social and cultural ‘disintegration’ in many underdeveloped countries (Lanfant, Allcock and Bruner 1995; Trekking on Tradition film). Tourists are portrayed as cogs in the ever expanding wheel of global capitalism in which they view the landscapes and the cultures of the world as things to be consumed (Rojek and Urry 1997). According to these theories, these hedonistic travellers spread the principles of the market economy to the far reaches of the world thus corrupting and changing it forever (Hutnyk 1996).

Tourism and tourists are often seen, by their critics, as responsible for the reinforcement of exploitive relationships in lesser developed countries (van den Berghe 1980), environmental degradation, ghettoization, inflation, and commoditization of local culture (Adams 1995) to name a few. If tourists are aware of the impacts their trips may be having on the local populations, most are portrayed as uncaring or so self-centred in their own pursuit that the benefits of travelling, in the opinion of the tourists, outweigh the damages to the locals (Bruner 1989; Errington and Gewertz 1989; O'Rourke 1987). This attitude is poignantly illustrated in the film "Trekking on Tradition" when a tourist boldly states that despite feeling guilty about the damage his travels are having on the locals, he doesn't feel guilty enough to stop travelling.

In the late 20th century, however, tourism has almost exclusively been criticized for placing travellers in a false relationship to the countries through which they travel and for deforming the cultures and economies of their hosts. Particularly when the 'tourist-receiving countries' (to use a planner's parlance) are poorer and less powerful than the 'tourist-generating regions', leisure travel is condemned as a hedonistic practice involving blind indifference to surrounding misery. (Adler 1989:1384).

The conclusions obtained from both sets of literature deny tourists the capacity of making sense of their own actions and the often damning conclusions and unsympathetic portrayals fail to account for the popularity and frequency of tourists travelling the globe and "...impose[s] an elitist politics blind to its own assumptions." (Bruner 1994: 412). If we are to understand the serious implications that tourism holds for the communities and eco-systems where it occurs, we must take the tourists - undeniably important actors in the performance of tourism - seriously.

Despite the great increase in social science tourism research over the last

twenty years, we are still very much in the dark about tourist motivation, what tourists experience, how their travels affect their knowledge, their attitudes and conceptions of themselves. (Crick 1995: 218)

## **OF TOURISTS, TRAVELLERS AND GRINGOS**

I use the term 'tourist' here to refer to a diverse grouping of people who may not define themselves as such. Many tourists are reluctant to admit they are tourists. Some opt to call themselves 'travellers', a label considered to be far less contemptuous by some. And still others refuse to label themselves at all since they wish to evade the bad connotations they associate with both tourists and travellers. I am aware of the problems inherent with labelling or classifying people and that I may be mis-representing some individuals by using a descriptive term that they would not use themselves. But for the sake of clarity, I use the term tourist to refer to those people I met during my fieldwork who were not Guatemalan and who were in Guatemala temporarily and were touring, travelling or moving around the country. There were other foreigners in Guatemala who shared these tourist characteristics but who better fit into categories such as 'expatriate', 'development worker', 'missionary', or 'volunteer'. Wherever possible I have referred to these people using these terms but when I was unsure of their 'position' in the Guatemala context I have referred to them as 'gringo'.

The term gringo is used by both Guatemalans and foreigners but is mostly used by Latin Americans. The historical derivation of the term gringo indicates that it was

originally used to refer to people from the United States of America<sup>2</sup> and, knowing this, many non-U.S. tourists take offence at being called gringos since they equate the term with being called an American, something that most non-American tourists purposely try to avoid. But the use of the word gringo to refer to all non-Latin American foreigners indicates that, from the Guatemalan perspective, all foreigners are generally experienced in the same way and therefore receive the same label. It is similar to the way in which many gringos refer to the various indigenous groups in Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize as 'Maya'. Just as gringos may be unconcerned with the divisions between Yucateca, Quiche, and Mam, Maya may be unconcerned with the divisions between Canadian tourist, Australian traveller, American expatriate, and German development worker.

Gringos are referred to as such by the locals and some gringos use the term self referentially as well. "I would classify myself as a tourist who is studying Spanish. Because first and foremost I am a gringa." (Rebecca). Gringo has now become a more generic term which encompasses many nationalities (mostly Caucasian) and can carry with it inferred references to class since, relative to the local class structure, many gringos are from a higher socio-economic status than the majority of the local population.

## THE STYLISH TOURIST

...No description of travel style can be complete without attention to the kind of character, as well as the form of reality, that it is designed to test and confirm. (Adler 1989: 1385).

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<sup>2</sup> It is believed that the word gringo came from the two words 'green go' as shouted by the Mexican army at American soldiers wearing green uniforms

Tourists or, more specifically, the tourist I was and the many tourists who I met in both my studies and my travels were often highly reflexive and aware of their position as tourists. Many knew that their presence was affecting the local population in some way. Indeed, for many that was precisely why some of them had come to Guatemala - they interpreted their presence as 'benefiting' the locals.

...Um, you know, I don't know, I almost have this feeling and I know its absolutely impossible but its like you know if I could make up just a little bit for what's happened - even just a little bit you know... (Colleen)

Others were aware they were not privy to the 'real' aspects of the country and yet they continued to travel. "...We don't see the real thing. There is a charm about Antigua but beneath, it is a lot more serious..." (Summer). Travelling had, for many, become an integral part of their lives and had comprised many formative experiences for the tourists involved.

More recent studies have started to take a more qualitative look at the Tourist (Adler 1985 ; Clifford 1997; Hutnyk 1996; Krotz 1995; Lanfant et al 1995; Riley 1988; Urry and Rojek 1997). These studies have demonstrated the complicated intertwining of the deep seated desire that exists among 'Westerners' to travel and see 'foreign lands' tying these issues with local culture change and the global world economy. They do so while giving tourists a more audible and credible voice and accepting that tourists are not the only travellers. It is my hope that this thesis will be a contribution to this growing perspective.

It should be noted, however, that in my efforts to 're-dignify' tourists I do not want to be only contributing to the collection of interesting and amusing travel stories.

The whims of the tourism industry wield immense power in the lesser developed countries which rely on the industry as an integral source of income. Tourists may be some of the most *visible* and tangible extensions of this power but they are not solely responsible. Policy makers, planners, economists, and governments are not as easily identified as the tourist slurping an umbrella drink out of a coconut shell. While it may not seem immediately apparent, there is a connection between the comments of the tourists expressed here and the struggles of many Guatemalans, they are undoubtedly connected in contradictory and sometimes sinister ways (Hutnyk 1996: ix). While my focus may be on better understanding the leisurely, my ultimate intent is to do so while simultaneously demonstrating how the excesses of leisure are interwoven with poverty and how vacations are often linked to violence.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

If we are to better understand the tourist venture it is important to examine the gaps between social scientists' explanations of tourist behaviour and tourist explanations. I set out to do that in my project in the hopes of answering the following question: What is the nature of the discrepancy between the theoretical constructs of the tourist and tourists' conceptions of themselves?

The discrepancy derives from anthropologists developing categories and stereotypes of tourists and tourist behaviour while failing to recognize and acknowledge they too are a type of tourist. This failure has greatly affected the credibility and importance anthropologists attribute to tourists.

## METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The constructivist view that culture is emergent, always alive, and in process is widely accepted today (Lavie et al 1993).

Because I wanted to experience, observe, and listen to the stories of tourism as expressed by tourists, I chose to use a social constructivist approach in the collection and analysis of my data. I placed importance on trying to develop an understanding of being a tourist from the tourist perspective.

This is not the place to present an intellectual history of the perspective (social constructivist) or to discuss its variations, but what all the proponents have in common is the view that the meaning of the text is not inherent in the text but emerges from how people read or experience the text. (Bruner 1994:407)

In this instance, the 'text' was Guatemala and its 'readers' were tourists. I was most interested in the tourists who were wishing to expand their knowledge of the world through first hand cross-cultural experiences represented by the 'cultural immersion' provided by the language schools.

I was also influenced by the "experimental moment" (Marcus and Fischer 1986) and the idea of "nostalgic imperialism" (Rosaldo 1989) as they related towards a new way of depicting and understanding tourists.

I went to Guatemala as an 'engaged tourist'<sup>3</sup> with the objective of understanding tourists from the tourist perspective. Some may recoil at my self-identification with the

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<sup>3</sup> "The role of 'engaged traveller' is one way of situating a social scientist in the field." (Schwartz 1991: 589). I have replaced Schwartz's word 'traveller' with 'tourist'.

position of tourist since the identities of tourist and anthropologist are often thought to be mutually exclusive. Within the context of Guatemala, my role as a tourist dominated my role as anthropologist. My presence was largely experienced by Guatemalans and tourists around me as a tourist. “Where does tourism end and so-called fieldwork begin?” (Rojek and Urry 1997: 9).

I was engaged in a constant analysis of my own behaviour and of those around me with the object of studying the ‘touristness’ we *all* express. I became displaced in order to study the displaced. I was a traveller of one style among travellers of many styles.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROJECT**

I designed a project centred around engaging with tourists as they engaged, in various ways, with each other and with Guatemalans. To further focus my study, I chose to use Guatemala’s burgeoning Spanish language school industry as a way into the different tourist communities. These schools are set up as ‘cultural and language immersion programs’ and I decided that these schools would allow me access to many individuals involved with the tourism industry in Guatemala.

The tourists who were students at the language schools stayed in the country longer than more transient tourists and this allowed me to create longer relationships with each of them. Tourists who were studying Spanish also stayed in one place for a longer time while they were studying which enabled them to have more direct and repeated contact with Guatemalans. The structure of the language schools also gave me access to



Guatemalans who were directly involved with tourists as part of their jobs such as: the teachers who taught at the schools; the families with whom the students lived; and the administrators of the schools.

I did a comparison between two schools - one in the more cosmopolitan town of Antigua and the other in a remote town in the Western Highlands - Todos Santos Cuchumatán. I hoped the comparison would provide a range of tourist voices because I expected each place to attract different styles of tourists.

I “observed my participation” (Tedlock 1991) as an anthropologist, tourist, and language school student in Guatemala for five months from the beginning of June to the end of October in 1995. I spent seven weeks, divided over two visits, as a student in Antigua and five weeks as a student in Todos Santos also divided over two visits. I lived with three different families in Antigua and one family in Todos Santos.

When I was not registered as a language student in either school, I was interviewing or travelling with other tourist/students, compiling data at the research institute, or travelling between schools. I also left Guatemala for three weeks and travelled to Belize and Mexico - while this time could be seen as ‘vacation’ - the contrast it provided from my ‘work’ in Guatemala proved invaluable since I gained a broader context in which to place the tourists I had met at the language schools in Guatemala.

The focus of my research was on developing intense personal relationships with different tourists at each school. I did this through attending classes, living with different students and families, socializing with students at school and in the evenings, and going on weekend trips with students. Some of these relationships culminated in formal

interviews with the interview being among the final interactions I would have with each person. The interview material was supplemented by additional conversations and travel experiences I had with each of these tourists as my relationships with each interviewee extended from a minimum of one week of time spent together to over two months. Establishing this sort of relationship enabled me to set/create a context in which to place each person I interviewed which I felt was important since I had no access to their 'home identities'.

I conducted 15 formal interviews with tourists in Antigua and Todos Santos ranging from one hour to two-and-a-half hours in length. My choice of who to interview was random in the sense that I did not pre-plan what kinds of tourists I was looking to meet and I did not try to be 'representative' in my choices since to do so would be next to impossible. The population of tourists is, by its nature, unstable and changing. In many ways, I came to know many of the tourists 'by chance'.

To fill in the local side of the picture, I gathered information from various local sources directly involved with tourists at the language schools and with the tourism industry in general. Besides the tourists, the only other people with whom I conducted formal interviews were the key administrators from each school. Information from families and teachers was gained through observations, conversations, and daily interactions. I also became acquainted with various individuals directly involved with the tourism industry such as travel agents, hotel owners, street vendors, etc.. I also met and

spoke to many other tourists and Guatemalans during my stay<sup>4</sup> although I did not include these people in my sample. With 593 million tourists circling the globe every year (see above), my project can hardly be seen as representative of the entire tourist population but it does provide a snapshot of tourists in Guatemala during my stay in 1995.

In March of 1996, after my return to Canada, I sent 13 of the tourists I had formally interviewed transcripts of their interviews including my pre and post interview comments and preliminary analyses with a stamped, return addressed envelope. I asked them for feedback on the interview and any additional reflections on their trip. Two of the tourists I interviewed had no permanent address when I interviewed them so I could not include them in this process.

I received responses from 12 people<sup>5</sup> and I continue to have regular correspondence with 5 of these people into 1998. My relationships with these people have extended beyond researcher-informant and beyond tourist to tourist - they have evolved into long distance friendships. The continued correspondence with the tourists I met in 1995 indicates I have changed the relationship with my informants and the thesis itself has changed from being a collection of my observations from three years ago to being an extension of my continued relationship with the experience.

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<sup>4</sup> When I say "met" I am referring to having a conversation that lasted more than half an hour and would include details such as country of origin, travel plans, impressions, etc. for tourists and type of employment, living conditions, and impressions of tourists for Guatemalans.

<sup>5</sup> Chris' letter, which opens Chapter Four, is an example of a response I received.

This cooperative approach to the data collection was a conscious decision in keeping with my goal to have the tourists represented in ways they would recognize. It was also influenced by the ideas of collaboration in the production of knowledge and in the production of data between researcher and 'informant' (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986). I also plan to send the completed thesis to all those interviewed. If time had allowed, I would have liked to include their comments and responses to the completed thesis in an epilogue.

### **TOURIST 'CULTURE'**

It is arguable whether tourists can be considered to have a discrete 'culture' of their own. It has been stated that much of what comprises tourist 'culture' is really a remnant or strand of the tourist's home culture they carry around and express in various ways in the countries they visit (Van den Berghe 1994:16). The characteristics of the 'gringo trail' in Mexico and Central America are similar to those of the 'banana pancake trail' in India (Hutnyk 1996). When I was with my house mate Neil visiting Panajachel, a tourist filled hang-out on the shores of Lake Atitlan, he commented that the atmosphere made him feel as if he had returned to Thailand.

Much of what I would term 'tourist culture' exists relative to the local culture which exists alongside it. Some aspects of this 'tourist culture' are particular to Guatemala such as the language schools. Other aspects, such as the hippie 'hangouts' and vegetarian restaurants, pop up in many different countries as do Club Meds. This is also

confirmed by Riley's (1988) observations of budget travellers in South East Asia that mirror many of my observations of tourists in Guatemala.

In the case of my field research, 'tourist culture' was the juxtaposition of 'Western' cultural habits against Guatemalan ones. While it may be difficult to exactly define what tourist culture *is* - it is easier to see what it *is not*. The accumulation of these tourist attributes tie tourists of different cultural/ethnic/political/geographic origins together while they are in Guatemala more than they would be at 'home'.

In the case of my research, 'tourist culture' was distinguished from local Guatemalan cultures by dress, language, class, and education. Tourists generally dress in 'Western' clothes and their travel style can usually be identified by their dress i.e. Tourists in tour groups generally have more 'dressy' clothes and budget travellers wear extremely casual clothes. Tourists very rarely converse among themselves in Spanish, unless it is the most common language within the group or they are devoted to learning Spanish. Tourists have distinctly different daily routines from the locals - they are not engaged in 'work'. Tourists generally stay in temporary lodging such as hotels, rented houses or apartments, or with a local family. Tourists usually have more education and are from a higher socio-economic class than the majority of the Guatemalans they deal with. The tourists that I met did fit the 'transitional' type of tourist that has been observed by Cohen (1979), Riley (1988) and Schwartz (1991). For more information please see the demographic chart for those interviewed in Appendix A.

## CHOOSING GUATEMALA

In Guatemala things are more easily seen and felt than elsewhere. This is a regime that violently imposes the law of survival of the strongest; this is a society that condemns most people to live as if in a concentration camp; this is an occupied country where the imperium shows and uses its claws and teeth. Dreams inevitably fade into nightmares and one can no longer love without hating, fight for life without killing, say *Yes* without also implying a cry of *No*. (Galeano 1969:115).

Guatemala is a rather 'serious' country in which to study a 'frivolous' activity like tourism. I could have quite easily found tourists in many other countries. The conscious choice of Guatemala as a country in which to study tourism was influenced by my previous travel experience there but it was also influenced by the incredibly charged and violent situation that exists in the country. I chose Guatemala precisely because it did not seem to be a logical place to study tourists. I never forgot the seriousness of the issues that boil away in the cauldron that is often Guatemala. I wanted to understand how the tourism industry could flourish in a country wracked with violence and what kinds of tourists were attracted to such a place. By conducting a project concentrating on tourism in Guatemala my intent was not to trivialize or glamorize the violence that has occurred and continues to occur throughout the country. And while the focus of my project was often on the outsiders leisurely enjoying their time spent inside the country, I was not ignorant to the fact that most Guatemalans were far from being on vacation.

The defining characteristics of tourist styles stand out in sharp relief when set in a context of ongoing violence that has little to do with the virtues of relaxation and enjoyment. The converse is also true: the suffering, exploitation, and discrimination that

exists in Guatemala contrasts with the culture of moneyed tourists wandering the landscape with cameras around their necks and not a (relative) care in the world. Are these seemingly opposite worlds more connected than I dared think them to be? Can international tourism exist without the conditions that Guatemala provides? Can the situation that exists in Guatemala - tourism among violence and poverty - be seen as a microcosm of the larger tourism venture?

I must admit that I had, and still have, serious reservations about tourists and tourism in Guatemala. Considering the economic and political oppression under which many Guatemalans live, I found it both personally and academically difficult to not find some tourist behaviour either offensive, misguided, or insensitive. My reaction was not unlike the anthropologists who find the behaviour of 'their' natives deplorable but choose to represent them otherwise. I frequently ask myself if it is ethical for me to take such a relativistic stance towards the depiction and study of tourists in a country such as Guatemala. How can I try to portray and try to understand these tourists from their perspective *without* sounding judgmental?

The challenge that I faced daily during my field research was to lose my preconceived and prejudiced notions towards tourists and try and understand how tourists perceived their own behaviour. This was the crux of my research question and it was a contradiction that I had to face daily during my field research. I recognise that my elitist attitude stems from the anthropological belief that I was better equipped than my tourist friends to understand and react to the local culture.

## **Guatemala: Past and Present**

Guatemala is a country 108,889 square kilometres in size, or roughly the size of the island of Newfoundland. In 1995, there were an estimated 10.6 million people living in the country making it the most populous and ethnically diverse country in Central America. The official Guatemalan statistics estimate that 52% of the population are Ladina, a mix of both Maya and Spanish ancestry often referred to as mestizos in the rest of Latin America, while the remaining 48% of the population are identified as Indigena or Maya (Cronica 1995: 17). The debate over which group represents the majority has always been a contested issue and most statistics of this sort appear with a disclaimer (ibid) since ethnicity is an issue at the core of the power differential between these two communities in Guatemala. Therefore official statistics concerning ethnic identity are rarely accepted as entirely accurate.

The present division between Ladinos and Maya stems from Guatemala's long and bloody history. The Spanish conquest of the region by Pedro de Alvarado began in the 1520's. At this time, the communities in the highlands formed the backbone of the Maya population. These groups lived there as a result of earlier migrations from the Peten area to the Northeast and the Chiapas lowlands to the North and Northwest. These regions were the location of some of the most majestic Maya cities of Tikal, Chichen Itza, and Bonampak. These sites now form the foundations of the 'Ruta Maya' that many cultural tourists travel in Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, and Honduras.



During the first century of the conquest, the population was reduced by 70% to 90% due to smallpox epidemics (Handy 1984). Alvarado cunningly used already existing rifts between the Quiche and the Cakchiquel to augment his own army. The Maya soon became enslaved and access to Indian labour became as important as gaining access to the country's vast natural resources.

The Dominicans forced the formation of villages, '*reduccion*', separating the Maya from their lands, which were then seized by Spanish landowners. This combination of lost land and the introduction of Catholicism drastically transformed Maya traditions which are now a syncretism of both forms. Society divided into three groups the criollo (Spanish), the indigena, and the Ladino - a mix of the two.

Today, 60% of Guatemalans live in rural areas and this percentage has only dropped 8.9% in the last 45 years (Cronica 1995) indicating a low rate of urbanization. Most urban dwellers can be found in the capital of Guatemala City, population 2.25 million, and in the department of Sacatepequez where Antigua is located. Throughout the rest of the country, 70% to 88% of residents live in rural areas. Guatemala has the worst land distribution of any Latin American country (Handy 1984) and there continues to be a high dependence upon agriculture as the main source of income and employment for many Guatemalans.

The division between the different ethnic groups in Guatemala is often easy to see and hear since many Maya wear hand woven clothing referred to as '*traje*' that is specific to their village or region and speak one of approximately 25 different languages. Many

men no longer wear their '*traje*' but Maya women still continue to weave and wear their '*huipiles*', a woven blouse that is specific to the weaver's family and town.

Some estimates claim that 52% of Guatemalans can read and write (Cronica 1995: 17) but other agencies have stated that Guatemala has the second highest rate of illiteracy in Latin America with Haiti taking first place (Simon 1987). In 1995, there were 112,601 University students in the country representing a minute percentage of the total student aged population (Cronica 1995). That schools for tourists have become such an important factor in Guatemala's economy is ironic indeed.

Since the American-backed coup in 1954, bringing an abrupt end to promising land reforms, there has been extensive U.S. involvement in the military affairs of the country. As a response to the new government's repressive measures and American involvement, numerous guerrilla factions appeared throughout the highlands in the early 1960's when civil war erupted.

The civil war climaxed between 1978 and 1984, referred to as '*la violencia*' years, when hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans were displaced, disappeared and killed by both the military and the guerrilla (Carmack 1988). The civil war continued for approximately 35 years and a peace treaty was recently signed in Guatemala City in 1996. Guatemala appears to be on a more peaceful path but politically motivated killings continue and violence remains prevalent.

There are 5 televisions per 100 Guatemalans; 2.6 telephones per 100 Guatemalans; and 1.9 vehicles per 100 Guatemalans. 50% of the population has access to medical services and 60% have regular access to potable water. While the bus system is

extensive, roads are often in terrible condition making travel to most places difficult and long. The cumulative effect of all these factors has led to a country which is extremely regionalized in terms of its economy, communication and transportation systems. This has been both a curse and a blessing. Ineffective communication systems have made it difficult for information to flow to different parts of the country but this isolation has enabled many cultural traditions to remain 'unchanged' including dress and language. "The rugged terrain helps isolate their land and their municipio, fostering local identification and inhibiting national awareness." (Handy 1984 :16). And while the rough terrain and poor roadways make it difficult to travel, they have allowed the guerrilla forces to survive since it is hard for the army to find them. These same conditions also enable the army to attack villages without worrying of the possibility of a combined resistance.

Statistics now rote on the Guatemalan scholar circuit indicate that thirty-nine percent of all 'disappearances' throughout Latin America since 1966 have taken place in Guatemala. According to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), over the past two decades there have been at least 100,000 political killings and 38,000 'disappearances' carried out by army, police, and paramilitary government forces. (Simon 1987:15)

### **Portraits of Guatemala**

Beyond statistics, it is hard to know where to start when describing Guatemala. Most representations of the country fall into one of two competing and intertwined narrative structures. These representations are indicative of how many of Guatemala's visitors, including myself, "frame" (Hutnyk 1996) their experiences there.

The first focuses on the rich archaeological heritage and cultural traditions that exist among Guatemala's vast and diverse Maya. Many archaeological or historically focused texts discuss the elaborate system of Maya hieroglyphs, temples and a complex calendar that was kept by special day keepers (Tedlock 1985). This narrative structure is used extensively in tourist publications such as the excerpt below.

The World of the Maya has many faces: some of them ancient as found carved in towering temples, others as modern as those of the people who live in Guatemala today ... Guatemala is a showcase of natural history and dramatic landscapes, yet its most distinguishing asset is the rich and colorful traditions of the various ethnic communities, such as K'iché, Kaqchiquel and Achi. (Tourist publication distributed by the government agency Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo (INGUAT) in 1995).

Much, if not all, of Guatemala's tourism industry relies on this 'distinguishing asset' while the remaining sectors of the economy rely on the low paid physical labour that many Maya provide on coffee and cotton plantations continuing a long tradition of exploiting cheap Indian labour. Few Maya ever visit Tikal despite the fact they are surrounded by images of their history and monuments to the Maya culture. The connections between past and present have been seemingly cut off.

The second group of representations, written after the American CIA backed coup in 1954, have focused on Guatemala's incredibly turbulent and violent contemporary history and this context informs an overwhelming number of books and articles written about the country. Titles such as; *Guatemala: Occupied Country* (Galeano 1969); *Gift of the Devil* (Handy 1984); *Harvest of Violence* (Carmack 1988); *Guatemala: Eternal Spring Eternal Tyranny* (Simon 1987); *Living in a State of Fear* (Green 1995); *Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy* (Perera 1993); and *Massacres in the*

Jungle: Ixcan, Guatemala (Falla 1994) are indicative of the issues that lure people to write and read about Guatemala.

### **Violent Vacations**

One wonders what can be done. These people (the Maya) are short of land: weavings, peanuts, and photograph opportunities are among the few things they can sell. Nobody wants to see his children begging from gringos, but no one wants his children to go hungry. Tourism exploits the Indian, but the Indian suffers if tourism is withdrawn. The dilemma is one of control, and it will remain unresolved until the larger question of Indian rights in Guatemala is addressed. (Wright 1989:177).

The Guatemalan government simultaneously profits from the Maya as cheap labour in the fields and as convenient tourist attractions when they are at home.

Guatemala is the richest Central American country in terms of natural resources and receives the most international investment from multinationals in Europe and North America "... and yet its Maya majority of 5 million have the lowest per capita income in the region." (Perera 1993:11). It seems that not much has changed in the 350 years since explorer Thomas Gage stated that;

The conditions of the Indians in this country of Guatemala is [sic] as sad, and as much to be pitied as any of the Indians in America ... Certain it is, these Indians suffer great oppression from the Spaniards, live in great bitterness, are under hard bondage, and serve with great rigour. (Gage in 1648 from Ackerman 1993:228).

Tourism in Guatemala relies almost completely on the 'attractiveness' of the Maya population to tourists. The source of this attractiveness, the Maya's 'noble savage' appearance and adherence to traditions, has in many ways, been perpetuated by the oppressive system under which the Maya have lived in the centuries since colonization. It

is possible that a factor contributing to the fact that many Maya continue to live in the same ways they have for centuries is precisely because the system under which they live has also not changed for centuries.

The United Nations issued a damning review of Guatemala human rights Monday, painting a grim panorama of state killings, death squads, and abuses by leftist rebels... The main victims of the abuse continue to be human rights activists, politicians, and public prosecutors...Guatemala has the worst human rights record in Latin America. (Reuters 18:09 10-30-95)

It would seem that the leisure industry would not and could not exist within such a violent context - but in Guatemala it does. " More than 600,000 tourists visit Guatemala every year, with more than a quarter coming from the United States. The industry represents a yearly income of more than \$300 million (US dollars) for Guatemala." (Reuters 01-19-98). Tourism is the biggest source of foreign income behind coffee and sugar. Tourism revenue represents the most important contribution to Guatemala's international monetary reserves and greatly affects the rate of exchange of the Guatemalan quetzal against the U.S. dollar (Cronica 1995:11).

There are opposite forces at work however in the development of the tourism industry in Guatemala. As the former military dictatorship makes the rocky transition to 'democracy' a more free society may lead to a more dangerous society for tourists. When I travelled to Guatemala in 1990 I felt relatively safe despite the fact that the year was marked by continuing human rights abuses against numerous Guatemalans carried out by the army. Notable incidents that received international attention that year were; the murder of Guatemalan anthropologist Myrna Mack (Manz 1995); the abduction and rape of US nun Diana Ortiz; and the murder of US hotel proprietor Michael Devine. Tourists,

in the midst of a police state *were* relatively safe since the repercussions arising from robbing or assaulting tourists did not outweigh the benefits.

However the landscape has changed since then and 'random crime' has increased against both Guatemalans and tourists. The 1998 attack on a busload of American Anthropology students received much attention and discussions surrounding the rate of actual violence against tourists began to be reported by the government (CNN 01-19-1998).

The forces behind this change are many. When the police state had complete control the majority of the 'crimes' that were occurring were those sanctioned or directed by powerful members of the government, military, or guerrilla. Under this sort of system it was more apparent who the 'criminals' were and who the victims would be. Tourists were possibly 'safer' in this kind of environment since it would not be in the government's best interest to endanger tourists because they were 'good' for the economy and keeping tourists unharmed kept the international spotlight out of the country thus allowing for the atrocities against Guatemalans to continue. And, unlike other countries such as Peru guerrillas chose not to target tourists.

As the government has changed it has become more difficult to discern who the perpetrators of this 'random' violence are. With the de-militarization movement there has been a shift in the power base. And while many corrupt colonels and generals are removed from their positions, much of their power and connections within the country remain intact. These individuals need to find an alternative source of income to the bribes and kick-backs they were receiving while in the employ of the state. Perhaps many turn

to a life of 'crime'. During the run off to the elections of 1995 it was suspected that many candidates were ordering the kidnapping of wealthy individuals to raise money for their campaigns through the collection of ransoms (Knight Ridder 12-06-95; Globe and Mail 01-01-96). While I was conducting my research there was an unprovoked massacre of eleven repatriated Guatemalans in October of 1995 that received international headlines.

While I was conducting my field research, there were numerous articles in the local newspapers indicating that 1995 was the most violent and dangerous year for tourists in the country due to an increase in crime. I was held up at gunpoint and robbed in the middle of the day during my second week of fieldwork. The discussion of danger and violence is extremely prevalent among tourists and Guatemalans. I recorded numerous stories of robberies/muggings from tourists and locals.

At the most extreme end of the spectrum, four non-Guatemalan women (1 development worker, 2 tourists, and an expatriate) were killed in three separate incidents within 6 weeks of my return from the field. (Reuters 12-05-95; 12-06-95; 01-08-96). These murders of foreigners occurred in a climate of escalating widespread violence where it was reported that in one weekend alone, 37 bodies showing signs of violence and torture were received at the Guatemala City morgue (Reuters 12-07-95).

Most recently, Bishop Gerardi, Guatemala's equivalent to El Salvador's assassinated Bishop Oscar Romero, was brutally murdered in his garage after he released a human rights report outlining the extent of the military atrocities carried out during the civil war (Miami Herald 04-28-98). This unprovoked murder underlines how hard it will be for Guatemala to change.



The Guatemalan economy has become increasingly dependent on revenue generated by the tourism industry and the government hopes that by the year 2000 tourism revenue will exceed the money now brought in by international coffee exports (Cronica 1995:33). Therefore, Guatemala's economic future – and by extension – the future of many Guatemalans is inextricably linked to the changes that tourism will bring. Understanding the tourists who come is a step towards helping Guatemalans brace for that future.

## POSTCARD

The daily downpour started earlier than usual that day. As people leisurely strolled through the central park on their way back to work or school, the rain caught them by surprise. As I scurried up the street, I quickly became hidden under my trusty black umbrella which, after one too many drenched episodes, was my constant companion. Those not so fortunate, hurried past me headed towards the dry refuge provided by one of the three archways facing Antigua's central park. The park and its surrounding cobblestone streets were soon cleared of people as everyone crowded in dryness and stared out at the empty benches and gurgling fountains as if waiting for a soccer game to start. As I neared the edge of one of these respites, I lowered my umbrella and there before me was a sight that made me stop and stare. A picture worth far more than a thousand words.

Closest to me was a rag tag group of gringos. Three Long-hairs wearing the trademark Birkenstock sandals and smoking cigarettes while mingling reluctantly with two pearly white Americans with T-shirts to match. Some were sitting, some were standing, all were waiting for the rain to stop but none seemed in a hurry to go anywhere. Their common desire to escape the rain brought them together but they also shared something else : all were armed with cameras and one even wielded a video recorder.

Following the mechanical gaze of the Sony Camcorder, my eye came to rest on a group of Indian Maya women huddled together around a lunch of corn tortillas and a tomato broth. Dressed in their brilliant hand-woven clothing these 'vendedoras', or street vendors, sat perched among their enormous wicker baskets filled to overflowing with colourful wares. Tortillas were passed around and each woman filled her small ceramic bowl with the steaming broth from a large pot in the centre. Oblivious to, or uncaring of, the video camera shooting them from behind the women continued their lunch, chatting to one another in Kakchiquel, and looked despairingly at the sky. All wondered when the rain would stop so they could return to the park and sell more of their 'tipica'.

A wandering child strayed from the impromptu picnic group and bumped into a camouflaged soldier guarding the national bank in front of which everyone had gathered. Surprised by the collision, the small boy quickly returned to the enclave of baskets while the soldier and his four other uniformed friends resumed their conversations and laughed in unison. The five soldiers stood, hardly at attention, and continued to joke and laugh among themselves swinging their Galil automatic rifles from side to side. They did not move out of the way of the many passers-by dodging the rain and, needless to say, nearly everyone gave them a wide berth. When I became unfrozen from my stare, I nearly stepped back out into the rain to keep my distance from them as I continued on my way unforgettable images of cameras, tipica, and guns in my head.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ANTIGUA

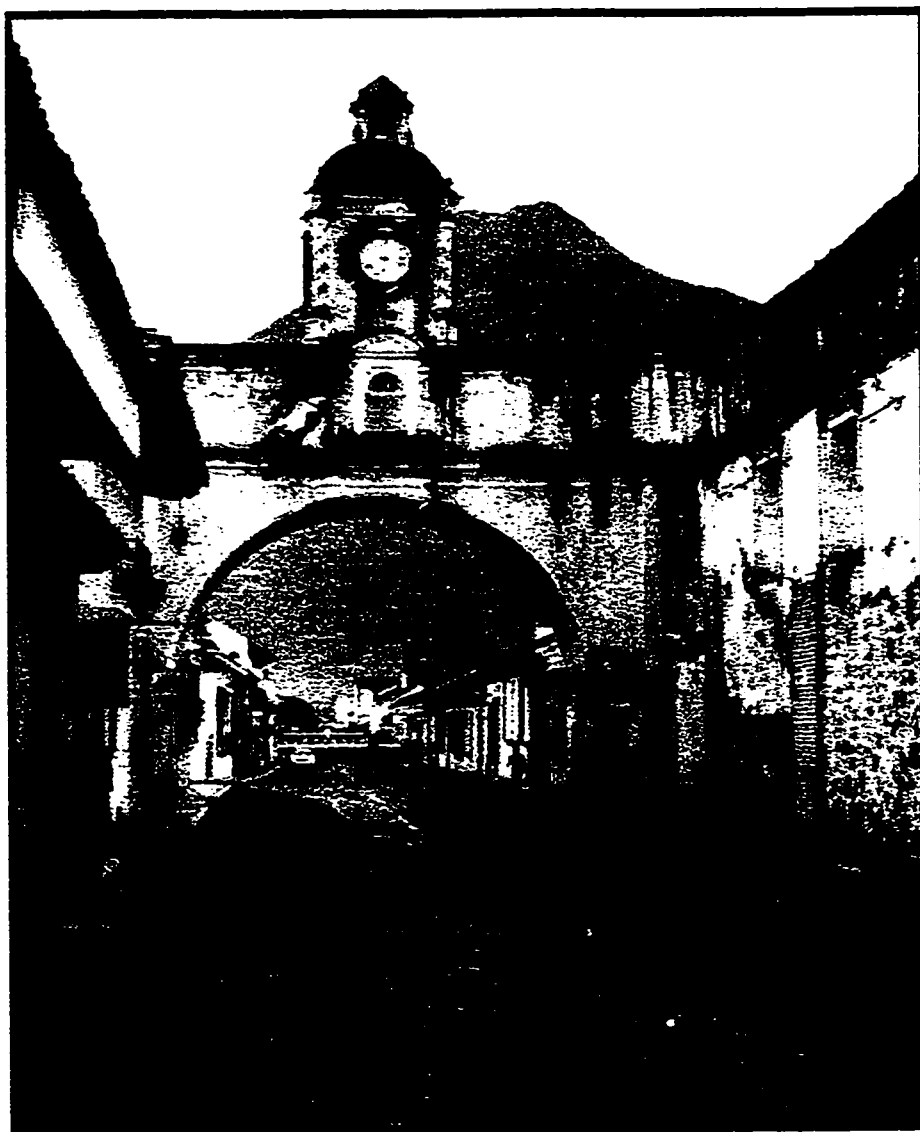


Photo of Calle del Arco, Antigua

Taken by a tourist, October, 1995



## LA ANTIGUA GUATEMALA

The city was founded in 1541 in Panchoy Valley, Department of Sacatepequez. Antigua is a jewel of city planning and colonial architecture. The city was declared a 'Patrimony to Humanity' by UNESCO in 1979. (Guatemalan Tourism office brochure from 1995).

La Antigua Guatemala, or the 'ancient' Guatemala, is most commonly referred to as simply Antigua by both tourists and locals. It is a picturesque town of approximately 25,000 people located 45 minutes from the Guatemala City International airport. Antigua used to be the capital of Guatemala, hence the 'ancient' reference, and one of the most important centres of religious and intellectual institutions in the region. "By 1773, the city had 38 churches, as well as monasteries, convents, and numerous other ecclesiastical structures." (Glassman 1977:87). It was also in this same year that numerous earthquakes eventually forced many of the residents to abandon the city. By 1776, the city of New Guatemala of the Assumption, in the neighbouring valley, had been designated as the capital and remains so today.

Antigua has since transformed itself into a living colonial legacy. Many of the mansions and convents have been restored and converted into residences, hotels, and restaurants. These magnificently reconstructed buildings exist beside vegetation covered ruins of colonial era buildings which have been reconstructed into tourist sites. The designation of Antigua as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has had a significant impact on the existing architecture and development of the town since it is unlawful to change the exterior colonial facades and it is also unlawful to tear down the ruins of churches and other buildings from the 1773 earthquake.

To the tourist eye, Antigua appears as a beautiful town both architecturally and geographically providing the best of the best of Guatemala. It is a small town with most services centrally located and within walking distance from the central plaza. Antigua is a tourist hub and expatriate refuge and few visit the country without at least passing through it. The town hosts a broad array of tourist services, hotels, and restaurants to suit the most budget conscious of backpack travellers along with well-heeled tourists.

Antigua today is full of gringos. Language schools and foreign missionary organizations base themselves here to avoid the noise and dirt of Guatemala City. You see large blond gringos, huipiles tucked into bulging blue jeans, drinking beer and enjoying the relentless courtship of Ladino men half their size. (Wright 1989: 173)

The tourist industry often conceals other aspects of the town and Guatemalans sometimes appear as a colourful background to a town of gringos. But the pace, the beauty, the affordability, and the hedonistic atmosphere of some of the tourist hangouts is alluring and attractive to many. Development workers, missionaries, and some backpack travellers disdain Antigua because of its flagrant displays of excessive wealth and commercialism that appear sinister compared to the suffering and the poverty elsewhere in the country yet many of these same people can be seen in the streets of Antigua enjoying a gourmet meal or reading the New York Times while sipping cappuccino.

A short walk around the town's centre reveals a plethora of international restaurants serving everything from French haute cuisine to the common staples of refried beans and tortillas. The shopping is plentiful with upscale boutiques, outdoor handicraft markets and numerous street vendors selling silver and jade jewellery, hand woven

textiles, paintings, furniture, hand woven wool blankets, glassware, T-shirts, clothes, table ware, shoes, leather bags, and more.

There is a communications centre with telephones, fax machines, computers, and Internet services. There are also high quality bookstores in Antigua carrying books in Spanish, English, French, and German and two public lending libraries. The cultural centre 'El Sitio' features regular events such as classical guitar performances, film screenings, charity benefit concerts, and an art gallery for local artists. The majority of the people who can afford to use these services or attend functions at these venues are gringos and wealthy Guatemalans.

Antigua's tourist nightlife is vibrant and gringos regularly crowd into the popular bars with names such as Macondo, Casbah, Latinos, and Chiminea. Numerous dance instructors offer lessons to left footed gringos so they can salsa and meringue the night away. There are houses and apartments available to rent by the week or by the month complete with maid and gardening services. There is a mountain bike rental shop, which offers guided bike tours; a New Age crystal store selling 'Free Tibet' bumper stickers; a vegetarian restaurant with a rumoured Hare Krishna connection; Cappuccino bars; Gourmet delicatessens; and wine shops. Many language schools transform into impromptu movie theatres in the evenings showing recent English language movies such as Braveheart or Pulp Fiction with up to five different show times a night. Antigua provides the amenities of 'home' to tourists in a cheaper, 'quainter' and more colourful atmosphere.

Rumours claim that 45% of central Antigua is owned by gringos (repeated personal communication) and it is not uncommon to overhear conversations in gringo restaurants discussing the easiest way to buy property, the going rate for servants, or the best shipping company to use when moving furniture to Guatemala. This invasion of gringos has artificially raised the cost of living in Antigua forcing many local people to live in the surrounding towns of Jocotenango, Chimaltenango, Pastores, and San Antonio Aguas Calientes (see Figure 1). "You may have noticed that everyone who works in Antigua lives in Jocotenango. It is too expensive to live here (Antigua). I was born two blocks from the park here and I have had to move to Jocotenango." (Director PLFM)

While Antigua may appear as an anomaly to the rest of the country it does share a history of violence like many other places in Guatemala. Although many tourists may not be immediately aware of the risks that Antigua can pose there is more underneath and behind Antigua's colonial facades. Tourists are warned not to walk alone after dark and it is recommended that men should accompany women if they choose to go out at night. There have also been numerous violent assaults of tourists during the middle of the day on the path leading up to a hilltop that overlooks the town. The majority of the people out on the streets after 10 p.m. are tourists and there is the occasional army patrol that marches through the main plaza.

## **LANGUAGE SCHOOLS**

Many tourists come to Antigua to study Spanish. The Spanish school industry supports a large part of Antigua's tourist infrastructure and the continuous presence of



language students has shaped much of this infrastructure development. Many tourist services are geared to a population that is in Antigua for a longer time than the average tourist stay of one or two nights. “ I feel more at home than I thought I would. I really feel like Antigua is sort of like home.” (Julie).

The Spanish Language schools are based on the premise of one to one instruction with cultural and language immersion provided from living with a family while attending school. In 1995, Antigua’s tourist information centre listed 20 local Spanish language schools that were officially registered with the National Tourist agency (INGUAT). Many school administrators and teachers report that Antigua has anywhere from 35 to 64 schools operating at one time while there are an estimated 80 to 100 schools operating throughout the country. In addition to the schools, there are Spanish teachers who offer private tutorials and families who board tourists in their homes regardless of whether they are studying Spanish or not.

The majority of the schools flourish during the summer months from the beginning of May until the end of September. Mostly North American and European tourists descend en masse to learn Spanish while enjoying their summer vacation. The more established schools operate year round while smaller schools only run during the peak months.

There was a noticeable change in the number and the nationalities of tourists observed in the country over the length of my stay. North American tourists dominated the scene during June and July with the number of arrivals steadily increasing as the summer wore on. By the beginning of August, there appeared to be more European

tourists in the country reflecting the fact that most Europeans take their holidays in August. By the end of September, the numbers of tourists started to drop off and the majority of the tourists remaining were mostly European. Throughout my stay I also met tourists from Israel, Australia, and New Zealand although they represented the minority. Many tourists, regardless of nationality, were University students on summer break from classes. All the tourists I interviewed had at least one University degree (for more demographic information please refer to Appendix A).

There are many schools to choose from in Antigua and many schools market themselves in ways that will attract certain styles of tourists. Some notable examples are the following; there is a school which caters to students who speak Japanese as a first language; a Christian Spanish Academy that specializes in teaching missionaries; a school that runs a fitness and aerobics program every afternoon; and a school that donates all its proceeds to building libraries in the surrounding communities.

For tourists interested in studying outside of Antigua, there are also numerous types of schools; there are two 'eco-schools'; one run in the rainforest of El Peten for students interested in learning about the rainforest and the ruins of Tikal to the north and another run on a yacht in Rio Dulce to the east for those interested in the Caribbean coast of Guatemala and its river ecology. There are also a few schools in the town of Panajachel on the shores of Lake Atitlan. Regardless of their location, most schools are similar in their fundamental structure and in the type of instruction they offer. Many schools depend on word of mouth between tourists or they have informal 'agents' that greet tourists at the town's bus station or hand out flyers and pamphlets in the town's

main square. Advertisements for language schools are a common sight in travel magazines, posted in hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, bus stations, airports, handicraft stores, and bars.

A factor that appeared important in how schools marketed themselves was whether the school declared itself as a 'non-profit' or 'locally owned' organization. In a country where some tourists are very concerned about the impact their visit may be having on the local population, there is a demand for 'socially responsible' schools and these claims appear important in guaranteeing attendance. The prevalence of these 'socially responsible' schools was significantly less in Antigua than in other towns, specifically Quetzaltenango, discussed in the following chapter. The focus of these more politically oriented schools is on their level of social responsibility and community involvement. The majority of the schools in Antigua focus on the superior level of their language instruction and/or on the extra-curricular 'bonuses' the school has to offer.

For students pre-arranging their studies, there is an organization called Language Link that can be accessed from many countries around the world. They provide advice regarding various language schools through out Latin America. They will make all the necessary arrangements such as confirming registration prior to your arrival.

In Antigua, there is an office called AmeriSpan, which specializes, in placing students/tourists with a school according to the tourist's specifications. Their advertisements claim they span 'the bridge between cultures'. After speaking to the gringos that ran this office they informed me they started the office because they felt some Antigua schools had a monopoly over the student market. It was believed that

many schools paid the tourist bureau to include them on their list and that smaller, less established schools often with community based development programs were unable to afford this sort of influence. AmeriSpan functions off the commission received from the schools they promote. They also provide information regarding schools in Mexico and Costa Rica. As political tensions have eased, schools have also appeared in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua (personal observation) and AmeriSpan provides information about these schools as well.

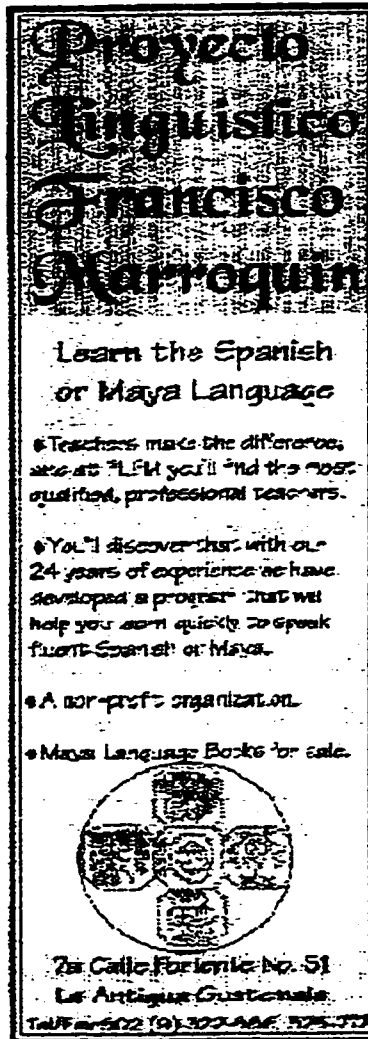
### **PROYECTO LINGUISTICO FRANCISCO MARROQUIN (PLFM)**

After doing a quick survey of the schools on the Friday after my arrival, I was most strongly directed towards Proyecto Linguistico Francisco Marroquin (PLFM). I was told at the tourist bureau and at Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Meso America (CIRMA) a local research institute and library, that PLFM was by far the ‘best’ school in town. Reportedly, PLFM is the only school in Guatemala that Language Link recommends. PLFM was not highly recommended by the AmeriSpan office while other smaller schools fared better.

PLFM, reportedly the first language school of its kind in the region, has inspired the model for all the language schools which have since sprouted up through out Latin America. PLFM is presently the largest language school in Guatemala with the capacity to teach a maximum of 150 students a week during the peak tourist season as well as find suitable family accommodations for all of their students. The school was named after Bishop Francisco Marroquin who was “... a defender of the rights of the poor and the

founder of the first school in the capital..." (Glassman 1977: 87). PLFM claims that it is a not for profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Maya language and culture with a Maya board of directors.

PLFM is a Spanish language school and linguistics project that was founded in 1971 by a group of linguists in conjunction with a group of indigenous Guatemalans as a joint project to offer intensive language learning experience in Spanish and to support the ongoing linguistics research and preservation of the Mayan languages. (From material given out by the school in 1995).



The school teaches an average of 100 students a week through out the year with the peak season occurring from June through August (130 - 150 students a week) and the low season from September through December (60 students a week) (personal communication with PLFM director). To accommodate all the students, PLFM rents five different buildings throughout Antigua that are used for instruction. Four of the buildings are large houses which have been converted into schools by filling them with small tables and chairs placed around a central courtyard and in the rooms of the house. PLFM also has a central building that is used for administration and

linguistic research. "Francisco Marroquín seems to be nicer than other schools. Other schools don't have as nice facilities. Teachers seem more professional somehow. I'm very pleased with it." (Summer)

It is important to note that non-Guatemalans started PLFM and part of its longstanding success is due to the fact that it has strong contacts within the United States. These contacts ensure an ongoing population of students, linguists, archaeologists, and anthropologists who need to learn either Spanish or a Maya language to carry out their work. From this academic grounding, the school has been able to branch out to the more general tourist population.

PLFM is the only school in Guatemala that is accredited to give the US Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Spanish language exam. PLFM claims in their promotional material that they are "... the only school certified in Washington, D.C. to give the exam and certify the student's level. A grade of 3 in the exam is considered bi-lingual by the FSI in Washington." (School documentation received in 1995). For this reason many of the students that require or desire official documentation of their language training choose PLFM. The school also has many ties to American universities and many students were able to receive University credit for attending the school.

My main number one reason for coming here was because I need a language requirement to get my PhD. After researching the language schools in Central America and Mexico I found out this [PLFM] was one of the best schools in Guatemala. Guatemala is one of the cheapest places to come as well. (Bill)

Those tourists interested in attending PLFM will receive a more structured learning experience at a school with a solid reputation for Spanish instruction at a lower price than if they studied at home. Classes are held Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 12 noon and 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. The seven-hour schedule includes two half-hour breaks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. During my stay PLFM charged

\$125 US for 30 hours of instruction per week (\$4.50 US/hour) and \$50 US a week for the family stay program (approx. \$8.35 US/day)<sup>6</sup>.

Most other schools in Antigua charge anywhere from \$100 - \$140 US a week for different hours of daily instruction and room and board with a family. Despite the relatively inexpensive cost of PLFM when compared to private instruction costs in North America or Europe, PLFM is the most expensive school in Guatemala. For this reason, very few backpack or budget travellers attend this school since they can travel, study, and live elsewhere for as little as \$7 US/day.

The school encourages early registration and all the PLFM students I met, except one, had pre-arranged their studies in the months prior to their arrival in Antigua. When I registered on the Friday before my classes were to begin, it was noted that it was most unusual to take 'walk-in' students.

PLFM provides a structure that takes care of many unknowns or worries for people wishing to learn Spanish and travel in Guatemala. The school will meet students at the airport in Guatemala City and make hotel accommodations for students arriving before they can move in with a family. On the first day of instruction, the school provides transportation for each student and their luggage to their families' homes. The seven hours of daily instruction occupy the majority of the students' time during the week with evening activities located in town. The school recommends travel agents for students to consult for weekend outings and many students form groups after their first week of school together and go on pre-arranged or guided weekend trips together. This

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<sup>6</sup> As of October 1, 1995 these prices were raised to \$135 US and \$65 US respectively.

built-in structure provides a low risk style of travel for these tourists. “ I would say I am a terrible traveller. I’m a person who likes consistency and a home. It’s probably one of the reasons I have been in school (PLFM) for so long - because it’s easy.” (Rebecca)

## **Teachers**

PLFM claims to employ only the best-certified Spanish teachers in the country. “All of our teachers are native Guatemalans with Spanish as their primary language.” (Information distributed by PLFM in 1995). Most teachers are Ladino and have attended the equivalent of two years of junior college before teaching at PLFM and all teachers are supposed to receive a 100 hour instructional course on how to teach Spanish before they begin working with students. While these standards may apply to the full time teachers at the school, during the busy season the school is sometimes forced to hire part time teachers who may not meet these qualifications (personal observation).

It was generally agreed amongst PLFM teachers that PLFM was the hardest school in which to get a job because of their strict hiring policies and high teaching standards. Many teachers had taught at other schools but preferred PLFM because they were able to get consistent work year round while other schools would lay off almost all of their teachers during the slow season.

Sixty five to seventy percent of PLFM’s teachers are women and the majority of the male teachers are under 30 since they usually move on to other higher paying jobs or continue their education after saving money from working at the school. Teachers’ salaries have remained relatively the same, in terms of the local economy, since the



school was founded (personal communication with the school's director). The increasing popularity of language schools has not translated into increased wages. New teachers earn approximately 70 Quetzales a week (approx. \$11.50 US/week) while more senior teachers make closer to 120Q a week (approx. \$20 US/week). The school director reported that he was paid 200Q a week (approx. \$34 US/week). The disparity between the cost of the school and the teachers' wages was a point of contention amongst the teachers and shocking to those students who learned about the teachers' wages. With the disparity between wages and fees being so high the question of where the profits in this 'not for profit' school were going was a question asked by teachers, families, and students.

During my studies at PLFM I had four different teachers: two women and two men. My level of conversational Spanish was more advanced compared to most students when I started my studies so I was able to converse with all of my teachers beyond the formal lesson plans. I also made a concerted effort to socialise with other teachers during morning and afternoon breaks. I also took the Foreign Service Spanish exam at the end of my field research and received a grade of 3 - the passing mark to enter the Foreign Service. Despite the differences between all of my teachers, they were excellent instructors.

My first teacher was a handsome young man named Carlos. Carlos lived in Jocotenango and had been teaching at PLFM for three years to help support his family and save money to continue his education at San Carlos University in Guatemala City. He was very interested in discussing male - female relations with me and other women

who had studied with him also confirmed this. Carlos was quite forward in his comments regarding my personal life and, after two weeks of constant flirting, he had me convinced that he didn't have a girlfriend.

This '*machismo*' aspect of our relationship was prevalent throughout the two weeks that I had him as my teacher. I refused his constant requests to meet him outside of school and, after I finished studying with him, I found out from a female teacher that he did have a serious girlfriend who taught at another school. I frequently saw him around town in the evenings with his next female student even though I told her that he had a girlfriend.

My experience was but one example of the different cultural values regarding relationships with members of the opposite sex expressed by teachers and students at the school. All students I interviewed, whether male or female, reported that male-female relations were an often-discussed topic between teachers and students. There was a certain dynamic often created between male teachers and female students and during my studies it was not uncommon to see a female student with her male teacher during the evenings or on the weekends.

Many female tourists reported finding Guatemalan men attractive and the compliments and romantic advances made by the men towards them are often quite persuasive and very different than what many female students are accustomed to. Guatemalan men still generally believe that foreign women are 'easy'. This aspect sometimes strains relationships between female students and female teachers since many Guatemalan women resent the freedoms that many tourist women have and may perceive

the women tourists as threats to the relationships they have with their husbands or boyfriends. Outside of the school structure it would be out of the ordinary for a Guatemalan man and a gringo woman to spend seven hours alone together in a non-romantic relationship.

My second PLFM teacher was a young woman named Rosalia. Rosalia was not a regular teacher at PLFM and had been hired because the school was so busy. She was eager to please and strictly followed the teaching plan. It was hard for me to try and get her to discuss more personal issues regarding her opinions of the tourism industry and Guatemalan politics since she was initially more concerned with following the curriculum. Rosalia repeatedly emphasized that I was a very different student from the other few students she had taught because I knew so much about the political context of the country and was eager to speak to her about it.

Political discussions between teachers and students only occurred if the student initiated such a conversation. I engaged all of my teachers in political discussions and all of them stated that most students at PLFM never speak about this subject. Some teachers were nervous talking about the government and would lower their voices or close the door to the room in which we were studying so that nobody could listen to our discussion. I was aware of the sensitivities surrounding these topics and made it clear to all my teachers that they were under no obligation to discuss these topics with me in case they felt threatened by any of my questions.

When I returned to PLFM from my first visit to Todos Santos, I requested to have Sergio as my third teacher because he was very gregarious during coffee breaks and we

had immediately established a strong rapport since he was always suggesting newspaper articles for me to read. He was also reported to be a very good teacher. Sergio was married with two children and didn't flirt with me and we were able to openly discuss the differences between how men and women got along in Guatemala as compared to Canada. He came from an indigenous family and had been a radio journalist in Guatemala City before becoming a teacher at PLFM. He was excited by the opportunity to discuss politics with me and was the only teacher who took an active interest in my research.

Sergio was very interested in talking about the new move to include Maya representatives in the government. We often talked about Rigoberta Menchu; a Quiche woman who won the Nobel Peace prize in 1992 after narrowly escaping from the country during the 1980's (Du-Bray 1984). We had many conversations about the future of Guatemala's indigenous people.

While PLFM prides itself on being an institute dedicated to the preservation of Maya language and culture it employs very few indigenas as Spanish teachers and very little school programming is directly related to informing students about the Maya. I also asked all my teachers if they had ever seen or met the owners of the school and none of them had - even a teacher who had been teaching for 14 years had never seen a member of the collective.

School field trips are often to Guatemala City to visit museums, the zoo, and Monterrico beach – sites representing Ladino culture. Very little is mentioned about the social conditions, the civil war or human rights awareness. I never discussed information

regarding the linguistic research program or the Maya board of directors. Other students I spoke with confirmed that they never broached these topics with their teachers either.

My last teacher at PLFM was Clara. She had been teaching at PLFM for fourteen years and she had also been the director of PLFM's satellite school in Huehuetenango until it was closed. She was the best teacher I had during my entire studies. Clara had chosen teaching because it provided a steady income but she did mention that it was very difficult for women to progress much further within the system. She was also very wise about the tourism industry and how the language schools fit into the scheme. She was aware of Antigua's facade and we often talked about the differences between Antigua and the rest of the country. Female teachers were interested in finding out about the different opportunities allowed to women in the 'West' and female students were always shocked to find out that most Guatemalan women never went out after dark and rarely drank.

All teachers commented that they found it refreshing to have conversations with me. They said I was more interested in talking with my teachers than actually following the lesson plan - for which my grammar most probably suffered. Teachers said they often get tired from the repetition of teaching, asking the same questions about students' lives, and only being able to speak in superficial terms to students about their own condition since most students were not aware of some of the fundamental differences.

### **Family stay program**

PLFM employs approximately 60 Ladino families in Antigua with whom they board students. Most PLFM students live with other students in the house. In the first house where I lived I had only one other student living with me and this was not the norm. Most students had at least three students to a house and some houses had close to ten students living with a family at one time. These houses resembled boarding houses and the students existed within the household quite separate from the family and usually spoke to one another in English. Many families had scheduled eating shifts with half the students eating half an hour to an hour before the second shift since the dining table and kitchen could not accommodate all the students at one time.

In cases such as these, living with a family no longer represented a 'cultural immersion' for the student but a cheap place to live where three square meals a day were provided. For many families, boarding students, originally undertaken to supplement their incomes, has now become a main source of income. Now that boarding students has become the main business of many households the boundaries between public and private space, work and home, have collapsed.

PLFM charges \$50 US a week for living with the family the family receives \$40 US a week. This wage had not changed in three years despite the constantly rising cost of living. When I advised the mother of one of my families that the school was raising the

price of the Family stay program in October she claimed that none of the families had been informed of this despite repeated requests for more money from the school.

PLFM informally enforces that 'their' 60 families only board PLFM students since the school claims that if families are working for other schools there is no way for PLFM to know whether the family has a room available for a PLFM student. Most families have worked for other schools but all the families I lived with said they were happiest working for PLFM because of the steady amount of students the school received. These families felt that boarding PLFM students was more reliable than working for other schools. There was no system of rotation amongst the families and those families who had the nicest houses or received favourable recommendations from students received more students on a regular basis.

Julie, a tourist, wondered if Antiguan residents resented having tourists all over the place and if they got sick of having to cater to people who had so much more money than they did. She asked the mother at her house this question to which she received the following response - "No, we do not mind. If it wasn't for the tourists Antigua wouldn't exist."

All students reported that their families employed housekeepers who cleaned the student's rooms and prepared the meals. All three families I lived with in Antigua had a housekeeper who came in everyday except Sundays to cook and maintain the household. All three of these women did not live in Antigua but commuted from different surrounding communities 6 days a week.

Families realize their houses will be more attractive to students and language schools if they are centrally located and have amenities similar to those that tourists are

accustomed to in their own homes. Many families sacrifice their personal comfort so students can be comfortable during their stay. The first family of four I lived with all slept in the same room and used a toilet and sink as their bathroom while Neil and I each had our own rooms and shared a bathroom with a hot water shower. The family was in the process of constructing a second story to their house so the upstairs could house three to four students with their own bathroom and private entrance and the family could have the main floor to themselves. “Generally, the host families tend to have quite a bit of money, or at least more money than the average Guatemalan, because they do have hot water and they do have television occasionally.” (Brian).

While catering to the students in this way may not seem like much of a ‘cultural immersion’ experience to some, many students find their housing and food very different than what they are used to.

I was pretty shocked about my room. The cement floor and the courtyard. Overall it was kind of dirty. I live in an extremely large house though and the family is doing relatively well. But it is very bare and we have no hot water. But it hasn’t been anything that I haven’t been able to adapt to. (Summer)

There was an informal grading system of families and houses among PLFM students. If students wanted more luxurious accommodation with regular hot water, private bathrooms, western style meals, or a private entrance they were able to make requests through the school. For an additional fee students could stay at houses that provided even more ‘luxuries’. David stayed in a beautiful colonial style home in central Antigua that had marble floors, antique European furniture, hand woven wool blankets on a queen size bed, his own en suite bathroom with hot water shower, and cable television



including American channels. Two full-time servants prepared his meals and the boarders ate in an enormous dining room. At the time David was staying there he was the only student in the house. He paid \$75 US a week to live there and rarely saw or spoke to the family members who lived in the house. Students often complained that they didn't get to know their families as intimately as they had expected.

I find the family I am living with to be very pleasant. The only disadvantage is that they haven't brought us in as much as I had hoped they would. They have kept a professional distance. We do have good conversations at meal times but they have very separate lives from us. (Bill)

However students that stay with their families for a longer time, as Rebecca did, are able to develop a closer relationship to their host family. "I think I have the most wonderful family. I mean I have been with them for two and half months now and I think they're great." (Rebecca)

### **The Tourists**

I have spoken way more English than I expected to and have not learned as much Spanish as I had hoped. There were way more amenities than I expected and I have been more comfortable than I expected to be. I didn't realize I would meet so many gringos. I haven't met any other gringos who aren't PLFM students. (Julie)

Between 70% to 90% of PLFM's students are from the United States (differing statistics from PLFM coordinator and PLFM director respectively). All the students I met at PLFM were from the United States except for one other Canadian, one person from the UK, and one person from Denmark.

Most PLFM students are well educated and/or have professional careers. During my first few days I felt as if I was the only non-MBA student in the entire school. Along

with MBA students, I met US army, US coastguard, US State Department employees, and US investigation officers. There were also rumours that the CIA sent agents there to learn Spanish but I never met anyone openly claiming to work for the CIA. There were also many students who were not affiliated with any state run organization but had become acquainted with PLFM through their universities or workplace. The desire and necessity for all these individuals to learn Spanish represents the increasingly important role that Spanish is playing in the United States as well as the US government's continued presence in Latin America.

Many PLFM students have a clear itinerary upon arrival and were not of the more 'laissez-faire' character of the stereotypical backpack traveller. Many students at PLFM, unless they have been sent through their employer i.e. US coastguard, come to Guatemala by themselves. The school is very much the central focus of most students' visits and most of their time revolves around activities in Antigua. On weekends, some students stay in Antigua and take day trips to surrounding villages. Many travel the 'gringo trail' and take short trips to well visited places such as; the ruins of Tikal and Quirigua; the weekend market at Chichicastenango; Panajachel and Lake Atitlan; Montericco beach; and the Rio Dulce region. Since the time available to travel outside of Antigua is limited, most tourists travel in private tourist mini vans and see the more common 'chicken buses' as novelties and not as the main mode of tourist transportation.

Despite the PLFM students being drawn to the same school to learn Spanish, the similarities between them end there. They were a diverse group and it was difficult to generalize about them. There was a distinct split of focus for the students in Antigua

between learning Spanish and enjoying being on vacation: Tourism as education and tourism as escape/leisure.

I came to learn Spanish and to have fun after my stressful year of medical school. I really had the itch to travel and go somewhere different. Preferably a third world country that would be interesting. (Julie)

Many tourists come with the primary goal of having a good time - in the same style they would have a good time at home. For some, this attitude extends to the way they dress (very short skirts, tank tops, revealing clothing), how much they drink, and how late they stay out. Very little effort is put towards understanding, mimicking, or respecting the local customs.

I go out **alot** here. We don't go out every night though. Only for special occasions (nudge, nudge, wink, wink). On the weekends we go out and go to movies. I like going to Chiminea's, Casbah, Macondo, and Latino's. I speak English all night. I've been really fortunate to get along so well with the people I have met. Everyone is so nice here - even the tourists. Tourists seem more receptive to getting to know other tourists here. Tourists spend more time getting to know each other here and even the locals seem interested in getting to know us. (Brooke)

In general, the tourists/students at PLFM are much less political than tourists/students in other parts of the country. Many of the students, when asked said they did not know very much about the political or cultural history of the country. Students would often ask me to explain the political situation to them which often put me in a difficult situation since I knew I could potentially alter their experience by giving them information so I was sometimes reluctant to do so.

I didn't know there was a war in Guatemala until I was reading about armed guerrillas and I was thinking Wow! That would be kinda cool to be held up by armed guerrillas! (Brian)

I knew a lot about Guatemala - militarily - before I came here. In addition

to being a history student I did a lot of other outside reading about this place before I came. I haven't been surprised that other Americans here don't know very much about this place. The ones that I have run into don't know much about what is going on. (Bill)

The large tourist population in Antigua makes it easy for tourists to speak their native language with each other. Families have had so many students in their homes that students themselves have become 'commodities' to the families. Teachers regularly engage in conversations that are directed by the student and focus on furthering the student's knowledge of Spanish and not the history of Guatemala or the culture of the teacher.

The tourists I encountered in Antigua were in search of a cross-cultural encounter - self defined - as a means of learning Spanish and not necessarily as an experience in and of itself. These tourists, if classified using the established classifications, would fall in a category based on the fact that the majority of them came on a pre-arranged tour (the Language school) and participated in structured activities on weekends. But this would only be categorizing them according to the activities they take part in and I do not think this is an entirely accurate method by which to organize or represent tourists.

Guatemala, in and of itself, is not the key destination for these tourists. Their desire to learn Spanish brings them to Guatemala. The language school provides the main context for these tourists' experiences. The long hours that students spend at the school reinforce this. After studying for seven hours a day it is not surprising that few students become more informed about the country over the length of their stay.

The one PLFM student I met who had her knowledge of the country radically altered during her stay was Rebecca who studied in Antigua for three months, the longest of any student I met there. Rebecca's perception and knowledge of Guatemala changed dramatically over her three-month stay. She went from knowing no Spanish and what was written in a guidebook that she read on the aeroplane to passing the Foreign Service Language exam and having an understanding of the political and cultural make up of the country.

I mean there are areas where tourists go to and it seems like right now that most of the problems are farther away and that to be a tourist here it is important to be well informed of where you are going and what you are doing and what's going on. I mean if people stay in Antigua you really don't have to think about that I mean here its just general delinquency that affects you rather than a war. I hate to say that any place needs tourism but Antigua survives on tourism right now and tourism brings a lot of opportunities for a country and development depending on how a country uses it ... I guess - I take for granted - I have been thinking about the massacre up in Alta Verapaz - I take it for granted that my government isn't going to kill me - it isn't always true - but I can't imagine what this country has gone through for the last 35 years or so - civil war. That I have a lot of freedoms that I take for granted and have a lot of expectations for my life which are beyond the scope of people here. (Rebecca)

Since few students planned on doing much travelling outside the parameters of their studying time, the acquisition of Spanish was intended not to facilitate their present trip but as a skill they needed or could use in their careers back home. Tourists clearly stated that Spanish was a tool they needed to facilitate their futures as doctors, international management consultants, PhD students, hotel and travel industry representatives, and a university researcher in Spain. It was not important to these tourists that they learn Spanish *in Guatemala* per se but that they learn Spanish period

Neil was the only PLFM student I interviewed who was learning Spanish to facilitate his three-month trip through Honduras, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Peru. Learning Spanish was part of his overall trip it did not constitute the major focus of his time away from New York. All the non-PLFM students I interviewed in Antigua were also learning Spanish as part of their travels and studying was not the only reason they had come.

All the people I interviewed were able to be somewhat reflexive about being a foreigner in Guatemala when asked.

I believe that tourism is very important to this country. It brings much-needed American dollars into the country. It also provides a sort of control of radical elements - both right and left. The things that come from tourism also moderate the possibilities of what could potentially happen in this country - meaning the economic benefits deter an explosion of political sorts here. A lot of people didn't want me to come here. My dad asked me if I was sure I wanted to come to Guatemala. I've been to war twice and he asked me if I wanted to come here. (Bill)

I expected a general third world country which is in an impossible situation of development and at the mercy of the first world countries. Underdeveloped infrastructure economically and socially. (David)

Since I have been here, I have found the melange of poverty, violence, expatriates, and tourists very intriguing. (Neil)

They all shared the common goal of learning Spanish but they also came for many different reasons and motivations. While the reasons for, or the definition of, this 'cultural immersion' may not be the same for an anthropologist or a devoted budget traveller it is an encounter that is seen as genuine by those interviewed. This is despite the fact that some tourists are very aware that they are not seeing what they refer to as the 'real' Guatemala.

There is a society here who are disillusioned with the States and come here because it's charming. But there is a lot of pomp, a lot of pretension and no depth. This contrasts with Guatemalan society where many women have lots of babies and live with a lot of hardship. It appears pretty great and simple but it is really rough here. The roses are nice in the park and the restaurants are nice too but there's more underneath. Seeing the poverty outside of Antigua has been very hard. The road to Santa Maria de Jesus was a real shock. When you go outside of Antigua it is very, very different. (Summer)

But these statements are not coupled with expressions of sadness or disappointment. These people are not upset that they were unable to access the 'real' Guatemala - what they were able to access could be said to satisfy them - if indeed satisfaction was what they were in search of in the first place. "This has been the very best summer of my life." (Bill)

Even though students are not getting 'immersed' in the 'real' Guatemala as they put it, even though PLFM students have similar goals and backgrounds, even though PLFM offers a standardized program and curriculum for everyone, students' experiences, reactions, motivations, and observations could not be standardized. Some were more reflexive than others, some knew about the political climate others did not.

These tourists are immersed in the culture of Antigua and Antigua is immersed in tourism. "Two weeks of being a tourist here is not all of Guatemala, but it is *one* side of Guatemala." (Director PLFM).

## (UN) GUIDED TOUR

*Are you frazzled and fatigued by language classes? Are your hopes for a quiet moment dashed by pint-size merchants? And has television just become another episode of "The O.J. Simpson Trial: Live"? Maybe, just maybe, you need an escape to another world.<sup>7</sup>*

Desiring a mini-adventure and needing a break from the sometimes claustrophobic confines of colonial Antigua and the routines of language school, Neil and I decided to take a day trip to the mountain town of Santa Maria de Jesús.<sup>8</sup>

*For mental, physical, and spiritual renewal, how about a day trip to Santa Maria de Jesús? It's easily accessible, colorful, quiet and surrounded by cool, clean mountain air.*

I had previously visited the town but I decided to go again and accompany my housemate. After a leisurely stroll around Antigua's bustling Saturday market we squeezed onto a bus bound for Santa Maria.

*Pack yourself a picnic lunch or pick one up; you can buy smoked oysters and salt crackers, along with Tobler chocolate for dessert at La Llorona, or submarine sandwiches from Samba, or cold-cuts from Deliciosa and La Manzana Grande. Bring along a couple of jugs of drinking water, and if you're so inclined, a bottle of wine. Grab yourself a sweater, an umbrella, and you are all set for a day in the country.*

As we bounced along we talked about our families back home and our attitudes towards religion. We were jostled past the historic convent of San Juan el Obispo and about 20 minutes later we found ourselves higher up the mountain and in front of the church in Santa Maria.

*Buses for Santa Maria de Jesús depart from Terminal de Buses, located west of the mercado in Antigua, leaving more or less every hour - choose a seat, and settle in for a fairly short (about 30 minutes) and pleasant, if bumpy, ride up the flanks of the Volcano Agua. You'll pass through coffee fincas, vegetable and corn fields and towering cedars. The air gradually cools and freshens and if you choose a good window seat you can enjoy the view of all three volcanoes and the valley.*

With only one other gringo in sight we wandered the main street where the very small market hushed along compared to the push and shove of Antigua. Flies swarmed over

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<sup>7</sup>The text in italics is from a 'Travel and Lodging' feature article by Michael A. Graham that appeared in *The Revue* August 1995, Volume 4, no. 9 (pp.14-15, 29-30).

<sup>8</sup> This text in regular font is my field note account of the events of June 24, 1995.



half empty baskets of over ripe fruit and no one even bothered to try and sell us anything. We might as well have been invisible.

*The colonial temple is right on the village square and it's a nice first stop. Inside is an altar painted in a splendid baby blue, trimmed with gold - and there are also about a dozen statues and portraits. You can also sit here for a while, savor your thoughts, enjoy your solitude and maybe even gain some spiritual restoration ... at least until a couple of protesting toddlers are brought into the church by their penitent Mom. Enjoy quiet anywhere you can, while you can, then just sit back and watch people living their lives here in this village that feels so far away.*

Neil immediately commented on how different Santa Maria was from Antigua. The people were very poor here and the wealth of Antigua was worlds away. Although the women's weavings for sale in the market were beautiful, neither of us was interested in buying anything.

*Fine huipiles are made in Santa Maria and you can purchase them directly from the weavers. These huipiles are recognized for their distinctive diamond patterns of bright pinks, purples, and greens that are typical to this village. It does seem fashionable here to wear 'non-native' huipiles as much as the home-town variety, and all this color can brighten anyone's day!*

The cane fences and crumbling adobe walls steered us down the dusty street and we started walking towards the hillside cemetery. The large number of soldiers in full camouflage at the cemetery's entrance as well as the group doing push-ups among the tombs put us off. The army made us both tense. If they were around it was best if we weren't. We turned around and headed back to the centre of town.

*Walking around the town is another rewarding diversion. Delightful treasures are to be found in the form of architectural curiosities, folk art signs, and in the people themselves. A hike up a road leads you to the local cemetery, always an interesting and insightful segment of any community. This one is a mix of several concrete tombs and rows upon rows of rustic crosses. Check out the indigenous names and note the cultural burial practices. There is an intriguing blend here of burial ground, soccer field and machine gun nests, all sharing the same space.*

We decided to head back to Antigua. We planned to walk down the winding mountain road. It was a sunny day and we wanted the exercise. I had spoken to a few expatriates who said they frequently jogged on this road and found it to be a comfortable distance. In any event, we could always get on a passing bus or truck if we decided we didn't want to walk any farther. We asked a group of people we met on the road if we were headed in the right direction to go back to Antigua and they assured us we were. With their confused laughter behind us we started off.

The walk was relaxing and the views of the valley before us and the volcano beside us were breathtaking. It felt good to be outside and away from the loud and sometimes dusty city. Neil asked me probing questions about my research. He was trying to convince me to take tourists more seriously when a white BMW came up behind us and offered us a ride. We declined the generous offer. Who would want to be in a car on a day like this?

A few minutes later another vehicle approached us from behind and we could hear its engine slow as it came closer. We prepared our grammatically correct polite refusal of another ride. But before we could turn around the truck skidded to an abrupt halt and nearly pushed us both in the ditch. We turned around with surprise and anger at the reckless driver. As we did so a squat Ladino man jumped out of the passenger seat wearing a dirty T-shirt that stretched across his paunch. He waved a revolver in our faces as he yelled for our money.

*Don't forget that picnic lunch.*

My eyes were glued to the 35-mm pistol glinting silver in the afternoon sun.

*You might decide to dine at the plaza, if you can find a place to sit, or in the cemetery, if it doesn't seem too eerie for you.*

I handed over my bag.

*Believe it or not, another excellent spot for a picnic is along the roadside, back to that grove of tall cedars you passed on the way into the village.*

The fat Ladino pressed the gun into the side of my head. I took off my watch and undid the shirt and raincoat I had tied around my waist. He passed the loot to a second man standing in the bed of the truck. The driver, also male, stayed at the steering wheel. The Ladino with the gun pointed at my waist and with the gun still at my head he undid my belt and began to unzip my pants. I shuddered and closed my eyes - fearing the worst.

*Spread your feast under the sprawling branches,*

He was looking for my money belt. When he saw that I didn't have one he became quite agitated and angry and waved the gun yelling even louder. Neil threw the money from his pockets onto the ground and the gun-wielding thief went over to him and demanded more. He snatched Neil's knapsack from his shoulder, Neil slid off his watch and handed it over. He held the gun against Neil's head and screamed at me to turn around and go back up the hill towards Santa Maria.

*pop the cork,*

I stood. Frozen. He yelled again, this time pointing the gun at me and repeated his order. I slowly turned and began to walk up the road squinting my eyes waiting to hear a gunshot headed for my back or Neil's skull. The dust and the heat were all of a sudden unbearable. I could hear the dirt crunching under my shoes.

*lean back, and enjoy the crisp air,*

At a distance, I heard a loud rumbling engine coming from up the hill and I hoped the approaching bus would soon save us - if only it would arrive sooner.

*the tranquil surroundings and the beautiful valley vistas.*

The banditos took this as their cue to leave and as they did they ripped Neil's glasses off his face and jumped in their brown pick up truck still yelling at us to keep running. And, as quickly as they had appeared, they were gone.

*And when you feel refreshed and thoroughly satisfied, simply catch one of the buses headed back for Antigua.*

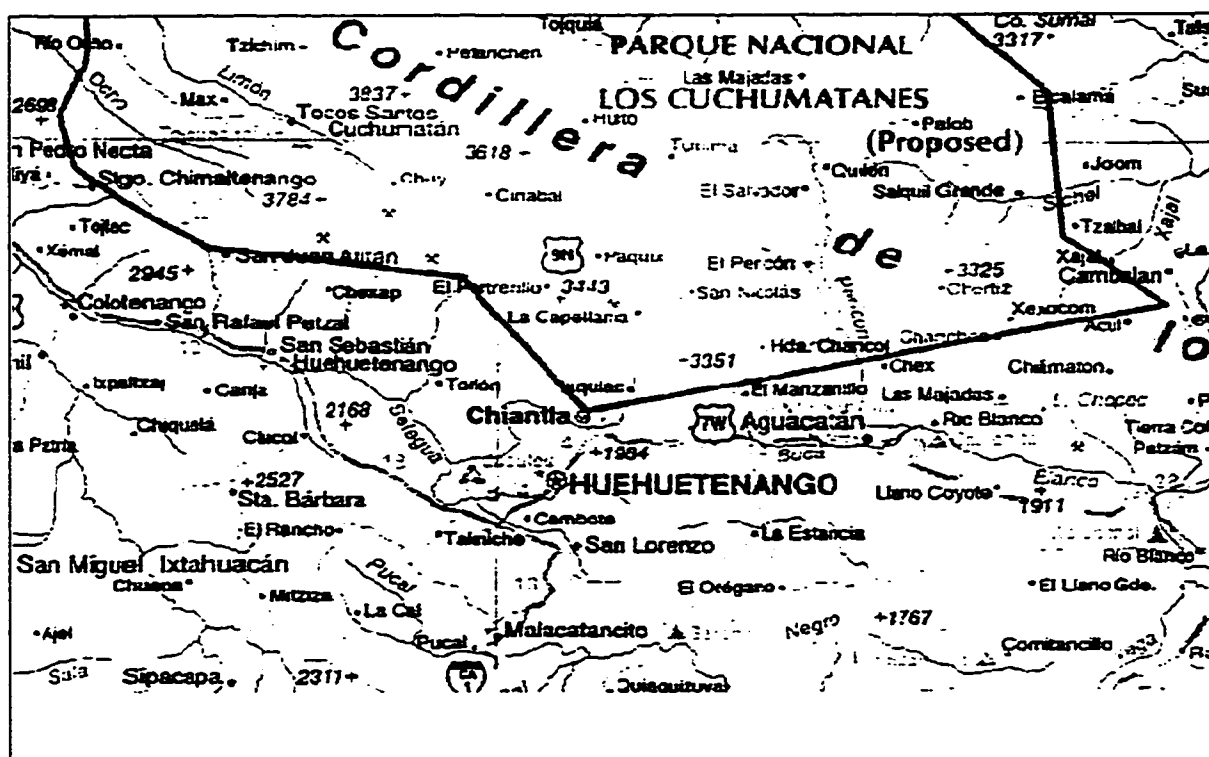
Visibly shaking, we continued walking up the hill towards the oncoming bus. My T-shirt was drenched with sweat. I could not stop my hands from trembling. Neil was hyperventilating. The bus stopped and the driver let us on without even asking us for money. He knew what had happened. Our faces told the story. Two women quickly moved aside and let us sit in the front seat where we sat silently until we arrived at Antigua's bus station.

Neil had lost about \$200 cash, his Giorgio Armani glasses, credit card, camera, watch, and knapsack full of books. I lost some clothes and my Visa card, ordinary things I could easily replace. When I handed over my bag I did lose the only irreplaceable things I had with me - my field notes and my journal. As I fell asleep that night I imagined them being tossed from the truck and landing in a ditch their pages flapping in the wind. Useless to everyone except me.

**CHAPTER THREE****TODOS SANTOS CUCHUMATAN**

Portrait of Todos Santero schoolteacher Benito Ramirez Mendoza at age 25.  
(Namuth 1989:93)

FIGURE 2



### TODOS SANTOS CUCHUMATAN AND SURROUNDING AREA

Excerpt from Traveller's Reference Map of Guatemala and El Salvador, 1991

## TRAVEL LOG

*"Shadows of dark clouds. Distant sun. The mountains an olive green. The sky, the air, everything the color of prickly pear."*<sup>9</sup>

*Todos Santos Cuchumatán*

***Population 1199 (township 10,613; 92% indigenous); Altitude 2450 meters; Languages: Mam and Spanish; Fiesta: November 1; Market Day: Saturday; Cuchumatán, "place of the parrot hunters," or possibly 'joined together by force'.***

***In its own enchanted valley high in the Cuchumatanes mountains, Todos Santos appears as if in a Shangri-La world. The trip to Todos Santos takes the visitor up from Huehuetenango on a twisting dirt road on the face of a mountain ridge, over the summit to a bare, frosty plain, and along a branch road down a valley where sheep graze among twisted stunted oak trees growing out of the rocky earth. Gradually, houses appear more frequently, but many of them have roofs of spruce shingles, instead of the red tiles more common in western Guatemala. Stands of the tall pines, spruce and cypress trees appear, and finally patches of corn, as the road winds down the widening valley into the town of Todos Santos.***<sup>10</sup>

Judy and I awake from the knock at the door at 3:30 a.m. What are we doing? The power in the hotel is still out so we quickly dress in the dark and pack up our things by the light of a candle. No need to break out of the hotel this morning. The hotelier is awake and waiting to let us out of the hotel's locked courtyard. We easily walk out and quickly walk towards the honking bus announcing its departure. The old man who sells coffee greets us again as he did yesterday. He is even there at this god-awful hour. Again, we are the only crazy gringas in sight and everyone must be wondering what we are doing. I am.<sup>11</sup>

**Mary and I started off the next morning at five on our way to Todos Santos, riding through the dark, empty streets of Huehuetenango in an ancient taxi and carrying with us a thermos of tea, bottles of water, and food. The sky was clear and the stars seemed to say "no rain today". After we passed through the small village of Chiantla, about three miles from Huehuetenango, we started to climb into the black mountains that hung over us. When dawn came we could see way beyond the darkened valley three volcanoes which stood out against the clouds and the sky: the**

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<sup>9</sup> *The text in regular italics is from Nobel Prize winning novel Men of Maize by Guatemalan writer Miguel Angel Asturias (1949:8)*

<sup>10</sup> *Text in boldface italics is from Guatemala Guide (Glassman 1977: 197)*

<sup>11</sup> *The text in regular font is from my journal entry from February 24, 1990.*

**sharp peak of Santa Maria near Quetzaltenango, and the double peak of Tajumulco near the Mexican border.** <sup>12</sup>

We leave on the bus at precisely 4:07 a.m. with sugary coffee and sweet bread in our tummies. I am wearing wool socks, pants, T-shirt, long sleeve shirt, fleece jacket, wind breaker and have the purple shawl wrapped around my head. I wish I had kept my long johns on and I am debating getting my sleeping bag out. We're off!

Its pitch black out and very foggy but we bounce our way back up to the altiplano from Soloma and, after getting stuck behind a stalled bus, we make it to the crucero by 6:35 a.m. As we reach the crucero, the skies begin to clear and Judy and I remember why we wanted to do such a crazy thing. We hop off the bus with a man who looks as if he is from Todos Santos and start walking together towards All Saints. We have just missed the bus headed in that direction but, with it being market day, we are assured of a ride in a passing truck. And, as luck would have it, we find ourselves in the back of one not five minutes later.

**The old Ford panted and wheezed as it wound back and forth up the steep, narrow road and became so hot we stopped to cool the motor and admire the view. The sun came up and we saw the beauty of the valley as it cast off its cloak of darkness and came into being. At nearly four thousand feet we turned off onto a plateau, crossed a treeless plain toward a few huts which seemed to cling to the edge of the grass. This was Paquix, the village where we would change from taxi to horses.**

**Mary tried to impress on the taxi driver the importance of his being back at Paquix at four o'clock that afternoon to fetch us. But he was doubtful of the possibility of our getting back from Todos Santos by that hour as we were of the chances of the Ford making the climb a second time that day. We waited in the car, sheltering ourselves from the cold wind, until the horses arrived, and when they did our worst fears were realized. The animals looked half dead already.**

The sun shone in our faces as we went up and up - higher than the already towering altiplano. As we headed towards the *cumbre* - the summit of the pass - there were 12 of us and close to 500 pounds of goods crammed in the back of this not even half ton pick up truck. Seven men - six of them wearing their brilliant red striped pants, red woven floppy collars, black breeches and over coats and straw hats. Three children, two of who ended up in the front of the cab because of their motion sickness. And last but not least, the two white gringas in brightly coloured windbreakers done up tight with their eyes wide open in awe and astonishment. We had entered Todos Santos territory. Every man we passed was in full regalia.

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<sup>12</sup> The text in bold face is from "Beyond the Windy Place" by anthropologist Maude Oakes (1951:4-5)

**Just the same we mounted them and rode off into a Daliesque landscape of stunted pines, twisted cripples of the tree world, and strangely shaped grey-black rocks. Mary and I were both thankful when we left this land of foreboding and entered slowly rising terrain covered with scrub pines, cedars, and a variety of flowers. As this was August, the rainy season, now and then we found ourselves riding through meadows rich with green grass.**

*Vegetation creeping like smoke along the rocky soil. Squirrels with the leap of chocolate froth in their tails. Moles moving like lava trying to perforate the earth before it grows cold, and lolling this way and that. Gigantic parasites with flowers of porcelain and candy floss. Pine cones like the bodies of tiny motionless birds, sacrificed birds petrified with terror on the ever convulsing branches. And the unceasing lament of the dry leaves dragged along by the wind. Sadness of the cold burnished moon. The maize-blighting moon.*<sup>13</sup>

**Near the top of the pass the cold wind became so violent we were forced to dismount. We wrapped scarves around our necks and heads, and walked to stimulate circulation, although breathing was made difficult by the high altitude and the freezing blasts. I thought to myself: "No wonder this pass is called 'The Windy Place'". But then as we descended on the way to Todos Santos the wind lessened. The trail wound through very tall, straight pines, firs, and hemlocks. Mountain walls rose on either side and we could see glimpses of the distant valley below. Streams flowed on all sides and flowers grew everywhere.**

*The trail became lost in the cages of trunks carpeted by dry pine needles, to reappear further along, now in the grip of the hollows riddled with ground squirrel holes in a trembling of lights cut to shreds by the branches of the low trees that fell over the riders with the sound of water stirred by continual slaps. Downhill, after the pine carpeted flat lands, the vegetation turned heavy, continuous, close-knit, forming long tunnels through which the barely visible road looked like the skin of a snake.*

**On the slopes we could see Indians working their potato patches. The view of the fertile valley slowly opened up while mountains on each side rose higher and higher. It was as if there were two valleys: the earth valley opening out beneath and the sky valley closing in above.**

**We reach the cumbre. I gasp out loud at the valley laid out in front of us. I assume Todos Santos is at the bottom but it is hidden underneath a blanket of white clouds that start at least 2000 feet below us. We bump our way down and down and down some more. Leaving the clear high world of the altiplano and descending into the mist covered town of Todos Santos Cuchumatán.**

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<sup>13</sup> *The text in italics is from Men of Maize (Angel Asturias 1949: 81 -82)*



## **THE TOWN OF TODOS SANTOS CUCHUMATAN**

I would see tourists get off the bus and they were immediately impressed with Todos Santos. They would immediately see it as a Shangri - La. They are usually very idealistic about it. This is very disenchanting however because they don't see the reality of what is here. (Jason, past school coordinator)

The western highland region of Guatemala is a rugged area. Although Todos Santos is only 45 kilometres from Huehuetenango, it can sometimes take three to four hours to climb the steep mountain pass and descend into the valley where Todos Santos is located.

During the height of the civil war in the early 1980's the highlands were the site of the worst political and cultural repression. Hundreds of villages were burned by both the army and guerrilla and many families were displaced or fled to the Ixcan region along the Mexican- Guatemalan border.

Very few areas within the region have been developed for tourism like in Antigua or Lake Atitlan and much of the highlands are considered off 'the gringo trail'. Travel advisories often discourage travel in this part of the country. The resulting tourist development in the area has attracted tourists who want to consider themselves as separate from the 'gringo trail'. Many of these tourists, although not all, are aware of the political and cultural history of the region. While the town is remote and is harder to reach than other tourist destinations in the country, Todos Santos is the most visited town in this less frequented region.

Geographically, Todos Santos is located in a stunning valley and one must travel through the breathtaking altiplano before arriving in All Saints (see Figure 2). The journey to Todos Santos is seen as a rite of passage for travellers. As you sit on the crowded bus you are transported both figuratively and literally to a very different place. The intensity experienced during the voyage to Todos Santos does not subside once you arrive.

The town of Todos Santos has a population of approximately 5,000 people but the surrounding *aldeas* and *cantons* bring the total population of the valley to approximately 22,000 people. 90% of the people in the valley and in the town of Todos Santos speak Mam. Language and dress are important identity and ethnicity markers and Mam speakers refer to themselves as ‘Mam’.

The town is known throughout the country because of the striking *traje* that the majority of Todos Santos wear. The men’s bright red and white striped pants and floppy collared shirts make Todos Santos highly visible especially since few Maya men in the country still wear *traje*. The Mam in this valley also wear distinctive hats, lending the Mam a slightly Andean appearance, which further distinguishes them from other Maya groups.

Some Mam continue to live in thatched roof houses but these are giving way to houses with ceramic tiles or aluminum sheeting. Most Mam also have a small structure located outside their houses called a *chuj*. The *chuj* resembles a very small stone sauna with a tiny doorway. The *chuj* has religious and ritual significance but it is also used to heat up water for bathing by lighting a fire inside to heat up buckets of water and stones.

The smouldering fire is removed once the *chuj* reaches the desired heat and then individuals enter it.

The physical isolation and beauty of the town coupled with the traditional language, dress, and housing of the community makes Todos Santos a desirable location for 'cultural tourists' to visit since it aligns itself with many aspects of what these tourists consider the 'real ' Guatemala. For the tourists who are aware of, and interested in, the civil war, Todos Santos becomes an even more desirable place to visit because it is located in the region of the country that was most severely persecuted during the height of the war in the early eighties.

Buses arrive and depart three times a day in Todos Santos and while I was there the first Mam owned bus began taking passengers. There is only one telephone in Todos Santos, and only for national calls, it became operational while I was there. There is no bank, no daily newspaper service, and an unreliable post office. The closest hospital is in Huehuetenango and a small auxiliary medical clinic serves the entire valley with a Ladino doctor visiting once or twice a week. There is a Catholic church located off the central square and two evangelical churches within a block of it on either side. Doctors Without Borders runs a small veterinary program in the valley and a small development organization from Canmore, Alberta called CAUSE Canada has various small projects operating throughout the valley.

#### **CASA FAMILIAR**

Besides the language school, the single most important feature for tourists arriving in Todos Santos is the hotel Casa Familiar, the most popular of four hotels

located within a block of the central square and all providing the most basic of accommodation. Owned by Santiago Mendoza Pablo, Casa Familiar had 7 rooms and could sleep approximately 25 people at one time in rooms furnished with up to four beds. Tourists paid 10 Quetzales per person per night. Casa Familiar was the only place in town that had a hot water shower, available for 5 Quetzales, for both guests and non-guests of the hotel. The hotel also boasted two flush toilets with toilet paper. There was also a *chuj* that tourists could pay to use. The hotel also had a *tipica* store that declared itself a 'cooperative' selling handwoven crafts made by Santiago's family.

The most important feature of Casa Familiar is its terrace which overlooks the valley and town. The terrace is the only social meeting place for tourists, apart from the language school, and it was easy to count how many tourists were in town since they would often accumulate on the terrace whether they were staying at Casa Familiar or not. The terrace also served as a restaurant and tourists could order food, such as banana milkshakes and granola, unavailable elsewhere in town. All the formal interviews I conducted with tourists in Todos Santos took place on this terrace.

Casa Familiar has a distinct advantage over the other hotels because of its food, hot water, and lounging area. I asked Santiago where she came up with the idea of running the hotel and she mentioned that when the anthropologist and filmmaker Olivia Carrescia had been in town making both of her documentaries<sup>14</sup>, they had discussed it and Olivia had given her ideas of how to make the hotel successful. Santiago also routinely

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<sup>14</sup> Olivia Carrescia's 2 documentaries; Todos Santos (1982) and Todos Santos: The Survivors (1989), are shown on Monday evenings at the school.

asked tourists for their suggestions to improve the hotel. She knew how to provide services and amenities important to tourists because she had an outside contact who provided her with this information. The other three hotels, one of which was owned by a language school collective member, were not nearly as busy and were largely frequented by Guatemalans during and before market days.



### LANGUAGE SCHOOLS IN THE HIGHLANDS

To better locate the language school in Todos Santos it is important to first situate it within the larger context of language schools in the Guatemalan highlands. Apart from Antigua, the other growing hub for language students is the town of Quetzaltenango, also known by the Maya name of Xela. Quetzaltenango is located approximately 166 kilometres west of Antigua, or 4 to 5 hours by bus, and approximately 125 kilometres from Todos Santos, or 7 to 10 hours by bus. It is the second largest town in Guatemala with a population of 125,000 and is regarded as the commercial and cultural centre of the western highland region.

Quetzaltenango is not a Tourist Mecca. With relatively few tourists the city has avoided the label '*Gringotenango*' like other Spanish study centers. You can often sit in Xela's *parque central* and be the only foreigner. (From the Hermandad Educativa's information brochure received in 1995)

Since I have only visited the schools in Quetzaltenango, I cannot claim to know the character of its schools as intimately as those in Antigua. There are approximately 10 to 15 schools based in Quetzaltenango and all appeal to tourists who are interested in 'socially responsible' travel.

Quetzaltenango's language schools are not-for-profit and are associated with community development projects such as supplying outlying villages with school books and libraries and providing materials and labour to build proper cooking stoves with chimneys in outlying areas. In conjunction with the community development aspect of the schools there is a distinct political and historical side to the language instruction. The school in Todos Santos has been modelled after these schools and is most closely affiliated with a sisterhood of three schools known collectively as *The Hermandad Educativa* based in Quetzaltenango.

ABOUT THE SCHOOLS		
<p><b>El Proyecto Lingüístico Quezalteco de Español</b></p> <p>This school is the mother project of the <i>Hermandad Educativa</i> and the first collective, nonprofit school in Quetzaltenango. Established in 1988, the Proyecto provides economic assistance to groups and individuals working in the field of human rights.</p> <p>Mailing address: Apdo. 114            Street address: 5a Calle 2-40, Zona 1            Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, CA            Fax/Tel from US: 011-502-963-1061            Fax/Tel in Guatemala: 063-1061            Fax/Tel in Quetzaltenango: 63-1061</p>	<p><b>El Proyecto Lingüístico "Education para Todos"</b></p> <p>This project was founded in response to the urgent need for educational scholarships in Guatemala's rural areas. While students receive Spanish classes, they provide funding to educate Guatemalan students.</p>  <p>Mailing address: Apdo 379            Street address: 6a Calle 7-42, Zona 1            Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, CA            Fax/Tel from US: 011-502- 963-0717            Fax/Tel in Guatemala: 063-0717            Fax/Tel in Quetzaltenango: 63-0717</p>	 <p><b>El Proyecto Lingüístico de Español/Mam Todos Santos</b></p> <p>In the Proyecto "Todos Santos" students have the rare opportunity to live in an indigenous community while learning Spanish and the Mayan language Mam. This school supports various local reforestation and educational projects. We recommend that students study at least one week in this sister school.</p> <p>Todos Santos Cuchumatán            Huehuetenango            Guatemala, Central America            Fax/Tel: to the Proyecto Lingüístico Quezalteco de Español</p>

The *Hermandad Educativa* is a sisterhood of three not-for-profit educational collectives in Quetzaltenango and Todos Santos, Guatemala. Established in 1988, the schools of *The Hermandad* have three main goals. First to teach students to speak, read, and write Spanish effectively while providing insight into the social, cultural, and historical reality of Guatemala and Central America. Second, to create jobs for teachers and

host families at decent wages. And third, through grants and scholarships, to support individuals and groups who are working in projects that improve the dire conditions under which many Guatemalans live. (From The Hermandad Educativa information brochure received in 1995)

The founding school of the sisterhood was Proyecto Linguistico Quetzalteco (PLQ) which was founded by an American named Austin in 1988. I had accidentally come upon this school during my visit to Guatemala in 1990 and attended a lecture given at the school by a student activist who had been blinded by tear gas sprayed at him by the army during a student protest. I remember being simultaneously intrigued and intimidated by the seriousness of the school. The school, at that time, was in an unmarked building and did not appear to do much local advertising. There seemed to be a certain amount of secrecy surrounding the school as well. There were only 6 European students studying when we visited. We chose not to study there since we had already done our stint at a language school in Antigua and were eager to keep travelling. A decision that part of me regrets today.

### **THE LANGUAGE SCHOOL IN TODOS SANTOS**

The school in Todos Santos - El Proyecto Linguistico de Espanol/Mam Todos Santos - was started in July of 1991 and formed the second school in the sisterhood. The third school was started in November of 1991 in Quetzaltenango. The Hermandad's information brochure states that the Proyecto in Todos Santos was started with two goals in mind: 1) to give language students the opportunity to live in and experience an

indigenous community and 2) take the burden of the numbers of students that were trying to study at the Proyecto Quetzalteco (from school information received in 1995).

A separate collective runs each school. The collective in Todos Santos is made up of five Mam men who also teach at the local primary and secondary school. I asked three members of the collective, on separate occasions, about how the idea of a collectively run language school started and I received three slightly different answers.

A synthesis of the answers provides the following details. According to two members of the Todos Santos collective, Austin proposed the idea of opening a language school to Todos Santos as a way to bring tourists and money into the community. Austin's idea for the school was based on the premise that the school would be run by a collective made up of primary school teachers in the community. The money generated from the school was to be made available to community members for various community development projects.

At this time Antigua was really the only city in Guatemala that had language schools. In Antigua the owners of the schools were rich people who only became richer by owning the school. There were some tourists who were not happy with this situation because they felt that the school owners were not distributing the money fairly. (Jose Ramirez, teacher in Todos Santos and founding member of the collective).

While it is uncertain whether Austin gave the collective any money to start up the school, he promised that if the collective agreed to run the school after his PLQ model, Austin would include the school in the Hermandad and promote the Todos Santos school at his school in Xela. This arrangement has worked out quite well since every student I met in Todos Santos had come from a language school in Xela. The majority of the



Todos Santos students had studied at PLQ and come to Todos Santos because of PLQ's strong recommendation to spend at least one week of study time in Todos Santos.

The other story of how the language school was founded is that one of the members of the present collective came up with idea of starting a language school and proposed the partnership to Austin who accepted the proposal. Regardless of where the idea came from, Austin's role in the development of the school is significant since all three collective members I interviewed mentioned Austin's involvement. As with PLFM in Antigua, it is relevant that outsiders have played initiatory roles in the development of the language schools.

In 1995, the profits from the Todos Santos school had been, or were being, directed towards the following projects; a community reforestation project; the maintainance of the local primary school; helping to finance a local women's cooperative bakery; providing funds for two gas stoves for two outlying *aldeas*; bringing electricity to a very small community; paying two teachers in the remote *aldeas* of *Twichcuxlaj* and *Twixoch*; helping to support the 15 families that hosted students; helping to support the individuals who gave lectures at the school; and supplementing the incomes of the primary and secondary school teachers who received a meagre salary of 60 to 70 Quetzales a week.

The collective employs a gringo school coordinator to act as a liaison and translator for the students since none of the teachers speak English and some students arrive with rudimentary Spanish skills. When I arrived, the coordinator was an American named Adam who had only been working and living in Todos Santos for two weeks. He

was preceded by another American, Jason, who had lived in Todos Santos for a little over 4 months and had ended his 6 month contract early because he had been admitted to a Master's program at The New School of Social Research in New York. I had corresponded with Jason before my arrival concerning my research and I had the opportunity to interview him when he came to say his good byes to his friends in Todos Santos. I was fortunate to meet Jason during his visit since Adam could not provide much information regarding the school and the town since he had just arrived himself.

The coordinator position is a key role in the administration of the school and also in the management of the student experience.

I was the only person at the school that was bilingual and this was important to do public relations for the school. I translated between everyone: the teachers, the students, and the people who gave conferences to the students. (Jason)

The school charges 400 Quetzales (\$100 USD) a week for three hours of daily instruction, two hours of daily conferences, evening activities, and the family stay program. The money is distributed as follows; 140Q to the family; 100Q to each student's teacher; 10Q to each person who gives a *conferencia* for a total of 50Q; and 110Q towards community development projects. This breakdown is explained to all students shortly after their arrival during the student orientation.

There are 11 teachers who teach at the language school and the school has a fluctuating enrolment from week to week. During my second week of study in July there were 15 students registered and this was reported as a record high for the school. Of the

42 students enrolled over the course of my two visits, only 2 students stayed longer than one week. During my last visit at the end of September there were only four students registered in classes.

Students are asked to arrive in Todos Santos by Sunday afternoon and meet at the school at 4 p.m. for an orientation session. Compared to PLFM, the orientation is not organized and is very informal. Some of the teachers were not present to meet their students and it was decided on the spot which teacher would be paired with which student. During each orientation that I attended, Adam repeatedly emphasized the poverty of the families whom students would be living with and braced students for smoky houses with dirt floors and often only one room in which everyone would sleep. Teachers then whisked students off to their respective families and were told to meet back at the school on Monday at 2 p.m. to begin classes. There was not very much time given to meet other students and the orientation was, if anything, slightly disorienting.

### **The Family Stay Program**

The school employs 15 families in Todos Santos for their family stay program. They qualify to host students by being among the poorest families in town who are still able to provide adequate accommodation and food for a student. There are families in Todos Santos who are poorer than those that host students but these families live in such basic conditions that students would be unable to stay with them. The families receive students on a rotating basis so that no family receives more money than the others over

the year. There are some exceptions made however if the family has no other source of income.

Only one student lives with a family and if two students wish to live together there are only two families in town who are able to accommodate this request. The lodging is extremely basic with most families sharing a tap with surrounding households. There is no running hot water. Most houses have no indoor plumbing and all food is cooked over an open flame or on a wood stove. The language school was one of the few places in town that had a gas stove and flush toilet.

Some students sleep in the same room as the rest of the family. In the past, students even shared the same bed as the family since most families sleep at least four people to a bed. Most families have now invested in a separate bed for the student while the rest of the family often crowd themselves into one or two other beds. The family I lived with slept two adults and five children on two double beds in one room while I had my own room.

### **The Rivera Family**

I lived with the Rivera family. They were one of the few Ladino families living in Todos Santos. Since Todos Santos is reportedly 90% Mam speaking I was surprised that a school run by Mam speakers would employ Ladino families. My assumptions were influenced by the fact that, in most parts of the country, Ladinos have more money and more land than the Maya. This is not the case in Todos Santos. When the civil war reached its peak during the 1980's, Ladinos in Todos Santos became the targets of

guerrilla assassinations. Any Ladino who could afford to leave during this time did and only the most poor Ladinos were left behind. The Riveras did go to Huehuetenango for a short time during the peak of *'la violencia'* but they returned when things settled down since they had nowhere else to live. Emilio, the father, was a carpenter and also knew there would be work rebuilding homes that had been destroyed in the area by the army and the guerrillas.

My first reaction was to think that I should have been living with a Mam speaking family as this is the cultural experience that draws many students to Todos Santos in the first place. During my stay, some students specifically requested they be moved to a Mam family's house after they had been assigned to live with a Ladino family (there were three Ladino families that boarded students) stating they wanted the 'real' Todos Santos experience.

I made a decision to stay with the Rivera family for the entire time I was in Todos Santos. I knew this would reduce the representativeness of my family experience in Todos Santos but I felt that I would have compromised my relationship with the Riveras if I had requested to move since most students who did this were usually seen as being more interested in the Mam speakers than in Ladinos. I did not want to give this impression to the family or to the other teachers in the school. I was questioned about this decision by some members of the collective who felt I might be more comfortable in a different house since the last student to stay with the family had contracted scabies (a bacterial skin infection), but I refused the offer and stayed where I was. I decided that a

deeper relationship with one family would be more beneficial than two or three shorter relationships with different families.

Emilio, and his wife Filomena, had six children ranging in age from one to fourteen years old. Emilio had broken his arm while felling a tree a few years earlier and never had the bone properly set. His arm was withered and he could no longer work to full capacity. The family depended on the extra income that students provided. Filomena's brother, Juan, was one of the two Ladino teachers at the language school. The other Ladino teacher, Julio, paid to eat meals at our house since he only had a room in town where he slept and his family lived further down the valley.

There was a street off the main street in Todos Santos where many of the Ladinos lived. The street was extremely steep and many of the houses were built by digging into the side of the hill. It was said that this was the worst place to live in Todos Santos because of the hill and also because nobody on this street had any outdoor space for drying clothes, growing corn, or raising animals. My room was built into the side of the hill under the main part of the house.

There was a television in the family bedroom and on most nights this room would transform itself into an informal community television room. Many children, mostly teen aged Mam boys, would come by to watch the Simpsons or other children's shows and pay the family a small entrance fee. During the shows, Filomena made food available to the children, also for a fee, and the eldest daughter, Eva, served as a waitress of sorts running back and forth between the television room and the kitchen with orders for tortillas or coffee. Other households in the community showed other programs. One

house down the street was the 'soap opera' house and another house on the main street had a VCR and 'screened' Rambo and its sequels regularly. Filomena also sold *atol*; a hot drink made from corn similar to porridge, during the week and during the Saturday market. The household was a constant site of activity and business: restaurant, movie theatre and hotel.

There is very little integration between the Ladino and Mam communities in Todos Santos. One evening when independence day celebrations were taking place at the community hall/gymnasium, I asked my family if they were planning to attend. Filomena told me that this event "was not really for them" and they would all be staying home.

During the parade which had taken place that morning, the two oldest boys, Edwin and Domingo, had to borrow *traje* from other Mam speaking boys in town so they could take part in the parade - an unexpected switch from many Maya who either choose or are forced to abandon their *traje* in favour of western clothes. The boys were ecstatic about their 'new' clothes and asked me take pictures of them before and after the parade.

I felt useless most of the time when trying to help with household chores such as making tortillas or doing laundry and found the poverty much harder to deal with than I had expected. I experienced the most intense feelings of culture shock and psychological discomfort of my fieldwork experience while living at the Rivera's house. I was fearful of getting sick because of the seemingly unhygienic conditions and I had a severe case of bed bug bites when I returned to Antigua.

Many students report similar feelings of physical and mental discomfort while living with their families but students are reluctant to talk about this with each other and most comments I heard surfaced during interviews when I asked them about their family stay experience. Tourists display a stoic attitude towards enduring the living conditions and when one student, Margot, moved to a hotel she was chastized for doing so by other students since it was felt that she "... couldn't take it."(Colleen).

Students express wanting to give their families gifts and money before they left. I felt the same although I also observed that Filomena and Emilio would often become embarrassed when I brought home fruit for the family at lunch time or when I gave the children school books, crayons, and pens when I left.

### **The Teachers**

The teachers are kings around here. They make more money than anyone else in town. But more important than that is the fact that the school supports 15 or 16 families, 3 women do the cooking, 1 woman does the cleaning, there are teachers at the primary school that depend on the language school, 2 teachers in outlying *aldeas* depend on the school, the reforestation project needs the school, and they give the owner of the building a steady rent cheque as well. The school is a major, major economic stimulant for Todos Santos. (Jason)

My first teacher in Todos Santos was Jose Ramirez, one of the founding members of the collective that started the school. He also taught at the primary school. Jose immediately showed interest in my project and had many things to say about tourism in the Todos Santos. He was the brother of Benito (see photo on opening page of this chapter) and he stated that the family placed a high regard on education and on teaching.



My second teacher was Filomena's brother Juan. He was an excellent teacher and very motivated to teach tourists Spanish: teaching was his passion. He longed for more contact with books and information about the world outside of Todos Santos. I visited his primary school class of sixty second graders. He also taught at the secondary school and found these students more challenging since not many of the students were motivated to stay in school and do well. A strong emphasis on education ran in his family as well and his older brother also taught at the primary school. Unlike the Ladino teachers in Antigua, there was no discussion of male and female relations during class time with any of my teachers and there was no flirting like the sort that went on regularly between males and females in Antigua.

My third teacher was Benito Ramirez. Benito was the first indigenous teacher in the department of Huehuetenango. Benito is featured prominently in Víctor Perera's recent book *Unfinished Conquest* (1995). A portrait of him as a school teacher in 1978 also appears in photographer Hans Namuth's book "Los Todos Santeros" (1989).

Benito is regarded as a sort of celebrity in the town and amongst the tourists who recognize him from Olivia Carrescia's documentaries (see above). He has been to New York and travelled through-out the United States reportedly always wearing his *traje*. Benito does not offer this information to students and he was very surprised that I recognized and remembered reading about him before I came.

While I did not have him as a teacher, another influential man at the school was Jose Calmo. He was the head of the collective and a respected man in town. He owned one of the hotels and one of his 'wives' had a family that hosted students. The only

woman who taught at the school, Catarina, was Jose Calmo's half sister. Two of the other teachers were also direct relations of Jose Calmo.

The Ramirez family and the Calmo family were not only key players in the language school but in the town as a whole. They had influence over the language school curriculum and which community projects would receive money but they were also key administrators at the primary school. Education was seen as an important key to change and this was often expressed by all the teachers that I spoke with from both the language school and the primary school.

### **THE *CONFERENCIAS***

There is a very strong focus on teaching the students about Mam traditions and way of life along with the present political situation in addition to the language instruction. Every afternoon the school holds a seminar known as a *conferencia* on various topics. The *conferencias* are open to tourists who are not studying at the school and are advertised at the hotels for an admission fee of 10 Quetzales per person.

A *conferencia* that teaches some basic Mam phrases is held at the beginning of every week so students can learn Mam greetings they can use around town. The other *conferencias* feature individuals from the community who do not teach at the language school. There is a sense that the information given in the *conferencias* is viewed as controversial by the community and students are asked not to repeat the information they learn outside of the room. When the *conferencias* are held at the school they are always held in the basement of the school with the door closed and often locked. It is rare for

other language school teachers to attend the *conferencias* and the school coordinator often performs simultaneous translation from Spanish to English for those students who only have basic Spanish skills. I often served as translator since I was a faster translator than Adam. Other *conferencias* that I participated included the following.

A dynamic Ladino teacher from the primary school gives a rousing lecture on Guatemala's horrific and ineffective educational system. He links the educational system to the repressive government clearly demonstrating that one cannot exist without the other. The Todos Santos primary school has 800 students and 15 teachers. Some classes cram as many as 75 students into a small room. This is a contradiction to the one on one language instruction provided by the language school. Educated Guatemalans are forced to use their skills teaching foreigners instead of spending the energy teaching other Guatemalans.

A Mam woman who is an auxiliary nurse at the local clinic speaks emotionally about her life and what it is like to be a woman in Todos Santos. She tells her story of living with an abusive alcoholic husband and how she refused to follow the norms and stay with him and chose to move out and live on her own and become a nurse. Her discourse is framed in 'Western' feminist terms and appeals to the women tourists in the audience. Tourists applaud her triumphs over an abusive and repressive system of male/female relations.

A '*comadrona*' or midwife/healer discusses childbirth rituals and healing herbs while students sit on her porch surrounded by her chickens and pigs. She speaks only in

Mam and this *conferencia* is translated from Mam into Spanish and from Spanish into English.

Two *chimanes*, or shamans also give *conferencias* and students travel to their respective houses to hear about and take part in some of the divining rituals still practised in the area today. These *conferencias* are also translated from Mam.

Students visit the reforestation project funded by the school and learn about the positive changes this project has brought to the community. Santiago occasionally hosts *conferencias* on the Casa Familiar terrace to discuss '*la violencia*' and the changes that tourism has brought to Todos Santos.

Half the *conferencias* appeal to the sense of injustice done in the and the other *conferencias* appeal to the ideal of traditions being upheld in the community. The injustice/oppression and traditional values coincide together to maintain/create an anti-Western and anti-capitalist ideology among the students.

One thing I have been wondering is that I have yet to meet someone who doesn't share the same political line as I have. It really does seem to be an age twenty to thirty crowd relatively homogeneous for the most part. Likely similar economic backgrounds and similar politics. I don't know if there are any right wing 25 year olds wandering through Guatemala.  
(Robert)

Through the daily *conferencias* and the level of political conversation between students the school could be considered an 'activist' school. Many of the conversations revolve around ideas of changing the political situation for the Maya of Guatemala: a subject considered risky to speak about openly given the history of oppression and violence against people speaking and acting out against the government.

It was repeated by a number of locals that the continued presence of tourists insured a lower military presence in the area confirming Schwartz's observations of independent travellers in Tibet when he stated that "Independent travellers may have increasingly important roles to play in closed societies that limit access to information and deal with unrest by expelling professional information gatherers such as journalists." (Schwartz 1991:603).

After the *conferencias*, at approximately 6 or 6:30 p.m., students return home to their families for dinner and then return to the school at 8 p.m. to watch a film. The film showings are also open to non-students for a fee and the nightly showings are advertised at all the hotels in town.

On some nights there would be as many tourists as students attending the films since there is very little else to do in the evenings. The films document Guatemala's civil war and the human rights atrocities that occur in a climate of extreme discrimination against *indigenas* who live and work in feudal conditions. Some of the documentaries shown are the following; Todos Santos; Todos Santos: The Survivors; The Cost of Cotton; Devil's Dream; School of the Americas: School of Assassins. As previously mentioned, the two films about Todos Santos feature many prominent Todos Santos including Santiago from Casa Familiar and Benito Ramirez from the school. These individuals, after students see them in the films, obtain a sort of 'star' status. Occasionally, American feature films about Latin America during the 1980's are also shown such as; Salvador (1985), Missing (1982), or Romero.

There was never any formal discussion period after any of the films and on most nights students would quietly disperse and head for their homes negotiating the pitch black streets scattered with groups of men leaning up against store fronts drinking *aguardiente*, a highly distilled alcohol. Many students, including myself, found the transition from watching the films that document the horrors of the civil war to walking the streets where so many of the atrocities had occurred very jarring. Negotiating the lack of distance between information and reality was a formative experience for me.

### THE TOURISTS

As far as I see it there are three kinds of tourists who visit Guatemala. There are some people who only come to Guatemala to amuse themselves, there are people who only come here to take pictures and ask lots of questions, and there are people who try and create genuine friendships with people. These people want to learn but they also want to give help and solutions to the problems here. In my opinion the third group is the best one. They want to make sure that help goes to those people who most need it. (Jose Ramirez, founding member of the collective)

Demographically speaking, the tourists at the school in Todos Santos are not that different than the tourists encountered at PLFM (see Appendix A). The majority are from the United States although there were also Europeans, Australians, and some Israelis at the school. What divides Todos Santos students from those in Antigua is their ideology and general purpose of travel. Tourists who come to Todos Santos for longer than an afternoon come expecting to 'rough' it. They are full of empathy and curiosity about how the local people live. It is not uncommon to see tourists in Todos Santos wearing *traje*. Most have at least a general idea of the political situation in the country, indeed this is the main drawing card for many, but most leave knowing more from the

experiences they have with their teachers and families, the *conferencias*, discussions, and videos they are exposed to through the school. In a very short time, these students come to learn and experience a great deal.

There is an overload of 'hard' information here; adjusting to the living conditions and the culture shock, the poverty, and learning about the systematic oppression. These are all things that are difficult to deal with but these are the experiences that are sought after by the tourists who come to Todos Santos.

After a short but intense week in Todos Santos, the majority of the tourists leave with a very different perception of Guatemala than when they arrived supporting the idea that travel can be "unusually potent" in its powers of ideological transformation and confirmation (Adler 1989).

None of the students I met in Antigua knew of The Hermandad schools while all of the students in Todos Santos were aware of many of Antigua's schools, including PLFM. During my first week of studies in Todos Santos I was the only tourist out of 11 who had even been to Antigua. This was despite the fact that all the other students had been in the country for at least a month. This group purposely avoided Antigua and many only planned to stay for one night before they flew out of Guatemala City - if they went at all. Only two PLFM students I interviewed visited Todos Santos and they were also the most politically informed students I met at PLFM. They also spoke more Spanish than any other students in Antigua and planned on doing more travelling in Latin America.

The structure of the school and its main goals are products that have been introduced to the community by outsiders much like PLFM in Antigua, except that the Todos Santos collective has found way for more people in the community to benefit from the language students. The frame that is put on the student experience is that their presence is 'helping' the community. Living with the family is interpreted as 'helping' that family and studying at the school is interpreted by students as making a contribution to the community. Many students hope that the information they learn through both the 'political' *conferencias* and the 'traditional way of life' *conferencias* will allow them to continue 'helping' the community after they leave.

Most students stay for only a week in Todos Santos and it is one of many stops on everyone's itinerary. Whereas most PLFM students see Antigua and PLFM as their main destination and their travelling revolves around Antigua, students in Todos Santos have much more diverse and less planned itineraries. Learning Spanish is perceived as something to be integrated into the whole trip and is not the main purpose of their travels. Spanish is a tool to be used while in Guatemala and during their travels as opposed to PLFM students who often learn Spanish as a tool to be used in their roles at home.

There is also a different level of teaching provided at the school. My Spanish had progressed to the point where only Juan could teach me the advanced grammar I needed to learn. He was a Ladino teacher who spoke only Spanish. Not all of the other teachers were as capable of teaching advanced grammar since they spoke Spanish as a second language. Many students commented that the level and style of teaching was not as effective or as professional as the other schools they had been to.



It's a very interesting cultural experience here but I wouldn't come to learn Spanish. The indigenous teachers aren't that great. But its interesting to see what problems there are here. Their hearts are in the right place but the money and power issue always takes over. I'm glad that I came to see the school and the community and it is a very beautiful place. (Chris)

I felt like I had much more in common with these tourists than those in Antigua because I felt that they, like me, were actively seeking information even if the information was upsetting. Despite the fact that I only spent a week with each group of tourists in Todos Santos, the relationships were generally more intense than those formed in Antigua.

While I got along with the students I met in Antigua I felt like more of an outsider there than when I was in Todos Santos. Since many of the tourists in Antigua were not aware of the political situation or the history of the country, I sometimes felt as if I was in a different country than they were.

However, the exclusive attitude of the tourists in Todos Santos was also difficult to deal with. Tourists in Todos Santos are very discriminating towards other tourists and routinely engage in a process of distinguishing themselves from others, similar to how anthropologists distinguish themselves from tourists.

I try not to pre-judge according to people's travel experiences but I am an anti-package trip tourist. I also pre-judge people according to where I meet them. If you are among a few tourists in one place it usually means that the people you will meet will be more interesting. I must say that language students have an admirable head start over other tourists. (Chris)

The social networking among students in Todos Santos is also different than in Antigua. I noted that not all students were friendly or warm to one another while in

Todos Santos. This seems strange since the community of tourists is so much smaller than in other places. One would think that tourists would instantly bond. This is perhaps not the case because the majority of tourists who come fall into the category of tourists who travel independently and seek out places where there are few or no other tourists. They are in a mode where other tourists are often seen as the 'enemy' and many tourists do all they can to distinguish themselves as 'different' than the other tourists around them. This attitude is best exemplified in the following statement from an online Guatemalan discussion group.

Todos Santos is one of the most magical places I have ever visited. Unfortunately, because of an invasion by a language school which brings foreigners to that quiet, undiscovered town, it is at risk of losing traditions that it has held on to for so many centuries. With an increase of tourism comes an increase of prices for the locals and the adoption of 'gringo' culture. Up until this invasion by this language school, one could visit Todos Santos for a night or two without seeing more than one other tourist. Students who are staying for weeks at a time destroy this atmosphere forever and will take away from that magical experience of before. *Que Lastima* (How sad). Betsy May (Email from a Guatemala chat group on American Online, Subject: Study Spanish in Guatemala, Date: April 1, 1995, 22:45:05)

Tourists in Todos Santos are also slightly competitive with each other when telling stories. The tourist who has gone the farthest, sat on the longest bus, or endured the most discomfort 'wins'. The following is an excerpt from a lengthy story that Robert told me about his trip to Tikal and back. This portion of the story is recounting a ride he took on the top of a Coca-Cola truck full of empty bottles.

At some point I decide to sit on the spare tire to see if that is any more comfortable - but it is also sliding across the bottles so I am going from one wall to the next and everything is either a steady climb or a steady drop. It starts getting dark, it starts getting cold. Herman (the driver) is

now saying that it is three and half hours on the horrible road and then another hour and a half. So instead of being two hours it's going to be closer to five. At some point I just feel like I'm getting kidney punched by a really steady blow over and over again. My back and kidneys are slamming into things, my stomach and back have seized up. My arms are bleeding and there are scratches and scrapes and bruises forming everywhere - on my ribs, back, and wherever else ... a truly miserable experience. *In its own way I did love it.* (Robert, my emphasis).

Robert's discourse about the painful truck ride being the absolute best time of his life illustrates that rewarding and comfortable do not go together with these kinds of tourists. The actual visit of Tikal's ruins was secondary to Robert's 52-hour non-stop bus ride getting there and his 2 day odyssey getting back. The actual physical act of travelling itself is what rewards these travellers despite the discomforts endured. 'Getting there' can be more important than 'being there'. This contrasts with tourists in Antigua who don't move around the country very much and, when they do, it is usually in tourist transportation (mini vans) and not local transportation (buses). The tourist site is the focus for these tourists.

For Todos Santos tourists, the rejection of Western comforts goes hand in hand with the rejection of Western capitalism and materialism.

Being here has made me realize that as American tourists we are a bunch that are grossly obsessed with consuming and having things and possessions. And I have realized how little I need. How little I need to make me happy. (Colleen)

The fact that so many tourists are interested in consuming first hand information about the human rights abuses that happened in the area is ironic given the fact that I physically felt much safer in Todos Santos than in Antigua. I personally found it much easier to deal with the living conditions in Todos Santos than dealing with the fear of

being assaulted or robbed that I continually experienced in Antigua and other tourist spots.

The willingness to 'endure' life as the locals live it is seen as the ultimate way for tourists to show their solidarity for the local people and to empathize with them. Living with 'the people' is an experience to be consumed much like visiting Tikal is for other tourists.

I think tourism is equally as damaging as it is beneficial for this country. I think, um, you know how they say that when anthropologists observe a culture it affects the culture? Well, I think that tourism has grossly changed the cultures here but at the same time this country has allowed a lot to the tourist industry and it does bring money into this country. I am curious as to where that money goes... As far as the negative effects of tourism um, I feel like in some places that I have been tourists bring an ugly colour to the villages. We don't have the same living standards. You know we don't eat the same foods and we don't prepare our food the same way. We don't wear the same clothing. We don't think the same. I think in a lot of ways maybe we - how can I put this? I think tourists - and I'm certainly one of them, even though I hate to admit it (she laughs) are consumers. (Colleen).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RETURN

It is a strange thing to come home. While yet on the journey, you cannot at all realize how strange it will be.

- SELMA LAGERLÖF (1858 – 1940)  
*Swedish writer (Nobel winner)*

A traveler. I love his title. A traveler is to be revered as such. His profession is the best symbol of our life. Going from – toward; is the history of every one of us.

- HENRY DAVID THOREAU (1817 – 1862)  
*American essayist*

## LETTER

June 6, 1996

Eaglemont, Victoria  
Australia

Dear J'Val,

I'm really sorry - truly I am - but I'm going to write to you anyway. My tardiness is an example of what I have become in the five months since I returned home from my travels. All my hopes of becoming a well-rounded, well-balanced; driven - by - perspective individual vanished as I lapsed back into narrow-minded, focused, driven-by-perfectionism life of a final year medical student. It amazes me that an individual - in this case me - can see, do and experience so much over 12 months and then within the short space of four - five months feel almost as though he has never been away - such is the ease with which I have slotted back into the "old life".

I write this with some reservations because I know that my trip has changed me - perhaps the problem is that it hasn't changed my family or friends or the niche that they have in their world for me. I also had to return to my studies almost immediately upon my return at the end of *enero* (January) and unfortunately the nature of the beast (and it has been a beast) is somewhat all-consuming.

Well, where do I begin with "post-interview" travel stories? I went back to Xela and moved in to my Spanish teacher at PLQE's house. I thought we were good friends, she thought we were something more (A very unusual situation for me, I can assure you) and things became somewhat awkward and confused for a few days there - although my Spanish improved in leaps and bounds.

I then sort of wandered around Nicaragua for a few weeks before deciding that if I was to fly home from Buenos Aires at the end of the year, I really should get to South America, so I flew from Costa Rica to Ecuador. I planned to travel there for a couple of weeks but stayed for a couple of months - confirming in my own mind my idea that I like spending more time in one place - next time it will be one country for 12 months, not one huge continent.

I worked in a hospital in the jungle on the edge of the Amazon Basin in Ecuador for a month. As you can imagine this was the *fuelle* (source) of innumerable travel stories - perhaps the best of which occurred one evening when some idiot threw a tear gas bomb into the "towns" main square - of course our "Emergency Dept" was "inundated". I drew the only non tear gas patient, a woman in labour. So there I was having delivered a handful of babies in Australia under the utmost of supervision of course, with my 70 year old Italian nun assistant shoving a large pointed instrument at me and screaming "*Rompa las bolsas, rompa las bolsas!*" (Rupture the placenta, rupture the placenta!) -

well, needless to say my Australian training hadn't included much artificial rupturing of membranes but Sister 70 year old was quite adamant that it be done - unfortunately this particular lady had a prolapsed cervix which felt quite like *las bolsas* but reacted to being "*romped*" by bleeding quite profusely which was when my assistant started muttering Hail Marys - still the show had to go on - and as the baby's head emerged it became obvious that the umbilical cord was around the neck - no problem, I'd dealt with this before you just have to pull the cord over the head - unfortunately, they don't make them like they do here over in Ecuador and I ripped it in two - one end then began to spin around like a garden hose with no one holding it spraying blood over the nun's pristine white habit... anyway, to cut an already too long story short no one died... except me of embarrassment.

Suffice to say it was an interesting experience - not so much from a medical point of view as from a sociological point of view. The doctor -patient relationship in Ecuador today is as I imagined it was in Australia at the turn of the century - extremely patriarchal and condescending - this situation was exacerbated in the hospital where I was because the majority of the patients were indigenous people who according to the doctors "were too stupid to understand what was wrong with them or why they were in the hospital", even if they were told.

Anyway - I'm digressing and I'll never finish this letter if I continue at this rate. I spent the next two months travelling through Peru and Bolivia both of which were amazing countries - I fell in love with the mountains of the Andes. I spent Christmas and New Year in Buenos Aires with two Argentinean girls who I had met travelling in Guatemala in April and I fell in love with the Argentinean girls. Then I spent the next month hitchhiking in Patagonia before finally flying home.

I was interested to read the transcript of our conversation. My time in Guatemala was the most stimulating of my trip. In the three months that I spent there I really felt as though I was able to get a feel for the place and this was largely due to the time I spent in the language school and to the people whom I met. My immediate reaction to reading what we had spoken about was that I am a "hopeless gossip" and that our conversation reflected my tendency to shoot from the hip.... Well, maybe a lot, when I'm talking. I also felt quite defensive when I read that you felt I was "pushy" in my questioning of Santiago about the guerrillas.

It occurs to me now that during those few months that I spent in Guatemala I did quite actively seek information about the history and the politics and the injustices which occurred and were occurring. It was exciting - a bit of a voyage of discovery, but now - especially today when I sat down to write a letter to my friend, the Spanish teacher, I felt depressingly like a voyeur - she had taught me about the plight of women in Guatemala, about the corruption of the government and about the inadequacies of the health care system - but now all I could do was write a letter from the comforts of my Australian home. I wrote *Como estas?* (How are you?) And I meant has your life changed or do

you still live in a nightmare and I felt guilty that I had found my little three month voyage of discovery empowering.

But then again maybe being a tourist is a necessary step towards gaining awareness and I hope that one day I will have the initiative and motivation and determination to make a difference - not necessarily in Guatemala - but somewhere.

So, J'Val I'm sorry I got carried away and filled an entire page with another story (but I thought it was quite funny) and I'm even sorrier that I've taken so long to respond to your letter. I'd love to hear from you again and even to read a copy of your thesis - if the offer still stands. I hope that the writing went well and that you are well.

*Un abrazo grande,*

Chris



## CONVERGENCE

Tourists are essentially unilinear evolutionists who find the world filled with chiefs and witchdoctors, and their self-referential tales are based on - indeed require - partial, simplified and often completely erroneous information. However ultimately incomplete the understanding anthropologists have of the other, we are, to judge by our Papua New Guinea experience, incomparably better informed... We use our superior understanding (and we really must emphasize that no tourist seriously attempts to understand Papua New Guinean kinship, exchange or cosmological system) to convey what the world looks like to the natives and how our world affects theirs. (Errington and Gewertz 1989:46).

From the perspective of ethnography, tourism is an illegitimate child, a disgraceful simplification, and an impostor. (de Certeau 1984:143).

Tourist views run the range from naive to sophisticated, but despite the variation, the tourists are fascinated with cannibalism and with spirit beliefs, and they all engage in the same activities on the tour; mainly, they take pictures and bargain for souvenirs. (Bruner 1989:441)

The taste for studying tourists, like that for reflecting on anthropology's complicity with colonialism in the past, seems to afford anthropologists a chance for self-reflexivity at one remove. It may expose patterns in which we ourselves are caught but that would be hard to own directly. (Mascia-Lees and Sharpe 1994:653).

We strive to distinguish ethnography from tourism, for tourism is an assault on our authority and privileged positions as ethnographers. (Bruner 1989: 439)

The meanderings presented here have been structured in many ways as a response and reaction to the common anthropological attitude exemplified in the selection of quotes above. The thesis has examined the ways anthropologists have constructed tourists to create an inadmissible tension between tourist and ethnographer. The tension propels the research forward to the realization that anthropologists have stereotyped

tourists and failed to recognize that anthropologists are a type of tourist. This failure has affected the conclusions made regarding tourist behaviour.

Our understandings of the tourist experience have been greatly affected by the lack of seriousness accredited tourists by anthropologists. Because anthropologists have been overly preoccupied with differentiating themselves from tourists and from qualifying tourist behaviour as it compares to anthropological behaviour – much depth concerning the tourist experience has been lost.

I have charted a newer course by choosing to conduct my research from ...

... the premise that what the vacationer experiences is real, valid and fulfilling, no matter how 'superficial' it may seem to the social scientist ... It assumes that the vacationer's own feelings and views about vacations are 'authentic', whether or not the observer judges them to match the host culture. (Gottlieb 1982: 167)

Through my representations of tourists and the varied experiences they have had of Guatemala it becomes clear that our understandings of tourists would be more fruitful if we focused not on *what* tourists know, but *how* they come to know what they do. I have portrayed the tourists I met and the experience of attending each of the language schools in a way that has made an effort to not ironicize the tourists and, through these representations and observations, simultaneously subverted and commented upon the ways that researchers have traditionally represented tourists.

When anthropologists are as respectful of tourists as they are of the 'natives' they customarily study, tourists give anthropologists insights into the epistemology of cross-

cultural knowledge. The “Ways of Knowing” (Goulet 1995) of both anthropologists and tourists are simultaneously revealed. Recognizing that anthropologists are tourists is not meant to diminish their work but to re-contextualize them among travellers instead of against them.

This thesis has also responded to the generalizations in the literature about the tourist and the tourist experience that has included little observation of the tourists’ own reactions and interpretations (Bruner 1995:225). Perhaps part of the reason for this lack of observations stems from the attitude that prevents ethnographers from letting tourists speak for themselves.

I tried to get at the heart of how the tourists I met came to know what they did through their experiences at the language school and the time they spent in the country. I tried wherever possible to include their words and observations. I admit that it wasn’t always easy not to be judgmental and to accord my own understandings as ‘superior’ to the tourists around me. The anthropological style of travel tends to support that anthropologists have a better corner on the local reality.

### **SEARCHING HIGH AND LOW**

“Perhaps anthropologists defining themselves as ‘sophisticated’ compared with other travellers is merely one more example of how different types of tourists distance themselves from each other.” (Crick 1995:209). The uneasy relationship between anthropologists and tourists is another version of the dialectical relationship between high culture and folk culture. This distancing is clearly stated by David in the excerpt below.

There are two different types of tourists here but both are here for virtually the same reason. The first group because of their short ephemeral time here are more explicit tourists in their buying power and their impact on the community. They are more obvious because of their itinerary. They are here for a short duration, they have concentrated buying power and are therefore more intense. They visit more in less time. The second group has basically the same objectives - to visit, to buy, to see the country, the buildings, the artifacts, etc. and to be part of a different culture than their own. However this group exploits even more the cheap price of commodities. However the overriding impression one gets from these tourists - shall I say 'travellers' - backpackers, scumbags, lazy bastards - that was a joke those last ones were a joke - don't write that its off the record<sup>15</sup> - is that they believe they are more adventurous than tourists. I notice a very big divide and dislike between backpackers and the first set which I find rather puzzling at times as I believe the impact of both groups of tourists are equally, at the same time, beneficial to the society and damaging. (David)

My goal has been to gently admonish anthropologists for being stand offish and defensive about being classified as a type of tourist by illuminating the intelligence of tourists, the intensity with which they travel, and the importance they place on their experiences. Just as there is no common experience of Guatemala: there is not one type of Guatemalan tourist.

#### TOURISTS ON THE MOVE

The borders we have drawn around tourists do not properly contain them. The usefulness of the categorizations comes into question because of the fluid nature of tourist behaviour. Despite the implicit or explicit value judgements placed on each type we must understand and acknowledge that these individuals are having genuine experiences. We all have different ways of seeking experience and bringing them home.

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<sup>15</sup> I later asked David if I could include this quote verbatim and he agreed.

While it is noted that not all tourists may choose to cross behaviour boundaries most regularly do. Even though all those interviewed shared in the experience of attending Spanish schools their experience of those schools varied tremendously.

Although notoriously cultivated as a form of 'cultural capital' and a strategy for lending social authority to one's own opinion, travel has equally served to buttress the inner conviction of truths that otherwise had to be accepted on faith. (Adler 1989:1383).

While broad categorizations may serve to describe how people travel it does not answer the question of why they travel. For example, Neil would shift 'categories' based on his motivations at the time he was making decisions stating "I'd rather go home early than be miserable." (Neil). Neil's style of travel was motivated by wanting to experience a place and this would dictate how he would travel. When he went to Todos Santos he easily and willingly endured the basic accommodation with no complaints but when we were at Lake Panajachel he opted to stay at an expensive hotel on the lake. The material trappings of how Neil travelled did not define what kind of tourist he was.

The dichotomy between tourist and traveller experiences does not create a dichotomy of differences in how these experiences are constructed as meaningful to each individual involved. The emphasis on tourists searching for the 'authentic' has been misplaced. The more appropriate question should be - how do tourists make their experiences 'authentic' to them? In this instance I think that the word genuine or meaningful has better resonance.

Many tourists were aware that they were seeing a tourist version of Guatemala and weren't seeing what they often referred to as the 'real' Guatemala but they did not

indicate that they were in any way disappointed by this fact. It was largely accepted that they were not going to be privy to the 'real' thing. In fact many tourists were satisfied with the Guatemala they did see and experience.

## TRANSFORMATIONS

The trick will be to retain the open eyes and open mind at home that I have acquired while travelling. The content feeling, the wealthy feeling of having everything you need. Really believing that you can get by with less not more. Getting the most from simple pleasures. (Personal journal entry from January 12, 1990).

I would like to come back at some point in time with a better background. But I think I would like to come back *doing* something rather than just on the tourist end. Um, I don't know what that would be whether that's work or volunteer work but I think I'd like to do something which I know has a positive impact and I know that I can make a difference some place. (Julie)

Granted, I have been generous in acknowledging that the differences between tourists and ethnographers are quantitative and not necessarily qualitative. And none of the tourists I met were required to write a thesis about their experiences. But many were affected by their travels after they returned home as stated in their letters. The tourist experience informs the tourist's 'after-life' and those with whom they come into contact with in ways that cannot be measured as demonstrated by Chris' letter.

If tourists are not solely in search of authentic experiences - then what sorts of experiences are they in search of? Some tourists stated that an unforeseen result of their travels was either the positive or negative reinforcement of their own cultural customs and values. This can be supported by the realizations about 'home' that many tourists

have upon returning. How many appreciate their countries more after being exposed to another one. And conversely, how many tourists appreciate aspects of other cultures more than their own.

Meeting people who have seemingly very little and very much in antithesis to people at home who appear to have very much and have very little. (David)

The experience of travelling and going to Guatemala and seeing something that isn't home gives a new perspective on what my life and what my home is like. I think that is the biggest change here is that I developed to some extent a new perspective towards the advantages and luxuries and things I take for granted at home. (Rebecca)

You know there are a lot of traditions and understandings here that are different and I think in part that is what I came to see hoping that consequently I would appreciate everything that the States has to offer a little bit more. Just the difference, you know, looking at the differences so I can go back home and appreciate the similarities. (Brian)

Of those tourists that responded to my letter after they returned home, many wrote about the 'culture shock' they experienced upon their returns. Rebecca was disgusted by the opulence of the grocery store in Boulder and Neil was surprised at how little had changed in New York during his three-month absence. Brian, who witnessed a shooting and abduction in El Salvador commented on how boring and without purpose his life felt after returning from his 16-month trip. David, the most well travelled tourist I met, returned easily back into his home life stating that his worldview was cemented in place and that not much could change it anymore – travelling had surpassed the enlightening stage and was now purely escapist for him. Bill went on to complete his PhD. and present a paper at a Latin American Historians conference in Mexico City. The Spanish

he learned in Guatemala spurred him on to travel solo in Peru and Ecuador. I never heard back from Colleen but her father informed me that she moved to Guatemala and did not know when she would be returning to the U.S.

Perhaps these 'changes' are negligible compared to the continuing land loss the Maya suffer in Guatemala, the escalating unemployment and the continued abuses of human rights. Indigenous people are caught in the middle of tour buses, coffee plantations, and tanks. As tourism continues to grow in importance in Guatemala it also becomes more important that tourist studies expand there as well.

If tourism continues to be seen as an extension of colonialism – are its effects worse than the situation Guatemala would be in without it? While tourism brings many changes to Guatemala - the changes it brings are often the lesser of many potential and past evils. It may be an extension of imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo 1989) where we recognize our complicity in the 'loss' of traditions and simultaneously bemoan their disappearance. The mix of violence and vacationers is a complicated one as demonstrated by the excerpt of an editorial that appeared in a Guatemalan newspaper.

The much- publicized Xaman massacre of two weeks ago has dealt yet another harsh blow to the country's already battered tourism industry. Again, on the eve of the most important part of the year for the tourism sector, the army has gone and messed things up again. (Editorial page 2, Guatemala Weekly Oct.21 -27, 1995).

If theory can show that tourists are implicitly involved - unknowingly perhaps - in the continual oppression of those whom they visit - then perhaps anthropologists and other social scientists must take responsibility for the same crime.



I almost have this feeling and I know its absolutely impossible but its like you know if I could make up just a little bit for what's happened - even just a little bit you know. (Colleen)

### QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE TRAVELS

Since the tourist population is always changing and, as mentioned, many of the relationships I developed were created 'by chance' I would have liked to have stayed longer to see if there were any cycles or patterns that would become apparent over a longer period of time. Since the tourism industry is seasonal, the difference in tourist make up from season to season would have been interesting to observe.

I would have liked to include tourists from a broader range of schools in the country. I think I managed to choose the two schools in the country that were the most different from one another. They provided a good range of tourists although the overwhelming majority of them were from The United States. A broader selection of nationalities may have been more interesting as well.

I would have liked to round out the study by including more responses and insights from teachers and Guatemalans that I met. If I had been able to stay longer I would have been able to better gauge the place that tourism held for more of the locals. As it was, I was usually perceived as a tourist and few were willing to share any negative comments towards tourism with a gringo like myself.

I would have liked to interview academics working in Guatemala. Their opinions of tourists and how they affected the country and the locals would have added another 'local' side to my representation.

Guatemala, Antigua, Todos Santos, and the two language schools were the

laboratory: the place and circumstance I used to explore many issues. There are however many un-resolved issues raised here concerning tourism in violent places – all the more reason to adjust the approach taken towards studying tourists. The repercussions for both tourists and locals can be severe. And while I emphasize here the changes that many tourists undergo as a result of their travels – I am not ignoring the fact that the lives of the locals are greatly changed as a result of tourism as well. A growing tourist industry will be successful only if there is an increase in respect for human rights. They are dependent on one another. Without this improvement the country will not only become harder for locals to live in but the tourists will stay away making it that much harder for those who have come to rely on tourism for their livelihoods. This is a subject for further study.

#### **FAREWELL**

The intrigue, the desire for understanding, the excitement and the freedom of travel were all part of what made my first trip to Guatemala one of the most formative experiences I have had. Indeed, if it had not been for these tourist adventures, I would never have studied anthropology or written this thesis.

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Volume 4 No. 7.

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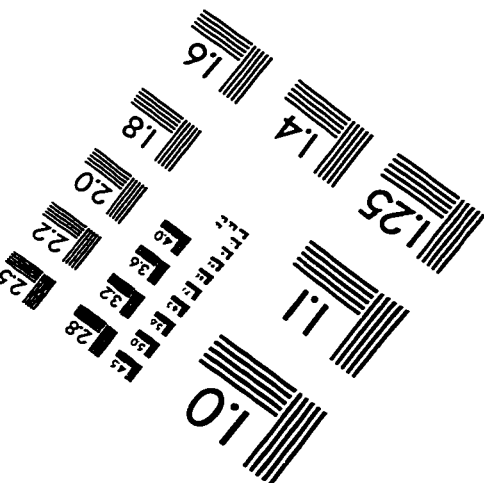
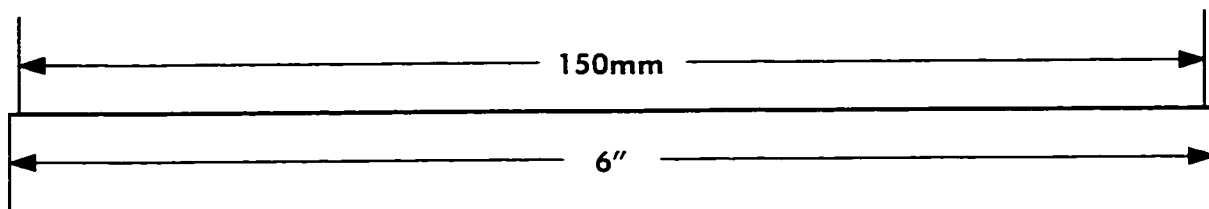
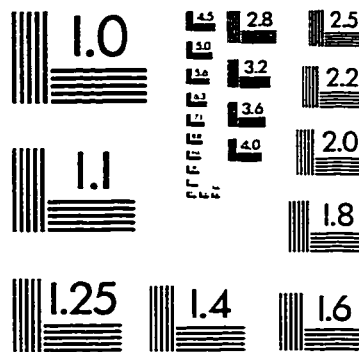
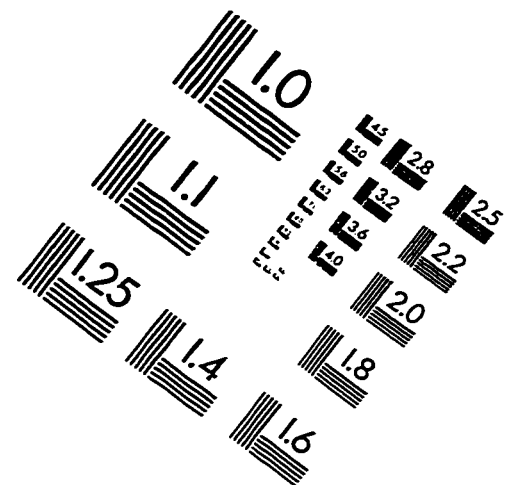
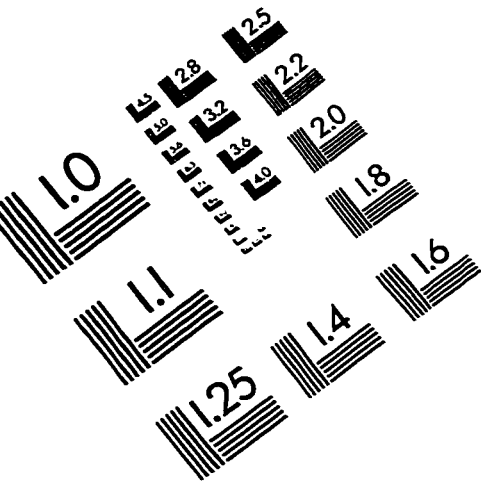
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APPENDIX 1 – DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF INTERVIEWEES (continued on to the next two pages)								
TOURIST	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	NATIONALITY	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	LENGTH OF TRIP	BUDGET	RESPONSE
#1 JULIE Antigua	27	Single	USA, Dallas	B.A. Medical School	Student	5 weeks	\$175/wk + \$700	Yes, 3 postcards, letter
#2 BILL Antigua	49	Married	USA, Kansas	B.A., M.A. PhD. Student	Student, Retired Army Colonel	8 weeks	\$175/wk + \$75/wk + gifts	Yes, 22 email messages
#3 SUMMER Antigua	24	Single	USA, Dallas	B.A. Medical Student	Student	8 weeks	\$175/wk + \$500	Yes, letter and card
#4 BROOKE Antigua	22	Single	USA, Phoenix	3 <sup>rd</sup> year University	Student	8 weeks	\$175/wk + pretty unlimited budget	No
#5 NEIL Antigua	28	Single	USA, New York	B.A., M.A., M.B.A.	About to begin job as Management Consultant	3 months	\$175/wk in school + ?	Yes, 3 letters, 2 phonecalls, 13 email messages
#6 ROBERT Todos S.	30	Married	USA, Austin	B.A.	Waiter	6 weeks	\$475 for 4 wks of school, + \$700	Yes, 5 cards, 17 email messages

TOURIST	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	NATIONALITY	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	LENGTH OF TRIP	BUDGET	RESPONSE
#7 CHRIS Todos S.	23	Single	Australia, Victoria	B.A. Medical Student	Student	1 year	As little as possible	Yes, 1 letter
#8 COLLEEN Todos S.	29	Single	USA, San Francisco	4 <sup>th</sup> year University	Student	3 months or more	\$25 a day	No, moved to Guatemala
#9 DAVID Antigua	29	Single	U.K., Birmingham	B.A., starting M.A./PhD.	Student	10 weeks	Doesn't have one	Yes, 8 letters, numerous email, visited in U.K.
#10 REBECCA Antigua	21	Single	USA, Colorado	B.A.	Unemployed, just finished degree	3 months	\$175/wk + \$1100	Yes, 4 letters & email
#11 BRIAN Antigua	26	Single	USA, Chicago	B.A., M.A.	Unemployed, just finished degree	18 months +	\$30 a day	Yes, 1 letter
#12 CAROLE Antigua	40	Single	Canada, Quebec	B.A.	Passenger Agent with Air Canada	5 weeks	\$75/wk for school + expenses	Yes, 1 letter
#13 KAREN Antigua	46	Divorced	Germany	PhD. Psychology	Crisis/ Trauma Psychologist	1 year	Doesn't have one	No, no forwarding address
#14 LISA (T.S.)	28	Single	USA, Oregon	B.A.	About to start Film School	3 months	\$25/day	Yes, 1 letter

TOURIST	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	NATIONALITY	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	LENGTH OF TRIP	BUDGET	RESPONSE
#15 JOSH Todos S.	25	Single	USA, Wyoming	B.A.	Unemployed, just finished degree	3 months	As little as possible	Yes, 1 letter

# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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