Unzipping Zipolite: tourist-local relationship in a backpacker enclave in Southern Mexico.

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Photo 1: Zipolite Beach (Source: tomzap, photo by Ray St-Sauveunt)

Introduction

Backpacking, a form of travel practiced mostly by western youths as a way of 'self-development' and 'gaining experience' by overcoming obstacles in far-off places around the globe, has created a market niche of tourists which have left an increasing impression on the places they travel to. Considering themselves better than conventional tourists (Hylland Eriksen in Torskenaes 2004), backpackers are often criticized for their appearance, conduct – especially sexual freedom and use of drugs – superficiality, stinginess and seclusion in backpacker enclaves (Cohen, 2004: 43). They are also portrayed as exploiting poor locals with their low-budget tactics by tourism officials. Some governments of developing countries try to keep backpacker tourism out, as they prefer the image and income created by mass or luxury tourism (Richards & Wilson 2004). At the same time, backpackers are glamorized as being the ultimate travelers, adventure seekers and cultural gurus by contemporary media. Various programs on the Travel Channel, literature such as Alex Garland's best-selling-novel-made-film *The Beach*, and numerous on-line travelogues portray the backpacker as the anti-hero representing freedom and independence.

In the past 30 years, the growing demand for this type of travel has proved difficult to avoid as backpackers can now be found from the most chic, cosmopolitan cities like Paris, to the most remote, traditional villages of the Andes. As the paths of these partying youth with nothing but time on their hands begin to cross, they give these remote places an ambience of their own. The trail these treks are creating has become strewn with "backpacker paraphernalia - cheap hostels, banana pancakes, Internet cafes, bars with organized 'movie nights', and Lonely Planet guidebooks" (Iver, 1998).

This collection of 'backpacker paraphernalia' in defined places has led to the development of backpacker enclaves. Also referred to as 'tourist ghettos', enclaves may be urban (Khao San Road in Bangkok and King's Cross in Sydney) or rural (Goa in India, Ubud in Bali and Montezuma in Costa Rica) and serve a number of different purposes including: a place to meet other like-minded travelers, a place to relax from a long journey on the road, a taste of home (with international cuisine choices), a place

for gathering travel information and a place for sharing stories and adventures with other backpackers. The formation of backpacker communities takes place to a large extent inside these backpacker enclaves (Richards & Wilson 2004: 274). It is claimed that the growing number of backpacker enclaves is making the backpacker experience increasingly similar to that of the 'Western culture bubble' (Ateljevic & Doorne 2004: 61), since travelers rarely encounter local people in non-commercial settings anymore (Fitzgerald 2000).

In recent times, academic interest in motivations and experiences of backpackers has picked up, as their impact on destinations and native populations has become recognized by a global audience (Richards and Wilson 2004: 3). Yet, most of these studies focus on examinations of the backpackers themselves as representatives of postmodern society. According to Erik Cohen, the first sociologist to write about the phenomenon that has evolved into what we call backpacking today, "There is a lack of anthropological and sociological research that has concentrated on the locals perceptions of the backpackers," (Cohen, 2004: 58). I agree that the academic field is bound to become biased if the focus of study does not take the spotlight off of the backpackers and shed some light on the people who make their visits possible. Instead of selfishly pondering over what backpacking can do for us (westerners), researchers should be asking: How do the locals deal with aspects of modernity implemented in to their cultures and environments through backpacker tourism? Do they view backpackers any differently than conventional tourists? And, how has the 'backpacker trail' changed the place they call home?

This thesis thus proposes to unveil not only the backpackers' but also the locals' perspectives on backpacker tourism through a presentation of a short, ethnographic field study conducted in backpacker dominated destination. Hidden away deep down on Mexico's Pacific coast, the sleepy town of Zipolite (pronounced zip-o-LEE-tay) has gone from being an off-the-beaten-track destination to a destination for those traveling on the 'backpacker superhighway' (Marshall 1999: 58). Zipolite is an example of an enclave characterized by a 'backpacker culture' with accommodation facilities and other businesses that target backpackers forming clusters that in turn attract more

backpackers to the area[1] (Kain & King, 2004:197). The field study documents specific instances of social relationships occurring when backpackers[2] and their hosts come into contact. This relationship between locals and tourists is technically the crossing of two socio-cultural systems: a native system, which gets invaded by tourism, and the developing tourist system itself (Cohen 1996: 57). My case study examines this crossing of two cultures through the analysis of the nature and dynamics of the tourist-local relationship, which has three main components: interactions, perceptions and attitudes (ibid). The outcome of this complex relationship will allow me to understand specific socio-cultural impacts backpacker tourism has on the host population living inside a backpacker enclave.

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[1] A full description of the location, history and present condition of the enclave is included in Chapter 3.
[2] Many backpackers prefer to use the term traveler when referring to themselves.

Chapter 1: Backpacker Theory and Research

Backpacker Research

Of the 76 dated references relating to backpacker and youth travel accumulated by the Backpacker Research Group (BRG) in 2000, only 11 were published before 1990 (Richards and Wilson, 2004: 4). The term 'backpacker' was formally introduced to the academic field by Pearce (1990) when she claimed, "…the most prominent definitions of backpackers today are based on quantitative marketing research", since the group's potential as a marketing tool in terms of the growing economical significance of the market was realized (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2004: 65). Pearce went on (1995) to identify a number of commonalities among backpackers which documented close relations with the locals, preference of low-budget accommodations and loose travel plans in order to have more authentic travel experiences. Today, the term 'backpacker' has come to stand for freedom and mobility acquired through travel. The backpack allows one to achieve these actions easier than a suitcase, and it has also come to represent a way of travel - or even a lifestyle (Atljevic and Doorne, 2004: 60).

Ideally, backpackers like to think that their travels are unique. Yet, most backpackers live conventional western lives in which they are taking a break from, follow similar itineraries, and use the same guide books which lead them to the currently-popular backpacker enclaves where the participate in 'similar sightseeing, vacationing and partying activities' (Teas 1988, as quoted in Cohen 2004: 51). Uniting in their differentiation from conventional tourists, an 'alternative' ideology has been created specifically for this type of tourist. The following five points are considered the *Five Badges of Honor* of backpacker ideology, according to Bradt (1995, as quoted in Welk 2004: 80): 1) to travel on a budget, 2) to meet different people (other travelers and locals), 3) to be (or to feel) free and open minded, 4) to organize one's own journey individually and independently, and 5) to travel as long as possible. Backpackers who master this ideology may be referred to as 'real' backpackers who serve as role models for backpacker culture. Through a literature review, this chapter aims to unravel how backpackers have evolved from being the innovative offspring of the late 'drifters'

(Cohen 1973) into more conventional tourists carrying a different shaped luggage. This information allows me to identify the 'alternative' tourists analyzed in my case study, which prove to have unique impacts on the destinations they visit.

The Evolution of the Backpacker

Beginning with the US National Scenic Trail Act of 1968, 'backpacking' became a popular way of extending hiking trips to last more than a day throughout the trails which then opened for recreational, public use (Think Quest). This new-found sport quickly evolved into a mobile lifestyle adopted by hippies and free-spirited travelers opting to drop out of mainstream society to follow the bohemian dream. Inspired by the Beat Generation and the Peace Movement of the 1960s, these western youths were looking for adventure off-the-beaten-track.

Erik Cohen was the first sociologist to develop a typology of tourist roles. He identified four types of tourists in his preliminary studies (Cohen, 1972, 1973, 1974), these being: 1) the organized mass tourist, 2) the individual mass tourist, 3) the explorer and 4) the nomad or drifter. The first two types fall under what Cohen called 'institutionalized tourists', while the former are thus 'non-institutionalized tourists'. The institutionalized tourists stuck together inside of a 'Western culture bubble' and organized their tours through travel agencies and tour guides. The non-institutionalized tourists shared many of the same values such as independence, adventure, spontaneity and exploring new destinations (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2004: 62). The nomads, or more specifically the 'drifters' were the original alternative or anti-tourists:

> This type of tourist ventures furthest away from the beaten track and from the accustomed ways of life of his home country. He shuns any kind of connection with the tourist establishment, and considers the ordinary tourist experience phony. He tends to make it wholly on his own, living with the people and often taking odd jobs to keep himself going. He tries to live the way the people he visits live, and to share their shelter, food and habits, keeping only the most basic and essential of his old customs. The drifter has no fixed itinerary or time table and no well-defined goals of travel. He is wholly immersed in his host culture (Cohen 1972: 168).

For Cohen, the drifter represented a growing counterculture of western youth who were considered un-patriotic, hedonistic and even anarchistic (Cohen 1973: 91-92). Dissatisfied with the political situation of the time (the Vietnam War), many youths decided to abandon conventional ways of life in search of new experiences that urged them to travel and live among exotic and more primitive surroundings (ibid: 93); and were often influenced by the drug culture that was exploding in the far East and Latin America. Yet, as drifters' paths began to cross, a new infrastructure serving drifter-tourism slowly rose into existence (ibid: 96). This alternative infrastructure marks the development of the earliest backpacker enclaves.

Other fields began to take an interest in alternative tourism research shortly after Cohen paved the way. John Vogt, an anthropologist who preferred the term 'wandering' to 'drifting', gave insight to the behavioral dynamics and internal culture of the phenomenon (Ateljevic and Doorne 2004: 63). His approach saw 'wandering' as a way of gaining experience by decision making, problem solving, and gaining "feelings of mastery over the self and the environment" (Vogt 1976: 30). He also found that one of the major driving forces of wandering to be an opportunity to engage in new and different sets of interpersonal relations where the "awareness of the brevity encourages a sense of intimacy" (ibid: 34). Vogt's theory argues against Cohen's because he says that the 'wanderers' have more sense of time than the 'drifters'.

These early recordings of anti-tourism activity have heavily influenced later research in the area. Nearly every article written about backpacking acknowledges Cohen's work, as his typology stands as the foundation for alternative tourism research dealing with social and behavioral change. Vogt's work, on the other hand, has encouraged new discussions dealing with the internal affairs and consumption patterns of the subject. Their early work is the foundation for later discussions about the 'drifter' and the 'wanderer' being the direct ancestors of the contemporary backpacker. I will now explain how commercialization and marketing strategies have tainted the original intentions of these archaic role models.

A Market is Born

The 1980s was a time of major expansion in tourism studies. The industry was booming, and destinations like Waikiki, Marbella, Cancun and Jamaica were becoming overcrowded with tourists of the suitcase sort. A few innovative projects were being implemented in developing countries which were described by Pearce (1992:16) as small scale and involving a high degree of participation from the local community. While most academic research of the time emphasized MacCannell's (1976) conceptualization of the mass tourist being exposed to a 'staged authenticity' performed by locals, the backpacker quietly set out to conquer clandestine destinations around the globe. These 'travelers' experienced travel differently than normal tourists:

> Tourists stay in Hiltons, travelers don't. The traveler wants to see the country at ground level, to breathe it, experience it - live it. This usually requires two things the tourist can't provide - more time and less money (Wheeler, quoted in Welk, 2004: 84).

Although backpacking culture was born in 1975 (after Tony and Maureen Wheeler published *South East Asia on a String*, the first *Lonely Planet* guidebook[3]), their presence seemed to be ignored by the tourism industry at this time. Very little research was conducted on backpacking, with a few exceptions (including Cohen 1982, Pearce 1987; Riley 1988; and Smith 1992). After the *Lonely Planet*, other travel guidebooks (including *Let's Go* and *Rough Guide*) have been written for the independent traveler, documenting addresses and maps for youth hostels, affordable restaurants, popular bars, cultural and ecological museums, and 'unspoiled' beaches around the world. Hence, by the 1980s, the drifter is no longer original; he is just another follower in the crowd. This transformation has provoked social anthropologist Hylland Eriksen to say, "It is just exactly [the *Lonely Planet*] that is making anti-tourism like mass tourism, which is generating its own anti-tourism in return" (2004).

The popularity of the *Lonely Planet* motivated scholars to regain interest in these 'alternative' tourists. Judith Adler (1985) argued that while contemporary tourism

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[3] Today, the *Lonely Planet* supplies guidebooks for over 650 countries. The guidebook has come to be considered the 'Bible' by international backpackers (Richards & Wilson, 2004: 35).

can be compared to the 'Grand Tour' taken by European aristocrats of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, backpacking can then be compared to 'tramping', a phenomenon which started in the eighteenth century. Tramping allowed (typically) young men to travel form village to village in order to see new places and obtain experience in trade for work. According to Adler (1985: 339), "…these tramp trips appear to have become rites of passage to full male adulthood through separation of the home and family". Tramping came to have negative connotations by the 1930s (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2004), just as backpacking would by the 1980s. But Adler's research prompted other scholars (Anderskov 2002, Binder 2003, Cohen 2004, Maoz, 2004, Richards & Wilson 2004) to look at traveling as a learning experience which prepares the individual for the future and aids in the development of the self.

Backpacking as a 'Rite de Passage'

Backpacking as a social phenomenon has been compared to the anthropological term *rite de passage* (Turner 1973, Johnson 2003, Cohen 2004). A rite of passage can be defined as a ritual or ceremony signifying an event in a person's life indicative of a transition from one stage to another, as from adolescence to adulthood (van Gennep 1960). Originally developed by French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, the term has three phases: separation, liminality and re-intergration. In the first phase, the backpacker withdraws from the society at home and separates from his/her family to enter a 'liminal' situation abroad. Drifting, wandering, tramping and backpacking all fulfill this second state of being in *limbo*. This state pushes one to be independent, responsible and adventurous as all securities are left back at home. In the third phase, the backpacker reenters the home society, having completed the trip. This accomplishment is an affirmation of his/her competence and often marks the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Yet, modern technology (Internet and cell phones) allows backpackers to keep in contact with their families at home – thus decreasing the severity of the separation from home and causing some scholars (Cohen 2004) to question the credibility of using this approach to understanding backpacking.

Riley's (1988) influential research disengaged the backpacker's connection to Cohen's conceptions of counterculture and drifting (Ateljevic and Doorne 2004: 64). Her study saw backpacking as serving as a rite of passage for individuals embarking on a travel after one chapter of their life and before opening a new chapter. She came up with the term 'international long-term budget traveler' to describe this individual who:

> Prefers to travel alone, is educated, European, middle class, single, obsessively concerned with budgeting his or her money, and at a juncture in life. Many are recent college graduates, delaying the transition into the responsibilities associated with adulthood in western society, or taking a leave between jobs. Their status is achieved on the road by experiencing hardships and non-touristic experiences, and by getting the best value (Riley 1988: 313).

Riley's definition gave these travelers a new image. Detached from the drifter, the group was finally viewed as a potential money-making market by the tourism industry as young travelers tend to travel more frequently and for longer periods of time than charter tourists.

The Rise of the Backpacking Industry

The term 'young independent traveler' became adopted by the travel industry to classify this niche of like-minded tourists who were now believed to be going through life crises and in need of a break from the ordinary. Marketing strategies of the 1990s urged youth to 'Go before it's too late[4]', and used eye-catching advertising tactics to attract the attention of a younger crowd. Adventure and risk became ploys for attracting tourists looking for an alternative to the mainstream. Backpacker-targeted tour companies began to advertise their tours as ecotourism, green tourism and adventure tourism, emphasizing that their tours were more 'authentic' than their competitor's. These advertisements aimed at backpackers tried to do a better job of concealing the 'staged authenticity' of the tour, as opposed to conventional ads which aim to reaffirm stereotypes.

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[4] Slogan for Kilroy Travels.

This new market demanded backpacker oriented facilities to suit its ideals. Organizations such as International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC) and Youth Hostel Association were created for people to 'join' the backpacking culture, and receive a ten percent discount at associated hostels with a membership card. Travel Agencies such as Kilroy Travels in Scandinavia and STA in the US opened up for students and youth under the age of 26 to receive discounted plane fares. The travel industry has thus commercialized backpacking, making the travel-method appealing to a larger market. The increased popularity of this type of travel has resulted in the collection of backpacker paraphernalia in formerly 'untouched' areas. The development of the backpacker trail across the globe is thus changing indigenous cultures and primitive environments. This thesis aims to analyze the impacts backpacker tourists can have on their hosts.

The Impacts of Backpacking

By 2003, the number of international tourists reached 694 million (Cabrini 2004), and today the tourism industry employs over 74 million people and domestic and international tourism receipts account for 9.3% of GNP worldwide according to the World Tourism Organization (WTO). It has a multitude of impacts, both positive and negative, on people's lives and on the environment (United Nations Environment Programme online source). On a world scale, tourism is felt in every collective level of society – economic, political, geographical, socio-cultural, ecological and technological – as well as in the less tangible area of social reality, such as its systems of signs and symbolic processes (Lanfant, Allock & Bruner 1995:26). While backpackers only make up a small percentage of international tourists, their impacts are becoming difficult to ignore.

Economic Impacts

Backpackers have for a long time been shunned as being of low economic value to the tourism industry. But since the 1990s, significant economic contributions can be attributed to the young-independent traveler. One point overlooked in the past, is that

although backpackers travel on tighter budgets, they tend to spend more time in one destination than an average tourist does. Perhaps due to a common language, many recent studies have been conducted on economic impacts of backpacking in Austrailia and New Zealand. These studies (Kain and King 2004, Oppermann & Chon 1997) reveal that backpacker tourists spend a greater amount per capita than any other market segment. Statistics show that international backpackers contribute over $A1.5 billion per year to the Australian economy and that the average backpacker stays 83 nights compared to 23 nights by other tourists (Kain and King, 2004: 196). This is exemplified by one interviewee who stated:

> If I wanted a luxury vacation, I would have only come for a week and blown all my money on booze and souvenir crap. But, I am traveling for like a year, and my wallet is getting skinnier by the day. I probably spend at least $20 bucks a day – and that's being cheap! (Nate, New Zealand, 34).

While this 'so-called poverty' may make backpackers feel closer to the local people of Third World countries, they are still spending much more than most local people ever could in one day.

Inspired by the drifter, backpackers penetrate into more peripheral areas as not to be bothered by large crowds. This brings money to locally-run businesses which are not usually visited by conventional tourists. Although luxury tourism is often preferred by local governments, the impact of luxury tourism is in many ways similar to that of natural resource extraction: very little economic advantage accrues to the local area, while the rapid installation of modern infrastructure and amenities quickly undermines the traditional way of life (Sunrise Pashmia and Bridges PRTD). It is claimed that backpacker tourism on the other hand, tends to trickle-drip money directly into the hands of the local people, while encouraging community action to protect both the natural environment and the cultural features which are the primary tourist attractions (ibid).

Environmental Impacts

In the aftermath of the international tourism explosion, efforts to preserve environmental and cultural integrity became implemented into the tourism industry. 'Sustainability' became the catchphrase of the time thanks to the influence of Local Agenda 21 (LA 21). LA 21 was adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and suggests: that sustainable development is only achievable through planned, democratic decisions which should protect local culture, respect local traditions and promote local ownership and management of programs and projects in order to allow tourism growth while at the same time preventing degradation of the environment. Tourism's aim became to utilize development strategies which ensure that environmental and cultural conservation accompanies tourism growth or change. Making up a large component of 'alternative' tourists, backpackers may assume that their journeys are less detrimental to the environment and to the lives of the host populations than those of conventional tourists – but is that really the case? At least Jacobsen and Eide don't think so, as they state, "not all alternative or nature tourism is equivalent to eco-tourism" (2002: 203).

While I found much literature criticizing bad adaptations of eco-tourism in general, I found only one article specifically pertaining to backpacking tourism and its environmental impact. Smith (1992) found that unplanned development on the island of Borocay, Philippines based on alternative tourism strategies is not sustainable in the least. At the time of her field study in 1987, Borocay had no electricity, running water or sewage system. Backpackers, summoned to the island by word of mouth, demanded comforts of home in their new-found paradise. This led to the introduction of diesel powered generators to power the tape decks at discos, refrigerators to keep the beer cold, and neon lights to attract a crowd (Smith, 1992: 148). Although Smith found that many locals *like* and *want* tourism on the island, this uncontrolled development led to an overflow of waste, contaminated water supplies and erosion of beach front land. Her study prompted the discussion as to whether alternative tourism can actually be considered an alternative, as these 'alternative' tourists left 'mainstream' problems on the island. While I understand that there is a need for further research on the impact backpacker tourism has in on economic and environmental issues, this thesis does not

touch on those aspects. Instead, my focus lies on the socio-cultural impacts of backpacking.

Socio-Cultural Impacts

Socio-cultural impacts are the ways in which tourism is contributing to changes in value systems, individual behavior, family relationships, collective life-styles, safety levels, moral conduct, creative expressions, traditional ceremonies and community organizations of a host destination (Fox 1977: 27). Or in other terms, socio-cultural impacts are 'people impacts'; they are about the effects on the people of host communities of their direct and indirect contact with tourists. However, there are few studies which suggest ways of assessing the social impacts of tourism. The most prominent framework used for measuring these impacts comes from Doxey's (1976) irritation index, in which he suggests that the existence of reciprocation impacts between outsiders and residents of a tourist destination may be converted into varying degrees of resident irritation. The framework consists of four stages: *euphoria, apathy, irritation and antagonism.* Doxey argues that the host community typically embraces tourism enthusiastically when it is introduced to a destination. This euphoria then turns to a level of apathy as hosts begin to take the tourism for granted. This indifference eventually leads to irritation when the locals become increasingly irritated and annoyed by the invasion of outsiders into their space. This irritation then leads to apathy, as locals become resentful and hostile towards tourists. This framework proves a useful method in my study for determining how the locals of Zipolite have reacted to the 'backpacker trail' which has created change in their village.

The Tourist-Local Relationship

Socio-cultural impacts are a result of the social relationships occurring when tourists and locals come into contact (Mathieson & Wall 1992: 135). Valene L. Smith's book, ironically titled *Hosts and Guests* (1976), was the first of its kind to analyze the tourist-local relationship. The ethnographic studies presented in Smith's book pointed out specific instances where local lives were changed through their relationships with

tourists. The book views tourism as an imperialistic infrastructure which essentially replaces aspects of local cultures with western values through economic, political, religious and other interests (Nash, 1977: 44). With the creation of the tourist realm, various social interactions are set up between tourists and their hosts. The case studies presented in the book thus use the tourist-local relationship as a tool for determining socio-cultural impacts of tourism. This approach has been followed after Smith's lead. Yet, Cohen notes that there have been few studies which deal specifically with the nature and dynamics of the tourist-local relationship, which has three main dimensions: people's interactions, perceptions and attitudes. My study thus proposes to examine these three dimensions in order to better understand how 'alternative' tourists relate with the locals and vice versa.

Sutton (1967:220 in Cohen 1996: 56) viewed the tourist-local relationships as a series of interactions between tourists who are in transit and out having a good time and the hosts who are relatively stationary and cater to the tourists needs. These tourist-local encounters are typically transitory, non-repetitive and asymmetrical, as the participants are focused on achieving immediate gratification than toward maintaining a continuous relationship (ibid). Many of these relationships thus prove to be open to mistrust and exploitation. Other studies on the tourist-local relationship claim that the local culture becomes sold as a commodity in order to attract more tourists (Greenwood 1977). Dean MacCannell's acclaimed theory of 'staged authenticity' (1976) goes hand in hand with the theory of cultural commoditization, as hosts begin to 'play the natives' for profit. In this sense, "Culture is being packaged, priced and sold like building lots, rights of way, fast food and room service" (Greenwood 1978: 136). This commoditization can lead to a strain on tourist-local relations, as perceptions become more influenced by stereotypes. However, not many studies have explicitly compared different types of tourists and their impact on their destinations.

Although backpackers and other 'alternative' tourists are said to have more contact with the locals than mass tourists (Pearce 1982), I find it odd that I did not come a cross many publications dealing specifically with the backpacker-local relationship. An early study on drifter relationships with locals was conducted by Cohen (1982),

where he examined the impact of drifter tourism on two beaches in southern Thailand. Analyzing business relations, he notes that the drifting youth may be more interested in maintaining local infrastructures because they are looking to experience new ways of life. But his conclusion is pessimistic, as he feared that mainstream tourism was not far behind the drifters. He concludes that because of the lack of economic capital on the islands at the time of his study (1982), they locals are even more susceptible to being overtaken by outside interests in the future. His work proves influential to my research, as my case study yielded similar results.

Darya Maoz (2004) conducted a comparative study of two groups she labeled as 'the Conquerors' and 'the Settlers' within the specific Israeli backpacking phenomenon. Every year out of a population of five million, 50,000 young Jewish Israelis travel to India as backpackers – most of them in the twenties and just having completed their mandatory army service (Maoz 2004: 109). She defines the Conquerors (111) as those travelers whose journeys' extend their intense experience of the army by participating in strenuous trek lasting for weeks. These youth are regarded as unfriendly toward locals and their circles are closed. The Settlers (113) are then those travelers who decide to stay and create their own small 'neo-colonies' in India. Here, they are likely to 'go native' and experiment with Yoga and Reiki and eat local cuisine. Her study proves very interesting, as her identification of two different types of backpackers is useful for the organization of my case study.

Hazel Tucker's article "The Ideal Village: Interactions through Tourism in Central Anatolia", looks at how 'alternative' tourists enjoy themselves in an 'adventure playground' (Tucker, 1997:110) inside a Turkish village. These tourists perceive the village as 'ideal' because the people there are imagined to be 'living in the past', living a life other than our own; a life free from the burdens of modern civilization. Making contact with this pure other life is experienced by these tourists as enhancing their own humanity and their own selves (119). The presence of tourists looking to 'get in touch with the primitive' has affected the local community in a number of ways. Changing gender roles due to sexual relationships between the local Turkish men and the female travelers proved to be the most significant socio-cultural impact in the village. This was

also a prominent phenomenon in Zipolite. The above mentioned articles have all served as a useful foundation for the development of my case study, which aims to understand what happens when the 'alternative' meets the 'primitive'.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter has described the evolution of the contemporary backpacker in both academic research and in the tourism industry. I understand and appreciate the previous research that has been conducted on backpackers and on the impact of backpacking. My analysis of this research has inspired me to look further than at what the backpacker has evolved into - it has pushed me to wonder how local communities are handling the backpacker's global trek. The existing research on the tourist-local relationship has prompted me to expand these theories by analyzing the relationships locals have with 'alternative' tourists. As native cultures become increasingly immersed in traveler culture and backpacker paraphernalia, I suggest that there is a demand for further research pertaining to both traveler/backpacker-local relationships as well as the local perspective towards this 'alternative' type of travel. This thesis offers one example which examines the complex relationship between 'alternative' tourists and the 'primitive' locals they encounter through a case study conducted in the Mexican village of Zipolite. The 'alternative' ideologies that the ex-patriots, drifters, travelers and backpackers included in my study prove to have important socio-cultural impacts on the traditional ways of life in the village. My study proposes to look at how this backpacker enclave is experienced and perceived by both travelers and locals, with an emphasis on the perceptions of the locals. As the number of backpacker enclaves is growing world-wide, I feel that this thesis may add valuable insight to a growing field of research.

Chapter 2: Project Objectives and Methodology

The aim of this thesis is to understand the socio-cultural impacts backpackers, as 'alternative tourists', have on the destinations they visit. Through a case study analysis, I examine the relationship between the hosts and guests of one specific backpacker enclave. In order to apply my method of participant observation, I spent five weeks living as a backpacker in the small village of Zipolite. Based on my observations, I denote three distinct groups living together side-by-side within the enclave of Zipolite. I term these groups as: 1) the settlers, 2) the contemporary backpackers and 3) the ethnic locals. These three groups each have their own defining features and independent ways of thinking, yet they have a definite interdependence. Zipolite is thus characterized by the conflicting cultural values and views of these three groups. Through a presentation of interviews, conversations, observations and anecdotes, I illustrate how each of these three unique groups perceives the enclave. My overall purpose is to understand the relationship between these 'alternative' tourists and their hosts through an analysis of people's interactions, perceptions and attitudes within the enclave (Cohen 1996: 56). From this analysis, I am able to draw upon possible socio-cultural impacts that backpacker tourism has brought upon the host population of Zipolite.

Organization of the Case Study

Chapter 3 sets out the history and the physical context of the area under investigation. I begin by presenting background information about tourism's great importance in Mexico, in order to make the reader better understand the economic situation and cultural heritage surrounding the area under investigation. I then give a detailed account of Zipolite's location, including its physical setting and ways of accessing the village. The chapter lays out the recent history of the village: from the arrival of the first drifters in the late 1960s, to the settlement and development of the village by a group of hippies in the 70s, to its transformation into a backpacker hangout in the decades which followed. I also include a report of natural disasters, technological advancement and the infrastructure found in Zipolite today. This information sets the

stage upon which the settlers, backpackers and ethnic locals interact with each other in the chapters to come. An analysis of these interactions and relationships will be the focus of discussion in the conclusion.

Chapter 4 examines the group I consider to be responsible for turning Zipolite into a backpacker enclave. Zipolite was founded as a tourist destination by a group of hippies, who lacked clearly defined priorities and ultimate commitments. I define a hippie as a person who opposes and rejects many of the conventional standards and customs of society, especially one who advocates extreme liberalism in sociopolitical attitudes and lifestyles (Answers.com). These hippies (or drifters) were pre-disposed to try out alternative life-ways in the quest for meaning in their lives. Travel was not the only form of their quest; authenticity, mysticism and drugs also served alternative paths to the same goal (Cohen 1996). Some of these hippies got 'stuck' there, and decided to make Zipolite their home. I term the group the 'settlers' because the way their businesses took over the village exemplifies overtones of colonialism. Over the years, this international community of drifters has developed the town to resemble a pseudo-hippie-land, where today's more fun-oriented backpackers with less far-fetched aspirations (Welk 2004: 85) can reminisce the Zipolite's glory days of the 1960s. These activities highly contrast the traditional lifestyles of the local people born and raised in Zipolite. It has since turned into a village in which traveler norms have become mixed with the values of the local culture (Richards and Wilson, 2004: 60), resulting in a relaxed, tolerant and socially permissive atmosphere (Westerhausen & MacBeth 2003). The chapter looks at how the mixing of western and native cultures has brought on changes to the local community.

Chapter 5 looks at the group of contemporary backpackers I found staying temporarily in Zipolite. The existing literature on backpackers shows how this niche group of tourists has over the past three decades changed from a counter-culture of rebels into a sub-culture of tourists (Wilson 2001) which has since come to resemble its arch rival, mass tourism, due to increased marketing strategies and the growing number of participants. No longer nomads wandering aimlessly around the globe, today's backpackers have set itineraries, limited travel times, and higher budgets than their predecessors. The contemporary backpacker is no longer looking for complete isolation

from other westerners, as they tend to congregate in backpacker-friendly enclaves. Zipolite offers numerous backpacker facilities where travelers can meet, exchange information, create short-term friendships or romances and explore new identities without speaking the local language. In this chapter I see whether my backpacker subjects can be classified as 'real' backpackers or not, through an analysis of Bradt's backpacker ideology. This chapter illustrates that because contemporary backpackers are so focused on becoming better backpackers, they do not make substantial contact with their hosts. Therefore, there contact with the locals proves to be no greater than that of mass tourists.

My interpretations of the interactions, perceptions and attitudes of both the settler and the backpacker communities in Zipolite have prompted me to understand how backpacker tourism is perceived and dealt with by the local Zapotec population. Chapter 6 examines how the ethnic locals react towards backpacker tourism by using Doxey's (1976) irritation index. Although Doxey implied that the local community would experience these stages in a cyclical manner, I argue that all four levels exist simultaneously in Zipolite today. My analysis of these co-existing stages illustrates the ethnic local perspectives about backpacker tourism inside the enclave. This chapter introduces numerous members of the ethnic local community in order to see how they are handling the presence of the hippies, ex-patriots, backpackers and other travelers in their village.

The final aim of the thesis to understand prevalent socio-cultural impacts backpacker tourism has had on the host community of Zipolite by presenting interpretations of my data I obtained in the case study. These impacts arise from the direct and indirect interactions between the hosts and their guests. I hope to determine whether backpacking as an 'alternative' form of tourism is less detrimental to the host population than mass tourism. As there has been little research conducted on the impacts of this newly evolved type of travel, I suggest that this thesis may offer valuable research to a growing field. As these impacts prove to be both positive and negative, I conclude that backpacking can be both romanticized and demonized.

Methodology

Ethnologist Peter Welk (2004: 58) stated that there is a need for anthropological community studies of popular backpacker destinations in which the researcher will achieve a grasp of the local situation and study the backpacking visitors within its context. Ethnography is thus my method of inquiry. The majority of my data comes from a five-week field study which took place from the 13th of September, 2005 to the 21st of October, 2005. The research was conducted in the town of Zipolite, in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico where I traveled/lived as a backpacker in order to apply my method of participant observation. This method includes the combination of personal experiences, interviews, surveys and daily observations which I recorded in a journal. To reiterate as clearly as possible, my overall purpose is to analyze the interactions, perceptions and attitudes held by the 'settlers', the backpackers and the ethnic locals in order to examine the impact the relationships built inside the backpacker enclave have on the socio-cultural aspects of Zipolite[5].

Interviews

I conducted interviews (both formal and informal) with nearly all of my subjects. I spoke with 13 different members of the 'settler' community[6]. These informants gave me a lot of information about the history of the enclave. I recorded interviews with American Daniel, Canadian Beth and French Natalie. These informants were extremely helpful with my research. I conducted semi-structured interviews with six of the other 'settlers', and had brief conversations with the remaining five. I recorded a series of interviews and discussions with 12 long-term backpackers and conducted informal interviews and had conversations with 22 others[7]. Topics of the

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[5] Inspiration for the project comes from personal experience as a backpacker in North America, Central America, Europe and Southern Africa. My original focus for this project was intended to be whether or not backpackers were more environmentally friendly than mainstream tourists, but my data proved that this is not necessarily the case, as tight-budgets seem to override ecological efforts. I have since changed my focus to analyzing the complex community within Zipolite in order to understand the impact of the backpacking phenomenon in the developing world.

[6] A full list of these 'settler' informants can be found in Table 1.

[7] A full list of these backpacker informants can be found in Table 2.

interviews ranged from discussing personal backpacking experiences inside Zipolite to views on the impact of backpacking as a whole. Points of investigation with this group were to find out in what ways Zipolite fulfills their travel needs and how close they come into contact with the locals. I also conducted recorded, in-depth interviews with two members of the ethnic community.[8] I resorted to note-taking and had frequent conversations to obtain my information with 18 others. Discussions primarily covered local perceptions of tourism, relationships with tourists and what the future holds for the village.

Surveys

Surveys were used on 34 backpackers[9]. Their responses provided me with quantitative data including demographics, accommodation preference, information sources and daily expenditures of the backpackers. Basic qualitative data pertaining to travel motivations and goals were also acquired using this method.

Observations and Daily Journal

I kept a daily journal throughout my field study in order to record my observations of the settlers, the backpackers and the ethnic locals. In this journal, I have recorded specific stories, anecdotes and conversations which contribute to my interpretations about the above mentioned groups.

Interpretations and Analysis

From these interviews, surveys and journal entries, I reflect and interpret how the complex community interacts with and perceives each other. The existence of a cultural pluralism has since led to an unusual triangular relationship between three distinct groups I observed living together in the enclave. Through an analysis of each of these groups, my thesis aims to examine the impact this alternative travel style has had on the host community, whose lives now depend on the income from the niche market

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[8] This proved to be the most difficult group to record due to intimidation these informants felt in the presence of the tape recorder.
[9] A cop of this survey can be found in Appendix 1.

of backpacker tourists. I do not merely view the locals as a backdrop for studying the backpackers against, as much of the previous backpacker research has done. Instead, I attempt to grasp the local situation of the delimited area and thus study the backpackers *in* the context of this community (urged by Cohen, 2004: 58). My analysis of this tourist-local relationship will determine how the local community is socio-culturally affected by the presence of 'alternative' tourists. This case study thus points out relevant excerpts that might be global in context.

Chapter 3: Delimiting the Place of Study

International Tourism in Mexico

Mexico is, and for a long time has been, the unparalleled giant of the international tourist industry in Latin America (Chant 1992: 85). Since the 1970s and 1980s, tourism has almost always been a first place generator of foreign exchange and increasing employment opportunities in the country, beating the oil and manufacturing industries. Mexico is an appealing tourist destination thanks to its beautiful beaches, indigenous cultures, colonial history and exquisite cuisine. The Mexican government has played an important role in the development of tourism in the country (OECD 2001). Mexico was one of the first countries to jump at the gun to expand international tourism in the late 1960s, when development projects began in Cancun, Puerto Vallarta and Acapulco. Realizing that tourism was one of the only ways to avoid many parts of the nation from hitting poverty level, the government has been involved in setting money aside for major tourism resorts and areas in Mexico – especially along the coasts. According to Chant (1992), government involvement has ranged from building new airports and roads, to planning new resorts and finding foreign investors, to building schools or training institutes for the service industry. Yet, each state deals with the implementation of tourism differently, as some states are more equipped with valuable touristic resources than others. My study examines the phenomenon of backpacker tourism in the state of Oaxaca, which is in the southern most part of Mexico.

The State of Oaxaca

The state of Oaxaca (see map below) covers an area of 36,820 square miles with 370 miles of Pacific coastline. The coast of Oaxaca is at a latitude of 16°, placing it well into the tropical zone (Penick 2006). As there is little seasonal variation in temperature, it is usually very hot. The rainy season runs from May to October. Most of the state is mountainous with rugged terrain right down to the coast.

Map 1: Map of Mexico (Source: *Lonely Planet*)

It has a large indigenous population composed of numerous different groups including Mixtec, Náhuatl, and Zapotec. Many of these inhabitants continue to live traditionally. Oaxaca is known for its black pottery, unique carved wood figures, coffee, and is the source of the first chocolate brought to Europe (ibid). Oaxaca is the second poorest state in Mexico, next to its neighbor, Chiapas, yet it is rich in tradition, cuisine, culture, and natural beauty. The state is lucky to possess natural and cultural resources which, in turn, generate marginal profits (see statistics below). The Pacific coast is home to two major resort towns and several other undeveloped, palm tree clad beaches offering a variety of water sports and eco-oriented activities. On the other side of the Sierra Madre Mountain Range lies the old, Spanish colonial city of Oaxaca with its beautiful churches and buildings. Archaeological sites such as Monte Alban offer displays of ancient pyramids and ruins. Plus, the entire state is decorated with the bright colors of the traditional clothing and exotic dishes of the indigenous people.

Oaxaca's Ethnic Roots

The 3.3 million inhabitants of Oaxaca State are made up of descendents from 15 different groups including the Zapotec, Mixtec, Chatino, Trique and Mixe peoples. These people speak over 14 languages and 90 dialects (Green & Day 2000). The terrain of the state of Oaxaca directly influences this cultural diversity as the mountain ranges and valleys separate the villages, and these isolated areas have developed their own languages, foods and customs. The Zapotec Indians inhabited Oaxaca for over three millennia and there were more than 500,000 at the time the Spanish conquered Mexico[10]. They have, however, not received as much attention as the Mayan and Aztec cultures have in global context. It is relatively unknown, but the Zapotecs are accredited with inventing the first calendar system and the first number system up to twenty. They also had an advanced writing system and were the first civilization to live in city-states. Zapotecs refer to themselves as 'the True people of Oaxaca', believing that their ancestors came from the earth, caves and even jaguars. There are currently approximately 423,000 speakers of the Zapotec language. Other ethnicities found in Oaxaca include the Mixtec, Nahua, Mazatec, Chocho, Chicatec, Trique,Amuzgo, Chantino, Chontal, Zoque and Huave groups.

Even though Oaxaca is the most 'Indian' state of modern Mexico, racism still thrives. An Iowa State research project on the Zapotec Indians states that negative connotations toward ethnic Mexicans limit job opportunities, forcing many Indians to live below poverty level. The state's high unemployment rate causes many ethnic Mexicans to migrate from home in search of work. Those who do not leave the state might end up selling their cultural heritage as a commodity in a marketplace (Little 2004). Sadly, many Mexicans of indigenous origin have already begun to loose aspects of their ethnicity due to racism by the lighter-skinned Mexicans called *chilangos* within the country and to modernization brought on by tourism.

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[10] The information used for the following section comes from an Iowa State online source on Zapotec culture.

Dependence on Tourism

The state of Oaxaca has thus depended on tourism as a way of creating employment opportunities across the state. Reflecting a trend throughout the nation, the tourism industry in the state of Oaxaca continues to rise annually. The following information obtained from a report by the Secretary of Tourism entitled *Resultados Acumulados de la Actividad Touristica de Enero hasta Septiembre 2005*[11] (datatur) shows the increase of tourism related activities in within the past year:

1. In the first half of 2005, Mexico received 7.6 million international tourists, a 10.8 percent increase from the year before.

2. The increase in the number of international tourists across Mexico rose by ten percent from the previous year. The number of domestic tourists rose by 14 percent, which equals about 9.7 million Mexican people traveling.

3. The formal jobs of the tourism sector in September estimated 1,854,000 jobs in Oaxaca. This is a 3.1 percent increase from the same month last year.

4. The number of people employed by hotels at the end of September 2005 equaled 1,816,000 employees in Oaxaca State. This is a 3.6 percent increase since 2004.

5. The balance of the tourism industry in the state of Oaxaca is continually favorable as it gained $US 3,296,000 dollars. This amount equals a 13 percent increase from 2004.

As these figures show, the increase of touristic activity in the state of Oaxaca proves to be economically beneficial for the Mexicans of both indigenous and non-indigenous backgrounds living there. Yet, I have seen that the boost in the economy from tourism revenues can be detrimental to the social and cultural aspects within the state of Oaxaca. My case study highlights one example of how tourism is perceived and dealt with by both the host population and their guests through an analysis of their interactions within a defined Mexican village in Oaxaca State.

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[11] Accumulated Results of Tourist Related Activity from January to September 2005.
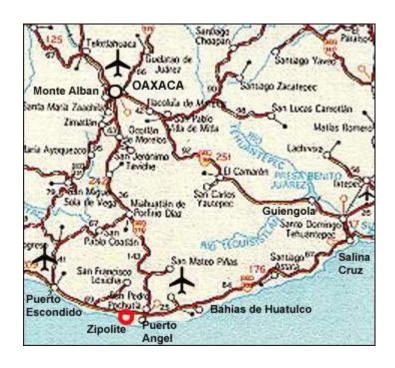
The Physical Setting and Indigenous Roots of Zipolite

The name Zipolite derives from the Nahuatl Indian word *Sipolitan* or *zipoliti*, meaning 'bumpy place' or 'place of continuous hills' (Penick 2005). This describes the lush and vibrant green, tropical jungle spawning down from the Sierra Madre mountains to the edge of the Pacific. Locals say the name originates from the Nahuatl words meaning the beach of the dead (or as the locals say in Spanish, *la playa de los muertos*) because of the outrageous number of deaths that have occurred at the beach due to extremely strong currents and a powerful shore break. The village is situated behind a two kilometer stretch of sandy beach, and until 1955, only one family lived there (ibid).

An excavation of a site at Zipolite held in 1962, under Donald Leslie Brockington from the University of Wisconsin, showed that the beach had a long history after he discovered 65,000 pottery fragments and uncovered two burials (Brockington 1966). This is only one of the 128 registered archaeological sites that line the coast of Oaxaca, most of which are thought to have been ruled by Tututepec rulers. The archaeologist concluded that the site has been inhabited since the Pre-Classic (before Christ) times with no evidence of radical changes in pottery styles. He suggests that a small, isolated population of Zapotec Indians sustained the forces of nature with population growth limited by arid conditions, low agricultural potential and a violent ocean (ibid).

Location

Playa Zipolite is located between the long-time surfer paradise of Puerto Escondido and the up-and-coming-eco-resort of Bahias de Huatulco. As early as the 1960s, the Mexican government began searching for untouched, potential beach-resort sites possessing profitable characteristics, in order to build them up into master-planned resorts with the intention of boosting the Mexican economy and improving living standards in rural regions of the country (Advantage Mexico). After a thorough search of Mexico's 9,600 km of coast, researchers agreed upon promoting the development of the remote shores of southern Mexico.

Map 2: Overview of the state of Oaxaca (Source: tomzap)

The town of Puerto Escondido (Hidden Port*)* was built in 1928 for exporting the supplies of coffee beans growing in the mountains inland of the port (net nude). Fishing became the major industry thereafter. Puerto Escondido is home of the biggest surf break in Mexico. In the 1970s, a few rustic hotels started to pop up as 'surfer dudes' brought their 'beach babes' across the border to surf and sip Margaritas in the sun. Thirty years later, the tourism industry has now tripled the town in size (*Lonely Planet*) and older fishermen are selling sunglasses to make a living. As Puerto Escondido is not one of the biggest resort towns in Mexcio, it caters to a middle-class, conventional or 'weekend' tourists who are likely to be found buying trinkets and fish tacos.

On the other side of Zipolite, lies the 35 km stretch of coves, inlets and bays known as Bahias de Huatulco (pronounced wa-TOOL-co). This area is now known as the hemisphere's first *ecotourism resort* and Hautulco has become the first tourist community in Latin America to receive the Green Globe certification, granted to cities that operate with high environmental standards. Green Globe is a program based on the sustainable development principles adopted by 182 countries at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, organized by the United Nations (*Vuelo*, September 2005: 32). Since

the resorts in Huatulco are very exclusive, they cater mostly to luxury tourists who stay confined to their 'western culture bubble' (Cohen, 1973). I observed that many activities offered in Huatulco targeted toward high-end clientele – jet-skiing, boat cruises, and motorbike tours in the jungle – to be quite the opposite of environmentally friendly. These destructive forms of tourism contradict the ultimate goal of conservation.

Compared to the above mentioned resorts, Playa Zipolite is a mere speck on the map. Yet, the growth of tourism in the area has caused for Zipolite to gain recognition by tourists who dare to go stray away from expensive resorts. Today the majority of visitors to the village are low-budget travelers looking to avoid the steep prices in Puerto Escondido and Huatulco. Yet, due to its remote location, Zipolite has not developed nearly as much as the two surrounding resorts.

Accessing Zipolite

Zipolite is still considered a place off -the-beaten-track by conventional tourists. This is because previous access to the village was limited. But for those traveling with a backpack, it has become an essential stopover on the backpacker circuit. According to my backpacker interviews, word of mouth was the number one way travelers found out about Zipolite. This information has now been written into a variety of sources and travel guides including the *Lonely Planet, Rough Guide* and *Let's Go*. The *Lonely Planet* recommends Zipolite for budget travelers because there are many cheap accommodations and backpacker oriented facilities. But the 'bible' warns travelers to watch out for the dangers of being robbed and of the dangerous ocean currents which have taken so many lives (*Lonely Planet*, Mexico 2004). And *Rough Guide* actually advises people *not* to go there (*Rough Guide*, Mexico 2005).

International airports in both Puerto Escondido and Huatulco now offer accessible transportation services to Zipolite by either taxi or bus. The road has become an extension of Highway 175, which now runs all the way from Oaxaca City through the Sierra Madre Mountains to the coast. Public transportation running from the busy

city of Pochutla can get one to Zipolite in less than a half an hour. But there are no direct buses to the costal village. A taxi ride from Pochutla to Zipolite costs approximately $US 10 and takes about 20-30 minutes, depending on the driver and depending on the direction from which he is coming. Budget travelers tend to opt for a longer but cheaper option, also used by the locals. This option entails piling into the back of a pick-up-truck known as a *collective* for a mere $US 1. The ride can be nauseating and uncomfortable, but the price cannot be beaten. Welcome to Zipolite.

Map 3: Accessing Zipolite (Source: tomzap)

The History of Zipolite

Arrival of the 'Gringos'

Most families in Zipolite are descendents of the Zapotec Indians, and have for a long time respected the traditions of their ancestors. According to one of my sources (Margarita), the local inhabitants of Zipolite prospered in small businesses such as tortilla making, small-scale fishing and turtle poaching during the 1960s.

Photo 2: Tortilla vendor (Source: Solstice)

Due to the seclusion of the village surrounded by many hills, the locals had a limited market. It was possible to access the two other small villages on either side of Zipolite, Puerto Angel to the southeast and Mazunte to the northwest, by foot. The locals lived simple lives which placed much dependence on the nature they lived in. Until one day, in 1969, under the total eclipse of the sun, Zipolite was changed forever.

> I remember it so well. I was about 12-years-old and we were playing on the sand. We saw these light-skinned creatures walking up the beach with really weird hair and really strange clothing. I tell you I thought they might have been aliens! How ugly they were! *[12] (Margarita, 42)

Margarita's quote demonstrates the initial shock the natives of Zipolite experienced when the first international tourists 'discovered' Zipolite beach, staggering out of their Volkswagen buses with long dread-locks and a clothing-optional style, followed by a cloud of marijuana smoke. These 'drifters', had steered away from the resorts skyrocketing out of other Mexican tourist destinations like Acapulco, Puerto

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[12] this symbol (*) denotes a quote that has been translated from Spanish to English.

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Vallarta and Cancun and had landed on the untouched and unspoiled beach bounded by two gigantic rocks at either end of the cove. They arrived in search of a spot to view the eclipse. An occurrence happening only every 410 years (krysstal), the hippies couldn't have picked a better spot. Climbing up the big rock at the west end of the beach, a perfect view of the moon crossing the path of the sun was encountered. The hippies had stumbled upon a new paradise.

The Introduction of Tourism to Zipolite

In 1970, Gloria Hope Johnson moved from Southern California to Puerto Angel with her two children and $US 300. They camped on Zipolite Beach. On the beach below the hill that is now home to the Shambhala, she fell in love with a fisherman and diver named Tomas Lopez. After being there about six months, Gloria met a few drifters who had wandered off-the-beaten-track to Zipolite and an idea sparked in her head (Shambhala). Gloria became a Mexican citizen, and in 1973, Gloria and Tomas married and bought the spectacular hill overlooking Zipolite. She literally dug into the hill to build a restaurant and hammock-hang-up-place. The business began operation in 1975 under the name Arca de Noe. A year later, Gloria began serving vegetarian food at the place on the hill and changed its name to Shambhala. This hotel is legendary in Zipolite and is often referred to simply as Gloria's, and is considered the most 'authentic' place to stay in the village[13].

Development, Settlement and Electricity in Zipolite

The original drifters who founded the paradise of Zipolite in the late 1960s returned in the following decade, bringing their like-minded friends with them. During the 1970s and 80s, a small, foreign community was established in Zipolite.

> My friend Dave and I were in Zipolite in 1973. We thought we'd
> stumbled onto paradise when we arrived at the deserted main beach and
> climbed the trail leading to Playa de Amor. There below us were about a
> dozen naked young women all in their 20s. We knew right then we were

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[13] Unfortunately, Gloria was away visiting her son (who lives in Los Angeles) while I was in Zipolite, so I did not have the pleasure of meeting this respected female entrepreneur. I still had a chance to explore the beautiful hotel grounds.

going to stay awhile. (Bill, American, journal entry from Visitor's Comments about Zipolite, tomzap).

Several hammock hotels were opened along the beach of Zipolite (after Gloria's success story) by expatriates from the US, Chile, Italy and Argentina who decided to make Zipolite their home. Inspired by the local Mexican infrastructure, accommodations were built to resemble the locals' homes. Hammock hotels, called *palapas,* provided a roof over one's head – but didn't offer any walls. The price to hang a hammock under the *palapa* was just $US 1 dollar per night. Private rooms had sand floors and were equipped only with a bed or a hammock inside. Catering to the pocketbooks of the 'wandering' travelers, the hotels were extremely inexpensive – especially when rented out for longer periods of time. It was normal for travelers to stay for months and 'set up camp' as one old drifter recalls:

> My first visit to Zipolite was in 1973. I ended up staying there for about a year. At that time there was no electricity. I lived with Ramon's family and with his in-laws, Maria and Manuel, two of the founders of the village. They were very old back then and told me some amazing stories of the place back in the days of their youth in the 1930s-1940s. We basically supported ourselves free diving with homemade Hawaiian slings. We would bring the catch back to Maria and she would cook it up and feed it to everyone. There was also a place owned by Filipa and Catalina. That's about it. I returned often during the 70s and 80s. I was there the night they turned on the electricity for the first time in February of 1976. Things started to change pretty quick after that (Anima, journal entry from Visitor's Comments about Zipolite, tomzap).

During the 1980s, Zipolite received more visitors after rumors reached home about the tolerance of nudity on the beach and the wide selection of drugs. "By 1982 the scene was more about drugs and less about anything else it seemed, though it was still fun. Between '82 and '90 I started seeing lots of opium and the beginnings of the cocaine influence" (Anima). Up until the late 1980s, the beach had been kept a fairly good secret. Backpackers and other adventure tourists still had to trek the five kilometer walk to Zipolite Beach as the paved road only went as far as the small fishing village of Puerto Angel. One backpacker recalls his time in Zipolite in 1987: "There was about 10-15 hammock hotels, and there weren't really any rules. It was dead cheap – I don't know… one or two dollars a night. And the beach…it was just….perfect,"

(Erik, 42). Residents seemed to have the same good memories as the backpackers: "In '89, '90 and '91, this place was still virgin territory," according to Pedro Guerrero, a long time resident of Zipolite. "There was no highway and there were no police.....There were turtles. There was total nudism on the beach and the best-looking foreign women. Pot was everywhere. And it was the best, the very best".

Change Hits Zipolite

The 1990s brought on much change and unrest to Zipolite. Increasing numbers of tourists also brought a rise of criminal activity. A police station was built at the eastern end of the town in 1993 (Penick 2005). Nudists were pushed down toward the west end of the beach as more conventional backpackers were not as keen on taking their clothes off as the hippies were. The paved road was extended all the way into Zipolite from Puerto Angel, continuing through to the nearby communities of San Agustinillo and Mazunte as well. Taxis and *collectivos* were introduced to the area, and more traffic flowed in and out of the town.

Crime became a problem; police began to control the beach 24-hours-a-day in order to minimize the amount of robberies and gang violence. A small jail was put in with an overnight holding tank for criminals before they got shipped off to the bigger, county jail. But the worst damage came from Hurricane Pauline which hit Zipolite on October 7, 1997. With 180 mph winds and 30-foot waves, the blossoming tourist destination was washed away in one day. No deaths occurred, but the damage to hotels, restaurants and homes was overwhelming. According to a hotel manager, "…it was probably the worst day of our lives because everything was taken away in five minutes*" (Tino, 32). The potential impact of such disasters on tourism development can be substantial both in the short and long term[14] (Rudkin and Hall 1996). After much work, things were rebuilt, and the town was up and running again within one year. Electrical lines were reinstalled and telephone lines followed shortly thereafter. Then, after such a struggle the residents had to get the electricity running again, an electrical

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[14] Cement became common in Zipolite after Pauline, in order to insure against damage by future hurricanes. Many people opposed to this because the introduction of cement meant the introduction of larger and more modern hotels.

fire burned at least six major beachfront hotels to the ground in 2001. This catastrophe pushed progress and expansion of the town back once again.

Zipolite Today

Thirty years after tourism was introduced to the small village, the local population of Zipolite has still not exceeded more than 800 inhabitants (Zipolite police records). The infrastructure in Zipolite can accommodate up to 3000 guests, outnumbering the locals four to one, according to an American hotel owner. The high season ranges from October to March or April, with the busiest time of the year being at *Semana Santa* or Easter week. The low season comes with the rain, from May to October. During the summer months, Zipolite hosts a good deal of domestic tourists from the bigger cities in Mexico looking for a beach get-a-way.

Map 4: Overview of Zipolite (Source: Costachica)

Local Infrastructure and Organization

A history of disasters in Zipolite has caused for some areas to develop more quickly than others. The town is set up as follows (see map below): All traffic enters Zipolite on the main road which is about a quarter-mile off the beach. Along this road you will find the police station, the local elementary school and a few run-down hotels and produce shops. There is no bank or post office in Zipolite.

Map 4: Organization of Zipolite[15] (Source: Solstice)

The two kilometer stretch of sandy beach is lined with various small-scale hotels
and restaurants. These establishments are painted with bright colors and 'beachy'
decorations. The 'downtown' of Zipolite consists of a dirt road just behind the beach on
the West end of town. The area is called *Colonia Roca Blanca*[16], after the name of the
road *Avenida Roca Blanca,* which refers to the gigantic rock in the ocean in front of
Zipolite that is covered in bird droppings. On this road there are five *tiendas* (small
grocery stores), one pay-phone, three Internet cafes, three clothing and jewelry shops
and a few taco-shops (mostly visited by locals). The disco is also located on this main
street, which plays extremely loud music on the weekends. I observed that the hotels
located in this central area were more popular with backpackers due to the proximity of
communication sources, food stores and a party scene.

The residents who do not own a hotel on the beach typically live just behind the
center of town in the hills of Zipolite. In this neighborhood there is one church
(Catholic), some small restaurants, laundry service shops and many chickens running
around. The poorest families live in stick houses roofed with aluminum and palm
leaves. Some of these families still live without running water and electricity. Others

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[15] I do not mean to advertise for Solstice Yoga. This map is only used because it was the most descriptive
map showing the structure of Zipolite I could find. I tried several times to draw my own map, but none of
them were as clear as this one.
[16] A detailed map of Colonia Roca Blanca can be found in Appendix 2, which identifies all restaurants,
hotels and shops in the area.

can afford cement walls and have built more modern homes. The most extravagant homes with views are found higher up the hill, and are mostly inhabited by foreign interests. The eastern end of the town is not as developed as the western end. There are a few hotels and restaurants here, as well as the police station, the library, the elementary school and a football field.

Accommodations and Businesses in Zipolite

As of yet, there are no Four-star hotels in the town of Zipolite. In fact, most hotels would not qualify for One-star. The accommodations are basic and have managed to maintain a 60s-style-vibe of communal living, giving the impression that the village is still 'primitive'. These hotels are also reasonably priced for domestic tourists. During the time of my field study, I counted 35 hotels and 23 restaurants in Zipolite. The following information describes the different types of establishment available in Zipolite which attract the budget traveler. Using the mentality of a backpacker, I begin with the most economical options first.

Hammock Hotels and Campsites

The most economical way to sleep in Zipolite is definitely renting or hanging up one's own hammock under a thatched roof called a *palapa* for just $US 3-5. The price includes a locker to put luggage and personal belongings in - but as these lockers do not always come with a lock, this type of accommodation can be problematic for some unprepared backpackers concerned with thievery. At least 20 establishments offer this type of accommodation during the high season (when the beach is longer owing to lower tides). It is especially popular amongst backpackers or independent travelers to purchase a hand-made hammock while in Mexico. This single purchase serves a very useful purpose both as a bed and a souvenir, which is also easy to travel with. It also denotes experience. The quote below illustrates one traveler's appreciation of his hammock:

> I have to wait three more days until my hammock will be finished. Tino's sisters are making it for me. I'm getting it triple woven so that it will be

totally mosquito proof. And it's gonna be so big that *three* people can
sleep in it. (Laughter) But I think I am just going to wrap myself up in it,
you know, like a spider does to a fly, to keep me safe from those bugs,
man. It's gonna be awesome – by far the best purchase of my trip
(Aaron, American, 32)

Travelers with cars can sleep for even lower prices in Zipolite. The Trailer Park Las Palmeras charges just $US 2 per vehicle and offers electrical hookups and bathrooms. Here, people can set up tents and keep their valuables locked in their car. Yet, setting up camp in any other area is prohibited by the local authorities. According to Police Officer Marco Ledesma, this is because it takes business away from the hotels and thievery has been a big problem in the past.

Dormitories with Communal Kitchens

The next cheapest accommodation in Zipolite is to sleep in a bunk bed in a shared dormitory room. This costs around $US 5-7 at the following hotels: Shambhala, Posada Navidad, and Posada Emmanuel and Chololo's. Dorm-style sleeping arrangements are a common feature in accommodations known as youth hostels.

Cabañas or Bungalows

Guests looking for more privacy, yet still on a budget, may opt for staying in a *cabaña*. A basic *cabaña* is very primitive. It consists of one room built from bamboo or another light wood which is covered with some palm leaves. There may not be windows, as there is often no floor, just the sand itself. Depending on the establishment, there may be a basic bed inside, or merely hooks to hang up a hammock with. These simple *cabañas* cost anywhere from $US 8-12 dollars (Roca Blanca, Cabanas Zipolite, Posada Mexico), while more high-scale ones with showers and mosquito nets can cost up to $US 50 dollars (El Paraiso, El Alquemista, La Volantina). *Cabañas* are popular with guests looking to 'get closer to nature' with their rustic appearances. They also allow guests to experience a 'local ways of living', as many of the hosts live in *cabañas* year round.

Hotels

Conventional hotel rooms are also available for tourists or backpackers with a higher budget. Some backpackers treat themselves to hotel rooms as a reward for surviving on the road for such a long time (Suzie, Australian, 29). Hotel prices vary in Zipolite, according to cleanliness and location. Mexican owned San Cristobal Hotel Zipolite has by far the nicest rooms ($US 25) I have seen in Zipolite – as far as cleanliness goes. The 28 rooms have views of the court-yard garden and beachfront restaurant. Yet, just across the street, Posada Esmeralda offers rooms ($US 9) that resemble a whore house. The drunken staff hanging outside in front of the liquor store wasn't very comforting either. The largest hotel in Zipolite as of yet is a four-story, 30 room ($US15-25) concrete building called Brisa Marina.

Photo 3: Brisa Marina Hotel (Source: tomzap, photo by: Cathie Leavitt)

The American owner, Daniel Wiener, is proud of his contribution to the town, while other locals feel his hotel is too commercial for the rustic style of the town. Either way, it remains popular with the international backpacker crowd. But Daniel is soon to be outdone by a massive 100 room hotel which is currently under construction next door to him by a Swiss developer.

Restaurants and Bars

Zipolite has an exquisite cuisine. In addition to the delicious local dishes found in several restaurants, expatriates from the US, Argentina, Italy, France, Switzerland and Germany have opened restaurants and cafes that offer dishes from their respective cultures. There is something for everyone – vegetarian food at Shambhala, Mediterranean food at El Bodegon, Italian specialties, video nights and free tiramisu at Buono Vida, Stone-baked fish at La Piedra, traditional food plus excellent pizzas at 3.deciembre, a continental cuisine at Argentinean-owned El Alquemista and real espresso (not Nescafe) at the Swiss-owned Peter Pan Coffeeshop. Many restaurants are situated on the seashore with the tables and chairs in the sand.

During the high season, Zipolite has a buzzing nightlife. Weighed down by the rarity of having 'too much time' on their hands, backpackers solve this problem by 'wasting time' – or rather, 'getting wasted' (Tveit, 2002). The beachfront restaurants turn into nighttime hangouts after the sun goes down. Places like the French-owned Pacha Mama offer a bar on the beach, candle lights in home-made, paper lamps and live music. El Alquemista even has swings for barstools above the sand. Some locals can be found inter-mingling with backpackers at such establishments, although many prefer local bars with Spanish music. A favorite hangout for locals is at La Puesta, a bar with pool tables on the main road. Tourists are not always welcomed here. While there are some feelings of hostility toward tourists by the host population, most locals have adapted to and even enjoy living with tourism. These attitudes will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Activities in Zipolite

Lounging on the beach is probably the most popular activity in Zipolite, but contemporary backpackers are often looking for other 'alternative' activities to occupy their time in the enclave. Eco-tourism has made its way into the area in the form of guided snorkeling tours, tours at the Turtle Museum in Mazunte and even a crocodile safari. New Age tourism has also been introduced to the village by foreign settlers. The beautiful meditation gardens at Gloria's Shambhala and Brigitte's Solstice Yoga retreat

and vacation center are thus businesses targeted at tourists looking to 'get in touch with their spiritual side'.

Conclusion

This chapter has given in depth information concerning the physical setting, location, history and modern infrastructure found in the Mexican village of Zipolite. Economic, environmental and socio-cultural specific information was also given about the destination and its people. The aim of this chapter was to describe the setting of my case study and to illustrate how Zipolite has become built up as a backpacker enclave. The case study will now look at what goes on inside this enclave by analyzing interactions, perceptions and attitudes of the complex community in the village. The following chapters focus on the ways that the 'local' and 'global' converge in the everyday lives of the inhabitants of Zipolite through Geertz inspired 'thick description' anecdotes and interviews with my subjects of study.

Chapter 4: The Settlers of Zipolite

MacCannell (1976:171) claims that hippies have functioned world wide as the 'shocktroops' of mass tourism. He continues:

> They opened up Mexico in the 1960s and are now concentrating their
> energies on the overland route from Western Europe to India, finding the
> communities, cafes and hostelries that can handle the traffic. They teach
> the service personnel the language of tourism, which is Partial English.

The hippies made their way to Zipolite in the late 60s. They traveled as drifters who believed "reality and authenticity to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler life-styles" (MacCannell 1976: 3). Considered drop-outs from their respective societies back home, MacCannell says that these alienated individuals were seeking to attach themselves to an 'elective center' beyond the boundaries of the modern world. Zipolite became transformed into an 'ideal village' (Tucker 1997) as the group of hippies began to develop the village as a hippie-colony. In their attempts to 'go native', these 'settlers' learned Spanish, wore ethnic clothing and took on the 'primitive' lifestyle of the indigenous Mexican and created a tight community amongst themselves. This chapter aims to discuss the different relationships this community has with the local inhabitants as well as with other 'alternative' tourists staying inside Zipolite.

Relationships within the Settler Community

> The reason we all get along…is because we all come from somewhere
> else (Daniel, American, 56).

The settler community of Zipolite unites in their individual differences and their shared respect for the village. There are no universal markers for these settlers, no shared symbols of identity, no single common language or physical boundaries; however they do appear to share a desire for freedom of thought and movement and a need to escape from restraints (Macleod 1997: 134). The community consists primarily of western nationalities, but also includes Mexicans who have migrated to Zipolite from other parts of the country. Relationships within the foreign local community are usually

pleasant, and it is commonly believed that people are accepted for 'who they are'. Daniel, who has lived in the town for nine years, feels that all foreign locals are equally ranked in the village. He explains:

> Since no one's really from there, nobody can be more local than the next guy. The way I see it, you can pretty much do whatever the hell you want, and nobody's gonna look twice. That's the beauty of Zipolite (Daniel, American, 56).

Yet, according to Beth, a Canadian who has lived in the village for over five years, there is class stratification within the foreign local society. "It takes more than five years to be 'in' with the long-term locals. But, if you stay through the rainy season, people take you more seriously and like you better." Although she does associate often with Mexican locals, Beth told me that most of her closest friends in the village are other foreigners. She feels that the foreigners are always seen as outsiders no matter how long they have lived there. "Zipolite is a town where two different worlds collide. Our culture is so different than theirs that neither group will ever really understand each other all the way." This following section looks at instances when these two worlds meet.

Interactions with the Ethnic Locals

In their attempt to penetrate the local society, the settlers have come into direct contact with the ethnic local community in a number of ways. The have developed relationships with the natives as employers, friends, enemies, lovers and strangers. This contact has led to changing views within the native community. This section examines some typical encounters between the settlers and the natives I observed during my field study. These encounters all offer examples of how the local community has been affected by contact with the settlers.

As Employers

Brisa Marina Hotel, Colonia Roca Blanca, Playa Zipolite: It is early in the morning and Daniel and his employee are in the reception arguing. Daniel is yelling at

Tino in bad Spanish. Daniel thinks that Tino does not work hard enough and doesn't take his job seriously. Tino just rolls his eyes and walks away.

This brief encounter I observed between the foreign employer and local employee exemplifies how things can go wrong when the cultural differences collide in the work place. Although, Tino has worked for the American Daniel for nearly five years, the employer and employee still argue over their different work ethics. Yet, Daniel cannot fire Tino, because he has close relationship with Tino's family[17]. When Daniel arrived in Zipolite nine years ago, he needed a Mexican to partner up with in order to secure his property. Thus, Daniel and the Mexican family became co-owners of the property and Daniel opened up his business. He fulfilled his promise and has employed several members of the family over the years. Therefore, both the employer and the employee become economically dependent on each other.

As Drug Dealers

Colonia Roca Blanca, Playa Zipolite: I see two men arguing behind a building not far from the main road. They yelling gets really loud and I start to feel uncomfortable. I start to walk the other way, but I end up right in the middle of a fight. The men are pushing and shoving and waving a small white bag of powder around. It seems that the local Mexican man was trying to steal drugs from the aggressive Italian settler. The Italian is bleeding and screaming and the local man runs away.

Hippie culture is known for its experimentation with a wide-range of drugs, and Zipolite exemplifies this. Traditional Indian use of drugs existed before the hippies settled the village, but not typically for recreational purposes.

> In the 70s, most people just smoked dope and took psychedelics. But in the 80s, a bunch of Italians brought in some harder stuff. By the 90s, a large number of the Mexican population was addicted to heroine and

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[17] Deed restrictions limit the outright sale of land to foreign interests. All land is public in Zipolite and any purchase of the land must be 51 percent Mexican. Foreigners solve this problem by 'teaming up' with an ethnic local in order to open a business. Local Mexicans are usually willing to do this because it gives them a chance to become a land-owner and opens up business opportunities. These situations have become problematic in the past (Beth, Canadian, 34).

cocaine. Its really sad actually – the hippies really fucked up their society
in that sense (Daniel, American, 56).

During my study, I noticed many settlers and other travelers openly consuming alcohol and drugs. This influence has also been passed onto some members of the ethnic community. I often saw a group of local drunks sitting together in the center of town harassing foreign girls. To avoid these problems, the local police force has tried to crack down on drug related crimes. But the drug culture of Zipolite seems to be unstoppable, as experimental settlers and backpackers keep the drug industry in business.

As Lovers

Playa del Amor, Zipolite: I see Lucia (43), an Argentinean settler practicing Yoga on the beach. She is topless, wearing only very skimpy bikini bottom. Her long hair flows in the as she changes positions. A young, local man has been watching her from the rocks. He finally gets up the nerve to go over and talk to Lucia. She ignores his presence at first, and he gets closer. He is staring at her breasts but she seems not to notice. After a while, she stops doing Yoga and sits down to chat with the man. They go for a swim together and when they get out of the water, the couple leaves the beach holding hands. I do not think Lucia knew this man much before, and I am surprised at her promiscuity.

It has become a common phenomenon for the local men of Zipolite to become romantically involved with foreign or western women staying in the village. In the largely Catholic Mexican society, women are left home to take care of the children and the homestead. While their wives are stuck at home, many Mexican men are out being promiscuous with the more liberal (and less clothed or often nude) white women (both settlers and backpackers). These female tourists and settlers are perceived as 'not caring about virginity' (Tucker 1997: 113) and therefore represent limitless opportunities for local men to prove their own sexual prowess. During my research, I heard a story of one local man of Zipolite who had gotten four different white women pregnant. Although this man's sexual identity was most likely strengthened a great deal through these sexual encounters, he was looked down upon by the ethnic community for breaking

traditional gender roles. In order to avoid loosing respect from the ethnic locals, one female settler warned me, "Don't get too involved with the local guys, it usually turns into a sticky situation" (Beth, Canadian, 34).

As the 'Other'

This settler-local encounter illustrates an example of a two-way cultural misunderstanding. I heard a story of one American settler who has been trying to re-implement the use of adobe homes in the village, because he thinks this original material suits the primitive image of the town. Adobe has been used by the Zapotecs for centuries, but they have stopped because the material did not hold up in the rainy season. Disregarding this factor, the American man offered to build a poor Zapotec family a new home out of adobe for free. When they had finished moving in, they invited the man over to see their new place. To his surprise, the family had used all of their savings to purchase a large-screen TV, a DVD player and a high-tech stereo. The man couldn't understand why they would want such items. They represented everything their primitive culture was not. He looked at the family with disdain for not trying to preserve aspects of their ancient culture.

The increased value in material goods by is one cultural adaptation the natives have borrowed from the settlers. In this example, the family prioritizes western dreams of wealth and status symbols over preserving their traditions. This is ironic, because without the western influence brought to the ethnic locals, the family would probably not have the desire to purchase such goods. These examples have shown how the weaker, native culture is susceptible to the influences of the stronger, western culture.

Interactions with the Contemporary Backpackers

Over years of contact with the locals, the hippies have become successfully integrated into the local area as one of the sights to be seen there by straighter tourists (MacCannell 1973: 172). Through the blending of traveler norms with local customs, the settlers have created a hybrid culture (Hylland Eriksen 1993). This hybrid culture thus becomes *the* attraction as the more conventional backpackers preoccupied with

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identity striving to adapt to these alternative norms and values. I argue that the settler community has made themselves into a tourist attraction in order to attract more conventional backpackers.

Effort to maintain Zipolite's image as a village lost in the rustic past is what MacCannell (1976) refers to as 'staged authenticity' put on by the settler community in their effort to professionalize the infrastructure of the village. The goal of professionalization is to preserve and enhance the area's reputation and thereby ensure the long-term benefits of a continuous and growing flow of tourists (Cohen 1996:57). This case is unique in the sense that it is not the ethnic locals that are 'playing the natives' in the enclave. Realizing business potential, some of these foreign settlers have implemented factors of their hippie culture into the primitive setting in order to increase alternative tourist visits. The native culture seems to be left in the background, as the settlers are the ones 'performing' or 'selling' aspects of their 'hippie' culture for profit. I understand the motivation for making money out of their alternative life-ways as being the desire to maintain this alternative/hippie style of living. Without the income from the backpacker clientele who put up with lesser standards in order to ensure cheaper prices, the hippies will most likely be out of business once mainstream tourists comes to the village. Settler interaction with backpackers is thus largely a result of economic benefits.

As Hippies

Pacha Mama, Roca Blanca, Playa Zipolite: The sun has set and the stars have just begun to peek out from the dimming sky. I am sitting with a group of backpackers having some after dinner drinks at a popular beach-front hangout. A couple of other backpacker crowds are dispersed around the small restaurant. At around 10'oclock, more people start coming. They look more like locals than backpackers. Shortly after, a band starts to play. The five band members looked as if they had just stepped off of Haight Street in 1969, and their music had reminded me of the Grateful Dead. The two vocalists could have been Sonny and Cher back in their hay day, with their bell-bottomed pants and tambourines. The man playing the bongo drums wasn't wearing a

shirt, and his black curls bounced with every beat of the drum. The man playing the guitar and the man with the flute both had Thai-fisherman pants on and long hair. The local crowd was dancing, singing and laughing to the music. My backpacker crew was sitting back in the corner at a private table, when a hippie woman approached us. "Hola, me llamo Natalie…", she began. It turns out that French Natalie is the proprietor of Pacha Mama and that she wants to offer us a drink if we get up and dance. Her offer was enticing, as she made us backpackers feel welcomed in the 'authentic' hippie scene inside Zipolite. Without hesitation, the backpackers got up and made an attempt to 'groove' until the free drinks were received. Yet, afterwards, most of the backpackers secluded back to their table in the corner.

In using this anecdote, I wish to express one example of the foreign community of Zipolite trying to craft the 'free spirit' of the town. While of course, these settlers may be enjoying themselves on stage, they are actually performing a live, hippie-act which maintains Zipolite's image as a hippie/backpacker paradise. The alternativeness of the village is what attracts many backpackers looking for something off-the-beaten-track. Therefore, it is of major importance for the settlers of Zipolite to preserve this image, in order to ensure their small-scale standard of living. After the concert, I observed the band selling home-made CDs to their audience, which enforces the fact that these hippies are not merely satisfied with 'peace, love and happiness'. Money plays a role in the band's motivation to play for an audience of backpackers. The following interview illustrates how one foreign local prospers in 'hippie-land'.

The above mentioned Natalie has lived in Zipolite for four years. Her restaurant/bar has become a popular backpacker hangout, known for its international food selection and 'authentic' atmosphere. One would never guess by her appearance that she was a trained chef in France. Her head is full of red-ringlets and she wears at least two dozen silver bangles on her right arm. I saw her frequently dressed in flowing skirts and backless tops. She told me she is very happy with her business and loves the lifestyle of her favorite village in the world.

Zipolite is so special. It is a mix of so many cultures. But as it is getting bigger now, I am afraid that it can change. Different tourists are coming and they don't care about the town's history. I hope that my business contributes to the good vibes here. We have to thank the hippies who made the town for the way it is. I don't want that to disappear. I want to help keep it real, to give a cool place for people to enjoy (Natalie, French, 33).

Foreign entrepreneurs like Natalie, contribute to keep the 'hippie vibe' alive in Zipolite, three decades after the first hippies set foot on the beach. Natalie is not merely concerned with making money in Zipolite, she is more concerned with living her life the way she wants to. She explains, "Pacha Mama is not about the money. It is about having a job I love and being happy. The restaurant makes me to support myself and to continue traveling when I have some time". Natalie's laid-back mentality gives her restaurant a hippie-feel to it, which attracts younger backpackers looking for 'authentic hangouts' of the 'original drifters'[18] in far-off places.

As Cultural Brokers

As hosts, the foreign settlers of Zipoltie often take on the role of the cultural broker. Cultural brokers act as mediators between tourist and hosts, normally as guides, translators or sources of information (Mathieson & Wall 1992: 163). These educated foreigners (meaning not from Zipolite) essentially take business away from the ethnic locals who cannot speak English. Some of these middle-men, entrepreneurs and cultural transformers try to structure to their own advantage transactions between the two systems brought together by tourism.

Playa Zipolite*:* I am walking along the beach and a man approaches me holding a book. Here are lines from our conversation:

Hector: Hello my name is Hector. Are you interested in nature? Have a look in my book. See, there are dolphins and turtles and many fishes. Would you like to go snorkeling? I am in the *Lonely Planet*.

Heidi: Maybe. How much does it cost?

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[18] The term 'original drifter' can now be compared to the term 'real backpacker' which I will discuss in the following chapter.

Hector: It is very cheap for you, my friend. Only $US 10. I pick you up tomorrow. Be at the hotel at 9:00 and you will see my whale van.

Heidi: Oh yeah, that is your van. It is great. Well, ok. I will be there tomorrow morning.

Hector (37) is a Mexican entrepreneur who owns a dive-shop in Puerto Angel. Born in Mexico City, Hector migrated to Zipolite in order to be closer to the ocean. He opened a small-scale dive shop. He transformed a Volkswagen bus to resemble a whale (tail and all) which he drives along the highway everyday as a form of advertisement for his business. Hector thus uses the ocean savvy locals in order to make a profit off of nature-seeking tourists. While on the tour the next day, I spoke with Hector about his business:

> The environment has become an important issue in the tourism industry. My tour guides offer tourists a way to get closer to nature at a reasonable price. I am listed in the Lonely Planet book which I think increases my business (Hector, Mexican, 37).

Hector he told me that backpackers are the most typical tourists on his guided tours because they are always looking for adventure. This exemplifies the desire backpackers have to embark on risk-taking activities. Yet, he also notes that the backpackers are looking for 'safe-dangers'. They want to be adventurous, but, they are willing to pay a small fee to secure their safety. While I took the mistake of believing backpackers to be more environmentally friendly than mass tourists, I realize that they are more inclined to go to natural parks or participate in nature tours because they are usually free or relatively cheap. This proves that contemporary backpackers are more driven by their desire for adventure and their slim wallets, than by their love for nature. Hector's business targets these low- budget tourists looking for a 'real' experience in an exotic landscape. Yet, as Hector is a *chilango*, his business may actually exploit the indigenous Mexicans by putting them to work for him for low-wages.

Settler Perceptions of the Ethnic Locals

The 'original drifters' who settled Zipolite were romantic in the sense that they idolized the Mexican and wanted to become integrated into this foreign culture. Some

of my modern-day settler subjects claimed to have had meaningful relationships with Zapotec families living in the village:

> Some days I will sit for hours talking with the Zapotec locals outside of the taco shop on the main road. These people respect me as I do not have a reputation as a slut or as a drug addict. I try to be involved in their lives but it is not always easy. I have been invited a few times for dinner at one family's home, but the relationships I have with the locals are definitely limited compared to those I have with other foreigners here (Beth, Canadian, 34).

While Beth makes an effort to get involved with the ethnic community, the same cannot be said for all of the modern-day settlers I encountered. I noticed an elite group of foreign residents trying to segregate themselves from the Mexicans. Part of their plan was to build a private school for their English speaking children, because these foreigners were not satisfied with the local school system. These parents seem to disregard the fact that they will be responsible for the exclusion of their children from the ethnic community if this action takes place. This segregation does not seem very healthy for settler-local relationships. Criticizing the negative perceptions of her peers, Beth proposes the question: "If they don't like the locals, then what on Earth are they doing here?"

I heard other foreign locals complaining about the Mexicans as being lazy and not having good work ethics. Daniel expresses this feeling when he refers to the Mexicans he employs at his hotel:

> I can't believe Tino, asking for more vacation time! He just had one week off. I probably pay these guys more than any of the other hotels would, and they are still not happy. Maybe if he'd get off his ass and do something, I'd consider giving him more time off.

Another new Swiss settler/developer stated:

> It's always *mañana, mañana* for these guys. I am looking to get my place up and running as quickly as possible, but at this rate, it'll never get finished. I always heard Mexicans were hard workers, but I find that to be the case (Rolf, Swiss, 43).

Because the Mexicans provide a cheap labor force for the Western entrepreneurs, Rolf does not complain too much. Yet, tourism in the Third World is about more than mere economics. Cultural differences must be confronted, and I observed a number of modern-day settlers who have lost respect for their 'hosts' in Zipolite. Now let's see how the settlers react when the tables are turned, and they take on the role as 'hosts' to the backpacker tourists visiting the village.

Settler Perceptions of the Backpackers

The development of the town by the settlers has been targeted at backpacker tourism for decades. By *only* building budget accommodations and offering an alternative tourist infrastructure, the settlers got what they asked for. But how do the group of hippies living in the village feel about the backpackers coming to stay there?

> A lot of [members of the international community] have traveled as backpackers in the past, before settling down here. So, of course we respect them, it is just that the whole backpacking thing is becoming so mainstream that it's hard for us with more hippie spirit to understand them anymore (Natalie, French, 33).

Natalie's quote illustrates the noticeable change in backpacking today. But the more conventional backpackers are still preferred over mainstream tourists by the foreign community. This is because the two groups share similar value systems that can both be considered 'alternative'. American Daniel also expresses preference to backpacker tourists over the 'mainstream Yankee type' when he told me:

> What the hell do you think I got outta the US for? I was sick and tired of being surrounded by fat conservatives wearing Hawaiian shirts to the beach. Sure, backpackers are cheaper than luxury tourists, but who cares! I gladly do business with them - at least the backpackers are not afraid to express a little freakiness sometimes.

Natalie agrees with Daniel when she says, "I prefer backpackers over normal tourists because they want to see the place for what it is, not just in a resort". This statement is ironic, because I see that Zipolite has become a resort targeted at backpackers who 'want to feel different'.

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Yet, most of the foreign locals in the village do not associate with backpackers on a deep social level. While the settler community is usually polite and informative to their backpacker 'guests', they do not typically befriend them, unless the backpacker ends up staying in the village for an extended period of time. This shallow relationship between backpackers and settlers occurs due to the fast pace of backpacker travel today. Culturally, the settlers relate to the value-system of backpackers more than they relate to the ethnic locals. But the quick backpacker infiltration in-and-out of the village denies them access into the local community.

> When I first moved here I had a lot of contact with the backpackers, probably because I felt like I was still traveling myself. But with time, I got so tired of always having the same conversations with people and then they just leave the next day. Now I try to focus on making lasting relationships with the people I know I will see tomorrow (Beth, Canadian, 34).

Beth expresses that she is fed up with 'wasting her energy' trying to befriend backpackers and prefers concentrating on maintaining relationships that will last more than a week. But this is not because she does not like the backpackers. She states, "The backpackers are not a problem. Most of them are cool, if you take the time to get to know them. But if you look at them from afar, they all seem the same" (ibid). This generalization of backpackers by the settlers creates another type of segregation within the village. For example, backpackers are not typically invited to parties at the foreign locals' homes, nor are they seen hanging out with many settlers unless it is business oriented.

Analysis of the Settlers' Attitudes

The word I would best use to describe the members of the settler community is 'hippie'. I met many settlers who still embrace hippie-culture in its fullest – from the dreadlocks, to the flowing dresses to the dirty, bare feet. These hippies have made Zipolite their home, but they still do not necessarily feel accepted by the local community. I believe some of these individuals have earned the right to be called locals, while some of them are merely posing as hippies. Many of these individuals still

express romantic values about maintaining their 'ideal' community. I was even told that problematic would be physically removed from the village.

> That's right, if they are going to make problems for us, we have to take them out. You have to remember, that we who live here think this village is the best place in the world. We have to do our best to protect it (Brigitte, Belgian, 40).

This quote expresses a colonial attitude I found present amongst the settler community. Afraid of loosing their pristine way of life to mass tourists, the settlers have been active in preserving and selling aspects of the hybrid hippie-culture the town is now famous for. I thus noticed a change in the attitude of some of the settlers, who expressed their concern for maintaining and even increasing business in the village. Daniel, the American owner of the three-story Brisa Marina hotel in *Colonia Roca Blanca*, claims responsibility for much of the commercialization of Zipolite. He has talked with all of the popular guide books about Zipolite with hopes of increasing business for his popular hotel.

> I don't care if people think I am destroying Zipolite, because I am not at all. I am trying to ensure money coming in this town. So sure, I talk to all the guidebooks to try to give Zipolite a good rep. The Brits are the biggest assholes because they are lazy and don't review the information. [The *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide*] tell people not to even come here. That just scares people away (Daniel, American, 56).

According to Daniel, Zipolite's bad reputation of a dangerous ocean, crime and drugs will keep the luxury tourists out and therefore remain to grow at a slow, sustainable pace. It is a place for Mexican tourists and budget tourists. He tells me that there are few places as tolerant as Zipolite left in the world and that in itself is what draws the more curious travelers here.

> Change is inevitable because hippies have turned into a dying breed. When I first came here in the seventies, it was cooler – more drums and more bonfires. I didn't expect the market to change, it just did. The backpackers today are looking for that old scene (ibid).

Daniel has noticed a change in the type of tourists coming to Zipolite in the nine years he has owned his hotel there. Before the average tourist was in the range of 18-22-years-of-age and now the average has changed to 25-35-years-of-age. These older travelers have more money and can afford to spend a bit more, but they can still not afford to stay pay the high-rates at a resort. Daniel and the other settlers have acknowledged the change in the backpacking market. In their efforts to keep Zipolite 'cool', these free-spirited individuals have implemented various 'backpacker friendly' services which now attract contemporary backpackers looking to get a taste of the hippie-lifestyle that existed here once upon a time.

Conclusion

The settler community that resides in Zipolite views the enclave as an 'ideal village' (Tucker 1997) where they can forget about the constraints of modern civilization. Many members of this group are ex-patriots, drifters, travelers and hippies who have rejected the conventional societies of their respective homes and found peace in the slow-paced Mexican village. A number of settlers have consciously tried to incorporate Mexican values into their lives. Attempting to 'go native', the settlers often dress in ethnic clothing, enjoy Mexican cuisine and speak Spanish. Yet, as their dominant culture overrides the weaker Mexican traditions, the Mexicans prove to be more susceptible to their influence. The settlers have thus 'colonized' the village with their businesses, loose morals and western values. This 'colonization' has lead to the development of the town in a particular way which now attracts more 'alternative' tourists to the village.

However, the settler community has not been completely accepted into the community by the natives. Cultural differences have made it difficult for the two groups to have a mutual understanding of each other. Therefore, the relationships between the natives and their now permanent guests have impacted the host community in a number of ways. Laws prohibiting the outright sale of land to foreigners have caused the settlers to depend on the natives for rights to land and property ownership. This dependency has created employment opportunities for the ethnic locals who had no dominant industry in

their village before the introduction of the tourist system. In recent times, a number of settlers have become Mexican citizens in order to avoid business partnerships with the locals. This act may eventually exploit the locals, as they are no longer needed by the settlers with business aspirations. Outside the workplace, the settlers have created relationships with the locals as friends, lovers and peers. Since the settlers interact with the locals on a daily basis, they have a strong influence on the host population. From the data pertaining to the interactions, perceptions and attitudes of the settlers presented in this chapter, I speculate possible socio-cultural impacts on the host community in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5: The Backpackers of Zipolite

Brisa Marina Hotel, Colonia Roca Blanca, Playa Zipolite: Two figures arise on the horizon of the east end of the beach. Their shadows dance on the sand behind their bulging backpacks of which they so badly want to set down after a long journey. The sun is slowly setting in the west, as a slight, on-shore wind fights the ocean currents, causing the waves to collide into each other from different directions. The figures approach the hotel where I am swaying back-and-forth in my hammock under the *palapa*. One of them points in my direction and nods his head eagerly. The other one squints at his *Lonely Planet* guidebook and breaks into a smile. The 'Bible' has proved trust-worthy yet again. Another segment of their backpacking scavenger hunt has been completed. A new-found confidence in their walk makes them look like modern-day Conquistadores, as they marvel at the beauty and emptiness of this seemingly secret beach and set out on their next mission to find the cheapest (and coolest) accommodation possible.

This anecdote exemplifies how the contemporary backpackers I encountered in Zipolite differed greatly from the drifter-like settlers who were introduced in the previous chapter. While the settlers arrived in Zipolite with neo-colonial aspirations of creating the 'ideal village' where they could live for an extended period of time amongst the natives, today's backpackers arrive in the village with the assistance of organized guidebooks and Internet reservations and only plan to stay for a few days. Backpackers have thus become a more conventionalized version of the drifter, coming to Zipolite to refuel from long journeys on the road, to enjoy some comforts of home and to get travel advice. One purpose of this chapter is to document how the backpackers behave and interact inside the enclave. Through an analysis of Bradt's backpacker ideology, I show that the preoccupation with backpacker culture limits the interactions between backpackers and locals. This limited interaction makes them seemingly indifferent than mass tourists. The chapter also reviews how my backpacker subjects perceive the settlers and the ethnic locals in order to draw conclusions about the diverse backpacker attitudes present in Zipolite today.

Contemporary Backpacker Culture

Like the settlers, backpackers unite in their opposition to 'ordinary tourists' as on respondent claimed that these tourists were "uninteresting and often annoying people" (Christian, American, 32). Therefore, they are drawn to meet other like-minded travelers inside backpacker enclaves, which serve as a 'breeding ground' for backpacker culture. It has been argued that backpacker culture is tourist sub-culture based on a learned and shared symbolic system of meaning and values, beliefs and attitudes which thus shape and influence perception and behavior (Richards & Wilson 2004). Fitzgerald (2000) explains how backpacker culture can be considered tribal:

> Easily recognized, their garb is a strange hybrid of cultures, the rich
> pickings from a global bazaar: wide-legged batik trousers from
> Indonesia; multi-hued saris from India worn with tattered Birkenstocks
> or Nikes; pseudo-tribal tattoos and multi-pierced orifices; surf T-shirts;
> ubiquitous tie-dyed sarongs, braided hair, and a pirate's hoard of silver
> on fingers, wrists, necks, and ankles.

Most of my conventionalized backpacker subjects fit a less hippie and more sporty profile – frequently spotted wearing Teva sports sandals and pants that unzip into shorts. Increased popularity in this method of travel has developed a variety of outdoor products targeted at this niche market. Modern marketing schemes have made it easy to purchase the 'backpacker look', by buying the right products. These include high-tech backpacks, all-weather outdoor gear, hiking boots, fast-drying towels, travel size cooking utensils and water-proof money belts. The use of these items denotes one's membership in the backpacker community.

Experimenting with new identities and statuses is a major part of backpacker culture. Since traveling entails the dangers of leaving the community where work and social role offer a sense of identity, and entering another community where personal roots and recognition do not exist (Voase, 1995), people are forced to build new statuses based on their travel method, experience and appearance. Backpackers typically judge each other based physical appearance as Italian Lucas (29) explains:

When I meet people on the road, it doesn't matter where they come from or what they do back home for a living. I judge them more by the kind of clothes they are wearing, or how traveled they look. If they look more roughed-up and tanned, I am more willing to take travel advice from them.

Lucas's quote illustrates how important status indicators within backpacker culture. I observed that backpackers are constantly comparing themselves to other backpackers in order to determine who holds a higher status based on the use of values, signs or symbols prevalent to backpacker culture. Important backpacker symbols include use of the Lonely Planet guidebook, carrying a backpack, sporting a dirty appearance and wearing ethnic clothing. One Dutch interviewee explains how he judges other backpackers based on the size of their backpack. Minimalism thus signifies expertise in the backpacker culture.

The smaller the pack, the better. If someone has a really small pack, it means that he has been backpacking before and learned not to bring too much stuff with him. It means experience to me (G.G., Dutch, 27).

G.G. had been traveling a few times before and had a fairly small pack. He was proud of his 'experienced' look as a backpacker and felt that others respected him. "People are always coming to ask me advice. Do I look like I know what's going on or what? (Laughter) I guess they think I am 'hardcore' when they see me in this ugly football jersey everyday, because I didn't bring anything else!" G.G.'s rough appearance gained him prestige within the backpacking culture based on his perceived ability to master backpacker ideology.

Backpacker Ideology

As stated in Chapter 1, a current example of backpacker ideology was defined by Bradt (1995) which lists the top five values of backpacker culture. Based on the data obtained in my interviews, I argue that a sixth characteristic should be added to Bradt's definition of backpacker ideology. My updated version of the ideology is thus: 1) to travel on a budget, 2) to meet different people (other travelers and locals), 3) to be (or to feel) free and open minded, 4) to organize one's own journey individually and

independently, 5) to travel as long as possible, and 6) to develop the self through achieving personal goals. A backpacker who displays all of these characteristics may be considered a 'real' or 'hardcore' backpacker. I define a 'real' backpacker as someone who strictly follows backpacker ideology. In doing this, a 'real' backpacker still manages to travel in the old-fashioned, drifter manner without a set schedule and without an idea of when they plan to return home – if they plan to do so at all. The descriptions of 'real' backpackers by my subjects were also reminiscent of the drifter. Thus, a 'real' backpacker is also said to be:

> someone who is well-traveled, never takes a shower, wears old clothes, doesn't use a guidebook, travels alone, hangs out with the locals, spends as little money as possible and never knows where he will be the next day (Lina, Swedish, 23).

> I guess they are you know, hippie-ish, they usually have tattoos or piercings and a lot of them have dreadlocks and wear tribal clothing. They are loners and don't care about being in the backpacker scene. Sometimes they can be intimidating because if say, I don't look as cool as them, they probably won't talk to me (Charlie, Australian, 28).

I cannot say whether 'real' or 'hardcore' backpackers really exist or are only a myth, as I met none which matched the above descriptions during my field study. The closest example would have to be Tom, a 27-year-old Israeli (who looks like Jesus with his long hair and beard), never wears a T-shirt and always wears Peruvian pants with holes in them. He is an experienced traveler, as this trip is his fourth trip as a backpacker. He's been to India twice: the first time after finishing the military, and the second time making a documentary film about Israeli backpacker-romances in Goa. Last year he went to South America alone, where he picked up some Spanish through hitch-hiking. Although he may look like a 'real' backpacker, he doesn't consider himself to be one as he explains:

> I consider myself a backpacker, but not a *hardcore* one because on this trip - I know it may sound shallow - I am *only* looking to meet other backpackers. I only have one month to travel so I am only going to backpacker places like Zipolite because it is the easiest way to get to know people. I like being able to just show up to a place and make instant friends…like us now, for instance. We share a common interest

in travel, and we can discuss that even if we know we will never see each other again. For me, it is about enjoying the company of others. I choose to travel like a backpacker because I know the backpacker community exists. That makes it so easy to get 'in touch' with strangers....because we are all strangers and have nothing to loose. But I need more time to get close to the locals (Tom, Israeli, 27).

Like Tom, most of my other respondents did not consider themselves to be 'hardcore' backpackers either. Many of them referred to themselves as travelers rather than backpackers, because they felt they were not backpacker enough. When asked why they didn't consider themselves 'real' backpackers, I received answers such as:

I have too high a budget. I don't bargain enough and I don't take enough risks (Suzie, Australian, 29).

I don't meet enough locals because I don't speak Spanish (Hans, Norwegian, 24).

Well, I don't look like a hippie and don't have any tattoos so I guess I probably come across as a charter tourist (Zoe, British 21).

These quotes show that my contemporary backpacker subjects consider themselves less adventurous and less alternative than how they believe a 'real' backpacker should behave. While some of my respondents did express desire to be considered more 'hardcore' or becoming a better backpacker, most of them were satisfied 'blending in with all the others' and 'following the crowd'. I will now give some examples of how my backpacker subjects loosely interpret Bradt's backpacker ideology. These loose interpretations make backpackers more like mass tourists and therefore create new impacts on the local population of Zipolite.

Traveling on a Low Budget

I spend like $ US 150 a week. I am totally embarrassed about that because I am sure the people I am traveling with spend way less than that (Heather, American, 22).

Heather didn't feel like she was following the backpacker ideology as well as her peers. She was working on becoming a better backpacker by cutting back on expenditures. Other backpackers expressed their pride about being cheap. Bragging

about his budgeting skills, a Swiss respondent told me, "I only spend about $US 3 on food everyday. I always make food at the hostel" (Frank, 20). Yet, the majority of my 34 backpacker respondents ate out at least two times per day, and admitted to being frivolous with their money. According to one informant this was because:

> You can't think about money all the time. I would much rather enjoy myself and spend my money than starve myself just to be able to say I traveled for a longer time. I'm new at this game, and it takes time to become an expert. In the meantime, I just want to have a good time and not worry about what other people think (Synne, 24, Norwegian).

Western consumption patterns prove hard to break when prices are dropped in developing countries. The higher budgets of my backpacker subjects proved to be beneficial for the economy of Zipolite. According to my backpacker surveys, most of my subjects spent between $US 23-35 per day while staying in Mexico. This is a relatively low amount of money compared to the money spent by luxury tourists in Huatulco, but for the ethnic locals of Zipolite it is a fortune. Although over-spending money is seen as a negative thing in the framework of backpacker ideology, increased expenditures by backpackers proves to have positive impacts on the host populations of backpacker enclaves.

Meeting Different People

The experiences backpackers are looking for are often driven by a fascination with the 'other' mentioned by MacCannell (1976). Pearce (1990) has also pointed out that 'meeting people' is one of the main characteristics of backpacking. Yet, due to language and cultural difference, most of my backpacker subjects did not penetrate into the host community of the enclave. Because of this, the average backpacker sees their short encounters with local taxi drivers, waiters, hotel owners and ticket agents as a sufficient 'otherness'. I met only one backpacker who I observed making full contact with the ethnic locals. American Aaron (32) had only been in Zipolite for one week when I met him. Unlike most of the backpackers I met, Aaron spent his days playing soccer with the local youth, playing dominoes with the ethnic locals working at the hotel, going on an excursion with a local girl and speaking a high level of Spanish. He

had an affinity for making friends with all members of the society living or staying in Zipolite. I noticed that this skill made other backpackers envious of Aaron, as one subject exclaimed, "…Damn that Aaron! How does he do it? He's got a magic touch that I sure don't have. My new goal of the trip is to be like Aaron… (laughter)" (Charlie, Australian, 28). Charlie then (jokingly) blames his girlfriend for being the reason he doesn't meet more locals, as there is a consensus that an independent traveler is more apt to meet people than a pair traveling together.

Limited Contact with the Locals

The majority of my backpacker subjects made very brief contact with the ethnic locals. When asked if one interviewee had made any contact with the locals, he replied, "Very little – one hotel manager chatted with me about Independence Day…and last night I tried to flirt with a cute, local girl working in a bar, but she wasn't exactly interested" (Christian, American, 32). Christian valued these brief encounters with the locals because they made him feel like he was "at least trying to be cultural". As these brief encounters gave him some good conversation topics with other travelers, he was satisfied with his efforts to meet the Mexican. Another subject also admitted that the only contact he had made with the locals when he tried to buy marijuana on the beach.

> I was just lookin' to score something and the guy totally ripped me off.
> That bastard! Forget that man, next time I will be sure to ask a white guy
> (Anonymous, American).

This unlucky encounter with a local drug dealer made this subject skeptical of the natives, illustrating overtones of racism. I observed that this subject later used this anecdote in order befriend backpackers the remaining time he was in Zipolite. This brief encounter with a local thus became a valuable tool for befriending other backpackers.

A Swedish couple admitted that they had not made any local contact what-so-ever, except when it was necessary to buy bus tickets and eat in restaurants.

> It's embarrassing when we show up to the ticket office at the bus station
> with our Spanish dictionary and don't understand anything. It is really hard
> to even ask basic questions (Lina, Swedish, 23).

Lina and Per expressed happiness that there many waiters and hotel receptionists spoke English in Zipoite, and that it was easy to find other backpackers to help them order in Spanish if they needed assistance.

> I guess the nice thing about staying in backpacker places like Zipolite, is not having to think about anything. Everything is set-up for an idiot to understand, and everybody kind of helps everyone out like a family. It is very nice to come here to relax and recharge after a long bus ride from Mexico City (Per, Swedish, 24).

After departing Zipolite, the young couple was heading to Guatemala to study Spanish in hope of increasing their contact with locals. American Marcus (46) also felt segregated from the locals due to his lack of language skills.

> I really want to get to know the locals, but it's a bit hard when we don't even understand each other. But I am happy just to make contact with them when I go to the store. I feel privileged to be in their home and appreciate their hospitality. I have had some conversations with the English speaking hippies living here. They are locals enough for me. They told me some interesting stories about how this town used to be.

Backpackers value the contact they make with the settler community of Zipolite, as it often proves to be their only local contact. The settler takes on the role of the local in this situation. I frequently observed American Daniel surrounded by a swarm of backpackers. He was usually glowing at all the attention, but the backpackers were usually just trying to get travel information out of him.

> Yeah, Daniel is pretty cool. I talked to him for about an hour yesterday just about how to get down to Guatemala. He told me everything I need to know. He kind of acts like a dad to us backpackers who are far away from home (Darya, Israeli, 25).

Darya felt that Daniel was a Zipolite local, even if he wasn't Mexican. She felt that as long an individual had lived in the village for an extended period of time, they were locals.

> All the hippies who live here are locals. I mean, Daniel has lived her for nine years, and the lady who has a hotel next door has lived here for even

longer. I definitely feel that they have earned the right to be considered locals (ibid).

From the way Darya spoke of these 'foreign locals', I noticed that she respected them a great deal. Her interview gave me the impression that she looked up to the settlers because they had made traveling into a way of life. She told me she often ate in the restaurants owned by foreigners because she wanted to try to get in with the local hippie community. But since she was only staying in Zipolite for one week, she did not have enough time to make lasting friendships with the members of the settler group.

Interactions within the Backpacker Community

A number of my respondents made it clear that they had enough to deal with experiencing new foods, languages and customs to really try to get deeper involved into the local community[19]. When the local community proved hard to break, most of my contemporary backpacker subjects resorted to meeting others of their own kind.

> I had pictured myself eating tacos with the locals and practicing my Spanish with the kids here. But I end up eating pizza and speaking English with other backpackers who I meet at the hostel. It's funny to think I came all the way to Mexico to meet people from Europe and North America. Who would've guessed? (Suzie, Australian, 29).

Efforts to meet ethnic locals are forgotten when hanging out with an international crowd appeases the backpacker's desire for contact with the 'other' (MacCannell 1992). My informants explained that they spent time with other backpackers in order to: share funny travel stories, conquer loneliness, and get information on destinations and travel-routes. Youth hostels often serve as the meeting grounds for postmodern backpackers. The following anecdote illustrates a typical night in a backpacker youth hostel. It demonstrates how

Villa Escondida, Colonia Roca Blanca, Playa Zipolite: The rain began to pour down as soon as it got dark. Everyone staying in the hostel has gathered in the lobby to keep dry since the main dormitory and several other private rooms are flooded. Manu

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[19] This is probably because only six of my 34 backpacker respondents spoke Spanish when I met them in Zipolite and ironically three of them were Spanish.

Chao plays on the stereo and the receptionist is now acting as a bartender. Six backpackers (two Swiss, one French, one New Zealand, one Israeli and one Australian) are sitting at a candle-lit table finishing a communal meal the Israeli boy fixed for them. Two Israeli girls are sitting on the sofa studying their Lonely Planet guidebook. I am sitting playing cards with another group of backpackers (one Spanish, one Swiss, one American and two Swedes) whom I met earlier that evening. I had planned to go out to dinner, but never got the chance since the rain became so heavy. Everyone is drinking beer, smoking cigarettes, laughing and singing along to the music. Conversations shift from discussing the most dangerous backpacking experiences people have had in Mexico to explaining how to cross the border in Guatemala. No one knew each other yesterday, but today everyone acts like best friends.

Backpacker Conversations

Most backpacker conversations begin with introductory questions such as: "*Where have you been? Where are you going? Where are you from? How long have you traveled? How long are you going to travel?*" The introductory stage can take from a few minutes up to hours, but sometimes the conversation never gets beyond exchanging travel experiences. The topic of travel gives strangers a common ground and something to talk about as well as provide the backpacker with new travel information. The backpacker then uses this information to compare his own travel experiences to other backpackers'.

When the introductory stage and the exchange of travel information is over, the conversations often repeat themselves, as I observed backpackers to discuss each other's cultures. By doing participant observation I have engaged in numerous conversations on topics such as: school systems, tax systems, wages, national food traditions, music, books, films and laws in the various countries my informants and I represented. These conversations act as a *comparison* of cultural systems. These conversations are of importance to the individual's identification process, because it makes him reflect on his own 'cultural baggage' (Anderskov 2002). I argue that although backpacker conversations may be brief, they give a person a chance to reflect on his or her life from

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a distance, because they are disconnected from their community at home. The following lines make up part of a conversation I recorded under the Brisa Marina *palapa* on September 20, 2005:

Heidi: I realized it when I was walking back to my hotel room alone. That is that I am here all on my own and nobody knows me at all. I can be whomever I want and do whatever I choose. I am the only one I can rely on. And that can be a scary feeling.

Suzie: Yeah....it can be scary. But also invigorating. I mean when I think about what my friends and family are doing at home I feel like they could never even relate to things I do while traveling.

Christian: I know, traveling is like opening a door to a new dimension. Now, I see the way we live at home differently. I mean, especially in the US where everyone owns three cars and are so preoccupied with material things. Here, the people have almost nothing, but they seem to be happier than we do at home... In Western society it is so important to be independent and self-sustained, but when I look at the locals here they are so much more into their families.

Heidi: I know. I realized the same thing in Africa when a local woman thought it was so sad that I was alone and away from my family. I tried to explain to her that I had chosen to travel on my own in order to see the world, but she just thought it was sad!

Tom: But at least you can understand her point of view now. That's what traveling is all about. Learning about yourself and others. I have a theory that we compare traveling to what is going on in music scene today. In the 1960s and 1970s all the bands were groups and a collective feeling was more valued. Today, all the artists are going solo. Think of all the people who have broken away from their bands to go solo...like Beyonce and Justin Timberlake. It is all because that is the way our society is pushing us to do. We have to be independent, otherwise, we become failures back home. So, I think backpacking helps young people to do something on their own to show themselves and the others that they can make it.

This conversation ultimately confirms the claim that backpacking serves as a rite of passage. By leaving the home society, the backpackers are given the chance to see themselves and their cultures from an outside perspective in their liminal state of travel. Backpackers are faced with problems to solve and cultures to decipher – as well as their inner thoughts to deal with. Most people are used to having other people to depend on, but when taken out of their comfort zone people begin to question the meaning in their lives and self-development can occur. Ultimately, this development process occurs by discussing cultural differences with strangers in backpacker enclaves. Both Suzie and

Christian remarked that they see themselves differently after embarking on their backpacking journeys. Tom's 'theory' thus seems sociologically valid, as all participants in the conversation expressed feelings of gained independence. This independence stems from the feeling of 'freedom' my subjects experienced in Zipolite.

Feeling Free

> Dude, this place is rad. I totally feel like I am in the 60s or something. Last night we were smoking joints and dancing to a hippie-band in the sand at the Pacha Mama. The moon was almost full and it was *sick*. It was like going back in time. The only word that comes to mind is…*freedom*…hey, I like the sound of that. I think I never wanna go home (Alex, American, 22).

Many backpackers come to Zipolite looking for a sense of freedom they are lacking at home. A popular way of finding freedom in Zipolite is by experimenting with drugs and alcohol. Zipolite's reputation as a hippie-hotspot lures travelers looking to alter their state of mind through illegal substances. A few of my backpacker subjects arrived in Zipolite specifically looking to encounter the drug and party scene.

> I actually came to Zipolite to find some psychedelics, because I heard there is a big drug scene. Psychadelics just open your existential side, you know, induce freedom. I'm looking to find some mescaline and go on down to Palanque and see what the pyramids have to say to me. (anonymous, American).

Many of my subjects had taken, or were planning to take, drugs in Zipolite, and I met only three backpackers in Zipolite that did not drink alcohol. Tequila and Mescal, another derivative of a cactus plant, were preferred drinks for backpackers to 'go *loco*' (Julio, Mexican, 25). Although I noticed that many backpackers did not drink every night in order to save money. Some preferred to smoke marijuana because it was cheaper than drinking and it 'allows backpackers to open up to each other and really let go and have fun' (Eva, Belgian, 22). I was surprised to find that not many backpackers respected the new crack-down on drugs in Zipolite, as many were seen smoking marijuana on the beach (an action specifically condemned by the *Lonely Planet*). This

shows that contemporary backpackers are still hold rebellious characteristics. Like the drifters, these subjected value doing as they please rather than doing as they are told.

Organizing the Journey Independently

The search for freedom represents the backpacker's desire to be an independent traveler. My backpacker surveys showed that most of my subjects came to Zipolite to avoid mass tourists. One interviewee told me:

> When I finally got to Zipolite, I was so relieved that there weren't hoards of people baking themselves on lounge chairs drinking expensive Margaritas like I saw in Playa Zicatela in Puerto [Escondido]. (Heather, American, 22).

Heather was pleased that there were not many mass tourists in the village.She admitted that she was surprised at its popularity by backpackers.

> It is crazy that there are almost only backpackers in this town. I like that because it is easy to meet people, but it makes me feel like I am not very original. I thought this was a place off-the-beaten-track, but I feel like I am in 'backpacker land'.

While none of my 34 backpacker subjects had used a travel agency to organize their journey, only six of them had *not* used a travel guide. More specifically, 13 of my subject were using the *Lonely Planet* to organize their travels. These numbers show that contemporary backpackers are not as adventurous and spontaneous as the drifters were. The backpacker infrastructure formed by the Lonely Planet guarantees that one will meet up will meet up with other backpackers when using the book. Rather than going off-the-beaten-track as the drifters did, backpackers tend to follow each other along the backpacker 'superhighway' which now circulates the globe. The *Lonely Planet* dictates which destinations are 'cool' or not. The reliance backpackers have on guidebooks such as the *Lonely Planet* actually defeats the meaning of independent. One interviewee expresses his dissatisfaction upon arrival in Zipolite:

> Zipolite is totally not what I thought it would be. Everybody comes here using the same book and then stays at the same hostel and does the same thing as everyone else. I was expecting total anarchy and nude-bathing –

but that is not the case from what I have seen. I guess I should've been here ten years ago (Jean Pierre, Swiss, 29).

Jean Pierre feels that Zipolite has been ruined by the strong reliance backpackers have on the *Lonely Planet*. The abundance of backpackers in the small village has thus taken away from the 'authenticity' of the village. His statement also confirms Hylland Eriksen's criticism of the *Lonely Planet*, which is making backpackers indistinguishable from mass tourissts. He claims that the conventionalization of backpacking is thus generating its own anti-tourism movement in return. Therefore, most of my backpacker subjects were not completely independent travelers, as not many of them went off-the-beaten-track in the literal sense of the term.

To Travel as Long as Possible

Since backpacking has become conventionalized by institutions like the *Lonely Planet*, its participants seem to have adapted new perceptions of time to the travel style. The drifters and possibly 'real' backpackers viewed travel as a way of life with no limit on their travel time. These individuals incorporated ways to make money with travel in order to extend their trips as long as possible. In Zipolite, members of the settler community value this characteristic, as they would rather set up shop in a tourist destination than head back home to work the grind of the nine to five. Yet, backpackers are no longer seeking out 'eclective' centers to substitute for that of their home society, they are merely taking a 'time out' from their ordinary lives by seeking out diversionary experiences (Uriely *et alt* 2002). The use of travel as a 'time out' has thus conventionalized the original goal of backpacking. Only nine of my 34 backpacker subjects were traveling for longer than six months. This shows that most of my subjects were taking 'extended vacations' rather than making backpacking a way of life. A few of my subjects were only traveling for six weeks. Yet, due to the lack of backpacker subjects to choose at the time of my field study, I had no choice but to utilize the material available. This factor has led me to look at the ways my subjects utilized their limited time inside the backpacker enclave.

Loosing Track of Time

As my backpacker subjects had embarked on fast-paced journeys where they tried to squeeze as much experience into their time limit as possible. Therefore, I noticed that while inside the backpacker enclave, all sense of time becomes lost. I have noticed that many backpackers did not wear watches in the enclave. This symbolizes complete freedom from a daily schedule and being detached from society back home. I once saw one backpacker get really angry at another backpacker who kept asking him what *time* they were supposed to go on the crocodile safari the next day. "Do you see a watch on my wrist? I don't care what *time* we go – we go whenever we wake up! You got it?" (Hans, Norwegian, 24). Other backpackers enjoyed the freedom of doing whatever they wanted with their time in Zipolite. The backpacker infrastructure of the town offers many different ways of spending time. One backpacker explained her typical day in Zipolite to me in an interview: She implied that all of her days in Zipolite blurred together. She mentioned that the only day-to-day difference she noticed were the people. Heather specifically liked the freedom of being able to choose who to hang out with everyday. She said that if she was with a group of people she didn't really like, she could just walk down the beach, sit at a café and start talking to some new people. There was no use 'wasting time' with unwanted company for her.

The Australian couple, Suzie and Charlie, told me that Zipolite was the first stop on their six month trip after arriving in Mexico City. Suzie told me,

> We figured it would be the perfect place to unwind and get used to
> traveling time. It takes a while to relax, you know. Here, at least we
> can meet some people and get into the whole backpacking scene
> easily (Suzie, Australian, 29).

The couple had intended to unwind in Zipolite for just over a week, but a bad case of the *turistas* kept them there for nearly three weeks.

> I've been eatin' white Bimbo bread and Gator-aid for a week now, mate.
> It sucks, but I guess we could've been stuck in a worse place. The days
> just seem to fly by here like minutes (Charlie, Australian, 27)

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The disregard for time seemed to be a common phenomenon in Zipolite. American Christian had asked a couple how long they had been staying at the beach, and surprisingly neither of them knew. He said they looked at each other kind of strangely, and then the woman said, "I think we've been here for three weeks". It turns out, later that night the woman checked her journal and laughed. The next day she told Christian that they had been there for just over two months! It seems the couple was so busy doing nothing, they had lost track the time they had spent in the enclave. This section has shown that my backpacker subjects do not put a high value on traveling for as long as possible. Rather, they try to forget all constraints of time during their short journeys.

Personal Projects through Backpacking

This section discusses the sixth characteristic I believe should be included into Bradt's backpacker ideology. During their 'dead time' inside backpacker enclaves, backpackers are given the chance to develop their selves through a number of activities. The value of self-development was a main value of the subjects in my study. Many of the backpackers I interviewed in Zipolite had some sort of personal project or goal they wanted to accomplish through backpacking, which took over their efforts to contact the local community. Some of the self-development activities my informants were engaged in when I met them were:

> I make myself write at least five pages in my journal every day so that when I return home I can see how much I have changed during the trip (Synne, Norwegian, 24).

> I have to learn to surf. I am so excited about it. It is something I have always wanted to do and I will feel so great about myself when I succeed at it (Jean Pierre, Swiss, 29).

> It's not a big deal, but I want to finish this cross-word puzzle book. With all this dead time being on the bus and lying on the beach, at least I will feel that I have been productive (Heather, American, 22).

> My goal of the trip is to learn Spanish. I can't go home until I do it (Per, Swedish, 23).

All of these subjects expressed goals which ultimately would make them a better person or even a better backpacker. Accomplishing personal goals makes backpacking a meaningful identity making process for 'rootless' backpackers. This search for meaning is illustrated by the eccentric Marcus:

> Oh yeah... (laughter)... I decided to go traveling because a telephone psychic told me to. I was originally planning to move to London...but you know....the psychic told me that she could see that I didn't have the funds to go to London and that she envisioned me going South – to Mexico – and that I should continue on as far it takes to find what it is I'm looking for.

Marcus, is a 46-year-old artist from New York. I decided to include him into my study although he is older that the average backpacker. He is interested in taking Yoga classes at the Solstice and visiting the meditation gardens at the Shambhala. Marcus felt that by getting in touch with himself mentally, he was more able express himself and his sexuality more freely. Marcus told me he was very drawn to the tolerance of nudity on the beach and liberalness of Zipolite, because traveling as a homosexual had proved to be a challenge for him. Other people had less concrete personal goals such as becoming more patient, self-confident, or blending in with the locals:

> My goal is to get as brown as the locals so I just blend in and look like a Mexican. I'm not that far from it! (Aarron, American, 32).

> I decided to go backpacking to reconnect with myself. Sometimes you forget who you really are when you are running around in the rat race of the 9-5 world (Christian, American, 32).

> I admit that I was terrified at the thought of traveling alone. But it was something I just had to do. It will make me so much more confident in life (Lucie, Belgian, 22).

Ideally, all of these goals allow the backpackers to feel that they are 'moving forward' in more ways than just the spatial progression achieved through travel. Volunteering in Zipolite allows backpackers to incorporate self-development, global-aid and free-housing into their travels. Helga is a 24-year-old German girl who volunteers at Pina Palmera in Zipolite. She found the job through the Internet and had been there for 2 months when I met her. "It is great here. I am living in a paradise, while getting credits

for my nursing studies and helping people". She lives and volunteers at the Non-Profit Organizations headquarters in the center of the village, where she takes care of handicapped Mexican adults and children. Along with doing something good for the local community, Helga is also fine-tuning her Spanish skills and making friendships apart from her volunteer work. She will travel around Mexico when she has time off, and backpack into Central America after her work is finished.

My analysis thus far of my contemporary backpacker subjects has shown that many of these individuals are more conventional than the drifters. Their loose interpretations of backpacker ideology show that none of my subjects could be considered a 'real' or 'hardcore' backpacker. Their failed attempts to be 'real' backpackers essentially made all of them dependent on backpacker culture as a means for bettering their backpacking skills. This preoccupation with the self and the experimentation with new identities caused for many of my subjects to ignore their hosts in Zipolite. The following section looks at what these backpackers really thought about the settlers and the ethnic locals.

Perceptions of the Settlers

Based on my observations of the backpacker-settler interactions, I understand the backpackers to idolize the settler community as representing the 'real' backpackers or the 'original drifters' (the only difference being that the settlers are stationary). This is because the backpackers envy the settlers' ability to embrace the backpacker ideology on a full-time basis. I believe the backpackers to be naïve to the 'staged authenticity' the 'settlers' have implemented into the enclave. Posing as 'free-spirited' hippies, the settlers have thus become part of the 'local setting'. 'Hippie-heroes' thus become a tourist attraction for conventional backpackers. The infamous Gloria is an example of a backpacker icon.

> Have you met [Gloria]? She is the nicest woman! What she did for this
> town is just amazing. She just followed her heart and now she is like the
> mother of Zipolite. It's the people like her who weren't afraid to speak
> her mind and live the way she wanted. She created a paradise for those

tourists, like me, who never really fit in with the mainstream (Marcus, American, 46).

I believe that today's more contemporary backpackers perceive the 'settlers' to be the founders of backpacker culture. I observed some of my subjects trying to imitate the hybrid-look of the 'settlers' This was usually accomplished by purchasing ethnic clothing and jewelry which signify one's association with 'alternative' culture. Heather (American, 22) exemplified this after she had met Natalie: "Oh my God! She is so adorable. I love her. Did you see the necklace she had? I have to get one like that. It was so cool". These quotes show that the settlers are glorified in the eyes of the conventional backpacker. They may even be perceived as being 'local', as the ethnic locals become disregarded by backpackers.

Perceptions of the Ethnic Locals

Because most of the backpackers did not speak Spanish, their contact with the ethnic locals of Zipolite was very limited. Because of this, their search for the 'other' is satisfied by their encounters with the settlers and other backpackers. This essentially pushes the ethnic locals into the background of the enclave, as backpackers view them as 'decoration', which give the village an 'authentic' feel. One interviewee expresses his disregard for the ethnic locals:

> Sometimes I forget what country I am even in, because I've been traveling for so long and I am surrounded by a strange mix of cultures all the time. All the towns start to seem the same. And then I saw some guys playing soccer on the beach in jeans and cowboy hats – using their cowboy boots as goalposts – and I remembered where I was. I guess the bottle of tequila was a dead give-away (Alex, American, 22).

This comment demonstrates how the backpacker enclave serves as a 'western culture bubble' where backpackers can become too engaged in backpacker culture to appreciate the hospitality of the host population. The jumping from enclave to enclave thus gives backpackers perceptions based on confirmed stereotypes. Israeli Darya also paid little attention to the ethnic locals of the village. She explains:

I fee like the Mexicans of the village just want my money. I am tired of being harassed by vendors and sellers trying to get me to buy something, or men trying to talk to me. I have just started to ignore them, because they don't mean anything to me anyways. They are just money-hungry and want to take advantage of tourists. I would rather have a meaningful conversation with other foreigners than be harassed by the Mexicans (Darya, Israeli, 25).

For Darya, the Mexican locals were just there to 'make the town look authentic'. In order to avoid uncomfortable incidents with the locals, she told me she only made contact with them if she had to buy food in the store. Other than that, she pretty much ignored the ethnic locals. This behavior marks a major difference between the drifters and today's contemporary backpackers.

I also noticed a difference regarding the perceptions of local men and women in the enclave. Dressed in bright, ethnic clothing, women and children were usually perceived as 'cute' or 'authentic' by the backpackers, while men were often perceived as 'creepy' and 'aggressive'. Female backpackers especially objected to the obscene comments and behaviors local men made to them and expressed discomfort when walking alone in the town. One example comes from Eva:

I was on my way to the beach when three local guys approached me. I don't know what they were saying since I don't speak Spanish, but I did understand *la playa*. When we got close to the beach they all started running to the water and one of them took off his clothes. So I just walked away from them and thought they were perverts. I later realized it was a nude beach – but still – that was uncalled for (Eva, Belgian, 22).

Eva's story illustrates again the 'wrong-idea' local men have about western women. These misconceptions have made her skeptical to interact with local males. Darya also had the feeling the local men were overwhelming:

I don't get it. Do they really think that every white woman wants to sleep with them? Their whistles are annoying and I don't feel comfortable walking alone in the town. I get too much attention from the men (Darya, Israeli, 25).

Often viewed as sex-symbols, western women have become agitated at the aggressiveness of the Mexican men. This cultural misunderstanding has led backpackers to have negative perceptions about the locals.

Analysis of the Backpackers' Attitudes

The above anecdotes and interviews illustrate how contemporary backpackers have evolved into a more conventionalized version of the 'original drifters'. This chapter has shown how today's backpackers loosely interpret backpacker ideology and therefore cannot be considered 'real' backpackers. Sorensen (1999:61) has pointed out that the backpacker community is formed by a community of strangers. Yet, these strangers all form a very homogeneous group. The average backpacker is young, white and western. The majority of backpackers I spoke with came from Europe, Canada, Australia, Israel, New Zealand and the US. Most of my informants were in their twenties or early thirties and had recently completed their studies or were in the process of studying at an institution of higher education. Others were taking a break from the 'pressures of the workforce' (G.G., Dutch, 27) or just 'playin' it by ear' (Aaron, American, 32). Yet, the backpackers I met all possessed unique characteristics and motivations for travel. Here are a few examples of why my backpacker subjects came to Zipolite taken from my backpacker surveys and follow-up interviews:

> I came to Zipolite to get drunk, get laid and smoke some weed. I'm tired
> with all the Spring Break bullshit like in Cancun. This is the place, man. It
> is still underground – full of topless women and bountiful supplies of
> drugs. That's what I'm talkin' about (Alex, American, 22).

Alex still seems to feel that Zipolite is still an off-the-beaten-track destination, as this is his first trip traveling as a backpacker. Before, he was more of the packaged vacation type of tourist, signing up for Spring Break getaways with his university back home. Alex thus represents a mass tourist who conformed into a backpacker. Tom represents another type of backpacker:

I knew I would find people like myself in Zipolite. I came here to have fun and share funny travel stories with other backpackers. Its one of the few places left in the world that hasn't been contaminated by normal tourists…I always go to the backpacker places when I'm backpacking, because that's where I belong (Tom, Israeli, 27).

Tom came to Zipolite specifically looking to meet other backpackers. His extensive travel experience has taught him that backpacker enclaves provide him with the services he prefers and guarantees that he will meet up with other backpackers. Marcus (American, 46) also came to Zipolite to meet other people whom he referred to as "lost souls – like myself". He told me that he was hoping to meet someone to continue traveling on with him into Guatemala. He was pleased that the laid-back atmosphere of the town made it easy to talk to people, and that he would continue his travels with the Australian couple Suzie and Charlie. Marcus and Tom both utilize their membership in backpacker culture to make their travel experiences more meaningful.

Yet, some of my other backpacker subjects came to Zipolite in order to enjoy the natural beauty of a place that has not yet been destroyed by mass tourism. Brigitte (German, 51) who had been traveling for one year when I met her in Zipolite. She wanted to see Zipolite because she had heard it had a relaxed atmosphere and she wanted to unwind and reflect on her journey before turning back to the real world. Zipolite was also attractive Julia (Dutch, 29) who came in order to take Yoga classes on the beach. She has a very positive attitude about the town:

This town is so wonderful. The people living here are so lucky. It is like a beach lost in time, unaware of the outside world. Everyone here is so nice and I am so glad I got to experience the feeling here before too many tourists discover this paradise.

Helga (24), the German volunteer also had an extremely positive attitude about her stay in Zipolite. She told me that she would never forget the people she had met in the village and that her job working with the locals was the best thing she has done so far. However, not all of my subjects held such positive attitudes about their stay in Zipolite. Israeli Darya (25) thought that the men in the town were too aggressive and that the locals were only after her money.

Everyone told me that Zipolite was such a great place. Well, I disagree. I get the feeling that the locals just see me as a walking dollar sign and that they want to take advantage of me. I have heard so many stories of backpackers getting robbed here. That makes me uncomfortable. And did you here that an Italian tourist was murdered here just the other day? I can't believe it. I am leaving tomorrow to go to Huatulco. I think I will feel safer there.

Negative attitudes prove to be prevalent amongst more conventionalized backpackers who feel Zipolite is too dangerous for their likings.

Based on my research presented in this chapter, I conclude that the contemporary backpacker community I encountered in Zipolite expresses great diversity. Although these individuals may travel in the same manner and even look alike, they all express individual travel motivations and attitudes. Loose interpretations of backpacker ideology allow for a variety of tourists to embark on a backpacker voyage. This chapter has pointed out that contemporary backpackers are becoming more conventionalized through the development of 'backpacker paraphernalia' such as the Lonely Planet. Therefore, the diversity amongst these 'niche-market' tourists, marks a big difference between the settlers and the contemporary backpackers in Zipolite, and also produces different socio-cultural impacts on the local community.

Conclusion

The backpackers I encountered in Zipolite during my field study perceived the enclave as a place they could refuel from a long journey on the road, enjoy the international cuisine, and exchange travel advice. The abundance of low-budget accommodations and backpacker facilities makes it difficult not to meet other like-minded travelers in which to share stories and experiences with. Therefore, most of the backpackers I met were more concerned in developing backpacker culture than becoming involved with the local community. The backpacker-friendly infrastructure of the town thus segregates these more conventional tourists from the other two communities occupying the enclave. Language barriers and negative perceptions limit the contact backpackers have with the natives of the village. The brief relationships

explained in this chapter between backpackers and locals prove to be shallow and open to mistrust and exploitation.

Based on the findings of my observations and interviews with the subjects introduced in this chapter, I understand the backpackers to have a self-centered logic which is driven by their desire to have fun and to achieve personal goals. When confined to the enclave, backpackers prove to be no different than mass tourists concerning the amount of contact they have with the locals. I originally thought backpackers would have made more contact with the locals within the enclave, but the results of my study prove that backpackers are more interested in sustaining their own unique culture than getting to know the local culture. Consequently, the modern day backpacker seems to be evolving into a conventional tourist – happy inside his enclosed bubble with others of his kind. Impacts based on the relationships between backpackers and Zipolite locals will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6: The Ethnic Locals of Zipolite

The aim of this chapter is to understand how the natives of Zipolite feel about their village being overrun by tourism through an analysis of anecdotes and interviews with members of this group. The framework for this chapter is based on Doxey's (1976) irritation index[20], in which he suggests that it is possible to determine local perceptions about tourism by measuring their irritation levels. I understand Zipolite to be in the development stage of Butler's resort cycle. Therefore, according to Doxey, the local inhabitants of the village should have arrived to the level of irritation in his index. While I did find some Mexican locals who were indeed irritated by tourism in their home, this chapter challenges Doxey's argument by including interviews and anecdotes which show that all levels of the irritation index were expressed by different members of the ethnic local community. This chapter illustrates the stages of euphoria, apathy, irritation and antagonism as expressed by the ethnic locals of Zipolite in interviews and conversations.

The Level of Euphoria

> I remember the first time I saw tourists on our beach, we all thought we were going to be rich. It was so exciting and gave us something to look forward to* (Anita, Zipolite, 48).

The introduction of tourism to the tiny village of Zipolite proved to raise the spirits of the economically unstable local community. Dreams of money and modernization established Doxey's state of euphoria, as town members believed tourism was the answer to all of their problems. This was because the flow of cash that came along with the tourists created new opportunities for the families living in Zipolite. During this time, the strange white people were openly welcomed in the village, and a mutual feeling of satisfaction was shared by all community members,

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[20] This index can be compared to that of the resort cycle described by Butler (1980) which says that destinations go through the following stages: 1) exploration – initial discovery by a small number of individual travelers, 2) involvement – local entrepreneurship is stimulated which results in the creation of tourist facilities, 3) development – non-local capital establishes more elaborate facilites and the area becomes a defined destination, 4) consolidation – large scale operators dominate the places and conventional tourism takes over, and 5) stagnation – the place has lost its popularity and resources are running dry to do over-use.

according to Anita. Yet, thirty years after tourism made its debut in the Zipolite, the level of euphoria has decreased greatly. The increase of touristic activity in the village has caused locals to realize that tourism can have negative impacts upon the host society. However, not all members of the ethnic local community have come to see tourism is in fact harmful. I noticed the youth of the local community still reacts euphorically to tourism growth in the area. This is because the younger generation in Zipolite is keen on adapting Western values and modern fashions they pick-up from the tourists. The following interviews illustrate feelings of joy expressed by local youths who work within the tourism industry.

Juanita is a 16-year-old girl I met working at a *tienda* at the end of the main street of the town. She wears tight-jeans and a halter-top, and has much lighter skin than many of the other locals. She has bleached her dark hair so that it has become a reddish-orange color, and her eyes are almond-brown. She has grown up with tourism in Zipolite, so for her it is not strange at all. When there are no customers, her eyes are either glued to the television or she is outside playing football with her younger brother and sister and the other neighborhood children in front of the shop. The following is part of an interview I had with Juanita while she was working alone in the shop on September 29, 2005 *:

Heidi: Do you want to stay in Zipolite or move to another place to work?

Juanita: I am accustomed to Zipolite. I don't know many other places very much. I have been to Pochutla sometimes and once to Oaxaca City.

Heidi: Do you work in this shop everyday?

Juanita: My parents own this shop and I work almost everyday here. My father is busy with the products for the shop and my mother has to take care of the house and the other children. But I like to work here because there is a TV and my boyfriend comes to visit me. His name is David. He goes to school in Pochutla.

Heidi: I think I have seen your boyfriend here with you. Do you go to school too?

Juanita: I don't go to school anymore. It is more important to work for my family.

Heidi: What do you think about the tourists that are coming to Zipolite?

Juanita: I like the tourists because they have lots of money. It is best when there are many tourists because then everyone is happy.

Heidi: Have you learned some English from the tourists? Or what else do you like or not like about them?

Juanita: (Laughter) I can count in English because many times the tourists do not speak Spanish and they always ask how much things cost. But I don't know more...I like the clothes the tourists have. I want to go to USA or Europe because everything there is so new and modern.

Heidi: But you don't think anything is bad about the tourists being here?

Juanita: No, I like the tourists. They are a part of the town too. If they didn't come here, we would have nothing to do. Sometimes my parents say that they don't like them. But I like them.

Juanita's interview shows tourism is appealing for young people in Zipolite, who want a chance to meet foreigners and appreciate their differences – especially their features of modernity. The presence of the exotic is still intriguing to the youth culture working in the town. Juanita is not alone in her appreciation of tourism, as other young members of the community are still enthusiastic about working in the tourism industry.

Alberto (20) is a Zipolite native who works as the captain of one of Hector's three snorkeling boats. Alberto doesn't mind the increase of tourism in the area, as he told me he was happy that more people were coming to visit Zipolite.

> I like my job. If there were no tourists here, I could not work like this. Who else would pay me to play in the ocean all day, see pretty girls in bikinis and drink beers with my lunch? But of course, I am serious about my work. I like to show the tourists the beautiful fish we have here and see them smile when they see new things. I just wish that they knew how to swim better* (Alberto, Mexican, 24).

On the rare occasion that the ocean is calm, Alberto and his friends also give private surfing lessons to tourists in Zipolite. The charge is only $US 5 for a one-hour lesson. He realizes it is not a lot of money, but he wouldn't change his situation for anything. These examples show that the younger generations of Zipolite are coming up with new money making schemes in order to sustain their laid back lifestyles which cater to tourism.

Twenty-two-year-old Alejandro Garcia Vazquez drives a taxi in Zipolite to support himself during his studies at La Universidad del Mar in Huatulco. He studies international relations and hopes to work abroad when he finishes. He has already lived and worked for two years in Los Angeles, and has also worked in Chicago and Virginia. He is thankful that tourism has come to Zipolite because without any tourists, he wouldn't have anyone to drive around in his taxi. Alejandro speaks excellent English and I believe that because of his history of growing up with tourism, he has gained economic security as well as social abilities which will benefit him in his future career choices. These three examples show that the youth of Zipolite are still expressing characteristics associated to Doxey's level of euphoria, even though tourism is no longer in its initial stage in the village.

The Level of Apathy

The initial euphoria and enthusiasm associated with the preliminary phases of tourism begin to dissipate as the industry expands and the number of tourists increases (Mathieson &Geoffrey 1992: 140).The impact of tourism introduced on indigenous cultures often produces a social situation in which local people alter their lives to suit the demands of the tourists (de Burlo, 1992: 256), but because backpacker tourism is so 'self-involved' there is less of a stress upon the local community to exploit their ethnicity by performing dances or shows to please the tourists. At the most, the natives explain ancient aspects of their culture in a guided tour hosted by the Turtle Museum down the road in Mazunte. But other than that and a few native hand-crafts for sale, I saw no evidence of the local Zapotec culture being used as a way of attracting tourists – as was the case with other Indian groups in Oaxaca City. I believe this is because the 'exotic other' backpackers are looking for is actually the predecessor of their own culture – the hippie. While some women can still be found embroidering blouses in Zipolite, aspects of the local Mexican culture seem to be pushed in the shadow of backpacker paraphernalia.

This disregard for the local culture by backpacker tourists creates a feeling of apathy amongst the ethnic local community of Zipolite. During this phase of Doxey's

index, the hosts are seemingly tolerant of the tourists' demands, but the locals become indifferent about tourism as a whole. They see tourism as an easy way to make money, and don't necessarily complain about the invasion of foreigners on their land. As long as the numbers of tourists and their cumulative impacts remain below a critical level, and economic impacts continue to be positive, the presence of tourists in the host destination is generally accepted and looked at as a means of survival (ibid: 141). As one woman explains, Tourism is the only thing we have here, there are no other industries at all*" (Anna, 28).

Anna is a 28-year-old native of Zipolite of Zapotec origin. She was born and raised in the village and is currently raising her two children there. She and her husband own a minimal hotel consisting of eight bungalows for which they charge $US 8 per night. They also offer one of the few laundry services in Zipolite. She has two washers and just one dryer, but if it is not raining she prefers to hang the clothes to dry due to cost efficiency. The couple charges $US 1 per kilo of clothing to be washed and dried. She has shoulder length, brown hair, and one front tooth with a silver rim which glistens in her smile. She is eager to speak with me as she sweeps the street in front of her hotel and her two-year-old son and four-year-old daughter play with a plastic ball.

> Without tourism we have nothing. We can't go back to the old customs
> now, it would be like going back in time. You know there are still people
> living in the mountains just behind the main road without electricity and
> running water. They just go on living like nothing has changed here. But
> it has changed! My generation has seen that change. Today we see
> people from all over the world, which I didn't see when I was a kid. But
> my kids will grow up with modern things. Today, kids of Zipolite grow
> up with different ideals and ambitions. But I feel lucky. I like it that I
> although I don't have enough money to travel with, I have still met
> people from many, many countries* (Anna, 28).

Anna is not different than many other local entrepreneurs in Zipolite. She and her husband benefit directly from the tourism industry in their home village and seem to enjoy their slow-paced lifestyle. They have been able to adapt to the changes in their society in order to benefit and earn money from the tourism industry. Like in Smith's study on Borocay Island in the Phillippines (1992), income generated directly into

family enterprises has given many participating women considerable social independence as well as cash resources. In the traditional Mexican society, men had gone fishing along the coast of Zipolite and taken their catch to sell in larger communities while women stayed home to tend to the garden and watch over the children. The new presence of outsiders has thus broadened the worldview of the natives in Zipolite.

The Level of Irritation

However, for some, and especially women newly introduced to the work force, the glitz and glamour of becoming a tourist 'hot-spot' wore off quickly. Margarita (the woman who told me about the *strange* people who came to Zipolite when she was a child in the 60s) has worked as the head of housekeeping for the American entrepreneur Daniel for nine years at his hotel Brisa Marina. She is no longer married, but has three children and four grandchildren. While she admits the tourists bring in more money, she misses the old days before tourism took over the town.

> Before working in the hotel, I used to make tortillas with my family to sell in the village. Sometimes we would make *pinatas* for the fiestas too. I would rather be making tortillas and pinatas than cleaning hotel rooms, but the hotel gives me a steady income and Daniel pays well. But you want to know a secret? My friend and I are starting up a new *pinata* business next year. I haven't told many people yet because I am nervous. I am excited to do something for myself. But I don't think I can quit the hotel. I depend on the money I make there* (Margarita, 42).

In order to get ahead and be able to take care of her children, Margarita has dealt with long hours of routine laundry, bed-making, cooking, cleaning and waiting on the public. Her parents and her sisters run a small *tienda* or shop which sells a small variety of food and drinks as well as essential products such as sunscreen and bug-spray. Unfortunately, all of Margarita's children have moved away due to lack of study and job opportunities in Zipolite. She is sad because she doesn't get to see them very often, but she will not leave her village. She hopes they will return one day, but doesn't count on it because her children are not guaranteed a job if they return. The population of Zipolite remains low because many youth are forced to seek work outside of the village.

The small-scale infrastructure of does not create a sufficient number of jobs for the number of people living there. The lack of work may push local Mexicans to become involved with illegal activities in order to make a living. This can make the members of the local community more irritable, because their reputation becomes associated with drugs and crime.

Illegal Activities Concerning Locals and Tourists

> Just tell the police to shut up if they try to bribe you for money. Without you [a tourist] they don't have nothing – no food on their plate (Hector, 37).

Although drugs are strictly forbidden in Mexico, Zipolite is famous for its 60s-style drug scene. Hedonistic backpackers are thus prime customers for the local drug lords who patrol the beach, avoiding the police when possible. Jose Angel is one of the town's most obvious drug dealers. He is 27-years-old, covered with tattoos (including a big one that reads *Mi Vida Loca* across his stomach) and always wears red, which is his signature color[21]. His average day consists of cruising up and down the shoreline with his time divided between checking out girls, selling drugs and body-boarding. I assumed he would not be willing to talk with me, but to my surprise he was very open to everything. One afternoon we went body-boarding together, and he told me his philosophy on Zipolite and marijuana.

> I grew up in Puerto Angel and have always been surrounded by a lot of tourists. I moved to Zipolite when I was 18 and have been here ever since. For my business, this place has the best customers. It is so easy to sell *la mota* to the *mochileros* (backpackers) here because they are always looking for something. Most of them never complain about the price because they don't know better, and I make more money that way. I don't have a problem with that because they have more money than we do anyways* (Jose Angel, 27).

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[21] When I asked him why he always wore red trunks and a baseball cap, he told me that it was so people could easily recognize him on the beach. He said he was not afraid of the police catching him because he had been caught before and most of the police knew him already. In fact, he told me that the police needed him. Without him, the police would not be able to bribe tourists for money when they caught them smoking marijuana on the beach.

Later in the afternoon of the same day I had been talking with the local drug dealer, I spotted two fully geared *federales* patrolling the beach. They wore black from head to toe, equipped with helmets, bulletproof vests, combat boots, knives and frighteningly large rifles. Despite being intimidated, I went to talk with them alone under a thatched hut. They were very friendly and wanted to assure me that Zipolite was not dangerous and that there is not as much crime as people talk about. Five years ago, the government pressured them to crackdown on drug dealers, gangs and thieves in the area in order not to scare away the much needed tourists. The increase of crime and corruption makes the town more dangerous for the locals living there. This danger creates irritation and fear amongst the natives.

The Irritable Low Season

> That's the problem with this business – you never know when it will be good or be bad (Hector, 37).

I sensed a high level of irritation within the ethnic community due to the lack of work during the low tourist season. The influx of foreign settlers and backpacker entrepreneurs is threatening to the Mexican inhabitants because these people raise the competition in the job market. In contrast to the foreign locals who may take the chance to travel during the low-tourist season, the natives do not have that kind of economic freedom.

> We depend on the money we make during the high season (December to April) to hold us over during the low-season. We have to be careful to make the money last. Usually, it is not a problem. But sometimes the low-season can be very bad and we have to live with what we have…one year was very bad and my husband went to work in the USA for two years. It was hard for me to run the business alone, but I am stronger because of it* (Anna, 28).

Anna's interview shows that the tourism industry does not guarantee a steady income, as other members of the formal sector have confirmed her fears. But I notice that the seasonality of the industry hits the members of the informal sector the hardest when one ethnic local told me, "That's the problem with this business, if there are no tourists, we

are screwed. It's not like I have a boss breathing down my neck to make me work harder. It's up to me, and my girlfriend" (Hector, 37). This seasonality, affects both the formal sectors (proprietors of hotels, restaurants or cafés) and the informal sectors (low-cost workers, guides and vendors) of the tourism labor force within Zipolite (Cukier, 1992). The following anecdote expresses feelings of irritation when business is slow in Zipolite.

Colonia Roca Blanca, Playa Zipolite: Hector has long, frizzy hair and wears traditional Indian pants which are striped red and white. He doesn't wear a shirt and he neck is adorned with at least three necklaces. I met him on the beach in front of our hotel where I was sitting with a group of backpackers. One of the backpackers (Aaron) knew him already, and introduced him to the rest of us. After a brief chat, Hector invited all of us back to a house down the street to smoke a joint. He is extremely eager to meet us, which seems peculiar coming from a local. I soon realize that his friendly gesture has an underlying purpose as we enter his room. Inside, his beautiful girlfriend Nancy (who was a good 10 years younger than him) has set out their collection of jewelry on top of the bed in the middle of the room. The invitation was in actuality a business proposition. We sit scattered about the room, on the floor or in plastic chairs, as the joint is passed around. Hector speaks great English and kept his audience captive with his strong opinions about American politics. He passionately believes that George Bush is a descendant of the reptile family and tries his best to convince us of his theory. Nancy, on the other hand, is nearly silent and just smiles and keeps handing different jewels to the tourists to try on.

> We have been having a really hard time lately because there are no tourists here now. I feel like I am working all the time for nothing, and it is really affecting our relationship. Without tourists, there is no money and then everything is bad (Hector, 37).

Their business tactics work, as at least four of the six backpackers in the room purchase something from the vendor couple. But it doesn't appear that they have such good luck very often.

I noticed other vendors to be extremely pushy during the height of the low-season. As I happened to be one of the only backpackers in town, I recall one man asking me at least ten times in the same day if I wanted to buy a coconut from him. The woman selling *empanadas de piña,* which she carried on her head up and down the beach was also extremely persistent. Also at this time, I noticed many children vending jewelry on the beach alone or with their mothers. I hope this tactic is only used in times of desperation. The general local spirit turns bitter and irritable because there is no cash flowing into the community. The anecdote below explains how boredom and desperation can also be irritable side effects of tourism in Zipolite during the low-season.

Colonia Roca, Playa Zipolite: I spot a group of four Mexican locals playing dominoes on white, plastic table under the shade of an awning. The heat is still sweltering at 4'oclock. Four of them are men in their mid-thirties and one is a woman in her twenties. They have been playing for a good hour, and their faces are grim with boredom. One man swats at the flies with his t-shirt has taken off. The pocket change they are gambling for is passed around and this time the woman wins the pot. One man says something offensive and the woman just smiles and rolls her eyes. I am sure she would rather be anywhere else than playing this game with these men if she could be – even working might be more enjoyable than this.

This scene demonstrates disdain and unhappiness I observed from the ethnic locals when they were out of work. The very low number of backpacker tourists in September, causes the locals to waste their days in the hot sun without earning much money. Their boredom leads to gambling, drinking and even the consumption of drugs. Tourism can therefore induce higher levels of poverty amongst members of the society who do not work in the tourism industry. These attitudes and addictions can eventually lead to hostility towards tourists in Zipolite.

The Level of Antagonism

Doxey argues that tourist resentment stems from the rapidity and the intensity of tourist development in a destination over a short period of time. This statement is not

valid when applied to my study, because Zipolite has managed to sustain a small-scale development over a long period of time. However, according to Jafari (1974: 246) resentment tends to be highest in areas such as Zipolite (which he terms 'tourist magnetic' areas), where tourism is the principal source of income and all activities become oriented to accommodation tourist demand. Due to the dependence on the tourism industry within the village, I found a few local Mexicans that have started to show antipathy towards both foreigner residents and tourists.

Members of the ethnic community expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which their town had been and was currently being developed. "Zipolite has been going downhill since 1992, when the highway arrived", according to long time resident Pedro Guerro. "It used to be here," Pedro continued, his hand at his chin. Pedro's hand then fell a little each time he mentioned another year. By the time he arrived at 1996, his hand was at his knees. "The cars run around really fast on the road. And now the tourists want hotel rooms with fans. They want to be able to live like a king" (Pedro, 47).

Pedro's companion, Fernando also expressed concern about Zipolite's rapid transformation in the 1990s. Fernando's concerns were more about foreign communities moving into his village. "This is a town of people from other places," he said. "There are people from other parts of Oaxaca, other parts of Mexico and from abroad. It's disorganized. People don't know each other." This disorganization was troubling to Fernando as he continued, "There's a lot of theft here. You always have to keep your eyes open. If you look the other way for one moment, someone will grab your things. And the police are never there when they rob you." The problems brought on by tourism can result in hostile relations toward tourists by locals.

Local Bar, on the main road in Zipolite: It is September 16th, Mexican Independence Day. After hanging out at the hostel all evening, I decide to join a group of backpackers going out on the town. It looks like a war-zone in Colonia Roca Blanca. Fireworks are going off in every direction and there are hundreds of people on the street. Most of them are drunk, Mexican teenagers, who have crowded around the disco to celebrate. As we near the disco, the ground is actually vibrating and the teens look

sweaty from dancing inside. My backpacker acquaintances think the disco looks too hectic and we decide not to go in. One backpacker, Torrey, says he was at a cool bar earlier the same afternoon and that we should go there. He is extremely nervous as we follow his lead, because he is not certain where the bar is exactly. After a 15 minute hike along the highway, we see a gate on the right hand side of the road. A dim light shines on the gate and we hear a lot of noise inside the bar. Torrey timidly rings the cow-bell hanging over the door and takes a step back. The five of us backpackers wait with anticipation. A young, local man comes to the door and looks strangely at us. He asks who we know here and Torrey tells him that he was there earlier. The man closes the door and another man comes out to talk to us. This man recognizes Torrey, and says that he can enter but the rest of us cannot. He says it is a party for V.I.P.s only. And when one backpacker protests and asks why we aren't V.I.P.s, the man just laughs and slams the door in our faces.

This story notes the only time I observed ethnic locals being blatantly rude to backpackers. I suppose the ethnic locals deserved a private party free of *gringos* on their Independence Day, since they have to greet them with a smile on their faces every other day of the year. I was surprised that the feeling of hostility towards tourists was not more prevalent in the village. According to Doxey's irritation index, more hostile attitudes will most likely come once large-scale corporations are introduced to the village. For the time being, the locals seem to have learned to tolerate tourism and tourists in their village. But the increased value in material goods brought into the town by travelers is creating a class-stratification within the local community. This class distinction can lead to increased poverty levels and acts of crime and hostility towards tourists. I will now look at how the ethnic locals have come to perceive the *gringos* who invaded their land.

Local Perceptions of the Settlers

Previously in the paper, I discussed the initial shock felt by the ethnic locals upon their first encounter with the hippies. This shock has since turned into the norm as the settlers have integrated into the local community.

> During the following years, I remember becoming accustomed to seeing more and more of the *gringos* that had started coming to our village. They would usually just sleep on the beach in tents or in hammocks, but after some time there were so many of them that that is when they finally started building the hotels....Gloria was the first, because she was one of them, but now she is more like one of us* (Margarita, 42) .

This quote shows that some of the ethnic locals tolerate the presence of the settlers in their village. But she tells me that she doesn't agree with everything they stand for and everything they have done to the village.

> They are very different from us Mexicans. We do not have the same beliefs or customs. From the way we dress to the way build houses to the way we work – we are different (ibid).

Cultural difference can strain the tourist-local relationship, creating tension within the community. As the settlers are responsible for bringing the tourism industry into Zipolite, the natives perceive the settlers in two ways: either as employers or as competitors. As employers, the settlers are perceived in a positive light. "Daniel is crazy, but he is a good guy. I am thankful my family and I have jobs in his hotel. He has given my family an opportunity to make money*" (Tino, 32). The staff at Solstice was also appreciative of the foreign employers. "Brigitte has done so much for me. She is a good boss*" (Fatima, 25). These natives of Zipolite have accepted these foreigners into their community as employers, co-workers, neighbors and even friends.

On the other hand, the settlers are viewed negatively when they act as competitors to ethnic entrepreneurs. From this perspective, the settlers are a threat to the success to the small-scale business opened up by locals. As the settlers usually have more money to invest in their businesses, Mexican entrepreneurs cannot compete with the development of massive hotels, as Anna explains:

They are building a new four-story hotel in front of our hotel on the beach. I am afraid to lose customers to them, because I have already lost many to the other, bigger hotels on the beach like Daniel's because the backpackers like to stay there. I am afraid because I do not have the money to expand my hotel and I don't want to loose my business* (Anna, 28).

This feeling of competition strains settler-local relations in general. In attempt to keep their community closed, the ethnic locals have prevented the settlers from influencing political issues in the village and usually do not invite the foreign residents to town meetings. Yet, one settler (Beth) reported that the ethnic locals are invited to meetings when the natives need money. For example, when the natives decided to build a park for the children of the village, they invited the settlers to a meeting to ask them for help with the funding. This shows that the ethnic locals hold a grudge against the settlers for taking over their town. They may even feel that the settlers owe them something in return.

Local Perceptions of the Backpackers

The natives of Zipolite prefer backpacker tourists over domestic tourists due to the high level of discrimination they receive from the *chilangos* (light-skinned Mexicans). Hence, backpackers are perceived as being polite and as being good tippers. Since backpackers have longer travel itineraries than mass tourists, entrepreneurs appreciate their business.

The *mochileros* (backpackers) are good customers because they stay for an average of five days, while most of the Mexican tourists just stay for the weekend (Humberto, 47).

The hotels and restaurants owners in Zipolite depend greatly on the money they make from the backpackers. As they are satisfied with lower standards in order to save money, backpackers do not demand luxuries such as air conditioning, room service or hot water. Humberto commented that backpackers were less inclined to complain or demand refunds than Mexican tourists. He also said that luxury tourists don't even dare

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coming to Zipolite because they are never happy with the living conditions. Therefore, most ethnic locals do not object to backpackers in the village.

Yet, vendors such as Hector and Nancy mentioned above, insinuated that backpackers try to bargain too much and are never willing to pay the asked price.

> Sometimes they only offer half of the price I ask. But I know they have money and they just don't want to spend it – and then they try to rip me off! (Hector, 37).

I got the feeling that most of the ethnic locals see the backpackers as a metaphor for money. The low budget tactics used by backpackers are thus frustrating for the natives. Yet, based on all of my interviews and conversations, I believe that the ethnic locals hold positive perceptions of the backpacker due to their overall positive economic influence on the local community.

Analysis of the Ethnic Locals' Attitude

> This was a pretty place. But, we have to accept the change. Man has the capacity to evolve himself. We can't remain behind. We have to evolve and go with the change (Pedro, 37).

Overall, my ethnic local subjects did not oppose to the growing tourism industry in their village. As tourism proves to be the *only* serious industry within the town, the locals have had no choice but to welcome and accept the strange looking *gringos* into their lives. The younger subjects were actually enthusiastic about the growth of tourism in the area, as they enjoyed meeting an international crowd and catching up with modernity. The older subjects, who remembered the days without tourism, showed some reluctance towards the intrusion of westerners onto their soil, but they all agreed that industry provides them with a better economic situation than they had in the past.

This information shows that native interest in the tourism is almost always economically rooted. The logic of the ethnic locals in Zipolite is then based on money-making principles. In their quest for money, I wouldn't be surprised if the ethnic locals are the first ones to sell out to big corporations, as was the case in Cohen's (1982)

study. But the ethnic locals don't see a big change in their future as one taxi driver explains:

> Zipolite will never turn into another Acapulco because the government won't allow it. Everything here is owned by Mexicans and they won't sell out to the big American corporations because that would destroy everything. And since almost all the other beaches are developed already, we have to keep something special for ourselves (Alejandro, 22).

This relaxed attitude toward tourism may eventually become dangerous for the ethnic locals. Alejandro may be a dreamer, but if the rest of the local community thinks the way he does, it is only a matter of time before greedy locals sell out to bigger corporations for bigger profits. I got the impression that as the ethnic locals have picked up western values, they place more value on money than on 'keeping something special for themselves'.

Conclusion

The development of the tourist system in Zipolite has dramatically altered the traditional lives of the Zapotec natives born and raised in Zipolite. Since the hippie-settlers were the first tourists in Zipolite, their influence has had the most impact on the natives. The settlers now interact with the locals as employers, business competitors, friends and even lovers. The liberal attitudes of the settlers have thus rubbed off on the locals, changing the local way of life. Interactions between the locals and the contemporary backpackers, who find their way to the village thanks to the detailed travel information offered in the *Lonely Planet*, prove to be more shallow and asymmetrical. In these brief encounters, the locals may strive to extract as much gain as possible from each encounter, no matter the long-term consequences of such actions on the flow of tourists to the town (Sutton 1967: 221 in Cohen 1996: 156).

Overall, the introduction of tourism has been beneficial in creating new jobs and higher salaries for the local inhabitants. Yet, at the same time, the presence of tourists in the town has increased the gap between the rich and the poor. By putting emphasis on the economic domain, tourism enhances the value of money as a criterion of

stratification versus traditional criteria such as status-honor (Cohen 1996: 62). Thus, the natives who prosper in the tourism industry in Zipolite tend to be enthusiastic about increased numbers of tourists in the area. Yet, those who do not directly benefit from the tourists may fall deeper into poverty – resorting to stealing and holding hostile attitudes towards tourists. This chapter has aimed to give one example of how indigenous natives feel about the 'backpacker paraphernalia' that has come to characterize their village.

Chapter 7: Five Socio-cultural Impacts of Backpacker Tourism in Zipolite

Summary of the Case Study

This thesis has presented a case study which has examined the three main dynamics of this tourist-local relationship by presenting accounts of people's interactions, perceptions and attitudes of three distinct groups inhabiting Zipolite. My approach has been based on the theories of various schooloars (Sutton 1967, MacCannel 1976, Smith 1977, Greenwood 1978, Cohen 1996). My study has examined three distinct groups living together side-by-side within the enclave of Zipolite. I have termed these groups as: 1) the settlers, 2) the contemporary backpackers and 3) the ethnic locals. These three groups each have their own defining features and independent ways of thinking, yet they have a definite interdependence. Zipolite is thus characterized by the conflicting cultural values and views of these three groups. Through my presentation of interviews, conversations, observations and anecdotes, I have shown how each of these three unique groups perceives the enclave. I found that each group is ultimately seeking to benefit themselves and therefore most interactions and relationships between the groups are limited and shallow. Each group is not necessarily concerned with the well-being of the other groups. Rather, they view each other instrumentally, as a means for each group to reach their respective goals. Yet, the dependence the three groups have on each other has created a number of relationships. I will now briefly summarize the relationships between these three groups as stated in my case study.

The Settlers

The settlers of Zipolite, introduced in Chapter 4, represent the group of ex-patriots, drifters, travelers and hippies who turned travel into a way of life in order to escape the constraints of modern society. Travel was not the only form of their quest; authenticity, mysticism and drugs also served alternative paths to the same goal (Cohen 1996). Upon their arrival in Zipolite, these travelers found meaning in the simple lives

of the natives, which they considered to be more 'authentic' than their lives back home. In their attempt to make Zipolite their 'ideal' home, these hippies essentially 'settled' Zipolite, pushing their loose morals, liberal values and business skills upon the local population. Over years of contact, the settlers have created lasting relationships with the members of the local community. My case study has provided specific examples of settler-local relationships. The members of these two groups interact in the workplace, as friends, as business competitors, as lovers and as peers. As the settlers have tried to become involved in the local community, they have greatly influenced the norms and values of the native population.

The Contemporary Backpackers

The contemporary backpackers I met in Zipolite prove to follow a revised ideology than that of the settlers or drifters. Chapter 5 of my case study has shown how this group is no longer looking for complete isolation from other westerners, as they tend to congregate in backpacker-friendly enclaves. Zipolite is an example of an enclave that offers numerous backpacker facilities where travelers can meet, exchange information, create short-term friendships or romances and explore new identities without speaking the local language. The data presented in Chapter 5 has shown that today's more conventionalized backpackers are too self-involved to get closer to the local community. The relationships these backpackers had with the natives prove to be shallow and brief. Many of the backpackers I met only interacted with the locals as customers in restaurants, shops and hotels. Therefore, their contact with the locals proves to be no greater than that of mass tourists.

The Ethnic Locals

The development of the tourism industry in Zipolite has proved to have a number of impacts on the local Zapotec population. Many of these impacts have arisen due to the direct and indirect contact the Mexican hosts have with their international guests. The relationships the locals have with both the settlers and the contemporary

backpackers prove to be aimed at gaining economic stability. I examined how the ethnic locals react towards backpacker tourism in their village in Chapter 6, using Doxey's (1976) irritation index. According to my research, most of the ethnic locals of Zipolite are not opposed to tourism in their village. Yet, as the impacts caused by increased contact with 'alternative' tourists become more noticeable, some locals become resentful towards tourists. The following section looks at five of the most prevalent socio-cultural impacts I found backpacker tourism to have on the local population of Zipolite.

Socio-cultural impacts

This chapter discusses my final aim of the paper, which is to understand socio-cultural impacts of backpacker tourism in Zipolite based on my interpretations of the tourist-local relationship documented in the case study. According to Singer, (1968: 528 as quoted in Mathieson & Wall 1992: 158) culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior, acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups including their embodiments in artifacts. Cultural impacts of tourism are thus changes in the conditioning elements of behavior brought on through the development of tourism infrastructure. The social impacts of tourism refer to the changes in the quality of life of residents of tourist areas (Matheison & Wall 1992: 137). My research has shown how the 'settlement' of hippies in a Mexican village has dramatically altered the lives of the local inhabitants by developing the town into a backpacker enclave. The development of this system has thus attracted contemporary backpackers to the village. These more conventionalized 'alternative' tourists prove to have less contact with the local inhabitants, yet their abundance continues to change the lives of the locals. This chapter looks at the five most prevalent socio-cultural impacts I observed the settlers and the backpackers have brought upon the local community of Zipolite.

Neo-Colonialism

Critics of the tourist industry's infiltration to the Third World have called it a form of 'new imperialism' (Mowforth & Munt 1998: 51). This claim is based on the exploitation of locals through their employment in the tourism industry. Critics have also referred to tourism as neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism is a policy whereby a major power uses economic and political means to perpetuate or extend its influence over underdeveloped nations or areas (Scientific American). Tourism, like colonialism in the past, creates the possibility of recreating and changing local customs and the history of the native community. The culture of tourism may eventually be seen as the millennial stage of colonialism and Empire. (MacCannell in Smith, 2001:385) Tourism can be criticized for inflicting Western views upon local populations around the globe and changing the lifestyles of the natives to better the tourists' needs. It can be said that tourism is a form of post-colonialism because like the colonists who took over Africa, South America and islands such as Hawaii, tourist destinations are transformed by westerners to appeal to their own needs and luxuries.

In fact, the former Executive of the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism (ECTWT) suggests that:

> Tourism, especially Third World tourism, as it is practiced today, does not benefit the majority of people. Instead it exploits them, pollutes the environment, destroys the ecosystem, bastardizes the culture, robs people of their traditional values and ways of life…In other words, tourism epitomizes the present unjust world economic order where the few who control wealth and power dictate the terms. As such, tourism is little different from colonialism (Srisang 1992: 3).

Tourism can be viewed as a neo-colonial activity based on these three economic conditions: 1) the dependency of the natives on tourism revenues, 2) the majority of the transfer of wealth profits foreign investors instead of locals, and 3) the employment of non-locals in managerial positions (Mathieson & Wall 1992: 149). I found all of these conditions to be present in Zipolite today.

Firstly, as my case study implied, tourism is the only prominent industry in Zipolite today. Therefore, the success of the natives depends on their willingness to accommodate fully the needs of tourists. Although the needs of backpacker tourists are less demanding than those of mass tourists, the implementation of this small-scale tourist system still dramatically changes the lives of the locals. All economic and political priorities and organization in Zipolite have become directed towards conserving the tourism in the area.

Secondly, the development of the tourism industry in Zipolite has been highly influenced by foreign interests (whom I have referred to as the 'settlers'). These foreign interests have higher budgets than locals, and have the possibilities to open bigger more modern establishments. The popularity of such establishments by backpackers thus takes money away from local entrepreneurs who offer lower standards. A large proportion of the profits go directly to the settlers, and many locals never see the actual profits from this thriving industry.

Thirdly, the employment of settlers in the professional and managerial positions also provokes charges of neo-colonialism. As more settlers opens up shops in Zipolite, the locals have gone from being entrepreneurs to employees with menial tasks. The settlers have pushed the ethnic locals of Zipolite into subservient positions with low-pay. Examples concerning employer-employee relations and problems were discussed in Chapter 4.

The above discussion represents a radical perspective on the role of tourism in Zipolite. Yet, my case study has given examples in which tourism proves to be exploitative to the local community. These examples display many characteristics of colonialism. One interviewee also feels that Zipolite can be viewed as a neo-colony. She explains:

> The white people came in and pretty much took over the development of
> the town. It's not that the Mexicans are stupid, it's just that don't have
> any logic in their organization or the way the do anything. So the white
> people took advantage of that and made the village into their own. It
> definitely has a colonial feel (Beth, Canadian, 34).

According to Doxey (1977), the dependency on tourism revenues can eventually lead to resentment of tourists by the ethnic locals. This resentment stems from the changes in the quality of life of the locals. Once 'colonized' by tourists, a destination cannot go back to their traditional ways of living.

Gender Issues

The entry of women into paid jobs is significant because traditionally Mexican women have represented a very low percentage of the work force (Chant 1992: 96). The low rate of female employment is a result of discrimination by employers and of restrictions brought on by house-hold and child-care duties most married Mexican women have. Opportunities for the employment of women in tourism related jobs have thus brought on changes in gender roles and family relationships in Zipolite. On a positive note, Mexican females are given the chance to become financially independent by obtaining a job in the 'formal sector' of tourism (meaning legit and with a contract). This financial stability lessens the female dependence on their male partners, and has been shown to delay marriage in some instances (ibid: 97). Yet, such is not typically the case.

The employment sector in Zipolite is distinctly 'feminized'. As most of the local women are uneducated and unskilled, they end up in menial positions often working long hours cleaning hotel rooms, cooking and washing laundry. Most Mexican women acquire these skills through gender socialization at home. My case study illustrated three examples of local women who have been forced to work in *la industria*. Margarita (42) has spent nearly nine years making beds and cleaning hotel rooms in order to support her family as a single mother. Her daughters were forced to take on household responsibility at an early age while their mother was working. Anna (28) has washed hundreds of kilos of laundry in the past three years in order to feed her children while her husband fled to the US to find work. And Fatima (25) has been washing dishes since she was 12 just to give half of her salary to her father.

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Increased female employment has also had an impact on the relations between men and women in the village. Some men can act violently towards their wives as they no longer have time to carry out household chores. In extreme cases, men have reacted to women's increased financial autonomy by reducing their own contributions to the household income. This was displayed in my case study using the anecdote about the group of men drinking and gambling when they had no work to do. This shows that with their wives in the workforce, men are less compelled to save their own earnings. They are also more compelled to have affairs with the more 'free' female tourists staying in the village.

Negative impacts on gender relations within the family have arisen from the presence of other women in Zipolite. Local men seem to be mystified by the female settlers and backpackers who travel alone and often stay in the village for an extended period of time. The large number of sexual encounters between female tourists and their Zipolite hosts causes for many misconceptions about foreign females by local men. For Mexican men, the white women parading around naked on the beach represent 'sex'. While Mexican women are gendered into conservative housewives, foreign women are seen as having 'loose morals' and as not caring about virginity.

Many of these foreign women are open to sexual encounters with the local men, and thus represent countless opportunities for local men to experiment with their sexual competency. In this sense, tourism strengthens local male sexual identity (Tucker 1997: 114). Traveling allows moral constraints to be set aside as female settlers and backpackers are charmed by numerous attractive young men in Zipolite. Some, like the 'promiscuous' Lucia (Argentinean, 43), are flattered by the male attention they get in the village, while others, like Eva (Belgian, 22), have made it clear that local men make them feel uncomfortable. Either way, tourism has become an integral part of the local culture in Zipolite, which has ultimately developed new styles of living and working as well relating to women. This shows that the local culture has become 'touristified' through the process of tourism production (ibid: 114). This 'touristification' has led to changes within the local Zapotec culture.

Cultural Change

It is claimed that when two cultures come into contact of any duration, each becomes somewhat like the other through process of borrowing (Nunez in Smith 1977: 207). This process was identified in my study by the settlers in their attempts to 'go native', as well as by the locals in their attempts to become more modern. The theory also suggests that when contact takes place between a dominant culture and a weaker one, it is usually the former which influences the latter (Petit-Skinner 1977: 85). This process is also referred to as westernization. Westernization is a process whereby traditional, long-established societies come under the influence of western culture in such matters as industry and technology, law, politics and economics, lifestyle and diet, language and the alphabet, religion and values (wikipedia). This change can lead to the gradual homogenization of cultures in which the local identity becomes assimilated into the stronger visiting culture. As the locals in Zipolite have adapted to tourism in order to satisfy the needs of the tourists, they have also picked up values and norms of the visiting culture. The blending of traveler and local norms into a 'hybrid' culture has thus changed social and cultural aspects of the native culture.

Language

The language of the local community in Zipolite has changed tremendously since the arrival of the settlers. According to Margarita (Mexican, 42), many more people spoke the local Zapotec dialect in the village three decades ago. Today, the dialect is nearly forgotten as most locals speak Spanish together. I believe this initial language change came from discrimination by migrants and tourists from other parts of Mexican who only speak Spanish. Spanish has since become the official language of the area. The increase of non-Spanish speaking backpackers has called for a higher demand for English speaking natives. English speaking natives usually act as 'cultural brokers' working in positions such as guides and translators. Yet, according to one English teacher, "There is a very low level of English spoken in Zipolite which prohibits the natives to communicate with the tourists on the same level as the foreigners who have businesses here" (Beth, Canadian, 34).

Clothing

Western influence has also changed the clothing styles worn by the ethnic locals. For example, I did not see many of the indigenous peoples wearing their traditional clothing. Of course, some women still wore bright colored, embroidered blouses and dresses, but most of them had taken to wearing T-shirts and jeans or even shorts. I recall being in a small clothing shop in Colonia Roca Blanca which sold both ethnic and western clothing. I found it ironic that the sales girl was dressed in completely western gear (tight jeans and a cropped top), while she sold mostly ethnic items to backpacker clientele. These new fashions worn by the local women have prompted the local men to view them differently, as they now resemble the foreign tourists. The local men have also adapted to western clothing, typically wearing board-shorts, jeans, T-shirts and base-ball caps.

Food

The international cuisine choices found in Zipolite has had an impact on the eating habits of the local population. While, there were still a number of restaurants in the village which served local dishes, nearly every restaurant had changed the menu to satisfy the taste buds of the tourists. As the locals cater to the tourists, their local dishes may become westernized over time.

Technology

There are currently six Internet cafés and two telecommunication centers in Zipolite. These technological advances have allowed the inhabitants of the small village to get in touch with the 'outside world' through cyberspace and telephones. Westerners tend to think that the implementation of such technologies essentially 'destroys' the local culture. For example, what would happen if all the local women of Zipolite replace their past time of embroidering traditional clothing to check their e-mail. In this sense, the introduction of technologies to local communities can lead to the degradation

of the local culture. Yet, one settler in Zipolite argues that the locals enjoy being technologically up to date.

> Everybody thinks that the introduction of cell phones and computers in Zipolite is bad for the locals. But have you ever asked them what they think about it? They love it. For the first time, they can communicate with their relatives in other parts of Mexico. Just because they are 'natives' doesn't mean that they can't enjoy the same opportunities as us (Natalie, French, 33).

Of course, it is not fair to keep the locals in the dark once they have already been introduced to modern technology. Natalie is right in her promotion of equal opportunities in the village. But what she doesn't consider is that the locals may never have had the desire for such western advancements if they hadn't been brought into the village by tourists. The increased value in western goods leads me to the next socio-cultural impact I found prevalent in Zipolite.

Increased Value in Material Goods

Tourism plays a disruptive role in reinforcing locally unattainable socio-economic aspirations. The demonstration effect (Bryden 1973: 95 in Mathieson & Wall 1992: 143) occurs when foreign ideologies and ways of life are introduced to the host population. This effect can be positive if it encourages the locals to work harder for something they are lacking. But usually, the parading of symbols of western affluence by tourists can be detrimental to the host community. Western commodities are rarely desired prior to their introduction into host communities, and for many locals of the developing world, these commodities remain out of reach (Mathieson & Wall 1992: 143). In mass tourism destinations, discontent grows amongst the locals who resent the rich tourists staying in luxury hotels. Yet, I argue that since 'alternative' tourists value traveling on a low-budget, their impact on the locals is slightly less severe.

The members of the settler and backpacker communities in Zipolite both place a high value on maintaining aspects of hippie culture. They therefore tend to dress in ethnic or dirty clothing and do not flash material goods as much as mass tourists do. Yet, because contemporary backpackers are adapting to a more conventional ideology,

they have higher budgets than the drifters did. Arriving in the village with digital cameras and MP3 players, these 'alternative' tourists appear rich to the ethnic locals. As a consequence, the hosts often develop misconceptions about the backpackers.

Assuming they have money to spend, the locals have been reported to use a double-pricing system when selling souvenirs to backpackers (Hector, Mexican, 37). The backpackers' low-budget tactics and bargaining skills often irritates the locals who don't understand why the backpackers try to be so cheap. As backpackers have few constrains while traveling they often behave in an uninhibited fashion and spend their money frivolously in the eyes of the local. Heightened economic expectations among the local population who envy the material standards and values of the tourists may lead to the copying of western consumption patterns (ibid: 144). This change in the native value system was exemplified in my case study in the story about the family who had used all their savings in order to furnish their new, adobe home in a western style.

Changing values in Zipolite has also led to a change in the stratification of the local community. As tourism has increase the importance of the economic domain, statuses based on wealth override traditional stratification criteria such as a person's origin or family-honor. The presence of wealthier tourists in the village has thus widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Since the emergent tourism system in Zipolite has allowed some members of the local community to greatly benefit from it, other members are pushed into menial jobs with no chance for advancement. These individuals now make up what can be considered the 'middle' class of Zipolite. Even worse, the tourism system may deny unskilled natives employment opportunities, increasing poverty levels of indigenous locals.

Greater wealth and upward social mobility have become increasingly desirable for young members of host communities. Employment in the tourism industry is one way for young natives to improve their standard of living. Yet their low salaries do not allow young locals to spend money the same way the travelers do. This causes the locals to become envious of the young travelers they observe wearing western fashions, dining in restaurants and drinking in bars. This envy can become problematic when

locals begin to steal in order to purchase western goods which give them higher statuses within the local community.

The Increase of Criminal Activity

The final and possibly most negative socio-cultural impact tourism has brought into Zipolite is the increase of criminal activity. Since the *gringos* introduced aspects of their western cultures to the natives of Zipolite, their desire to have such things has often led to drastic measures. Since the late 1970s, Zipolite has been a town known for crime. Backpackers are advised not to leave their belongings unattended and not to walk carrying their backpacks on the road leading from Puerto Angel into Zipolite. During my field study, I heard numerous accounts of criminal activity targeted at backpackers. The most common attacks on backpackers were those of petty theft. A number of backpackers had had money or personal belongings stolen by locals on the beach. One informant told me that they had met someone who had even been robbed by the owners of the hotel they were staying at. Other more serious criminal attacks mentioned local men assaulting male backpackers and even raping female backpackers. The police authorities I spoke with in Zipolite confirmed that the crime rate in the village has risen in the recent times. However, in an interview with a local police officer, I was told that tourist should not be too worried about being the victim of a criminal act due to increased numbers of patrolling officers in the village 24-hours-a-day. But it seems that the local police force cannot stop every attack, as one Italian tourist was murdered by a local man, five kilometers away from Zipolite during my field study (Officer Ledesma). Luckily, they had caught the murderer who, at the time of the interview, was being detained at the Pochutla County Jail.

Much of the criminal activity mentioned above can also be connected to increased drug use by members of the ethnic local community. Although Zapotec traditions have used drugs in ceremonies in order to find spiritual meaning (Iowa State Report), native drug consumption patterns have increased due to their contact with the settlers. As hippies are known for their recreational use of drugs, the settlers and backpackers have created a high demand for drugs in the area. Some of the settlers

actually get 'stuck' in Zipolite due to bad drug habits. In the 1980s, a group of Italians brought in a lot of cocaine traffic – which proved to be highly addictive for locals (Beth, Canadian, 34). In later years, heroine had a heavy influence on the town, as many settlers and locals ended up as junkies living in the streets (Daniel, American, 56). Police control has become much stricter in recent years. But this has not stopped backpackers from purchasing drugs from local suppliers. This shows that the drug industry plays a role in the illegal sector of the tourism industry.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to understand some of the socio-cultural impacts 'alternative' tourists have on one specific backpacker dominated destination. Through my analysis of the relationships between the settlers, the contemporary backpackers and the ethnic locals examined in my field research, I have denoted five socio-cultural impacts my settler and backpacker subjects have had on the local community in Zipolite. These impacts have been 1) the neo-colonial influence the settlers have had on the locals; 2) the changes in gender roles due to employment of women in the tourism industry and relationships between local men and female travelers; 3) changes to the local culture which include: language, clothing, food and technology; 4) the increased value in material goods which essentially changes class stratification and status symbols within the local community; and 5) the increase of criminal activity to the area due to the economic focus the natives of Zipolite now have and the increase of drug use in the village.

As these socio-cultural impacts can be both positive and negative, I conclude that the impact of backpacker tourism in Zipolite can be both romanticized and demonized. I believe that backpacking can be romanticized based on the positive impacts tourism has brought to the native inhabitants. Because the only businesses in Zipolite prior to the introduction of tourism were tortilla-making and turtle-poaching, tourism has thus created job opportunities and economic benefits for the locals of the small village. The organization of tourism infrastructure has given the women of Zipolite a place in the workforce. This allows women to be economically independent,

which may lead to lower teenage pregnancy rates as well as fewer women being forced to stay in abusive relationships due to their economic dependencies on men.

Yet, because of the abundance of negative socio-cultural impacts tourism has had on the local community of Zipolite, I believe that backpacking can also be demonized. First of all, the economic dependence the locals now have on the settlers and the contemporary backpacker has creates unequal relationships, where the locals are usually working for or serving the other two groups. As the tourism industry of the village is dominated by foreign interests, the unskilled locals are typically given menial jobs with low salaries. Women tend to be placed in gendered positions which entail long hours and hard work. There are rarely possibilities for the locals to move up the career ladder. The primary job for locals in Zipolite is that of 'hosting' their guests. Jobs in the service industry can essentially create hostile attitudes amongst locals who may begin to resent the tourists they perceive as being rich and without morals. Secondly, the western influence of the settlers and backpackers in Zipolite has led to the diminishing of local tradition and languages. Ethnic dress has become replaced by Nike and Levi's. Cultural dishes have become 'touristified' to suit the taste buds of the tourists. And western goods have come to hold more value than traditional art and handicrafts. Locals are also becoming 'de-moralized' through their contact with backpacker tourists who have been criticized for their sexual freedom and use of drugs. Thirdly, the presence of western tourists in the village of Zipolite has led to increased levels of criminal activities. These negative actions toward tourists have given the village a bad reputation as well as induce fear in the local inhabitants.

My interpretations of the case study presented in this thesis have allowed me to come to the conclusion that the socio-cultural impacts of backpacking, as an 'alternative' form of tourism, are less detrimental to the host population of Zipolite than those of mass tourism could be. As mass tourism introduces more extravagant accommodations and tourists with more money, the changes brought upon the local population by mainstream tourism are more dramatic than those of backpacking tourism. My case study has shown how the small-scale fashion of backpacker infrastructure was introduced in Zipolite at a slow, sustainable pace. Thirty years after

the first 'drifters' discovered the beach; the town is still in the 'development' stage of Butler's (1980) resort cycle. This slow development process is mainly due to Mexican laws which prohibit the outright sale of land to foreigners. Relationships have thus been created between the locals and foreign entrepreneurs in order to evade this law. These relationships have given the locals time to adjust and adapt to the settlers and backpackers residing and visiting their village.

However, as all forms of tourism are destructive in their nature, backpacking is no exception. This study has pointed out many negative socio-cultural impacts 'alternative' tourists have had on one Mexican village. The liberal attitudes of the settlers have permanently changed the value system of the natives in Zipolite. Plus, the conventionalization of the contemporary backpackers I encountered in the town is essentially making the locals more resentful toward tourists. Although the locals may like and even want tourism in their village, many of their cultural traditions are now lost forever due to the changes brought on by backpacker tourism.

This thesis has provided a detailed case study analysis of the 'alternative' tourist-local relationship inside of a currently popular backpacker enclave. These relationships have led to a number of socio-cultural impacts on the local culture of Zipolite. Although my findings have not proved anything new in the field of tourism, I have used existing theories which have allowed me to better understand the consequences of tourism in the developing world. The approach I have chosen to use has highlighted one example of how 'backpacker paraphernalia' has changed the lives of the local population of the enclave. As Zipolite hosts a mix of 'alternative' tourists, I conclude that the relationships made between 'alternative' tourists and locals have induced fewer negative socio-cultural impacts on the host community than mass tourism has in other destinations.

Conclusion

After my five week stay in the village of Zipolite, the time had come to say good-bye. I said my farewells to and exchanged e-mail addresses with the backpacker crew I had been most recently hanging out with at the Brisa Marina Hotel. I also said good-bye to Daniel and thanked him for his interest in my project. I put on my backpack and set out to leave the enclave that had served as my 'home' for these five, short weeks. I was just about to leave the hotel grounds when Margarita came running after me to say *adios*. She had spent a lot of time discussing how the village had changed since the arrival of tourism with me. I hugged her good-bye and stepped out onto the dirt road of *Avenida Roca Blanca*, passing all of the shops and restaurants I had visited so many times. I waved good-bye to the 'chicken man' who was outside of his restaurant grilling his chickens in a big cloud of barbeque smoke. I made my way up to the main road of the town and waited for a *collectivo* to pass by.

About ten minutes later, I was sitting in the back of a pick-up truck. Driving along the main road back towards Pochutla, with the wind blowing in my face, I thought about all the people I had met during my stay. It seemed like my field research had gone by so quickly. I thought to myself, "Had I gotten enough information for my thesis? Had I really uncovered the locals' perceptions towards tourism?" Just then, as I looked to my right, I saw a billboard on the side of the road which read in big black letters: *Conserva El Turismo! No Tira Basura!*, which translates into: Conserve the tourism! Do not litter! This sign answered all my questions as to how the locals perceived tourism in the area. No matter the abundance of negative impacts the tourism industry has brought into Zipolite, the locals have come to depend on the income gained from tourists as a means of survival. In other words, the locals depend on their interactions with tourists in order to ensure economic stability. Although there are both winners and losers within the industry, tourism has become a way of life for the native community of Zipolite.

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Appendices

Table 1: List of 'Settler' Subjects

Name	Nationality	Age	Profession	Length of Time in Zipolite
Daniel	American	56	Hotel Owner	9 years
Natalie	French	33	Restaurant owner	4 years
Beth	Canadian	34	English Teacher	5 years
Carla	Argentinean	31	Shop Owner	3 years
Federico	Argentinean	35	Shop Owner	3 years
Hector	Mexican (D.F)	37	Snorkel Tours	8 years
Brigitte	Dutch	39	Yoga Instructor	12 years
Beverly	American	50	Biologist	2 years
Rolf	Swiss	45	Developer	9 months
Miguel	Mexican (Guadalajara)	41	waiter	Off and on for 6 years
Ana	Swedish	22	vendor	1 year
Lucas	Italian	49	Restaurant owner	5 years
Lucia	Argentinean	43	Hotel owner	Off and on for 7 years
Rodrigo	Mexico D.F.	41	Internet Cafe	4 years

Table 2: List of Backpacker Subjects

Name &Nationality	Sex	Age	Length of Travel	Occupation	Source of Info	Identify themselves as
Alex: American	M	22	1 year	English teacher	Word of mouth	Traveler
Veronica: Spanish	F	31	1 month	teacher	Spanish guide	"Tourista economica"
G.G.: Dutch	M	30	6 weeks	Office job	Fromer's	Tourist
Ingrid: Dutch	F	28	6 months	PhD research	Fromer's	Field researcher
Borris: French	M	24	4 months	student	Lonely Planet	Traveler
Per: Swedish	M	23	11 weeks	student	Lonely Planet	Backpacker
Lina: Swedish	F	24	11 weeks	student	Lonely Planet	Backpacker
Hans: Norwegian	M	24	4 months	student	Lonely Planet	Backpacker (not hardcore!)
Synne: Norwegian	F	23	4 months	student	LP and internet	Backpacker
Erik: French	M	42	2 months	Manager	Internet, sister	Backpacker
Darya: Israeli	F	25	6 months	Finished army	friends	Backpacker
Shashawna: Israeli	F	23	6 months	Finished army	Lonely Planet	Backpacker
Eva: Belgian	F	20	1 month	student	Lonely Planet	Traveler
Lucie: Belgian	F	22	3 months	teacher	Lonely Planet	Traveler
Maggy: Belgian	F	22	1 month	student	Lonely Planet	Traveler
Lucas: Italian	M	29	undecided	Work&travel	friends	Traveler
Frank: Swiss	M	20	3 months	construction	Lonely	Traveler
Zoe: British	F	21	3 months	volunteer	Internet	Volunteer

Name &Nationality	Sex	Age	Length of Travel	Occupation	Source of Info	Identify themselves as
Claire: British	F	20	3 months	volunteer	friend	Volunteer
Jean Pierre: Swiss	M	32	2 months	Between work and school	Lonely Planet	Traveler
Charlie: Australian	M	27	6 months	English teacher	Rough Guide	Backpacker
Suzie: Australian	F	29	6 months	Social worker	Internet	Traveler
Tom: Israeli	M	27	1 month	TV producer	Word of mouth	Backpacker!
Torrey: American	M	24	2 months	Personal trainer	brother	Tourist
Christian: American	M	32	2 months	lawyer	Internet	Traveler!
Nate: New Zealand	M	34	1 year	Unemployed outdoors-man	Lonely Planet	Backpacker
Vincent: Dutch	M	27	1 month	construction	Dutch book	Tourist
Julia: Dutch	F	29	1 month	NGO	Dutch book	Backpacker
Ramon: Spanish	M	36	2 months	Engineer	NOT Lonely Planet!!!	Backpacker
Marcus: American	M	46	undecided	artist	Lonely Planet	Traveler
Aaron: American	M	32	undecided	undecided	Word of mouth	traveler
Heather: American	F	22	1 month	Student and waitress	Internet	traveler
Misako: Japan	M	30	3 months	computers	Internet	No response
Helga: German	F	24	6 months	volunteer	Internet	backpacker

Table 3: List of Local Subjects

Name	Age	Place of Origin	Occupation
Margarita	42	Zipolite	Housekeeping, tortillas, pinatas
Anna	28	Zipolite	Hotel owner, laundry service
Hector	37	Zipolite	Jewelry maker\vendor
Nancy	26	Zipolite	Jewelry maker\vendor
Jose Angel	27	Puerto Angel	Drug dealer
Tino	32	Vera Cruz/Zipolite	Hotel Manager
Alejandro	43	Pochutla	Waiter
Jorge	22	Pochutla	Police officer
Marco	28	Oaxaca	Police officer
Alejandro	22	Zipolite	Taxi driver
Juanita	16	Zipolite	Shop employee
Humberto	47	Zipolite	Hotel Owner
Issac	42	Vera Cruz	Waiter\recruiter
Paco	36	Huatulco	Waiter\cook
Alberto	23	Zipolite	Snorkeling guide
Pedro	47	Pochutla	Shop owner
Fatima	22	Puerto Angel	Waitress\cook
Julio Cesar	24	Zipolite	Taxi driver
Fernando	43	Zipolite	Friend of Pedro
Anita	39	Zipolite	Shop Employee

Copy of Backpacker Survey Questions

Name: **Sex: M/F**

Nationality: **City and Country you live in:**

Occupation: **Length of travel on this trip:**

1) **Destinations you have or will travel to on this trip:**

2) **Accommodation preference (or most often used):**

3) **Average money spent per day:**

4) **How often do you eat in a restaurant?**

5) **Method of transport used most in Mexico:**

6) **Are you traveling alone or with others? Who?**

7) **Do you speak Spanish?**

8) **What is your primary source of travel information?**

9) **Do you consider yourself a tourist/ traveler/ backpacker? (circle one)**

10) **Why did you choose to come to Zipolite?**

11) **What do you hope to accomplish in Zipolite?**

12) **What has been your best or worst experience in Mexico so far?**

13) **Do you try to avoid big resorts and other tourists? Why or why not?**

14) **Have you made any contact with the locals? Who?**

15) **Do you think it is easier to meet travelers than it is to meet locals?**

16) **What do you think of the locals?**

17) **What is the main goal of your travel?**

List of Hotels and Restaurants in Colnia Roca Blanca in Zipolite

1. Roca Blanca Restaurant & Hotel
2. San Cristobal Hotel & Restaurant
3. Nuevo Sol Rooms
4. Hotel El Paraiso
5. Brisa Marina Posada
6. Tao Rooms & Hammocks
7. Paisano Market
8. Eclipse Restaurant
9. Pizzas Alex
10. El Terrible Pizza
11. Arbarrotes Elvy (store)
12. La Choza
13. Cabanas Zipolite
14. El Patio De Mi Casa Restaurant
15. Internet Cafe
16. Posada Navidad
17. Hongo
18. Miscelanea Elizabeth (store)
19. Farmacia & Doctor
20. Tres Hermanos Store
21. Cafe Castelet
22. Taqueria Delfin
23. Laundromat
24. Telephone & Fax
25. Jael Restaurant
26. Piasano 2
27. Swim Suits
28. Oceano Bags / Tel.
29. La Sirena Restaurant
30. La Puesta Disco & Bar
31. Drug and Stationary Store
32. Ziponet Internet, Bakery, Clothing
33. Internet Jardin
34. Posada Del Tio Juan
35. Creperia Adriana
36. 3 De Diciembre Pizzeria
37. 2 De Diciembre Restaurant
38. Buon Vento Restaurant
39. The Mechanics House
40. Abarotes Elvy (store)