

Ticos and Tourists: Cross-Cultural Gender Relations in Quepos, Costa Rica

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Introduction

The discotheques and bars of Quepos, Costa Rica are perhaps the central arenas for the town's cross-cultural interactions. Although the beaches and hotels near the National Park of Manuel Antonio provide a meeting spot for locals and tourists, interactions, which occur here, are often solidified by a promise to meet for drinks at night. The bars and discos which are frequented by tourists are also frequented by those locals interested in personalized contact with foreign visitors, most of whom are local males in their twenties. On any one night, one would find in such an establishment young tourists and students from around the world in interaction with these representatives of the local culture. In actuality, these men are perhaps the least representative of traditional local culture due to their extended personal interactions with foreigners. Young local women also frequent these tourist hot spots, but the presence of local women is much less visible than that of local men.

The lesser visibility of local women in the nightlife of Quepos can be attributed to several factors. Many Costa Rican women marry in their early twenties and have children soon after, at which point the majority of household responsibilities come under their responsibility. Mothers are expected to stay home and care for the children while it is common for fathers to go out with friends at night. In addition, many of the men who go out to the discos and bars at night have children but are separated, divorced, or were never married to their children's mother. Thus the care of their children falls under the responsibility of the children's mothers. Another factor which affects the greater attendance of men at the tourist hot spots of Quepos is a differential perception of proper gender behavior. While it is acceptable for men to continually date and even spend the night with tourist women, such behavior on the part of local women would result in a generally negative perception of her by other locals. This has resulted in local women's interactions with tourists, particularly tourist men, taking on a different character than that adopted by local men.

Relationships between tourist women and local men are the most visible form of intercultural relationship in Quepos, Costa Rica. The phenomenon of romantic relationships between foreign women and local men is a common occurrence throughout Latin American and Caribbean culture and has received considerable recent anthropological attention. In their article "For Love and Money: Romance Tourism in Jamaica," Deborah Pruitt and Suzanne La Font present a study of this phenomenon in Jamaica. In contrast to sex tourism, which they define as sexual relations between foreign men and local women, they designate romance tourism as the phenomenon of romantic/sexual relationships between foreign women and local men. While the foreign woman provides the Jamaican man with money and gifts, the local man offers sex and cultural knowledge. They assert that "The local man is not merely a sexual object, but rather the woman's personal cultural broker. He serves to ease her experience in the society and provide her with increased access to the local culture." (1995: 426) As Pruitt and La Font point out, amorous relationships between locals and foreigners involve much more than sex. Many tourists desire what they perceive as a genuine experience of local culture, and an obvious means of achieving such an experience is through interactions with local people. Both locals and tourists continually asserted that it was easier for them to meet members of the opposite sex, and thus intercultural romantic relationships seem an obvious means of achieving a desired cross-cultural experience.

Methodology

I attempted to gain a stratified sample of informants, interviewing informants on the basis of age, sex, and Costa Rican or foreign nationality. The groups used were Ticos, Ticas, Gringos, and Gringas, and each of these groups was divided into subgroups of informants aged thirty and above, and aged below thirty. (Costa Ricans refer to themselves as Ticos and Europeans and North Americans as Gringos) I interviewed people whom I met or introduced myself to in town, in the hotels on the road to Manuel Antonio, or at the beach, as well as several members of families with whom students from the program were residing. Snowball sampling was also used, in which interviewees provided me with the names of other possible informants. In addition, participant observation was fundamental to my understanding of gender issues in Quepos. Information was gained from casual conversations and observations made at the beach and in town, as well as my own personal experiences as a young American woman in Costa Rica.

Problems

My main problem was based on my identity as a foreign woman. This meant that local informants might not have given me honest responses as to their perceptions of foreigners, particularly foreign women. In a country such as Costa Rica where the avoidance of conflict is a cultural imperative and the desire to *quedar bien* (“to get along and make a good impression in an encounter, to appear amiable [Biesanz et al.: 1999]”) is paramount, it seems likely that any negative emotions felt by locals towards foreigners would not be expressed to me. Another problem related to my identity as a foreign woman is that some male informants may have told me what they thought I wanted to hear, for at the conclusion of several interviews which I conducted with local males, they expressed some level of desire for a relationship beyond friendship. While a few American males told me certain things that Ticos had told them with regard to foreign women, such as “American women are easy,” rarely were such stereotypes expressed to me. Also, the generally more reserved demeanor of local women often made it difficult for me to gain information, and during several interviews with young local women I had a difficult time getting them to open up to me. However, there were many exceptions to these general rules, which allowed me to gain insight into the issues that I sought to understand.

A Gringa In Quepos

I walk down the street, past the halfway house for former drug addicts and prostitutes that I have passed every day for the past five weeks. As always, its inhabitants “tsk” at me as one might call a cat, and I hear “Hola” and “Hello” from several male voices. As I continue my walk, a rusty pickup truck passes and its two middle-aged male inhabitants look me up and down. A Tica woman in her twenties, holding the hand of a small child, passes me walking in the opposite direction. I attempt to make eye contact with her but she does not look at me. A forty-year-old man on his bicycle passes and leaves a lingering, “Hola, Linda.” Just another five minutes for a young Gringa walking down the road in Quepos.

Upon asking Ticos and Ticas about the cause of such behavior, several informants responded that Ticas are shyer than Ticos. My response to such an assertion is always, “But why are they shyer?” Often this question is greeted with a pensive look, followed by an, “I don’t know, that’s a good question.” One Tico informant needed little time to think, and responded that such behavior is the result of the greater amount of freedom granted to Ticos, and thus their

greater comfort with talking to strangers. Upon my asking why Ticos are given more freedom, this respondent also needed no time to speculate. He answered that it is because unlike Ticas, Ticos can not get pregnant. In a Catholic society which prohibits abortion and looks down on sexual relations outside of marriage, the greater social freedom allotted to males seems a logical check against occurrences considered shameful to the family and society at large.

Past and Present

Prior to the 1970s, unmarried couples would go out dancing to the local club, but only in the company of a chaperone such as a parent, older brother, or uncle or aunt. Unmarried girls would not go out at night without adult supervision, although this was acceptable for men. Obviously such a custom served as a means of preventing sexual activity before marriage. Now it is very common for young girls to go out with their boyfriends, although the most common scenario is for girls to go out with their female friends and meet up with male friends in the bars or disco. Several local older informants lamented the many changes that have occurred with regard to the youth of Quepos. According to them, pregnancy before marriage was virtually unheard of thirty years ago, while now it is common for fourteen and fifteen year old girls to be pregnant. A fifty-year old informant gave the introduction of television and tourists as the reasons for the change in female behavior. Both became widespread in the 1970s, and since then what is considered socially acceptable behavior for women has been steadily changing. One local man described Costa Rica as a sponge, absorbing the customs of other societies, losing their own culture integrity in the process.

Dolls and Pin-Up Girls

The room which I inhabited for the five weeks I spent in Quepos belonged to a seven-year-old girl. Barbies and baby dolls, a stroller and play stove, and a plethora of stuffed animals, covered one wall of the room. Similar reflections of society's planned place for women cluttered my own childhood room, but the messages inherent in the room of this Costa Rican girl extended beyond such socialization of gender roles. Out of the ten Barbies with whom I shared my living space, only one had dark hair, a Barbie representing Pocahontas. The rest were the classic portrayal of Barbie, long blonde hair, and long tan legs. Out of the five baby dolls, four had blonde hair and the other was bald, and four of them had blue eyes. After several weeks of sleeping in this room, this concentration on blond hair and blue eyes suddenly struck me. Surely such a focus on physical traits impossible for most girls to attain, let alone a Costa Rican girl with darker skin, hair and eyes, must have a negative effect on the self-image of young girls. Light skin and hair are often present as a mark of sexual desirability. A popular Costa Rican beer, Pilsen, produces an annual calendar visible on the wall of virtually every bar that I visited. Apparently the photographs are of more interest than the calendar dates, for I have often seen months other than the current months displayed. For each month, a different scantily clad woman lounges, the Pilsen logo discreetly placed on her person or in the background. February's representative wears a blue bikini with bright yellow flowers, and has two blonde braids which fall on either side of her face. The May model has light brown hair and her bikini clad skin is a light tone, typical of Euro-American ethnicity and rarely found in Ticas. In one small and worn Costa Rican owned bar, the page for January of 1997 was taped to the wall. A blonde in a strapless turquoise bikini leans her head backwards, eyes closed, one hand pushing back her hair. One young Tico complimented my friend and I on the color of our eyes and hair, and stated that this was why Gringas were so pretty--they have various colors of eyes and hair

while Ticos are "just normal."

The idealization of a physical form found predominantly outside of Costa Rican society is reflected in the perception of foreign women in Costa Rica. Even if not possessing these idealized physical traits, the female tourist in Quepos is perceived in a similar light. A thirty-five-year-old Tico informant told me that many Tico men perceive North American women as sex objects. The vast majority of pornographic films and magazines are from the United States. In addition, Hollywood and television portray the American female as always willing to jump into bed with the male protagonist. Thus many Costa Rican males associate North American women with sex. Such a perception is further strengthened by the behavior of many female tourists in Quepos.

Free from normal constraints, the female tourist often engages in sexual behavior which would normally be out of the question at home. As several American informants pointed out, tourist women can do things which no one at home will ever find out about unless the women themselves choose to discuss their sexual experiences. Erik Cohen (1988) compares the tourist experience to Victor Turner's "rites of passage," in which the tourist's journey is compared to the liminal state found in rituals throughout time and space. In this transient state, the boundaries of normal everyday life are broken down, causing an alteration in ordinary modes of experience. This is especially pertinent to the sexual behavior of women, for the cultural ideology of many "western" societies continues to place more constraints on the sexual actions of women than on those of men. Thus the sexual constraints imposed on women are likely to find expression when normal societal boundaries are no longer present.

Cross Cultural Gender Relationships

Upon first deciding to research cross-cultural gender relationships in Quepos, I envisioned each type of intercultural interaction as possessing distinct and clearly definable characteristics. However, I soon sensed the great complexity of such relationships and the vast variation which exists in personal experiences. Nonetheless, certain dominant patterns became clear, patterns which, despite numerous exceptions, appeared again and again in my interviews with both Costa Ricans (Ticos) and foreigners (Gringos). It is these dominant patterns which are presented, along with certain notable exceptions.

Gringas and Ticas

Of the Gringas with whom I spoke who currently live in Quepos, all have at least some Tica friends. An American woman in her early twenties who works at a popular American owned coffee shop has lived in Quepos for three months and now lives with two Ticas. Both of them are her co-workers, and she has met several other local female friends through them. Many of the local women with whom I spoke told me that they have female friends to whom they write to in other countries. However, none of the female tourists with whom I spoke felt that they had established any real friendships with local women. Apparently, local women do not make an effort to establish a relationship beyond mere friendliness with most female tourists, for, as one American woman stated, "Two weeks doesn't give you enough time to establish much more than sex." Another factor may be the generally more reserved demeanor of Ticas, something which was pointed out to me many times in my interviews with all the groups with whom I spoke. Such a demeanor means that a lasting friendship would be unlikely to develop in the short length of time which many tourists spend in Quepos. Also, the greater familial responsibilities placed on women mean that they are less accessible to foreign women as well as foreign men.

In my experience, most of the workers in clothing, food, and souvenir shops as well as most waitresses are women. These women have always been friendly, but unlike positions such as tour guide and bartender, positions filled largely by men, such positions do not offer a chance for extended interaction. The briefer interaction which such jobs entail may be an important factor in explaining local women's lesser knowledge of English with respect to their male counterparts. One female tourist from Holland established an especially friendly relationship with a daughter, mother, and aunt who worked at a small locally owned restaurant in town. Their interaction was somewhat restrained by her limited knowledge of Spanish and the women's limited knowledge of English. Nonetheless, this woman found them very friendly and open with her and felt as though they had established a true bond.

Several American women mentioned that local women may feel somewhat intimidated by foreign women, for they perceive themselves as having both less education and less money. Also, several foreign informants, both male and female, spoke of a suspected tension between Ticas and Gringas resulting from the attention which foreign women receive from local men. They suspected that this led to competition between local and foreign women, and that this competition translated into an undercurrent of hostility. However, all of this is merely speculation on the part of foreigners, for no Tica ventured to interpret for me the perception of foreign women by locals except by describing them as "*más liberales*" than local women, a description which I heard repeatedly in my interviews with both male and female local informants of all ages. This can be interpreted several ways, but despite its interpretation, it clearly suggests a perceived difference in the social actions of local and foreign women. Thus Ticas may not relate to the different manner in which Gringas interact with others, particularly men. However, no Ticas spoke disapprovingly of Gringas, either because of my identity as a foreign woman or because they felt no negative emotions towards them.

In contrast to the belief expressed by foreign women that local women resent their dating local men, several local informants told me that Ticas and Gringas are not interested in the same partners. A twenty-year-old Tica told me that it is only the young Ticas who are interested in the local young men who frequent the beach, bars, and discotheques, the hot spots for young tourists. While the younger Ticas of fifteen or sixteen years old sometimes are interested in such men, older and more mature Ticas want a boyfriend who is more responsible and has a steady job. As one informant pointed out, most locals are born here and spend their whole lives here. Many are thus not as into the whole "party scene" because, unlike Gringas, they must consider their future in Quepos.

A female tourist who had been in town for three days complained to me about the fact that women do not greet her on the street or talk to her when she goes out to public places. I pointed out to her that she had not greeted them or approached them either. She had not thought of it this way, and suggested that because the men in Quepos are so open and friendly with her, she may have judged the women against this standard. In my own experience, one only needs to smile or say hello to a passing woman or to approach her in a public place and she will respond with the same warmth and friendliness with which she is greeted. Thus it seems that both Costa Rican and foreign women do not usually make an effort to interact with each other, something which is often translated into a perceived lack of interest.

Ticas and Gringos

For the majority of the male students who I interviewed, both from our Anthropology group and from the Spanish school on the road to Manuel Antonio, their interactions with local women were largely restricted to the women in the families with whom they were staying. One

informant gave the language barrier as a reason why Gringos don't interact with Ticas to the same extent as Ticos and Gringas. Ticas generally do not speak as much English as Ticos, and thus interactions between them and tourists usually must be conducted in Spanish. He asserts that the local guy polishes his pick up lines and practices them repeatedly, while interactions are restricted between Gringos and Ticas because, "Most Gringos don't know any winning pickup lines in Spanish." He has noticed Ticas when he has been out and thought that they were cute, but envisioned himself choking on his words and being unable to express himself. Gringas are usually approached and are often spoken to in English, so this is not an issue for them.

Two male students mentioned that local women have made sustained eye contact with them when they have been out at clubs or bars, and they suggest that this is a means of showing their interest in a socially acceptable way. Several foreign male informants have been approached by prostitutes when out at clubs or bars, some of whom they said they would never have recognized as such without their offer of "How may I help you?" spoken in English. None have been approached by Ticas other than prostitutes when out, and thus to approach a foreign male in such a situation is clearly an action reserved mainly for prostitutes. Perhaps this association is a cause of the stigma against Ticas approaching Gringos. Several Tica informants who go out to the discotheque on the weekends said that they are asked to dance by both local and foreign males, and that they talk to both types of men. However, they are introduced to foreign males through mutual friends, or they wait for the male to approach.

A young American woman who has lived in Quepos for the past six months said that in her experience, foreign men stick to what they know--foreign women. North American men are not as aggressive and confident as Latin American men, for they do not possess the infamous Latin American machismo attitude. Ticas are similarly reserved, and thus relationships between them are not as common as those between foreign women and local men. I have witnessed many of the young men who come to Quepos either as students or tourists getting together with other students or travelers, and have never known any of them to meet a local girlfriend. A Tico who works at the reception desk in an expensive hotel informed me that many foreign men come up to him and ask him how they can meet a Tica woman. He tells them to go to the discotheque, but they respond that most of the women there are tourists. According to him, these men often end up going to the prostitutes.

A twenty-seven-year-old American male who has lived in Quepos for three years has been dating a Tica for the past year, and says that they are very much in love. Upon my mentioning that the young foreign males who I had spoken with have interacted little with the tourists, he informed me that it is very common for Ticas to date foreign men, and that his girlfriend has several female friends with foreign boyfriends. However, these women are not interested in the young transient travelers, but rather the Europeans, particularly the Italians, who are more sophisticated and possess more money. On several occasions, both local and foreign informants mentioned a stereotype of money as being very important to local women.

One local woman told me that many of the relationships between local women and foreign men revolve around money and the hopes of moving to the home country of their boyfriend or husband, where they envision a better life. This same informant had dated an American man for a year, and is now dating a man from Nicaragua. She is in her early thirties and has two young sons. She mentioned that while her American boyfriend would help out with the housework and cooking, her current boyfriend expected her to do all of the work. Upon my asking her if she preferred one way over the other, she responded that to her it was not important. She stated that she did not mind doing all of the housework, for this is just the way

things are in her culture and she has been doing these chores all of her life.

A Tica in her fifties has two daughters in their late twenties, both of whom are married to American men. Her older daughter met her husband when he stayed in Quepos for two months as a student, and a year later they married in the United States where they now live with their two children. While visiting her in the United States, the younger daughter met her brother-in-law's best friend, who she soon became engaged to. They married in Costa Rica, but now live in the United States. A student in the Anthropology program stayed with a family in which the mother was from Quepos and the father from the United States. They met when the man came to Quepos as a Spanish student. He was only planning on staying in Quepos for a few weeks, but they fell in love and have lived in Quepos ever since. Another student stayed with a family whose daughter lives in California with her American husband and their children. Thus despite the lesser visibility of romances between local women and foreign men in comparison to those between local men and foreign women, such unions certainly occur, many of them socially visible in marriage.

Gringos and Ticos

According to a twenty-five-year-old male informant from England, Gringo and Tico relationships revolve around transactions. As an example he gave the exchange of a beer bought by a male tourist for information on local points of interest from the local, such as where to go in the evening. He then spoke of another type of transaction which commonly occurs between Gringos and Ticos, the selling of drugs. In the bar from where he had just come, a Tico had approached his male companion and asked him in English such questions as "Where are you from?" and "How long are you in Quepos for?" After a couple of minutes, the Tico asked his companion if he smoked marijuana and upon hearing that he did, offered to sell him some. The interviewee referred to this concept as "buttering up," for it allows the Gringo to lose some of his suspicion. The Gringo is put at ease because, having engaged in small talk, he feels like he knows the Tico on a personal level.

Another way in which foreign and local men interact is through a joint interest such as surfing. One Tico surfer who I spoke with has several male friends from all over the world who he has the option of visiting if he so chooses. However, another told me that although Tico surfers are generally friendly with foreign surfers, they are much more interested in the foreign women. An American surfer who has been here on vacation for several weeks told me that the local surfers treat him with inconsistency. While they will be very friendly out on the waves or in certain situations, they will show him no interest when with several other Tico surfers or when out at the disco. Another American surfer told me that the only time he interacts with Tico surfers is on the water, and that Tico and Gringo surfers generally remain separate outside of this context. Nonetheless, I have heard of several instances of friendships being established between local and foreign surfers.

A twenty-three-year-old Tico who works at a hotel on the road to Manuel Antonio told me that the machismo attitude often prevents Ticos and Gringos from establishing friendships. He says that a man's masculinity would be at stake if he went out alone with a male tourist, for everyone would think that they were gay. A twenty-seven-year-old American who has lived in Quepos for three years told me that although older men greet him on the street, younger men do not, for such behavior would be threatening to their masculinity. Homosexual relationships may occur between local and foreign men, but I was unable to gain any definitive information on this issue.

Several male informants thought that the local men had no interest in them, only their female friends. One twenty-two-year-old American male and his American male friend were playing pool with two Ticos in a popular bar. Although they tried to make an effort to start up a conversation, the local men were unresponsive. A twenty-five year old male tourist from Puerto Rico informed me that on several occasions he started up conversations with local men when he went out at night but that they were inattentive. He states that every time a pretty Gringa walked past, the man would stop talking or listening, or would say that he would be right back, often not returning. However, several others spoke of very amiable relations established with Ticos, especially those met in ways unrelated to the nightlife. In the case of students, friendships with Ticos were often established through the family with whom they were staying.

Ticos and Gringas

The interest which local men show in tourist women is obvious to all who have visited Quepos. Despite numerous exceptions, local men who attempt to have romantic relations with foreign women are widespread. The young tourist woman who participates in the nightlife of Quepos is continually approached by local males and asked such questions as her name, where she is from, or for a dance. Several American women have told me that upon realizing that they were not interested in a romantic affair, the Tico with whom they had been talking no longer showed any interest in conversing with them. One Tico tour guide in his early twenties informed me that his Tico friends would often engage in contests. They would choose an unsuspecting tourist woman as the goal, and whoever ended up engaging in sexual relations with her (not necessarily intercourse) would win the contest. The more attractive they deemed the girl, the more successful the winner was considered to be. One male foreigner stated that “it becomes a challenge and a hunt for Ticos to conquer not only “their women” (his quotes), but the Gringas as well.” He continues that guys “target” who they want to pick up on the beach or in the clubs, and then go in for the kill, and referred to a popular discotheque, Arco Iris, as a meat market. I often heard such generalizations about the behavior of local men, but soon realized that despite the definite existence of such a mentality, it belongs to only a certain segment of the population. Its appearance seems so widespread because of the places where the generalizers frequented—the beach, the bars, and the discotheques.

In the bars and discos of Quepos, the Tico who approaches a foreign woman will often speak in English. Every time I have asked such Ticos how they learned to speak such good English, they have responded that they learned it from the tourists, pointing to the considerable contact which they have had with visiting women. Obviously the tourist women are only in Quepos for a short time, so the motivation for local men in searching out a foreign women seems to be a sexual motivation. Several informants have told me of a desire for locals, both men and women, to meet a foreigner to have a serious relationship with, but the majority of informants said that such men are looking for a brief encounter with a foreign women only to be followed by another when she leaves or even while she is still there.

Although walking down the street men show interest in the passing women, this is a cultural custom more than anything else. In their book *The Ticos: Culture and Social Change in Costa Rica*, the Biesanz family writes of the custom of admiring passing women. (Biesanz: 1999) Earlier in the century, Costa Rican males would formulate poetic verses which they would recite to passing women, and it became playful competition to see who could come up with the best verse. The custom of admiring women on the streets continues, although it is now largely confined to commonly recited phrases such as “Hola linda.” One Gringa said that the guys here have to at least try to pick you up as a way of asserting their masculinity.

Many American women with whom I spoke with expressed annoyance at the constant attention they receive as they walk down the street. As one girl put it, at first the attention was flattering but soon became aggravating. Two women from Holland told me that prior to coming to Costa Rica they had learned of the machismo attitude and had been apprehensive of the attention they would receive from male strangers. However, they said that it is not offensive as they had expected it to be, and that they did not feel threatened by the attention. They say that they do not get nearly as much attention in Holland, but that they see the behavior of the men here as just being friendly. They said that in places they had visited such as Greece and Turkey such behavior was much more offensive. The men in these places would grab them and attempt to make them stay and talk to them while here the men simply greet them as they pass.

Several Ticos told me that they prefer to have foreign girlfriends because Ticas are too demanding in their relationships. One Tico said that Ticas are very jealous, and do not want him talking to their friends out of a fear that he is trying to pick them up. Another Tico told me that Tica girlfriends always want to know where he is going and do not let him go until he tells them when he will see them or call them next. A twenty-three-year-old Tico told me that he no longer dates Ticas, for in his last relationship with one she was constantly badgering him to settle down with her and have children. In contrast, they say that foreign women are much more relaxed in relationships, leaving much more space and making far fewer demands. Several Tico informants have had girlfriends in the United States with whom they have kept in touch and who have eventually returned to visit them. One Tico told me that such relationships would not be possible between Ticas and Gringos, for Ticas always want to know exactly where their boyfriend is. Several Ticos have told me that in contrast to Ticas, Gringas are not as focused on the future of their relationship.

Although several informants and students from previous years have referred to Ticos who use female tourists for their money in exchange for the company which they provide, I have not personally experienced this. In contrast, I have repeatedly been offered drinks and other financial favors from Ticos, such as paying my way into the disco. I have concluded that it is only a certain segment of the male population who attempt to gain financially from personal relationships with the female tourists, while many are willing to provide the tourist women with whatever she desires. However, the males who hope to gain financially from the female tourists certainly exist. One Tico informant would not let me buy him a drink during our interview, for he said that he did not want to be associated with the young men who spend their days at the beach and expect their Gringa companions to support them. He and his friends refer to such Ticos as sharks, while another young Tico informed that he and his friends refer to them as vultures. They assert that such men do not have jobs, but instead use their youth and good looks to attract female tourists who are willing to provide for them financially during their vacation. In their article on romance tourism in Jamaica, Pruitt and La Font state that female tourists experience a sense of power in such relationships. This form of power is not usually available to them in their own countries, where women's financial status is often inferior to that of their male counterparts. (1995: 427)

Sitting on the beach with several female friends, someone mentioned the fact that Ticos will approach them and tell them how beautiful and special they are, only to lose all attentiveness when another foreign women walks up, transferring their interest onto her. One twenty-year-old Tico with a Swedish girlfriend who lives in San Jose and visits on the weekends made passes at numerous American women who I knew, often on successive nights. I have witnessed several instances in which Gringas will spend the evening with a Tico, kissing him

and talking to him, and the next night the Tico is with another girl. A couple of female informants described this behavior as a defense mechanism, for if the Tico were to stay with the tourist throughout her stay in Quepos, they would likely become emotionally attached to her. Thus to avoid emotional involvement, they simply move on to the next Gringa.

Conclusion

Tourists come to their destination out of a desire to break free of the patterns of their everyday life. Their jobs and responsibilities at home become more bearable with the knowledge that they will be free from these constraints for a short while, during their vacation. Free from the demands placed on them at home, tourists engage in behavior which they would not normally engage in. A major aspect of this freedom takes the form of a loosening of boundaries with the opposite sex, resulting in romantic or sexual liaisons during their vacation, often with locals. This phenomenon applies especially to women, for more societal constraints are placed on their sexual behavior in their home country than on men. Free from these unseen constraints, the tourist experience offers them a means of engaging in behavior deemed inappropriate by the mores of their own culture.

Relationships involving members of the opposite sex are the most widespread of intercultural relationships in Quepos. Although relations between local women and foreign men certainly occur, they are more subtle and less socially visible than relationships between local men and foreign women. This difference in visibility stems from cultural constructions of proper gender behavior. While it is considered acceptable for local men to approach foreign women and even spend the night with them, such behavior on the part of a local woman would result in a generally negative perception of her by other locals. Such behavior would result in the spread of gossip and the damaging of a woman's reputation as a respectable member of society, for Quepos is a small town and news travels fast. Such a differential perception of proper gender relations is perpetuated by machismo, a cultural attitude which extends throughout Latin America. This phenomenon not only deems acceptable, but encourages men to constantly seek and show their interest in women, while women are expected to remain the passive recipients of such attention.

Although cross-cultural relations between members of the same sex occur, they are not as common as those between members of the opposite sex. This is likely due to the greater ease which members of both sexes express towards meeting strangers, particularly those from another culture. However, all of the foreigners I spoke with who now live in Quepos have at least some local friends of the same sex, and the majority of locals with whom I spoke had at least some foreign friends, many of whom lived or have lived in Quepos. This suggests that while tourists are generally not in Quepos long enough to establish much more than brief amiable encounters with members of the same sex, relationships between locals and foreigners of the same sex often develop when time constraints are not present.

Tourism is perhaps the dominant vehicle of cross-cultural interaction in contemporary society. Costa Rica has become a favorite tourist destination, and interactions between Costa Ricans and tourists have taken on a decided character. The encounter between contemporary Euro-American and Latin American culture spawned by tourism in Costa Rica is flavored by differential cultural gender ideologies. The combined effect of culture and gender has thus resulted in definitive patterns in the relationships between locals and tourists in Quepos, Costa Rica. Tourism is a phenomenon likely to have far reaching implications for cultural exchange throughout the world, and by understanding cross-cultural encounters with a recognition of

gender dynamics, the researcher is left with a much fuller sense of exactly what this cultural exchange entails.

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