

Faculty of Humanities, Social Science and Education

# Never Hold Your Breath

*Stagnancy, Alienation and Trash: A Case Study of Environmental Attitudes in Utila, Bay Islands, Honduras*

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Master thesis in Visual Cultural Studies May 2016





# **Never Hold Your Breath**

## **Stagnancy, Alienation and Trash: A Case Study of Environmental Attitudes in Utila, Bay Islands, Honduras**

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## Abstract

Unlike a majority of Caribbean islands, the inhabitants of Utila in the Bay Islands of Honduras came there by choice. As a result, they have handcrafted a society where the key to harmony and avoiding confrontation is “live and let live”. In addition, they harbor a fierce sense of independence from Honduras, maintaining their allegiance to the formerly British Western Caribbean. Despite sharing a limited space the community is still divided racially and economically much as it was 150 years ago, and common property, the reef and surrounding waters were a shared resource whose management was adhered to through an unspoken understanding, much like the social relations on land. A surge of immigration from the mainland of Honduras in the 1990’s is neither welcomed nor confronted, despite the newcomers’ lack of cultural education about their new surroundings. *The complacency to one another coupled with the sense of freedom endowed to themselves from their “Spanish rule”, has created a stagnancy in regards to environmental protection, so that even solving a visible issue such as trash management and education is a major hurdle.* This inaction does not couple well with the Honduran government opening up the Bay Islands to create a “tourism free zone”, giving unprecedented access to land and goods to foreign investors.

In recent years the tourist trends have shifted from traditional backpacking to eco-friendly tourism, which in the context of the Utila is everything from volunteering for beach trash clean-ups to diving courses. These trends have further exacerbated the local inclination to autonomy, and serve to alienate locals from their own management. For a significant part of the population the perception of their resources is still fluid and limitless, despite strong scientific evidence to the contrary. This rift in knowledge creates another barrier to understanding and salvage efforts. Despite all these rip currents at force, local actors still move forward to better their community. Through the unique language of the Caribbean steps are being made towards local action.

Keywords: Honduras, Caribbean, Islands, Diving, Tourism, Commons, Environmental Management.



## Contents

Abstract .....	v
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Methodology and Positioning .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.1 Reflexivity and Methods .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.2 Access.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.3 Exclusion .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.4 Contradictions in Knowledge .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.5 Camera Work .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3. Theoretical Framework .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3.1 Case Study: Situational Analysis .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3.2 Island Studies .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3.3 Travel Journalism .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3.4 The Commons .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4. Historical Landscape.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4.1 Historical Landscape 1830's to 1980's.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4.2 Historical Landscape 1980's Onwards: People on the Move .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>5. Ethnographic Present – Trash Management .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>6. Analysis .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>6.1 Community Character: Social Division and Conflict Management .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>6.1.1 Social Division.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>6.1.2 Conflict Management.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>6.2 Honduras: Governance Disputed and Immigration.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>6.2.1 Honduras and Disputed Governance.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>6.2.2 Honduran Immigration from the Mainland .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>6.3 Environmental Degradation and Action .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>6.3.1 Environmental Threats and Causes.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>6.3.2 Environmental Action .....</b>	<b>40</b>

<b>6.3.3 Community Perceptions of Environmental Action and Degradation.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>6.4 Alienation caused by Tourism.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>6.4.1 Alienation from Management .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>6.4.2 Alienation from Local Knowledge .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>6.4.3 Alienation from Resources.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>6.5 Trash Management .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>8. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>9. Literature Refrences .....</b>	<b>56</b>

## 1. Introduction

Utila, the smallest of the Bay Islands of Honduras is a unique and intriguing community. After its aboriginal element was completely displaced by Spanish colonials in the 1650's, it was again resettled by Antilleans of different origins in the 1830's. These were English speaking Protestants, who were British citizens until 1859, when their islands were succeeded to Honduras. These original families still live in Utila today, and a descendant of the first family was mayor of Utila for 12 years, ending his last term in 2014. This strong connection to the past is evoked on Utila, as if walking into a time capsule, of which era one is not sure. Many of the wooden houses that line the single main street or lead off to the small avenues or roads to the jungle and mangrove swamps still have the "gingerbread work" and enveloping verandas typical to Southern US influence that Utila has had since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the oceanfront every house, restaurant, hotel or dive shop have a simple dock for easy access from the sea. Most restaurants bars and hotels are open structures, so that unless you are in your room; you are outside, shielded from the elements only by a roof and white washed support beams. Nearly all concrete structures have ocean themed murals, depicting eagle rays (*Aetobatus narinari*) and whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*). The only movie theater on Utila is a 40 person wooden cinema, without a single window, where you can sit and sweat through the Bugs Bunny cartoons shown before each feature, as was the custom in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Alternatively you can watch a rotating group of men of all ages play an intense game of dominoes on a rickety table, the game that has been going since "the beginning of time" as one local told me. Most yards have at least one coconut tree, and in the spring and summer months you can pick fallen mangoes from the ground for breakfast. The groceries come by ferry twice a week, so you better time your shopping accordingly, because that last tomato on the island is not a pretty one. The expatriates (foreigners who are permanent residents on the island, mostly from the North America or Europe) seem to be an important part of the community, owning businesses and usually cohabit with a local or mainland Hispanic person. The tourists walk barefoot and slowly down the streets, not in any kind of rush, this is after all a Caribbean paradise, and everything is on Caribbean time. They alternate scuba diving and partying, and although most locals don't dive, they have their own parallel celebrations. Sometimes it's a wedding, birthday or Christian celebration, often the entire island is simply celebrating a Tuesday.

The Honduran government passed laws in the late 1980's that incentivized foreign development, and encouraged work migration from the mainland to Utila. A tourist boom in

Utila in the 1990's saw the rapid growth of a dive industry that is based on entry level dive education, rivaled by few worldwide. I stayed on Utila for five months in 2012-2013 to become a dive professional, and returned in 2015 (May-August) for fieldwork and filming. As a diver, I reflected on the state of the environment in Utila, and was sceptic about the health of the reef and other natural resources on the island, like the mangrove lagoons and wetlands, which comprise nearly seventy percent of the island. I also wondered about the kind of impact that me, as a tourist, and others like me had on the island and its people, both culturally and environmentally. Disposable plastics were an obvious problem, as was trash in general a very visible issue, and very visibly ignored, despite the occasional beach cleanup by tourists-organized by local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's). Despite the overwhelming presence of tourists and an influx of mainland immigrants, there is still a distinct Western Caribbean culture that permeates through as a uniquely Utilian character. Utila is still very much Utilian, and after two weeks, most visitors feel like they are also Utilian. The people are friendly and tolerant to most kinds of mischief. When interviewing locals and foreigners alike as to their favorite thing about Utila, the answer most common was freedom. To do what you want, to be whom you want, without interference or judgement.

Sadly, Utila does indeed suffer from severe environmental degradation, "Environmental concerns on the island are numerous, including mangrove and coral reef destruction, overfishing, illegal capture, consumption and sales of endangered and endemic species (including sea turtle and iguana), and inadequate solid waste disposal and waste water treatment systems. The island also has limited freshwater and is now suffering from declining water quality and the contamination of seawater associated with the pressures of tourism development... Mangroves along the island's shores have also been destroyed to accommodate tourism infrastructure and new housing developments for expatriates looking for a 'piece of paradise'" (Brondo 2015, 1410). The state of the environment on Utila is a despairing one, and it seemed as if community attempts at fixing or curtailing the problems are lackluster. What a place of contradictions Utila is, where you have the freedom to do anything, and anything seems possible, except cleaning up your own back yard (both figuratively and literally). Taking this as a point of departure the questions that beg asking are *how do Utilians relate to the degradation of their natural environment? Why do they relate to it as they do?*

Following many hours of interviews with different stakeholders in the community, participant observation and previous literature analysis, I have come to some initial assumptions. Utila seems like something of a living museum, frozen in time. Perhaps there are important key

elements in Utila's history that have created a social condition which hampers collaboration and thwarts change. It seems as if the different people of Utila may be working side by side, but not together. This may have to do with the era in which Utila was settled, its political background in relation to Caribbean-British-Honduran influences, the manner in which it was settled and the demographic make-up of its settlers. In relation to the Caribbean-British-Honduran influences, it may be that a sense of independence has created a resistance to authority from the mainland, and therefore a resistance to authority in general, creating a very loose system of governance. These factors may have been compounded throughout the history of Utila, resulting in a state of social stagnation, and lack of ability to promote change, positive or otherwise. It may be that a community that can easily avoid conflict would be harmonious, but would have difficulty dealing with a wave of immigration from the poorer and crime riddled mainland of Honduras. Another assumption is that the accelerated development of the island has alienated the Utilians from their own management, both physically, as some quickly cashed in on land sales and were left dependent on tourism and fishing for income, and as tourism and neoliberal economy has promoted environmentalism that is both sponsored by foreign funding, implemented by foreign hands (tourists and eco tourist alike) and relying on environmental knowledge that also comes from the outside (scientific research and general attitudes towards resources). The final assumption is that despite all these rip currents at force, local actors still move forward to better their community. That through the unique language of the Caribbean steps are being made towards local action.

My case study of Utila relied initially on my first visit to the island. I retained access to many social spheres, both local and foreign, and created new contacts throughout my fieldwork, participating as much as possible in the open public sphere, and conducting 33 open ended filmed interviews and many casual unscripted ones (a.k.a. talking to people). By the time I left I knew more about Utila than some diver professionals that had been my contemporaries during my 2012 visit and never left, but was a far cry from having an islander's point of view. The following segment will give detailed methodological background explaining my position and access in the field, and account the theoretical case study framework used in this paper. This will be followed by a thorough history of Utila. These segments will lay out the foundation for my own ethnographic work as well as previous social, anthropologic and environmental academic literature about Utila and the Bay Islands in the discussion of the assumptions made here.

## **2. Methodology and Positioning**

The following segment will explain my positioning in the field. It will discuss my methods and my reflexive acts towards a balanced research. It will also discuss the way I accessed the field in general and the type of access I had once inside. Finally, a link will be made between my methods of camera work, with the ones already in existence in the community. When I left Utila the first time, it felt like I was leaving home. But this is in no way anthropology 'at home'. This is an anthropology of the foreign, and as such, this segment dwells on my access to the community, only made possible through collaboration with informants.

### **2.1 Reflexivity and Methods**

At some point after finishing my bachelor, I wanted to see Central America. I arrived on Utila on New Year's Eve 2012 and left in 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2013. It is often said that people who go on journeys go in search of something, consciously or otherwise. Whatever it was that I was looking for I found on the tiny Island of Utila, off the coast of Honduras, in the Caribbean Sea. So the origin for this thesis was born of adventure on and under the high seas, love and friendship. This is perhaps the reason why at many points throughout this project I was tempted to conform to the colonial perception of Islands and the Caribbean as harbingers of a paradise utopia, while also being a microcosms and focal point for environmental change (Savory 2011). This leaning was exacerbated by my affection towards the Island and Islanders, and the deceiving nature of Utila, in that the most descriptive trait of the Island is avoiding conflict, creating what seems to be a harmonious society (albeit more likened to the end of days scenario where the wolf lives with the lamb, and the calf is safe with the lion). A "free for all" atmosphere where anything goes, everything is possible, and the word on everyone's lips is freedom. I returned to Utila on the 22<sup>th</sup> of May 2015 and stayed until 3<sup>rd</sup> of August of the same year. For much time I struggled to understand why this harmonious collaboration did not extend to conservation. It was when I saw a quote from Edward Abbey, an American conservationist, "Sentiment without action is the ruin of the soul" (Abbey 1989). That the spell was broken, and I saw Utila as a complex and unique community, that is afflicted by both isolation and a complete dependence on the outer world. But is it my place to analyze and possibly critique this community? What would they say of it?

Franz Fanon said of being written into his own identity; "Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me... by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories." (Fanon 1999, 418). What is more terrifying to an ethnographer than to be depicted as the colonial

researcher? As a white woman writing about people of all colors I am in a precarious position, and for some time was tempted to either romanticize or say nothing at all (as mentioned above). It is true that “Knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’, but has the power to *make itself true*” (Hall 1997, 48), but gladly, awareness of power relations is the first step in evening out the playing field. I used the ‘case study’ as my theoretical framework, but also relied on post-colonial island literature and aspects of the global politics of travel writing to keep a grounded reflexive perspective. On the other hand, there were times that I felt that the knowledge was denied me, and therefor overturning the prospect of the power/knowledge scenario altogether. I maintained my partiality during filming through the demographics of my interviewees, and through consistency in my questioning. One source lead me to another, I took nearly all opportunities rather than just the ones associated with stakeholders. I did not hand over my camera for a ‘shared experience’ that emerges from the ethnography of the particular (Waage 2013), but I did widen my work and interaction as much as possible, to maintain a sense of equality in research. Finally I tried my best at focusing on the significance of personal identity, the emotions and senses in social life, in the words of MacDougall “intimations of a kind of knowledge that come from a close personal acquaintance with a particular society” (MacDougall 2006, 273). Not mine, but theirs. Their stories; “the anthropology of place and space: rootedness and displacement, migration, diaspora, and memory; questions of cultural boundedness, locality, and history; colonial and post-colonial struggles for identity; and the study of social life worlds as they are materially and culturally constructed” (MacDougall 2006, 272). In doing so, hopefully, my work at visual anthropology is focusing on those aspects which are specifically accessible to a visual approach, not necessarily the visual, and not necessarily ‘mine’ or ‘theirs’, but to what Edgar Morin refers to as the “emotive fabric of human existence” (Morin as cited in MacDougall 2006, 269).

Methodologically, the research is based on 33 open ended filmed interviews with islanders of mixed heritage, as well as dive professionals that have been on the island from two months to thirteen years. Besides these I had many informal interviews with islanders and tourists alike. Some were casual conversations made in passing, but many were a result of failed attempts at filmed interviews. In respect to Charlotte Aull Davis’s (1998) review of interview scenarios I found that the formal interview had no place in Utila. It was too structured and alien an act in ‘paradise’, but I did persist, interviewing with my notes and questions until my last day in the field. I felt that although most people preferred to talk with the camera in the bag and a beer in their hand it was important to push towards a different kind of conversation. It is true that the

social actor is always performing (Goffman 1959), especially when the camera is turned on, there will always be an element of performance (MacDougall 1998). But it is possible for the researcher and interviewee to influence one another in creating knowledge together (Rudie 1994). I wouldn't go so far as to say we created culture together, but something did happen. In the film I ask the grocer Wardley if he considers the immigration situation difficult, he said, "When you sit down and think about it, yes". That is the purpose, taking the time out of the everyday, a shift in rhythm. The day after I interviewed a dive instructor, she told me those were questions that she had never asked herself, that suddenly made her understand and appreciate certain things, and helped her understand what I was doing as well. So there was mutual impact between the question marks.

The interviews were followed up with participant observation, days spent on or under water, including dive courses, specialty courses, "fun dives", a carnival boat parade, invasive species hunting tournaments and following dissection and celebration, a fishing trip, visits to the small islands of the Utila Cays (pronounced 'keys'), attending street parties that rotated through the four neighborhoods of the island, the main carnival parade, family cook-offs and friendly BBQ's, attending seminars held by local NGO's and beach debris clean-ups, and two beauty pageants, one annual and one part of the youth recycling parade on *Día del Árbol* (Arbor Day, a holiday dedicated to trees and environment) etc. Although the focus of the thesis will not be the scuba diving element of Utila, it is important to note that it is my perspective, the perspective of the outsider, the only one I can truly own. This was not a detriment to my fieldwork, because it is my belief that the common ground that the diver develops on the island with its community is being in and around the water. Therefore it becomes instrumental in creating a physical embodied knowledge, if not a cognitive knowledge (Pagis 2010). Much of cultural practice is not verbalized (Rudie 1994) and the best approach to understand a social situation and cultural scene is to interview, observe *and* participate (Spradely and Maccurdy 1972). So although I do not dare to have "grasped the native's point of view, his relation to his life, to realize his vision of his world" (Malinowski 1961, 25), I did immerse myself in participant observation, and ate the fallen mangoes from the ground, same as locals and tourists alike.

## **2.2 Access**

Before arriving, I had contacted J., a friend who was still living in Utila, and asked if I could stay at his place for a few nights while I was looking for an apartment and getting settled. When I had last seen him he was an intrinsic part of the diving community and a fixture at our 'home' dive shop, Underwater Vision. Things had much changed; after living on the Island for the last

two years, he had focused on several other non-diving jobs, and lived far away from the touristic center. I knew that in order for me to start gaining access to the communities on the Island I would have to get closer to the physical center, gain more mobility, and be able to have easy and safe access for myself and my equipment. Ironically enough, my first real point of access happened the day I arrived at J.'s 'out of the way' apartment, through his next door neighbor. I had met A. two years earlier, on Utila, through mutual friends. She invited me in that first night and we had a long talk. We were fast friends, and she had a pivotal role as both a support system and a highly informed, mobile member of the community, which helped me with both ideas and leads to people and information, and took an active part in my research while serving as a translator and conducting interviews in Spanish.

Through my contacts at the dive shop (the manager and owner's daughter T.) I was introduced to some of the workers and students at the dive center, and two days later introduced myself to all of them at the weekly staff meeting. Four or five days after that I found an apartment. The following day I started diving and filming. After the first dive I knew that in order to gain access to the diving community I would have to dive with them, and I would have to get a tan. The untanned gringo looks very suspicious in a Caribbean setting. I would go out diving and filming at the dive shop as often as possible, arriving with the staff ahead of time to set up the dive gear and help out the customers and students. I was offered to work there, but I hadn't paid my membership dues (to PADI, the dive association that I'm affiliated with), which was fortunate, because otherwise I think I would have been expected to pitch in and help the staff to my full capacity as an Scuba Instructor. Through diving and socializing I became very close with the members of the Underwater Vision Dive shop.

### **2.3 Exclusion**

In contrast to the situation at the dive shop, there were some difficulties at obtaining interviews and filming the local community. Those who were more upfront, would refuse, and explain that they were "shy, small island people", not un-proud, but not willing to be singled out and placed under the spotlight. Others didn't wish to say no, but would stand me up at meetings, which would be perpetually delayed. I also wanted to incorporate a different dive-shop into my work, but that was also difficult. I found out that belonging to a dive shop meant to some extent that they were your family, as in, they belong to you and you belong to them. What an armchair anthropologist would describe as 'clan like friendships and rivalries' between different dive shops, took on a real meaning in my fieldwork. I found that in some cases, my access to a certain field would be blocked, because I belonged to a different shop, but even more so, because it

was a matter of allegiance. The people who did talk to me, especially from the non-diver community, more often than not, did so out of allegiance to the owners of my dive shop, or out of allegiance to someone I knew who vouched for me.

In certain cases it became very evident to me that there were places where my entry was barred to some extent. An example of this is during the Lionfish Derby. Lionfish are an invasive species that are plaguing the waters of the Caribbean. In my project description I had mentioned that I wanted to use the lionfish as an example of an imminent ecological threat, as well as a possible metaphor for the tourism on the Island. Lionfish are constantly hunted by the staff at all the diveshops on the island, and are an obvious and visible threat to the reef. As opposed to ocean acidification and rising temperatures of oceans worldwide (Bradbury 2012), issues that are at once so big and despairing and at the same time accumulative in a way that is nearly invisible on a daily basis. The Derby tries to promote cooperation with all the dive shops on the Island, as well as promote the fishing, cooking and eating of lionfish among the locals and restaurants, which do not deign to do so (one local woman explained to me that they do not eat the lionfish because they never used to eat it). A dive shop could decide to host a lionfish derby of its own, and divide itself up into teams, or join up with different dive shops to compete against one another. In the case of the derby on the 4th of July, it was being arranged by volunteers at the Bay Islands Conservation Association (BICA), and Coral View Resort. This resort was hosting biology and ecology students from the UK, who were going to dissect the lionfish collected by the divers and catalog them according to size and weight, in order to determine the winners, but also taking inventory of stomach content and tissue samples, that would be part of larger studies cataloguing the detrimental effects of this species. The same night there would be a cooking competition. This seemed like just the opportunity to capture this moment on film, but circumstances were not in my favor. It seemed like the dive shop that I 'belonged' to, Underwater Vision, were not intending to compete. Perhaps it was because there was pressure on the staff caused by many customers, perhaps because there wasn't a leading force, but probably because 'clan-like friendships and rivalries' tend to rear their heads where you least expect them. So instead of being able to ride with the 'home team', I had to search for a different dive-shop that would agree to take me with them on their boat during the hunt, the night before the Derby. It was an uncomfortable position for me, and turned out to be an even more uncomfortable position for those I asked to join.

It was that evening that I felt for the first time, that there was no use, in the short time that I had left on the Island, to try and break the boundary that I had naturally acquired as a result of

'belonging' to a certain dive club. As will be discussed later on, this kind of separatist yet non-confrontational trend fits in perfectly with my analytical understanding of Utila. I shall claim that the same archetype of group relationships that existed between the dive shops existed between the different demographic groups of Utila.

## **2.4 Contradictions in Knowledge**

Within the universe of Utila there seemed to me to be a fusion between recollected sentiment and collected facts, what I at first perceived of as conflicting sources. That is, when two informants or more give contradictory information, as well as discrediting other informants. Eventually I ceased looking at information as solid and linear, but as a liquid and transformative.

As my original theme had much to do with fishing, I was eager to find an active fisherman to speak with. Babe is a local fisherman and family man that spontaneously agreed to an interview. After him I interviewed a British Dive instructor, Adam, that had a very different perspective of the 'facts' (elaborated in the analysis). On another occasion I filmed at the Jade Seahorse, a bar, restaurant and hotel that has been a work in progress artwork made from recycled materials. I had been permitted to come and film at the bar by the owner, an expatriated Canadian. I refrained from having an in depth interview with him, because it had seemed to me on previous occasions that he had a tendency to go way off-topic, and that the things that he said were extreme and inconsistent, so that I wasn't sure if he was joking or ranting. When I turned the camera on him at his home, he started performing, telling a story about salt water piranhas attacking an overweight Norwegian tourist, with the only thing left of her being her bikini bottom which could serve as a parachute if need be. I liked it. I thought it was funny, and what else, it made me think about a potential audience watching it. Would they believe him? They had no reason not to. What was the difference between what he said and the kind of information I received from others I had interviewed, on or off camera? That is partially why I kept his story in the film.

The day afterwards I had a meeting with the former mayor of Utila, Alton, son of the owners of Underwater Vision, brother to T., their manager, my friend. This interview was hard gotten, and that only because of the former Mayor's mother. His answers to my questions in some cases, were so conflicted with the information I had previously collected, that it was mind boggling. He swore that there are no more than 2,500 people living on Utila, after I had heard

from other sources the population was between 5,000 to 10,000<sup>1</sup>. He discredited many of the people that I had previously spoken to or interviewed. Come to think about it, he had been discredited by many as well. These two successive interviews made me rethink the crusade for truth that I had been on previously. It was almost like I had ignored the contradictions until then, and made a median of the responses and held to it. I had decided to stop trying to go with my gut feeling of what was right and wrong or true or false, and just follow through with the stories I was presented, I had reminded myself that anthropology is not about absolute truths, but about cultural conceptions. This was especially true when I looked upon my field of questioning as an arena, as defined by Gupta and Ferguson (1992) as social and special locations where people confront each other over issues, such as resources, values and representations.

## **2.5 Camera Work**

This led me to Shelby, who most people had referred to as ‘the man with the camera’. I went to see him at his home where I found a very involved an interesting man, who had taken a great part in the recent history of Utila as he was one of the founding members of the Bay Islands Conservation Association (BICA) on Utila. He shared a great deal of information with me in a very clear manner. This should not have been a surprise, since he was the host of the daily evening news on the Utila local network channel HQTV. With limited assistance he would film different events on the island, and work them as segments into his live broadcast 1 (To save space the prerecorded events would be edited in the camera, so that when the segment was shown live, it was directly from the camera. This meant that nearly all of these segment were never saved, unfortunately.) I believe that he was eager to assist me because he saw my project as a positive opportunity for the community. He helped me with information gaps that I could not have obtained otherwise and through him I met and interviewed some interesting players in the community. (He invited me into his studio to film his interview with the head of a C.O.R.A.L. a Central American conservation association that discussed the newly acquired status of Utila as a sustainable destination). He also helped me meet a friend of his G., a Canadian that was another of the founding members of BICA. He was perhaps the most reluctant person that I had attempted to interview. I came to understand that as an outsider attempting to put ecological safeguards into place in early 1990’s Utila, he had experienced a lot of backlash. From his account he was met with resistance that at some points simply felt like

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<sup>1</sup> A 2007 study claims the permanent population to be an estimated 8,500 people (Canty 2007 cited in Brondo 2015). A 2012 study claimed there were 950 mainland migrants, 2,800 Utilian Islanders, 1000 permanent expatriates mainly from the US and Europe, and an additional flux of 5000 temporary residential tourists (Hogg et al. 2012, 443). I think it’s safe to say that in a small place every person makes a difference.

spite, from men that were strong pillars in the community. He was so passionate about conservation and so disappointed with local as well as global destruction, that he had surrendered his role to the ‘younger generation’ with more bitterness than hope. He owned a gift shop in Utila town and lived on a huge property on a hillside overlooking the ocean. In the cliché of a ‘man in a high tower’ he was cautious about visitors and fearful of the immigrants from the mainland knowing where his property was, for fear of robbery and violence. Yet he still walked the beach everyday with his dogs covering up the trails that hatching female turtles left from the night before. Although Mr. Shelby and the Canadian were of the same generation and the same movement, the latter lacked the strong community ties to keep him rooted in his actions. Mr. Shelby on the other hand seemed to be very open with his information, and to be less susceptible to loyalty to any certain party on the Island. I think this is because he had the power and independence to do so. The power came from him being wealthy, having inherited much land on the Island. He had attended university in the US and lived there for a long period of time, which I think influenced the way he held himself in relation to his community and its bonds.

Some methodological aspects of using a camera the camera as a tool for gaining knowledge in terms of social situations: John Jr. and Malcolm Collier in *Photography as a Research Method* (1986) have referred to the camera as more than a means to illustrate and record natural happenings, but also as a rich source of qualitative information about human interaction. They praise the camera as a highly sensitive tool, never tired of scribbling in a notebook, always ready to review the material without generation loss and never misquoting. Taking a step further in the use of the camera as a research tool, is the effect of the presence of the camera. In *Visualising Situatedness* by Bjorn Arntsen and Lisbeth Høltedahl (2005) there is mention of the two researchers, one is the anthropologist and the other is the interviewee, who strives in his own way to understand the goals and perspectives of the person behind the camera. In addition, the awareness of the interviewee to the unknown future audience, also has a part in their self-expression and presentation, to varying extents. It is important to take into consideration both the role of the camera as a player and the invisible audience when interpreting an interview.

In events like the Recycling Parade on *Día del Árbol* I was myself able to “parade around” with my camera, since I was not the only one doing so. Shelby was already there with his own camera, preparing his segment for the evening news. I was even asked on this occasion if I was filming for Shelby, and other times during interviews I would be asked jokingly, “I hope this is not going on the evening news with Shelby”. In this way, as in his work with environmentalism

and extended ties in the community Shelby had paved the way for me and my research. Shelby filmed weddings, beach cleanups, beauty pageants and community meetings regarding environmental issues and enforcement long before I even heard of Utila. For fourteen years he would replay the people to themselves. But that was the public sphere. In the private sphere of interviews I conducted with locals I felt like they were not talking to me as much as taking the opportunity to appeal to outsiders. I know that is how Shelby saw my presence, as an opportunity to make the community heard, and I believe that is the explanation for the candidness in my other interviews with locals.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This segment gives a description of the theoretical framework which enabled me to map out the assumptions I have made regarding the Utilians perceptions of the degradation of their environment and their treatment of trash.

#### **3.1 Case Study: Situational Analysis**

As mentioned in the previous segment, my analysis relies on interviews as well as ethnographic presence and description. A big part of my study is the Recycling Parade, held on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June on *Día del Árbol* (Arbor Day), which I found indicative to perspectives on community management and cooperation. It is this situational analysis which typifies my work as a ‘case study’. “The ‘case study’ refers to an observers’ data, i.e. the documentation of some particular phenomenon or set of events which has been assembled with the explicit end in view of drawing theoretical conclusions from it. The focus of the case study may be a single individual as in the life history approach or it may be a set of actors engaged in a sequence of activities either over a restricted or over an extended period of time. What is important is not the content of the case study as such but the use to which the data are put to support theoretical conclusions” (Mitchell 2006, 26-27). The ‘case study’ framework is somewhat circular in its pattern, because it allows one to start in a specific situational analysis, then develop your understanding progressively by moving into different contexts of relevance to this case. But in order to be able to choose a specific case and make assumptions based on it one must first have accumulated knowledge in the specific culture. “The single case becomes significant only when set against the accumulated experience and knowledge that the analyst brings to it. In other words the extent to which generalization may be made from case studies depends upon the adequacy of the underlying theory and the whole corpus of related knowledge of which the case is analyzed rather than the particular instance itself” (Mitchell 2006, 36). I can say that I feel comfortable in a process in which there is a constant accumulation of knowledge so that every time we divert from the

original case to delve into one of its aspects, we return to it with the ability to create even more knowledge.

The reservation that always arises with the case study is to what degree is the case ‘typical’ or ‘indicative’ of the culture to be able to support a theoretical conclusion? To this I refer back to the Manchester School of thought, “The essential point about the basis of making inferences from case material: that the extrapolation is in fact based on the validity of the analysis rather than the representativeness of the events” (Mitchell 2006, 26). Therefore the move to expanded relevancies serves to both support the validity of the analysis and expand on the theoretical conclusion; “More knowledge about the systematic connections between different kinds of socialities, their contextual invocation, their change through different network contexts, and their historical transformations would make significant contributions to a better understanding of the unfolding social processes... What would be desirable here is a better integration between approaches focusing on conscious reflections and those focusing on practices and emotions... Thus we learn how the past is the present, how the translocal is the local” (Glaeser 2006, 85-86). To create a better understanding of social processes in this case of Utila I start with the situation and open up to an integrated network of related literature to my own (and others’) ethnographic material that both deepens my assumptions and work to validate my analysis.

Although my *modus operandi* was the ‘case study’ framework, there are important theoretical perspectives that have served as background to guide me through my analysis and keep my research reflexive. Island and Caribbean studies have expanded my horizons to the simultaneous insularity and openness of Caribbean islands. Theories of the global politics of travel writing have unveiled the effectiveness of every individual, be it intentional or otherwise, in actively changing their surroundings. Lastly, Hardin’s *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968), and specifically the unmanaged commons (Hardin 1994), are, I believe, a theoretical basis and background for environmentally oriented research in every field.

### **3.2 Island Studies**

There is, unsurprisingly, an entire cross disciplinary field called Island Studies, headed by the University of Prince Edward Island in Canada, as well as a biannual journal. Not only is there prolific research that is *island oriented*, but there is a prolific point of view that island research needs to realign itself with the idea that islands are “stand alone” entities within the research discourse. “Close to 10% of the world’s population - some 600 million people - live on islands today. One fourth of the world’s sovereign states consist of islands or archipelagos. The combined land area and exclusive economic zone of the world’s islands takes up over one sixth

of the Earth's surface. Islands have pioneered the emergence of such disciplines as biogeography and anthropology; they are typical 'hot spots' for both biological diversity and international political tension. Islands offer distinct identities and spaces in an increasingly homogenous and placeless world" (Baldacchino 2005).

The island discourse deals first and foremost with the strong connection islands have had within colonialism and the colonialist discourse. In Elizabeth DeLoughrey's introduction to *Of Oceans and Islands* (2011) she relates to the way global ecological issues are represented within the island discourse, "With the increasing threat of global warming, islands have become harbingers of planetary ecological change... If we consider the large and often paradoxical body of fantasies projected onto islands- such as exoticism, enclosure, boundedness, isolation, shipwreck, leisure, romance, nature, degeneration, dystopia, cannibalism, utopia, tourism and the Garden of Eden- this newly fashioned role as signifiers of our changing global climate is not altogether surprising". I myself had made this metonymic move, relating the story of Utila, to that of the world, as Richard Grove has said in *Green Imperialism* (1995), "the island became... an easily conceived allegory of a whole world". While it is true that this is an easily phrased and depicted metaphor, and I don't contest its truth, it is equally important to understand that islands are far more than continental miniatures. In this way, it's possible to create a more engaged understanding of an island community, while relating to the "real world" of islands, without ignoring or otherwise fully focusing on the "imagined world" of islands (Fletcher 2011). An example of this can be seen in post-colonial island literature. In Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse*, he uses geography and geology to contemplate this region's modernity "island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea." I find that this example, as well as the one I mentioned earlier by Antonio Benitez Rojo; "the culture of the caribbean is not terrestrial but aquatic", truly assist my writing in analyzing and understanding my field. These points are helping me make sense of the Utila environment and the products of my research, such as recurring themes of freedom, as I mentioned above in the key situations.

Another important point of view concerning islands is brought up by Elaine Savory's article *Utopia, Dystopia, and Caribbean Heterotopia* (2011); writers of Caribbean birth have avoided depicting the island in either utopian or dystopian terms. Instead they imagine a diversity of responses. This might be described using Michel Foucault's heterotopia (Foucault 1986 as cited in Savory 2011), which he theorized is the containment of all "real sites" within a culture,

simultaneously represented, contested and inverted”. Neither a utopia or a dystopia, an island, in this case Utila, is a space that has more meaning and relationships than meets the eye.

### **3.3 Travel Journalism**

Travel journalism may seem far from influential for a place like Utila, but on the contrary, it is among the only ways that it appears on the ‘world map’. There has been some research done on Utila and the Bay Islands, but on the non-academic international scale they seem to only exist through travel writing. This limits the perception of outsiders of the island. For example, The Lonely Planet website had to say about Utila in a 2012 article: “Plenty of Caribbean islands have been labeled with the daydream-inducing word: paradise. If your definition of paradise includes empty beaches, no crowds, and not having to dress for dinner, consider packing your bags for an easy-access option you might not have considered: the Bay Islands of Honduras. These islands give visitors a taste of what the Caribbean was like before development surged: a laid-back getaway with turquoise water, lush tropical vegetation and an easy transition into island life with no high-rises, no traffic and no stress. The Mesoamerican reef system that rings the Bay Islands like a jeweled necklace is second in size only to the Great Barrier Reef” (Lonely Planet 2012). While on the main page of Utila they make a noteworthy and important comment “A little rough around the edges, Utila is no manicured Caribbean hideaway. For such a tiny island Utila has an annoying traffic problem: a constant tide of motorcycles, quad-bikes, tuk-tuks and pickups curses the island's two streets. Trash is another huge issue” (Lonely Planet 2015).

The problem is that travel writing has the power to be influential in global politics as well as in a biased chronology of local histories. “Recent research highlights contemporary travel writing’s complicity in global politics, and the genre is claimed to reproduce the discourses that constitute our understanding of the world. It has also been argued that the genre holds a possibility to help us gain further knowledge about contemporary global politics, as it may work as an arena where global politics is commented on, intervened with and reshaped. With this double view, current research exemplifies how scholars today grapple with the challenge of accounting for simultaneous and sometimes conflicting histories and conditions that are altered and affected by colonial contacts, practices and ideologies, and by recent globalization” (Posti 2014, 1319). This turns what should be an impartial player in the publishing scene into an extremely influential one. This reflects again on the perspective of local versus global knowledge, that I will investigate further on. Who decides what content is inscribed on the pages of the guide to Utila and the Bay Islands, certainly not Utilians. Debby Lisle in *The*

*Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* argues that “travel writing is a form of global politics... [as it] reproduces the same discourses of difference that hold our prevailing understanding of the world in place” (Lisle 2011, 277). Because of this travel writing has the possibility to “help us understand the discursive terrain of global politics” (Lisle 2011, 277). And because of travel writing’s taking part in the reproduction of difference, as well as being extremely popular, it has “the opportunity to comment on, shape and intervene in the ‘serious’ events of global politics” (Lisle 2011, 276-7) and “the potential to re-imagine the world in ways that do not simply regurgitate the status quo or re-peat a nostalgic longing for Empire” (Lisle 2011: xi).

Quite unfortunately, travel writing is not under a very big magnifying glass. More importantly, it lacks reflexivity. As Piia Posti writes about Lisle “In her wider analysis of contemporary travel writing, Lisle identifies a number of issues that need to be addressed... pointing to the genre’s historical affiliation with the colonial project as being a fundamental problem that travel writers consistently fail to address, and showing that the encounter with and construction of difference are both the driving force and predicament of travel writing, she concludes that the genre is still “a profoundly *uncritical* literary formation”; it lacks a level of “*meta-conversation*” and self-reflexive questioning about the prevailing popularity of the genre and what role it plays in shaping and disseminating contemporary views of globalization (Lisle 2011: 261-67, original emphases)” (Posti 2014, 1320). This narrative is crucial, because it is the entire universe of the majority of those who arrive on Utila.

### **3.4 The Commons**

After establishing the greater discourse, we can approach the real heart of the matter, the issue of contested resources, within the meeting at the reef. The relationship between man and environment are complex and many. The dualism of nature-culture is far too simplistic, as explained by Ingold (1992). He proposes not to set out man against nature but to understand the process of interpretation by which people classify the environment. In this specific case, it is likely that different cultural perspectives have interpreted nature in different ways. In his theory, these interpretations are variations on a scale of affordances and effectivities, “between the action capabilities of subjects (people) and the possibilities of action offered by objects (nature)” (Ingold 1992, 52) In the case of Utila, the issue of shared natural resources may be more easily understood by following this reasoning to try and see the different perceptions of affordance and effectivity that are displayed by different actors with different cultural backgrounds.

In respect to the ecological deterioration of the reef surrounding Utila we can easily relate to the pessimistic tragedy of the commons model by Hardin (1968). The overfishing and pollution is a classic example of common resources drained to their maximal capacity. His only solutions are a socialist government and private ownership. A more recent study (Feeny et al. 1990, 11) has shown that people are able to organize their common property, monitor resources and adjust their use to avoid depletion. Especially in smaller scale communities. This study has also shown that state governance doesn't necessarily ensure sustainable usage and protection of natural resources. While this does not ensure the future of the environment in Utila, it shows that there are many ways in which people manage their commons, often by creating their own regulations that are specified to their own needs. In a sense a rebuttal, Hardin's 1994 *Tragedy of the Unmanaged Commons*; "Except in the smallest of communities, *commonism* cannot succeed. An unmanaged common fails because it rewards individual exploiters for making wrong decisions – wrong for the group as a whole, and wrong for themselves, in the long run. Freedom in the commons does *not* produce a stable prosperity" (Hardin 1994: 199). He refers then to an exception to the rule, alluding to the saddest misconception of all, that seems to be rooted in our humanity and biology, the endlessness abundance of the oceans, "when a resource is present in abundance, an unmanaged common may actually be the most efficient. The general rule, 'freedom of the seas', led for centuries to the economical exploitation of oceanic fisheries" (Hardin 1994:199). But unfortunately, "The survival of today's industrialized nations is now threatened by a different sort of commonization. Decades of well-intentioned propaganda in favor of a 'world without borders' have stripped sophisticated moderns of psychological defences against truly entropic forces. 'To each according to his needs' implies that *needs create rights*... What happens after globalized wealth degenerates into globalized poverty? What happens then to the environment for which posterity will hold us responsible?" (Hardin 1994:199). The same applies on the tiny scale of Utila.

#### **4. Historical Landscape**

The following segment will give a wide historical landscape of Utila until the present day. This background is both necessary in situating the reader in this esoteric landscape as well as being basis for the choice of situation for my case study analysis.

##### **4.1 Historical Landscape 1830's to 1980's**

Utila is one of the three major islands of the Bay Islands Archipelago, which include Roatan, Guanaja and Utila, as well as four smaller islands and 53 cays (Brondo 2015, 1409) located off the northern coast of the Republic of Honduras (Lord 1985, 51). Utila is the closest to the

mainland, about 29 kilometers from La Ceiba, and the smallest at 13 kilometers long and 5 kilometers wide. Its highest point Pumpkin Hill is slightly under 300 feet (92 meters) above sea level (Lord 1985, 51), and seventy percent of the island's terrain are swamps wetlands and mangrove growths (Brondo 2015, 1409). All the Bay Islands are situated at the tip of the Mesoamerican Barrier reef, and volcanism and reef building are another important make up of Utila (Lord 1985, 51). These processes have created 13 additional smaller islands along Utila's southwestern axis called cays, which played a big part in Utila's modern history. An interesting way of seeing Utila is through David Lord's writing, a researcher that worked on the Island since the 1970's "Politically and geographically, Utila is part of Central (or Meso) America inasmuch as it is actually an extension of the limestone shelf constituting the Yucatan peninsula. Likewise, aboriginal inhabitants were related to if not Meso, then South American populations, and Spain subsequently claimed the island as part of its mainland conquests once it had made inroads into the New World. Hence, there are multiple associations of Utila with Central America. But it is also Caribbean by virtue of the people, central to this discussion, who came from such places as the Cayman Islands to settle the Bay Islands chain in the early part of the nineteenth century" (Lord 1985, 51).

On the 30th of July, 1520 Columbus 'discovered' Guanaja, whose endemic pine trees prompted him to name it Island Isla de Pinos (Valladares, 1939, 1 as cited in Lord 1985). Columbus was documented to have been impressed by the friendliness of the endemic abundant population of the Bay Islands, in Utila today they are commonly known as the Paya people (Davidson 1984 and Shelby Interview). The Spanish used the local population for slave labor and by 1650 those that remained on the islands were relocated to Guatemala (Strong 1935, 15 as cited in Lord 1985). In an interview with my informant Shelby he told me that the postmistress told him one day that the Island's letters were being sent to a town in the Honduran mountains called Utila. He believes that is an indication that Utila is the original Payan name for the island, which means 'land of rising black smoke', a reference to Pumpkin Hill: the single volcano that created the island.

The empty islands were situated conspicuously on a main Spanish trade route and were therefore used often and for various purposes "pirates, privateers, merchant mariners and naval personnel of many countries used the islands with regularity as victualling stations, repair stations, rest and recreation stops, and so on. Locales popular with famous (and infamous) individuals became identified with them in some cases and have come down to us today as Coxen Hole (named for the pirate John Coxen), French Harbor (after the habit of the pirate Laffitte using

the area as a base from which to prey upon Spanish ships), and so on” (Lord 1985, 52). As well as a place for British pirates to stash their plunder (Stonich 2000), and harass Spanish mainlanders (Moreno 2005, 221). What made them as convenient as a gas station on a modern highway made them vulnerable to attack, military or otherwise, so there was no permanent settlement, and the islands passed back and forth between Spanish and British control for nearly 400 years (Davidson 1974).

In 1776, the British used Roatan, the biggest of the Bay Islands, as a penal colony for approximately 5000 Black Caribs, as a punishment for collaboration with the French during their war with Britain. In doing so they were also laying their judicial claim on the Bay Islands (Lord 1985, 52). No such forced settlement occurred on Utila, but by the mid 1830’s there were nearly a dozen people in permanent (voluntary) residence on the Utila Cays . Both lore and records coincide in the origins of the first families, “Joseph Cooper, his wife and nine children, came to Utila from the Cayman Islands by way of Belize as the first settlers of European extraction... The *Cooper* family and an American named Samuel Warren, who was born in Massachusetts and served with Perry in the Battle of Lake Erie... formed the nucleus of Utila's future population” (Lord 1985, 53). Research has shown several speculative factors that may have brought these settlers to these islands. They were farmers looking to utilize good free fertile land, at exactly the time when the British abolished slavery throughout their empire, 1834. They were “apparently one of the many land-hungry British subjects of peasant or working class descent that had found the British Isles too constricting” (Lord 1985, 53). These people were English both culturally and ethnically, spoke English natively, were Protestant, and governed themselves according to British Common Law. Through word of mouth others of European descent came to the burgeoning settlement; the Howell, Morgan, *Bodden*, Diamond, Gabourel, and Thompson families among others, the dominant names on Utila today. The descendants of the *Coopers* are the family who owns the dive shop where I did my fieldwork, whose eldest son Alton, was mayor of Utila for three terms. Troy *Bodden* is the current mayor of Utila, and my informant Shelby is a Morgan on his mother’s side (who according to him was related to *that* Captain Morgan). Before 1855 the first black Utilians came to the islands, also primarily from the Cayman islands: Grand Cayman, Little Cayman, or Cayman Brae. Based on a ‘first come first serve’ basis, the whites who arrived first lay claim to the majority of the best land in the Utila Cays, building residence on two main islands Suc Suc cay and Howell Cay (Lord 1985, 53) or Suc Suc and Pigeon Cay (Korda *et al.* 2008, 968) while farming the rest of the cays. The newer black residents had to “work proportionately

harder to gain the resources necessary to attain comparable status in Utila” (Lord 1985, 54). The farmers were working towards a prosperous economy, raising crops (coconut, citrus, bananas etc.) not only for their own use, but for trade as well. Therefore many farmers were sailor merchants who had ties to markets in mainland Honduras and there was also limited presence of Honduran merchants on the Island (Rose 1904 as cited in Lord 1985). Nevertheless, the majority of the Utilian trade was with the greater Caribbean; Belize, the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, as well as the US. These market connections were extended partially in an attempt to maintain social and economic distance from the mainland (Moreno 2005, 222). The Islanders had permission from the Honduran government to settle on the Utila Cays, but their loyalties were clear when they successfully petitioned for annexation to the British Empire, and were part of it from 1852-1859 (Lord 1985, 54) or 1860 (Stonich 2000). This surrender was considered an act of betrayal by the islanders and they subsequently petitioned for reinstatement as a British colony several times to Queen Victoria (Stonich 2000). Today the Utila municipality exercises authority devolved from the Roatan Municipality (the main Honduran municipality of the Bay Islands), through an elected Mayor (Korda *et al.* 2008, 969).

From 1870-1900 the islanders (specifically the land owners) prospered greatly from, and came to rely on, trade with the US with the rise in popularity of tropical fruit, the so called Fruit Boom, and photographs of the islands from the end of this period and physical structures that remain show a lifestyle similar to that of contemporary communities in the southern US. This prosperity came to an end when giant plantation companies like United Fruit and Standard fruit entered the international market of tropical fruit trade, followed by the worldwide Great Depression (Lord 1985, 54). It was around this time, the beginning of the 1900’s that some members of the community moved from the cays to the main Utila island, 4 km away, built houses, schools and businesses, essentially splintering the community, in reality and later by definition to Utilians and Cayans, with the majority of development occurring on the main island, Utila Town, from then on (Korda *et al.* 2008, 968).

The communities only started to recover during WWII when there was a demand for seamen in Allied merchant shipping, which turned in the 1960’s and 1970’s to a demand for worldwide shipping. The island subsisted through a remittance economy, fueled by US or Scandinavian merchant marines; “Remittances, funds sent home by people who have emigrated or are sojourning out of country, have given rise to a sociocultural system resting heavily on traditional aspects of Utilian society and culture” (Lord 1975, 6). While this is true of both Utila

town and the Cays, this remittance economy was also supplemented by fishing from the 1960's onwards and entirely replaced commercial (coconut) farming (Korda *et al.* 2008, 968).

A decline in worldwide shipping and more flexible migration laws in the US prompted a lot of migration to the US, specifically New Orleans. So that in 1985 there were approximately 1200 people living on Utila and the cays, which “derive(d) their livelihood from absentee work and maintain their lifestyle from remittances” (Lord 1985, 55). Lord testified in 1985 that Utila at the time was still heavily influenced by the US culturally and in importing “material goods, values, and world view”. Private education was still in English, although most Utilians *below the age of forty* spoke Spanish as well and some families relocated to the mainland. The community was still largely Protestant. The substantial trend that Lord saw was the return of Utilians who had emigrated elsewhere to spend their retirement and final years on the Island. This trend still exists today as testified to me by Utila's former mayor Alton, ”We see a lot of people wanting to spend the end of their lives in Utila”. At the time Lord thought that “Utila could become a largely retirement/recreation settlement given enough time and continuation of these trends” (Lord 1985, 55). He did not foresee the next part of the story of Utila.

#### **4.2 Historical Landscape 1980's Onwards: People on the Move**

In response to the economic crisis in the 1980's the Honduran government started working towards making use of the tourist potential held in the Bay Islands. In 1982 they declared the islands a priority tourism zone through Accord 87 (*Acuerdo Numero 87*), and followed up with other laws that enabled development in previously “off limits” areas. In 1991 Ministerial Accord Number Two (*Acuerdo Ministerial Numero Dos*) provided minimum standards for development and Decree 83-89 (*Decreto 83-93*) of 1993 created a Bay Islands Commission aimed at promoting development (Stonich 2000). While under Article 107 of the Honduran constitution, foreigners couldn't own land that was 40 km off the coastline (or borders), exceptions to this rule were put in place in 1990 through the passage of Decree Law 90/90. This law stated that urban land could be owned if the property was deemed to have social, economic, or public development interest by the Secretary of Tourism (Brondo 2015). Finally, the Callejas administration passed legislation in 1992 that declared all land suitable for tourism development to be classified as ‘urban’, thus opening all of the Bay Islands to foreign land ownership (Hamilton *et al.* 2012 as cited in Brondo 2015).”

This market progressed quickly. In 1971 there was only one hotel on the island, (Davidson 1974). Shortly after the adjustment in regulations, 1985, there were 34 hotel rooms available, and by 1996 there were 199 and several dive shops with attached lodging opened in the 1990's

(including Underwater Vision). By 2001 there were 30 hotels and 11 dive shops (Currin 2002 cited in Brondo 2015, 1409), and during my fieldwork in 2015 there were 14 dive shops, not including a new, seasonal dive shop that opened on Pigeon Cay. In the mid-late 2000 a new international airport was opened on the Island (Brondo 2015, 1418), making it even more accessible. The economy of Utila Town is today largely based on dive tourism, and its associated “spin-off” businesses, (hotels, diving and other recreational enterprises) and the majority of resident white Utilian fishers have gradually become involved in this industry, which has contributed to basic public services (Korda et al 2008). Despite the speed of development, Utila is still a backpacker destination. It is still one of the least expensive destinations to acquire a scuba certification (Brondo 2015, 1409), while it, along with the Bay Islands was considered in 2005 fastest evolving tourist destinations in the western hemisphere (Moreno 2005).

By contrast, there is little tourism and poor public service provision in the Cays (Korda et al. 2008, 968) and a lack of alternative livelihoods<sup>2</sup> finds the majority of men from Suc Suc and Pigeon Cay still heavily reliant on fishing (IAB 2004 as cited in Korda et al. 2008, 969). There is yet another pronounced demographic division on the island. In step with the accelerated development came unchecked work migration from mainland Honduras. The immigrants live in a neighborhood built on mangrove lagoons lacking basic sanitation infrastructure (Hogg et al. 2012). As Chaparro says in the film, “when I came to the island (1998) there were four houses there and today it’s the biggest neighborhood on the island” (Chaparro Interview). Studies have shown that these immigrants have caused a great depletion in the wildlife and marine life of the island and the reef, both for personal consumption and to send to their families on the mainland (Hogg et al. 2012).

Coinciding with the influx of development in the early 1990’s, local actors opened a chapter of the Bay Islands Conservation Association (BICA – had already existed on Roatan) on Utila, that was paid for through private initiatives. They promoted many projects that have since been endowed to the care of the municipality. An example is the garbage collection system that started with BICA, and today is paid for by the municipality; the garbage is taken to a dump not far from Camponado and burned several times a week. There are two recycling compactors on the island but they were both out of service while I was there, and a barge donates metal recyclables removal to the mainland. Sewage is dealt with by independent septic tanks, which

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<sup>2</sup> The study also attributes the continued reliance on fishing to a sense of pride towards the community’s fishing heritage.

means that each household has its own septic system powered by electricity. I have heard of and seen more than one case of the sewage going directly into the ocean or the mangrove bay. Approximately seven years ago there was an attempt by the Bay Island Association to put in a single sewage pump system for the island. A lot of money and work were put into it, but the project dwindled and stopped as it became clear the community could not afford to pay the electricity costs of the system. The electricity on Utila is powered by diesel generators, which means that it is both polluting and extremely expensive<sup>3</sup>. Utila's fresh water comes from wells. The community was donated a desalination plant by the Spanish government, but the cost of running it were also deemed too high and it has since fallen to disrepair.

Utila is a thriving community in many ways, a draw for immigrants, land developers, expatriates and tourists. It has a rich history that is strongly relevant in its vibrant, unique present. Nevertheless, there seems to be a gap between the appeal of this 'island paradise', and the infrastructure and municipal systems that exist to support it. It is possible that this gap is a result of community perceptions and values, especially with regard to the environment. This shall be explored in the following segments.

## **5. Ethnographic Present – Trash Management**

This segment presents trash management on Utila through interviews and the description of the recycling parade held on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2015. The trash management case was chosen specifically because it addresses a very visible and material issue, which I believe to be indicative of community attitudes towards environmental degradation, as well as possible sources to these attitudes. The situation will be presented in depth for later analysis.

In the film, the young Australian diver couple who were my collaborators lived in a raised stilt house on filled mangrove swamp land. Across from the entrance to their home is a garbage dump. This is not the municipal dump, but simply a place where garbage is left. Trash is a very visible issue on Utila which arose often during my interviews. Many of the locals who I came across would have trash underneath their homes, or behind their businesses. When I spoke to the Mayor about the trash he made it seem like a temporary problem which would soon be addressed. As shown in the Lonely Planet description (See 3.3 Travel Journalism), in a 2012 article there was no mention of trash, but in 2015 "Trash is another huge issue" was included in the description of the island. It seems that his influential source were not casting aside the

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<sup>3</sup> Electricity on Utila is 10 Lempiras per one kilowatt-hour (kWh). For comparison, in Tromsø Norway May 2016 it is 0.188 Norwegian Kroner per kWh (<http://www.tromskraft.no/privat/nett/prisinforasjon>), a tenth of the price.

problem and was making it part of the Utilian discourse. To me it seems like a warning to Utila, in the style of *clean up your act*.

My informant Shelby, along with his partners in BICA founded the trash pickup system on Utila, and passed it on to the municipality. Through the initial funding of the association they bought trash bins and placed them around the island. As one of Shelby's former partners told me, "first they would throw their trash *next* to the bins", then gradually started to place it inside. Shelby, who is a more optimistic character explained it to me, "...before everybody threw their trash in the water in the sea, because it went [gesturing with his hands]. But it was like paper and it was no plastics then. So when we got organized in 1991, Bay Island Conservation Association that was one of our projects to start doing something about the trash. Because Honduras began manufacturing plastics and [waxed] carton, so everybody had the same habit. Now we changed from paper and cardboard to plastics and waxed cartons and stuff, so everybody still threw all their stuff in the water, and it went down the right of the beach, so the whole beach here to the right, harbor of Utila was nothing but a dump site" (Shelby interview 2015). Adam, a British dive instructor and marine biologist who lived on Utila for 13 years and raised two children on the island also brought up trash management. He decided to leave the island with his family, explaining that it has changed a lot since he first moved there, and the education is not good enough. We talked about local marine knowledge versus scientific western knowledge (which I will refer to later on), and said "I think we shouldn't work with the older people, we should work with the younger people. Because they don't know any better. It's like teaching locals here to use the garbage cans. The kids you can [teach], and the kids will throw it in the garbage can, adults won't. They'll throw it on the floor next to a garbage can, or throw it out the window, you can't teach them. Classic phrase, you can't teach an old dog new tricks. So don't bother with the old dogs, teach the puppies" (Adam Interview 2015). U., a 16 year old student from the Methodist school had a different canine analogy that also had to do with trash. My question was, *do you feel like your generation and your parent's generation are learning different things?* To which he answered, "Yes it is different what we're learning and what they're learning. But, it's not really being taken in. Let's say in the case of, I'm going to explain this with dogs. Dogs sniff their butts to contact each other or whatever, but what if dogs stopped sniffing their butts and start sniffing their ears? Every other dog would start doing that too. If you see your parent or dad throwing, right here it's a really big thing just throwing your garbage on the floor, you'd be like 'No Bro, go pick that up'. Most people do that here, they're like, 'Nah, pick it up and put it in the trash can and we'll get this over with'. But when people

stop doing that they're just like 'Eh, if he doesn't do it I'm not gonna do it either'. That kind of way of thinking that's what's gonna mess us up. And it really comes from their generation, our parents' generation to help us go on and keep on doing it so we can have a nice community now and forever I think... Yes, basically, we're getting educated one way but we're still depending on what our parents and things say. I don't know why it's like that, it's just a way, if you go thinking it more, then you get an idea of why it's like that. Other than that it's like ok, in my case my mom is a great figure for me, she's a model of who I want to be and be that person, and a better person. That's what my family is like, they want us to be as good as them and better. My mom is like 'You gotta do this and that'. And another parent will be like you gotta do this and that. It depends on what different people think. The influences are really great here on the island" (Usher interview 2015).

It seems that in the past trash was disposed of in the ocean, where it would then degrade over time. When non degradable products started becoming more popular the community kept to their traditions of trash disposal until there was an effort from BICA to create a pickup and education system. Through the interview with U. we can understand that despite the 23 year presence of these systems, it is still an unclear issue to many people on the island who are caught up between generational influence and outside education.

An ethnographic situation that made a big impact on me happened in my second week of fieldwork. I started filming an Open Water course, in between the dive skill sessions I was speaking to M., a Utilian woman who has worked at the bar for many years and who I knew from my previous stay on the Island. She told me about the trouble she had making a dress out of newspapers for her daughter. It turns out that the next day there was going to be a parade along the main street of Utila leading all the way to Chepe's Beach, and that the girls were dressing up in recycled materials; a recycling parade with marching band and all. I asked if I could come and film her and her daughter getting ready and follow them through to the parade, but she was reluctant on inviting me into her home. She was in a relationship with another Utilian woman who also works at the bar, and they are open in public. I suspected that she didn't want me to film this cohabitation, but it could have been any of the other reasons mentioned previously. We arranged to meet in the morning at a certain crossroads, and I decided to skip the dive session I had planned to film the next day, thinking that this was a unique opportunity. The recycling theme was the deciding point, not the parade itself, as there is no shortage of parades, parties and other social events on Utila. We met and took a tuk-tuk (motor-taxi) to the main street of Utila, where it appears that we were rather late. The daughter sped off, wearing

a one piece strapped dress made entirely of newspaper and translucent tape, “tailored” to fit, assisted by a friend wearing a school uniform. I could only imagine what her mother must have gone through to create this piece, and I was already rooting for her win. Soon it became apparent that would not be the case, as girls and young women along the street were wearing more and more elaborate pieces made entirely of recycled materials. Some of the more outrageous outfits were so intricately made that they required the help of at least two assistants, one to make sure none of the pieces would fall off before they had a chance to actually be paraded (at least none of the central fragments of the outfit), and another to hold the hand of the young lady, a stabilizing force against the altitude of the high heels she was wearing. More than anything it made me think of the US Southern Belle archetype (meshed with some modern punk elements).

This day was *Día del Árbol*, also known as Arbor Day, a holiday dedicated to trees and tree planting that had evolved into a celebration of the environment. The parade’s start was the gasoline station, but there was also a counter current on the main street. We could start hearing the marching band from a distance off. I had never realized there were so many children on Utila! As it turns out the initiative of the parade was led by the head of the Methodist school (and he was also physically leading the parade), and involved the four schools of Utila; Utila Methodist Community College and School, the oldest and most established private school on the island (the current mayor went there), The Adventist School, also private education, and two public schools as well as two kindergartens; Sunshine Kinder and Federico Se Canales (the older of the two). When we finally met the brunt of the parade it was truly beautiful, a multitude of children of all ages and sizes marching together, some wearing school uniforms, many wearing green shirts. One school or kinder was followed by another in procession, with the marching band following the Methodist school in the lead. The youngest children in costume were adorable, and many of the older ones were carrying signs. The signs seemed to be either for health and against smoking, or promoting a healthy environment: *Consumo Menos, Reciclo Mas*, (Consume Less, Recycle More), *Tu Cuerpo es el templo del Spiritu Santo*, (Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit), signs with mesh cigarette crossed out diagonally, or simply giant mesh cigarettes, *Sin Ambiente no hay Futuro*, (Without Environment there is no Future), *Cuidemos el Medio Ambiente*, (Care for the Environment), *Dia mundial del medio ambiente, 5 de Junia !Cuida el Planeta! !Piensa en verde!* (World Environment Day, 5 June, Take care of the Planet! Think green!). I only spotted one sign in English that read, *5<sup>th</sup> of june the day of the earth. My promise to the environment, keep it clean*. Many signs needed no language like one

depicting an embodied Planet Mars as the doctor of an embodied Planet Earth whose waters have all turned brown.

Shelby was there filming for HQTV, the broadcasting network of the community. The costumes were made from colorful individual snack bags, plastic bags, straws (hundreds of them) plastic cups, bottle caps, and custom cut beer cans. These were not only the clothing, but made to cover or create shoes, earrings, hats, dress purses and umbrellas to protect the young girls' complexions. As they were walking down the street proud parents were escorting them from the side, taking pictures with smart phones, and I thought how on a Caribbean island so many can time off work for their children. Some police officers were in attendance, maybe their daughters or sons were in the parade. The tourists were suddenly invisible, this was not about them or their money, it was about the children. For the first time I felt like this was an island that belonged to its people.

The parade convened at the end of the paved road at Chepe's beach. Some of the children were climbing trees while the contenders in the pageant spruced up in preparation, while their friends in uniform looked on admiringly. An instructor friend of mine, who had lived on Utila for 10 years, and brought his children to the parade broke the spell. He pointed out the hypocrisy of dresses promoting the environment that were literally made of hundreds of brand new straws that were already littering the street. The hundreds of new plastic bags that would find their way into the ocean sooner or later. He also made it clear how he felt about the vulgarity of taking a day that signifies such an important issue for the island, and turning it into a beauty pageant. For children. What a collision of worlds. Suddenly I saw and smelled the stagnant, putrid mangrove swamp on the other side of the beach. A teacher came up to the stage that had been erected on the beach and started reading from Genesis in Spanish: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters....* Two police men and one police woman were standing behind the stage, the woman bowed her head. Some words of thanks were said for the organizers of the event and then the beauty pageant began. A light drizzle began and I put away my camera.

The description of the parade along with my reaction and that of my diver friend add more dimensions to the issue of trash management that arose from the interviews (and the visibility of trash on the island). It seems like there are contradictions in community perceptions which are difficult to grasp. The following segment will delve into different elements of the

community and environmental management that will come together as an analysis towards understanding relationships towards this management.

## **6. Analysis**

In this segment I will take the case of the Recycling Parade and develop an understanding and analysis progressively by moving into different contexts of relevance to this case. The relevance is both vertical and horizontal, as we look at the past and delve into literature and observations in each context. Based on my own fieldwork observations, interviews and related literature I have come to some assumptions. The first is that based on the background of the people of Utila, they have handcrafted a society whose main theme is avoiding conflict through public liberalism, that is what I refer to as a “live and let live” society, which has anchored the community in its social division and hierarchy. This has created a situation where people are ‘side by side’ but not ‘together’, making collaboration very difficult. The second is that a fierce sense of independence from mainland Honduras has created defiant attitudes towards authority, another hindrance to collaboration. The combination of these social forces has created a stagnancy in regards to environmental protection, so that even solving a visible issue such as trash management and education is a major hurdle. Third, that development and tourism, and specifically environmental/eco-friendly tourism of the kind that happens on Utila have exacerbated the local inclination to autonomy, and serve to alienate locals from their own management. After this discussion I will discuss what I perceive to be the future of trash management in Utila, which may be an indicator to greater tides of change.

### **6.1 Community Character: Social Division and Conflict Management**

The recycling parade seems like the purest form of community cohesion and collaboration. Children of all ethnicities carrying signs in many languages marching towards a better future seems idyllic. But as said in the methodological reflexivity this is a mirage. Just because there is no visible conflict does not mean that people know how to work together. A friend of mine who lives on Utila and runs a business there told me “It’s a dog eat dog place. But not on the surface. Your neighbor will never tell you that you are bothering him by playing your music until 2 am. Never. He will just smile to your face, and the next night he will play his music until 4 in the morning”.

#### **6.1.1 Social Division**

The laid back lifestyle on Utila, coupled with a general colorfulness of the population tend to give the impression that there is little to no racial tension on the island. Clearly, as in any society this is not the case. I believe that there are maintained in Utila clear demographic group division.

To quote Lord, “Immigrants from the eastern Caribbean brought a two-tiered system of social stratification with them when they settled Utila... based on class and ethnic criteria” (Lord 1985, 50). He continues to reason that “founding families -white- entered Utila with a bias towards coloreds probably stemming from previous experiences in the eastern Caribbean (although not necessarily limited to same); the social order brought and subsequently fostered by founding Utilians was a class conscious and class stratified one, again probably reinforced by experiences in the eastern Caribbean; social mobility in whatever direction was attributed to activities associated with education, hard work, and material acquisitions; and, finally, whites were able by being first on the scene to monopolize economic resources in land” (Lord 1985, 57). The original Utilians were for many years in a state of economic inequality that had much to do with ethnic origin and class. As they prospered in the fruit boom at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this gap only got wider. After suffering from economic crises the community again found work through the merchant marines of WWII, ”Significantly, economic recovery and prosperity as of World War II were based on one's skill and/or strength (labor) rather than ownership of the means of production (land). At this juncture land became not the means to wealth and attendant social position, but a symbol of wealth (along with other material possessions)” (Lord 1985, 54). So it seems that marching along with the rest of their US influenced economy and culture, Utila would slowly start to reshape their society, following the human rights movements of the 1960’s. But that was not the case. In 1985 as aforementioned there were only 1200 people living on Utila, with limited migration from the mainland. But Lord in his study shows that these immigrants would not become part of Utilian society, and remain outcasts unless they were absorbed into the community through marriage. Marrying white would be a rise in social status, while marrying black would be the opposite; “in order to at least break into Utila's social system rather than remain on its periphery” (Lord 1985, 59). He also points out a “total lack, at least in official records, of white males marrying colored females with British surnames, or conversely” making his point that “Hispanics lose their own ethnic identity and acquire an identity within Utila's traditional structure” (Lord 1985, 60).

Much has changed on Utila since his work in 1985, but a 2005 study claims that “Social stratification is still evident in marriage, residential location, and language” (Moreno 2005, 221) in the entirety of the Bay islands and a “limited mixing of the Black and White groups on the Bay Islands over the past two centuries, leading to a mixed Creole people that comprise about 15% of the total population” (Davidson 1974). This study showed that regardless of this separation, traditionally, all groups have shared the coastal waters as commons resource fishing

grounds, and that personal fishing territories were informal and informally established and defended (Moreno 2005, 221). Despite this, a 2008 study which measured prosperity of fishermen in different demographic groups (White Cayans/Black Cayans/White Utilians/Black Utilians) still showed that, "The White Utilians, resident to Utila town, enjoy the highest socio-economic position on the island out of the four fisher demographic groups" (Korda et al. 2008, 969).

This division is reminiscent of the one I experienced at the dive shop level (see 2.3 Exclusion). Why are these trends so dominant and how do they effect community relationships to environmental management? This will be discussed in the following segments.

### **6.1.2 Conflict Management**

It is my belief that the social division is a conflict management strategy indicative of other similar societies, and extends from the Utilians to the other populations of the island (tourists and mainland immigrants). Also I believe that this strategy is present in island lore and therefor made even more concrete. The apparent results is a 'live and let live' society where there is little community censorship, and less collaboration.

In Eriksen's 1992 study of Trinidad and Tobago and Mauritius he defined these island states as lacking a premodern history, since they were created by plantation colonialism. Utila is not an island state, but it does see itself as one. It is even more unique, because every single one of its waves of immigration were a product of choice. They continue to fall under Eriksen's categories as "neither "primitive" societies or "our own" society" representing a variety of modernity called "creole cultures" or his preferred term "plural" societies, to mean that they contain populations of diverse origin (Eriksen 1992, 1-2). Eriksen saw a pattern of ethnic peace managed through avoidance in Mauritius, and termed it "The rule of the highest common denominator... As has been indicated Mauritians have stereotypical, derogatory notions about members of other ethnic categories...A few days after arriving in Mauritius, a local intellectual explained to me that 'the way we maintain ethnic peace is through avoidance. We avoid discussing every controversial subject outside our inner circle'. I propose to label the policy indicated through these two examples, and exemplified in several of the examples above, the application of *the rule of the highest common denominator*. The 'inner circle' alluded to may, according to context, be the family, union members, the party, the religious congregation, the neighbors or indeed any formal or informal group one might think of; and thus, the highest common denominator is defendant, as it were, on the global content of the equation... 'we walk on eggshells'. In this she meant that it is difficult not to go beyond the common denominator,

into controversy that is, in casual intercourse” (Eriksen 1992, 86). A similar course of action (or inaction) has been taken in Utila another example of a plural society. Eriksen gives other reasons to explain why Mauritius is less conflict ridden than other societies with multiple ethnicities, one of which is the small size of the island, making space scarce, and meaning explosions would be felt throughout the whole.

Does this make Utila an unaccepting community, or a very accepting one? Edouard Glissant in the book, *Caribbean Discourse*, discussed Sameness and Diversity, “Sameness is sublimated difference; Diversity is accepted difference” (Glissant and Dash, 1989, 98). Sameness is differentiation between peoples that is modified into a culturally higher or more socially acceptable activity, while diversity is accepted differentiation. Although all the evidence shows that there is clear stratification on Utila, their way of solving problems does not lack acceptance of difference.

This is a transcription of a story I was told on a foray to Pigeon Cay, a central piece of Utilian lore:

C: One of the worst things that ever happened on the island, one of the worst mass murders that ever happened on the island, there was an old wooden boat that used to take bananas, breadfruits, up to Guanaja and Roatan.. and there was this black dude, this colored dude called Bob MacField

A: Butcher MacField

C: He sneaks aboard the boat at night. Goes and takes all the weapons on the boat, hid all of it and he slept on board the boat that night... they used to take passengers also... and he comes out of his hiding spot in the middle of the night and starts killing everybody... The sole person that survived that trip, her name was Elsie Morgan, The onliest one, she actually lived in the house that I’m living in right now on Utila. She swam across to the North Side of this Island. She came up on Rock Harbour. There was an old man from the Cayes who used to set turtle nets up there, his name was Mr. Biron... And when he saw her he thought she was a ghost and he ran, then she hollered at him and said, no, Mr. Byron, no, this is me, Miss Elsie Morgan. So he comes back, they brought her here, to the Cays, cleaned her up, so she told the whole account of the story what happened... They found him up in Patuka, that’s up by Castilla, up in the Gariffuna village... So they call Tegucigalpa at that time and tell the president, and he says ‘Do with him whatever it is that you want to do with him. Take him, do whatever you want to do with him. Judge him, you guys be the judge’... So they walk him through the town,

and she was sitting on the porch, and when she saw him, she stood up and she said ‘Bob MacField, here I am, The sole survivor of you massacre.’ They took him up on the graveyard, and how they told it to me, they hung him. But nobody know where he was buried. Hung him up on Mango tree, nobody knows where he was buried.

D: Tanton Jackson kicked the barrel from under him

...

D: He wanted her, and it was forbidden back then, and that why he killed everyone, he went mad... I heard from the old heads of Utila, not from tell-tale tales from books that people wrote, from the original old heads (of Utila), that live a hundred years old, told me that was the problem. He was black, and fell out with a white girl. And back then it was forbidden for them to do that.

C: Before my grandmother died she told me, ‘Never, never mention this guy’s name. Never never talk about it because he still has relatives that are alive.

C: You know Munchies (a restaurant on the main road)?... There’s two buildings, there’s munchies, then the store, then my house. That’s the porch that she sat on, when Bob MacField he walked through the town... My house was owned by the Morgans, my ancestors bought that from them. Long time ago.

A: That was an infamous thing, because the biggest thing about it was because he was black and she was white, besides the actual crime it became a racial thing too, because they were saying they were just punishing him because he was black. It was a tense thing and then the town was so small back then they barely had a jail cell here. That’s a pretty cool story.

This story is both lore and legend. There is a book written on the subject, but its validity is hard to prove. What are the meanings behind this story? I see it as a clear warning about the result of the mixing of the communities. It is fine for the people of Utila to live side by side and work side by side. They do not interfere in each other’s affairs and even share the waters as an open common resource. But like in the case of Mauritius, they avoid conflict through silence, which means that they do not actually work together. This ‘live and let live’ stance has been extended by the Utilians to all newcomers to the island, from tourists to mainlanders. It is my belief that this is the freedom that people speak of on Utila, a lack of social admonition in all matters. A somewhat similar explanation was given me by Alton, the former mayor of Utila for 12 years, “It’s true that we are very accommodating and very inviting because most of us have been seamen, even down to generations, from the days of the piracy, a very small ship with a lot of

people... it's very important we get along with everyone. And since then we've lived in small communities, on Islands, so I would attribute it to this reason. Living in small communities and working on ships, being a seamen most of our lives... It's a strong connection with the ocean, and not just the ocean, but the island". Weather this strategy is called: division, acceptance, 'live and let live' or segregation the apparent results are that the community is reluctant to place checks and limitations on itself or on newcomers, or work together to create agreed upon limitations. Without limitations there is no environmental management.

I am not the first to suggest this idea: "The common property resources in this case are threatened by the inability of the Bay Islanders to constitute a unified collectivity (perhaps a symptom of pronounced divisions between Black and White islanders) and exclude outsiders. Typically, exclusion of outsiders from common property resources is reinforced by a feedback loop in which users are able to make and enforce rules in response to abuses or unauthorized use. This type of feedback is nearly impossible on the islands due to a lack of politicization and the largely contrary aims of the Honduran government" (Moreno 2005, 225).

For many years the differences between the different demographic groups in Utila were drawn in the sand. That is to say, they were explicit, but not acted upon forcefully. Island lore is indicative of this trend, and helped maintain another 100 years of peaceful separation. But the surge in tourism as well as mainland immigration has pushed the boundaries of their sandcastle hierarchy. As said in Eriksen, "An ethnic group is ... not a fixed, constant entity; ethnicity is fundamentally *an aspect of a social relationship*, not a permanent property of persons or groups which are stable in space and time" (Eriksen 1992, 77). As the social relationships continued to be fixed, and the communities separated, newcomers were folded into the existing system of acceptance and the community has lost some of its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The inability to adapt has caused a stagnancy whose effects are most evident in the management of their resources, which have come to threaten existence on the island.

## **6.2 Honduras: Governance Disputed and Immigration**

In extending the case study we must address specifically the community's attitudes towards mainland authority and the issue of mainland migration. Since the late 1980's and early 1990's Utila has dealt with a wave of immigration from Honduran migrants. How has the community responded to this movement immigrants and to their impact on the island? How has Utila's attitudes towards Honduras shaped their community character? This is what we shall discuss now.

### **6.2.1 Honduras and Disputed Governance**

Honduras gained its independence from Spain in 1821, and by 1911 was one of the major Banana Republics of Central America and the Caribbean. In that year the American Cuyamel Fruit Company supplied the weapons for a coup against the government of Honduras, and prospered under the newly installed president (T.W. 2013).

Most tourists do not travel in Honduras, since its major cities are considered some of the most dangerous in the world, but travel through Honduras directly to the Bay Islands. Drug trafficking has caused an increase in gang violence, that touches on all levels of society (International Crisis Group 2014). “Since 1995, the homicide rate has decreased in many countries, mainly in Asia, Europe and Northern America, to the extent that it can be a relatively rare occurrence. Yet it has increased in others, particularly Central America and the Caribbean, where today it can be seen to be nearing crisis point (UNODC 2011, 9-10). In Central America, homicide rates have increased in five out of eight countries in the last five years, with Honduras in particular seeing homicide rates more than double between 2005 and 2010” (UNODC 2011, 50). During my stay in Utila, one diver who had left in the direction of Nicaragua used the public bus, which was held at gunpoint and all its passengers robbed, 30 minutes outside of La Ceiba<sup>4</sup>.

Without delving too much into the complex history of Honduras, suffice to say that it was heavily impacted by U.S. policy, and remains affected until today<sup>5</sup>. Locals, who shall remain unnamed, told me that weeks before my arrival at the end of May 2015, an American Naval vessel arrived in Utila and proceeded to “engage” at the municipal offices. So it is apparent that the islands have some political and economic dependence on the US, as well as a cultural predilection as mentioned before. This is partially caused by an important import to the US; “Honduras’s position on the trafficking route from South to North America means that most of the cocaine bound for the United States passes through its borders” (T.W. 2013). This violence and corruption was ever present during my fieldwork in May- August 2015 when the Honduran president was caught red handed in another corruption case.

It has been said by my informants that when they are abroad they prefer not to identify themselves with Honduras, perhaps because of the attributions listed above. But the rift between the Bay Islands and Honduras is older than the recent malaises plaguing today’s Honduras, and

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<sup>4</sup> The central harbour that connects Utila to mainland Honduras.

<sup>5</sup> It has been testified that Honduras was an important operational center for the CIA’s cold war efforts against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, and a base for military operations in the Caribbean. These actions went so far as to “undermined (the US’s) own policy goals, which included promoting democracy, advancing human rights, and influencing economic development along capitalist lines” (Randall 2003).

stem from a long history of separatism. To this I evidence that Utila was directly impacted as a fruit economy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the colonial and economic players in its region, mainly the US and Britain, yet still continued to identify with them. The source of the friction between islanders and mainlanders may have been partly that they were very different, the mainlanders being from Hispanic descent, Catholic, and with a different set of legal values; Roman-Dutch Law (Lord 1985, 53). From the first plantations on the cays it was evident that the settlement was an economically motivated one, yet there was a lack of an advantageous economic symbiosis between the islanders and mainlanders (Lord 1985, 53), and very quickly the islanders tried to shake the mainland off entirely with the aforementioned petition to the British crown. “Although this was hardly the heyday of British global prominence, the Britain of this era must have loomed vastly superior in contrast to the personalities and governments generated by mainland Honduras. Added to cultural and racial/ethnic considerations regarding superior and inferior status (using the latter term in the sense of prestige) are, I think without question, nationalistic strains of superiority and inferiority” (Lord 1985, 54).

Bay Island locals still share proud stories of their pirate ancestors (Bronzo 1409), and many Spanish-speaking Hondurans still perceive Bay Islanders as pirates (*piratas*), usually in a derogatory sense, illustrating the historical antagonism between the islands and the rest of the country (Lord 1985, 54 and Moreno 2005, 221). On the other hand the Bay Islanders refer to themselves as “English” as opposed to the counter term “Spaniards” in relation to the mainlanders (Lord 1985, 54 and Stonich 2000).

Despite being a remittance economy for many years, basically allowing the islands to be self-sufficient (Lord 1975), the Bay Islands were opened up to tourism in the late 1980’s, the effects of which were already evident in the early 1990’s. In the Islander’s own telling (to me) of how their home was opened up to visitors there was not one mention of the Honduran government’s involvement, instead it sounds like a slowly building enterprise that emerged from the community. “[Before tourism there were] no hotels or anything. Backpackers would come and stay in your rooms or camp in your yard or stuff like that. My dad had a little hotel right over here, they called it Las Palmas, it was my Mom’s house, and they had little rooms in there for half a buck [dollar]... two Americans actually (dive shop owners) were trying to put each other out of business on Utila. In paradise. And we’re all watching these crazy people fighting for all the business. So they put the prices lower and lower and lower until a dive course got to 78\$. For Open Water thing [course]. Well, that information got to Guatemala where all the students go to study Spanish, and within the next week, the place was packed with travelers” (Interview

with Shelby 2015). In reality, laws were passed by the Honduran government to incentivize foreign investment, and influenced by wider economic factors; “widely advertised, para-governmental consulting organizations like the Foundation for Investment and Development of Exports (FIDE) help foreign companies develop investment programs in Honduras. Significantly, the first minister of Honduras’ Ministry of Tourism was a former president of FIDE” (Moreno 2005, 223). It seems as if the Islander’s prefer to leave Honduras’s legislative power outside of their discourse. I believe that another important element in the legend of Butcher MacField is that they were allowed to deal with the crime on their own, to dispense their own justice, which fits together with their apparent contempt towards the Honduran authorities.

These assumptions are present in other studies about Utila’s governance; “Until very recently, common property resource management on the islands had been extremely informal. With limited mainland influence and limited population density, Bay Islanders have traditionally isolated themselves from the Honduran political system, preferring to resolve internal disputes on their own (Davidson 1974). Before the major tourist influx beginning in the 1970s, islanders possessed little in the way of development plans or community organization. This may be due to their independent-minded culture and a general reluctance to deal with ladino officials regarding resource use. When tourism boomed, islanders had few, if any, formal mechanisms in place for management of social or ecological common property resources” (Moreno 2005, 224).

The direct result of development legislation has been a rapid migration of poor work force from Honduras to the island, accelerated land sales followed by unchecked building and development of vacation homes for foreign markets, and development of tourist friendly facilities in an environment that lacks the infrastructure to support them, or check their cultural and environmental footprint. For many years Utilians have been Honduran, but believed themselves to be British. In an interview I had with a Bay Islander from Roatan, he told me that he was a part of a movement that was petitioning the British government again to take the Bay Islands under their wings. Utilians also believe that the Honduran government earns a huge amount of taxes off the Bay Islands, but does not invest it back proportionately (Interview with Mayor 2015). Utilians have always had a disrespect and disregard to the authority that comes from the mainland and a fierce sense of independence. It appears that this attitude towards authorities along with the wish for independence has caused them to reject the rule of authority in Utila. As the dive boat captain Hoover says in my film “Ain’t no rules for fishing. Not in Utila. Ain’t

no rules for nothing in Utila” (Hoover interview 2015). Together with the lack of community cohesion, this rejection of authority works against environmental management on the island.

### **6.2.2 Honduran Immigration from the Mainland**

The Honduran immigration from the mainland has by sheer numbers damaged community ties, as a segregated Hispanic neighborhood has risen in the heart of Utila. “In-migration of ladinos to the island has been substantially encouraged by the government since the 1920s, when the government began appointing more Spanish-speaking local officials and began building more schools for Spanish-speaking students” (Moreno 2005, 225). This immigration is no longer a trickle. With rapid development came need for a workforce, which was to be supplied from the mainland. This immigration was supported initially by both the Honduran government (Stonich 2000), and the Utila municipality, accounting for the cheaper labor (Hogg et al. 2012, 443). “When mainlanders began to migrate to Utila in the late 1990s, they were constructing small shanties in the inner lagoon, but also in other parts of the islands, including areas that original families (Brondo 2015, 1416) owned and lived. In 1998... the Municipality decided to allocate the wetlands Camponado land... and to sell it in a ‘symbolic way, at a very low cost’ (reportedly 8000 lempiras, or US\$615). Many took advantage of the low land cost and purchased plots, including native (non-mainlander) Utilians; today plots continue to be filled in and homes constructed, and plots are even resold” (Brondo 2015, 1417). Today Camponado is “a shanty development with substandard infrastructure and services, and associated health concerns (e.g. water borne illnesses and skin conditions)” (Brondo 2015, 1410) as well as being socially isolated with “a single narrow entry and exit point, making it geographically isolated” (Hogg et al. 2012, 443). These conditions do not deter immigration, and global economic pressures, political and social instability push rising numbers of work migrants to the island (Brondo 2015).

Culturally, Utila’s previously isolated culture has been “rapidly diluted with foreigners and Hispanic Hondurans” (Moreno 2005, 223). Utilians have stated that the education trends on the island to a more Hispanic focus has diminished the quality of the education (Stonich 2000). Some limited community action has been made in attempt to protect culture and education (forming of NGO’s), “but the sheer numbers of ladinos and foreigners coming into the islands pose serious challenges for these inexperienced organizations” (Moreno 2005, 225).

It is apparent that Utilians are being overwhelmed culturally by migration. The Mayor of Utila told me in 2015 that the municipality has started working towards legislature that will limit migration from the mainland. This is a step that is being made quite ‘late in the game’,

considering immigration has gone unchecked for nearly 25 years. I believe that the typical ‘live and let live’ attitude and social divisiveness is what allowed this situation to become what it is today. It is especially alarming, since this migration has accelerated environmental degradation, as we shall see in the next segment.

### **6.3 Environmental Degradation and Action**

As said in the introduction there are numerous environmental concerns on the island. For me as a researcher the trash was just the most visible of these issues. But what are the main environmental threats and their causes, and what action has been taken? In the case of trash management, change was happening halfheartedly at a snail’s pace. I have claimed that a lack of community cohesion and a general disrespect for authority partly to blame for this. Let us expand the case study further to understand how other issues are being dealt with in the environment and their effectivity.

#### **6.3.1 Environmental Threats and Causes**

A 2015 study found that many elements of the ecological makeup of the island were at risk, “including mangrove and coral reef destruction, overfishing, illegal capture, consumption and sales of endangered and endemic species... and inadequate solid waste disposal and waste water treatment systems. The island also has limited freshwater and is now suffering from declining water quality and the contamination of seawater associated with the pressures of tourism development” (Brondo 2015, 1410). A 2012 study listed nine species of that are under national and/or CITES level protection, but are still being cut down or hunted for food; the red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*), the black mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*), the white mangrove (*Laguncularia racemosa*), and the buttonwood mangrove (*Conocarpus erectus*); the endemic Utilian spiny-tailed iguana (*Ctenosaura bakeri*)- locally known as the “swamper”, and the green iguana (*Iguana iguana*) the queen conch (*Strombus gigas*), the hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) (Hogg et al. 2012).

The mangroves are being cut down as a result of development. They play a specifically important role in this fragile ecosystem. Besides protecting endangered species, and serving as a breeding ground for some fish species, the mangroves also serve as a buffer zone that protects the dry parts of the island from coastal erosion flooding and storms, they protect the coral reefs and sea grass beds from natural and manmade debris and erosion, absorb pollution from air and water. They also store carbon in their root systems which reduces the impacts of climate change (Canty 2007 as cited in Brondo 2015).

Mangroves are under attack by both ends of the demographic spectrum. They have been destroyed to accommodate tourism infrastructure and new housing developments for expatriates (Brondo 2015, 1410). An example is the island updating their tourist facilities. The old Utila airport was a thin dusty gravel strip along the southeastern beach. The new international airport at the northeastern point of the island (Swan's Bay) was recommended to remain underdeveloped "due to its ecological importance and significance to the island's potable water" (Currin 2002 as cited in Brondo 2015, 1418). It was a lush forest, breeding ground for endemic iguanas, and nesting area for many bird species, and included several fresh water wells. Nevertheless 425,000 m<sup>2</sup> were cleared in 1999, cutting off natural ecological corridors "resulting in the departure of several birds from the island and a decline in the iguana population. Furthermore, erosion and sediment loss from the airport are threatening the reef ecology on this side of the island" (Currin 2002 as cited in Brondo 2015, 1418). On the other end of the demographic spectrum, the neighborhood of Camponado is on and in the mangroves. Mangroves systems grow into a woven system of brackish water, therefore the homes built in Camponado are either on poles in the swamp, or the water must be filled in. In Brondo's study she attested to conservationists coming to clean up the trash in Camponado and being "asked" to leave, because the locals are using trash to compact and fill in the mangrove swamps, to prepare land for further development (Brondo 2015, 1417). Since the neighborhood lacks basic waste water treatment facilities, these also affect the quality of the water in the mangrove lagoons, which eventually find their way to the reef.

The reef system surrounding the island and the cays are the main fisheries of the community. The pressure on these fisheries is a result of both immigration from the mainland and dive tourism, "leading to a state of Malthusian overfishing, a condition associated with poverty and coastal crowding. Several fish species, including certain grouper and snapper are thought to be in danger of sequential commercial extinction, and it is possible that poorly managed development and fishing practices will contribute to a total algal phase-shift amongst the surrounding coral reef" (Korda et al. 2008, 969). The reef is also directly affected by coastal development of homes and roads that promote erosion, which suffocates the reef system (Stonich 2000). A 2005 study showed that many residents still did not have any sewage disposal systems (the sewage goes directly to the sea), and the septic tank systems that the rest have are prone to leakages that seep into the groundwater or the sea. The natural aquifers have also been disturbed by indiscriminate well digging, leading to saltwater infiltration, and damaging natural streams (Moreno 2005). This 2005 study indicated that, "eutrophication of nearshore waters

and human health risks from fecal coliform in drinking water and around dive sites are especially pressing concerns since they threaten the health of the reef and the attractiveness of the islands as a tourist destination” (Moreno 2005, 223). The Mayor indicated to me that recent bacterial tests have also shown that the water surrounding the islands is unsafe in certain areas. It appears that the environmental threats on the island are severe, and did not happen overnight. BICA was founded in the early 1990’s, so there were those in the community that were aware that some action must be taken. In the next segment we shall review the scope of environmental action taken in Utila.

### **6.3.2 Environmental Action**

As a result of increasingly visible signs of environmental degradation throughout the Bay Islands, an extension of the Bay Islands Conservation Association (BICA), which already existed on Roatan was established on Utila in 1992. It was funded mostly through its collaboration with the Diving Association, which raised funds through mandatory dive insurance fees for the diving tourists (Korda et al. 2008, 969 and Shelby interview). BICA’s central accomplishments was putting down mooring buoys at popular diving spots to protect corals from anchor damage, the creation of the trash collection system, the turtle conservation project where they gave children baby turtles to raise until they would be big enough to survive in the wild, and the establishment of a marine reserve at Turtle Harbor for turtle conservation and to improve fish stock numbers (Shelby interview). Today BICA is an environmental non-governmental organization that has legal status from the Honduran government to carry out activities for sustainable development alongside the municipalities of the islands and is responsible for running the Turtle Harbour marine reserve. In Utila, it operates as a semi-autonomous sub-group, and its projects include marine reserve management and environmental education (Korda et al. 2008, 969). These local actions were enveloped into a 1994 initiative by the Honduran government and Inter-American Development Bank “to maintain environmental quality on the islands as a basis for sustainable economic development and distribution of benefits to all of the islands’ 24,000 residents” (IDB 1994 as cited in Moreno 2005).

The Iguana Station facility works to save and research the iguanas of the island, and started out as a German financed scientific projects, and was turned over to the Hondurans in 2007, and is now run by the Fundacion Islas de la Bahia. “Like most NGOs in Honduras, it struggles to maintain financial solvency. Fees paid by volunteers serve as an instrumental source of income to keep the station afloat” (Brondo 2015, 1411). The main organization on Utila that works with

mangrove biological diversity conservation is the relatively new Kanahau research station. On their website, <http://www.kanahau.com/>, they advertise themselves as a research facility that run long term studies and offer accommodation to researchers, and are currently in the process of developing a teaching outreach program. They are supported by several non-Honduran organizations and internet crowd funding. The Whale Shark and Oceanic Research Station (<http://wsorc.org/>) also acts as a research and monitoring station for visiting volunteers and researchers.

It seems as if the environmental action taken on Utila is limited to the BICA initiatives in the 1990's, and foreign environmental research stations. This was what I observed on Utila, but it is important to check how the community sees these actions, as we will check in the following segment.

### **6.3.3 Community Perceptions of Environmental Action and Degradation**

“BICA, the municipality and the other environmental NGOs are perceived by stakeholders to be ineffective in either reversing marine environmental decline or safeguarding socio-economic livelihoods, and to have failed to effectively involve fishers in management decisions”(Korda et al. 2008, 969).

In their analysis of fisheries on Utila, Korda *et al.* used discourse analysis to “explore sub-plots in complex fisheries management situations”, like the one in Utila (Korda et al. 2008, 969). They found the Utilian fisheries management to be largely market oriented “with some elements of hierarchical governance, but with little stakeholder participation” (Korda et al. 2008, 970). By a market oriented management, they mean a management that is “underpinned by the forces of supply and demand, reflecting the assumption that the unimpeded pursuit of rational self-interest by independent individuals will maximize the economic return from natural resources” (Korda et al. 2008, 970). As shown in Hardin (1968) the actors will pursue economic yield. As long as it is economically profitable more actors will engage, leaving less for each individual until it is no longer economically profitable (the situation on Utila today).

Although the study showed that the fishermen gave reasons why the fisheries declined on Utila, (by prevalence) unsustainable overfishing, fishing by immigrants who fished intensely and unselectively with “no loyalty”, targeting spawning fish, tourism as causing an increase in fish demand, and a lack of alternative employment, foreign trawlers, pollution, and poachers from La Ceiba. Most fishermen admitted to targeting spawning fish, despite knowing the kind of damage that could cause to the health of the stock (Korda et al. 2008). The 2008 study demonstrated that many fishermen did not know where the Turtle Harbor reserve was, and that

a quarter thought the restrictions only applied to tourists (Korda et al. 2008). BICA was seen as the only connection between the fishermen and the local authorities, but had little power within the municipality. The study continued to check the authority of the mayor and BICA at the time and found them to be lacking authority, and that the fishermen had little confidence in their fishery governance. That attempts made at community solutions fell apart because “Nobody trusted each other” (Korda et al. 2008, 976), “There’s no law on this island”, “we tell the municipality to stop the pots and nets, but aren’t listened to (Korda et al. 2008, 977). The study found the Utilians from the Cays and Utila town believe they are too different to work together, so that avenues of participation were selective and reserved to those in the higher social strata, who would also probably “retain privileges and power in any immediate form of community co-management, and not share the benefits of resource use equitably” (Korda et al. 2008, 977), making it disadvantageous for them to work together at all.

Islanders have much to say about the mainland immigrants that live in the Camponado neighborhood of Utila. As mentioned before, their main argument is that the immigrant hunt iguana, crab, and turtle eggs indiscriminately, as well as anything and everything from the reef. A 2012 study by Hogg et al. determined that household social capital works against community social capital in Camponado. This tension is caused firstly that these immigrants are temporary economic migrants, aiming to make money during a relatively short time and return to the mainland, and therefore their commitment to community norms is limited, and they have no long term stake in the community’s health. Secondly, the attitudes that islanders display towards them alienates them further from Utilian social norms, “especially with relation to the environment” (Hogg et al. 2012, 441). The study continues to say that these behaviors are not a matter of poor environmental understanding, “of those householders who answered questions about mangroves, 100% declared them to be an important resource, with 98% affirming that they required protection. Indeed, householders made dire predictions about the impact on the community of the disappearance of the mangroves, saying it ‘would be a disaster, because if there’s no mangroves, we wouldn’t have protection for the environment’ against hurricanes, storms, floods, and excessive heat from the sun; ‘the animals [especially iguanas and birds] would have nowhere to live, the reefs would die, and the fish would have nowhere to lay their eggs’; ‘the ground would be destroyed,’ ‘it would be a desert . . . no water . . . all the water would go out’; ‘the island would go to hell’; ‘we would die.’ The questionnaire survey also revealed that 97% of householders thought that animals (including iguanas), birds, and shellfish needed protecting, and that longer term resident householders perceived that the number of

animals, birds, fish, and shellfish had declined over the last 10 years” (Hogg et al. 2012, 441). Although in theory they value their environment in practice their own needs and the needs of their household come first. While householders claimed that they wanted mangroves to be protected 63% of the householders held Camponadons responsible for cutting them down, while all households claimed they valued wildlife they cited overhunting and overfishing by Camponadons as the main cause for biodiversity loss (conch, endemic iguana, crabs rabbits, deer and fish). “Typically, a householder who was employed part-time as a conservation patrol guard also hunted illegally for iguanas, while another householder threw rubbish over her shoulder as she complained about the amount of garbage” (Hogg et al. 2012, 450).

So, in fact the Utilians who claimed the mainlanders lack the environmental knowledge in their practices in Camponado and the reef are wrong, they lack the cultural knowledge of the meaning of the commons to Utilians. The study continues to say that the mainlanders also showed a lack of optimism and faith in the authorities in regards to reporting poaching, “Several householders declared that reporting was pointless because, as ‘everyone sees, the authorities see it’s all reported on the television but no one does anything’ “ as well as a general pessimism about improving sanitary conditions in Camponado, “There seemed to be a feeling of passivity or helplessness and a dependence on outsiders like the mayor to tackle the problems: “All people do is talk, no one gets up and does anything”; “no one gets together, they wait for someone else to sort it out.” (Hogg et al. 2012, 449). But also “a common admission was that ‘most people just throw their stuff in the swamp.’ One householder said that “the majority of people criticize the mayor, but we do this to the environment” (Hogg et al. 2012, 450). And another final important issue is that, “As mainlanders, ladinos have traditionally lived under authoritarian rule (even dictatorships) where everything was perceived to be done for them by the government. By contrast, Utilian islanders, especially the expatriates, are more used to non-authoritarian rule, where they have influence over decision making” (Hogg et al. 2012, 451).

“Typically, exclusion of outsiders from common property resources is reinforced by a feedback loop in which users are able to make and enforce rules in response to abuses or unauthorized use. This type of feedback is nearly impossible on the islands due to a lack of politicization and the largely contrary aims of the Honduran government (Moreno 2005, 225).

While anything and everything goes on the rest of the island, fast paced standardization processes occur in every dive shop on the island. The PADI system of scuba dive instruction has created a system of instruction that is made up of an accessible regiment of modular courses accompanied by educational material. They create a precise standard of education, that can be

followed verbatim, and updated annually, through obligating the purchase of their published material (that can now be bought through an E-learning system), which prevents deviations from the standard. The system is so efficient, that a backpacker who came to take a beginners course on Utila, can within two weeks after arriving on Utila, if he chooses to start on the path to become a professional and after 20 dives can and will start assisting new students. So it is true that morality is flexible on Utila, and that freedom is the only word on its pirate flag, but this stops when it comes to professionalism in diving education, which is certainly an interesting paradox. Especially interesting since you consider that Utila is one of the places with the highest Open water PADI certification numbers in the world (Diego Interview 2015).

The characteristic ‘live and let live’ acceptance on Utila has led to lack of enforcement of any kind. Newcomer immigrants treat their environment like a convenience store, and are not afforded the social mobility that incentivizes them to care for it. A lack of authority, or power of authority has neglected to act against such practices by the immigrants, or against no less destructive acts by developers. The situation is so dire, that it has been 25 years since the Utila community started dealing with garbage practices, yet people, even young people, are still not entirely sure if the trash should go in the bin or on the floor under your home.

#### **6.4 Alienation caused by Tourism**

As seen above, there are community factors and attitudes which have created a cultural stagnation and inability in the people of Utila to work together and authoritatively to curb the degradation of their resources. This case study would not be complete if I were not to discuss the way that tourism affects the community strategies. I arrived for fieldwork one week before turtle laying season, and beach cleanup efforts were already underway. Every Monday for a month before my arrival and throughout my duration on Utila at 09:00, tourists would gather across from the bank on the main street of Utila and get picked up by the municipal ambulance (pickup truck), and be driven out to pick up trash from Utila’s beaches. I believe, and previous studies have shown that certain tourism practices alienate locals from their own environmental management. First they are physically alienated from their land, as they quickly cash in and sell their land to foreign developers. Second they are alienated from management as the neoliberal economy forces municipalities to rely on foreign NGO’s and foreign work force (eco-tourists, volunteer-tourists), thirdly they are alienated from the knowledge of their own resources.

##### **6.4.1 Alienation from Management**

A 2015 study conducted on volunteer tourism in by Keri Vacanti Brondo in Utila (at the iguana conservation station) has shown that volunteer tourism results in “fictitious conservation”

surrounded by a “spectacle of saving”. This spectacle advances neoliberal trends for its participants, while further concealing the “micropolitics of commodified nature. Volunteer conservation tourism creates value in the trade of experiences in or with “nature” while detracting from the labour and value produced through grounded local interactions with natural resources...As a site of fictitious conservation under neoliberalism, conservation voluntourism advances the creation of new neoliberal citizens while justifying its own existence by furthering ecological devastation, obscuring uneven development processes and devaluing local labour and relationships to natural resources” (Brondo 2015, 1405). So while volunteer tourism is a satisfactory affair for the tourist, looks good on a resume, and can help with one’s entrepreneurial skills in a neoliberal market, it does more damage than good to both the environment and the associated communities. Volunteers can often be unskilled and complete unsatisfactory work. The communities are affected by the voluntourism on multiple levels. First, the existence of the voluntourism justifies neoliberal conservation, which takes the responsibility for environmental management into the precarious hands of NGO’s and foreign funding, instead of creating stable work for locals. Secondly, as was the case in Utila, the resources are protected away from the locals (in this case the swamper iguana), instead of taking into account local consumption traditions and relationship to resources (Brondo 2015). As mentioned before, the main causes for resource depletion on the island are a result of “primarily, development policy and building regulations that favor land privatization and foreign investment in tourism growth” (Brondo 2015, 1415), which means that voluntourism perpetuates the problem. “Mainland migrants, expatriates building vacation homes, and backpacker dive tourists are some of the actors influencing conservation dynamics on the island” (Brondo 2015, 1420). In the current situation, the already stagnant attitudes towards conservation are being exacerbated through further alienation from local resources.

A 2005 study related again to ecotourism in the Bay Islands and elsewhere stated specifically that it is very hard for communities to reap the profits of ecotourism if they do not have an existing political organization in the local community (Moreno 2005). The tragedy of the commons (Hardin 1968) states that open access resources are inevitably destroyed because of a lack of assigned responsibility and because each user benefits in the short-term by deliberately exceeding the capacity of the resource. Though the coastal waters are not likely to be utterly destroyed in either case, the ability of the local community to derive benefits from them has been diminished (Moreno 2015, 236), in the case of lax community management. Importantly in the case of Utila, ecotourism benefits depend on the community and government committing

to active socioeconomic involvement of local peoples, low negative tourist impact and proven conservation. Unfortunately “Many Caribbean countries use the term ecotourism to describe any part of their tourist product associated with natural attractions, e.g., touring a reserve or national park (Patullo 1996 as cited in Moreno 2015). This trend has resulted in common trumpeting of ecotourism, but rare delivery of its associated benefits, especially local socioeconomic involvement” (Moreno 2005, 238).

Even the diving trend has the taint of environmental tourism attached to it. The founders of PADI formed a foundation whose aims are to work towards ocean related preservation issues, and have woven this foundation into the core of the PADI doctrine, a quote from one of the originators of PADI John Cronin: ‘We want to feel that our children, their children and generations to come will be able to enjoy the underwater world that has given us so much. There are so many significant problems facing mankind, but as divers this is truly our cause. If scuba divers do not take an active role in preserving the aquatic realm, who will?’ Out of a true concern for the environment, the Project AWARE Foundation was formed” (PADI 2015). The problem is not, of course that there is a tourism that is involved in environmental issues, but that this kind of “ecotourism” has risen to a prominence that both justifies tourism in mass numbers, and in the case of Utila is used as a wide umbrella term for any tourism that is associated with the environment, without the checks that should come with it.

A recent 2015 study of reef fish cleaning habituation to diver presence at a reef site that has been dived for over 20 years in Utila has shown that the fish do not in fact habituate to diver presence. This means that continual diver presence does have a “negative impact on the fitness and potential lifespan of individuals” (Titus 2015, 11). This must of course be weighed against the possible “wide-ranging direct economic and conservation benefits of ecotourism” in a long term study (Titus 2015, 11).

Cases from several countries indicate that “a greater tendency that small locally owned and managed fishery alternatives would experience negative interference from big capital investments from private sectors that blurs the separation with that of public-state enterprises” (Cabral & Aliño 2016, 66-69), in regards to privatization of the commons as a solution to unclear property rights and open access to the commons, as recommended by Hardin (Hardin 1968).

#### **6.4.2 Alienation from Local Knowledge**

This kind of tourism and the actions of NGO’s, even those that arise from the community have created a rift in knowledge. Islanders, who we have already established as stubborn, for lack of

a better word, are suddenly confronted with criticism of their own practices, along with competition for their resources. It is no wonder that in a case such as this there can be a standoff between local, cultural marine knowledge and knowledge which stems from scientific study and observation.

In their 2008 study of Utila fisheries, they found that between 70 % to 93 % of the fishermen they interviewed thought that fish stocks had declined in recent years, while the minority were “confident in their optimism”, some citing that the fish stocks had not changed in the last eight years and that the “sea is infinite”, others declared that the resources “will last forever”, or that fish stock fluctuated naturally (Korda et al. 2008, 971). Although this is the minority, in a small place like Utila, 3 out of 10 is a big number. “The discourses of expertise that are setting the rules for global transactions, even in the progressive parts of the international system, have left ordinary people outside and behind” (Appadurai 2000, 624).

Here is an example of contested knowledge that I perceived in my study. Adam “I know many local people in their 60’s 70’s 80’s that go, ‘Well, when I was a kid, I could fish all day long, and there were millions of fish. And my dad was the same and my grandfather was the same’. You’re not catching the same fish now, as your grandfather did. There’s a reason why. Especially when it comes to the spawning seasons of fish. Some fish come to Utila once a year to lay their eggs and make their babies, and all the fishermen know this, and they all go there and they fish those fish... Teach the kids, because then they’ll grow up and they’ll change. And they’ll teach their kids the proper way. If you try to change the parents and grandparents you’re fighting a losing battle. Its like hitting your head against a brick wall. Because they don’t believe us. I talk to locals and they say its not right: ‘I’ve been fishing 50 years, I know more than you do’. Well you don’t. ‘Scientists don’t know nothing’. They [locals] have this [attitude]: ‘We know better, we’ve lived with this all our lives’. Well, you actually don’t, you haven’t watched this grow in a lab, and see how big it gets how quickly it gets and how long it takes to reach maturity. They only have their ideas. [I asked if they might see it as insulting, and Adam answered;] Insulting and condescending, yah. Which is why I think we shouldn’t work with the older people, we should work with the younger people. Because they don’t know any better” (Adam Interview 2015). As a rebuttal I offer what Mr. Babe told me, when I asked him about what would resuscitate the reefs : “If you could get the fish traps to stop, the fish would come back, because if you could get the fish to spawn for a couple of years [then] fish grow very fast, they don’t grow slow. Fish grow very fast, lobsters grow very fast, conchs grow very fast. People say it takes years [shakes his head], they grow very fast. I had some BICA people,

environment[al] people tell me a yellow-tail snapper has to be at a certain size to spawn, they make a big mistake. A yellow snapper spawn from that size [makes the width of two fingers]” (Babe Interview 2015). I don’t think that Babe was actually talking about Adam, since they know each other he would have referred to him by name. Adam worked much of his career on Utila at the dive-shop where Babe’s children learned to dive, so he was probably their instructor, and I could imagine the two of them having this argument. Who’s to say which one is right? There is certainly room for speculation (as far as fish rejuvenation is concerned).

### **6.4.3 Alienation from Resources**

As far as foreign land development and ownership there are many problems involved with the selling of the land as “Legal demonstration of land ownership often requires going through a lengthy, expensive process that few locals can afford, so squatting islanders often relinquish claims to their land to real estate brokers for relatively modest fees. Many brokers then create artificial deeds for the properties and sell them at an inflated price to a third party, usually a foreign investor. The investor often finds that their newfound property is still occupied by the original tenants, and that their claims, based on artificial or unrecognized deeds, must be argued in court. This has led to fierce disputes between locals and foreigners. Many of the real estate brokers are foreigners themselves. There is some question as to whether the economic benefits of foreign funded development on the islands, and tourism in general, outweigh its costs. Those locals who have benefited most have been those with sufficient incomes to invest, generally those elite and middle-class islanders who were already wealthy. Poorer islanders tend to have a mixed reaction to development” (Moreno 2005, 224).

In 2014, there is little to no available land on Utila. Recall the island’s incredibly small size: 11.4 km at its widest point, 70 percent of which is covered in mangroves. Global economic pressures, political instability, and social unrest continue to push rising numbers of migrants from the mainland to the island in search of labour. International travel and housing markets have transformed any available land into something no longer attainable for most islanders (outside of the few original families)” (Brondo 2015, 1417). Perhaps not so surprisingly there was plenty of land for sale when I went back to Utila for my fieldwork in May-August 2015.

Opening up Utila to tourism and land development meant that many sold their land, and were left only with fishing as their livelihoods, “we knew nothing of money, and they flashed hundreds of dollars at us, and it blew our minds, so we sold all our land, and relied only on fishing from then on” (Korda et al. 2008, 972), then the tourists want to eat fish, lobster and conch when they are on vacation, and the fishermen comply. The rapid development causes

effluence from the tourist industry that runs directly into the water. Their water. The fishermen expressed hostility towards tourists for other reasons as well. They blame them for the Turtle Harbor restrictions and scaring off the fish with incessant presence (Korda et al. 2008, 975), as well as doing actual damage to the reefs, and going so far as to claim that “it is the tourists which make the decisions round here”, and that “it is tourism that controls the law” (Korda et al. 2008, 976).

The impact of tourism and development is far more complicated than meets the eye. Quite easily and quickly, individuals were incentivized to sell their property, and were culturally ready to rely on the environment for their sustenance. The fast paced degradation was unforeseen and created a further incentive to continue harmful practices, this time for survival. On a profound level, outside interference in protection and knowledge has locked the locals out of the management game altogether, leaving them alienated from their environment, and in many cases powerless to change this situation.

### **6.5 Trash Management**

In Hylland Eriksen he talks about a “composite cultural show” that occurred during the Independence Day celebrations in Mauritius with the opening speeches made in the unofficial national language Kreol (Eriksen 1992, 80). Utila has no independence day, but it does take an entire week to celebrate the carnival that flows through the Bay Islands. The carnival originates in celebrated in Guanaja for a week, then moves to Utila for a Week, then is followed by a week celebration in Roatan. During this week in Utila the island takes its time to celebrate each and every neighborhood. In 2015, during my fieldwork this was the schedule: Sunday the 19<sup>th</sup> of July Boat party in the Bay, Monday the 20<sup>th</sup> Carnival Queen coronation at Bondo Beach, Tuesday the 21<sup>st</sup> Bonfire at Chepe’s Beach, Wednesday the 22<sup>nd</sup> Carnivalito in Sandy Bay, Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> Carnivalito La Punta, Friday 24<sup>th</sup> Carnivalito Cola de Mico, and finally Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup> Parade day, Great Carnival Party with float parade and Cayman Island Band. Since they don’t have independence they show and maintain their solidarity through festivities such as carnival.

For Eriksen the aim of this event, and similar ones, was to create “unity in diversity”, and to accostum different spectators to different traditions. The shows “strive to give significance to metaphors of “organic wholes” composed of incongruous elements but fused in the common destiny of the... people”. The show signified something different than its parts, and could be said to encourage solidarity “in the sense that people’s subjective perceptions may begin to relate to a higher systemic level than formerly – they may orient themselves away from

communal (ethnic) identity towards national identity” (Eriksen 1992, 80). In the case of Utila this solidarity aims at bringing people of the island to share common interests and goals that relate to the Island. Also, whereas cultural shows strive to create solidarity and national identity - Utilians still strive to separate themselves from their national identity as Hondurans to maintain their perceived independence. In the long term, hopefully this independence will come to mean more than separatism from the mainland, but an identification with the island, all its people, and its environmental welfare.

In much the same way as the Carnival signifies unity, the recycling parade can act in the same manner. Despite being a new tradition, it can fall under the term “invented tradition” (Hobsbawn 1983 as cited in Eriksen 1992), which serve mainly as “redefinitions of cultural reality”. If the event is successful people will “redefine their cultural universes and modify their models for action (although patterns of social action itself are more inert than their models and may thus remain unchanged for a while). An individual defining himself as being a member of a nation rather than of an ethnic category in a particular context, will then modify his ideas and beliefs about politics, economic relationships, marriage strategies, friendship, and so on: and he may accordingly, proceed to modify his patterns of action” (Eriksen 1992, 80-81). In this case these celebrations might be the tipping point that will both bring the community together, and behind the collaboration they need to manage their environmental sphere, at least with respect to trash and recycling.

Although Utila has already been attested to as a place that carries strong influence of capitalist societies from the 1975 study by David Lord, the torrents of foreign investment have taken their toll on the community, and many of its members have found themselves out of the economic loop. It is reasonable to suppose that once the community comes together in action, and ethnic boundaries will vanish in particular contexts (As was partially the case in the 1985 Lord study of integration of the small mainland migration to the island). Afterwards they will be replaced by what Eriksen terms “not necessarily by nationalism, but by aspects of modern individualism... not by encompassing nationalist forms of consciousness, but rather by virtues and principles of organization associated with industrial capitalism and the capitalist commodity market” (Eriksen 1992, 90). Reverting in some ways to the society it was before the opening of the islands to foreign development.

This also means that the Utilians will have to come to terms with some cultural loss. But I believe that their resistance to change was a consequence of an overwhelming 25 years of rapid movements. After all the culture of the Caribbean is a fluid one. In Edouard Glissant’s

*Caribbean Discourse*, (1989) he uses geography and geology to contemplate this region's modernity "island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea". In the words of the acclaimed Cuban author Antonio Benitez Rojo; "the culture of the Caribbean is not terrestrial but aquatic", the culture of People of the Sea, is fluidity and rhythm (Rojo 1985, 452). Also I am optimistic that "The Caribbean is not an apocalyptic world.. the notion of the apocalypse does not exist within the culture of the Caribbean" (Rojo 1985, 438). To this I evidence that in the Carnival Queen coronation on the second day of the celebrations, the speeches by both the contestants, the judges and the mayor were made in both English and Spanish.

After all has been said I must mention my interview with the mayor of Utila. He explained to me that the cays fishermen would be supplied with marine steel buoys, for fishing and income, to curb their hazardous fishing habits. The two broken trash compactors were going to be fixed and up and running in no time. There was an outside investor interested in replacing the diesel generators used to create electricity on the island with solar power. A new road would be paved to the trash dump to allow easier access to the site, and they were considering moving the site further away from the residential area of Camponado. Perhaps most importantly was the beginning of application for laws to prohibit and limit migration to the island, and work on water waste treatment would begin simultaneously. Hopefully all these plans will come to fruition.

## **8. Conclusion**

Unlike a majority of Caribbean islands, the inhabitants of Utila in the Bay Islands of Honduras came there by choice. As a result, they have handcrafted a society where the key to harmony and avoiding confrontation is 'live and let live'. The different demographic groups live side by side, but do not work together towards common goals. In addition, they harbor a fierce sense of independence from Honduras, maintaining their allegiance to the formerly British Western Caribbean, and in a sense shrugging off authority altogether. Despite sharing a limited space the community is still divided racially and economically much as it was 150 years ago, and common property, the reef and surrounding waters were a shared resource whose management was adhered to through an unspoken understanding, much like the social relations on land.

The Honduran government opened up the Bay Islands to create a "tourism free zone" in the early 1990's giving unprecedented access to land and goods to foreign investors. The rapid development of land and tourism caused a surge of immigration from the mainland of Honduras that is neither welcomed nor confronted, despite the newcomers' lack of cultural education

about their new surroundings. The complacency to one another coupled with the sense of freedom endowed to themselves from their “Spanish rule”, has created a stagnancy in regards to environmental protection, and so even solving a visible issue such as trash management and education is a major hurdle. While it is apparent that the community cares greatly for their environment, the term stagnancy best defines their actions, as in, they are stuck in a quagmire of their own creation.

In the last 25 years the tourist trends have shifted from traditional backpacking to eco-friendly tourism, which in the context of the Utila is everything from volunteering for beach trash clean-ups to diving courses. These trends have further exacerbated the local inclination to autonomy, and serve to alienate locals from their own management. The alienation occurs on three fronts, an alienation from resources, as their land was sold and their waters are restricted by tourist interests. Alienation from the management itself, as management resources are provided by foreigners, and the management jobs are given to untrained volunteers, and finally alienated from the knowledge of their own resources as foreign research stations are built throughout the island and their opinions are deemed ignorant. In this situation, we can begin to understand why the Utilians have limited action against their environmental degradation.

Despite all these rip currents at force, local actors still move forward to better their community. Through the unique language of the Caribbean steps are being made towards local action. Especially in the case of trash it appears that new cultures of unification are arising towards a shared management.

I think that this thesis has spent a lot of time separating “us” from “them” and breaking down components to a point where it might seem like there actually is an “us and a them”. Despite wanting to avoid comparing Utila to an allegory of a whole world it bears the resemblance. What is the global north if not the first settler to lay claim to the best land that has gotten used to his privilege? What is the global south if not the mainland immigrants who have despaired of their hardships and move, flow out, in search of something better? And what is the global state of environmental decay, if not a world of people who do not know how to work together waking up one day for a last ditch attempt at trying to salvage the remains.

Attachments:



Figure 1. Raised map of Utila and dive sites with local history made by Gunter Kurdowski; Utila History, 1500 Paya Indians, 1502 Discovered by Columbus 4<sup>th</sup> Voyage, 1526 Spanish Slave Raids, 1642-1650 Pirate Base, 1650 Spanish Warships took remaining Indians and dislodged Pirates. 1850 British Slave colony, 1860 Sovereignty of the Bay Islands to Central America.



Figure 2: Images from Recycling parade, June 5<sup>th</sup> 2015.

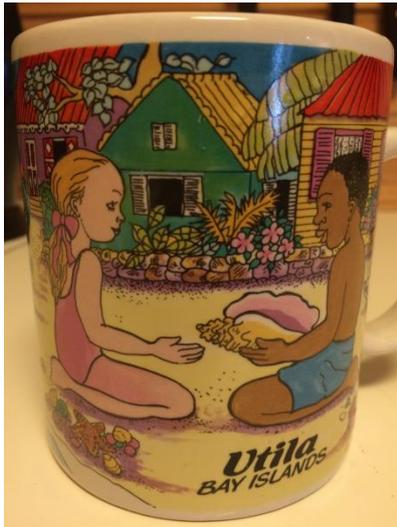


Figure 3: Specialty mug, sold at Utila Originals souvenir store, the only souvenir store on the island.

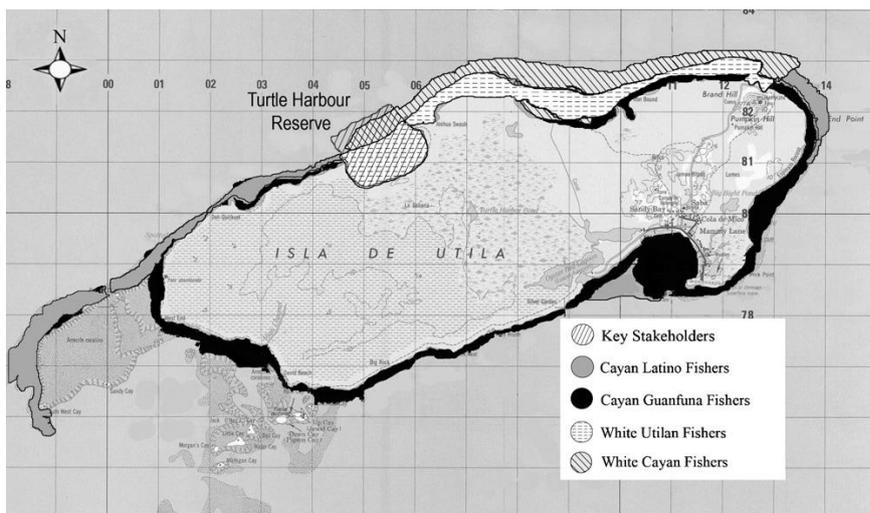


Fig. 4. Map illustrating the actual and perceived location of the Turtle Harbor Reserve by key and primary stakeholders (Korda et al. 2008, 973).



Figure 5: Carnival Posters on Utila main street.

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