Offshoring The American Dream: Lifestyle Projects of U.S. Expatriates in Nicaragua

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Offshoring The American Dream: Lifestyle Projects of U.S. Expatriates in Nicaragua

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Abstract

Lifestyle migration, residential tourism, and retirement migration—all are variations of a privileged form of transnational mobility, whereby relatively affluent citizens of high-income countries electively move to destinations in low-income countries in order to achieve a better quality of life. This growing trend may be summed up as leisure-based migration, and the individuals who migrate are leisure-based migrants or leisure-based expatriates in their adopted country. Unlike the traditional understanding of immigration and labor migrants who move to stronger economies in search of opportunity, leisure-based migrants seek opportunity in weaker economies. Leisure-based migrants/expatriates move to low-wage economies where their relative wealth enables increased buying power, which allow expatriates to work less and have more free time for family, leisure, or whatever they deem important. U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua represent a unique instance of this leisure-based migration trend owing to the long history of U.S imperialism and hegemony in Nicaragua, which has produced greater relative wealth for U.S. expatriates and less for average Nicaraguan people. U.S. leisure-based expatriates act on their positionality when they move to Nicaragua to produce a higher quality of life in Nicaragua’s low-wage labor market. Neoliberal subjectivities and market-based social organization naturalize a transnational capitalist strategy of reducing the cost of producing one’s desired lifestyle by relocating lifestyle production to a low-wage labor market. For U.S. leisure-based expatriates in Nicaragua, this strategy represents the ‘offshoring’ of the American Dream.
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Introduction:

“If you have some sort of online job or whatever and [can] be down here and live for a third of the cost—that, I think, is your best option. Make First World dollars and live in the Third World in some place that's super nice.”

(Sept. 2017 interview with U.S. expatriate interlocutor)

The interior of the home had an open and airy tropical feel. Grand in scale, but casual in its natural styling. My interlocutor slowly panned his iPad across the space showing off the upscale kitchen with open hardwood cabinets stocked with quality local and imported foods. The American-style kitchen shared a vaulted hardwood ceiling with a spacious great room only minimally removed from the verdant jungle exterior by broad picture windows, also framed in tropical hardwood. He continued panning his iPad until the image streaming through my laptop was a sweeping view out through his sliding glass doors and past the pool, down the forested hills, over the beach town of San Juan del Sur, and across the picturesque bay and the Pacific Ocean beyond.

My interlocutor is retired, but not old enough to collect social security. He moved to Nicaragua two years ago with his wife and young daughter in order to enjoy a leisurely, yet affordable lifestyle. They live off of his retirement stipend and the returns from his remotely managed investment portfolio. Like many North Americans living in Nicaragua, he comfortably wears the label ‘expat,’ although, as he points out, his wife believes ‘immigrant’ is a more appropriate identifier. Their legal status in Nicaragua is maintained via three-month tourist visas. They may pursue residency status if the government decides to crack down on ‘perpetual tourism’ and habitual visa renewals.
This study participant and his family are rather typical of a recent wave of foreigners relocating to the Central American country of Nicaragua, primarily from the US and Canada, but also Western Europe. Others may be older or younger, retirees or entrepreneurs, families or individuals, but they all share a desire to enjoy a high quality of life in a tropical setting with a low cost of living. These leisure-based expatriates, or ‘expats’ as they commonly refer to themselves, are representative of a broader global leisure-based migration trend, where, over the last thirty years, citizens from the world’s wealthiest countries of the Global North are permanently or seasonally relocating to low-income countries of the Global South. These destination countries are characterized by the aesthetics, climate, and amenities common to tourist destinations; more often than not, expatriate destinations are tourist destinations. Leisure-based expatriates relocate to these destinations seeking an enjoyable and fulfilling lifestyle and low cost of living. These expatriates’ ability to live a touristic or leisure-based life is because their relative wealth—often in the form of pensions and other income streams from their home countries—enables them to enjoy elevated buying power in the low-wage economies of countries of the Global South, such as Nicaragua. This economic advantage permits leisure-based expatriates to work less or not at all, freeing up more time for leisure, family, or ‘dream’ careers, while at the same time, enabling them to afford a higher standard of living, often including desirable real estate and domestic employees. Scholars increasingly refer to these leisure-seeking expatriates as ‘lifestyle migrants,’ ‘residential tourists,’ and ‘international retirement migrants’ depending on which aspects of mobility, stage of life, motive, and lifestyle are being emphasized. Many of the existing case studies of leisure-based expatriates focus on migrations of Northern and Western Europeans to the Mediterranean, as well as examples of Australians moving to Southeast Asia, and US-Americans and Canadians moving to Mexico.
This thesis is a study of U.S. leisure-based expatriates living in Nicaragua, and is a unique case study for a number of reasons. First, Nicaragua as a leisure-based expatriate destination has received less scholarly attention than instances of leisure-based migration in other parts of Latin America and the world in general. This owes to the fact that leisure-based expatriates are relatively recent arrivals in Nicaragua, and Nicaragua is a relatively recent arrival on the international tourism scene. Until recently, Nicaragua was better known for its 1979 socialist revolution and U.S.-backed counterinsurgency than its beaches and Spanish Colonial cities now featured in tourism and real estate promotions. Second, the wealth gap between expatriates and locals, although a key ingredient of leisure-based expatriatism, is exaggerated in Nicaragua as the second poorest country in the Western hemisphere behind only Haiti (World Bank 2016). An individual who emigrates from the US middle-class arrives in Nicaragua as a wealthy elite with extraordinarily disproportional buying power in the local economy. Finally, U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua are a unique example of leisure-based expatriatism because they originate in a country that has sought to manipulate or control Nicaragua’s resources, politics, and economy for 170 years. This history has produced relative advantages for U.S. expatriates and relative disadvantages for most Nicaraguans. Thus, while U.S. expatriates are not necessarily more privileged than other expatriates in Nicaragua, they carry significant historical baggage. However, Nicaragua is also uniquely welcoming to U.S. expatriates and other relatively wealthy foreigners at this time. The Nicaraguan economy has been slowly but steadily growing since the arrival of tourists and expatriates, and many Nicaraguans welcome the influx of capital and job opportunities generated from these sectors. Furthermore, the Nicaraguan state—despite the inequities and social problems arising from extreme wealth disparities and U.S. imperialism—is
actively courting foreign immigrants and investors from the Global North as an economic growth and poverty reduction strategy.

This thesis offers an anthropological approach to the investigation of the growing U.S. leisure-based expatriate population in Nicaragua and the growing trend of leisure-based migration. This is significant for a few reasons. First, the expatriate population in Nicaragua is a largely unexamined population within the interdisciplinary field of leisure-based migration studies. Second, until recently, the field of anthropology has paid less attention to the study of leisure-based migration/expatriates than other social sciences. Finally, an anthropological approach is uniquely qualified to analyze cross-cultural interactions and culture change, and illuminate the lived experiences of broad power structures and global events in the minutia of the daily lives of expatriates. Within this thesis, I bring together the interdisciplinary field of leisure-based migration studies, the anthropology of tourism, the anthropology of Latin America, and the perspective of neoliberal globalization studies to analyze data from an internet-based ethnographic study of U.S. leisure-based expatriates living in Nicaragua. I wanted to know: Why do relatively well-off, middle-class U.S. citizens leave their country for Nicaragua? What are the lifestyle pursuits of U.S. leisure-based expatriates in Nicaragua, and how are they achieved? And, how do these foreigners perceive their Nicaraguan neighbors, and how do they understand their role in Nicaragua?

I argue that U.S. leisure-based expatriates pursue a lifestyle project in Nicaragua, which I refer to as ‘offshoring’ the American Dream. By American Dream, I refer to the cultural expectations of personal fulfillment, wellbeing, and economic advancement associated with success in the United States. I argue that U.S. leisure-based expatriates use a capitalist offshoring strategy to produce personal fulfillment, wellbeing, and economic advancement more efficiently
in Nicaragua’s low-wage labor market. This strategy enables expatriates to work less and have more free time for family, leisure, or whatever they deem important. This offshoring strategy also increases expatriates’ buying power, situating them as wealthy elites relative to most Nicaraguans. This enables U.S. expatriates to not only work less or electively, but also afford luxuries such as domestic workers. I argue that U.S. expatriates’ ability to engage in a capitalist offshoring to Nicaragua is contingent upon their advantaged positionality in a division of labor between the U.S. and Nicaragua. This division of labor is the outcome of 170 years of U.S. imperialism and hegemony in Nicaragua, which has left the Nicaraguan population at an economic disadvantage to most U.S. citizens. Furthermore, since 1989, U.S. soft power hegemony in Nicaragua has been part of a broader process of neoliberal globalization, which, among other effects, has naturalized the capitalist market as a global social order. Thus, I argue that U.S. expatriates with historically produced privileges act on neoliberal market logic when they offshore the production of a ‘better quality of life’ to the low-wage labor market of Nicaragua.

Methods

This thesis is the result of an Internet-based ethnographic study of sixteen self-identifying expatriates, or ‘expats,’ in Nicaragua. Internet-based ethnography—also called digital ethnography (Pink et al. 2016) and netnography (Kozinets 2010)—was an appropriate and productive method for locating study participants and researching the expatriate population in Nicaragua. Many U.S. expatriates already have an online presence, and use social media, email, and Internet voice and video calls to maintain social and professional connections with the
United States. Additionally, many U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua connect with each other via Facebook and other Internet based communication apps, such as WhatsApp.

This ethnographic study was conducted over a period of seven months, running from July of 2017 through January of 2018. I sought out research participants through targeted advertising on social media groups and forums oriented towards expatriates living in Nicaragua, as well as via snowball sampling originating with two expatriate acquaintances living in Nicaragua. Of the sixteen participants, ten responded to recruitment advertisements posted on several ‘expat’ oriented Facebook groups. Advertisements on the Nicaragua sub-sections of two international expatriate forums returned no results. The initial Facebook response was strong with approximately forty respondents, although only ten were both qualified and committed to the full term of the study. Because some Facebook groups were oriented toward Nicaragua-based expatriates in general, and other Facebook groups are for specific expatriate enclaves or cities, I was able to achieve a relatively diverse geographic and demographic dispersal. Study participants reside in seven different Nicaragua cities or towns, including the three most recognized expatriate enclaves of Granada, San Juan del Sur, and León. The age range of participants was 22 to 68 years. The length of time each participant has been in Nicaragua ranged from one month to 30 years, although the average was only three years. (at the time of interview). Eleven were married and living in Nicaragua with their partner, and seven had dependent children with them. Curiously, only four of the seventeen participants were male. In the interest of self-reflexivity, I wish to point out that the data produced from my communications with participants of both sexes may differentially reflect disparities in the comfort level and social norms experienced between a researcher and participant of the opposite
sex. It is quite possible that a female researcher would have elicited different—or at times, more substantial—responses from these same participants.

I accomplished the data collection portion of this study with a confidential online questionnaire, a confidential online interview, and follow up email communication. The questionnaire focused on three themes: demographic information, online use habits, and moving to Nicaragua. Participant interviews were conducted with a variety of online voice call and video call applications, for example, Apple FaceTime, Skype, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger. The interviews were semi-structured and typically lasted an hour. Interview questions were written to elicit responses related to expatriates’ experiences, lifestyle, motives, notions of identity and feelings of belonging, and perspectives on Nicaragua and Nicaraguans. These interviews were then transcribed and analyzed. I used NVivo qualitative analysis software to identify and code recurring themes in the questionnaires and interview transcripts.

**Literature Review**

This thesis draws on literature of several disciplines in order to situate U.S. leisure-based expatriates in Nicaragua within the context of U.S. hegemony and globalization. These literatures are those of: leisure-based migration/expatriate studies, the anthropology of tourism, the cultural anthropology of Nicaragua, and (neoliberal) globalization studies.

*Leisure-based migration/expatriate studies*

Research on leisure-based migration/expatriates comes from this still-developing interdisciplinary field with contributions from sociology, human geography, political science, tourism studies, and cultural anthropology. In actuality, there is no singular academic field by
this name. Rather, there are several different, sometimes competing articulations of leisure-based migration/expatriates. Proponents of each of these articulations, or subfields, emphasize different aspects of mobility, motive, stage of life, and lifestyle. I have focused on three prevalent articulations of leisure-based migration: residential tourism, international retirement migration, and lifestyle migration. However, there are earlier examples of expatriate research.

Early examples of expatriate studies did not focus on leisure-based migrants. Anne-Meike Flechter (2001) investigated corporate expatriates in Indonesia as non-voluntary (i.e., non-leisure-based) expatriates. Later, Fletcher (2010) turned her focus to the particular experience of corporate wives as non-voluntary expatriates. Erik Cohen (1977) created a topology of expatriates in similar form to his earlier tourist typology. Cohen defined an expatriate as: “voluntary temporary migrants, mostly from affluent countries, who reside abroad for one or several of the following purposes: business…mission…teaching…[or] leisure” (1977, 6).

Cohen’s definition of a ‘leisure’ expatriate from his 1977 typology of expatriates is useful as an umbrella concept for the fractured field of leisure-based migration/expatriate studies. Cohen defines the leisure type as: “owners of second homes abroad, the [relatively] wealthy, the retired living abroad, and other ‘permanent tourists,’ bohemians and drop-outs” (1977, 6). This definition provides an umbrella term for more nuanced definitions of leisure-based migration/expatriates, such as residential tourism, international retirement migration, and lifestyle migration.

The concept of residential tourism originated with Spanish scholars who recognized the often-blurry distinction between Northern European tourists and Northern European retirees residing in Southern Spain. Sociologist María Angela Cadado-Díaz (1999) characterizes residential tourism as a type of non-economic or non-labor-oriented migration. Casado-Díaz
defines residential tourists’ motives in very similar terms to later definitions of lifestyle migration; those being “climate, quality of life, recreation, and family ties” (1999, 224).

Geographer Vicente Rodriguez (2001) sees residential tourism and second home migration in Costa del Sol, Spain as an outgrowth of Northern European tourists’ subjectivities and economic lifecycle. According to Rodriguez, residential tourists are Northern European retirees who visited the Spanish Mediterranean as short-term tourists for years, and later as retiree-residents, they maintain the same patterns of touristic behavior and perspective (2001, 56).

Mason R. McWatters’s 2009 book, Residential Tourism: (De)constructing Paradise, broadens the definition of residential tourism by moving it to Latin America and opening the definition to younger, non-retired persons. Like Rodriguez, McWatters links residential tourism to existing tourism flows and infrastructure, while locating both in broader migration theory. He writes:

Tourism itself is a subtype of consumer-oriented migration...[and residential tourism is] permanent or semi-permanent, consumption-oriented migration to a particular destination, which more often than not arises out of pre-existing flows of short-term vacation tourism to that destination (McWatters 2009, 8).

Like residential tourism, the concept of International Retirement Migration (IRM) emerged from European scholars investigating Western European migration to Southern Europe. Residential tourism and retirement migration are overlapping and similar concepts. Yet, whereas residential tourism emphasizes settlement and destination, retirement migration’s emphasis is on stage of life and economic concerns of retirees on fixed incomes, as well as the healthcare needs of aging adults. Williams et al. (1997) defined IRM as a “highly selective migration process, which redistributes individuals – and their concomitant incomes, expenditures, health and care needs – across international boundaries” (Williams et al. 1997, 132).
Moving to the concept of lifestyle migration, this term owes its theoretical grounding to mobilities and migration studies. The first scholars to formulate this concept were reacting to what they considered to be a narrow definition of migration and immigrant, and to overly tourism- and retirement-based articulations of residential tourism. Michaela Benson and Karen O’Reilly (2009) argue that all the previously suggested ‘umbrella concepts’ for affluent citizens of the developed world moving abroad (e.g., retirement migrants, residential tourists, and others) share one commonality: lifestyle. Benson and O’Reilly offer ‘lifestyle migration’ as an umbrella term for a multitude of more nuanced expressions of affluent migrants. They write:

Despite the peculiarity of each case, these common lifestyle concerns demonstrate that these different migrations can be considered as a single phenomenon – lifestyle migration. As we perceive it, lifestyle migrants are relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life. (2009, 609)

Benson and O’Reilly go on to describe lifestyle migration as a ‘reflexive project of the self…whereby migrants escape disillusionment through seeking an alternative lifestyle” (2009, 615). Additionally, these authors take issue with residential tourism’s emphasis on consumption-based migration. Benson and O’Reilly note that many lifestyle migrants are producers who set up tourism-related businesses and other small cottage industries as a means of income or just a hobby (2009, 616). Thus, according to Benson and O’Reilly, the key elements of lifestyle migration are affluence, mobility, escape, and the search for a more satisfying life.

The Anthropology of Tourism:

The anthropology of tourism is rooted in the foundational literatures of the multidisciplinary social science of tourism. These literatures remain relevant and useful for understanding the touristic nature of leisure-based migration/expatriates. There is no doubt that
the expatriate phenomenon is closely linked to traditional understandings of tourism. After all, expatriates and tourists seek out the same destinations. They originate from the same countries. They often engage in the same recreational behaviors. They interact in the same tourism economies, albeit expatriates may be selling services to tourists. And, expatriates and tourists are generally in the same socio-economic position relative to local populations.

When considering what motivates individuals from high-income countries to migrate to low-income countries for a better lifestyle, we must consider what is being left behind and what is being sought. The concept of authenticity, as theorized in the foundational literatures of tourism studies, is a helpful starting point. Dean MacCannell (1976) believes that modern life has become detached from ritual and meaning, and therefore modern humans look for examples of “real life” in places and societies they deem pre-modern (91-92). MacCannell argues that modern humans’ quest for authenticity through touristic experience leads to being fooled by “staged authenticity,” whereby hosts delimit the degree to which tourists are able to penetrate local inner-workings or “back regions” (1973, 1976). MacCannell believes that our resistance to being labeled ‘tourists’ stems from the association of tourism with contrived experience. He writes: “The term ‘tourist’ is increasingly used as a derisive label for someone who seems content with his obviously inauthentic experience” (MacCannell 1976, 94)

Eric Cohen ([1979] 1988) understands authenticity is a tourist motive, but unlike MacCannell who sees it as a primordial urge (MacCannell 1973), Cohen sees authenticity as social construct, and thus “negotiable” (1988, 374). For Cohen, negotiable translates into a typology of tourist experience based on the degree to which perceived authenticity is valued. On one end of the spectrum is the “existential tourist” who will stray further from the comforts of modernity to connect with the perceived authentic, natural, pre-modern Other (377). Existential
tourists will dismiss transparent attempts at staged authenticity as the “commodification of culture” (375). Cohen puts anthropologists in this group and suggests that they can fall victim to “sophisticated forms of staged authenticity (377). On the other end of the spectrum is the “diversionary tourist” who is just seeking entertainment, and is not concerned with the commodification of the hosts’ culture (377).

Another central concept in tourism anthropology is that of the “Tourist Gaze” from sociologist John Urry (1990). Derived from Michel Foucault’s ‘medical gaze,’ the tourist gaze describes both the (often elevated) social position and the perspective of tourists relative to the host populations. The Tourist Gaze is imbued with unequal power structures reflected in the expectations placed upon, and the commodification of, the host population. The ontological core belief of the gaze is that it is subjective, and what it sees is the object of difference, or the Other. The tourist gaze is the perspective of the agentive modern human who looks out (or down) at what is less modern, less human, and less agentive. However, the tourist gaze is not necessarily a negative representation; it may be a romanticized imagining of other people and places, such as the “happy poverty” of a rural English village (Urry 1990, 96).

*The Cultural Anthropology of Nicaragua:*

Nicaraguan cultural anthropology is situated in the cultural anthropology of Central America. Cultural anthropologists first turned their attention to Central America during the Cold War era civil wars, which affected Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua (Burrell and Moodie 2015, 382). For this reason, the anthropology of Central America has taken a political-economic lean. The political economy of Nicaragua has been especially shaped by the 1979 revolution and its aftermath, thus so has the anthropology. For example, Lancaster (1994) investigated struggles

However, for the purpose of this thesis, I am interested in case studies of Nicaragua anthropology that attend directly to tourism. Florence E. Babb (2004) discusses the history of tourism in Nicaragua and the rebranding of the country as a “safe” destination during the era of neoliberal restructuring that followed the Sandinistas’ post-war electoral defeat. Babb tracks the Nicaraguan state as it pivoted toward international tourism in the 1990s; a shift that paralleled the changing profile of the Nicaraguan tourist from the leftist sympathizers and activists of the 1980s to the mainstream resort tourists of the new millennium who possess little or no knowledge of the recent war. Additionally, Babb demonstrates that both the conservative party and the leftist Sandinista political parties support the development of Nicaragua’s tourism industry.

Another anthropologist who has studied tourism in Nicaragua is environmental anthropologist Carter Hunt. His work has focused on material inequities within the development of Nicaragua’s tourism industry. Hunt (2011) shows the failed promise of post-socialist tourism through the displacement of locals, the fetishization of real estate, and destruction of the environment by tourism development. Hunt describes a neo-colonial cycle of foreign accumulation, where tourism development displaces locals from productive land only to become dependent on service industry jobs. This cycle has a compound effect: Displaced locals and the
expanding (residential) tourism industry add more environmental strain to the remaining local land holdings as more people try to produce from less space. Simultaneously, displacement and lack of land encourages displaced locals to seek service jobs within the same (residential) tourism enclaves that displaced them in the first place.

(Immanuel Wallerstein) Globalization Studies


According to Wallerstein ([1974] 2007), the modern world-system is a global capitalist economy comprised of many nation-states, sociocultural groups, and business firms, between which flow goods, capital (2007, 23-23). The ‘modern world-system,’ is structured by a global axial division of labor between capitalist firms in powerful, wealthy core states and a labor supply in weaker, less wealthy peripheral states (28). More profitable core production processes tend to be located in stronger states capable of protecting interests of core producers through policy and force; less profitable processes tend to be located in weaker peripheral states, which are susceptible to pressures applied by core states (Wallerstein 2007, 26-28, 50).

Robinson (2003) offers a similar model of global capitalism, yet argues that global capitalism has spread with the development of a transnational capitalist class uncoupled from the traditional core-periphery nation-state structure (2003, 166, 197). According to Robinson,
transnational capital and the capitalist class have become decentralized and flow multi-directionally in the global capitalist economy. However, Robinson notes, “capital and goods can move freely across national borders but labor cannot and its movement is subject to heightened state control” (2003, 273). Nation-states judicially and forcefully maintain the division of labor crucial to global capitalism by controlling the “free flow of labor [which would otherwise] exert an equalizing influence on wages across borders” (Robinson 2003, 273). Though, Robinson sees the core-periphery as a pre-globalization economic structure, he allows that nation-states remain vital in the production of the global division of labor and continue to “serve numerous interests of the transnational capitalist class” (Robinson 2003, 274).

Ilana Gershon (2011) brings globalization to the scale of the individual by exploring the concept of neoliberal agency and the neoliberal self. Individuals in the age of neoliberal globalization must adapt to a global social order based on the principles of the capitalist market. Neoliberal selves, or neoliberal agents, must adapt to the market-based social order by cultivating skill and assets to produce advantage and alliances. Gershon (2016) argues that neoliberal philosophy encourages individuals to think of themselves as businesses in the market-based social order. Individual ‘selves-as-businesses’ must remain flexible to the changing market, yet simultaneously must ‘brand’ themselves as coherent and stable.

**Thesis Structure**

The remainder of this thesis is divided into three chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter, I trace the history of U.S. interference, invasions, imperialism, and counter-insurgency in Nicaragua. This history begins in the mid-19th century with U.S. expansionists and transisthmian transport, through the direct U.S. imperialism of the first half of the 20th century,
the mid-century U.S.-backed Somoza dictatorship, the 1979 revolution, 1980s Contra War, and finally, U.S.-led neoliberal restructuring. Throughout this long history of interference and imperialism, I track the parallel history of the evolution of tourism in Nicaragua. By demonstrating these parallel histories, I contextualize contemporary U.S. expatriates’ relationship to Nicaragua and their relative privilege.

In chapter two, I analyze U.S. expatriates’ varying motives, lifestyles, entrepreneurship, and expatriate lifestyle projects. I use the concepts of residential tourism, international retirement migration, and lifestyle migration as a framework for analyzing my expatriate interlocutors’ varying motives for moving to Nicaragua, as well as their lifestyle ambitions in Nicaragua. I continue with an analysis of expatriate entrepreneurship as oriented toward the tourism and expatriate enclave economies. Finally, I describe my interlocutors’ expatriate projects as a capitalist strategy to offshore the production of their leisure-based lifestyles to Nicaragua’s low-wage labor market.

In chapter three, I explore my interlocutors’ perspectives of, and relationship with, Nicaraguan people. I begin the chapter with an analysis of my study participants’ varying integration into Nicaraguan society. Then, I describe the touristic ‘expat’ gaze of less locally integrated U.S. expatriates toward Nicaraguan people. Finally, I dig into my interlocutors’ complex work relationships with their Nicaraguan domestic employees. I analyze my interlocutors’ views of their employer-employee relationships as familial, friendships, and mentorship. I argue that the framing of work relationships as familial or friendships obscures inequities, yet also supports a moral economy. Further, I situate my interlocutors’ tutelage of their Nicaraguan employees within a neoliberal market-logic social order.
In my conclusion, I connect my interlocutors’ outsourcing of domestic burdens to Nicaraguan employees, their neoliberal subjectivities, their motives, their lifestyle pursuits, and their historically derived positionality to argue that U.S. expatriates’ lifestyle projects represent an offshoring of the American Dream.
Chapter I:
U.S. (Quasi) Imperialism in Nicaragua:
The Rhetoric of Friendship and Tutelage

This chapter contextualizes the unique relationship U.S. expatriates have with Nicaragua owing to a long history of asymmetrical U.S.-Nicaragua interactions. From the middle of the nineteenth century until today, the United States has sought to influence or control Nicaraguan resources, politics, and economics for the benefit of U.S. interests and often to the detriment of the Nicaraguan people. U.S. interference in Nicaragua has taken many forms, including private capital projects, military invasions, outright imperialism, and ‘soft power’ neoliberal economic hegemony. In addition to the history of U.S.-Nicaragua interactions, this chapter historicizes Nicaragua’s contemporary expatriate population by tracing the parallel evolution of Nicaragua as a tourism and expatriate destination. By way of illuminating these parallel histories, I set up an argument that U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua, whether cognizant or not, enjoy particular privileges produced through 170 years of U.S. interventions. Further, I argue the recurrent themes of friendship, tutelage, and modernization, which emerged in the narratives of my U.S. expatriate interlocutors, have historic precedents in rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy toward Nicaragua.

In what follows, I provide a historical framework for the unique relationship expatriates have to Nicaragua, a country whose history has been dominated by oscillations of resistance and submission to U.S. imperialism. Following Wallerstein’s ([1974] 2007) ‘world-systems’ approach, which recognizes the hegemonic influence of stronger core states over weaker peripheral states in a global economic system, I demonstrate the longue durée of asymmetrical interactions between the U.S. and Nicaragua. I continue by tracking the history of Nicaragua through different periods of U.S. intervention. Simultaneously, I track the parallel evolution of
Nicaragua as a tourism/expatriate destination by providing examples of the international travelers and tourists who visited Nicaragua during these eras. As we will see, long before the current wave of foreign tourism, real estate development, and expatriate enclaves, Nicaragua was a site for foreign adventures, incursions, manipulation, and capital projects.

The relationship between the United States and Nicaragua over the last 170 years is one well characterized as core-periphery. According to Wallerstein, the modern world-system is a global capitalist economy comprised of many nation-states, sociocultural groups, and business firms, between which flow goods and capital (2007, 23-23). Because the modern world-system is a capitalist economy and not a political entity, the units of analysis are regions of production in a global division of labor differentiated by profitability (Wallerstein 2007, 28). More profitable core production processes tend to be located in stronger states capable of protecting interests of core producers through policy and force; less profitable processes tend to be located in weaker peripheral states, which are susceptible to pressures applied by core states (Wallerstein 2007, 26-28, 50). Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the United States has been the preeminent core state in the western hemisphere, and by the mid-twentieth century, the world. During this time, U.S. citizens and firms have extracted raw materials, goods, and cheap labor from Nicaragua, while the U.S. government repeatedly intervened to protect U.S. state and private interests. Often, the United States or U.S. citizens have presented themselves to Nicaraguans as liberators, friends, and tutors of modernity, although as history shows, the liberation has been factional, the friendship has been conditional, and the tutelage not always invited.
Crossroad of Capitalism: U.S. Interventions in the 19th Century

During the nineteenth century, Nicaragua, like other formerly Spanish territories, broke free from one imperial power to find it was in the long shadow of a new rising power. Indeed, the United States was virtually bursting at its borders, while the overstretched Old World empires of Spain and Portugal lost their colonial grip on the New World. U.S. expansionists and capitalists came to Nicaragua proclaiming their intentions to liberalize and modernize, yet these intentions were mostly hollow rhetoric barely masking self-interests. These northern yanquis vehemently viewed Nicaragua with “imperial eyes” (Pratt 1992 in Babb 2004, 543) as an extra-territorial frontier to be assimilated and exploited with the backing of the U.S. military. From mid-century through the turn of the next, the notion of dominion and paternalism over Nicaragua, as well as the concept of access to Nicaragua, would become normalized in the minds of U.S. citizens.

By the time Nicaragua had declared its independence in 1823, the United States was already constructing a world that incorporated most of Latin America into its regional sphere of influence and control. In 1823, the United States had already become a prominent player in the world economy through trade and industry in no small part because of agrarian slave labor. Furthermore, Spain’s regional influence was in decline as its former colonies declared their independence prompting U.S. president James Monroe to formulate his doctrine rejecting further European expansion into the Americas—a foreign policy that would be increasingly used to justify U.S. hegemony over the Western Hemisphere. Foreign policy found its cultural corollary in the mid-century ideology of Manifest Destiny, which morally justified U.S. expansionism as the God-ordained right of white Americans to overtake the territories of non-white peoples in the American west, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Together, these economic, political, and
cultural prerogatives situated Nicaragua within entitled domain of U.S. citizens. From the mid-century on, Nicaragua’s national destiny was inextricably linked to the prerogatives of the United States.

Nicaragua’s potential as an overland transportation route between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans had long captured the attention of U.S. politicians and capitalists. Historian Michel Gobat notes that the idea of an interoceanic canal cutting across Nicaragua dates back to Thomas Jefferson in 1788, although it was the California Gold Rush beginning in 1848 that made a Nicaraguan transport route the preoccupation of U.S. entrepreneurs (2005, 1, 22). At that time, an ocean voyage with a land crossing in Nicaragua or Panama was the fastest route for the thousands of gold-rushers heading from the eastern U.S. to California (Gobat 2005, 23). This migration event inspired the first U.S. capital project in Nicaragua, when in 1851, U.S. shipping tycoon, Cornelius Vanderbilt, reduced the trans-isthmus travel time from twenty days of canoe and overland travel down to two days on an Accessory Transit Company Steamboat (Gobat 2005, 23). Vanderbilt could also be credited with the beginning of North American tourism in Nicaragua, for as Gobat notes:

“To the dismay of many Nicaraguans…North Americans not only owned the transit…and monopolized the sale of wood needed to fuel the steamboats, they also operated many of the hotels and taverns that catered to foreign adventurers. In creating this quasi-enclave economy, U.S. entrepreneurs displaced various local businesses, especially boatmen who had long carried the country’s transisthmian commerce” (2005, 24).

And in turn, conflict between Vanderbilt’s Accessory Transit Co and local authorities produced the United States’ first military attack in Nicaragua. In 1854, at the request of Vanderbilt’s company, U.S. marines bombed the British protectorate of Greytown (San Juan del Norte) because local port authorities wanted to tax ships entering the San Juan River route (Folkman 1972, 59-63, Gobat 2005, 23).
The United States’ first major political interference in Nicaragua—as well as Nicaragua’s first large influx of U.S. immigrants in the form of expansionist-colonizers—arrived in 1855 with a Tennessee-born mercenary and filibuster named William Walker. Walker came to Nicaragua under the invitation of Nicaragua’s Liberal Party based in León (i.e., landed elites who valued modernization and capitalism) who hoped that he would help them overthrow the ruling Conservative Party based in Granada (i.e., traditional landed oligarchs). Walker and his mixed forces of American mercenaries and Nicaraguan Liberals captured Granada, and Walker became the de facto leader and finally the President of Nicaragua a year later. News of Walker’s conquest and colonial aspirations was well received in the U.S. South, and as many as 10,000 Americans migrated to Nicaragua seeking land to colonize (Gobat 2005, 30).

While Nicaraguan Liberals believed Walker and the colonists to be friends whose mentorship would show the way to progress and modernity in Nicaragua (Gobat 2005, 27), Walker had a more sinister agenda. Walker envisioned a slave state with African labor and U.S. plantation owners (Gobat 2005, 34). Upon assuming the presidency, Walker declared English the official language, reinstated slavery, and began a military campaign to eradicate both Liberal and Conservative Nicaraguans (Gobat 2005, 37, Baracco, 2005, 33). In response, Conservatives and Liberals joined in revolt against Walker. Joining this unprecedented alliance were Guatemalans, Hondurans, Salvadorans, and Costa Ricans, as well as arms and funds provided by Cornelius Vanderbilt who had lost his transit route to Walker (Gobat 2005, 37-38). William Walker surrendered to the alliance in 1857, but only after burning Granada to the ground (Gobat 2005, 38-40). The Nicaraguans released Walker to the U.S. Navy, after which he attempted to filibuster in Nicaragua three more times until finally being captured and killed by Hondurans (Gobat 2005, 40).
19th Century Travelers

Nicaraguans also hosted less ominous, although unimpressed, U.S. travelers in the remainder of the nineteenth century. Florence E. Babb (2004) notes the “celebrated traveler” Mark Twain crossed Nicaragua en route to the Atlantic (543). The port town of San Juan del Sur—today, the Pacific jewel of Nicaragua’s tourism economy and the site of an international expatriate community—appears to Twain in 1866 as “a few tumble down shanties—they call them hotels—nestled among green verdure…and half clad yellow natives, with bowie knives two feet long (Walker & Dane 1940 quoted in Babb 2004, 543). Twain’s ethnocentric apathy was alleviated when, speaking for his fellow travelers he writes, “Our interests finally moderated somewhat in the native woman” (Walker & Dane 1940 quoted in Babb 2004, 543). In addition to Twain’s bucolic quips, Babb relates the grumbles of a dissatisfied 1880s trans-isthmian traveler from New York. San Francisco-bound Dora Holt complains about her “imbecile guide” and laments the “uninteresting, desolate hamlet of San Juan del Sur” (Agosín & Levision 1999 quoted in Babb 2004, 543).

Friend or Foe: U.S. Interference in the 20th Century

During the twentieth century, the U.S. government took over the roles of liberator and modernizer previously claimed by private U.S. citizens in Nicaragua. Added to these duplicitous roles were that of the paternalistic tutor, and the rhetoric of neighbor and friend. At the turn of the century, the United States reimagined its role in the Western Hemisphere as the singular regional authority with the right to interfere in the sovereign affairs of Latin American. In Nicaragua, this initially took the form of direct U.S. imperialism and occupation, and later, indirect imperialism through a U.S.-supported military dictatorship, and ultimately with the
subversion of a popular revolution. Typifying a world-systems model, the U.S. repeatedly interfered in Nicaragua on behalf of the interests of national and transnational capitalists, and not out of any real threat to the U.S. nation-state. Obscuring the bellicose and imperialist nature of these interferences, the U.S. frequently employed the rhetoric of friendly relationships to describe its foreign policy toward Nicaragua and Latin America. At times, the U.S. presented itself as a wise, thought patronizing, ‘big brother’ willing to tutor Nicaragua along the path to modernity. Other times, the U.S. acted as a disciplinarian, punishing Nicaragua for its backwards ways. Eventually, post-revolution Nicaragua would be welcomed back as a friend. Whichever approach, friend or foe, carrot or stick, it was U.S. interests and not Nicaragua’s that underlay this imperial relationship.

**Early 20th Century: U.S. Imperialism and a Nation Martyr**

The United States’ conduct toward Nicaragua in the early twentieth century is best characterized as gunboat diplomacy, or more colorfully as Teddy Roosevelt’s “big stick” approach. Renewed interests in an interoceanic transit canal brought increased U.S. interest in the politics of the lower isthmus. For decades, the U.S. eyed Nicaragua as the likely site of interoceanic transport canal—an economic carrot that U.S. diplomats and capitalists dangled in front of Nicaraguans as the path to progress (Gobat 2005, 67). Therefore, it came as a surprise to Nicaragua’s Liberal President Zelaya when, in 1902, the U.S. congress selected an alternative Panama route. In defiance, the formerly pro-U.S. Zelaya invited Germany and Japan to construct a competing canal in Nicaragua. This didn’t sit well with U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, who reinterpreted the Monroe Doctrine to favor military intervention to resolve “flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence” (Roosevelt 1910, 176-177). In fact, it was U.S. military
intervention in Colombia in 1903 that created the breakaway Republic of Panama and secured U.S. canal rights. Such was the manner in which the U.S. responded to Zelaya’s defiance by sending 1,000 marines to back a Conservative overthrow of Zelaya in 1909. Thus, as Gobat notes, in the first half of the 20th century, the United States’ primary interest in Nicaragua was to “prevent other foreign powers from constructing a rival canal” (2005, 1).

Zelaya’s overthrow ushered in two decades of U.S. imperial control in Nicaragua. From a world-systems perspective, Wallerstein suggests that the perfunctory roles of colonial administrators is to 1) civilize the locals and 2) prevent other strong states from accessing the resources of the colony (2007, 56). The U.S. had protected its resource, now it was time to civilize. The 1910 Dawson Pact between the U.S. government and the new U.S.-installed Nicaraguan government essentially made Nicaragua a U.S. protectorate by taking control of Nicaragua’s financial sector with the goal of “creat[ing] an exclusionary political order that served U.S. strategic interests” (Gobat 2005, 75). U.S. officials believed, as Gobat notes, “Nicaraguans lacked the financial responsibility and political maturity necessary to run a stable, pro-U.S. government” (Gobat 2005, 75). Taking the role of paternalistic tutor, the U.S. handed Nicaragua’s state finances over to Wall Street bankers.

Economic imperialism, however, had to be backed with force. Only two years later in 1912, the U.S. again invaded Nicaragua to protect its Conservative puppet government from revolt by anti-U.S. Liberals and moderate Conservatives. Following the civil war of 1912, the U.S. occupied Nicaragua with a small military presence, but the primary tool of imperialistic control remained financial control and a U.S.-loyal president. Civil war broke out once again between Liberals and Conservatives in 1926 following a Conservative coup of the newly elected coalition government. The U.S. responded with another full-scale invasion to back the new...
Conservative President. In 1927, the U.S. forced a peace agreement between Conservatives and revolting Liberals, which stipulated disarmament for both sides, new elections, and the fateful creation of a U.S.-trained national army, the *Guardia Nacional* (National Guard).

One passionately nationalistic Liberal general named Augusto César Sandino refused to accept the treaty or a continued U.S. presence in Nicaragua. Sandino and his peasant army, the Defending Army of the National Sovereignty of Nicaragua (EDSNN), broke with the Liberal Party and launched a protracted anti-imperialist guerilla war against occupying U.S. Marines and their subordinate *Guardia Nacional*. Sandino, who was not particularly popular with elite and urban Nicaraguans during his time, passionately believed in absolute sovereignty for Nicaragua, and considered those who collaborated with the occupying forces to be *vendepatrias*, (“traitors” or “homeland sellers”) (Bacacco 2005, 46).

In 1931, as Sandino battled the Marines, and the U.S. economy slid into the Great Depression, Nicaragua’s capital, Managua, was nearly leveled by an earthquake. Approximately two thousand people were killed and tens of thousands were made homeless. In response to this catastrophe, U.S. entertainer and commentator, Will Rogers flew to Nicaragua and asked his American fans to donate to the American Red Cross relief effort. A week after the earthquake, the Daily Boston Globe published this ground-zero dispatch from Will Rogers, which echoed the growing isolationist sentiment in the U.S.:

> Whether you believe the Marines should be here or not, they have been a Godsend during this last week. They have done some heroic work, but personally I don’t think it’s worth leaving ‘em down here just for the sake of another earthquake. We may dig a canal here some day, but we don’t have to guard the place [if] we are going to dig it. Nobody is going to sneak in here and dig it while we are away…Let’s help put ‘em on their feet, call it a day, and all go home and tend to our own business. Yours, WILL ROGERS

(Rogers, 1931)
Sandino’s EDSNN continued their anti-imperial struggle against the Marines and the Guardia Nacional until, at the height of the Great Depression in 1933, with dwindling support by the U.S. public, the United States pulled out of Nicaragua and handed control of the Guardia Nacional over to the Nicaraguan government. Sandino agreed to disarm, and signed a peace treaty with the Nicaraguan president that ceded de facto control of the northern departments (i.e., provinces) to the Sandinistas, which infuriated the head of the Guardia Nacional, General Anastasio Somoza García, who wanted to “finish Sandino” (Crawley 2007, 45-56). In 1934, General Somoza had Sandino assassinated by the Guardia, after which the Guardia massacred many of his peasant followers at their agricultural cooperative, snuffing out the Sandinismo nationalist sovereignty movement (Gobat 2005, 264).

**U.S.-Backed Military Dictatorship: 1937-1979**

In 1933 as the U.S. Marines were pulling out of Nicaragua, Franklin D. Roosevelt entered the White House and announced the “Good Neighbor” foreign policy, which declared an end to military interventions in Latin America. In the U.S., the Good Neighbor policy appeased the growing isolationist sentiment in response to the collapsing U.S. economy. Outside the U.S., Good Neighbor diplomacy sought to restore U.S hegemony (and eventually bolster trade) in the Western Hemisphere, which had been weakened by nationalistic resistance to no less than forty three U.S. military incursions into Latin America and the Caribbean in as many years (Crawley 2007, 8-13). Seen from the wide-angle lens of world-systems analysis, the Great Depression had precipitated a retraction of capital and production from the peripheral zones of the world economy; the U.S. government no longer had sufficient pressure to invest in direct imperial control of Nicaragua. Within Nicaragua, the non-interventionist Good Neighbor policy produced
the—perhaps unintended, but welcomed—result of opening the door for a military dictatorship, which proved to be a better neighbor to the U.S. than to most Nicaraguans (Crawley 2007, 8-9, 38-39).

Three years after the U.S. pulled out of Nicaragua, the Guardia Nacional attacked the presidential palace and Anastasio Somoza García, a Liberal himself, usurped power from the Liberal president. The U.S. government, who already had strong ties to Somoza via the Guardia Nacional, decided not to intervene citing the Good Neighbor Policy, while also recognizing that Somoza would stabilize the country and protect U.S. interests (Baracco 2005, 53). This marked the beginning of the Somoza dynasty and a 42-year dictatorship supported by the U.S. government and enforced by the Guardia.

The dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza García, the first of the three-member dynasty, was characterized by a concentration of power and accumulation of land and industry. Somoza enjoyed popular support in the early days of the dictatorship largely owing to the eradication of dissidents by a century of U.S. interventions and growing power of the Guardia (Gobat 2005, 270-271, Baracco, 2005, 57). The Guardia ensured his grip on the state by taking over administrative services, such as tax, intelligence, water, media and communications, the railroad, and the capital city (Crawley 2007, 125). Because of the loyalty of the Guardia Nacional, Somoza’s popular support became irrelevant and eventually nonexistent. Somoza alienated business and landholding elites by taking over and monopolizing some industries while skimming profit from others, and by forcing the under-valued sale of their lands (Crawley 2007, 103, 143). Somoza funded these purchases by pilfering the state treasury, shaking down business elites for the “National Defense Fund,” and by embezzling U.S. foreign aid (Crawley 2007, 134, Gobat 2005, 273). Likewise, Somoza alienated the peasant working class through lack of
services and oppression through the Guardia. Under the first years of the Somoza dictatorship, peasant wages dropped to nine cents per day, leaving them unable to afford adequate food, clothing, or medicine (Crawley 2007, 103, 139). Peasants did not risk challenging Somoza. As Crawley (2007) puts it:

[Peasant workers] generally accepted that any move in that direction would be met by immediate Guardia repression. The National Guard...had now acquired such a reputation that no worker was likely to risk arrest and a beating on suspicion of subversive activity...the labourer [sic] would run a substantial risk of never being heard of again (125).

Peasants came to view Somoza and the Guardia as repressive landlords, while elites increasingly saw them as unfairly advantaged economic competitors (Gobat 2005, 274).

In the United States, the State Department and the president were well aware of Somoza’s brutality and corruption. F.D.R is often credited with stating that the Somoza “may be a son of a bitch, but he’s our son of a bitch!” While scholars agree that there is no archival evidence of Roosevelt saying this (Crawley 2007, Gobat 2005), it succinctly expresses the United States’ attitude towards the pro-U.S. dictator. In Nicaragua, Somoza played up U.S. support for his regime by frequently referring to F.D.R in his speeches as a “friend” and going so far as to rename a Managua avenue “Avenida Franklin Roosevelt” (Crawley 2007, 154). U.S. support continued through the Truman administration and by the Eisenhower administration, the U.S. was pouring more aid, investment, trade, and tourism dollars into Nicaragua and Latin America than any other region of the world (Gambone 1997, 30). The working poor, the vast majority of Nicaragua’s population, received little benefit from this foreign capital. Samoza and his Guardia Nacional cronies became wealthy with U.S. money, while investing little into health and education for Nicaragua’s rural peasants, resulting in increased illiteracy and decreased life expectancy.
Tourism in a Stable Dictatorship

During Anastasio Somoza García’s dictatorship, Nicaragua did not draw the hordes of American vacationers and revelers, as did pre-revolution Cuba, however Somoza’s rigidly ordered society was welcoming to affluent foreign and domestic tourists. The attitudes and perspectives of Somoza-era tourists were captured in the popular writings and music of the time. The American public’s view of Nicaragua was pressed in the 1947 Billboard Magazine #1 hit, “Managua Nicaragua” performed by Guy Lombardo And His Royal Canadians:

“Managua, Nicaragua is a beautiful town
You buy a hacienda for a few pesos down...
Managua, Nicaragua, what a wonderful spot
There's coffee and bananas and a temperature hot
So take a trip and on a ship go sailing away
Across the agua to Managua, Nicaragua...
Every day is made for play and fun
'Cause every day is fiesta
And they work from twelve o'clock to one
Minus an hour for siesta”

This playful tune paints a picture of a leisurely jaunt to a depoliticized banana republic where, just as now, foreigners can leverage their ‘First World’ means to snap up relatively cheap real estate. What’s more, the Nicaraguan working class—the group who bore the brunt of Somoza’s oppression—is flattened into the racist stereotype of the idle and lazy ladino. Interestingly, the lyrics were written by Albert Gamse, who wrote, “Hail to the Chief,” the U.S. presidential anthem. An ironic twist, considering American tourists’ access to Nicaragua was underwritten by a history of U.S. imperialism and support of a dictator.

Americans were not the only foreign nationals visiting Somoza’s Nicaragua. Babb (2004) quotes British travel writer, Maureen Tweedy from her 1953 memoir, This is Nicaragua, in which Tweedy describes Nicaragua:
“The placid river flowing so gently through the cattle sprinkled meadows beyond Nandaime [SW of Granada] reminds me of the upper reaches of the Thames”…[and] “in preparation for Holy Week, thrifty peasants build huts and shelters of pineapple leaves, palms and bamboos, to rent to picnickers and bathers who throng the beaches.” (Tweedy quoted in Babb 2004, 543)

Visible within Tweedy’s complimentary description are her own rural idyllic longings, as well as (not uniquely) Somoza-era class division between peasants and domestic tourists. Babb (2004) also notes the Managua-based advertisements in the back of Tweedy’s memoir, including one for an American-owned exporter/travel agency and two for upscale Managua hotels targeting international tourists (2004, 543-4).

Another Nicaragua-themed essay by Maureen Tweedy titled, *Bluefields and Corn Island*, describes the picturesque Corn Island:

“A Caribbean jewel…untouched by science and unspoiled by man, is a Garden of Eden…of such utter tranquility and soothing beauty that commercialisation [sic] of it seems a crime…Mechanical transport is unknown and only the favoured [sic] few can afford to keep ponies…Plans have already been drawn up for building an air strip and erecting a large hotel thus enabling holiday makers from Managua.” (Tweedy n.d., 16-7)

Moving on to Little Corn Island Tweedy writes:

“At one time there was a jail on Little Corn Island which, one would have thought, would have been an encouragement to crime rather than a deterrent. Incarceration on such a lovely place can hardly be classed as a punishment although I believe the majority of the prisoners were political.” (Tweedy, n.d., 18)

As with her memoir, Tweedy’s essay makes passing reference to socio-economic difference between hosts and guests. She is also consistent in her portrayal of the timelessness and primitive purity of the rural Nicaraguan culturescape, although this image is interrupted by an artifact of political turmoil and persecution.
The Somoza Dynasty Continues

In 1956, Anastasio Somoza García was assassinated by Rigoberto López Pérez, a member of a dissident opposition party, as well as poet and composer. The slain dictator was succeeded by his eldest son, Luis Somoza Debayle, while his other son, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, commanded the Guardia Nacional. The Luis Somoza Debayle dictatorship continued with the same U.S. support that his father enjoyed. Luis reciprocated this support in 1963 by allowing the U.S. to launch ships and aircraft from Nicaragua for the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. During Luis’s reign, a group of young revolutionaries, inspired by the Cuban revolution and Sandino’s ideology, formed the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front), although it would be Luis’s younger brother who would confront them. Luis Somoza Debayle died in 1967, and power transferred to Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

Like his brother and father before him, Somoza Debayle ruled as a dictator with the full support of the U.S. government. Also persisting, was the mounting discontent among the oppressed poor, who saw increased illiteracy rates and decreased life expectancy under Somoza Debayle. However, unlike his brother Luis, who was well-liked by Nicaragua elites, Somoza Debayle’s ruthlessness ultimately alienated the majority of Nicaraguans outside of the Guardia Nacional. Detractors of Somoza feared the infamous El Coyotepe prison for political opponents, some of which the Guardia dropped into the Masaya volcano according to widespread rumors and an article in the opposition newspaper, La Prensa in 1968 (La Prensa 2006). Furthermore, following the 1972 earthquake that rocked Managua destroying infrastructure, killing thousands, and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless, Somoza and his cronies alienated residents and the nation’s business elites by embezzling millions of dollars of foreign disaster relief funds and leaving the capital in ruins. This blatant corruption galvanized Somoza’s opponents, but Somoza
answered back by assassinating his most outspoken critic, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal, the publisher of *La Prensa*. Somoza’s brash actions ultimately would lead many of Nicaragua’s urban middle and upper classes to join a small leftist guerrilla front seeking to overthrow the dictatorship (Gobat 2005, 268).

**1979 Sandinista Revolution and Contra War**

The popular revolution that overthrew four decades of U.S.-supported dictatorship in Nicaragua united, for a time, Nicaraguans of all social classes and political stripes. In 1961, a small group of students and intellectuals—inspired by Augusto César Sandino, the anti-imperialist revolutionary of the 1920s and ‘30s—founded the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN, i.e., ‘Sandinistas’). Encouraged by the recent Cuban revolution, the FSLN sought to overthrow Somoza and then establish a sovereign and socialist Nicaragua (Barraco 2005, 63). The politically obscure FSLN’s first guerrilla strikes against the *Guardia Nacional* in the 1960s were disastrous and perceived as criminal by the larger populace; however, their popular support was growing by the mid-1970s. The Sandinistas’ socialist message resonated with disenfranchised peasants who were ‘awakening’ to the concepts of social justice and class-consciousness that were spreading through social movements such as Liberation Theology (Baracco 2005, 77, Horton 2005, 55-57, Kruit 2011, 68). At the same time, Nicaragua’s urban residents and business leaders were becoming increasingly resentful of the Somoza regime’s corruption and greed, especially following the 1972 earthquake and the 1978 assassination of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal (Gobat 2005, 268.) By 1978, the popular tide had turned against Somoza. FSLN forces were battling the *Guardia* on both rural and urban fronts, to which Somoza responded with heavy artillery and aerial bombardments of combatants and citizens.
alike. In July of 1979, the popular revolt under the red and black Sandinista banner overwhelmed the \textit{Guardia Nacional}, and Somoza fled to Miami with most of the national treasury\textsuperscript{1} (Algeria and Flakoll 1996, 10-11).

Immediately following the fall of Managua, FSLN leaders—including future president Daniel Ortega and later opposition president Violeta Chamorro—entered the capital as liberating victors. The Sandinista government wasted no time in implementing major social and economic reforms. Land belonging to Somoza and his \textit{Guardia} cronies was nationalized and distributed to a mixed economy of small private farms and agricultural cooperatives (Horton 2005, 66, Kruit 2011, 63). Just one year after the revolution, the Sandinistas implemented an aggressive literacy campaign by building schools and sending tens of thousands of youth volunteers throughout rural Nicaragua reducing the literacy rate from 52\% to 12\%; a “cultural triumph” according to UNESCO (Kruit 2011, 57). In addition, by 1983, 73,000 young people had joined health brigades, which provided vaccinations and constructed health centers in rural Nicaragua (Kruit 2011, 57). According to sociologist Lynn Horton, this was the first time many rural Nicaraguans had access to health and education services (2005, 71). One of Horton’s informants reported that access to education had made him aware that “[the rich] didn’t want us to learn, so that we wouldn’t demand our rights” (2005, 72). Another of Horton’s Nicaraguan informants reported that he was excited to be in school and “hoping to receive my sixth grade diploma,” when the Contras attacked the Sandinista cooperative known as El Coco (2005, 73).

In 1981, a counter-revolutionary force began attacking Sandinista cooperatives, health clinics, schools—essentially anything and anyone associated with the revolutionary government, its supporters, and its beneficiaries. These counter-revolutionaries, or “Contras,” were a C.I.A-organized and trained guerilla army composed of remnants of the \textit{Guardia Nacional}, pro- and

\textsuperscript{1} Somoza was later assassinated in Paraguay by Sandinista Special Forces.
anti-Somoza landholders who lost their land to increasingly aggressive Sandinista land confiscations (including Atlantic coast Indigenous peoples), as well as Argentine collaborators. In 1982, U.S. President Ronald Reagan was eager to punish the Sandinistas and demonstrate that ‘communism’ could not gain a(ther) foothold in the American hemisphere. That year, Reagan provided the C.I.A with nineteen million dollars to fortify the Contras, and in 1984, congress authorized another 24 million in Contra aid. In 1984, congress and the U.S. public became aware that Reagan had authorized the deployment of underwater mines in Nicaraguan harbors to disrupt international trade (Washington Post 1984). With his mining scheme exposed, Reagan sought an alternative means of isolating Nicaragua from the world economy, and announced an embargo blocking U.S. trade and aid to Nicaragua. That same year, Congress—angered by Reagan’s illegal mining, and responding to growing public outcries over the Contras’ frequent targeting of civilians—cut off all U.S. funding to the Contras. The following year, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found that the U.S. violated international law by supporting the Contras and mining Nicaraguan harbors. The ICJ ruled that the United States was to pay reparations to Nicaragua (Nicaragua was suing for $1 billion in damages), but the U.S. refused to recognize the ruling (New York Time 1986). This, however, did not deter Reagan and the C.I.A. from continuing an illegal war against the Sandinista government. The Iran-Contra scandal in 1986 revealed a scheme whereby Lt. Col. Oliver North of the President’s National Security Council facilitated the illegal sale of weapons to Iran in order to provide funding for the Contras.

**Wartime Visitors: Solidarity and Spectacle**

While the U.S. Executive branch conspired to out-maneuver Congress and the American people, the people of Nicaragua suffered the violence of Contra attacks and an ongoing trade
embargo. Anthropologist Florence E. Babb notes that the Sandinista revolution “drew another class of traveler to Nicaragua. Journalists, artists and writers, engineers, and activists…often in delegations, from the United States and elsewhere” (2004, 543). These were ‘solidarity’ travelers, or as Babb (2004) remembers, the “sandalistas,” who came to witness and support the Sandinistas’ social revolution, and who later came to observe and report the atrocities committed by the U.S.-funded Contras.

One of my research participants for this thesis, a U.S. retired academic now living full-time in Nicaragua, recalls her first visit to Nicaragua in 1987 as a solidarity tourist:

“I went down just to see what was what, you know? And the whole business of the Iran-Contra was breaking at that point too…I hated that the United States was supporting the Contras and getting involved in that way. I mean, I just really thought this is too bad. And also the United States had this huge embargo and it was really killing it for the Nicaraguan people. So, I wanted to see what the results were.”

This type of observational activism proved to be critical in exposing the U.S. government’s illegal and violent activities in Nicaragua to the American public, and for this individual, created a lifelong bond with the place she now calls home. Likewise, anthropologists Jennifer L. Burrell and Ellen Moodie point out that many contemporary anthropologists and scholars first became involved with Central America as solidarity travelers and activists during the Sandinista revolution and parallel conflicts in El Salvador and Guatemala (2013, 6, and 2015, 382).

Another participant in this study, also a retired academic and longtime resident of Nicaragua, recalled another side to wartime tourism in Nicaragua:

I took journalists up into the north country because nobody else was nuts enough to go up there…Especially the Bulgarians. The Bulgarians, they wanted to go and sniff a little gunpowder, but they wanted to get some booze and then chase Indian chicks…Pretty well
avoided ambushes—got kind of caught in one that I got out of. And the Bulgarians, they just, they just loved the place. They liked the women and they liked the booze.

Unfortunately, according to several participants in this study, these adventuring opportunists still exist in the form of sex tourists and ‘sex-pats,’ a category of expatriate I will briefly address in the next chapter.

**An Old Friend and a New Market: The U.S. & Neoliberal Nicaragua**

By the late 1980s, the Sandinistas were pushing back the Contras, yet the high cost of the war had worn away at the Sandinistas’ popular support. Nicaraguans were war-weary. Nearly 62,000 Nicaraguans had lost their lives during the Contra war, which was in addition to the 50,000 killed in the revolutionary war against Somoza (Kruijt 2011, 56, 74). Furthermore, the Sandinistas had alienated one-time supporters through forced military conscription and by continuing to appropriate private landholdings. Most devastating, however, was the financial cost of the war and embargo, which left the Nicaraguan economy in ruins. Robinson (2003) notes that “irrespective of the shortcomings” of the Sandinista revolution, it ultimately failed due to the United States’…

massive destabilizing campaign and complex interventionist strategies designed to disaggregate Nicaragua’s external linkages and undermine internal cohesion, to make unworkable a popular alternative to polyarchy and free-market capitalism. The structural power of transnational capital was expressed precisely in the US state as a behavioral agent of hegemonic transnational capital to isolated Nicaragua from international markets and credits (72)

Or, in Wallerstein’s model of the capitalist economy of the modern world-system, “those who act with other motivations are penalized…and are eventually eliminated (2007, 24). Reagan failed to topple the Sandinista government with his illegal war, but he succeeded in strangling Nicaragua’s economic capability to implement their protective programs by cutting off their access to international trade and capital.
In 1989, the Sandinista government, faced with mounting economic and social woes, moved to appease Nicaraguan citizens and cultivate international support by advancing elections to 1990. Daniel Ortega, the current FSLN president, was widely anticipated to win the election; however, 55% of Nicaraguans voted for the opposition leader, Violeta Chamorro, the widow of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal and a former Sandinista supporter. Chamorro’s party, the National Opposition Union, was a U.S. organized coalition of wide-ranging and divergent interests that shared the common goal of unseating the FSLN. Prior to the election, U.S. President Bush promised the Nicaraguan people that he would lift the economic embargo if Chamorro was elected (The Washington Post, 1989). According to Robinson (2003), with the election of Chamorro, “U.S. intervention entered a new stage, that of advancing the transnational agenda” (74). That agenda was the neoliberalization of Nicaragua and its reintroduction to the global capitalist system.

In Wallerstein’s view, neoliberalism is a counter-reaction to mid-twentieth century communism and the radical revolutions of the ‘60s and ‘70s, in that its proponents seek to realign inward-oriented national economies to global free-market capitalism (Wallerstein 2007, 86). Neoliberalism, like traditional economic liberalism, espouses free market capitalism. Yet, neoliberalism goes beyond to emphasize a total restructuring and reorienting of states, institutions, and individuals toward a singular global economy with an emphasis on deregulation, especially the removal of the protectionist measure of individual states.

In Nicaragua, following the election of Chamorro, the agents of neoliberalism swooped in to disseminate yet another version of patriarchal tutelage to the battered country. Those agents were the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and International Financial Institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The
USAID and IFIs’ strategy was to pour billions of dollars into Nicaragua in return for the newly-elected government’s compliance with drastic economic restructuring (Robinson 2003, 78-79). This included the shrinking of public sector jobs and government services; the cessation of subsidies and loans for small farmers; and privatization of state land, industries, and institutions.

But, before the money started flowing, U.S. President Bush added another stipulation. Bush wanted Chamorro to forgive the 1986 International Court of Justices ruling requiring the U.S. to pay war crimes reparation to Nicaragua (New York Times 1990). Chamorro did just that in a speech to the U.S. congress that sounded more like an apology than a pardon:

Friends, we have arrived at a time when we can put an end to the conflicting relations between our governments... [The Sandinista government] obliged Nicaragua to maintain a confrontational relationship with the United States... We are restoring the friendship between the United States and Nicaragua (C-SPAN 1991)

Draped in the rhetoric of friendship, Chamorro absolved the U.S. of the ICJ ruling and international loans began to flow into Nicaragua.

Per the logic of neoliberalism, the World Bank and IMF strategically directed loans toward large-scale agro-exports and the development of non-traditional exports such as tourism and maquiladoras (i.e., low wage manufacturing facilities in ‘free trade zones’). Robinson (2003) describes this restructuring strategy as a “global economic straightjacket imposed on Nicaragua,” which ultimately reinstated a propertied elite and a submissive peasant class (79). Massive IFI loans push the state to outwardly orient its economy towards exports in order to earn foreign capital to pay off debts; over time, this financial flow empowers those most connected to transnational capital and leaves small producers without finance or market (Robinson 2003, 79). In Nicaragua, peasants who gained access to land and lending during the revolution were forced to sell their land to large export producers and once again become a property-less labor force. This, however, is not a side effect of neoliberal economics. Rather, this was a deliberate
neoliberal mechanism for supplying the cheap, dependent labor required by non-traditional export industries, such as maquiladora manufacturing and tourism (Robinson 2003, 81). In this way, neoliberal economic policies have succeeded in magnifying and fortifying a global division of labor that continues to extract value from less wealthy countries.

Destination Nicaragua

From the 1990s on, it is inaccurate to present Nicaragua’s political-economy and the evolution of the tourism in Nicaragua as parallel histories. The renewed ‘friendship’ proclaimed by Chamorro and Reagan opened Nicaragua’s doors for an export-oriented tourism economy. Unlike the revolutionary Sandinista state, which saw its role as an inward-oriented protector of national sovereignty, the neoliberal state’s role is to open borders to the flow of capital and facilitate privatization. Thus, beginning in 1999, the Nicaraguan government sought to bolster its economy and reduce poverty with a series of economic incentives designed to encourage foreign investment in real estate and tourism development. Additionally, Nicaragua implemented a penzionista program, which gave foreign retirees a path to residency with proof of income or retirement pension. These foreign-aimed incentives were backed by existing and new laws guaranteeing foreigners’ property rights and eliminating barriers to importing foreign capital.

Nicaragua’s bet on tourism appears to be paying off. The number of international tourist arrivals grew from just 281,000 in 1995 to 468,000 in the year 2000, and up to 1,386,000 by 2015 (World Bank, 2018a). Both Nicaragua’s GDP and gross national income per capita have more than doubled between 2000 and 2015 (World Bank, 2018b). However, that only brings the average income to around $2,000 a year, and Nicaragua remains the second poorest country in the hemisphere after Haiti (World Bank, 2016).
Environmental anthropologist Carter Hunt (2011) questions tourism’s ability to reduce poverty in Nicaragua. Hunt describes a cycle of increasing poverty that arises as development damages the environment, and simultaneously displaces locals to the surrounding landscape. As foreign investors drive up the cost of land, displaced locals are forced to put increasing resource pressure on whatever marginal lands they can acquire. Reduced access to land and resources, along with diminishing returns, forces the most vulnerable to abandon traditional subsistence practices and compete for wage labor, which “effectively subsidizes the labor expenses of the wealthier producers” (Hunt 2011, 269).

Robinson (2003) agrees that global tourism “reflects the domination of the rich over the poor in global society,” but cautions against viewing tourism in neocolonial terms suggesting “it is increasingly inaccurate to characterize this in nation-centric terms of domination of an imperialist core over the periphery” (197-198). Rather, Robinson argues that tourism increases Central America’s overall integration into the global economy, which has the effect of “generating local winners and losers as it contributes to social stratification…[in] their relation to the global economy (2003, 198).

Herein lies the distinct positionality of U.S. tourists and expatriates in Nicaragua. The global economy theoretically allows relatively wealthier foreigners and relatively less wealthy local Nicaraguans to freely exchange money for goods and services. Sure, most international tourists and expatriates enjoy elevated buying power in Nicaragua. And, these exchanges will generate local winners and losers, especially considering that some Nicaraguans will be better positioned or more entrepreneurial. In general, both the visitors and locals consider this global market access to be beneficial. This is all true for U.S. tourists and expatriates as well, yet their particular advantages can be traced to a specific history of often-violent core-periphery
imperialism. U.S. citizens enjoy greater access to capital, greater travel privileges, and higher social status as a result of U.S. foreign policy toward Nicaragua. This is not to suggest that any individual U.S. traveler or immigrant to Nicaragua is wholly responsible for the actions and policies of the United States or other U.S. citizens. Rather, I argue that these actions and policies have, by design, engendered greater relative wealth and positionality in the global division of labor for U.S. citizens, and the reverse for Nicaraguans. This necessitates a greater understanding of how U.S. citizens in Nicaragua use these inherited privileges to achieve a better quality of life. Furthermore, the greater relative privileges of U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua necessitate an interrogation of seemingly innocuous concepts such as friendship, modernity, and tutelage, which obscure inequity in unequal relationships, and frequently emerged in my interlocutors’ ethnographic narratives.

In the next chapter, I turn to the U.S. expatriates who are the subjects of this ethnographic study. I explore their motives, lifestyle, entrepreneurship, and their offshoring capitalist lifestyle strategies, all of which are produced in the context of historically derived privilege. In chapter 3, I will turn to U.S. expatriates’ relationships with Nicaraguans, and the use of the relationship categories of family, friend, and (modernizing) tutor to describe asymmetrical employer-employee relationships.
Chapter II: Expatriate Motives, Lifestyles, and the Global Capitalist Economy

In this chapter, I attend directly to the U.S. expatriates who are the subject of this ethnographic study. The small, but growing population of U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua is representative of a wider trend of Global Northerners moving permanently or temporarily to countries of the Global South. These leisure-based expatriates move seeking a higher quality of life with a lower cost of living, often in a tourist destination setting. Expatriates’ relative wealth enables them to enjoy elevated buying power in the low-wage economies of countries of the Global South, such as Nicaragua. This economic advantage permits leisure-based expatriates to work less or not at all freeing up more time for leisure, family, or ‘dream’ careers, while at the same time, enabling them to afford a higher standard of living, often including luxury properties and domestic workers. Scholars increasingly refer to this trend as ‘residential tourism,’ ‘international retirement migration,’ ‘lifestyle migration,’ and other related terms depending on which aspects of mobility, stage of life, motive, and lifestyle are highlighted. U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua represent a unique instance of this trend owing to the particular history of U.S. imperialism in Nicaragua detailed in the previous chapter. This does not mean that U.S. expatriates enjoy greater privileges or have different ambitions than other expatriates in Nicaragua. Rather, I argue that the lifestyle projects and relative privilege of U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua are inseparable from the history of U.S. hegemony that makes such projects possible.

In what follows, I begin by defining expatriate(-ism) as a form of human mobility in the age of globalization. I differentiate expatriatism as a distinct form of global mobility from tourism and labor migration. I then move on to analyze the ethnographic responses of sixteen
U.S. expatriate research participants, or interlocutors, in order to illuminate their motives and ways of life in the context of the global capitalist economy. My intention is not to produce a complete representation of U.S. expatriate life in Nicaragua. That is beyond both the scope of my research and the space in this thesis. Rather, I use the concepts of residential tourism, international retirement migration (IRM), and lifestyle migration as a theoretical framework for analyzing variations in my interlocutors’ motives for moving to Nicaragua, their leisure-based lifestyles, and their entrepreneurial activities. From this analysis, I make four interrelated arguments. First, I argue that residential tourism, IRM, and lifestyle migration are useful ways of thinking about pattern variations in leisure-based expatriates’ motives and lifestyles, yet despite differences in these categories, they are linked as privileged forms of leisure-based mobility more closely related to tourism than traditional concepts of migration. Second, I argue that the productivity and entrepreneurship characteristic of lifestyle migrants is oriented towards enclave tourism expatriate economies, thus lifestyle migrations is better described as a form of perpetual tourism rather than labor migration. Third, I argue that independent of the degree of leisure vs. productive labor undertaken by my expatriate interlocutors, the expatriate lifestyle project itself is a transnational capitalist project contingent upon outsourcing the production of daily life to a low wage labor market. Taken together, I argue that, in general, U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua enjoy a touristic and privileged lifestyle produced through transnational capitalist strategy, which capitalizes on advantaged positionality in a global division of labor, both of which are products of U.S. imperialism and hegemony in Nicaragua.
Expatriate Mobilities

I begin by addressing expatriates, tourists, and labor migrants/immigrants as differing modes of human mobility and movement. This concept of mobility includes the ways people move (i.e., means of transport), the reasons people move (e.g., leisure, labor, war, climate, etc.), what people carry (i.e., goods, ideas, capital, knowledge), the networks of places and people with which they connect, and the uneven constraints on movement, such as wealth/poverty, political power/control, and cultural ties/barriers (Sheller and Urry 2006). In some sense, mobility is the socioeconomic metabolism of the human world. Sheller (2011) writes:

[Mobilities are] the spatial mobility of humans, non-humans and objects; the circulation of information, images, and capital…the means for movement such as infrastructures, vehicles, and software…and include] the concerns of…inequality, power, hierarchies…territory, borders, [and] scale (…) Mobilities are of course the *sine qua non* of globalization; without extensive systems of mobility – and globalist, or neoliberal, claims for opening markets and states to external flows – social processes could not take place at a global scale nor be imagined as such (1-2).

Tourists, labor migrants, and expatriates are all forms of human mobility with different privileges, accesses, constraints, motives, ranges, and networks. Bruner (2005) frames tourism as privileged mobility “involve[ing] travel, however temporary and fleeting, by Western peoples on a massive scale to the margins of empire and the peripheries of modernity…[and] one of the greatest population movements of all time (10). McWatters (2009) defines tourism as a short-term, leisure-based, consumer-oriented form of migration (8). These notions of tourism as privileged, Western, leisure-based, consumer-oriented, and short-term are held in opposition to labor migration as lower status, less wealthy, production-oriented, and (semi)permanent relocation. As a form of human mobility, labor migration is traditionally understood as a contraflow to leisure- and consumption-oriented migration, in which less privileged peoples originating in the Global South move to work in the larger economies of the Global North
The concept of an expatriate shares some mobility features with labor migration, such as (semi)permanent relocation to another country, and sometime the centrality of productive labor, such as with non-leisure-based corporate expatriates (Cohen 1977, Fechture 2001). However, like tourists, expatriates are recognized to originate from wealthy countries of the Global North, and thus share privileged aspects of mobility, such as elite transport, ease of border crossing, affluent socioeconomic networks, relative wealth, and status. Cohen (1977) defines expatriates as “voluntary temporary migrants, mostly from affluent countries, who reside abroad for one or several of the following purposes: business…mission…teaching…[or] leisure” (6).

My choice of the term ‘expatriate’ to describe my study participants is certainly linked to their use of the abbreviated form, ‘expat,’ as a self-descriptor or community identifier. However, my purpose in choosing to use ‘expatriate’ was out of need to differentiate my interlocutors from short-term tourists and labor migrants on the one hand, and a need for an umbrella term for more nuanced leisure-based definitions of expatriate on the other. Thus, my use of ‘expatriate’ generally follows Cohen’s (1977) expatriate typology of citizens of affluent countries moving abroad for the non-mutually exclusive purposes of business, mission, teaching, and leisure. Each of my interlocutors may be classified as an expatriate by one or more of Cohen’s types. However, 75% or more of my interlocutors may be characterized primarily, although not strictly, by Cohen’s leisure type as: “owners of second homes abroad, the [relatively] wealthy, the retired living abroad, and other ‘permanent tourists,’ bohemians and drop-outs” (1977, 6). Thus, I use ‘leisure-based expatriate’ as an umbrella term for the concepts of residential tourism, IRM, and lifestyle migration by which I analyze my interlocutors’ motives and lifestyles. Further, for sake of absolute clarity and precision, I define leisure-based expatriatism as the privileged and
elective transnational relocation of relatively affluent citizens of high-income countries to lower-income countries permanently, temporarily, or seasonally. For brevity’s sake, I use the term ‘expatriate’ as short hand for ‘leisure-based expatriate’ unless explicitly stated otherwise.

In the next section, I move on to analyze the motives and lifestyles of my expatriate study participants. Something worth understanding about the concepts of residential tourism, IRM, and lifestyle migration is that, more or less, each concept is intended to be an umbrella term for the same phenomenon of individuals from high-income countries relocating to low-income countries. Each concept emphasizes what its proponents consider to be the essential aspects of the phenomenon. I am using the concept of (leisure-based) expatriate as an overarching category with residential tourism, lifestyle migration, and IRM as differing, but usually overlapping, subcategories in order to highlight the emergent patterns of motive and lifestyle in my ethnographic data.

**Expatriate Motives and Lifestyles**

Why would a citizen of one of the world’s wealthiest countries, with one of the highest standards of living, choose to move to one of the world’s most impoverished countries? In the following section, I examine the motives and lifestyles of my 16 interlocutors. Using the concepts of residential tourism, international retirement migration (IRM), and lifestyle migration as an analytical framework, I demonstrate the differing motives and lifestyles expressed by my interlocutors, despite a common ‘expat’ identity. However, I argue that, regardless of differences in motive, stage of life, and lifestyle, most of my interlocutors share a leisure-based touristic lifestyle defined by touristic subjectivities, touristic practices, and/or productive entrepreneurial activities oriented toward enclave tourism and expatriate enclave economies. Further, I argue that
my participants’ leisure-based touristic lifestyles are a privileged form of mobility, which pursues opportunity in low-wage labor markets, as opposed to a traditional concept of labor migration where immigrants seek economic opportunity in stronger economies.

Residential Tourism

As the term implies, the literature on residential tourism foregrounds the practices of tourism and habitation. Original conceptions of residential tourism emphasized second home ownership by retired northern Europeans in the resort areas along Spain’s Mediterranean coast (Casado-Diaz 1999). More recently, residential tourism has been expanded to include the leisure-based residential patterns of relatively affluent foreigners around the globe. Within his investigation of North American and Western Europeans in Panama, McWatters (2009) defined residential tourism as:

consumption-led migration undertaken by individuals – primarily by retirees – of North Americans and Western Europeans…comprised of a lifestyle oriented around patterns of leisure and consumption, in which work imperatives are minimal or nonexistent; and it takes place permanently or semi-permanently in a destination, outside of one’s traditional socio-geographic milieu (3, Emphasis in original).

This more-broadly construed concept of residential tourism could describe most of my expatriate research participants. Yet, several of my interlocutors foregrounded their residences and leisure-based lifestyles as the defining features of their expatriate experience over and above other aspects. These individuals were either retired or on an extended sabbatical from work in the United States. All had chosen Nicaragua as an affordable destination to rent or purchase a house as a base of operation for their tourism-based lifestyles. One such individual, a middle-age author
on an open-ended sabbatical since 2011, explained the logic of selling her U.S. home and buying multiple properties in Central America:

*I sold my house in [the U.S.]...[and] I made a nice profit and then was able to buy and build something very cheaply. So for me, financially it was the smartest thing to do, and I'm always curious why more people in the U.S. don't do it!*

This individual truly designed her sabbatical lifestyle around her residences. With her U.S. derived real estate profits, she was able to purchase a small home in Granada, Nicaragua and another off the Caribbean coast of Honduras. She divided her time between the two destinations, and continually renews tourist visas in both countries. At the time of our interview, she was enjoying the urban ‘expat’ enclave of Granada:

*It's kind of the best of both worlds, and right now I'm in a Granada phase...At some point, I'll probably miss the tropical island, but right now Granada is really fun for me... I'm in a little tight-knit community...I have two Canadian friends who I see really almost every day at four o'clock, and we meet for a beer, and it's not as if we stay there drinking until midnight. It's just a fun gathering for us to check in.*

The impermanence of her residential habits is characteristically touristic, with time-limited visits to each destination. Legally she is a tourist, and not a legal resident in both countries where she keeps residences. Her legal status is that of a U.S. citizen who easily crosses international borders as a tourist. She told me that she might seek legal residency in Nicaragua or Honduras one day if she can decide where she wants to be. She goes on to note that her places of residence are not simply bases of operations for leisurely diversions. She finds her adopted neighborhood to be a source of both authenticity and security:

*During the rest of the day, it's really me interacting in Spanish with my neighborhood community... I'm surrounded by old Nica families and I think their houses have been*
passed down for who knows how many hundreds of years... So, [I live] on a little cobblestone street with really, really old colonial houses... it's nothing like the [other] expats' homes with this huge swimming pool and all of that. But, I also think my neighborhood is kind of the most authentic... And, I feel perfectly, perfectly safe. Partly because I have bonds with all these people on my street, and I make a point to try and converse with them almost every day. So, I feel like I have people really watching my back.

Another two interlocutors, whom I characterize as residential tourists, a retired husband and wife from the U.S. East Coast, were renting an apartment in Granada’s old colonial rival of León. They were living on tourist visas, but they have applied for residency, she told me. Her husband chimed in:

Yeah, because there's a difference between citizenship and residency. Because we have no intention of relinquishing our US passports. You know, that is a connection we won't give up.

Like the previous interlocutor, they wish to remain securely tethered to their homeland and navigate international borders with the privilege of a U.S. passport. She went on to describe their economic motive and touristic lifestyle. She told me:

Our goal was to live comfortably on my Social Security check, which we can do here easily. Our lifestyle is simple. We walk pretty much everywhere we want to go. We shop in the market for fresh fruits and vegetables. We drink the world's best coffee. We meet gracious people who make an effort to get to know us and help us in anyway they can. We are constantly learning more language, history, and culture... It feels like an adventure, but we are never in danger.

Like the previously quoted author on sabbatical, this married retiree described her residential tourism lifestyle in terms of affordability, leisure, local culture, and safety. Extant articulations of
residential tourism (e.g., Casado-Diaz 1999, Mazón 2006, McWatters 2009, van Noorloos 2011) emphasize the residential, mobility, and consumption patterns of relatively affluent foreigners residing in low-income country destinations. The themes of affordability and leisure are captured in this prevailing articulation of residential tourism. Tourism is emphasized only so much as a spatial zone and a mode of leisure-based consumption. Yet, my research participants’ interests with authentic culture and safety show tourism to be the under-emphasized and under-theorized half of residential tourism.

Some of the more humanistic theories of tourism demonstrate how the touristic subjectivities (i.e., notions of authenticity and safety) of my ‘residential tourist’ interlocutors indicate touristic motives beyond particular modes of consumption and habitation. Early tourism scholars theorized that the quest for authenticity is a driving impulse behind tourism. In MacCannell’s (1976) Marxist theorization of tourism, ‘modern man’ is alienated from modern society because work life and social institution have lost their original authentic or sacred meaning. MacCannell saw tourism as “modern man’s” search for authenticity in the “real life of others” in more traditional societies (1976, 91). Other scholars had suggested that tourists have no interest in authenticity, and simply wanted diversion from their own lives through contrived tourist productions (see Boorstin 1964 in Cohen 1979, 179-180 & 184, and Urry 1990, 7). Eric Cohen (1979) bridges the authenticity disagreement by proposing a typology of tourist experience and motive, which is relevant to expanding the role of tourism in conceptualizations of residential tourism. Cohen’s 1979 typology ranges from ‘recreational’ and ‘diversionary’ tourists who seek playful leisure and entertainment at one end of the spectrum, to ‘experimental’ and ‘existential’ tourists who seek authentic meaning in other societies, at the other end of the spectrum (1979, 183-191). Cohen (1988) considers recreational and diversionary tourists to be
the ‘mass tourism’ of popular destinations and resort travel, and conversely, includes ethnographers and anthropologists among the most austere authenticity seeking existential tourists (374-376).

Cohen’s typology of tourist experiences is relevant to expanding our understanding of subjective touristic motives in the concept of residential tourism. Residential tourists are not only tourists as consumers and (semi)permanent inhabitants of tourism zones. Rather, residential tourists’ interests in authenticity ‘map on’ to the existential end of Cohen’s graded typology. As (semi)permanent experimental/existential tourists, residential tourists desire, to varying degrees, intimate, quotidian, and extended experiences with traditional and foreign cultures they view as authentic. Their long-term residency is a means to move past the superficial experiences of short-term mass tourism. For example, one of my interlocutors, the author on sabbatical, found meaning in her integrated, though transient, domestic role within her adopted neighborhood community:

Right now, I am the one who is a tailor. I have a bread maker across from me. I have a Sandinista across from me who’s big into the politics…I love how authentic it is. And so, I personally would be sad, even though I'm not great at Spanish, I personally would be sad if it really changed.

Her comment exemplifies the intersection of expatriate residential patterns with the desire for authenticity, which has long been part of tourism studies discourse.

Likewise, tourism scholars have noted safety as a preeminent precondition of tourism. Tourism, as a mobility, is elective and therefore avoids danger that can be associated with other forms of mobility, such as labor migration and refugee diasporas. Tourists, or at least ‘mass tourists’ if viewed as rational consumers in the sense of Adam Smith’s self-interested individual, have no impetus to travel to dangerous places by dangerous means. Thus, for destinations and
travel to be considered tourism, they must be accepted as generally safe. Further, safety distinguishes tourism from earlier types of leisure travel, such as the *Grand Tour* undertaken exclusively by European aristocratic men. Verhoeven (2013) argues that, contrary to the widely held view of the *Grand Tour* as the origin of modern tourism, the eighteenth century Dutch leisure trips known as *divertissante somertogjes* represent a true transition to mass tourism, in part because advances in travel safety “helped these female travelers to join their male counterparts” (273). A defining characteristic of tourism is that it is a practice open to men, women, and children, which is dependent on the subjective perception of safety. Safety is of particular concern to single female travelers and residential tourists such as my author-on-sabbatical interlocutor previously quoted saying, “[she feels] perfectly, perfectly safe” in her “authentic” Granada neighborhood.

The perception of safety, as well as the quest for authenticity, are well-recognized and well-theorized aspects of tourism, which have not been sufficiently emphasized in the concept of residential tourism. A more balanced conceptual framework of residential tourism should incorporate other aspects of tourism, including authenticity, gender, and safety, along with spatial patterns and consumption practices. A conceptual framework of residential tourism, which balances an emphasis on residency with a better-developed theory of tourism more clearly distinguishes residential tourism from other less privileged residential instances of mobility, such as immigrant enclaves or refugee communities. Residential tourism, after all, is the domain of relatively affluent individuals who choose when, where, and how to live abroad.
International Retirement Migration (IRM)

International Retirement Migration, like residential tourism and lifestyle migration, includes the notions of destination, habitation, and leisure, yet the emphasis is on the economic and health concerns of expatriates of traditional retirement age (66+ years). Williams et al. (1997) defined IRM as a “highly selective migration process, which redistributes [retired] individuals – and their concomitant incomes, expenditures, health and care needs – across international boundaries” (132). Typically, international retirement migrants are on a fixed income in the form of a pension, and look to stretch their budget by relocating to a place with a lower cost of living. The retired husband and wife quoted in the previous section may just as well be characterized as international retirement migrants, excluding the fact that they remain in Nicaragua on tourist visas. In Latin American destinations, such as Panama, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua, international retirement migrants are often referred to as pencionistas because they receive special residency status with proof of a stable pension or other income stream. One interlocutor, whom I characterize as a retirement migrant, a single retired woman of 66 years, expressed the challenge of living on a fixed pension in the U.S.:

I think that life in the United States has become so difficult for average old people, and I was intrigued to find out that Nicaragua was courting retirees...I had medical bills...I had to use a lot of my retirement money to pay for that...I have a second pension but it's not as big as I had hoped it would be...I was sick and tired of, you know, of robbing Peter to pay Paul and worrying about finances and not having a safety net.

By moving to Nicaragua, this retiree greatly increased her buying power in the low-wage labor market and is able to live a very comfortable and privileged life on her fixed income:
I'm very fortunate in that I have an empleada (employee). I have a woman who comes, a young woman, who comes to my house three times a week to clean...She really makes it possible for me to live incredibly comfortably because she does the crappy stuff.

Another research participant explained the comparable advantage of a Nicaraguan retirement in this way:

This is a good home base because it's so cheap comparatively...I have my disability pension in U.S. dollars, so I can take that and basically multiply it by three by living down here instead of living in the States.

IRM’s emphasis on financial strategy does not preclude retirement migrants from living leisurely, or even luxurious lifestyles in tourism destinations, so long as they are in a low-wage country such as Nicaragua. And, although they tend to be legal residents in their adopted countries, they remain securely connected to the advantaged side of the global division of labor. Even on a fixed income, international retirement migrants live as wealthy elites in a very poor country like Nicaragua, unlike labor immigrants who tend to live off the relatively lower wages of lower status jobs in a new country.

Lifestyle Migration

Within this section and the next, I look more closely at the concept of lifestyle migration than I have previously done with residential tourism and international retirement migration. This is because: 1) lifestyle migration is increasingly used as an umbrella term for ‘reverse’ forms of migration, such as residential tourism and IRM (e.g., Benson and Osbaldiston 2016, Hoey 2016, Janoschka and Hass 2014), and 2) the majority of my study participants are better characterized as lifestyle migrants than residential tourists, retirement migrants, or non-leisure-based expatriates. In what follows, I provide the accepted definition of lifestyle migration. Next, I
analyze my interlocutors’ motives for relocating to Nicaragua from the U.S, and their expatriate lifestyles using the concept of lifestyle migration. I complete my look at lifestyle migration in the following section by using the concept to analyze my interlocutors’ entrepreneurship in connection to their expatriate lifestyles. Throughout, I emphasize the lifestyle ambitions of my interlocutors, while paying attention to inconsistencies in the concept of lifestyle migration. I argue that lifestyle and the concept of a better quality of life are central to my interlocutors’ purposes in relocating to Nicaragua. Yet, I note instances of touristic motives and practices in order to demonstrate the leisure focus of their lifestyles. I maintain, that U.S. expatriates’ leisurely lifestyles are made possible by their relative privilege produced from U.S. imperialism and hegemony in Nicaragua.

Lifestyle migration is arguably the most accepted umbrella term used by scholars studying expatriates as relatively wealthy, leisure-based immigrants in low-income countries. However, lifestyle migration, like residential tourism and IRM, forwards its own particular emphasis. Benson and O’Reilly (2009) provide the most frequently cited definition of lifestyle migration as “relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life” (609). And, while this broad definition is open to individuals of all ages, lifestyle migration is often seen as a migration trend characterized by individuals still in their productive income-earning years, and often with families and dependent children in tow (Benson and O’Reilly 2009). All together, this interpretation of leisure-based expatriates emphasizes quality of life over touristic leisure and economic strategy. Yet, quality of life is understood to be more free time to enjoy family, leisure activities, and often, new tourism/expatriate oriented ‘dream’ careers. Lifestyle migrants achieve more free time through the reduction of the work imperative by relocating to a low-income
country where their living expenses decrease with the lower cost of living as their buying power increases owing to relative wealth. Lifestyle migrants’ relative wealth often takes the form of imported capital, foreign income streams, and tourist/expatriate derived income. Thus, the primacy of touristic mobility, touristic leisure, and economic privilege remain central to lifestyle migration.

All of my research participants could be considered lifestyle migrants in the broadest terms of Benson and O’Reilly’s (2009) definition as “relatively affluent” and moving for a “better life.” However, to return to Cohen’s (1977) expatriate typology of non-mutually exclusive ‘business,’ ‘mission,’ ‘teaching,’ and ‘leisure’ types, lifestyle migrants’ focus on less work and/or elective touristic careers would be classified primarily as ‘leisure’ expatriates with some secondary overlap as entrepreneurial ‘business’ expatriates (see Cohen 1977, 6 for detailed descriptions of each type). Four of my interlocutors I do not classify primarily as leisure expatriates, therefore I do not consider these four individuals to be lifestyle migrants (I discuss these individuals as more ‘locally integrated expatriates’ in the next chapter). The remaining twelve interlocutors are characteristic of the concept of lifestyle migration. These individuals are below traditional retirement age. All are either still working, are spouses of income earners, and/or had investment income streams. Seven of the twelve have families and dependent children. All of these lifestyle migrants emphasized quality of life as a motive for moving to Nicaragua and as defining their ‘expat’ lifestyles. These lifestyle migrants tended to frame their motives in terms of push factors (i.e., problematic aspects of life in the U.S.) and pull factors (i.e., desirable aspects of ‘expat’ lifestyle in Nicaragua). In other words, the pull factors of ‘expat’ life in Nicaragua were presupposed solutions to undesirable push factors in the United States.
Often, the motives expressed by my ‘lifestyle migrant’ interlocutors were centered on work/life balance and family time. These lifestyle migrants repeatedly referred to escaping the ‘rat race’ and a desire to find balance. Sometimes referred to as ‘downshifters’ (Hoey 2016, Janoschka and Haas, 2016), these individuals tended to be working professionals from urban or suburban settings. As is the case with my research sample, 75% of whom are women, this group includes both employed and stay-at-home mothers. Before ‘downshifting,’ these professionals often worked long hours, and were relatively prosperous because of it. However, this prosperity came at a cost. Successful professional careers in the U.S. often require workers to sacrifice family time, leisure time, and sometimes health. Several study participants stated that before moving to Nicaragua, they felt that they were working and sacrificing to build a life that did not entirely represent their original dreams and goals. In the words of one interlocutor and young mother:

[My husband] was on the road Monday through Friday, and we rarely saw each other. Meanwhile, I was working from home stuck inside the house all day, every day...we were getting to the point where this isn't the dream that we really had in mind. Like, we're working our asses off. We've got this big house. Why? So I can sit there by myself all the time?

For my study participants who are married with dependent children (i.e., 7 of 16), lack of sufficient and quality time with their spouse and family was a primary motive to seek an alternative lifestyle. Another participant, a never-idle mother of two recalled:

We didn't have a family just to pass by the years and then be old and then see our grandchildren. We wanted to be married and spend time with each other. We wanted to spend time with our children...looking where we had come from when we first got married, all of our hopes and dreams and thoughts and all the plans, and looking at our likely future, it just looked like a whole lot more of the same: My husband working all the
time, me being home with the boys. It's just like one thing after another. Every day, pick up from two different schools and then basketball practice or soccer practice...then at the end of the day, it's "We're beat. Let's go to bed."

For these individuals, the labor input required to maintain their families’ lifestyles was in direct conflict with their ability to enjoy that lifestyle. This conflict appeared as a systemic flaw in their pursuit of happiness. The solution was to relocate to a destination, such as Nicaragua, where the low cost of living allows lifestyle migrants more free time with less work. A different mother in my research sample described her family’s lifestyle advances after moving to Nicaragua:

We have a lot more time together. It was the goal not to work as much. I think we would have achieved that anyway, honestly, if we would have stayed in the States. It just would have been a little different budgeting-wise...we would have had to make some sacrifices and the biggest change is I wouldn't be able to have a nanny...something I definitely wouldn't have had [in the U.S.], which probably makes me a more sane person.

Her comment makes note of the economic benefit of moving to a low-income country, while also acknowledging the nonessential and relatively luxurious nature of lifestyle migration. Owing to Nicaragua’s low cost of living and low-wage labor, her family’s need to produce income decreased while their buying power increased. She and her husband are able to work less and pay for the luxury of a nanny. All together, the net lifestyle proceeds of her family’s relocation to Nicaragua are a higher standard of living, more time together, and more time for herself.

Free time and family time were not the only quality of life concerns for my lifestyle migrant interlocutors. Like those I have classified as residential tourists, these lifestyle migrants were concerned with authenticity, or lack thereof. Yet, even more so than my residential tourist interlocutors who emphasized authenticity as a characteristic of their chosen setting, my lifestyle migrant interlocutors emphasized the dichotomy of modern vs. authentic in terms of push/pull
factors differentiating life in the U.S. from Nicaragua. One of the ways in which this push/pull dynamic emerged was in parents’ concern with the existential quality of their children’s childhood. Each parent (with dependent children) in my study mentioned nature and outdoor experiences as motives for moving their children to Nicaragua. In fact, the director of the expatriate-oriented English-language school (attended by the children of several of my interlocutors) designed the curriculum around heuristic, nature-based learning. She told me:

_I think we're doing a really great job of educating the whole child and being innovative and inquiry-based and child-centered and we're in nature._

Another parent of a student at the school agreed. She described the nature-based curriculum as a primary pull factor:

_The school here was actually a motivation... I wanted [our child] to experience this, to be outside and playing in nature. That was so much of our motivation getting here._

If an existential nature-based childhood was a pull then naturally, or rather unnaturally, its absence in U.S. culture was the push. Another parent of a student at the school felt that the more ‘authentic’ childhood he had known was a vanished way-of-life from a bygone era in the overdeveloped United States. Fortunately, in his view, that way-of-life can still be found in Nicaragua. He said:

_It's just a dream come true that I can provide this type of life for my daughter...[where] I grew up...we could just run, and there are fields and old water towers and places to explore where we could build half-pipes in falling down barns and everything else. That doesn't exist anymore and if it does, kids aren't allowed to play like that, like they used to, you know? Here [in Nicaragua], it's still like that._
Visible in my interlocutor’s comment is the notion of the rural idyll placed in opposition to ‘modern’ urban landscapes. Sociologist David Bell (2006) somewhat bleakly describes the rural idyll as:

a product of the bourgeois imaginary, worked up in the processes of urbanization, industrialization and modernization that are still unfolding. The idyll is imagined through the familiar bourgeois impulses of desire and dread (Stallybrass and White, 1986), and is set in opposition to the urban (158).

My interlocutor’s notion of escaping from the modern to a rural idyll has long been recognized as a touristic impulse. I have already noted MacCannell’s (1976) theory of tourism as stemming from modern disillusionment. Urry (1990) refers to this as the “romantic gaze” at the countryside where tourists seek the “real or natural,” and he notes that “the category of tourist is a relatively privileged one in rural areas” due to relative wealth (95-99). Certainly, lifestyle migrants’ escape from the modern to the rural runs contrary to the characteristically un-touristic global diaspora that is labor migrants moving from the countryside to urban jobs.

Another place of conflict between modern and authentic for my research participants was in the proliferation of business chains and franchises in U.S. cities and towns, which was seen to rob communities of their unique character. These expatriates felt that Nicaragua was still authentic because U.S. chain restaurants and businesses either had not yet penetrated the Nicaraguan market, or Nicaraguan communities were resisting ‘American’ influence. For example, one study participant applauded her adopted city of Granada’s “commitment to maintaining its colonial architecture” by limiting U.S. companies to “only one Subway sandwich shop.” Another interlocutor lamented:

I'll be sad to see a bunch of franchises come in here just because that's what a lot of people enjoy about it...that it's not completely developed and westernized.
“Completely developed and westernized” seems to indicate that pre-existing authentic institutions have been pushed out or have vanished. Economic geographer, Michael Storper (2000), argues that the cultural homogenizing effect of globalization produces a perceived lessening of quality of life for citizens of the U.S. and Western Europe. According to Storper, this owes to loss of “authentic local culture” as communities become indistinguishable with the same consumer goods, services, and franchises such as Starbucks (2000, 113-115). It may be that the (sub)urbanites of consumer-oriented, high-income countries experience loss of connection to place and loss of place-based identity as memory-imbued structures and institutions are replaced with generic franchises with no historic connection to the community. If authentic community is lost in changing consumer patterns, it follows that many of my interlocutors find a sense of authenticity and community in the less commercialized ‘Mom ‘n Pop’ consumer interactions of ‘expat’ life in Nicaragua. For example: my previously quoted residential tourist on sabbatical who “love[s]” her “authentic” neighborhood artisan economy. Another of my interlocutors, whom I characterize as a lifestyle migrant, answered the question “Who is your community?” by describing the expatriate-local mixed artisan economy in which he prefers to shop:

There's an Italian couple that lives in this store...she bakes bread, so we get bread from her. Then we might go to town and get cheese from the cheese guy. It's kind of like Europe in that way...Like, there is a guy from Australia that has chicken and pork.

Lifestyle migrants’ disillusionment with modernity and desire for authenticity exemplifies MacCannell (1976) and Cohen’s (1979) theories of tourism. Yet, these lifestyle migrants tended to view their ‘authentic’ experiences as differentiating them from tourists. For example, one research participant told me:
A tourist would come here sightseeing and not really make a connection to the community they are in because they know it's just a temporary thing, that they'll be moving on or back home... When we left the United States, we gave away or sold everything we had, so we made a commitment to plugging in here.

My ‘lifestyle migrant’ interlocutors often preferred to see themselves as committed immigrants, rather than extended or perpetual tourists, yet their touristic motives, such as the rural idyll and the quest for authenticity, are in conflict with this vision. However, my interlocutors’ overtly touristic practices clearly demonstrate the leisure-based, thus privileged, nature of lifestyle migration. The clearest indication that my interlocutors live touristic lives in Nicaragua is the practice of perpetually renewing 90-day tourist visas. Renewing their visa usually requires that they leave the country for one to three days, which typically involves a quick trip across the border to Costa Rica. One study participant told me:

I guess we're immigrants. We're here on tourist visas, and so, it's not that big of a deal. We're so close to the border. It's only, what? 45 minutes away? So, you only have to cross it every three months.

Expatriates do this because many see it as easier than going through the process of gaining legal residency, which is slow and bureaucratic. Repeatedly renewing tourist visas is not technically illegal, so long as the expatriate is not working (although many of my lifestyle migrants are, as I discuss in the following section). However, one who is legally a tourist cannot claim to be an immigrant committed to a new society. This was a point of contention with a few other study participants who had gained residency or dual citizenship and who were more integrated into Nicaraguan society (a theme I discuss in the next chapter). One these individuals said of the perpetual tourists:
They have a completely different mindset...you got one group that doesn't want to be residents, so they violate all the immigration laws, and they violate the tax laws—they violate all the laws.

Another of my more locally integrated expatriates offered this analysis of lifestyle migrants as perpetual tourists:

After a certain amount of time you should [become a resident]. Particularly if you're going to own a business, and you plan on living here for years. I just think that's part of showing respect that you're not trying to have it both ways. You know, where you're getting the advantage of living here in Nicaragua without taking the cost and the steps that are required to get the residency. I just think it’s showing respect. It's like in the States; we think that people shouldn't work without legal status. It's really the same.

Though, I will not suggest how my individual research participants should handle their legal status in Nicaragua, I agree that they cannot “have it both ways.” Living on a tourist visa means you are a tourist, not an immigrant.

In addition to their practice of perpetually renewing tourist visas, several of my ‘lifestyle migrant’ interlocutors expressed perspectives of expatriate life in Nicaragua, which demonstrated the leisure-based, touristic nature of their lifestyles. I asked one of my interlocutors what he believed was the difference between being an international tourist and an expatriate in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. He responded:

I would say it's really the same. It's just extended. I mean, we do the same stuff...There's surfing, there's Sunday Funday [i.e, the organized Sunday bar crawl]. It’s a big thing. If I were in my twenties, I would probably be going to that too. Other than that, there's not a lot going on here...we go to the beaches.
A few of my participants viewed their leisure-based lifestyles as a tradeoff for the discomforts of living in Nicaragua. Another San Juan del Sur interlocutor explained good and bad ‘Nica days’:

*Is it a ‘good Nica day’ or a ‘bad Nica day’? Sometimes...the electricity is out...or you get homesick for something...or, you get stung by a stingray or a scorpion or whatever – Or – you have a gorgeous day and you're like, people at home, this is what they think we're doing every day. You know, like vacation every day...we [i.e., expatriate families] have pool days, beach days, we make dinner together...*

This sentiment was echoed by yet another of my San Juan de Sur ‘lifestyle migrant’ interlocutors who described her touristic lifestyle as a reward mediating the frustration of living in Nicaragua:

*I can just walk down the street and talk to [my neighbor] or any of my other girlfriends..."Oh, what caused your Nica moment today?" Well, I'm covered in mosquito bites, and I can't avoid them and they're everywhere...It's just something to bitch about. Then we have a drink and it's like, OK yeah, we're still not in an office today and the beach is right there, and I can still hear the waves from my house, and yeah, it could be worse. It's all about perspective.*

The perspective of these lifestyle migrants, which views perpetual tourism as the tradeoff for putting up with the inconveniences of life in a so-called ‘developing nation’ destination highlights the privilege of choice and economic means that enable their expatriate lifestyle projects. Indeed, their touristic motives, behaviors, perspectives, and lifestyles in general demonstrate the incredibly privileged lives they lead compared to most of their Nicaraguan neighbors. Yet ironically, at least from the Nicaraguan side of the border, my ‘lifestyle migrant’ interlocutors, in particular, expressed economic strain in the U.S. as a significant reason for moving to Nicaragua.

Many of the study participants quoted in this chapter believed their quality of life and/or financial means back in the U.S. were capped or declining. This belief is worth questioning
considering that the U.S. has one of the highest global standards of living, which has consistently increased since the 1970s (Storper 2000, 108). Michael Storper suggests two globalization-based hypotheses for the perception of a diminishing quality of life by relatively affluent citizens of high-income countries. First, and contrary to classical economic thought, greater affluence does not lead to more leisure time. Rather, rising affluence is accompanied by less time away from work, thus the reward of consumerism ‘becomes our only realistic choice” (Storper 2000, 107). Rejection of this “time bind” (Horshschild 1997 quoted in Storper 2000) and the ‘consumer reward’ is at the core of lifestyle migration, as described by one of my interlocutors:

*We just wanted to put ourselves in a new...different lifestyle where everything wasn’t rush, rush, rush, do, do, do. I didn't want to hook myself—I didn't want to raise my son going ‘OK, are we comparing what he's doing with what Suzy is doing, and [he is] crying for Nikes when he's four because the other kids have them.’ It was a little bit of the 'keep up with the Jones' that...we wanted a little distance from.*

Secondly, Storper (2000) suggests that perceived quality of life diminishes for middle-class-and-above individuals in high-income countries as every socioeconomic class level is saturated with more consumer goods. Storper hypothesizes that middle-class-and-above individuals lose status linked to positionality, and therefore the material ‘catching up’ of the lower classes is experienced by higher classes as economic stagnation (109-111). It may be that many U.S. expatriates feel that the core concept of the American Dream, class advancement, is no longer possible in the U.S. In the words of one of my interlocutors:

*I feel like we haven't really come to terms in the U.S. yet, to say... 'no, not just anybody can be the president' as they used to say...it's just not the same in terms of upward mobility as it used to be.*

She later reflected on her family’s primary motive for moving to Nicaragua:
Our ultimate goal is that he can work less and we can save more...allowing us to have experiences and travel and give the boys opportunities as they get older, whether it's receiving an education or buying a piece of real estate when they're younger. Whatever those things are, to give us the freedom to feel that we can do that because we both came from families that couldn't do that for us, so it's important to us.

In a real way, this family had offshored their American Dream—that is, the ability to pursue happiness and reproduce success, if not class advancement, for their children—to Nicaragua. Opportunities my interlocutor saw as foreclosed in the U.S. were made possible by relocating to a low-wage economy with high-wage resources.

My research participants’ perceptions of a lessening quality of life in the U.S. reflect modern anxieties that may be relevant or legitimate in the United States. Yet, their lifestyles, however humble or average by U.S. standards, are defined by wealth and privilege once these lifestyle migrants have ‘immigrated’ into Nicaragua. Sheila Croucher (2016) is critical of lifestyle migration’s lifestyle-centric emphasis, as well as its problematic alignment with less-privileged labor migration. Croucher argues:

Lifestyle is clearly central to this migration trend, but an equally significant and related factor, and the one that most clearly distinguishes this mobility from south–north labour migration, is that these migrants possess a notable degree of privilege relative to both the inhabitants of the host societies where they settle and to their counterparts moving in the opposite direction. They are typically wealthier and whiter (2016, 3).

I should note that not all of my interlocutors are white, yet they all possess greater relative wealth and privilege compared to most Nicaraguans. Indeed, it is difficult to recognize legitimate hardship in the lives of most middle-class U.S. citizens compared to most Nicaraguans. Further, U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua experience few hardships compared to their Nicaraguan neighbors,
despite the stresses, discomforts, and culture shock they may endure. Likewise, my interlocutors experience little hardship compared to the labor migrants that move in the opposite direction. Yet, as I have already mentioned, many of my ‘lifestyle migrant’ interlocutors are still in their income earning years with families to support, and therefore need to generate income after moving to Nicaragua. For some of these lifestyle migrants, as well as some scholars of lifestyle migration, their post-move entrepreneurship qualifies them as productive immigrants, if not labor migrants. However, as Croucher (2016) points out, privilege distinguishes lifestyle migrants from traditional understandings of labor migrants. In the next section I look at the productive activities and entrepreneurship of my ‘lifestyle migrant’ interlocutors.

Entrepreneurship and Lifestyle Migration

In order to achieve and maintain their new, preferable lifestyles, many [lifestyle] migrants still need to generate income following migration, and it is common to find that they run small businesses as ‘self-employed expatriates’ (Stone and Stubbs, 2007). Their choice of enterprise varies and, while many work within tourism or providing services for other migrants, the advances in communications technology make the possibilities endless. Importantly, these lifestyle migrants use their businesses as a means to an end; they use them to fund their new lifestyles...[also important], entrepreneurial activities undertaken by these migrants are most often a departure from their careers in life before migration (Benson and O’Reilly 2009, 610-611).

Productive labor and entrepreneurship have been proposed as defining features of lifestyle migration, situating it as a privileged form of traditional labor migration, and differentiating it from the more touristic articulations of ‘expatriate,’ such as residential tourism (Benson 2015, 12). Indeed, as my research participants demonstrate, those expatriates who best fit the definition of lifestyle migrant tend to be younger, without a pension, and still in need of supporting themselves and perhaps their families. Yet, as I have argued, the pursuits of lifestyle
migration are essentially touristic, just as with residential tourism and retirement migration. The degree to which lifestyle migrants’ lifestyles are touristic is more a function of motive, behavior, and attitude, and less a function of productive vs. consumptive behavior. Further, lifestyle migrants tend to participate in entrepreneurial activities that support a touristic lifestyle, serve a tourism industry, support an expatriate enclave, or all of the above. In short, productive labor and entrepreneurship do not preclude lifestyle migrants, or any definition of expatriate, from more leisurely and touristic motives and lifestyles, which represent a privileged form of mobility. This privilege, in the case of U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua, is derived from an advantaged positionality produced through U.S. imperialism and hegemony.

U.S. expatriates’ primary motive for relocating to Nicaragua is to enjoy a higher quality of life, which relative to their previous lifestyles in the U.S., and the lifestyle of most Nicaraguans, may be described as leisurely and touristic. For those lifestyle migrants who still need or choose to work, the low cost of living in Nicaragua makes a leisurely lifestyle possible without the ‘rat race’ of professional careers in the United States. However, lifestyle migrants’ work is not simply a means to an end. Their work also contributes to a higher quality of life as a source of fulfillment, pride, accomplishment, and accumulation. Lifestyle migrants’ type of work may represent a quality of life choice as a career change, an opportune investment, social entrepreneurship, or simply less work.

Perhaps none are more predisposed to lifestyle migration than those who work remotely from their computers. For many lifestyle migrants, an Internet connection is all they need to remain networked with economic opportunities in their high-income home countries and the global economy in general. A few of my ‘lifestyle migrant’ interlocutors worked online, and/or managed assets, investments, and income streams online. For these individuals, moving to
Nicaragua was an easy way to reduce living costs and free up more time for family and leisure.

One research participant observed:

You can be down here with some kind of job requiring internet access...and you can be down here with this exotic, you know, beach lifestyle where you can go surfing every day and do your work. And so, the whole Nicaraguan culture is just part of the exotic backdrop.

Another study participant said that living in Nicaragua was a “no brainer.” He went on to describe his typical morning ‘work schedule’ to me:

I really do whatever I want. I get up early. I read a bunch of news about what the stock market's going to do, and do some business stuff because I manage my investments online. Um, I play some video games, then my daughter and wife get up, and I get her ready and off to school.

And, another mostly mobile lifestyle migrant managed to run his U.S. business through the Internet with occasional commutes back the States. He ended our interview by explaining that he had to catch up on work:

I've got a bunch of work to do because I didn't get a lot of work done on Friday, and I didn't do any work over the weekend, so I’ll get a cup of coffee somewhere and pound out a couple hours of work and [then] probably do a work out.

All three of these ‘wired’ lifestyle migrants emphasize recreation as they describe their online economic strategies. For these lifestyle migrants, the actual productive labor portions of their day are fit in to an otherwise leisure-based lifestyle.

Other working lifestyle migrants in my research sample were decidedly not mobile and largely financially dependent on businesses they had started in Nicaragua. These individuals
tended to work more than their more mobile internet-based counterparts. Yet, their businesses and lifestyles were oriented toward the tourism industry and expatriate enclaves in which they desire to live. For example, study participants’ entrepreneurship included real estate sales/investment, small hotels, B&Bs, an expatriate grade school, and small artisan productions geared toward the tourism/expatriate enclave economy. While not represented in my research sample, other expatriates in my interlocutors’ communities operated restaurants and bars oriented towards the tourist and ‘expat’ markets. By and large, my ‘lifestyle migrant’ interlocutors’ clientele were other expatriates and foreign tourists, and therefore revenue often came in U.S. currency and was scaled to high-income economies.

For some entrepreneurial lifestyle migrants, moving to Nicaragua is an opportunity to ditch an unfulfilling corporate job and chase a unique and adventurous dream career. Nicaragua’s low-income economy allows these expatriates to use their increased buying power to pursue entrepreneurial projects that were cost prohibitive back in the United States. One of my research participants and her husband did just that. She told me:

In the United States or in a lot of other developed countries we would not be able to own what we own, where we own it, in proximity to the beach... So our money went a lot further....we would never have been able to own and operate a bed and breakfast in the U.S. unless we were in [debt] even further than we are here.

These U.S. expatriates sank everything they have into their dream business, and therefore they are completely dependent on the local foreign tourism economy. She told me:

We not only have a brand new business, but we've given up our substantial salaries to come down here. We are one hundred percent dependent on any dollar that we make down here.
As new business owners, these individuals certainly work more hours than many other lifestyle
migrants. And, their income is much lower than they were accustomed to back in the United
States. However, compared to many local Nicaraguan hotel operators, they retain advantages
from their initial U.S.-derived capital investment, and their economic and social ties to high-
income clientele. She told me about how they differentiate their business from the local
competition:

One of the things that has set us apart already is that, well, one, we have a beautiful
property and a good location that's really well maintained, and we really hope that gets
across in our marketing and our reviews and our communication with guests. Also, we've
got new sheets. Like, we make sure there's towels, there's bathmats. There's things that
you just don't get here because Nicaraguans just don't understand that necessarily.

I asked my interlocutor if she thought that Nicaraguans do not understand Americans' taste and
what they expect in amenities:

Yes! And, it's hard to find sheet sets here, and if you get them you're paying a fortune
because they're imported. Towels, like, nice towels, are expensive. Like, we rented [at a
Nicaraguan-owned hotel] and paid a decent price, and they didn't have matching towels
in the bathroom! ...I don't know if they couldn't find towels, or if the person maintaining
it was Nicaraguan and he just didn't understand that. I was like, "Come on, just get
matching ones!" Like, that goes a long way, at least to us it does. And, so what we've
tried to implement in our hotel are the things that we find important, and just not cutting
any corners. Like, really having the nice things, even if it's simple.

My interlocutor is working very hard to build a new business in a competitive market, yet she is
fundamentally unaware of her privilege. Not only does she have more access to the U.S. market,
she can afford to purchase “simple” items that are expensive luxury items for most Nicaraguans.
What she interprets as Nicaraguan’s poor taste or naiveté, is more likely their economic
constraints. She may have less time for the privilege of leisure-based activities than other lifestyle migrants, but she is no less privileged.

Another area of expatriate entrepreneurship defined by privilege and economic advantage is the expatriate and vacation real estate market in Nicaragua. U.S. and other foreign investors who bring foreign capital into Nicaragua where their relative wealth and increased buying power enables advantaged access to properties. A few of the lifestyle migrants in my research sample were real estate agents or investors before moving to Nicaragua. They see Nicaragua as an investment opportunity, a virgin real estate market, and a means to build a life in a beach destination. One study participant, a mother and former realtor in the U.S., explained the opportunity to me:

*We were in real estate...[my husband] is starting a [real estate] office here in San Juan [del Sur]. They have two in Managua, and they're expanding into the coastal area starting here in San Juan...The real estate market here I would say is probably 90 percent foreigners buying land to develop or buying homes that were built for gringos and now being resold to other gringos...the opportunity is ripe to develop as more people are coming.*

A U.S.-style real estate market had not existed in Nicaragua prior to the arrival of U.S. expatriates in the early 2000s. Traditionally, property stayed in the family, was sold by word of mouth, or during the Sandinista years, nationalized and redistributed. I asked this same participant if she believed the foreign-led real estate market was ultimately beneficial or harmful to Nicaraguans:

*I think it's a good thing...I think single-family homes and development or hotels...and tourism development just brings more economic development to the country...[and] is probably going to have a positive effect.*
There was a general belief among my research participants that, although their entrepreneurial activities were largely oriented toward expatriate enclaves, these enterprises would ultimately serve the national economy by attracting foreign wealth and business skills. Another of my interlocutors—a seemingly tireless and widely admired educator—operates an English-language school, which primarily serves children of the expatriate community. She described her lifestyle transition from leisurely ambitions to career person:

*I came down with a very loose plan as far as my career or my, my life's work. I was thinking I was going to get out of education and, you know, open a yoga studio and gear my profession towards tourism and teach surfing and yoga. And, once I arrived, I had a three month old and I realized where is my kid going to go to school?*

Her English-language school has grown with the expatriate community, whose tuition now pays for the inclusion of several local Nicaraguan students. I asked her why she believed it was important to have an English-language school in a Spanish speaking country. To which she replied:

*[T]he practicality of drawing and retaining entrepreneurial families with resources who are going to, you know, bring more resources and more opportunities to locals...I think [expatriates] move here for a different way of life [and] for a better way of life...[and] the people in our community that are sending their kids to our school are all bringing resources and jobs, and I think we're helping Nicaragua.*

Indeed, this school does seem to draw expatriate families to Nicaragua. Several of the expatriate parents I spoke with cited this school as a primary reason for settling in the San Juan del Sur community. The operator of the school is one of the most work-oriented and more locally integrated expatriates in my research sample. She not only must interact with the Ministry of Education, she employs several Nicaraguan teachers. She told me:
I don't personally understand why I get a different title than a Nicaraguan who moves to the United States for a better life...and starts a business and is a productive member of society just like I've come down here and started a business just for the want of a better life. I'm not sure why I'm not considered an immigrant and why I might be considered an expat.

My interlocutor is certainly a hard working, productive member of her community, and she is feeding directly into the Nicaraguan economy through the employment of several Nicaraguans. Yet, I consider her a lifestyle migrant, not an immigrant. Although she has lived in Nicaragua several years longer than many of my interlocutors, she remains in the country by continuing to renew tourist visas. Further, her enterprise, while Nicaragua-based and a local employer, primarily serves an expatriate enclave in a tourist town. Thus, while her expatriate lifestyle could not be described as leisurely, ultimately she is more oriented towards the support of touristic lifestyles.

The working expatriates in my research sample all fit the favored definition of lifestyle migrant by Benson and O’Reilly as “relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life” (2009, 609). They have relocated to Nicaragua in order to enjoy a higher quality of life. They are not solely consumer-based migrants as residential tourists and international retirement migrants have been classified. Yet, their means of production, their work, is oriented around achieving a touristic lifestyle compared to their former lives in the U.S. or that of local Nicaraguans. Unlike traditional labor migrants who move to stronger ‘core’ economies in search of job opportunities, lifestyle migrants move to weaker ‘peripheral’ economies where their ‘core-based’ capital and income streams allow them to work less, work electively, or not at all. For this reason, lifestyle migrants are truly ‘reverse’ migrants, both directionally and economically.
In the next and final section of this chapter, I expand the concept of my U.S. expatriate interlocutors’ economic strategies beyond the individual entrepreneurship of lifestyle migrants to define the very act of moving from the U.S. to the low-wage economy of Nicaragua as an individual capitalist lifestyle production strategy.

The Expatriate Lifestyle Project: A Transnational Neoliberal Capitalist Project

Financially, I've always run myself as my own business, right? So, I've got money coming in and money going out. This is a good home base because it's so cheap comparatively.

(U.S. expatriate in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua, 2017)

“I’m not a businessman, I’m a business, man”

(Title of a 2016 article on the ‘neoliberal self’ by anthropologist Ilana Gershon)

In the previous section, I emphasized capitalist entrepreneurship as an idiosyncratic feature of lifestyle migrants differentiating them from other leisure-based expatriates who are retired and/or engaged in non-productive (i.e., non-work related) forms of extended or perpetual tourism. In this section, I expand the scale of my analysis of expatriate economic strategy to include all of my study participants—residential tourists, retirement migrants, and lifestyle migrants—by defining these individuals as capitalist enterprises unto themselves. I situate the privileged mobility, motives, and lifestyle pursuits of my interlocutors within the global economy and global division of labor in order to demonstrate the neoliberal capitalist strategy behind U.S. expatriates’ relocation to the low-wage labor market of Nicaragua. I argue that my interlocutors see themselves as individual businesses in the global capitalist economy. Like transnational business firms, my interlocutors and other U.S. expatriates seek to reduce costs and increase returns by ‘offshoring’ the production of their daily lives to the low-wage labor market.
of Nicaragua. This offshore economic and self-production strategy is what I term the ‘expatriate project.’ I argue that the expatriate project is a transnational, neoliberal capitalist, self-as-business, lifestyle production project, which seeks favorable conditions in a global market. The expatriate project is dependent upon U.S. citizens’ advantaged position in the global division of labor owing to a history of U.S. imperialism in Nicaragua and ongoing U.S. regional hegemony. Further, the expatriate project is informed by subjectivities rooted in the market logic and social order of neoliberal philosophy and in the progress ethic of the American Dream.

The purpose of my interlocutors’ expatriate projects is to achieve a higher quality of life for less cost. This purpose is primarily achieved through a capitalist strategy of offshoring the production of quality of life to a low-wage labor market. As a transnational capitalist endeavor, the expatriate project of U.S. expatriates is dependent on the global division of labor historically produced and sustained by the U.S. and other wealthy countries. According to Wallerstein ([1974] 2007), the capitalist world economy, or the ‘modern world-system,’ is structured by a global axial division of labor between capitalist firms in powerful, wealthy core states and a labor supply in weaker, less wealthy peripheral states (28). The interests of capitalist firms are protected by their strong core states, while weak peripheral states are unable to protect against those interests (28-29). Wallerstein argues that economic globalization occurs as “runaway factories” based in core states seek to reduce costs by offshoring production to cheaper labor markets in peripheral states (2007, 80).

Runaway factories from a core state is a fitting analogy for citizens of a high-income nation who move to a low-income nation to benefit from a low-wage labor market. However, Robinson (2003) offers a similar model of economic globalization that reduces the need for the ‘business firm’ analogy as an explanation of the expatriate project. Robinson argues that global
capitalism has spread with the development of a transnational capitalist class uncoupled from the traditional core-periphery nation-state structure (2003, 166, 197). According to Robinson, transnational capital and the capitalist class have become decentralized and flow multidirectionally in the global capitalist economy. Yet, he notes, “one of the political ironies of globalization is that capital and goods can move freely across national borders but labor cannot and its movement is subject to heightened state control” (2003, 273). Nation-states judicially and forcefully maintain the division of labor crucial to global capitalism by controlling the “free flow of labor [which would otherwise] exert an equalizing influence on wages across borders” (Robinson 2003, 273). Though, Robinson sees the core-periphery as a pre-globalization economic structure, he allows that nation-states remain vital in the production of the global division of labor and continue to “serve numerous interests of the transnational capitalist class” (2003, 274).

State intervention in the global economy is also one of the political ironies of the neoliberal economic philosophy that has come to dominate the globe since the 1980s. In its pure hypothetical form, the neoliberal state is supposed to secure strong individual private property rights, deregulate industry, privatize social welfare, and support unencumbered individual access to a free global market (Harvey 2007, 64-66). Unrestricted enterprise in the free market is supposed to increase productivity, which will “trickle down” to increase the standard of living at every income level (Harvey 2007, 64). In practice, the neoliberal state falls under (or continues under) the control of the wealthy class, which coerces the state to selectively intervene in the ‘free market’ on their behalf (Harvey 2007, 74). However, if anything has ‘trickled down’ in the neoliberal world economy, it is the advantaged ability of core state citizens to operate as
relatively privileged and mobile transnational capitalists in the global division of less mobile labor.

U.S expatriates are privileged members of the transnational neoliberal capitalist class. Their expatriate projects depend on their advantaged position in the division of labor between the United States and Nicaragua. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the United States produced and enforced this division of labor through 170 years of political, economic, and military interventions. I am not suggesting that my study participants are modern-day colonialists or imperialists acting out national expansionist projects, as did William Walker or Cornelius Vanderbilt in the nineteenth century. Rather, I am suggesting that U.S expatriates, as transnational neoliberal capitalists, follow the beaten path of a “history of prior contact between sending and receiving societies in context of asymmetrical colonial and post-colonial relations” (Robinson 2003, 271). U.S. expatriates retain particular privileges as vestiges of U.S. core-periphery imperialism remade as transnational mobility and greater access to capital in the neoliberal global economy. As a result, U.S. expatriates are able to increase their quality of life by moving with greater relative wealth to exploit low-wage labor in Nicaragua.

Certainly, I am also not suggesting that any of my study participants set out to exploit poverty as the prime objective of their expatriate projects, or that they necessarily see themselves as neoliberal capitalists. Rather, I argue that the economic motives behind their expatriate projects are fashioned in the neoliberal ideology of our day. Neoliberal philosophy extends capitalist market logic beyond the market to define all arenas of human existence. Foucault argued that the primary difference between classical liberalism and neoliberalism is that the latter views market rationality as a preferred social order (paraphrased in Gershon 2011, 538). This market-defined social order gives rise to particular subjectivities that inform individuals’ sense of
self and place in society. Gershon (2016) argues that the neoliberal social order encourages people to think of themselves as businesses in a global market. A market logic social order that treats people as businesses requires individuals to remain flexible and adaptive to a changing market reality, and cultivate business assets in the form of personal skills and traits. Gershon writes, “the neoliberal self-as-business...[is a] bundle of skills, assets, experiences, qualities, and alliances (2016, 227). Elsewhere, Gershon writes that neoliberal personhood conceives of “self as a project...[whereby] the self is produced through engagement with the market that...requires participants to be reflexive managers of their abilities and assets (2011, 539).

U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua exemplify the neoliberal self-as-business in the global economy. Beyond the market rationality of moving production to a low-wage labor market, my interlocutors’ comments demonstrate neoliberal value for flexibility and adaptation, as well as a desire to cultivate personal assets and experiences. Moving to Nicaragua was often seen as a flexible and adaptive approach to life, and an opportunity to develop diverse skills and build character through experiences. One research participant explained:

*I think the test and the challenges of moving internationally, especially to a developing country, [is that] it creates a hardy resilient person. It cultivates resilience. You have daily opportunities to overcome challenges that, you know, a lot of the world doesn't have to deal with.*

The concept of flexibility, as well as the notion of the self-project, is clear in her comment. In the subjective stance of self-as-business, she finds a globally competitive advantage in her willingness to do what other citizens of high-income countries may not—make a life in Nicaragua. Likewise, she sees the challenges of living in Nicaragua as an opportunity to develop
the competitive asset of resilience, which further increases her adaptive flexibility. Another of my interlocutors communicated a very similar idea. She told me:

*I'm doing what a lot of people would only think about doing. It is going to make us stronger and smarter and more adaptable in the long run, and same for our child.*

As in the first example, this interlocutor sees global market advantage in her willingness to adapt to a life abroad in Nicaragua. Also visible in her comment is the idea that in doing so, she is cultivating knowledge and skills, which will make both her, her spouse, and their child more competitive selves-as-businesses in the neoliberal social order.

Many of the parents of dependent children in my research sample viewed Nicaragua as an educational experience that will instill specific knowledge, such as Spanish language skill, as well as cultural fluency and a sense of cosmopolitanism in their children. One study participant said to me:

*[We wanted] cultural immersion for ourselves and our children—to develop fluency in Spanish. To give our bi-racial boys a more global perspective.*

The operator of the expatriate school quoted earlier in this chapter explained the school’s person-building cosmopolitan mission:

*I think we're...cultivating and nurturing really resilient go-with-the-flow global citizens, you know? We're really putting our money where our mouth is with our mission...I just think it's for the betterment of the world, not just Nicaragua.*

This cosmopolitanism has a neoliberal character that seamlessly meshes with the notion of cultivating assets as a self-as-business. Resilient global citizens will be both culturally competent
and capable of withstanding the pressures of the neoliberal social order. This will be an asset wherever their individual lives lead them.

The notion that U.S. expatriates are transnational enterprises arises from both the capitalist strategy of moving to exploit less-mobile low-wage labor, and the neoliberal subjective self-as-business. This capitalist strategy and market-oriented social order combined with U.S. expatriates’ individual desires and motives, cultural expectations, touristic subjectivities and practices, positionality and privileges, constitute the expatriate project. The expatriate projects of U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua represent an offshoring of the American Dream. As my interlocutors’ comments demonstrate, U.S expatriates move out of the U.S. and to Nicaragua to achieve a better quality of life as: a higher standard of living, more family time, the reward of leisure, natural and authentic experiences, the ability to live well off a pension, and/or the ability to invest and provide a nest egg for children. However, in the era of neoliberal globalization, the American Dream has taken on the logic of the market. While most study participants chose Nicaragua as an affordable site for their lifestyle pursuits, they did not equate their market decision with exploitative global capitalism. Gershon (2011) writes, “neoliberalism equates freedom with the ability to act on one’s own calculations…[yet], in capitalism, calculating to one’s advantage is all too frequently also calculating to someone else’s disadvantage” (540). The distance between U.S expatriates’ freedoms and Nicaraguans’ disadvantages is precisely what makes the expatriate project possible.

The freedoms or privileges of U.S. expatriates are not the outcome of any inherent capabilities, intelligence, or savvy. Likewise, the disadvantages faced by most Nicaraguans are not the outcome of idleness, simplicity, or naïveté. Rather, the inequality of wealth and privilege between U.S. expatriates and Nicaraguans is the product of 170 years of U.S. imperialism and
hegemony in Nicaragua. Of course, U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua cannot be held responsible for this long history. But they can recognize this unearned privilege and inequality in their interactions and transactions with Nicaraguans, as some of my interlocutors surely do. In the next chapter I turn to the relationships U.S. expatriates have with Nicaraguans.
Chapter III: 
U.S. Expatriate Interactions with Nicaraguans

In the previous chapter, I focused on U.S. expatriates’ motives, lifestyles, and capitalist strategies, which constitute their expatriate projects in Nicaragua within the context of the global capitalist system. Now, I turn to U.S. expatriates’ relationships with local Nicaraguan people. I analyze the ethnographic responses of my sixteen interlocutors in order to illuminate their varying degrees of local social integration, their perceptions of Nicaraguans, and their relationships with Nicaraguans. My primary point of reference—as well as the primary nexus of local interaction for most of my interlocutors—is their employment of Nicaraguan domestic workers. I found that my interlocutors’ perception of Nicaraguans, their understanding of their role in Nicaragua as expatriates, and their overall degree of integration into Nicaraguan society were interrelated and varied together. The small subset of my research sample of U.S expatriates who were more highly integrated into local Nicaraguan society tended to view Nicaraguan people as more agentive and as possessing more positive attributes. In contrast, the larger subset of my research sample who were less integrated into Nicaraguan society tended, to varying degrees, to view Nicaraguans as less agentive and underdeveloped. I argue that less integrated U.S. expatriates often view Nicaraguans from a privileged and ascendant touristic perspective as less agentive, simple, and underdeveloped. This understanding of Nicaraguans naturalized U.S. expatriates’ elevated position as employers and modernizers of Nicaraguan domestic workers. Additionally, I argue that U.S. expatriates attain their desired lifestyles, in part, by outsourcing domestic burden to hired help. Further, I argue that expatriate employers justify their exploitation of low-wage labor by providing their employees with extra-contractual compensation in the form of material loans and gifts, and social obligations in the form of family-like friendships and
tutelage. Finally, I argue that my interlocutors’ use of the relational categories of friend and tutor have antecedents in, and in some way are a continuation of, the rhetoric of historic U.S. foreign policy towards Nicaragua.

In what follows, I draw on my research participants’ responses to demonstrate varying patterns of expatriates’ integration into Nicaraguan society. Then, I describe the ‘expatriate gaze’ as the outside and often patronizing perspective of less integrated expatriates toward Nicaraguan people. Finally, I demonstrate the employer-employee relationship between less locally integrated, but more entrepreneurial expatriates, and their domestic workers.

**Variations of Expatriate Integration into Nicaraguan Society**

In the last chapter, I classified my study participants according to variations in leisure-based lifestyle and motives corresponding the differing concepts of expatriates as residential tourists, international retirement migrants, and lifestyle migrants. These concepts of an expatriate are not mutually exclusive. Many of my participants could be characterized as all of the above. However, there is a small subset in my research sample—perhaps 2-4 depending on negotiable parameters—who do not fit these more leisure-based and touristic definitions of expatriate. In general, these individuals’ lives are more oriented toward Nicaraguan society. They have close relationships with Nicaraguan people, they tend to live in Nicaraguan neighborhoods in Nicaraguan communities, they tend to have better Spanish language skills, and their careers and economic activities are oriented toward the Nicaraguan community and society. In contrast, the majority of my interlocutors tend to be less integrated into Nicaraguan society to varying degrees. They have few close relationships with Nicaraguan people other than as customers or employers in the service industry. They tend to be socially, spatially, and economically oriented
toward tourism zones and expatriate enclaves. And, while Spanish language abilities vary among my participants, many of the least integrated have little to no fluency. I found that, in general, those study participants who are most integrated into Nicaraguan society tend to see Nicaraguan people as agentive and capable. Conversely, those who are least integrated tend to see Nicaraguans as less agentive and less developed. I argue that this least integrated perspective lends to the expatriate gaze discussed later in this chapter.

Those study participants who are most integrated into Nicaraguan society are in spousal or partner relationships with Nicaraguans. These relationships attach these expatriates directly to the Nicaraguan community, Nicaraguan spaces, and require fluency in Spanish. One of my interlocutors, a U.S.-Nicaragua dual citizen, who still considers himself an ‘expat’ after thirty years and a distinguished academic career in Nicaragua told me about his marriage into the Nicaragua community:

My wife, we've been married for 29 years. She's got kids. They have kids. We have grandkids, got cousins, aunts, uncles. And so, I'm really integrated into the society here.

When I asked him about his connection to the ‘expat’ community he told me:

I hardly have any American friends. All the guys I hang out with are Nicaraguan!

Another of my most locally integrated participants, a recent university graduate who moved to Nicaragua to be with her boyfriend, told me about living with his family in Managua:

I am with my boyfriend and I am staying at his family's house here in Nicaragua...it's his two siblings, his mom and dad and, you know, there's no plans for the siblings to move out. It's just different because here multiple generations are expected to live together for, you know, until pretty much forever...You do everything for your family and family is everything.

When I asked her about her connection to the ‘expat’ community she told me:
The town that [my boyfriend] lives in, it's a lot more national tourism. So you don't find you know a lot of foreigners who speak English here. Nobody here speaks English, so every day it's Spanish.

Both of these individuals are completely integrated into Nicaraguan society through their relationships with Nicaraguans. The first interlocutor quoted, the 30-year ‘expat,’ has been integrated into Nicaragua’s economic and social fabric for much of his life. While both of these individuals still consider themselves to be expatriates, and they have the same historically produced privilege as any U.S. citizen in Nicaragua, it is inaccurate to characterize their lifestyles and motives as touristic or leisure-based.

Two other U.S. expatriates in my research sample, who I consider more integrated, are not married or partnered to a Nicaraguan. Yet, both their vocations and their social spheres are oriented toward Nicaraguan society. One of these individuals, a semi-retiree, recently moved to Nicaragua to start an apiary. In one sense, she could be considered a lifestyle migrant. She moved to Nicaragua to have a fulfilling second career, and like many expatriates, she lives in a home that is luxurious by average Nicaraguan standards. However, her bee-keeping enterprise is oriented towards the Nicaragua community. She told me about approaching three different communities with her permaculture and beekeeping project:

We were fought for. I have to say that honestly. We chose three cities to look at...And they were competing against each other because they knew the other two cities that we were looking at, and they would say, "You know, Esteli is better than Jinotega..." or Matagalpans would say, "We are so proud of our city and we fought so strongly in the revolution"...Everybody was really proud of their community and really wanted us to move there.

I asked this interlocutor why she thought the communities were fighting for her? She responded:
I think it was the skill set that I was bringing and what I talked about with working with women and bees...propagating plants for bees that we can then give away into the community so that people are planting more in their gardens to support bees...it's a good model to help us have food nearby for the bees that we want to keep, and then also help women to keep stingless bees as a way for them to have additional income through selling honey, selling propolis, and that sort of thing.

It is important to note that she was not offering service industry jobs or training oriented towards the tourism or expatriate economies. Her project, while certainly self-fulfilling, was oriented toward her local Nicaraguan community. Moreover, she recognizes agency in her Nicaraguan neighbors.

Another of my more integrated interlocutors was connected to a Nicaraguan oriented non-profit in the tourism and ‘expat’ enclave of San Juan del Sur. Like the previously quoted beekeeper, this interlocutor viewed her Nicaraguan neighbors as agentive and capable people. She told me how she thought expatriates could best serve the Nicaraguan community:

*Things like paying the way to go to university, or providing school supplies so that the kids have the chance to learn because they're smart...they're very capable people.*

This study participant was frustrated with the expatriate community she saw as resisting integration. She told me:

*I have some prejudice against expats [that] hold themselves apart from the Nicaraguan community to a great extent, and have created their own completely separate community and there's almost no overlap.*

She went on to the describe the consumer and spatial separation of the expatriate enclave:

*There are stores that are stocked with the things that only gringos are going to want...A lot of these people don't even use Córdobas. They use dollars exclusively. And then there are the restaurants and bars that are owned by expats where everybody speaks*
In contrast to this view, many of my interlocutors preferred enclaves such as San Juan del Sur for those very reasons. The presence of other English-speaking expatriates gave them a sense of community in a foreign place. One of my interlocutors told me about deciding where to settle in Nicaragua:

\[
\text{We focus[ed] on San Juan del Sur because it's more developed and there are a lot more expats there and there's more variety, there are restaurants that you can go to, whereas, in this other community there was like maybe two restaurants. Your nearest city or nearest grocery store is 30 minutes away and it was, it's just not expat friendly.}
\]

Another study participant reflexively described the expatriate enclave community of which he is part:

\[
\text{There is a community of expats here. Some of them that can just hang out with expats all the time. They've been here really long periods of time. They don't speak that much Spanish, and they've set up their own little world here, and they have a lot of the food they had back home. They want it to be like back home. They have a lot of luxuries they didn't have back home because the cost of living is so much less. And I think a lot of people that want to retire here and just looking for that place, that's what they're trying to achieve and this is a great place for that in a lot of ways.}
\]

Still, another of my interlocutors, who is more integrated into Nicaraguan society than most, captured what may be the crux of expatriate integration for the majority of my less locally integrated study participants:

\[
\text{I did not move here to become Nicaraguan. I moved here for a better quality of life for myself and my family.}
\]
The majority of my expatriate interlocutors did not move to Nicaragua to integrate into Nicaraguan society. As with this last interlocutor, they moved to Nicaragua to improve the quality of their lives. This higher quality of life is contingent upon U.S. expatriates’ greater relative privilege and wealth in Nicaragua’s low-wage economy. Thus, expatriates who approach Nicaragua as a site of low-cost amenities and services are positioning themselves as tourist-like consumers who primarily interact with Nicaraguans as subservient providers of labor, goods, and services. The combined positionality of a wealthy and privileged outsider as a high-status customer and/or employer engenders a particular downward-looking perspective, or ‘gaze’, toward the less wealthy, lower status service providing local.

**The Expatriate Gaze**

The perspectives my expatriate interlocutors expressed toward Nicaraguans varied from individual to individual. Yet, some patterns emerged in their ethnographic responses. In general, expatriates who were more socially integrated into Nicaraguan society tended to view their Nicaraguan neighbors as more agentive and possessing more positive attributes. Conversely, expatriates who were least integrated with Nicaraguan society tended to describe Nicaraguan people as less agentive and/or in less positive terms. The majority of my interlocutors, which I have characterized as residential tourists, retirement migrants, and lifestyle migrants, live more touristic lifestyles outside of the social fabric of the Nicaraguan community. As such, these individuals may be said to possess what John Urry (1990) describes as the tourist gaze to varying degrees.
The tourist gaze is simultaneously a point of view and an imposition of power on the viewed, in this case, Nicaraguan people. This gaze is inherently dominant or patronizing in that it is often a perspective derived from the greater relative wealth, status, and mobility of tourists compared to the visited population. Thus, the gazed upon population are consciously or unconsciously viewed as less agentive selves. The tourist gaze is also a commodifying gaze in that it places certain cultural, performance, and service expectations on the gazed. This gaze often says more about tourists’ expectations and desires for authenticity and uniqueness than the true nature of the people gazed upon (Urry 1990, 3).

To speak of an expatriate gaze is simply an extension of the tourist gaze. The only difference is that U.S expatriates gaze upon Nicaraguans with additional sources of power and status. For example, U.S. expatriates’ dominant gaze reflects the power and status inherent to employer-employee relationship between my interlocutors and their Nicaraguan domestic workers, which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter. More generally, U.S. expatriates gaze upon Nicaraguans from the advantaged side of the historically produced division of labor and income gap between the U.S. and Nicaragua. This aspect of the expatriate gaze was most notably expressed in my interlocutors’ perspectives on poverty in Nicaragua.

Poverty is widespread across Nicaragua. Although less extreme in the tourism and expatriate enclaves than the outer rural areas or parts of Managua, severe poverty is encountered daily by expatriates and tourists. All of my expatriate interlocutors expressed compassion and sensitivity about the poverty they were surrounded by. Most expressed a desire to help alleviate poverty and improve Nicaragua’s economy. Yet, many study participants viewed the poverty of Nicaraguans through certain tropes and misrecognition that demonstrate the expatriate gaze. The ‘poor-but-happy’ trope surfaced repeatedly in my ethnographic questionnaires and
interviews. Characteristically, my interlocutors employed this old trope as a well-meaning recognition of Nicaraguans’ good dispositions and resilience. One of my interlocutors, whom I would describe as compassionate and engaged, described her impression of Nicaragua’s poor:

*I've traveled all over the world and I think I’ve witnessed a lot of poverty, and I’ve seen it in our own country, and there's something about the people here...in the face of such adversity when there seems like there's really no hope...is still so much joy and celebration and connection and family time and smiles and laughter and happiness.*

This is a genuine compliment to the majority of poor Nicaraguans and recognition of their hardship. I do not disagree with this statement so long as the implication is not that poverty is an inherent part of the “something about the people” and happiness the natural outcome. Compare to the following statement by another study participant:

*Everyone here has so little but they're still so happy. Like, people here are just really happy and I wanted that. I remember thinking to myself, I want to come back here and live here because people are so happy without having everything you can get in the States...everyone here just lives with what they need and they don't have much else. It was something about having exactly what you need and still being really happy without feeling like you need the next phone or computer that comes out or the next upgrade of something. It's just about having what you need and what works for you then, and I really like that.*

Unlike the first interlocutor’s comment, which implies happiness in spite of poverty, this second interlocutor implies that happiness is an outcome of a ‘simple life’ rooted in poverty. Although well meaning, her comment flattens the extreme income gap between the U.S. and Nicaragua to a moral rejection of consumerism. Further, she views poverty-based happiness as a cultural commodity she may obtain by moving to Nicaragua. Still, this interlocutor, like the first,
recognizes Nicaraguans’ agency in their happiness as a form of resilience. Compare to another study participant’s interpretation of Nicaraguans’ poverty:

They seem very content with what they have, and if that's little, I don't think they really perceive it as not having much, and maybe I'm wrong.

Though, this participant allows that her interpretation may be inaccurate, her expatriate gaze replaces Nicaraguans’ agency with naïveté to their material conditions. This interpretation only makes sense if one believes that the majority of Nicaraguans are somehow incapable of recognizing the extreme wealth difference between themselves and expatriates, tourists, and elite Nicaraguans.

The misrecognitions of the expatriate gaze, exemplified in my interlocutors’ comments above, are not simply misunderstandings of Nicaraguans’ poverty and agency. These misrecognitions function to justify obvious inequities and relieve anxieties stemming from reactionary empathy and guilt over privilege. If Nicaraguans are so obviously happy to be poor, why should relatively wealthy foreigners be anxious about extreme inequity, or be compelled to consider its historic and structural sources? For some, the expatriate gaze is constructed to compartmentalize emergent feelings of empathy and guilt when confronted with poverty and inequity. The process of constructing such a gaze is visible in the narrative of one of my interlocutors as she explained coming to terms with poverty in Nicaragua:

I remember my first drive from Managua to San Juan del Sur...there were a lot of really skinny animals looking very sickly and that broke my heart as much as passing a lot of very low-income little shacks, and I was like "What are we doing? We should be leading a mission or something. Not on vacation!"
After officially relocating to San Juan del Sur, the same participant received advice from another expatriate, which helped shape her expatriate gaze and alleviated anxieties:

*I was saying something about feeling obligated like...How can I volunteer? What can I do to help people? And [another expatriate said], "Don't feel like you need to come down here and rescue anyone...Don't feel like you owe anything to anyone here because you don't!" And I'm like, “Well, seeing poverty it's going to be hard for me to accept and not do something”...And, where I'd like to say I'm doing more, I think I've kind of accepted too, like, we're not here to rescue anyone.*

My interlocutor’s negotiation between empathy and exemption demonstrates how the gaze is “constructed in relationship to its opposite” (Urry 1990, 2). The expatriate gaze alleviates ethical anxieties by maintaining a sharp distinction between the expatriate self and the Others’ society. This symbolic distance absolves the gazer from the normal reciprocal social responsibilities that define one’s own community or society.

**Domestic Workers**

For many of my study participants, according to their ethnographic responses, their closest associations with Nicaraguan people was through an employer-employee relationship with a domestic worker. At the time of my ethnographic interviews, thirteen of my sixteen participants were employing Nicaraguan domestic workers inside their homes. The relatively inexpensive labor provided by these domestic workers freed these U.S. expatriates to enjoy more free time for leisure, family, personal wellness, and/or ‘expat’ careers. This was especially true for ‘lifestyle migrant’ mothers who often provided the bulk of this labor before relocating to Nicaragua. However, the extreme wealth and status difference between U.S. expatriates and their Nicaraguan employees creates a highly asymmetrical relationship. My interlocutors variably acknowledged that their high quality of life is contingent upon this inequity and their ability to
exploit low-income labor. Some viewed ‘extra’ financial contributions and social obligations as offsetting the low wages paid to domestic workers.

In this section, I make several arguments about U.S. expatriates’ employment of Nicaraguan domestic workers. First, I argue that outsourcing the domestic burden generally enables expatriates to enjoy a higher quality of life, however, domestic help has a gendered effect on lifestyle migration owing to existing gendered division of labor in expatriates’ households. Second, I argue that my study participants’ lifestyle projects were conceptualized as a moral quest for a better life for themselves and their families, yet this moral framing is contradicted by the necessity of outsourcing undesirable lifestyle elements to others in order to accumulate ‘surplus’ quality time. Third, I found that many of my participants rationalized exploiting Nicaraguans’ cheap labor by framing the employer-employee relationships as familial, friendship, and tutelage. I argue that my interlocutors’ use of the moralized categories of family and friend indicate that—in addition to market economy—they also understand their employer-employee relations in terms of a moral economy, which incorporates extra-contractual obligations and compensation. Further, I argue that expatriates understand their role as tutors of their employees within a neoliberal model of modernization. Finally, I argue that as rhetorical devices, the framing of employer-employee relations as familial, friendship, and tutelage obscures power inequalities, and have antecedents in the rhetoric and practices of U.S. foreign policy toward Nicaragua. Overall, I maintain that this employer-employee relationship is defined by the greater relative wealth and privilege, which underwrites the lifestyle projects of U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua.

I should note that I acknowledge that domestic labor is undoubtedly an important source of income for Nicaraguan workers. However, this is not an analysis of the socioeconomic costs
or benefits of Nicaraguan domestic employment by U.S. expatriates for Nicaraguans or their local and national economies. My aim is to provide an analysis of my study participants’ motives and perspectives in regard to their employment of Nicaraguan domestic workers.

_Hired Help and Gendered Lifestyle Migration_

The higher quality of life sought by U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua is achieved, in large part, through the employment of Nicaraguan domestic workers. Although Nicaragua’s low cost of living enables expatriates to enjoy more free time owing to a reduced work imperative, many expatriates choose to free up even more time by outsourcing daily household work to Nicaraguan hired help. This domestic labor most often involved cleaning, cooking and serving, but also frequently included personal assistantship, such as errand running, and carework, such as childcare and informal healthcare. In the case of my study participants, their hired helpers spent anywhere from three to six days a week working in their home. Accordingly, many of the tasks and responsibilities that once consumed hours of my interlocutors’ lives fell into the background of their ‘expat’ lives. For many of my interlocutors, domestic help was one of the most significant lifestyle improvements gained by moving to Nicaragua. One of my ‘lifestyle migrant’ interlocutors said this of her hired help and reduced domestic duties:

_My housekeeper is the first person other than my kids and my husband that I greet in the morning. You know, and that's a huge, huge reason I love living here is that I don't have to do housework. Really. I don't do dishes. I don't do laundry. I don't mop floors and make beds. And, you know, on Sundays when I don't have a housekeeper and I have to do those things, it's like my whole day is housekeeping and I just wonder how other people do it when they don't have a housekeeper!_
Like most of my study participants, this ‘lifestyle migrant’ did not move to Nicaragua for the purpose of escaping housework, but the luxury of domestic help became one of the biggest amenities enhancing her ‘expat’ lifestyle. This was especially true for the five mothers of young children in my research sample. Their comments illuminate the gendered effect of hired domestic labor within the concept of lifestyle migration and expatriatism in general. For mothers, who often bear the lion’s share of uncompensated domestic labor (Groves and Lui 2012, 58), hired help is a potent lifestyle enhancer. More so than with the few men or the other women in my research sample, these mothers identified Nicaraguan domestic help as a principal determinant of their lifestyle advances. One of these mothers told me how she came to have a full-service domestic employee:

[A] recommendation from another mom that has a five-year-old...she was like, "You need to get some help." Because I was resistant to it at first, I was like, "Why? I'm not working. I can handle my son and cleaning the house." But, [domestic help] certainly makes it a lot more enjoyable. I have more balance in that I can do something for myself when [my domestic helper] is around or I can take a shower or a yoga class or meet a friend for coffee...[domestic help] is by far the biggest perk of living here...[My domestic helper] is always cleaning something or cooking something or running to get something, like, running errands for us.

That ‘domestic help’ is the biggest perk of living in Nicaragua is a strong statement. Yet, it is more understandable through a gendered perspective of lifestyle migration where outsourcing domestic chores and responsibilities differentially affect a gendered division of household labor. For example, compare the comment of one of my male study participants when I asked why he moved to Nicaragua. Midway though his response he exclaimed:
And there's help! ...It's easy, it's affordable to have help here. One of my friends was going to hire someone to walk around with a gun to be his bodyguard just because he could. It only costs 200 to 300 dollars a month!

For this lifestyle migrant and father, domestic help came in around #3 on his list of reasons to live in Nicaragua. Rather than associate hired help with a reduced workload, he viewed it as an affordable luxury and compared it to the novelty of hiring an unnecessary armed bodyguard. Of course, the gender imbalance in my (largely female) research sample could make this response appear anecdotal. Yet, research elsewhere shows that men tend to see domestic help as a luxury, while women tend to see it as a necessity (Groves and Lui 2012, 59). Males, who may have shouldered less of the domestic burden before moving to Nicaragua, experience less direct relief through the hiring of a domestic worker. While male expatriates may value domestic help as a luxury and convenience of living in Nicaragua, it is less likely to define their lifestyle. In sharp contrast to this male perspective, one of the working lifestyle migrant mothers in my research sample placed great personal importance on the availability of domestic help in Nicaragua. She told me:

Well, for me it means finding fulfillment and joy, and spending time with my kids without tons of stress and...for me, being healthy for having time to go surfing rather than doing housework.

Domestic Help through the Expatriate Gaze

I found the above comment remarkable for a couple of reasons. First, as I have been discussing, the availability of affordable domestic help is absolutely central to the production of this individual’s ideal lifestyle. Rather than luxury, convenience, or novelty, she views the
outsourcing of domestic burden as a fundamental component of her lifestyle project as a moral quest for self-actualization, wellbeing, and meaningful family time.

The second reason I find the above comment interesting is what was not mentioned. Like so many comments from my other interlocutors, the project of relocating to Nicaragua is often framed as a moral pursuit of a better, healthier, more meaningful life. However, in projecting the moral mission of attaining a better quality of life for themselves and their families, rarely did my interlocutors acknowledge that their lifestyle surplus is gained at someone else’s expense. For, if less work is the path to health, self-fulfillment, and meaningful family time, those Nicaraguan employees who absorb this work are themselves excluded from a better quality of life (if measured in the same terms). The moral contradiction of pursuing a better quality of life at the expense of another’s quality of life does not readily penetrate the expatriate gaze. Take for example one study participant whose Nicaraguan housecleaner, a married mother with young children, went above and beyond the job description with what would more appropriately be described as carework: My interlocutor described her employee’s faithful commitment:

*Both times that I’ve gone to the hospital I’ve called her or she has been called by my next door neighbor to come and be with me and she does not hesitate... And if my cooking gas tank runs out of fuel she expects me to call her and she runs over and she gets my tank and she goes and gets a new one...[and] she definitely will come to the hospital with me and make sure that, you know, you know, she’ll get me a bottle of cold water, she’ll run outside and get me something to eat, you know? She's just great. She's fabulous.*

This arrangement between my retired interlocutor (a person who I came to highly respect) and her Nicaraguan employee may very well improve the quality of *both* of their lives, although not if measured in the same way. Through the expat gaze, the young Nicaraguan employee is a fabulous and loyal caretaker who enables my interlocutor to live a better quality of life. Yet,
omitted from the expat gaze, at least in the account provided during her interview, is any acknowledgement of the disruption to her employee’s life as she spends odd hours or days at the hospital instead of with her family. Also invisible in this account is the likely emotional work provided by her ‘housecleaner’ by accompanying my interlocutor to the hospital. Hochschild ([1983] 2012) defines emotional labor as “[the] labor require[d] to induce or suppress [one’s] feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others—in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place” ([1983] 2012, 7). Emotional labor may not be recognized as work by its recipients, yet it requires effort from the provider.

While I cannot say for certain that this housekeeper is inducing or suppressing her feelings while accompanying my interlocutor to the hospital, we can see her emotional support in another comment by this same interlocutor. My interlocutor related a conversation between her and her housekeeper concerning my interlocutor’s pet dogs. She told me:

*I buy this stuff, it's called 'Hueso Rojo.' It's just bones that they sell that have some meat on them. And you know pieces of bones are chopped up into little pieces and I buy them for my dogs. Nicaraguans buy them to make soup. They buy them [and] that's the beef they get. They don't buy beef. They buy Hueso Rojo. They buy red bones, and I buy 30 pounds a month just to give my dogs. And I just, I feel embarrassed. But, you know, [my housecleaner] understands! She goes, "They're your daughters. They're your family!"

My interlocutor is not oblivious to the absurdity of feeding her pets as well or better than some Nicaraguans can feed themselves. In fact, she is quite self-conscious about it. Yet, her expatriate gaze seems to blur the distinction between her housekeeper’s acceptance of the situation and her duty-bound emotional support.
Another study participant, who I earlier described as a never-idle mother, directly acknowledged her moral dilemma with the employer-employee relationship and potential blind spots in her expatriate gaze. She described to me her discomfort with her leisurely lifestyle at the expense of another’s burden despite the improvement it represented in her own life. She said:

> I find myself on the days when I intentionally make time to just relax...and I have [my employee] here and she's cleaning the house, my discomfort is palatable. I'm like, I am literally kicked back with my feet up and she's making sure that our home is comfortable, and taking away one layer of something that I don't have to worry about. And we didn't have any kind of help--I was a legit stay-at-home mom back in the States. We didn't have a house cleaner or a gardener or any of that stuff, so I just feel, I wonder, maybe I should just ask her because I wonder what she thinks of that dynamic. I wonder if it occurs to her, or if it's just so much a part of the experience? I don't know. But for me, she's here 6 days a week [and] I cannot be here every day sitting back, you know, catering to myself when everyone is working really hard for every single Córdoba.

I describe my interlocutor’s dilemma as ‘moral’ not only because she expressed anxiety about enjoying a leisurely lifestyle while her Nicaraguan employee diligently works. This is her moral dilemma because, like many of my other interlocutors, she has described her purpose in moving to Nicaragua as a moral mission to improve her family’s life. If you recall her quote from the previous chapter:

> We wanted to be married and spend time with each other. We wanted to spend time with our children. We want them to have time to spend with each other. To explore things and have friends...

Her time gained, whether for relaxation or family, is attained by shifting her burden to an employee, who will then have less free time to rest or be with their family. Again, I am not suggesting that these workers are not benefiting from the employment, or that employing
domestic workers is immoral. Rather, my point here is that the frequent framing of the expatriate project as a moralized mission to live a better, healthier, and more fulfilling life is contradicted by the necessity of outsourcing barriers to that lifestyle onto someone else. Those Nicaraguan workers who take on the domestic labor that would otherwise prohibit expatriates from attaining their ideal lifestyle are themselves excluded from that lifestyle. Thus, this dilemma renders U.S. expatriates’ moral pursuit of a higher quality of life as an exclusive privilege of the relatively wealthy.

Nicaraguan Employees as Friends and Family in a Moral Economy

If more of my interlocutors experienced anxieties over exploiting cheap Nicaraguan labor, they did not let on. My interlocutors were very forward in expressing their delight with the affordability of domestic help in Nicaragua’s low-wage labor economy. Rather than express anxieties over the inequities of the employer-employee relationship, many study participants highlighted their friendships and family-like relationships with their domestic workers to whom they often provided extra-contractual compensation. I believe that for many study participants, the framing of their relationships with their employees as familial/friendship, along with ‘extra’ compensation in the form of loans, gifts of cash, food, clothing, and other financial support, justified the opportunism of an asymmetrical economic relationship. I argue that these perceived familial and friendship bonds facilitate the exchange of extra-contractual obligations and compensation in a moral economy. Yet, I also argue that the rhetoric of family and friends obscures the power inequities of the employer-employee relationship between wealthy foreigner and less-wealthy worker, a rhetoric with antecedents in historic U.S. foreign policy in Nicaragua.
While questioning my interlocutors about their Nicaraguan domestic workers, I was struck by how often employees were referred to as friends and family. For example, here is a comment by one of my interlocutors who had recently moved to Nicaragua. She described her relationship with her housecleaner (who I could hear working in the background) during our telephone interview:

[My housecleaner] is like my best friend here. She is here almost every day and even on days when she’s supposed to be off she’s here eating my food [laughing] … we’re always talking about family and what her kids are up to. I could totally see being friends with her outside of the work relationship.

Statements such as this, in which my interlocutors claim that their paid workers are ‘close friends’ or ‘like family’ were difficult for me to evaluate without access to their employees’ points of view. From my interlocutor’s comment above, I cannot be certain whether her employee shares equally in the friendship or whether she is being friendly as she exploits an economic resource, or somewhere in-between. Constable (1997) argues that “the benefits a [domestic worker] receive[s] depend on the emotional pressure she could exert and the extent to which she could convince them she really was ‘like one of the family’” (57-58). What is certain is that my interlocutors have a lot of contact with their domestic employees who, in some cases, spend much of the week in their employers’ homes. For many study participants, and presumably for many U.S. expatriates, this employer-employee relationship is their closest, or only, relationship with a local Nicaraguan person. This may lead to strong familial attachments. For instance, one of my interlocutors said this of her housekeeper/nanny:

[Our employee] is part of our family now. She is super happy every day [and] so helpful.

My son loves her!
Sociologist Lena Näre (2011) argues that “there is a tendency to transform labour relations into family-like relations due to the locus of domestic work in the privacy of households and the nature of domestic labour relationships as highly personalized” (396). Näre argues that this family-like dynamic gives rise to a household moral economy defined as “domestic labor…based on moral rather than economic contract…[with] shared notions of gratitude, shared responsibility, an altruism rather than profit maximizing” (405). Several of my participants described transactions that may be described as moral economy. For example, one of the fathers in my research sample described his moral obligation to his employee and her family:

*People [i.e., ‘expats’] kind of adopt certain families here, ya know? (...) like, we’re helping, we’re sending our housekeeper's daughter to school and she is going to learn English, and just that alone increases her earning power over her life and everyone in her family. It breaks the chain of poverty.*

His contribution to the education of his housekeeper’s daughter is a good example of shared responsibility in a moral economy. My interlocutor certainly places a lot of moral value on his family’s extra-contractual obligation to their housekeeper, and I do not think it is careless to assume that his housekeeper appreciates this contribution. Yet, even as altruism in a moral economy, it is a form of compensation for his employee’s labor. Consider the comment of another study participant as she describes her worker’s compensation:

*She comes to my house three times a week…and I give her many benefits for that. I mean, I just gave her $50 yesterday to buy clothes for her children because she is invaluable to me...And, this is the woman who is incredibly poor. She and her husband and her two children live in one room with an outside toilet, you know, an outhouse, an outside tap, and outside fire for cooking. You know, they are very, very poor by U.S. standards. They're pretty average by Nicaraguan standards. But, they, you know, she works for me for the equivalent of about a hundred and ten dollars a month...[she] is scrupulously*
honest and so is her husband. Her husband has been a great help to me...they're just lovely people. I consider them very close friends.

This study participant views her gifts to be ‘extra’ compensation beyond their contractual agreement, formal or otherwise. As a moral contract, these gifts are compensation for her employee’s “invaluable” work. And, her employee is surely better off for receiving these gifts. Yet, as altruistic as ‘extra’ gift compensation may be, it only partially offsets the incredibly low-wages earned by domestic employees in Nicaragua. What is clear is that U.S. expatriates’ relationships with their Nicaraguan domestic workers may be characterized as moral economy, but only so far as explaining extra-contractual compensation and moral justification for exploiting low-wage labor.

Constable (1997) argues that employers and their domestic workers are “unequal players” in a “field of power” (13). She further argues, “The family analogy has a coercive side…[because it] disguise[s] the exploitative side of the relationship” (Constable 197, 111). The analogy of family and friend is not empty rhetoric for my interlocutors. They certainly have real, reciprocal relationships with their employees. Nor is moral economy an inappropriate model for describing the social categories of family and friend as facilitating extra-contractual compensation. Yet, the use of friend and family to describe low-wage employees is a rhetorical framing of a relationship that forwards cohesion and altruism, while obscuring exploitation. The very reason most of my interlocutors have domestic help is because it is so inexpensive. U.S. expatriates’ great purchasing power in Nicaragua is by far the stronger magnetic pole in the “field of power” that is the expatriate-employee relationship. In other words, it is the employer with the power to initiate, define, and terminate the relationship. That power imbalance is, by its very nature, coercive. Take, for example, the comment of one study participant as she describes
the limits of a domestic labor moral economy and her power to define the relationship. She begins by describing her expatriate friend’s situation:

Like yeah, they're friends with them but their cleaning girl will still show up and it's not her day to work and expect them to feed her and kind of give, give those handouts...And, like, for me personally...we don’t just have cash flowing out our ears that we're just going to give [as] handouts to everyone. Plus, I'm not going to just give you a handout! You got to work for it! ...We had our employee or cleaning girl ask us for a $500 loan so she could build a house on her parents’ property and she wanted to pay it off over 15 months. And we were like wow! ...It's not $500 that's the big deal. It was just sort of like, we're not going to just give you a hand out when we're not even sure we want to keep you as an employee!

Now, I am not suggesting that my interlocutor was obligated to “hand out” a structured term loan or keep her employee in perpetuity. Yet, my interlocutor’s comment demonstrates the extreme resource and power inequities as well as the coercive nature of this employer-employee relationship. My interlocutor clearly views (i.e., 'gazes' at) the loan request as extra-contractual compensation, which in purely market economic terms, it is. However, her employee does not have equal access to the market economy, as does my interlocutor who, as a relatively affluent U.S. citizen, is better positioned in the global economy. Not only has my interlocutor had access to higher wages in the United States, she has had access to mortgage lending. In contrast, her employee has only ever had access to poverty level wages and no access to mortgage lending. For her employee, her expatriate employer is one of the only financial resources available to her.

The concept of a moral economy, or rather a mixed moral/market economy where extra-contractual gifts and loans are essential compensation, accurately defines the employee’s economic sphere. Yet, U.S. expatriates with greater access to the market economy have the privilege of differentially acknowledging the mixed market in which their employees live. With
less dependency on the informal moral economy, U.S. expatriates may freely hire, support, and fire low-wage employees at will, thus, enabling powerful coercive control over their employees’ wellbeing.

**Expatriate Tutelage: Neoliberal Allies and Modernization**

The moralizing categories of ‘friend’ and ‘family’ that work to obscure or justify U.S. expatriates’ greater power and exploitation of low-wage labor have strong parallels in the rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America. Much of 20th century U.S. diplomacy toward Nicaragua fell under the Good Neighbor policy, which turned a blind eye to the rise of a despotic dictator considered to be ‘friendly’ to U.S. interests. Later, following the brutal and illegal U.S. campaign against the Sandinista government, the neoliberal Chamorro government and the U.S. set about “constructing a new institutional relationship which reflects the friendship between the peoples of our two countries” (Chamorro 1991, emphasis added). As with U.S. expatriates’ use of ‘family and friend’ to describe their employer-employee relationships, the United States used the language of ‘neighbor and friend’ to obscure great power asymmetries and justify intrusions. Yet, the U.S. had another concept by which inequities and injustices were rationalized. This was the notion of tutelage towards modernization. The first American adventurers and entrepreneurs entered Nicaragua in the 19th century with the promise of guiding Nicaragua toward modernization. In the early 20th century, the U.S. government justified imperial rule with the imposed financial tutelage of the Dawson Pact. By 1989, the U.S. was coaching Nicaraguan elites on neoliberal economics in anticipation of the Sandinistas’ electoral defeat.
Likewise, study participants often spoke of mentoring their Nicaraguan employees as validating U.S. expatriates’ role in Nicaragua and as justifying their exploitation of low-wage labor. Several study participants spoke of teaching Nicaraguans the business and service skills they needed to advance out of poverty. In one sense, my participants viewed mentorship as a moral mission and extra-contractual compensation. However, unlike the analogies of family and friend that facilitated reciprocity within a moral economy, mentorship, or more precisely, tutelage, was viewed by study participants as grounded in the logic of the capitalist market economy. While my interlocutors’ tutoring efforts could be morally justified as offsetting their employees’ low wages, the stated purpose was to help Nicaraguans join the global economy. Furthermore, while the notion of expatriate-employee friendship is analogous to U.S. foreign policy rhetoric, I argue that my interlocutors’ notion of tutelage is not an analogy of U.S. foreign policy, but a continuation of it. I argue that the concept of tutelage offered by several of my interlocutors is a continuation of neoliberal globalizing policies rooted in the notion of unilinear development and modernization theory.

It is no coincidence that the expatriates in my research sample who see themselves as mentors also tend to be the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs. They see their presence as an opportunity for willing Nicaraguans to learn the capitalist service-oriented skills they need to escape poverty and exploit the emergent tourism industry. In the words of one study participant:

*I think [working for expatriates] offers some mobility to a motivated Nicaraguan who wants a different lifestyle—not saying that all of them should or do—but, having the ability to connect with someone who might teach them English, you know, obviously when you're bilingual in any community it opens doors for job opportunity, but certainly for the locals here, just working in a restaurant or hotel and being able to speak English makes a big difference for their family and their income where we're going to give you opportunities.*
Mobility for the motivated is a core ethic underlying the neoliberal ‘free market’ capitalism that drives U.S. expatriates’ transnational lifestyle projects. Through a neoliberal perspective, there is no conflict necessitating that the exploitation of low-wage labor be morally offset with extra-contractual obligations. Gershon (2011) argues that neoliberalism flattens differences in scale (i.e., size or power) between market actors who seek alliances to match skill sets (542).

Furthermore, Gershon argues:

In differentiating between skill sets, the neoliberal perspective creates a new status for the expert—the expert becomes someone with the unique reflexive role of explaining to other autonomous entities how to manage themselves more successfully (2011, 542).

For my interlocutors, this means that their capitalist endeavors—whether specific entrepreneurship or generally as their transnational capitalist expatriate projects—and the tutelage of their employees are parts of the same neoliberal strategy. From this perspective, both expatriates and Nicaraguan laborers are autonomous actors on an even playing field seeking advantageous associations. The difference is that U.S. expatriates have a more developed skillset. U.S. expatriates’ advanced skillset positions them to be tutors of their Nicaraguan allies. One of my interlocutors described how this might work through a hypothetical conversation with a Nicaraguan employee during our interview. She said:

“We're going to help you build these skills that are going to be here when tourism booms even more than it is. So, if you listen and you want to learn and you see this as an opportunity for you and you gain that knowledge...well, we'll show you. You don't know how to properly make a bed? Well here's how you make it. And then you can go get a job at a hotel and you can say “I've got all this experience. Look how well I make a bed”—but I just don't know if they think that long-term about it...So it's just sort of [about]
This comment exemplifies—through an exaggerated tone and a simplified example—the role of the neoliberal expert/tutor and the opportunity for the less-skilled ally. According to my interlocutor, she will “work together” with her hypothetical Nicaraguan employee to help her/him to develop marketable skills. Yet, it also demonstrates my interlocutor’s adherence to a civilizing ethic shared by modernization theory and neoliberal development policies.

Modernization theory—which emerged in the mid-20th century and was adopted by neoliberal economic policies that emerged in the 1980s—is a theory of global economic development “conceived as replication of the Western experience of development...implicitly the spread and consolidation of capitalist economy and society to the underdeveloped regions [of the world]” (Robinson 2003, 50, 147). This theory assumes a unilinear model of economic and cultural development where more primitive societies advanced step by step toward the ideal of Western capitalist society. Thus, the Western nation was positioned to be an example for, and tutor of, less-developed nations (Wallerstein 2007, 10). Indeed, my interlocutor quoted here shares the perspective of modernization theory and assumes the role of the exemplary developed Western capitalist.

Yet, the concept of the Western capitalist as highly civilized presumes an uncivilized Other viewed through a distinctly downward-looking gaze. Consider the frustration of one of my interlocutors as she considers Nicaraguans’ economic aptitude:

"I don't think that they truly understand [economy]. There's a lot of things that I, I don't understand why they don't understand things, and I don't know if it's just—this is going to sound so mean saying this—but I don't know if it's lack of common sense or lack of education because there's certain things that we were always like "why don't they get..."
And I don't understand if this just hasn't been part of their experience yet or if they're just narrow-minded. But yeah, I just don't think that they have the cultural understanding or awareness or experience.

This interlocutor’s view of Nicaraguans as profoundly underdeveloped is rooted in the Western concept of the underdeveloped, less civilized Other. Lutz and Collins (1993) argue that the concepts of modernization and developmental stages are hegemonic and taught in textbooks, political discourse, and popular media such as *National Geographic* (240). This was the same tragic philosophy behind Richard Henry Pratt’s philosophy of “kill the Indian and save the man” which stressed “civilizing” the Indians by teaching them English, converting them to Christianity, and giving them a trade (NMAH 2018).

Most study participants did not express such harsh criticism of their Nicaraguan employees as in the previous comment, but Nicaraguans were generally viewed as somewhat backwards by the less locally integrated expatriates in my research sample. Sometimes this was expressed almost as a mystified admiration, such as in this comment by one of my lifestyle migrant interlocutors:

*It's weird because they only like it to a certain extent because our first cleaning lady here was dirt poor, lived in a house with no floor, and we would try and give her more work. "Do you want to do my laundry?" She was doing it like twice a week. I was like, "Do you want to do it more? Do you want to clean more?" She was like, "No, no, no. That's enough. I don't want to work too much."...This is literally someone that lives in a house with a dirt floor and they're like, "No. I have enough for food. I have a roof over my head." They're generally happy. I don't know, but there's a different value placed on things.*

Through my interlocutor’s expatriate gaze, his employee’s choice to not take on more work seemed like an illogical rejection of capitalist opportunity. Yet, in all likelihood, she had other
responsibilities elsewhere and at home, and working a few more hours was not going to dramatically change her situation. Another of my less-integrated lifestyle migrant interlocutors expressed her bewilderment with Nicaraguans’ apparent lack of appreciation for the opportunity of gaining service skills. She told me:

*There’s a huge opportunity for these women. I mean like everyone has a cleaning person… Cleaning, you know, that’s never going to go away. That can't be replaced by a machine entirely, especially here. So yeah, learn a little bit. Be the best in your trade. There’s not a lot of motivation for them to do that, but hopefully, they’ll understand the need for it and understand the upside of knowing those skills.*

The rejection of the service industry and capitalism’s opportunity by some Nicaraguans was perplexing to some of my more entrepreneurial expatriate interlocutors. From the perspective of neoliberal capitalism, Nicaraguans had the same access to the global market as U.S. expatriates, albeit with a less-developed skillset that required tutoring. From this perspective, advancing from poverty was just a matter of honing and applying new skills. For some of my interlocutors, the role of a modernizing mentor rationalized their superior position in their relationship with Nicaraguan people.

To be sure, the development of Nicaragua’s tourism industry, and the availability of service industry jobs within hotels and expatriates’ homes do represent opportunity for many Nicaraguan people. Indeed, many Nicaraguans are better off because of these opportunities, and would be worse off if the tourism- and expatriate-driven service industry were to vanish. Yet the notion that expatriates are in Nicaragua to uplift their Nicaraguan employees contradicts expatriates’ lifestyle projects, which are dependent on low-wage labor. Practically speaking, if U.S. expatriates’ employment of Nicaraguan domestic workers were to eliminate these workers’ poverty, the expatriates would need to seek a new low-wage labor market to continue on with the
same lifestyle. This contradiction is obscured through a touristic and neoliberal expatriate gaze that misrecognizes Nicaraguans’ poverty and expatriates’ privilege, and justifies exploitation of Nicaraguans’ low-wage labor through a notion of extra-contractual compensation. The relationship between privilege and poverty within the employer-employee relations of expatriates and Nicaraguan domestic workers is obscured through moralizing analogies of friend and family, neoliberal tutelage alliances, and service industry pathways to economic modernization. At its base, the employment of Nicaraguan domestic workers by U.S. expatriates is a luxury enabled by U.S. expatriates’ relative wealth and Nicaraguans’ low-wage labor. Both the expatriates’ relative wealth and Nicaraguans’ low wages are the result of a global division of labor produced through U.S. imperialism and soft-power hegemony. Enterprising U.S. expatriates leverage their relative wealth against Nicaragua’s low-wage labor market in order to live cheaply and outsource their burdens so that they and their families may have a better quality of life.
Touristic transnational neoliberal self-as-business capitalists? Can’t an ‘expat’ just be an expat? I argue, no. Expat or expatriate as a category blurs or obscures too many important distinctions in motive, lifestyle, positionality, and privilege to be useful for anything other than blurring or obscuring those distinctions. That being said, there is nothing wrong with wanting a better life for one’s family, or simply wanting more leisure time. I certainly do. I enjoy being a tourist, and some day I will likely be a U.S. expatriate, in one form or another, living in another country. I believe U.S. citizens should take the opportunity to travel and live abroad if able. This thesis is not a condemnation of U.S. leisure-based expatriates in Nicaragua. Rather, this thesis is an excavation into the narratives of sixteen U.S. citizens living in Nicaragua. The purpose of this excavation is to understand: Why do some relatively well-off middle- or upper-middle-class U.S. citizens leave their country for Nicaragua? What are the lifestyle pursuits of U.S. leisure-based expatriates in Nicaragua, and how are they achieved? And, how do these foreigners perceive their Nicaraguan neighbors (and employees), and how do they understand their role in Nicaragua?

The outcome of this excavation and the answers to these questions are bound up in what I term the ‘expatriate project,’ which I argue is the offshoring of the American Dream. By ‘American Dream,’ I am referring to a set of cultural expectations informed by the ideals of progress and liberty, by which U.S citizens see the pursuit of happiness, security, and class mobility as fundamental individual rights. The notion of offshoring these pursuits to Nicaragua indicates a transnational capitalist strategy, whereby U.S. expatriates act as individual business firms moving capital and production of their daily lives and lifestyle pursuits to a low-wage labor
market. This act of offshoring decreases expenses allowing expatriates to work less and have more free time for family, leisure, or whatever they deem important. The act of offshoring also increases buying power situating expatriates as wealthy elites relative to most Nicaraguans, while simultaneously providing financial security and investment opportunities. U.S. expatriates’ ability to engage in a capitalist offshoring to Nicaragua is contingent upon their advantaged positionality in a division of labor between the U.S. and Nicaragua. This division of labor is the outcome of 170 years of overt U.S. imperialism and soft power hegemony in Nicaragua, which has left the Nicaraguan population at an economic disadvantage to most U.S. citizens. Furthermore, U.S. soft power hegemony in Nicaragua since 1989 is part of a broader process of neoliberal globalization, which, among other effects, has naturalized the capitalist market as a global social order. This social order, defined by market logic, situates persons, businesses, institutions, polities, and other groups in competitive market relationships. Thus, U.S. expatriates with historically produced privileges act on neoliberal market logic and perform neoliberal social relations when they move to Nicaragua to produce a better quality of life by exploiting the low-wage labor market.

U.S. expatriates’ offshoring of the American Dream indicates that it is advantageous or easier to achieve in Nicaragua’s cheap labor market. Yet, perhaps this also implies a growing difficulty in achieving the American Dream in the United States. So, is the American Dream becoming less attainable in the United States of America? This thesis is not a socioeconomic study of the U.S., and therefore cannot directly answer that question. However, judging by the number of immigrants, whether labor migrants, refugees, students, and others who come to the U.S every year, I would say the American Dream still represents opportunity and security for many. To be sure, not everybody in the U.S. has opportunity and security. Yet, for the U.S.
middle-class or higher, some reasonable degree of opportunity and security is implied. Thus, the ‘push’ motives of U.S. expatriates are worth examining when my interlocutors make comments such as, “Life in the United States has become so difficult…” and “It’s just not the same in terms of upward mobility as it used to be.” Many of my study participants expressed some disillusionment with aspects of life in the U.S. as motives for relocating to Nicaragua. For this reason, and to understand the varying solutions to these disillusionments, I believe it is useful to employ the leisure-based expatriate subcategories of residential tourist, international retirement migrant, and lifestyle migrant as an analytical framework for recognizing variations in motive and lifestyle that constitute U.S. expatriates’ offshore projects.

To suggest that residential tourism or any form of tourism is a solution to disillusionment with the American Dream may be seen as an overreach by some readers. I believe it is not a stretch. After all, is a vacation not one of the fundamental expressions of middle-class advancement, the pursuit of happiness, and the reward of hard work? The residential tourists in my research sample are certainly happy enjoying extended stays in Nicaragua while on sabbatical or after retiring from their life’s work. My argument that these otherwise joyful and content residential tourists have offshored some aspect of the American Dream is twofold. First, the recognition that vacation is an expression of the American Dream, and the concrete notion that an extended or permanent vacation is more affordable in Nicaragua. Second, the abstract notion that (residential) tourists are on a quest for authenticity, which is becoming lost in highly urbanized and consumer-oriented ‘American’ life. While (residential) tourists may not be completely disillusioned with American ‘modernity’ as MacCannell (1976) suggests, the residential tourists in my study do speak of finding authenticity in Nicaraguan people and places.
At the very least, these individuals are experience seekers who want to be in an interesting and authentic place where they can afford to stay indefinitely if they so choose.

International retirement migrants, as individuals who seek permanent residency in a country with a low cost of living, have a bigger fight to pick with the promise of the American Dream. Those who live on relatively modest fixed incomes can take issue with the rising cost of living in the U.S. Further, promised pensions and long-funded retirement accounts can shrink or disappear for political and economic reasons. Add to that, the rising cost of health care and the fact that Americans are living longer, and therefore need to stretch their limited retirement funds over longer periods. This is not the picture of security painted as the American Dream. However, U.S. expatriates as international retirement migrants have dramatically stretched their fixed incomes by offshoring themselves to Nicaragua where their regular expenses (including healthcare) are less, and their buying power is greater in the low-income economy. Thus, a retiree, who may have struggled or lived very modestly in the U.S., can live a life of leisure, and perhaps luxury, in Nicaragua.

Of these three articulations of leisure-based expatriates, lifestyle migration’s emphasis on achieving a better quality of life is most representative of the ideals and expectations of the American Dream. Lifestyle migrants in my study tended to still be in their income-earning productive years, and often moved to Nicaragua as nuclear families. They sought a better quality of life meaning less work, more leisure and family time, and a higher standard of living. Indeed, if one only considered the touristic and relatively luxurious lifestyles achieved by these migrants, their lifestyles could seem in excess of any expectation of the American Dream. It would be easy to see U.S. lifestyle migrants’ lifestyles in Nicaragua as reason enough to pull them from the United States. Yet, my lifestyle migrant interlocutors clearly expressed disillusionment with their
former lives in the United States. These families with one or two overworked professionals had little quality time to spend together and little time for recreating. In place of free time, their professional careers enabled them to reward themselves with consumer purchases, yet they did not have time to enjoy these rewards together. Further, as Storper (2000) suggests, in the age of consumerism, middle- and upper-middle-class Americans may perceive the loss of material-derived status as their own economic stagnation as globalization brings access to inexpensive consumer goods to all class levels. Add to this, a perceived loss of authenticity as urbanization restricts natural, existential childhood (or adulthood), and communities lose identity and unique character as they become culturally homogenized through the proliferation of franchise businesses and services (Storper 2000). Thus, my lifestyle migrant interlocutors’ decisions to move to Nicaragua were based, in part, on the notion that they could not achieve the American Dream in the United States. By moving to Nicaragua, these lifestyle migrants were able to: achieve drastic class mobility to become elites; find happiness in family, careers of passion, and leisure time; and have security in their low cost of living and investment opportunities.

Framing my study participants’ motives and lifestyles through the lenses of residential tourism, international retirement migration, and lifestyle migration demonstrates how some U.S. expatriates perceive challenges and solutions to the quality of life issues of socioeconomic mobility, wellbeing, and fulfillment. However, this framing also illuminates the leisure-based objectives and touristic lifestyles of these individuals. To say that U.S. expatriates are offshoring the American Dream is not equivalent to claiming that they are immigrating to Nicaragua for a better way of life. Residential tourism, international retirement migration, lifestyle migration, and leisure-based expatriation, in general, are highly privileged forms of global mobility. The touristic lifestyles and leisure pursuits, which differentiate my interlocutors from their
compatriots back home and most Nicaraguans, are inessential luxuries (albeit, sources of wellbeing and fulfillment). U.S. expatriates are not so desperate for a better life that they stand in line at a foreign embassy for days on end, or risk illegal and deadly border crossings, or dangerously crowd boats beyond capacity. Nor must they take low-status, low-wage jobs in Nicaragua, as many immigrants do in the United States. Expatriates who seek a better quality of life through the lower cost of living and the cheap labor market of a low-income country are quite the reverse of labor migrants who immigrate to a high-income country for opportunity. The difference between being able to seek opportunity in a weak economy versus seeking opportunity in a strong economy is one of privilege and position in a global division of labor. Leisure-based expatriatism, whether consumptive or productive, is the reverse image of labor migration.

The global division of labor that divides U.S. expatriates and Nicaraguans is produced at the scale of the world economy, yet it is ‘glocally’ manifested in the commonplace employment of Nicaraguan domestic workers by U.S. expatriates. In many respects, U.S. expatriates’ offshoring the production of a ‘better quality of life’ is achieved through the outsourcing of domestic burdens to Nicaraguan employees. These workers cook, clean, serve, run errands, and provide carework, such as childcare or emotional work (i.e., support). Study participants’ domestic laborers often spend several days a week working in the private space of their employer’s home. For many study participants, their Nicaraguan employees were their closest, and sometime only, relationships with a Nicaraguan person. This dynamic encouraged expatriate employers to view their work relationships with their employees as familial or friendship. This framing of the work relationship in terms of family and friend obscured the asymmetrical nature of the relationship, yet it also structured a moral economy, which encouraged employers to
provide extra-contractual compensation in the form of gifts and loans, which may have been reciprocated through loyalty and commitment. For Nicaraguan employees with few financial resources, it is likely that the market contract and the moral contract with relatively wealthy foreign employers is one in the same. However, for expatriate employers, extra-contractual compensation and the moralistic framing of work relationships as familial friendships justified their exploitation of Nicaraguans’ cheap labor. This use of the friendship metaphor to justify asymmetrical relations between U.S. expatriates and Nicaraguan employees has historic antecedents in the rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy toward Nicaragua. In a similar fashion, the notion held by several of my interlocutors that they are tutoring their Nicaraguan employees in the arts of service and business skill has antecedents in U.S. imperial control over Nicaragua’s state finances, and later, state-to-state neoliberal tutelage. In the case of both U.S. expatriates and the U.S. government, tutelage assumes the incapability of Nicaraguans and the need for a civilizing mission by experienced tutors. Ironically, U.S. expatriates’ claims to be mentoring their employees for the purpose of lifting them out of poverty undermines the very division of labor that enables their leisure-based expatriate lifestyles.

That U.S. expatriates employ domestic workers does not make them different from other expatriates or well-off Nicaraguans. Nor does the fact that U.S. expatriates live touristic lives, or have relative privilege make them unique from other expatriates of high-income countries who live in low-income countries. Neither does U.S. expatriates’ use of a transnational neoliberal capitalist strategy to pursue the core tenets of the American Dream. Neoliberal capitalism is a global phenomenon, and the ideals of the American Dream are not unique to the U.S.A. What differentiates U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua from other expatriates in Nicaragua, or from the growing tend of leisure-based expatriatism in general, is that they are citizens of the country
which has sought to control, manipulate, conquer, and exploit Nicaragua for 170 years. It is impossible to untangle U.S. expatriates’ relative status and wealth, and exploitation of Nicaragua’s cheap labor market from this history. This is not the same as saying U.S. expatriates are responsible for this history and its socioeconomic outcome. Rather, U.S. expatriates are the beneficiaries of an imperial relationship, which has simultaneously produced their relative advantages as it produces Nicaraguans’ relative disadvantages. Further, U.S. expatriates’ privileged interactions with Nicaragua and Nicaraguans are not passive or benign. U.S. expatriates’ lifestyle projects—of offshoring the production of ‘a better quality of life’ to Nicaragua’s low-wage market—take advantage of inherited privileges in order to produce more privilege. Again, I am not suggesting that U.S. expatriates are imperialists. My study participants have not set out to produce or reproduce an empire. Rather, I am arguing that U.S. leisure-based expatriates in Nicaragua are neoliberal practitioners of a philosophy that naturalizes a strategy of producing personal lifestyle gains by exploiting the relative disadvantaged positionality of others. That is, neoliberalism normalizes competition in a market-based social order. We have been taught that this is exactly what we are supposed to do.

Exploiting (i.e., using) Nicaraguans’ relative disadvantage (i.e., low-wage labor) is not necessary equivalent to reproducing their disadvantages. However, an analysis of the costs or benefits of expatriate derived jobs and income is well beyond the scope of this paper. One could make an argument for comparative advantage and mutual benefits of the employer-employee or customer-supplier relationship between U.S. expatriates and Nicaraguans. Certainly, Nicaraguans have benefited from servicing or exploiting the expatriate and tourism markets. More accurately, we can say that expatriates’ presence in Nicaragua “generat[es] [new] local winners and losers” (Robinson 2003, 198), and some Nicaraguans have profited or gained jobs
from the tourism industry and expatriate economy, while others have lost land and resources (Hunt 2011). I am not suggesting that U.S. expatriates and tourists not go to Nicaragua, or that they should not enter into transactions with, or employ, Nicaraguan people. Rather, U.S. citizens in Nicaragua should be mindful of their relative privileges and advantages in their interactions with less advantaged Nicaraguan people. U.S. expatriates must be aware of the unequal field of power in which these transactions and interactions take place. This may take the form of paying higher than expected wages or providing extra-contractual money, clothing, and scholarships as some of my research participants do. Yet, importantly, it also includes an understanding that for many Nicaraguans without access to credit or loans, a relatively wealthy foreigner is their only realistic source of financial assistance. Being mindful of unequal power also means not exploiting employees’ anxieties for personal convenience, such as that which an employee is willing to do, or sacrifice of their own life and time, for fear of losing a job. And most importantly, being mindful expatriates in Nicaragua means understanding that people with low-income are not less capable. They don’t need to be taught how to live; they need access to the same resources. Tourism, whether short-term or permanent, can definitely be an avenue of access to these resources.

This study provides valuable insight into the motives and lifestyle pursuits of U.S. expatriates in Nicaragua. My research demonstrates some of the reasons why reasonably well-off, middle-class U.S. citizens feel that they need to move abroad to achieve particular lifestyle objectives. Furthermore, my research shows how U.S. expatriates achieve their lifestyle objectives through a transnational capitalist strategy dependent on economic positionality produced through U.S. imperialism and hegemony in Nicaragua. I have demonstrated that the capitalist strategy of U.S. expatriates is one of offshoring production costs to Nicaragua’s low-
wage labor market. In particular, I have explored U.S. expatriates’ outsourcing of domestic burdens to Nicaraguan employees, and I have explored the relationships U.S. expatriates have with Nicaraguan employees from the perspective of the foreign employer. Yet, much is left to be understood, and I see several directions for future research on the topic of leisure-based expatriates in Nicaragua and other low-income countries. First, the phenomenon of leisure-based expatriates in Nicaragua must be approached from the perspective of local Nicaraguans. This is especially true of the Nicaraguan domestic employees. Next, the employer-employee relationship between expatriates and Nicaraguans opens up interesting avenues of carework research. For example, the growing trend of retirement migration will likely lead to expatriates looking to local employees for in-home healthcare, and eventually, end-of-life care. This dynamic will result in intense emotional labor on the employee’s part and great trust or anxiety on the expatriate’s part. Another area of leisure-based expatriate migration that must be addressed is the permanence of their stays, and commitment to their adopted country. Are individuals expatriating for particular stages of their lives? Do lifestyle migrants with families opt to return to their home countries before their children reach a certain level of education? If local governments enforce immigration laws, will expatriate communities seek political power or representation? These are but a few of the many directions open to be explored in the field of leisure-based migration. It is my belief that the often unequal, but never static, interactions between leisure-based migrants and the people in the places they visit is one of the most important and interesting avenues of study open to anthropology today.
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