

Inequalities and the ideology of growth: the case of global tourism in the Mexican Caribbean

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Abstract

Global environmental change and rising inequalities challenge the assumption that ever-ending economic growth reduces poverty without creating unanticipated negative consequences. Reformist responses to this challenge, such as ecological modernization, or inclusive/shared growth, claim to be capable of reconciling growth and socio-ecological degradation. In opposition to such reconciliatory responses, sustainable de-growth acknowledges upfront the impossibility and undesirability of continuous growth. Proposals for de-growth range from deep economic reform to relatively radical political change. The least radical de-growth route, often advocated by economists, consists of reforming or transforming the dominant macro-economic paradigm. A second route encourages value and institutional changes. The means for such changes is to theorize about, and actually foster, a political (de-growth) movement that combats the colonisation of people's minds by "economism". However, the "putting of the economy in its place" is assumed to be feasible without having to renounce either markets or representative democracy. Instead, the preferred strategy consists of adjusting markets and improving democratic representation through decentralization. A third more radical route proposes "inclusive democracy" as a Universalist project for human liberation in terms of social and individual autonomy. Drawing on libertarian thought, this third route postulates a fundamental incompatibility between market economies and de-growth. Accordingly, value changes, democratic reform, or radical decentralisation are not seen as realistic strategies because they do not address either power relations, or the historical characteristics of capitalist market economy, both structurally linked to growth. This paper proposes a research project to re-think growth in the light of Marx's conception of humanity, and inhumanity. The project's core is an ethnographic exploration of the crossings between, on the one hand, global tourism structures, and, on the other hand, Latin American communities/individuals to which/whom touristic growth is presented. In particular, research will focus in the hegemonic mass tourist super-structure as it intersects with three coastal enclaves in the Mexican Caribbean (Akumal, Holbox and Mahahual). These enclaves have been subjected for the last 30 years to intense tourist commoditisation. Fieldwork findings will be used to discuss, first, the role of the logics and actors of global economic growth in the evolution of these communities, including people and environment. Second, the extent to which the internalization of this logics has led to inhuman forms of living, through which people treat themselves and others as things. Third, the experience of some individuals who, acting against hegemonic structures, persist in connecting their own creative powers to the social flow of doing, and to nature, and thus resisting the subordination of their powers to commoditization rules.

Introduction

The de-growth movement, seeking to promote “good” instead of just “affluent” life, is gaining popularity in some regions of Western Europe (Latouche 2007). Its main strategy consists of “winning the battle of ideas” against the “tyranny of growth” (Aries 2005); thus avoiding just becoming another stakeholder drawn into the lobbying business of policy-making (Baykan 2007). The emphasis on ideas endows academic discussions on de-growth with a key role in the movement (Schneider et al. 2010). The intellectual pedigree of de-growth is often traced back to Georgescu-Roegen’s bioeconomics, including his interest in the irreversible and entropic nature of the economic process (e.g., Martinez-Alier 2009). However, as Georgescu-Roegen (1975:377) implicitly acknowledged, de-growth is not a quantitative question of just logically persuading society into bioeconomic rationality. Rather, the turning point required by de-growth is a matter of “economy of power”. As such, it has to be connected to critical traditions (ecological economics, post-development, political ecology, eco-Marxism or voluntary simplicity, to mention a few) that have challenged the assumptions of mainstream political economy and neo-liberal doctrine (Fournier 2008). As compellingly advocated by Martinez-Alier (2008), de-growth involves realizing that economics imposes a language of valuation, which often becomes a tool of power in decision-making. Therefore, a first step is to acknowledge the instrumental subjectivity of economic rules and the need to subject them to democratic scrutiny. Thus, de-growth seeks to recast economic activities in political terms, usually by putting forward traditional liberal concepts such as citizenship, participation, social movements, or democracy (Fournier 2008). In fact, a main route to de-growth calls for (re-)establishing popular or radical democracy. This involves delegitimizing what Palma (2009:846) defines as “low-intensity democracy”: a component of capital’s new technology of power to rule and dispossess the working population, restrain the state and subject it to market accountability.

This paper builds on current de-growth debates and argues that “deepening democracy” is largely insufficient to politicizing and humanizing the economy. Rather, efforts towards de-growth should emphasize consciousness change and human emancipation. These efforts would greatly benefit from reviewing Marx’s critique of capital. That is, the critique of commoditization¹ as the central driving force of our economic system that leads to alienation from ourselves, society and nature. This is a humanist critique because relates growth obsession with the commoditization of the objective conditions for human creativity (Gorz 1993). Accordingly, de-growth is to be defined as a project to regain control over our autonomous development (Gibson-Graham 2006). We argue that Marx’s humanism challenges the ideological commitment of political economy to a system of growth which is both unsustainable and inhuman. A system in which “each person speculates on creating a new need in the other, with the aim of forcing him to make a new sacrifice, placing him in a new dependence” (Marx 1964:3rd manuscript (Needs, Production and Division of Labor)).

The next section introduces three different routes to de-growth, each involving a different analytical lens to explain *growthmania* and explore alternatives. These lenses move from the outer and more apparent means to achieve de-growth to the deeper and most fundamental. The first least fundamental route adopts a technocratic lens and starts by challenging the assumption of perpetual

¹ A “commodity” is a good produced to be sold and exchanged for profit in the market.

growth using mainstream economic arguments and, from there, it formulates alternative economic formalisms. The second route transcends the technocratic critique of economic rules in order to postulate political changes that ought to establish “local ecological democracies”. These decentralized forms of democracy, in turn, ought to be capable of establishing new market rules and economic frameworks from outside of the economy. The third lens postulates a fundamental incompatibility between market logics and de-growth. This third route calls for “inclusive democracy”; a liberatory project towards individual and collective autonomy. This paper proposes a fourth route based on Marx’s humanistic thought. This humanistic proposal sets out the framework for ethnographic research on the tension between alienation and emancipation in the context of tourism growth. This fieldwork does not seek to find objective evidence of estrangement or emancipation in order to reify them as conceptual categories. Instead, it seeks to show how communities and/or people that engage in the logics of global tourist growth are pushed to live inhumanly, treating themselves and others as things. Consequently, research is needed to understand the possibilities of collective liberation from these inhuman ways of living.

Routes to sustainable de-growth

One of the major landmarks for de-growth debate has been the 2008 Conference on “Economic Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity”, which gathered 140 multidisciplinary scientists and reconvened in Barcelona in 2010. The conference’s declaration defines sustainable de-growth as “a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society” (Research & Degrowth 2010). Tim Jackson develops this line a bit further and includes a humanist wink: “We need a renewed sense of shared prosperity beyond the goal of economic growth. [...] Material wealth for the few founded on ecological destruction and persistent social injustice is no foundation for a civilised society. [...] Prosperity consists in our ability to flourish as human beings – within the ecological limits of a finite planet. The challenge for our society is to create the conditions under which this is possible. It is the most urgent task of our times” (Jackson 2009:5). Obviously, such agreeable discourses are just a starting point, while the kernel is to find out the actual path that may take us there.

The least radical de-growth route, often advocated by economists, consists of reforming the dominant economic paradigm. Economic reform ranges from introducing new accounting criteria (that re-orient the economy) up to establishing a new economic logic altogether. In either case, the idea is to move away from the goal of “maximizing growth at any cost” in order to fulfil broader welfare objectives, such as full employment, eliminating poverty, and protecting the environment (Victor and Rosenbluth 2007). A problem with this route is it is unclear how, when and why this economic paradigm shift is going to actually happen. Proponents seem to trust on the persuasiveness of their rational argumentation, but this naively overlooks the political breadth of economics. Perhaps one of the most comprehensive efforts of this type of “persuasion” is Jackson’s (2009) “Prosperity without growth” report. In fairness, Jackson realizes that merely developing a new macro-economics for sustainability, no matter how logically convincing, will not as of itself lead to wide endorsement. Consequently, he discusses the need of governance reform to ensure “that people participate fully in the life of society, without recourse to unsustainable material accumulation and unproductive status competition”. This sounds quite radical, but then Jackson

proposes that such reform is to be undertaken by the very governments through enhancing investments in public goods. Legitimacy would be drawn from by the sensible argument that this type of reform would lead to happier, less lonely and less anxious societies. But, How come governments have not ever before acted against this obviously destructive logic of consumerism? In fact, as Jackson acknowledges, governments across the world have instead consistently elevated consumer sovereignty above other social goals. Unfortunately, Jackson's solution to this apparent paradox is unconvincing. He argues that the neo-liberal allegiance of governments can be explained by the unavoidable need in modern societies to foster economic growth as a requisite to grant macro-economic stability, even if it means to sacrifice sustainability and the common good. The main problem with this argument is not its chicken-egg circularity, but the naiveté of considering that governments have had so far little to do in establishing these growth-dependent macro-structures in which they find themselves "trapped". The supposition that government's role is to defend the public good over private interests ignores the bourgeoisie origin of the state and the historical influence of political economy, as a discipline, in its formation and development.

Overall, blaming the intellectual success of mechanistic economics or general equilibrium theory for our *growthmania* has some merit, but it is just too easy. This simplistic critique encourages apolitical and government-driven alternatives to growth. This is precisely, and quite sadly, the stance adopted in the "Degrowth Declaration of the Paris 2008 conference"; in which the means to achieve "progress towards degrowth" are portrayed as "efforts to mainstream the concept into parliamentary and public debate and economic institutions; the development of policies and tools for the practical implementation of degrowth; and development of new, non-monetary indicators" (Research & Degrowth 2010).

Fortunately, a significant part of the literature, perhaps following the work of Polanyi (2001 [1944]), focuses on neither state nor market based responses. The idea is that both governments and economies can, and ought to, get embedded within powerful local communities that make them work along "authentically democratic" principles. In this vein, social scientists, and even some economists (perhaps regretting some of their professional personal choices), assert that the transition to degrowth cannot be left to economists or representative governments. Rather, the embedding of the economy into democracy is envisioned as the outcome of political struggle, leaded by coalitions of social/environmental movements (Martinez-Alier 2009). A comprehensive deployment of this argument is Speth's (2008) call for re-invigorating democracy from below in its deliberative and participatory forms, rather than seeking to direct change from above.

This second route to de-growth is prevalent amongst French de-growth proponents (e.g., Paul Ariès, Alain Caillé, Vincent Cheynet, Serge Latouche), but also amongst some English-speaking intellectuals (e.g., Clive Hamilton, Peter G. Brown). The goal is to theorize about, and actually foster, a political (de-growth) movement that combats the colonisation of people's minds by economism (the belief in the primacy of economic causes or factors). Interestingly, this "putting of the economy on its place" is assumed to be feasible without having to renounce to either markets or representative democracy (Fotopoulos 2007). Instead, the preferred strategy consists of adjusting markets and improving democratic representation through decentralization. Latouche (2006) depicts this strategy as: "a stick-and-carrot combination: regulations designed to force change, plus the ideal of a convivial utopia, will add up to a decolonisation of minds and encourage enough virtuous behaviour to produce a reasonable solution: local ecological democracy". In that way, local communities would be

able to subject economism to democratic scrutiny, and decide about the principles ruling (local?) money, markets, and wages. The hope is thus to create the conditions to encourage people to act as citizens (and make sustainable choices), rather than as self-interested consumers. Therefore, efforts are concentrated on instilling democratic and citizenship values that allow to delegitimize the sorts of economic rationality or growth ideology which works against the environment and the common good.

Unfortunately, it is not clear how and why people are going to disengage from consumerism and take on the burden of democratically designing the rules of the economy. It might be true that, oftentimes independently from the de-growth movement, many people are already acknowledging the urgency of climate change and the unfairness of the global economy. However, this painful realization does not lead them to take any significant action (Fournier 2008). Most importantly, one may argue that by focusing on combating growth as an ideology, this route is in effect disregarding the hegemonic macro-structure, which has emerged from the interplay between market economy, capitalist production conditions, and representative democracy. These macro-structures are important because they confer stability to the “tyranny of growth” both ideologically and practically, while at the same time depending on this very tyranny for their reproduction. As aptly put by Fotopoulos (2007): “[T]he political crisis, which is manifested by the total degradation of the meaning of citizenship and the growing passivity of citizens towards what passes today as ‘politics’, can be shown to be the outcome of the concentration of political power at the hands of political elites (and economic elites through their control of the mass media). But, it is [precisely] the dynamics of the system of representative ‘democracy’, which has led over time to the present huge concentration of political power at the hands of political elites”.

Takis Fotopoulos is founder of “inclusive democracy”, a universalist project for human liberation in terms of social and individual autonomy (Fotopoulos 1997). Drawing on libertarian thought, this project postulates a fundamental incompatibility between market economy and de-growth. Accordingly, value changes, democratic reform, or radical decentralisation are not seen as realistic strategies because they do not address either power relations, or the historical characteristics of capitalist market economy; both structurally linked to growth. Therefore, a precondition for de-growth is an egalitarian distribution of power, which would result from a confederation of communities functioning according to principles of economic equality, collective ownership, and direct democracy. Again, the means, the praxis, to achieve this organizational vision is the crucial issue. Although largely disregarding Marx’s humanistic contribution, inclusive democracy does point to a conscious and self-reflective choice for autonomy (over heteronomy) as a driving force towards de-growth. Maybe following Hegel, Fotopoulos (1997:181) situates this choice in the dialectical tension between individual versus collective, agency versus structure, or idealism versus materialism. The origin of this tension is situated in the fact that individuals are both free to create their world and at the same time are created by the world. According to Fotopoulos (2000), the way out of this tension is a liberatory project towards individual and collective autonomy that synthesizes democratic, socialist, libertarian, green and feminist traditions.

The humanistic route to de-growth

Largely neglected by Marxism, Marx's humanism was somehow rediscovered and reformulated in terms of political ecology by André Gorz (1980, 1993, 1999); as well as by others who have framed de-growth, at least implicitly, in terms of human development, self-emancipation, and autonomy from capital (Burkett 2005; Holloway 2002; Lipietz 1995). The basic tenets of this perspective were perhaps introduced by Fromm (1961:204) as: "[A] system of thought and feeling centered upon man [i.e., humans], [upon] his growth, integrity, dignity, freedom; upon man as an end in himself, and not as a means towards anything; upon his capacity to be active not only as an individual but as a participant in history; and upon the fact that every man carries within himself all of humanity".

As shown in the previous section, a humanistic perspective is implicit in critiques of growth which advocate value changes of "minds colonized by economism". In fact, the de-growth movement has displayed a certain, although often vague, humanistic inclination, including references to changing our "conception of Mankind" (Baykan 2007:515). Furthermore, the human dimension is integral to the "liberatory project towards individual and collective autonomy" of inclusive democracy. This paper adds to these efforts in two ways. First, by highlighting the theoretical and methodological contributions of Marx's notion of self-emancipation. Second, by setting off an ethnographic project to understand the self-emancipatory character of de-growth in particular places.

Arguably, the key contribution of Marx's humanism to de-growth is the realization/assumption that humans are essentially free, self-creating subjects, and that history is the process through which "we all make each other", including nature. In this view, the appeal of growth lays precisely in its illusory ("fetishistic") appearance of providing the possibility of material emancipation for all. That is, once the capitalist logic rules out wealth re-distribution, economic growth appears to be the only way to provide material security for all, and provides the illusion to eventually fulfil our essential nature as free individuals. The genius of Marx was to realize that industrialization had increased our material security, but at the cost of our own alienation from ourselves, community and nature. In this process, we subordinate our own creative capacities to the things that we have ourselves created: "Today entities like money, capital, and the state are crazily accepted as subjects; at the same time, we treat each other and ourselves, not as free self-creating subjects, but as if we were things. That is how we necessarily cut ourselves off from understanding ourselves" (Smith 2005:159). Thus, from Marx's perspective our subjugation to growth becomes a main obstacle to authentic freedom, even if it creates an illusion of freedom. To make things worse, it is becoming increasingly obvious that, due to the finiteness of the planet, growth may only provide local security for some and is in fact raising global insecurity and inequality.

Fixation with economic growth alienates us from true human development in quite the same way as do fixation with money, private property, wage labour, or the state. The practical consequence of this realization is that *growthmania* cannot be counteracted by the external means of democratic government action, as the de-growth movement generally assumes. In fact, governments are themselves alienated forms of social engagement, "the illusory community" (Marx et al. 1972:53). Furthermore, the routes to de-growth based on economic reform or ideological struggle underestimate the degree of integration of the state into the network of capitalist social relations: "The fact that work is organised on a capitalist basis means that what the state does and can do is limited and shaped by the need to maintain the system of capitalist organisation of which it is a part" (Holloway 2002:13). Decision-makers, voters, workers, or citizens are categories created and reified within a historical super-structure which privileges capital over human autonomy. Therefore,

the humanistic route to de-growth consists in fact of a self-emancipatory project from self-imposed and self-constraining categories; a self-liberation in which each person shall take conscious control over his/her creative powers.

Perhaps the main challenge of the humanistic route to de-growth is its esoteric outlook. What does self-emancipation, liberation or freedom actually mean? How can alienation be systematically observed? A main task is, therefore, to invest these key concepts with empirical meaning. As a small step in this direction this paper explores the self-creating nature of a particular place, including the instances of alienation prompted by the determinism of economic growth. Through the life stories of the people who created this place, we reveal the possibility of restitution, via self-emancipation, of human wholeness, in unity with fellow humans and nature. In this hugely challenging exploration we will follow what Smith (2005:18) calls “Marx’s standpoint, ‘human society and social humanity’”, which is described as follows: “He [Marx] traces the inner coherence of his object- money, say, or the State, or the class struggle. Then he can allow its inhuman, brutal meaning, its hostility to a truly human life, to shine through the appearance of ‘naturalness’ and inevitability. Its own development lights up the road which will lead us to its abolition”. In the case of tourism in the Mexican Caribbean, the “object” will be the hegemony of economic growth. I will not take the observable object (i.e., growth) as a reality to be logically modelled, but rather as an obstacle to a truly human world. For the observation of this complex phenomenon, I will focus in the history of a particular place and will use ethnographic methods for accessing the internal world of individuals.

The ethnographic study of emancipation from growth

The scarce existing ethnographic research dealing with de-growth has focused in squatter communities, within which the possibility of living with a certain degree of autonomy from money and labour; even if they are actually inserted within utterly commoditized contexts, has been discussed (Cattaneo and Gavalda 2010). A main concern has been to demonstrate the material and political viability of alternative forms of living and organizing. However, findings have instead pointed to the limitations and unavoidable contradictions of building autonomy at the household or community scale in the context of vastly commoditized social structures.

Ethnographies of alienation and emancipation from growth place these limitations and contradictions upfront. The main concern is to illustrate the struggles for freedom, at the level of human consciousness, whenever individuals and communities are positioned under the yoke of “economism” (i.e., under super-structures prioritizing economic growth). Following Marx, it is assumed that human nature is essentially self-creating even though we live under super-structures which persistently deny it. Therefore, the intention of emancipating from alienating super-structures is always latent anywhere and in anyone, even in the absence of strong material or practical manifestations. This idealist assumption comes from the premise, incidentally demonstrated by self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1995), that a truly human life is an autonomous one. Thus, again following Marx, the absence of clear manifestations of self-emancipation at the level of individuals would be due to impracticability in the absence of universal self-emancipation. Whether, and when, universal self-emancipation is going to take place is beyond the scope of ethnographic research. However, the important point is that its necessity and possibility can be studied before it takes place. For instance, we can study how self-estrangement from ourselves, our community and

nature, or the illusion of autonomy given by the “freedom” to further our egocentric interests, are actually hindering our self-development as free authentic humans and threatening the planet’s life support systems. Of course, this ethnographic project, beset with copious inspiration from Marx, can only be justified as part and parcel of a universal and inevitable “coming-to-be of real human self-consciousness” (Smith 2005:17). Summing up, I am seeking to build a humanistic ethnographic project which rejects assumptions of individuals as atomized and interacting with other atomized individuals and building personal stories of these interactions. On the contrary my assumption is that individuals are essentially free humans fighting constantly for achieving the manifestation of their true free nature.

I plan to produce ethnographies of alienation and emancipation in Akumal, Holbox and Mahahual, Mexico (Figure 1), as well as amongst the agents who engage in the global tourism growth super-structures impinging in these three coastal communities. Global tourism agents will be approached at global tourism fairs and expos (particularly in International Tourism Berlin 2011). The super-structure associated with the development of all-inclusive resorts in the Mexican Caribbean has its origins in the Balearic Islands. The exporting of this model by the very Balearic entrepreneurs who initially implemented it in Spain has been described in terms of “Balearization” (Buades 2006). The logics of capital accumulation articulated by these global agents will be analyzed.

Figure 1: Location of the Mexican Caribbean and urban centres under study



Source: Adapted from *Cuéntame... de México* (<http://www.cuentame.inegi.org.mx>) retrieved 28 April 2009

Fieldwork in the Mexican Caribbean will identify informants amongst pro-growth governance structures most directly linked to the three communities under study. Snow-ball methods will allow

identifying people known for having an overview of local history and significant involvement in the creation of these three places. Informants will be asked to identify others who are representative of the different sectors within the community until obtaining saturation. Some informants may be interviewed multiple times, using information from previous informants to elicit clarification and deeper responses. Some informants will be subjected to semi-structured biographical interviews including ten preset questions about life experiences, inner dimension, and personal relationship with pro-growth structures. Table 1 summarizes the type of agents from which ethnographies will be sought.

Table 1: Key agents to orient collection of ethnographies of alienation and emancipation from tourism growth

AGENT TYPES-GROUPS	STRUCTURAL SCALE	LOCAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE THREE COMMUNITIES UNDER STUDY
International tourism corporations	-Global tourism super-structure	-Balearic corporations with established developments in Akumal and seeking to develop Holbox
Regional factions of tourist developers/entrepreneurs	-Global tourism super-structure -Regional development structures	-Akumal well-established regional/local businesses -Yucatecan business factions striving for developing Holbox -Quintanarroense businessmen in cruise ship activities in Mahahual
Regional government (PRI political system)	-Global tourism super-structure -Regional development structures -Local governance structures	-Government development projects in Mahahual and Holbox -PRI unions and delegates in the three communities -Land agency and public services providers in the 3 communities
Small entrepreneurs and local "caciques"	Local governance structures Base	-American and Mexican middle class with property in Akumal - European, American and Mexican tourism pioneers in the 3 communities -Modern caciques in Akumal and Holbox
Local people	Base	-Immigrant workers in the 3 communities -Ejidatarios and fishermen in Holbox -Fishermen in Mahahual

Fieldwork findings will be used to discuss three aspects of growth. First, the role of the logic of economic growth in the evolution of these communities, including people and environment. Second, the extent to which this logic has led to inhuman forms of living, through which people treat themselves and others as things. Third, stories of individuals who, even under unfavourable circumstances, may have persisted on connecting their own creative powers to themselves, to the social flow of doing, and to nature; without subordinating any of these connections to commoditization rules.

Tourism Growth in the Mexican Caribbean

Statistics provide some ground to endow the Mexican tourism industry with an aura of growth success story. Success variably attributed to government intervention (Clancy 1999), and the neoliberal agenda of late Twentieth Century's globalization (Cothran and Cothran 1998). There is little doubt that some have greatly benefited from growth, including for instance tourism corporations, land-traders, tourism pioneers, government officials, or early immigrants. According to the UNTWO's World Tourism Barometer, Mexico has floated since 1990 between the 7th and 10th positions of the World's ranking of International tourist arrivals. The Mexican Caribbean, where Cancun and the three communities under study are located, has undoubtedly played a key role in this positive story. In fact, Cancun is the Mexican airport with the highest number of international passengers (Sct 2009:8); a number which has almost doubled in the last decade to reach 9,272,591 in 2008².

Economic triumphalism, however, is toned down by some discouraging signs. For instance, the last significant increase of international arrivals in Mexico took place between 1993 and 1995, and they have since then remained practically stable. In addition, the relative weight of the tourism sector in the Mexican economy has been consistently descending since 1995 from an 8.3% peak to a 7% of the GDP in 2004; while the sector's employment, as a share of total employment, also decreased from 6.3% to 5.4% (Inegi 2001, 2006). Thus, mixed economic trends may by themselves challenge any high expectations put on tourism growth as a means to foster the country's development (Brenner and Aguilar 2002). The economic picture at the scale of the Mexican Caribbean (Quintana Roo State) is much more encouraging. Hotel rooms have increased continually from a few thousands in the 1970s to more than 50,000 in 2005. Furthermore, tourism contributed 52% of the state's gross total production in 2003, and provided 47% of jobs (Inegi 2005).

Despite undeniable growth success, serious doubts have been casted regarding the social and environmental consequences of the tourism model deployed in Quintana Roo and other beach tourism enclaves of Mexico. A model which is industrialist and conceives tourism as an export activity to help external debt repayment (Clancy 2001). Cothran and Cothran (1998:494) highlighted the advantages and risks of such a government-backed corporative model: "The government has helped to put in place a largely privatized system that produces a quality product, often isolated in resort enclaves, which is both the strength and the weakness of Mexican tourism. The dissatisfaction of the average citizens seems to be intruding more and more on this tourism paradise, in the form of crime, drugs, corruption, and armed guerrilla". Cancun soon became the model's flagship; a tourism enclave promoted by the government in a peripheral location to attract massive private investment. One of its main characteristics is the neat segregation between space for tourists and workers. In Cancun, low- and medium-skill workers travel to the hotel zone by bus, and those with higher skills by car, but their own needs are met in a separate space. Pi-Sunyer and Brooke (2005:49) have described this model of "self-contained gated complexes" as "pieces of the First World ensconced in Third World environments".

As this industrialist model expanded towards the south into the Mayan Riviera³, further profit-making opportunities emerged involving land speculation, real estate development, housing for workers, or golf courses (Manuel-Navarrete and Redclift 2010). Nevertheless, this industrialist model

² http://www.asur.com.mx/asur/ingles/aeropuertos/cancun/trafico_pasajeros.asp

³ A term conceived in 1998 to market the coast south of Cancun, stretching from the north of Playa del Carmen down to Tulum.

fell short of fostering sustainable regional development. From the perspective of economism, export revenues and regional employment opportunities have increased (Clancy 2001). For instance, providing 96,577 tourist jobs and a gross annual production of more than 2 billion US dollars by 2003, just in Quintana Roo (Inegi 2005). However, even from this limited perspective, the model's reliance on international consortia and hotel chains has seriously limited its local benefits (Jiménez Martínez 2008). Brenner and Aguilar (2002), quoting Ortíz Dietz (1998, R4) point out that "between 1989 and 1994, 53 percent of the total profits from foreign investments in Mexico leaked abroad, leaving only 47 percent in the country to be reinvested". This is not surprising given the abundance of all-inclusive accommodations in Quintana Roo, where tourists can purchase all the services they will enjoy in their trip from a wholesaler in their country of origin.

From a critical perspective, the political economy of tourism in Quintana Roo reveals the anti-social and anti-ecological character of its developmentalist paradigm. Manuel-Navarrete et al. (2009b) studied the evolution of business, bureaucratic and political factions, and the coalitions formed for the deployment of this industrial tourism model. They showed that extant power structures consistently prioritize the needs of elites above those of citizens, while workers and the environment are consistently exploited. Looking at Cancun, Hiernaux-Nicolás (1999) pointed to the fact that there are both winners and losers from a model characterized by, amongst other factors, disorganized capitalism, the growing desire to use the place as a platform for private profit, and the crucial roles of drug investments and money laundering. Torres and Momsen (2005b) explored Cancun as a transnational and commoditized space invented for tourism consumption, where global capitalism shapes all aspects of life. These authors conclude that Cancun's model exacerbated existing inequalities and created new uneven geometries of power at multiple scales, including the subordination of local cultures, social structures, and environments. The same authors also explored the model's failure to ignite regional development and thus improve the socioeconomic conditions of marginalised rural inhabitants (Torres and Momsen 2005a). Wilson (2008) discussed the ways in which the model reinforces inequalities and creates poorly-paid jobs with little benefits. Quoting Sernau (1994:108), Wilson categorizes the model's outcome as "a sector that is very modern in many of its appearances yet filled with workers at the bottom rungs whose labour is inefficiently employed and minimally compensated, and who have few chances to establish themselves in more secure and profitable positions". In a similar line, Pi-Sunyer and Brooke (2005) criticized the structure of dependency brought about by tourism in Quintana Roo; a structure in which indigenous people are the most subordinated. These authors commented on the pitifully low wages, difficult living conditions and little job security of average Maya workers, but also on the psychological impact of becoming marginalized in one's own land. They lamented the limited knowledge we have about the cultural transformations of tourism on the Maya, including their health, diet, environmental resources access, as well as social organization and identity disruptions. In their opinion, though: "the key analytical question is the degree to which mass tourism may work to reinforce and perpetuate relations of dependency and inequality" (Pi-Sunyer and Brooke 2005:46). Their conclusion is that the model of tourism in Quintana Roo "can be summed up as a system in which the poor subsidize the rich" (Pi-Sunyer and Brooke 2005:49).

Looking at the model's structure, Buades (2006) explored its resemblance to *Balearization*; the intensive model of tourism development that emerged in the Balearic Islands in the 1960s during Franco's dictatorship. The fact that the majority of all-inclusive hotels in Quintana Roo are owned by Balearic and Catalan corporations reinforces Buades' propositions. *Balearization* leads to the

fragmentation of space and the disruption of natural and social systems' functioning for the sake of tourism growth. Analogously, Murray (2007) documented Cancun's socio-environmental disruption and identified the following causes: rapid urbanization, population growth, foreign market penetration and control, an emphasis on short-term economic gain, weak regulatory enforcement, and an overall lack of integration of coastal zone management. Pérez-Villegas and Carrascal (2000) described in further detail the devastation of ecosystems in Cancun and the ample failure of environmental planning.

In face of these pointed and disquieting analyses and assessments, a legitimate and intriguing question is: How such an inhuman, anti-social and environmentally destructive model has kept its hegemony for the last 30 years and even today seems to convey the only possible development vision for Quintana Roo (Manuel-Navarrete et al. 2009a)? Addressing the root of this question requires looking at the humanity (e.g., feelings and motivations, as well as rationalities) of the people directly creating, participating in, and suffering from this industrialist model. Why do people keep engaging in the model? Is it out of conformity, resignation, approval, consent, lack of imagination, or something else? Arguably, these were the questions concerning Marx as he observed the deployment of industrialism. Questions which are acquiring renewed relevance after decades of belt-tightening of the already exploited, middle classes and the poor, as they witness further capitalist penetration in all life aspects. To the extent that the promises of representative democracy to counteract the forces of capital vanish, cases like Quintana Roo, where the State always worked for the interests of economic elites, become key to understand the intricacies of this globalizing trend. Marx's critique of the State and the "fetish" of commodities; which more than ever before seems to permeate and dominate our lives, provide an excellent entry point to this exploration. In particular, Marx linked the rush for commodity production to the enlightenment ideal of the single, independent individual in civil society (which arguably constituted the base for the liberal State). He concluded that this resulted in a world increasingly dominated by money and capital, where people were separated their spiritual being, from each other, from humanity as a whole, and from the world of nature (Marx 1964). The "discovery" of this world of alienated individuals allowed him to draw the path for self-emancipation in which to be human means participation in self-creation, creating humanity historically, and even making the natural world (Smith 2005). Both alienation and self-emancipation are the main themes of my ethnographies in Akumal, Holbox and Mahahual.

There is a super-structure for growth in Quintana Roo. One may look at some of the ways in which this super-structure manifests in specific places. However, of particular importance are manifestations occurring at the level of individuals, which are observable, for instance in the ways they try to position themselves within the super-structure in order to benefit and gain privileges. These positionings are what maintains the super-structure afloat. However, there is also within each individual a tension to break free from the super-structure. This tension is crucial for the evolution of the super-structure and eventually its transcendence when the push for freedom supersedes the pull for control over (which is an illusion of true freedom). There are basically three movements: true freedom (internally motivated goals), freedom mirage (through better positioning within the super-structure or defending an idealized image that differs from what the super-structure means to deliver, thus creating one's own local super-structure), conforming (doing what you are told, or surrendering agency to the super-structure). These three are always present and one can observe different combinations. Of course, depending on the positioning within the super-structure the tension will take a different shape and the incentives for freedom versus control will differ.

However, when freedom is embraced collectively something really beautiful happens!!! Something worth remembering!!! Revolution?

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