Mayas and tourists in the Maya World

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In 1992, an agreement was signed by the governments of five Latin American countries: Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico, to join forces in the promotion of international tourism in the Maya zone. This elaborate and costly project, called the Maya World, promises the visitor "something for all tastes" in the way of cultural experiences and leisure pursuits. Such large-scale tourist projects raise many questions concerning the underlying motivations for the development and the impact that they will have on the peoples and environments of the regions. Essentially, the Maya World tourist project can be seen as a newly constructed cultural landscape, based on design features from the existing cultural landscapes of the 29 Maya cultures of the region, imbued with new meanings that make them significant to a target market, the international tourist. This paper examines the construction of the Maya landscape in a Yucatec Maya town in Mexico and compares aspects of this Maya world to that developed for the tourism initiative. Changes in the meanings of landscape features for the local Maya, brought about by the appropriation and commoditization of their "world," will have serious implications for the cultural survival of this indigenous group.

Key words: Mayas, landscapes, contested spaces, colonialism, tourism, Mexico

Construction of the Maya World Landscape

In 1992, the governments of Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico signed an agreement to unite sponsorship of a large-scale tourist promotion in the Maya areas of their respective countries. These governments felt that tourist dollars were slipping away due to disjointed information about the Maya and noncoordinated infrastructure throughout the indigenous zones. For example, archaeological vestiges of the Classic Maya period are found in all five countries, but traveling from one site to the next is hindered by international boundaries. Consequently, the countries joined forces in a historical act of cooperation and collaboration to standardize and disseminate information on the Mundo Maya or "Maya World." This project was initiated in 1988 with the assistance of the European Economic Community. Presently, Mundo Maya is represented by the Organizacion Mundo Maya at the World Tourism Organization where the aims are stated as: "to promote the public and private sectors of the founding members countries, the development of tourism, culture and environment in the Mundo Maya region, to facilitate suitable mechanisms that allow for the effective marketing of tourism products in regional and international markets."

The official map produced in 1992 is a detailed cartographic presentation of the project and is called the "Map of the Maya World," on which are marked major rivers, highways, and towns. It is the key to the symbols on the map, however, that guides the visitor to the zone, and the towns on the map are attributed importance and significance according to what they offer the visitor: infrastructural places (gas stations, hotels, airstrips, airport, and ferries); recreational places (beaches, fishing sites, snorkel sites, and dive sites); ecological places (caves, volcanoes, waterfalls, and biosphere reserves); and cultural places (where the visitor will find archaeological sites, colonial architecture, handicrafts, and museums). Many sites on the map offer a combination of these attributes, and not many places appear on the map which cannot be ascribed importance according to one or more of these meaningful criteria for the tourist. More important to our argument here is the fact that towns that are not considered to have a single attraction adequate for the visitor to this Maya World, regardless of their importance to the Mayas of the zone, do not appear on the map at all. For example, the map does not include any major Maya population or cultural center of the central Yucatan peninsula, Mexico. Such large and influential Maya towns as Peto, Tepich, Tihosuco, Ichmul, and Chemax are not part of this new Maya World, which is constructed through promotional texts at the same time as it is represented cartographically. This is the Maya World which "offers something for all tastes"; as one official brochure
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The Maya World offers its visitors a great variety of vacation options. Here there is, literally, something for everybody and the opportunity to create exciting combinations of activities and destinations.

The information that accompanies the official map of the so-called Maya World stresses the "traditional circuit tour to the principal Mayan cities," referring to the ruins of preHispanic cities, where at the same time the visitor can "contemplate nature and wildlife" in the rainforest. For those interested in colonial cities, the circuit can include places with beautiful architecture of centuries past where the visitor can buy handicrafts in the markets. A third option underscored in this brochure is designed for those who wish to visit the tropical beaches where water sports prevail. Finally, the visitor may participate in so-called ecotourism, through river rafting, horseback riding, mountain climbing, and caving.

In a typical information brochure, a beautiful photograph of the hotel zone of Cancun is graced by the following text:

The Maya World project does not only refer to the ancient pyramids and colonial monuments of the region, but includes also modern cities, beach accommodation of international quality, and an impressive infrastructure of services.

Thus constituted for the outsider, Maya World is a special space in which places have been constructed in two important ways. First, existing physical features from the landscape of some unidentified or minimally recognized "other" (namely "the Maya") are placed in the Maya World. These features are primarily the architectural survivals of historical periods, but also include natural phenomena such as caves, beaches, waterfalls, and volcanoes. Second, places have been constructed or reconstructed for inclusion in this new Maya World landscape, as is the case of Cancun, a city which was conceived, planned, and built to receive visitors. Cancun is therefore physically as well as symbolically essential to the Maya World landscape of the outsider.

Maya World is the presentation of a landscape to the outsider—the packaging of an idea and the promise of an appealing experience. Visitors, and especially large-scale tourism projects, create impacts on receiving societies. The literature on tourism is replete with studies of the environmental and social impacts of this activity, often with suggested strategies for their amelioration. This article focuses on aspect of this theme, namely, the impact of tourism projects of scale on physical and metaphysical spaces that a society and culture need for their survival. To illustrate this, the Maya World tourist project is juxtaposed with the Yucatec Maya community of Chemax to explore some of issues of power and cultural transformation.

Cultural Aspects of Landscape Construction

Culturally defined spaces have recently been examined as "cultural landscapes." As early as 1985, Denis Cosgrove (1985:15) defined landscapes as "a way in which certain classes of people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature and through which they have underlined and communicated their own social role and that of others with respect of external nature." Later discussions of landscapes have begun to emphasize the process of the creation of the landscape, in contrast to approaches that led to the simple inventory of physical properties and culturally defined resources on the landscape. Thus, Gowing (1995) emphasizes the people who are "implicated" in the landscape as they leave "traces" that instill meaning as well as memory, while Hinch and Butler (1996:281) concur with Smith (1977) that the cultural and physical aspects of the environment are inseparable and interdependent. Ryden (1993:259) goes further: "A familiar landscape provides tangible reminders of the past, solid anchors for memory, and thus invites contemplation of the self who lived that past, whose acts provided those memories." These are the "cultural memories" of Feld (1996), who proposes that social identities are constructed on the basis of landscape. For Charles Frake (1996:91), "(h)ere, landscape is put forth as a cultural praxis, a very different argument from the earlier conceptions of landscape in a more strictly material sense. The cultural focus on landscape now emphasizes the process of construction of that landscape and the collective memory that the constructed landscape evokes; that is, the temporal aspect of the landscape as part and parcel of the definition of the group responsible for its construction, and of the identity and cultural project of that group. The cultural landscape, complete with topographical and material elements, meaningful aspects, aesthetics, memory, and potentiality, is essential to the reproduction of the group. As such, it is part of its patrimony, although the conventional definition of this latter concept has focused on the material aspect in terms of "property," as a good inherited, from one's ancestors. Studies of conceptions and artistic reproduction of the English rural landscape have provided important advances in understanding the construction of landscape in the perceptions, memories, and self-conception of the local inhabitants (Cosgrove
1985); in relation to which Frake (1996) points out the transcendence of the image or "myth" of English countryside to the identity of the Englishman.

The physical and cultural features of the landscape in the Maya zone similarly provide the setting of the presentday cultures and the everyday life of the Maya people, as well as comprising a part of their patrimony essential to the understanding of their past and in the construction of their future. The landscape constructs and at the same time reflects their self-conception. Thus, transformation of the landscape reflects as well as produces cultural change of a more fundamental nature, and, it may be important to scrutinize the origins and intentionality of the forces of radical and rapid change. Societies require spaces and places in which to produce and reproduce. Loss of control over such spaces to another cultural or political entity is tantamount to loss of the spaces themselves and loss of the most fundamental resource necessary for cultural survival.

Cultural Landscape of the Chemax Maya

Chemax is a major Maya municipality located on the Yucatan Peninsula, approximately halfway between the cities of Merida and Cancun. At least 95 percent of the 17,000 inhabitants of Chemax town and hinterland are Yucatec Maya speakers, many of whom practice swidden agriculture in the tropical forests of the region. These people are inheritors of the Yucatec Maya culture, which includes the language, traditions and customs, knowledge and meaning systems, as well as the physical and symbolic features of the space in which they survive, grow, and change. The spaces and places on their landscape include ruins of past actions and activities, natural resources and regions, as well as sites newly identified to be included in the inventory of spaces and places on the local landscape. It is an understatement to say that such a cultural legacy is complex.

The region surrounding Chemax, indeed the whole of the Yucatan Peninsula, is a karstic plain of recent geological formation, which means that there is virtually no natural relief such as hills or mountains, that the bedrock is exposed with very little topsoil unevenly distributed in pockets, and that there are no rivers. Sinkhole formations and underground cavern systems (called dzonot in Maya or cenote in Spanish) dot the natural landscape, revealing the water table, at approximately 24 meters depth in the study area. These are the major water sources for local inhabitants. They are also seen to be entrances to the underworld. They are the openings to huge cave and underground river systems, which have been secret places of refuge during the recurring conflicts that have characterized the region. Often the details of their location are privileged information. Ritual paraphernalia are stored in cenotes, and they instill feelings of awe and sobriety while attracting local Mayas to peer down into them.

There are many man-made structures in the region. Stone structures and buildings are more expensive to build than those of wood but are longer lasting; they can be built high enough to project above the forest growth, affording an impressive view of the flat, forested plain, spotted occasionally with other tall man-made structures. In the Yucatan, these will be either pyramids, churches, or both. Colonial churches were built upon the base of pre-Hispanic pyramids, as is the case of Izamal. Monumental stone structures, which have fallen into disuse on a daily basis, litter the region around Chemax. They are landmarks on the Maya landscape, regardless of whether they fell into disrepair hundreds of years ago (the pyramids of Coba, for example) or as recently as 15 years ago (Xmaben and other abandoned settlements). In the opinion of local elders, this evidence of past activities is proof positive of the cyclical nature of events. This view of history obtains that places are founded and built; they grow, flourish, and inevitably disappear with their inhabitants, only to reappear at another time.

Civil war on the peninsula in the last century resulted in the virtual abandonment of the region around Chemax. Resettlement has been taking place over the past 50 years, following traces and patterns already established on the cultural landscape: new settlements are built at the sites of earlier ones, near water sources and along path networks through the forest. These are named places on the physical landscape. In the case of Joteoch, a hamlet in the Chemax region, new settlers have even used the same layout of the house plots of the abandoned town. Following the patterns of the ruins of the old town, new residents are rebuilding the stone walls that had separated lots from roadways when the town had 1000 inhabitants (circa 1828). In this resettlement process, cut and worked stone from ruins of both colonial and preHispanic structures is re-used extensively (and repeatedly) as building material for later structures. Thus, ruins of stone buildings on the landscape are transformed into newer buildings, themselves often falling into ruins through time.

In this way, it can be argued that present-day settlements in the Chemax region are extensions in time and space of previous epochs and that the imagined cartography of the region for the local inhabitant includes places and spaces with potential, inherited from the past and available for the future. In concrete terms, this includes the forest itself, which is always in varying degrees of recuperation after the effects of swidden agricultural practices. The continuum of stages of forest regeneration also is part of the cultural landscape, registered
on the landscape of Chemax as ecological zones apt for hunting, collecting herbs, building materials, firewood, or as fit for agriculture again. The exploitation of the forest for chewing gum, or chicle, became a multimillion dollar enterprise in the mid-20th century. Despite the virtual disappearance of this activity in the region, nowadays the chicle trees, because of the durability, often left intentionally as landscape, still exhibit the scars of an activity that brought many changes to the region. Ceiba trees are also inventoried in the forest, mainly for ritual reasons. Much of this specific information about landscape features is privileged and of restricted access. In a way, knowledge of the landscape empowers the Maya elders. They know the landscape and the meanings of the landscape features, a complex depository of history. Some archaeological sites in the Chemax region have special significance in terms of their supernatural potency. Coba is such a place. It has fallen into disrepair since its abandonment a thousand years ago, but it has not fallen into disuse by the Maya of the region. According to informants from Chemax, Coba is a place visited by Maya ritual specialists who paid respect to supernatural beings and collected plants for curing, rites, and ceremonies. They prayed so the local people could hunt in the vicinity without coming to harm by offending the site and the spirits, and they prayed to ensure successful agricultural harvests. At the foot of the main pyramid at Coba there is still an altar on which candles are burned and sacrifices made. According to those interviewed, sites such as Coba are cursed and, as such, are occupied by bad and dangerous spirits, especially at night. The specialists who pray there become bound to the place, since, in the words of a local informant: "the site gets used to the prayers and the offerings and so if they stop, people will be killed." The powers of Coba emanate from the ruins of a huge and beautiful city whose ruling class became abusive and evil, thereby cursing the city and its inhabitants. According to Don Pepe Mahla of Chemax, the city will reemerge and will be again sparkling and spectacular, because it was built by the ancient people and had its own king. Don Pepe pointed out that the splendor of Coba was and will be far greater than that of Cancun, which has no past or future in his view. It falls outside of these cycles of time and events.

Due to the availability of water, Coba became a campsite for workers in the exploitation of chicle during the 1940s. By the mid-1970s, Mexico’s National Institute of Anthropology and History had established a guard station at the site and hired a caretaker from the town of Chemax because of the scale and importance of the archaeological ruins. But shortly afterwards, this individual and his family returned to Chemax due to problems attributed to their living too near the site. According to a local informant, the caretaker’s sixyear-old daughter:

(U)sed to be fine...she understood everything that was said to her and she could speak.... But now she doesn’t understand. ..just sits there. (Then) her face suddenly pulls to one side, all of the muscles pull it to the side, it looks like her face is being pulled that way by the wind, an aire. She has been affected by the aire of the Coba site.

To explain the concept of aire, another informant adds:

You know that there were people living here before, well it is said that they are still the owners of this place. They never die, and they are still around, los antiguos. Well they are especially prevalent around ruins and cenotes. The aires are evidence of their presence.

Not all of the abandoned sites on the landscape have such powers. In fact, there are at least three types of sites on the landscape of Chemax. One includes those sites that are seen to be ruins of large cities which had kings. Stone and clay figures are found at these sites, representing the old inhabitants whose punishment was to be transformed into these materials. Local informants call these figures aluxes and attribute to them any mischief and misfortune that befalls the hunter and agriculturist in the forest. The archaeological sites of Coba and Tulum are included by the people of Chemax in this category, considered by some to be cursed and dangerous places. A second category includes sites local people consider to have been cursed at one time but have now lost their powers. According to an elderly informant, these are sites from which the clay and stone figures have been removed (retrieved and collected or sold). These are usually minor sites that did not have their own kings. It is said that they will not reemerge as important settlements in the cycle of time. The third category of sites comprises those places that have no powers, are not cursed, and therefore represent no danger to the present-day inhabitants of the zone. Chemax itself is one of these sites, since it always has had a permanent resident population.

On the Chemax landscape there are such physical features as settlements, path networks, water and forest resources, and ruins of differing types and importance. The features are salient on the cultural landscape precisely because of their meaning or significance in the history, mythology, presentday activities, and worldview of the local people. The meaning and importance of landmarks or spaces can change through time, as in the case of the archaeological sites that can lose their powers, especially if associated with a permanent human settlement. In this case, the importance of the hamlet or town as the defining feature on the cultural landscape takes precedence over the existence of ruins. Another example is the transformation of a coastal chicle campsite into a bustling tropical city. Cancun was a
named place on the eastern coast, familiar to the Maya inhabitants of the region but not inhabited by agriculturists in this century. Cancun was used primarily as a temporary base for hunting and chicle exploitation. It had not appeared on any map until Cancun became a focal point for national development, a place on the official landscape of Mexico, this happened with the birth of the “Proyecto Cancun” in 1971. This site was chosen for a large-scale government-sponsored tourist development project. The choice was based on the analysis of such factors as quality of beaches, average annual temperatures of air and sea, hotels, distance from points of origin of the potential tourists, and number of cloudy days per annum (Garcia de Fuentes 1979:82).

The Maya world of Chemax is not represented on a single map, and this complicates the task of comparing the Maya World of the tourist bureau with the Maya space of the local inhabitants. It is made up of places and spaces, routes and uses of spaces that embody knowledge about the past and the present, and which provide a framework for the future. It situates the people of the zone spatially, but also temporally: spatially because of the places and their names and histories, because of the relationship of this space with the world beyond, and therefore the inhabitants of this world with those of other places; temporally as the inhabitants have inherited the landscape worked and constructed by their ancestors, just as they will pass on the spaces and places imbued with information and meaning to future generations. This is their patrimony.

From Cultural Landscape to Commodity

On the one hand, the Maya landscape of Chemax is the space of cultural production and reproduction, and as such it is an essential component of the cultural patrimony of the indigenous inhabitants. On the other, the international tourist is a target consumer for a visit to the extraordinary. The product for sale is comprised of the Maya spaces and places, packaged as a landscape, as a commodity.

A conventional definition of commodities is "all objects which can satisfy human needs (value in use) and be exchanged (value in exchange),” while the commoditization process is defined as infusing something or someone with the qualities of a commodity (Vox Lexis 22 1976:3712). Francisco Zamora (1973) provides a synthesis of the history of economic theory with regard to the concept of commodity. He explains that to understand this concept it is necessary to distinguish between value in use and value in exchange, an idea originally put forward by Adam Smith in his seminal work, The Wealth of Nations. The former is value expressed through the use of the object, whereas the latter is expressed through buying and selling. Value in use was not the focus of his work, nor of David Ricardo in The Principles of Political Economy. Both economists were interested in the measurement of value and were aware that use value cannot be measured in any strict way since it is a culturally determined and culturally bounded concept. Value, for these economists, was best established through the exchange mechanism. Neglect for the idea of use potential, instilling value in an economic good, was thus introduced early in the development of economic theory.

Karl Marx further develops the idea of commodity production, proposing that an economic good becomes a commodity if it fits within the following two criteria: 1) it is not produced to satisfy the direct needs of the producer; and 2) only through exchange will it come into the hands of an individual who will use it to satisfy some need (Zamora 1973:168). Later, the idea of commodity came to include the quality of being able to be traded and to circulate in the economy. According to Zamora, the current use of the term commodity, rooted in the capitalist context, comprises at least six characteristics. A commodity is: 1) a physical product, which is 2) sold through a particular negotiation process, 3) advertised and promoted in a certain way, 4) packaged and made available in a given way, 5) sold under certain conditions, and 6) often delivered by the seller to the buyer. Given these characteristics, under what conditions could a cultural landscape be considered a commodity?

The five-nation Maya World tourism project builds upon the perceived interests, demands, and market potential of the international tourist to construct, package, and sell a product. The fabrication of this type of product, or “good,” for the consumption of the tourist has been discussed in the literature. Recently, Geoff King (1996) has examined the tourist experience as structured through the promotional materials available prior to the visit. He proposes that:

(T)he pre-packaged experience of the tourist is said to have replaced authentic forms of travel that involve real contact with different places. The territory to be visited is mapped in advance, whether in the simulacra of specially designated tourist sites/sights, pre-programmed itineraries or actual maps of routes to be followed at micro- and macrocosmic scales.... As far as the tourist sight is concerned the reproduction of its image is an important factor in setting the tourist off in search of the real object... (in a) process by which the image comes before rather than after the experience of the real thing (1996:80-83).

The mapping of a region, indicating places of ecological, historical, archaeological, and recreational interest to the consumer, is
tamtamount to the fabrication of a cultural landscape. The information package provided to the visitors prompts them on the meaning or significance that the destination should evoke. To be successful, these meanings must emerge from the culture of the tourists themselves; that is to say, they must be meaningful within the cultural framework of the visitors to the zone. In short, for the product to sell well, the consumers must believe they understand and identify with it. And it must have a value in use for them. The cultural landscapes of the consumers, the visitors, or explorers in today's world include areas with the meaning "undiscovered." The Maya zone is sold as one such area. The consumers are therefore willing to invest in this good, this commodity, which will enhance their own landscapes of the consumers, the visitors, or explorers in today's world include areas with the meaning "undiscovered." The Maya zone is sold as one such area. The consumers are therefore willing to invest in this good, this commodity, which will enhance their own cultural landscape. The visit to the Maya zone should cause a modification in such a landscape, by removing an area previously categorized on their cognitive map as "remote and unknown" to take on a new meaning, such as "exotic and tropical" or "marginal, backward, underdeveloped" based on experience. The producer of this commodity guarantees the consumers they will find "mystery, tradition, beauty, sun, sand, sea, and a little adventure."

A commercialized cultural landscape thus constructed does fulfill the basic criteria for the definition of commodity, as described above. Its value is determined through exchange, the producer is not creating the product for its use value, and it is made available to the consumer through exchange processes. It is not a physical product which can be circulated and resold, perhaps, but the tourist landscape of the Mundo Maya project surely is advertised, promoted, packaged, sold under certain conditions, and made easily available to the consumer. Therefore, the Mundo Maya project is the production and commoditization of a Maya cultural landscape. However, it is a cultural landscape constructed with criteria and meaning systems foreign and external to the Maya region. As observed by King (1996:149), in relation to tourist projects in general: "these features have been mapped (with) a variety of names and images that appear to have been imposed with little regard to native realities." In this sense, it is a simulacrum.

Most places of transcendence on the cultural landscape of Chemax do not yet appear on the constructed tourist landscape of the Mundo Maya. However, as places are discovered that will have tourist "appeal," "that is to say, that have a potential meaning within the cultural schema of the visitor, they will be included on the tourist map and landscape. The Maya "places" are redefined with outside criteria and "placed" on the constructed simulacrum landscape to be sold as a commodity. This is the process ironically "taking place" in the region today. It is the appropriation of spaces and places that exist and have local relevance due to actions of the Maya inhabitants in the past and present, and that are essential for the continuation, continuity, and integrity of these local cultures and communities. This is appropriation of a Maya common good by non-Maya outside interests, for its packaging and sale for profits which are unlikely to have any positive impact in the zone and on the producers of these now commercialized spaces. It is the commoditization of the Maya cultural landscape.

Implications

The idea of commoditization of cultural elements for their sale to tourists was put forth 20 years ago by Davydd Greenwood (1977), who focused on the packaging of specific events for sale to outsiders and the resulting loss of authenticity for the local population. Greenwood (1977:136) refers to this as "culture by the pound": "culture brokers have appropriated facets of a lifestyle into the tourism package," resulting in the loss of "meanings" for the local population and cultural confusion. He emphasizes a selective process in the identification of elements of "local color" to be of interest to the tourist, with little attention to the political implications of the development of the government sponsored tourist information packages. Therefore, he identifies a process of gradual disintegration of cultural elements, as "facets" are commoditized, but broader implications for landscape and space are beyond the scope of his argument.

For his part, geographer Daniel Hiernaux (1989:55) has studied the spatial implications of tourism in Mexico, proposing that the tourist industry is, in fact, "appropriating," modifying, and "producing space" The tourist in his words, rests upon the commoditization of territory by means of capitalist concepts of private property. However, Hiernaux's definition of territory derives from a geopolitical interest and does not consider it as a landscape of cultural construction through time by the local inhabitants. Territory is seen as a surface that can be appropriated, or expropriated, for tourist development, with serious negative implications for social inequality and access to power by local, rural populations despite rhetoric that emphasizes "economic development" as a result of tourism in these areas.

From the perspective of the "world" of tourism projects, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the Maya inhabitants of five countries have been constructing their cultural landscapes physically and culturally for millennia and continue to do so. The ecological, recreational, cultural, and even some of the infrastructural places, defined as such within the tourist promotional package, are places of interest and significance to the Maya inhabitants that exist because of the Maya presence in the zone, and engage the local Maya population in the
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situating of themselves in time and in space as part of a collective memory (Halbwachs 1990). Daily activities in the zones do not necessarily inspire reflexivity of the local populations in terms of the transcendence of the spaces and places on their landscape. This is pointed out by Hirsch (1995:4) who distinguishes between the "foreground actuality" of the landscape in everyday experience and the "background potentiality" which provides the context and form of experience. The combination, the cultural landscape, is the abstract space of cultural production and reproduction.

The tourist industry's landscapes are fabricated for sale to consumers, but their "production" depends on the prior existence of landscape features produced by another culture. Due to the nature of their project, the representation of the Mundo Maya zone on the official map only indicates places promoted as of interest to the consumer. However, the development of such a cartography requires that many places of importance to the local populations be excluded in the representation. Therefore, at the same time as a new cultural landscape is being constructed, the local landscape is being denied—it becomes a "silence" or an "empty space." This has significant implications. Chemax, for example, provides nothing judged to be of interest to the tourist, so it remains under Maya jurisdiction in terms of the local organization of space and landscape (see Brown 1993). This also has meant that it is not in line for significant direct positive impacts of the tourist activities, such as those promised in the rhetoric of "improving local conditions." Many local residents do not have running water and electricity. Chemax remains a primarily Maya space in the sense of moderating the incorporation of some outside influences, and rejecting, often violently, others.

Furthermore, there is no Maya cartography of this space. The Mayas lack of involvement in this project, together with the absence of a concrete representation of the Maya cultural landscape, is a reflection of relationships of power. King (1996:16) has pointed out the following:

The power to draw or redraw the map is a considerable one, involving as it does the power to define what is or is not real. The mapped reality appears to be inviolate, existing on the territory itself rather than being the outcome of particular institutional and representational practices.

Some of the places and spaces of the Maya appear on the official maps, many do not. The Maya inhabitants of the region do not have a place of power or influence in the definition of this newly conceived or constructed landscape as a tourist territory.

The Maya zone spans Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. It is the setting for the daily life and ordinary occurrences of almost 30 million indigenous inhabitants. The daily life of the Maya of this region was recently changed with the introduction of large-scale tourist activities. Ordinary, for the Maya, is extraordinary for the tourists. The arrival of the tourists has not been spontaneous. Governments have been involved in the development of infrastructure for visitors and in the promotion of international tourism. Promoting tourism to culturally and ecologically distinctive areas of a country is commonplace, and the usual goal of such activities is generation of revenues. However, in some cases tourism projects may have an additional motive. In the Yucatec Maya zone of Mexico, the promotion of international tourism amounts to the commercialization and appropriation of the cultural landscape of the Maya. If this continues to expand at the present rate, tourism will expropriate productive and reproductive spaces, both physical and abstract, necessary for the maintenance of Maya cultural integrity. The Maya would become producers of the spaces and places for a commercialized landscape to be sold to others, not producers of a Maya landscape in which their own culture will thrive.

The case of Chemax in Yucatan, Mexico, illustrates this transformation, as extraordinary events, places, and opportunities associated with the development of tourism in the zone have gradually become part of the daily life of its inhabitants. They have lived in a world of their own construction for millennia, but their world is nested into the wider world of Mexico, the continent, the planet. The placement of their world in this wider context and the introduction of outsiders to it have been managed, since 1992, through the five-vation project: The Maya World. This tourism initiative essentially sells a landscape designed to attract the outsiders, to a "world" marketed internationally as a holistic experience in the unusual.

No group lives in isolation of others and the history of humanity is the history of culture contacts and changes. Some contacts are exploitative and imposed within the framework of power relations, however. The identification of a target tourist market, and the packaging of a "world" or cultural landscape for sale to that market, which excludes Maya people from the decision processes, represents the appropriation of cultural spaces and will have devastating impacts on the indigenous peoples and cultures of the region.

I have argued here that the landscape of the Yucatec Maya from Chemax is an ancient cultural construct that is continually defined and redefined in time and space, while the tourism landscape of the Maya World project has been defined according to criteria external to the
residents of the Maya zone. Therefore, the meaning of features on these landscapes, by definition, should be different. This impedes the participation of the tourist and of the Chemax Maya in the landscape of each other because this participation would require an understanding of the meaning of the places and spaces on the respective landscapes. The tourism package does not provide the visitors with information which would make them sensitive to these meanings for the Maya. Cancun is not presented as a transformed fishing village or chicle camp; and Coba is not presented as a cursed city through which powerful spirits roam. The forest is not portrayed as the essential space for cultural production and reproduction for the local inhabitants. It is unlikely that the tourist will perceive, or look for, the complex types and forms of forest vegetation. Tourists cannot know the meanings of these landscape features so essential to the Maya of Chemax. North American or European tourists think of the tropical forest that dominates the landscape of the eastern Yucatan Peninsula in terms of pristine vegetational states, of endangered species, or of the fight against greenhouse gases. There is little place for human agency in these categories. The Maya are absent. And in this extreme example, the contrasting landscapes look more like landscapes of exclusion. This is not a single landscape, but competing ones.

In contrast, some of the Maya of Chemax have access to the newly constructed tourism landscape of the zone. If they are not excluded from this landscape, then what is the nature of their activity on it? An example is Coba, the ruins of a cursed city. Today, Coba is an archaeological site formally incorporated into the hierarchy of sites as defined by Mexico’s National Institute of Anthropology and History, according to their size, importance, and official infrastructure. Guardians of the site of Coba, originally men from Chemax with their families, are salaried government employees. Over the past 20 years, Coba has become an important tourist destination. Its exclusive Club Med hotel employs people from Chemax.

Coba has become a source of employment and commercial revenues for the zone. At the same time, the visits of multitudes of outsiders has caused the negative potency of the site to become diluted, according to elderly informants and ritual specialists in Chemax. The meaning of Coba on the local Maya landscape is changing. Its new meaning is inextricably tied to the importance of the archaeological site to the outsider and its promotion through tourist information.

Another example of this phenomenon is the hamlet of Punta Laguna, immediately to the north of Coba, which has been inhabited by swidden agriculturists from Chemax probably for millenia. Punta Laguna is the picturesque home of spider monkeys and has been proclaimed by an ecological lobby group as a protected site. The state government has contracted a local guardian and controls access to the site. Punta Laguna appears in the tourism literature as an important place to observe the wildlife. As a result, the Chemax Maya have lost open access to the area, which is now known to the young people more as a destination for visitors than as an agricultural outpost in the forest.

Cancun is the most obvious example of the interface between the two sets of criteria for the definition of places on the competing landscapes, for it was built for the tourist in disregard for its significance on the local Maya landscape. Now, the Chemax Maya participate in many of the economic activities of Cancun; for example, the vast majority of the construction workers in the early building phases of Cancun were from Chemax. Cancun is still the most important source of salaried work for the Chemax inhabitants, and it is the commercial hub of the region for shopping and selling of locally produced items. Without the attractions Cancun open to the visitor, those features which define it as a place on the Maya World tourist landscape, Cancun would not be nearly as significant a place on the landscape of the Maya of Chemax. But the features that make Cancun a place for the tourist and those that make it a place for the local Maya are mutually exclusive categories; that is, the beaches, hotels, diving, bars, restaurants, airport, rental jeeps, and shopping, which attract the tourist are not accessible to the Maya, while the jobs, selling opportunities, most educational and health facilities, and the type of commerce that attracts the local Maya, are emphatically not attractions to the outsider. Why is this an important distinction?

The placement of the Maya in the Maya World of the tourist project is a spatial positioning. In terms of the social spaces, the Maya in this project are invited to be actors at the level of workers in the construction and service industries. Conditions of such work do not, however, coincide with conditions of work in service and construction industries in countries such as Canada and the United States. And evidence does not yet support the idea of an upward mobility for the local Maya working in these industries along the tourist corridor of the eastern Yucatan Peninsula. In general terms, the Maya place on this tourist landscape is nonprivileged: they are disadvantaged in this new Maya World, even though the underpinnings of the new landscape were taken from the locally produced, original Maya landscape. They continue to "produce" a landscape, but now they are in danger of producing a commodity, a different landscape, not for its use value, but for its value in exchange. The Maya are negotiating a new identity in this newly constructed space; at the same time tourists are reconfirming their identity through experiences in the ersatz Maya World. This new identity corresponds to a new placement on a landscape outside of the control of the Maya people. All evidence suggests that their place in this overwhelming political and
economic project, with its recently constructed and appropriated spaces and places, corresponds to the powerless and the exploited.

Discussion

One useful tool for understanding the relationship between tourist destinations on an artificially constructed cartography and local cultural spaces is the concept of landscapes. Cultural groups are situated in time and space, both cultural constructs. Any natural landscape is seen through a cultural filter, through which empty or nonmeaningful, undifferentiated space is attributed importance and significance. The construction of a landscape is a permanent and necessary cultural process which is purposeful at an abstract level. The corollary of this is that the imagined cartography then exerts influence upon the social relations. In this way, the landscape creation and re-creation is essential to the persistence of the cultural group; it represents the space within which the group acts at the same time as it informs the actions of the group. The construction of a such landscapes is an appropriation of spaces, and challenges to a cultural landscape take the form of power struggles (Harley 1988:279; Wagstaff 1987:3). Cosgrove (1993:281) calls landscapes "discursive fields," while Wagstaff (1987:3) proposes that "the very act of designation, selection and observation, let alone the conscious search for order and pattern, arise from assumptions about meaning and significance, whether those assumptions are clearly articulated or not."

Chemax is a space thus constructed, and the strategic social, political, economic, and ritual hub of the Chemax landscape is the town itself, where lie the institutions that define membership and reproduction in space and in time (see Brown 1993). The processes behind the construction of the Chemax landscape of the Maya emerge from the project of spatially constituting the past, present, and future of this group. Chemax is a spatial and social entity. It is constructed and controlled primarily by the local Maya inhabitants, despite the fact that it is nested in the wider political and economic context of Mexico. The modern Chemax Maya participate in the wider economy and are increasingly bilingual and bicultural. The cultural spaces have coexisted, albeit in an environment of ongoing contestation, negotiation, and conflict.

But whose cultural memory is projected onto the tourist's Maya World landscape and which cultural group is constituted spatially and historically in this cartography? A key to this question can be found in examining the place of Chemax on the tourist's Maya World landscape. A first approximation of the place of Cancun on the Chemax landscape has been advanced: a newly constructed city incorporated as a place on the landscape due to its significance in terms of goods, services, and employment. However, the place of Chemax on the Maya World landscape is silence; it sits in unnamed and therefore empty space. It is neither meaningful nor significant. There exists no official map of the Chemax landscape, while the Maya World map is widely distributed and forcefully defines and promotes that which is important and significant in the cultural project of some unspecified group. Chemax and its landscape are, in the words of Harley (1988:292), "silences on maps" which are found to "enshrine self-fulfilling prophecies about the geography of power." Is there an ulterior motive for the exclusion from the tourist project of important Maya settlements and places such as Chemax? And is this motive underwritten by relations of power?

The tourists who become enthused about visiting the places and attractions on the map and brochures of the so-called Maya World are not colonizers in the sense of setting up permanent residence in a new, uninhabited zone. And colonization projects conventionally require the establishment of a permanent population. However, the existence of almost 20 thousand hotel rooms in Cancun that receive 1.5 million visitors a year, represents a daily floating population of upwards of 20,000 people in the city. This is a permanent population, despite the fact that the individual inhabitants change, characterized by consumption patterns which contrast with those of the Maya, the original inhabitants of the zone. This is the appropriation of space for the production and reproduction of nonlocal cultural behavior, and it is at the expense of access to and use of this space by the local inhabitants. The construction of such new, ahistorical spaces, first by defining a region as uninhabited, and then by introducing meaning systems from outside, results in a "colonial landscape" which, in the words of Hellen (1969), is formed by "exogenetic forces (in) disregard for the indigenous social environment." These are significant spatial acts that reveal structures of power relations, in a process that Hatt (1997:159) recently called "esconement," an act of power manifested through "appropriation and symbolic reincorporation" of features on the landscape.

In not one of the five signing countries to the Maya World tourist promotion do the Maya people have a significant political position, despite the fact that Maya-speakers are a majority population in Guatemala and number over a million in Mexico. If the governments of these countries are more interested in constructing a Maya World project of tourist development than understanding the existing Maya landscapes, there is not much the Maya populations can do to object. And to what should they object, anyway? The case of Chemax illustrates how meanings of spaces and places on cultural landscapes can be transformed and combined and their significance confused. However, where conflict of meanings emerges, potential for conflict of other types exists. The archaeological site of Coba cannot be both
a place of ritual significance that embodies cyclical time with the promise of reemergence, as the elders of Chemax relate, and a destination for tourists, now void of any spiritual powers. Nor can Cancun so easily be for some a temporary destination for fun, frolic, and conspicuous consumption, while the local population is excluded from these activities and spaces. For the landscape situates people in relation to each other, and these situations have as much meaning as the places and spaces in which action takes place and in which cultural systems are reproduced. Changes in landscapes, therefore, signify changes in relationships between people, fundamental modifications to that which Cosgrove (1985) calls the "social roles," and result in pressures that threaten cultural spaces. The spaces become contested.

For the region, one of the goals of the Mundo Maya tourist project is revenues and prosperity. However, the destination of those resources that stay in the zone may reflect a truer intention of the project. While in February of 1998 residents of Chemax were denouncing officials who did not comply with promises to extend the electrical coverage to all residents of their municipality, leaving many families without this basic service (Diario de Yucatan 1998), a few months later a representative of the Mexican Ministry of Tourism announced that during that same year, $580 million were spent on tourist infrastructure for the Mundo Maya project along the Cancun-Tulum corridor, an hour's drive away from Chemax. He stated that "during the past four years, Mexico has captured foreign investment exceeding $10 billion a year, which have been invested in diverse industrial activities, service, telecommunications, financial services, and tourism" (Uno Mas Uno 1998). This would seem to clearly suggest that places on the "tourist" landscape will provide living conditions and services unavailable at the places on the Maya landscape. This would not be the first such project that became self-perpetuating and self-fulfilling, calling into question the stated goals and presumed intentions of the original.

Conclusion

The Mundo Maya project was undertaken by the governments of five countries. There is little or no political representation or participation by Maya people in these governments. Disregard for the Maya content of the landscape, therefore, should not be surprising. Appropriation of areas of the national territory for their commoditization is facilitated if such areas are inhabited by economically and politically powerless populations. Furthermore, disenfranchisement of these populations from their own cultural landscapes effectively paves the way for their inclusion on the landscape of the nation, on which indigenous areas, if included at all, are generally shown to be "marginal." This becomes the basis for the final justification of the governments in the promotion of this tourist package: "This innovative project seeks to improve the lot (nivel de vida) of area inhabitants..." (Mundo Maya 1996:4). The power struggles in the indigenous zones of Latin America are often concrete expressions of struggles for cultural spaces. The tourist visiting the region would be, in the final analysis, a pawn in such struggles but government-sponsored tourist projects that mask political projects for the appropriation and transformation of cultural spaces may eventually kindle conflict.

What is the place of the Maya in the Mundo Maya project? While places of the Maya are essential for the success of this tourist development; the Maya inhabitants are essentially displaced in this landscape-construction project. They are unwitting commodity producers: the landscape to be appropriated is their cultural product. Herein lies the essential contradiction and threat to the project in its entirety. The pressures caused by the gradual loss of control over their landscape, the impact of changed meanings of landscape elements, and the type of economic transformation which accompanies tourist developments will generate changes so fundamental to the local Maya cultures that the very landscape which is the tourist attraction, the Maya landscape, will cease to be produced. In its place will be a caricature, produced intentionally in response to market demands for this "commodity." Still today, the modern Maya societies and cultures of the zone continue to exist in the "silences" that appear still on the tourist landscape. Not all of the Maya landscape has yet been appropriate and commoditized. However, the Maya are threatened with loss of the spaces in which their culture survives, changes, and grows-the space that permits their cultural reproduction. Barring a concerted rejection of this project by the Maya communities, their place as producers of a landscape to be commoditized by outsiders will evolve into a place as producers of a landscape fashioned to meet tourist demands for the unusual. We were warned 20 years ago by Davydd Greenwood (1977:138), "given the magnitude of the political consequences, we cannot afford to merely guess at the political implications of cultural commoditization." Only if intentions of the Mundo Maya project are noble, can we hope that such pressures created through tourist development projects will not result in cultural disintegration, further political disenfranchisement for the Maya, discontent, and increased violence and conflict in the region.

Notes

1 See . Information on the Mundo Maya project and a map can be found at .
The fieldwork for the following section on Chemax was carried out over 24 months between 1989 and 1999, as well as 3 months in 1979. Most of the relevant ethnographic material can be found in Brown (1993).

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