"Tourism, Tradition and Pragmatism in the Puuc"

A Case Study in Santa Elena, Yucatán, México.

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Photo 1: Abel Gutiérrez in front of unrestored pre-hispanic structure (*mul*) in *X'coox (a couple kilometers away from Santa Elena's town center).*

How has tourism affected local identity and cultural discourses in Santa Elena Yucatán?

Introduction

Since the "rediscovery" of the Maya in the 19th century, the Yucatán has been known around the world as one of the great hubs of the Maya civilization. With the dawn of the age of commercial air travel, tourists began to pour into México´s southern peninsula to discover for themselves the great pyramids and ceremonial structures they had seen in the pages of publications such as National Geographic. Upon arrival many tourists would realize that despite what many of their books told them, the Maya had not mysteriously vanished from the face of the earth but were in fact still there, living in communities surrounding the ancient cities and still speaking the language of the pyramid builders. As the popular Yucatec-Maya saying goes "way yano'one'" meaning *aquí estamos* or *here we are* (Ramírez 2011:179). Despite tourists initial impressions the reality of who the contemporary Maya really are is much more complex than what tourist brochures would suggest. After all, centuries of abusive colonial rule, forced religious conversion and the adoption of a new language would leave an extremely deep mark on any people.

Concerns regarding commodification and its effects on the authenticity of host communities has long been a staple of tourism research. While on one hand tourism is heralded as a powerful tool for promoting economic development, critics argue that the commodification of local ways of life and traditions often jeopardize the *realness* or *authenticity* of local cultures. For instance, by modifying local crafts to make them more appealing to tourists, host societies could be descried as suffering from a form of touristically induced cultural erosion. While tourism development certainly has the potential to be detrimental to host communities (and particularly those deemed to be highly *traditional)*, a

growing body of research in the fields of anthropology, human geography and tourism studies suggest that under some circumstances, tourism may present local peoples with opportunities conductive to cultural valorization and rediscovery. While in the past tourism research generally focused on the negative effects of tourism, much of contemporary scholarship takes a more nuanced approach which stands in stark contrast to the absolutist paradigms of scholars in the 1970s such as Greenwood. This being said it is important to keep in mind that tourism is itself is neither a positive nor negative force and that outcomes in any given context are likely to be a rather mixed bag of economic, social and cultural consequences.

In this thesis I investigate the links between tourism and changing local identities in Santa Elena Yucatán. The aim of this research is to arrive at a deeper understanding of how tourism has affected the lives of locals focusing chiefly on changing perceptions and approaches regarding local culture and identity. To this end this investigation will utilize tools from the fields of narrative analysis, ethnography and visual anthropology.

This research will contribute to a growing body of scholarship in the fields of tourism and Meso-American cultural studies. Additionally, the information collected is likely to be useful to researchers conducting cultural impact assessment studies in Santa Elena which address the social-cultural challenges and risks inherent in tourism project development. Furthermore, while every community is different, this research may also be useful in examining similar cases in comparable communities in the Yucatán and elsewhere in Meso-America.

Though this investigation addresses the influence of tourism on cultural and identity discourses in Santa Elena, it is important to keep in mind that other factors such as advances in telecommunication technologies and educational reform are also likely to exert a heavy degree of influence on local culture and perceptions of identity. This is to say that although the data collected for the purposes of this investigation may offer important insights, due to the scope of the present project it is virtually impossible to adequately account for all of the factors which may here be at work.

Chapter 1: Background and Context

1.0 - The Mexican Tourism Industry

The global tourism industry is widely acknowledged to be a major global economic force. According to UNWTO (2009) international tourist arrivals reached 922 million in 2008 (up by 1.9% from 2007). Furthermore the annual economic worth of the International tourism industry grew to US$ 944 billion in 2008. This increase corresponds to 1.8% from 2007. Receipts from international passenger transport are estimated at US$ 165 billion, bringing the total of international tourism receipts including passenger transport to US$ 1.1 trillion or over US$ 3 billion a day. Though Mbaiwa (2010) notes that international tourist arrivals have declined significantly across the board (likely due to the global economic downturn), the growth of new markets is likely to compensate for these losses. Olaru et al. (2009) notes that as in previous crisis situations, traffic to closer destinations is expected to be favored as compared to long-haul travel. In 2010 the number of tourists who visited México from the United States and Canada increased by 9.7% and 19.4% respectively and represented approximately 75% of total international tourism earnings (SECTUR 2007).

While policy makers and investors continue to tout the virtues of tourism as an economic engine capable of improving the fortunes of impoverished communities by delivering employment opportunities, the reality of how much tourism actually benefits hosts communities and workers is debatable. Zampoukos et al. (2007:25) notes that jobs in the tourism industry are often poorly remunerated, low skill and are of a temporary and part time nature. Furthermore, most jobs in the industry mostly include lower-end positions which offer limited training and opportunity for advancement. While these conditions could hardly be described as ideal, the

reality is that in many areas tourism remains one of few, if not the only source of employment available to local populations. Given the many debates surrounding the virtues and perils associated with tourism, researchers have long examined the characteristics of this sector, focusing on phenomena such as labor driven migration, changing consumption patterns, and cultural malleability. Given the extensiveness of this type of research, one may wonder why dominant discourses regarding tourism within policy making/investment circles tend to focus almost entirely on the question of tourism as an economic force. (Zampoukos 2007) notes that a partial explanation for this bias lay in the fact that a great deal of tourism research informing policymakers and investors stems from a resource management perspective (which is found principally at business schools and hotel management institutions). Additionally, Hall (in Zampoukos 2007) notes that many scholars (particularly tourism geographers) have been reluctant to embrace a critical stance towards neo-liberalism. Furthermore, neo-liberal conceptions regarding how to best regulate and expand the tourism sector have led to many changes regarding the ways in which tourism resources are allocated and managed. This has led to the thinking that tourism assets ought to be privatized or centrally administrated to ensure their profitability and competitiveness. While these schemes may or may not result in higher profitability for investors and tax collecting authorities, the implications for workers and host communities tend to be negative as these types of measures greatly reduce levels of local empowerment and the ability to administer and influence tourism initiatives. Here it is important to note that these criticisms of neo-liberal management models take objection to the disproportional manner in which large scale investors and governments benefit from the tourism industry, and not the existence of the industry itself. While it is only natural that investors and states seek to make returns on their investments, a more holistic approach towards tourism development which takes into account the interests and needs of local populations

is in the end not only more fair, but is likely to yield better results in the long term.

The boom of the tourism industry which began in southeastern México during the 1970s is widely regarded to have been the result of a closely coordinated effort between state and private actors. Despite its shortcomings and the difficult financial situation which many people still find themselves in, it is generally acknowledged that the effort of bringing development to the region by way of investment in tourism has (at least in a limited sense) been a success. In some cases growth allowed for the emergence of new niche markets which were quickly exploited by large investors and local peoples alike. Small scale investors began to open up small convenience stores, hotels, restaurants and hostels in the areas surrounding large archaeological sites and popular beaches. With the rapid saturation of these markets, many small scale investors began to pursue similar efforts at smaller and more remote attractions which were often located on land which they privately or communally owned. Despite the remoteness of these establishments, in some cases the overflow of tourists from larger attractions (and the improvements in the transportation infrastructure) trickled down in quantities sufficient to make these businesses profitable (although in many cases these profits tend to be fairly marginal). Furthermore, several communities have undertaken development initiatives which aim at building entirely new tourism markets which emphasize a particular town or regions cultural or natural uniqueness. Although there exist many individual/family run tourism ventures which would fit traditional definitions of a "small business" in countries such as Norway or Canada, many of the individuals who are often referred to as *small scale tourism investors/workers* are in fact local workers who may simply produce artisanal crafts or offer fishing tours as a complementary source of income. Along with famous beach destinations such as Cancun and Acapulco, Mexican tourism attractions also include a wide variety of pre-hispanic

archaeological sites, colonial towns, thriving cities, culinary centers, museums etc. These tourism destinations range from enormous resorts on the Caribbean coast to small local cooperatives and even single person jungle expeditions.

According to México's tourism authority (SECTUR 2011) in 2009 the tourism sector employed 4,843,091 individuals of which 44.4% were women. The true number of total individuals working in México's tourism is likely to be considerably higher due to the nature of the census and the fact that it under represents individuals working in the informal sector of the economy which by some estimates represents 50% of national GDP. Despite the lack of reliable figures, most researchers agree that there exist a near parity of representation of genders in the Mexican tourism industry. However, as is the case in most Mexican industries, gender segregation in the tourism industry is easily observable. The role of women (and particularly indigenous women) in the Mexican tourism industry tend towards low paying positions with few career development opportunities such as working as cooks, cleaners or waitresses. In large tourist centres it is common to see large groups of women selling textiles, jewelry and other types of crafts to tourists along busy streets and plazas. Because of the largely unregulated nature of this economic activity there are is little protection available to these women who are often victims of abuse due largely to their vulnerable position

While the Mexican state has long devoted substantial public resources to the development of the tourism industry, it is only relatively recently that the political discourse coming from México City (and the state capitals) has begun to focus and promote the idea of sustainable tourism. However, the majority of state initiatives have had the tendency to focus on sustainability as a tool to make the Mexican tourism industry more competitive, rather than as an opportunity to

engage more responsibly with vulnerable communities and the environment. This being said modest progress has been made and there now at least exist a generalized awareness at a national level regarding the importance of issues pertaining to cultural and environmental sustainability.

1.1 - The Yucatán

The geographical area known as the Yucatán peninsula is comprised by the Mexican states of Yucatán, Campeche and Quintana Roo along with north-eastern regions of Tabasco and Chiapas. Northern portions of Belize and Guatemala are also often included in geographic surveys of the region; furthermore, the idea that they too conform part of the Yucatán is often propped up by tourism literature, although locals often resent this type of claim. The state of Yucatán (officially: Estado Libre y Soberano de Yucatán) is one of the 31 states of the Mexican republic, which along with the Distrito Federal comprise the 32 federal entities of México. The state of Yucatán has a population of 2,015,977 which makes it the nation's 21st most populous state. 42.51% of the state's population is concentrated in the municipality of Mérida (830,732 inhabitants) (INEGI 2010).

1.1.1 - Tourism on the Peninsula

With approximately 5,215 hotel rooms, Mérida is the largest tourism center of the state (with Valladolid coming in second at 507). Though sites such as Uxmal and Progreso attract many visitors, most tourists and business travelers choose to spend the night in the capital thus elevating the demand and cost of hotel rooms and other services. With an average of 1.2 million visitors in 2006 (Sectur 2007) Chichen Itza is by far Yucatán's most visited tourist attraction. However, most

tourists to Chichen Itza spend only a few hours at the site as part of regularly scheduled day trips from resort towns in Quintana Roo such as Cancun and Playa del Carmen. International tourism in the state of Yucatán could be described as being primarily of a cultural nature, however many tourists compliment cultural activities such as visiting monasteries or archaeological sites with other types of activities such as shopping and visiting Spas. Cruise-ships coming and going from Miami and the several Caribbean islands regularly dock in the port of Progreso allowing passengers a few hours of beach time on the sandy beaches of the Gulf of México. Unlike the Caribbean beaches of Quintana Roo, the majority of visitors to Yucatán's beaches (the state not the peninsula) hail from nearby communities and neighboring Mexican states; particularly during long weekends, Easter and summer seasons. Other popular types of tourism markets in the Yucatán include eco-tourism which highlights the regions high level of biodiversity (Celestun, Sisal, Rio Lagartos) and adventure tourism which tends to focus on activities such as rappel, spelunking and the exploration of underground sinkholes knows as cenotes.

Although the idea of responsible tourism in the Yucatán has been around for a long time and has taken on monikers such as *sustainable tourism, community based tourism and eco-tourism,* its real world transformative power has been rather limited. There has in recent years been a noticeable tendency amongst large and medium scale tourism developers/operators to make claims regarding their efforts to protect local interests and safeguard traditional ways of life. Though some tourism projects do in fact make real efforts to engage with local communities in meaningful ways, many others promote what could be described as the cultural equivalent *of greenwashing*. These types of development projects often take the shape of token cultural or environmental programs which are then in turn marketed as part of larger tourism products. For instance, Xcaret (the largest of several so called "eco-parks" in the Yucatán) claims on their website

that: "Xcaret carries out two grand events to strengthen the cultural identity of Quintana Roo's communities: The Sacred Mayan Journey and The Death and Life Traditions Festival". An informant who preferred to remain anonymous mentions:

> *I have worked in places such as this [Xcaret] before. They always try to present a very positive image for tourists, but what they are really doing is putting on a type of circus and then claiming that this represents our traditions. To me it is very clear that all this is only done for their own gain and not for the benefit of the community. If they really wanted to help they could donate turkeys or some money to help put on our fiesta del pueblo[1].*

However, In the interest of fairness it is relevant to note that Xcaret has received a fair amount of praise and positive attention for the success of environmental initiatives such as their Macaw breeding program which has led to the reintroduction of specimens to areas where the species has previously gone extinct.

Aside from tourism and the service industry, the principal economic activities in Yucatán relate to textile production, agriculture, fisheries, ranching and poultry (INEGI 2011). Representing only 1.5 of México's total GDP Yucatán is ranked 23 of out 32 with regard to economic performance. In 2011 the state was ranked second lowest in the *National cost of living index*, making it the cheapest state to live in after Oaxaca. Despite its lackluster economy Yucatán typically tops Mexican quality of life indexes due to its low crime rate, health services and

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[1] *Fiesta del pueblo"* refers to local traditional festivities which are celebrated on a yearly basis; typically in honor of the communities' patron saint.

relaxed lifestyle (OECD 2007:13). Despite the complex security situation that plagues much of México, Yucatán has remained relatively untouched by the violence and has a result become somewhat of a haven for many Mexicans looking to escape the precarious situation of their home state. Though this situation has benefited Yucatán (and particularly Mérida) in the sense that these patterns of migration have resulted in a considerable influx of new investments, there is none the less a growing concern amongst many Yucatecos that the current pace of population growth is unsustainable (OECD territorial review 2007:14).

1.1.2 - Isolation, Independence and Complex Relations with the Mexican state

Throughout most of its history the Yucatán has been a particularly isolated region. Although the Yucatán was the first region in México to be explored by Spanish conquistadors, it was also the last to be conquered (Heusinkveld 1967:258). This was likely due to the peninsulas environmental ruggedness, its isolation from important centers and the perception that there was nothing of value to be immediately extracted and shipped off to Spain (namely precious metals). It was not until the middle of the 20th century that the peninsula was finally connected through viable infrastructure with the rest of the country. Even by the 1960s the approximately 900 km trip from Mérida to México City still took an average of two to three days. Due to this relative isolation from the rest of the country, Yucatecos developed a unique culture which often saw more influence from Havana than it did from México City. This sense of otherness is commonly expressed when Yucatecos says things such as "Me voy a México" by which they mean "I am going to México city" (as if the Yucatán was not a part of México).

In 1841 Yucatán seceded from the Mexican union but rejoined it in 1848 after receiving an indemnity and assurances from the federation that in the future the region would enjoy greater political prominence (Heusinkveld 1967:259). Nonetheless in an attempt to suppress future sovereigntist movements the federal government carved up the peninsula into three separate political entities of roughly equal geographic size (Yucatán, Campeche and Quintana Roo). While the Yucatán still maintains much of its cultural uniqueness, it is now completely culturally and economically integrated into the Mexican state. However, with the exception of the tourism industry, the region has typically under performed in areas such as economic development and poverty alleviation.

1.1.3 - The Henequen Boom

During the 19th century the economy of the Yucatán experienced a period of unprecedented growth due to its thriving henequen industry. Also known in Maya as *sosquil* or Sisal (for the port from which it was shipped all over the world), henequen is an agave whose leaves when processed yield a strong natural fiber useful for the production of various products such as rope for the maritime shipping industry. The wealth created by the henequen industry in the 19th century is still visible today in the form of enormous mansions, villas and haciendas which pepper much of the Yucatecan landscape as well as cities such as Valladolid, Izamal and Mérida. Although the development of synthetic fibers such as nylons in the 20th century all but decimated the henequen industry, this crop is currently experiencing somewhat of a revival as its natural fibers have begun to be commoditized in niche markets. Furthermore its pineapple like root has begun to be harvested and fermented to produce an alcoholic beverage similar to those from other agaves such as tequila and mezcal. In recent years some of these distilleries have started to expand and offer tastings for tourists

along with other offerings such as regional cuisine. Though henequen will likely never see its production return to the levels it experienced during the 19th century, the plant remains a powerful and highly identifiable symbol of the Yucatán which figures proximately in folkloric culture and even appears as the centerpiece of the official state code of arms.

1.1.4 - The Caste War

The caste war of Yucatán (1847-1901) was an indigenous revolt against the virtually complete political and economic power held by the region's population of European descent. Though the conflict officially ended with the occupation of the Mayan stronghold of Chan Santa Cruz in 1901 by the Mexican armed forces, raids and small scale skirmishes continued taking place in the region for several decades. Pineda (1992) notes that the involvement in the cast war of indigenous peoples from the area of Santa Elena was likely exacerbated by the frequent abuses of power to which they were regularly submitted. According to Pineda (1992:195) the uprising in Santa Elena which came to be known as the *rebellion of Nohcacab* resulted in a reduction of approximately 50% of the town's population. Since the end of the cast war the Yucatán has not seen any more indigenous insurrections, however the scars of the conflict continue to echo in contemporary times and the indigenous leaders of the revolt such as Jacinto Canek continue to be heralded as heroes in many Maya communities. Scholars such as Bartolomé (1988) argue that this conflict was fundamental to the creation of what we have come to think of as contemporary Maya identity and ethnicity. Gabbert (2000) observes that although the war that pitted indigenous factions against each other, in their isolated refuge area some of these factions became Maya-speaking ethnic communities which integrated peoples of diverse regions and ancestries. This is to suggest that the caste war marks a turning point in the

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way the Maya are conceived, given that before the conflict they were considered a desperate band of indigenous peoples rather than a culture or ethnic group.

> *The continued repression by the Yucatecan troops which attacked their settlements and destroyed their fields was an important factor in the development of an ethnic consciousness among the rebels and their descendants. The common fight against the government provided an important issue for ideological identification for the inhabitants of different villages and the followers of different leaders.* (Gabbert, 2000:13)

1.2 - Land Reform and the Creation of the Ejido

After the Mexican revolution of 1910 which saw the ousting of Porfirio Diaz, the government of president Lázaro Cárdenas signed into law an agrarian reform designed to nationalize and redistribute large tracks of land which previously belonged to large land owners known as hacendados (Hall, 1980). As a result, Mexican campesinos throughout the country gained access to communal lands known as ejidos. Later reforms undertaken by Miguel Alemán in the late forties and early fifties allowed peasants the ability to rent their portions of ejido land to domestic and foreign investors (Mesa 1961: 453). In 1991 President Carlos Salinas de Gortari amended the constitution and made legal the sale of ejido land; thus opening the door for large scale take overs of the best lands in the country by way of corruption, coercion and in some cases even force. These abuses coupled with the precarious situation of many indigenous peoples around the country led to what would be known as the Zapatista uprising of 1994 (Massieu 1992). Though many people living in rural communities such as Santa Elena continue to have access to ejido land, their holdings are typically fairly modest and lacking the modern infrastructure necessary to make them competitive in the open

market. In light of this reality many families practice subsistence agriculture and collect income from a variety of other sources such as remittances from family members abroad, employment at large plantations or in the tourism industry.

1.3 - Santa Elena

The municipality of Santa Elena is one of 106 municipalities in the Mexican state of Yucatán and is located one hour and a half south west of the state capital of Mérida. The entirety of the municipality is located in a region known as the Puuc valley; which archaeological evidence suggests was first inhabited by Maya peoples in 600 B.C. However most surviving pre-hispanic constructions date from the Puuc Classic period (600 - 1000 A.D). (Gunn et al. 1981:87). The Puuc valley is well known by locals and visitors to the Yucatán because of the many important archaeological sites in the region such as Uxmal, Kabah, Labná, Sayil and Chacmultun.

Map 1: Map illustrating the location of Santa Elena relative to well-known locations on the Yucatán peninsula.

Sources dating back to the 16th century suggest the town of Santa Elena was known as Nohcacab to native Mayan peoples. Though not much is known about Nohcacab and its role in the greater social/political life of the Puuc region, due to its close proximity to important Xiu centers (such as Uxmal and Kabah) it is fairly safe to assume that it fell well within the domain of the Xiu lords and was likely ruled over directly by Uxmal or perhaps held some sort of vassal status (Kowalski 1985: 5). In addition to frequently visited archaeological sites in the Puuc valley such as Uxmal and Kabah, the remains of many other ancient centers and settlements lay in close proximity to Santa Elena. While some of these sites (such as Mul-Chic) have been partially excavated and restored by archaeologists, many others remain entirely untouched. Though visiting these sights can present quite a challenge, the allure of slashing ones way through the jungle in search of these "mystical" ruins is irresistible to many tourists looking for an adventure. This being said, tourists are strongly encouraged to take along a local guide, as there are no signs, many snakes and little respite from the heat. Furthermore, Valerie Pickles (the English/Canadian proprietor of a local restaurant and hotel) notes that on a few occasions tourists have gone missing for prolonged periods of time, and that as a result the local authorities (much to their annoyance) have had to go out looking for them.

As of 2011 the population of the municipality of Santa Elena consisted of 3,617 inhabitants with the municipal capital of the same name representing a vast majority of residents (3,252) (INEGI 2005). With a population of 357, San Simón is the second most populous town in the municipality. While the resident population of Santa Elena is quite small, many individuals from various communities (such as Muna and Ticul) commute on a daily basis to work in places such as Uxmal (which does not have an official permanent population but falls within the limits of the municipality). For the sake of simplicity and given

the fact that this investigation deals chiefly with the capital of the municipality, I will refer to the town of Santa Elena simply as Santa Elena.

Many of the buildings in the town's center date from the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. These attractive structures feature adorned facades, thick stone walls and high ceilings which are designed to allow for the rise of hot air (which keeps these types of dwellings relatively cool). Though several families live downtown, this area also contains the highest concentration of businesses in Santa Elena. These include small convenience stores, internet cafes, food stands and a couple restaurants featuring pizza and hamburgers along with traditional staples such as poc-chuc and chochinita pibil. As one ventures out of the downtown area (which does not take more than a couple minutes) homes quickly turn from stately stone structures to traditional Mayan huts and very modern concrete houses; often build with incomes earned by workers abroad. These fairly large modern homes are often painted in vibrant colors, have large gates, Corinthian style cement pillars and look for the most part like they have not been entirely completed. Traditional Maya homes in Santa Elena (as everywhere in Yucatán) are built using materials such as soil, clay and the fibers from indigenous plants; all of which can be easily found and collected virtually anywhere in the Yucatán. These structures are typically oval in shape with a front facing door and no windows, interior separations or walls. Though unusual for those not accustomed to living in such a dwelling, the interior of this type of construction is surprisingly comfortable and cool (which is of course an important consideration in the Yucatán). Cooking and bathroom facilities are located outside of the main house. Because it is common for large extended families to live together, several of these types of homes are often found grouped together in large compounds which are fenced off by fairly low stone walls. The grounds of these types of compounds are more often than not used to grow fruits, vegetables and spices. Most households also raise animals such as pigs, turkeys, chickens and rabbits. With the exception of a few

modern appliances and later innovations such as hammocks, traditional homes in Santa Elena closely resemble structures depicted in ancient Maya art and are consistent with descriptions made by sources such as of Diego de Landa (which date to the 16th century). Towards the outskirts of town (only 10 to 15 minutes by foot from the center) are a handful of hotels and eco-lodges which also double as restaurants. Though many tourists in Santa Elena only remain briefly in the community for a quick meal on their to or from one of the archaeological sites on the *Puuc route,* a small but growing local tourism industry has developed over the past several years. While most of these tourists hail from abroad, one often notices Mexican tourists from places such as México City as well as local and expatriate day trippers from Mérida. The main attractions in Santa Elena include the opportunity to observe wildlife, visit the local church and adjacent museum as well as explore many off the beaten path archaeological sites in the area.

With the rise to power of *Emperor Maximilian I of México* (1865), Santa Elena saw the arrival of approximately 300 European colonists who settled in the town and founded a farming colony which they named "Villa Carlota" (in honor of the Emperor's wife). With the arrival of the colonists and the resources which the new emperor had granted them, Santa Elena experienced an economic boom which saw increases in agricultural production and considerably improved the local infrastructure. When in 1869 Emperor Maximilian was ousted and *Villa Carlota* collapsed, many of the colonists decided to remain in the town and raised families whose descendants still live in Santa Elena and several other surrounding communities (Durán-Merk 2008). While this investigation will not deal directly with the histories and identities of this particular segment of Santa Elena´s population, their very presence in the town helps to illustrate the many sets of complex identities which can be found in the town.

Though there is no reliable information regarding the specifics of the ethnic composition of the municipality as a whole, Santa Elena is a predominantly Maya and Mestizo (mix of indigenous and European) and is largely bilingual (Maya / Spanish). In many ways Santa Elena is the quintessential Yucatecan town. Streets are divided along rectangular grids which lead to the main plaza which houses the *palacio municipal* (seat of local government) and the 16t[th] century Franciscan church of *San Mateo*, which is also Santa Elena's main architectural feature. Though the church dates to the 16t[th] century much of the current facade and structure dates to 1779 (Huchim et al. 2009). The church sits atop an elevated natural formation (which formerly housed pre-hispanic structures) that renders it visible from all over town. The interior of the church is spacious and is made up of one main naive which starts at the western entrance and includes the area up to the crossing or the chancel which is sometimes flanked by side aisles. There are three entrances with the main one facing the west and two more on the lateral sides. The church also features an old stone baptismal font which is still in use and a wooden 18th century folk-art altar which features a crucifix and images of archangels on either side (mexicanarchitecture.org). Though San Mateo is relatively austere when compared to other colonial churches in the Yucatán, its steps and surrounding plaza serve as an important meeting place for locals; as well as well as the prime location for most community festivals, processions and celebrations. During the 18th and 19th century the grounds of the church and its atrium were used as a cemetery. It was also common during this period for families to exhume the remains of relatives from their resting places and temporarily move them on to altars in the interior of the church (Weiss-Krejci, 2004). Regarding this practice in late 19th century Santa Elena, Stephens (2010) notes that upon entering the enclosure he found a pile of skulls and bones which the locals had dug up and placed in the interior in a "grim and ghastly" fashion (Stephens, 2010:259). Interestingly, a similar practice still survives to this day in the town of Pomuch in eastern Campeche where duing the *Hanal Pixan* (Maya

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day of the dead celebration) families will dig up the bones of their relatives to place them upon altars for up to three days. Though bizarre to outsiders, having witnessed this ritual it was obvious that it holds important meaning to much of the local population as they believe it to provide an opportunity to commune with their deceased loved ones.

During maintenance work on the floors, twelve wooden coffins were discovered. The remarkable state of preservation of the bodies led many to regard them as having been mummified, however Huchim et al (2009) notes that this is not truly the case as their internal organs remained inside the bodies in an extremely decayed state. However many researchers and the local population continued to refer to the corpses as "Las Momias de Santa Elena". The bodies were soon sent to Mérida for analysis, however due to a lack of reliable records form the 19th century, the identities of the "mummies" was never conclusively determined. Four of the bodies are currently on display at the local museum which is located to the side of the church. According to employees at the museum, the bodies correspond to female individuals between the ages of 3 and 6. They are placed with their arms across their chests and still possess much of their teeth, hair and skin. While this makes for a fairly grizzly sight, Locals in Santa Elena are very proud of the museum and the mummies. When first meeting someone around town one of the first questions locals are bound to ask is "have you gone to see the mummies yet?"

In addition to its geographical meaning, the term Puuc is commonly used to refer to a pre-Columbian esthetic tradition emblematic of the region. More specifically, the term Puuc is used by anthropologists and archaeologist to describe a wide array of cultural productions such ceramics, jewelry and mural painting. However the term is used most commonly with reference to the architectural style

of the same name. The Puuc architectural style is closely associated with its use of carefully cut veneer stones, opulent façades, stone mosaics and its ever present depictions of the Maya rain god Chaac. Though Puuc architecture is certainly dominant at sites within the Puuc valley, its influence is easily observable throughout archaeological sites in the northern Yucatán, the Rio Bec region and beyond. In contemporary times Puuc architecture and esthetics have taken on an important role in molding contemporary views of what it means to be Maya in the Yucatán. This is evidenced by the heavy use of Puuc stylistic elements in the construction of civic and public structures throughout the Yucatán in the 20th century. Highly impactful elements of Puuc esthetics such as *Chaac masks* have also made their way into the architecture and decor of many hotels and restaurants. However, it is interesting to note that locally owned tourism business often tend towards complementing said representations with depictions of contemporary Yucatec life.

Photo 2: Mural in the interior of local restaurant in Santa Elena depicting Pre-hispanic and contemporary elements of Maya culture.

1.4 - The Maya

Close your eyes for five seconds and imagine "the Maya". Chances are that the images your mind conjured where of lush rain forests, massive pyramidal structures and an exotic yet warlike people. Despite popular imagination, the first use of the word Maya (as referring to the civilization which flourished in South Eastern México and Central America) occurred in the middle of the 19th century, and only in the 1880s was it extended to the family of related languages and its modern speakers (Schackt in Magnoni et al. 2007). Furthermore, there is no archaeological evidence to suggest that the term Maya was ever used in antiquity or that Mayan peoples saw themselves as belonging to any sort of greater nation outside of their immediate community or city state. However, over time the use of the term has become widely accepted by academics, popular culture and even *Maya* peoples themselves. The idea of a *Maya world* was reinforced by the establishment of "el Mundo Maya", a tourist route created and promoted by tourism ministries in México, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. While the route has been successful in attracting tourist to the region it also created incentives for local populations to represent themselves as Maya regardless of their ethnicity or own cultural identity. For example Tilley (2005:98) notes that the *Mundo Maya* campaign inserted a peculiar twist into El Salvador's ethnic environment by de facto redefining both Nahua and Lenca ethnic groups as Maya. The reasoning for this was largely pragmatic given that "Maya" sells to tourists in a way that "Nahua" or "Lenca" simply do not.

Sensationalist documentaries, books and movies often suggest that the Maya somehow vanished after the collapse of their civilization, however in reality the global population of Mayan peoples stands somewhere around six million and the Maya language (in its many dialects) continues to be one of the most widely

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spoken indigenous languages on the American continent. The *rediscovery* of Mayan civilization in the 19th century and the subsequent publication of works such as "Incidents of Travel in Yucatán" highlighted the impressiveness of Mayan achievements in fields such as architecture, engineering and the arts; however at the time it was almost unthinkable to suggest that these great feats could have been accomplished by the ancestors of the *lowly*19th century Maya which inhabited the lands of Meso-America. Although Mayan identity is often depicted as homogeneous, it is important to keep in mind that this is not the case. Groups traditionally grouped under the demonym Maya belong to a variety of different ethnic groups, speak a variety of dialects (some of which are unintelligible) and traditionally inhabit a geographical area which spans five countries (México, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize and El Salvador). Popular depictions and ways of imagining the Maya often have little basis in reality as they tend to focus on highly essentialized and diametrical conceptualizations of the Maya as either an exotic bloodthirsty race or as a wise pacifist people existing in communion with nature. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that many symbols commonly associated with traditional/ancient Maya culture are in fact not Maya at all; as is the case with the famous Stone of the Sun (which is Aztec) and the pyramid of Kukulkaan in Chichen Itza (which is Toltec in its architectural design and was constructed during a period of foreign occupation). Castañeda (2004: 3) notes:

> *The Maya are celebrated as an indigenous people demanding the respect of their cultural, political, and universal human rights. Many, like the Anglo-North American pilgrim in search of spiritual growth among archaeological ruins, are quick to pledge and assert solidarity with "the Maya" all the while ignoring the fact that not all Maya are "the Maya" that they imagine.*

1.5 - Maya, Mestizo and other competing identities

Individuals which may be identified as Maya based on their physical appearance, language or cultural beliefs may not consider themselves to be Maya at all. Gabbert (2000) notes that during the 19th century Maya surnames were considered the only reliable indicator of membership in the legal and administrative category "indio". In everyday interaction other features, like dress, language, and labor frequently sufficed to be considered and treated as an Indian. The circle of persons called indio was thus not unequivocally determined.

> *The Spanish-speaking urban elite considered the vast majority of peasants, farm hands and their families Indians. The vecinos in the interior, in contrast, who frequently spoke nothing but Maya, referred to people legally so defined, or people easily identifiable by a Maya patronym, as Indians when trying to claim a higher social status.* (Gabbert, 2000:15).

Though the importance of this system of differentiation is not as important today (at least in a legalistic sense), ascription of identity in the Yucatán continues to be a tricky matter. Commonly used terms such as mayero (Maya speaker), milpero (that works the milpa), indio (ethnically indigenous), mestizo (mix indigenous and European ethnicities) or catrín (that wears non-traditional clothing) are used to confer identity but are in no way rigid or mutually exclusive. Here it is important to note that these alternative identities focus on different aspects or features to ascribe identity; milpero in the case of those who identify themselves on the basis of their labor, mayero in the case of language and Maya or Mestizo in the case of mixed ethnicity. The way an individual may choose to identify him

or herself likely also depends largely on who is asking the question, since the perceived prejudices or expectations of the interrogator are likely to come into play. For instance, in the case of Santa Elena most of the people I have come in contact with have had no problem in referring to themselves as Maya or mestizo, acknowledging perhaps the complexity of their own identities and choosing to settle on a term they feel I would be familiar with.

Much of the complexity behind the term mestizo stems from the fact that either ethnically or culturally all Mexicans are mestizo; which is to say a mixture of European and indigenous blood and/or culture. In the case of the Yucatán this is evidenced linguistically in that even individuals who do not speak Maya use many Yucatec-Maya words in their every day speech. Furthermore the term is often used in different ways since for example the female form of this term *mestiza* can apply to any woman who wears a traditional terno or huipil regardless of her ethnic background. Though the term mestizo differentiates between individuals typically thought of as ethnically Maya and those of a mixed background, the term is also commonly used to signify an identity which could be described as *contemporary Maya*. This is evidenced by the fluidity with which individuals often shift between what outsiders may consider traditional Maya identities and more contemporary European influenced expressions. This is to say that the mestizo identity is closely associated with an ethos of traditionalism, which although differentiable from traditional Maya identity is closely akin to it. The strength and usefulness of the Mestizo identity likely resides in the fact that it allows individuals to maintain a connection with traditional pre-hispanic identities, while simultaneously making room for broader Yucateco, Mexican and Latin American identities. Though trying to decipher the complex matrix of identities and terminologies at work in Meso-American communities such as Santa Elena would provide more than enough material for its own research

project, for the purposes of this investigation we will attempt to limit ourselves to the use of the terms Maya and Mestizo when referring to local ethnicity.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.0 - Commodification and the heritage product

Commodification is the transformation process of goods and services, as well as ideas or other entities which normally may not be considered goods in to a commodity or product (Polanyi 2001:40). In the context of tourism, the initial assumption is that heritage is an industry in that it is modern, deliberate, organized and controlled with the aim of producing a product which can be marketed and sold (Ashworth: 1994). In the case of the heritage tourism industry, it is heritage itself which is the product. Here it is important to be clear about what is meant by heritage and how this term differs from history and culture. Ashworth (1994:16) notes: *History is the remembered record of the past: heritage is a contemporary commodity purposefully created to satisfy contemporary needs.* Thus, it is through the process of commodification that history becomes heritage. The same process is applicable to culture, as it is not culture itself which is the product, but rather a very specific interpretation of it. Heritage then (in this context) is not a sum of historical events, cultural beliefs or practices (as it is commonly understood) but rather a construct designed through selection to achieve specific political, social or economic goals. The key term here is selection, as it is through selection that certain historical or cultural resources are constituted into heritage discourses or are alternatively discarded. For instance, in the case of Wales, Pitchford (2008) observes that specific chapters of the country's history are selected (or ignored) to create a flattering image of Welsh heritage which is consistent with contemporary values and goals. Given that heritage is understood to be a construct built to serve a purpose there can exist multiple heritages crafted to suit different needs and markets. Furthermore, the validity of heritage discourses are situational rather than

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constant given that their interpretations are bound to change over time depending on the situation of the observer (Graham 2008). Thus it is meaning that gives value to heritage and explains why certain artifacts traditions and memories have been selected while others are ignored. Given the competition of multiple heritage discourses conflicts regarding the ways in which heritage ought to be presented are bound to arise. This is in part due to the fact that different social actors represent different interests and have different agendas. For example: in the case of Mérida (the capital of Yucatán) there exists a long tradition of celebration and simultaneous demonization of the conquistadors who colonized the region in the 16th century. While many individuals (particularly those who identify as indigenous) protest the glorification of these Spanish conquerors and the construction of monuments that bare their images, others (particularly the wealthier classes) celebrate the lives of these individuals who they see as having brought European "civilization" and religion to a "barbarous" land.
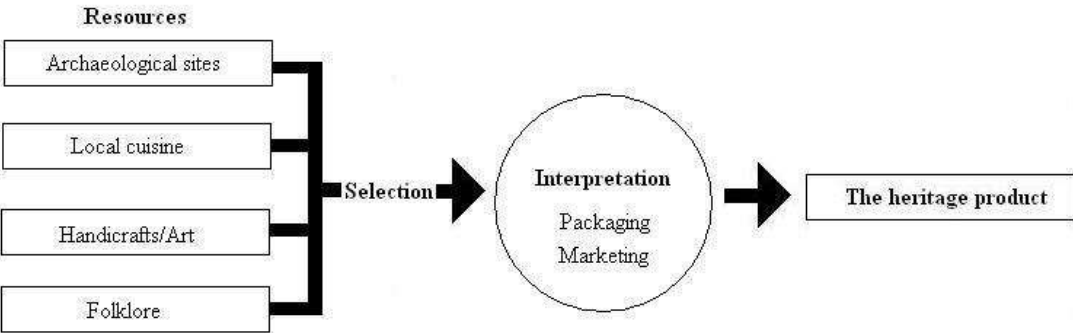

Fig.1: *Touristic commodification process of local resources in to heritage products.*

2.1 - The concept of Authenticity

Authenticity is often held as an idea, something to be valued and sought by individuals and entire societies as part of the process of becoming (Vannini et. al 2009). The term authenticity is often used in a myriad of different ways which commonly stem from pop-psychology, self-help books and new age pamphlets. This fragmentation of the authenticity construct is reflected in the many various competing and sometimes contradictory ways the concept is treated. (Kolar et. al 2009). While providing a complete description of the many ideas surrounding questions of authenticity fall outside the scope of the current investigation; the use of the term typically falls into four principal categories.

2.1.1 - Object Authenticity

Object authenticity communicates a sense of realness or genuineness of artifacts, customs, places or performances. However, the ascription of genuineness requires an objective measure against which object authenticity be compared. For example, one may object to the inauthenticity of a Mayan dance performance only if one already possesses knowledge of the so called *authentic form* of said dance (Wang, 199: 152). While *authentic forms* are typically regarded as such for their faithfulness to cultural esthetics or practices, a degree of deviation is often tolerated and attributed to artistic reinterpretation. The authenticity of objects is also often associated to their production and representation. This is to say that it is difficult to suggest that an object is an authentic cultural production when it is purposefully misrepresented as something it is not.

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2.1.2 - Existential Authenticity

Existential authenticity can be described as a human attribute or way of being which signifies being true to oneself or essential nature; as suggested by the famous Platonic aphorism γνῶθι σεαυτόν (know thyself). Steiner et al. (2006:303) suggests that existential authenticity "is deeper than being oneself behaviorally or psychologically". To be authentic transcends day-to-day behavior or activity; thus negating the concept of an authentic self. Steiner et. al (2006) argues that the concept of existential authenticity holds considerable promise as a conceptual framework for exploring the idea of what it means for tourists and hosts to be authentic. However, because this interpretation authenticity is experienced through action rather than as a mode of being, it becomes impossible to ascribe authenticity or inauthenticity to any person. Thus, at their most extreme tourists or hosts may simply prefer being authentic or inauthentic most of the time. Reisigner et. al (2005) maintains that it is apparent that existential authenticity is not just a wider take on the authenticity of objects or customs but another concept altogether. The nature of this distinction between object and existential authenticity is important indeed, given that confusing these two basic categories and applying the scope to which they each refer interchangeably is likely to cause much confusion.

2.1.3 - Cultural Authenticity

The term *cultural authenticity* is typically used to relate ideas regarding the perceived state of health or decay of a particular society. Herbert Marcuse suggested that something resembling authenticity can be achieved at the level of society as a whole through the harnessing of technology into an instrument for realizing the highest possibilities of human beings. However, he also noted that

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this social/cultural authenticity could not be achieved through the application of capitalism (Marcuse in Feenberg 2005). North American and European cultures are most commonly regarded as inauthentic on the grounds that their predominant cultural norms are seen as being forced upon individuals by way of coercion or advertising. Given this interpretation the authenticity of a culture depends (at least in part) on the ability which its members possess to articulate their own individuality. The use of the term cultural authenticity (more often than not) refers to a particular expression or manifestation of a specific culture, not the culture itself. Similarly, the term cultural authenticity may also be used to describe the way or mode in which a particular culture is presented to others. From observations collected while conducting fieldwork in rural South Africa, Mamadi (2004: 86) observes that:

> "Host communities represent their lives as imagined by tourists and do no represent their daily lives as they live them. Perhaps people's ordinary lives are not what tourists like to see, but the imagined past is no longer prevalent in the contemporary era. The representation of imagined lives is further perpetuated by the imagined presumptions tourists hold about host communities' lifestyles".

Bougot (2011) suggest that preoccupations with the cultural costs of tourism are chiefly the concern of tourists and researchers who apply western defined criteria of authenticity to the staging of cultural performances. Given this interpretation, the preoccupation of westerners to find authenticity in the other likely has its roots in a quest undertaken by tourists concerned with the shallowness and inauthenticity of their own lives (Steiner 2005:305). Put another way, the emphasis on the otherness and exoticism as sought by tourists in "primitive societies" is grounded in the belief that the lack of authenticity in western

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societies can somehow be found elsewhere though encounters with "unblemished and authentic cultures".

2.1.4 - Constructive Authenticity

Constructive authenticity refers to the meanings projected on to objects or practices by tourist or tourism producers in terms of their preferences and needs (Wang, 1999:352) This conception of authenticity is built on the understanding that if heritage is consumer defined, then so is authenticity (Ashworth 1994:18). This approach suggests that in the context of tourism, authenticity is best understood as ascribed rather than inherent. This does not mean that the authenticity derived from touristic encounters ought to be regarded as "fake" or less meaningful since host communities and tourists are not passive recipients but rather active participants in the heritage process of creating meaning (Merriam in Ashworth 1994: 21). In this sense, if tourists emphatically experience the toured objects as authentic, then, their viewpoints are real in their own right, no matter whether experts may propose an opposite view from an objective perspective (Cohen 1988). However, given the multiplicity of possible interpretations incompatibilities amongst different narratives and systems of meanings are bound to arise and can potentially become a source of conflict.

2.2 - Criticisms of Tourism and Touristic Commodification

The suspicion that something is lost when culture is commoditized has long been a staple of anthropological research. Though criticisms of tourism often center on the notion that commodification is damaging to host communities (and particularly those considered "traditional"). Greenwood (1977) notes that culture is altered and often destroyed when it is commoditized as a tourist attraction. According to Greenwood (1977: 131) culture as described by American anthropologist Clifford Geertz "emphasizes the authenticity and the moral tone it imparts to life experiences, and furthermore calls attention to the fundamental importance of systems of meaning in human life". Greenwood claims that by implication, "anything that falsifies disorganizes, or challenges the participant's belief in the authenticity of their culture threatens it with collapse" (Greenwood 1977:131). With regard to his study of local festivals in the Basque region of Spain, Greenwood (1989) criticizes the commodification of this "authentic, inward-looking, meaningful practice" into a public spectacle for outsiders on the grounds that the touristification of these festivities rendered them meaningless. Greenwood notes: "By transforming a local cultural practice into a development resource, the Ministry of Tourism robbed local participants of the meanings they had used to organize their lives. The ritual has become a performance for money, the meaning is gone" (Greenwood, 1989:179).

Though Greenwood's thesis that cultural commodification is capable of completely destroying a culture may be rather extreme, it serves to illustrate the concerns many researchers, tourists and host communities may feel. At the root of Greenwood's claims regarding the dangers of cultural commodification lay essentialist assumptions regarding the fragility of culture and the concept of authenticity. While this is not to deny that commodification can potentially

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impoverish culture, the characterization of change as an intrinsically destructive force posits a view regarding the fragility of culture which is likely more imagined than based on reality. Though most contemporary researchers discard the notion that traditional cultures are inherently incapable of adapting to outside forces, the question becomes not whether culture can sustain change, but rather how much change can be sustained.

Ashworth notes that the choice to stress the unique or the generic qualities of a product is fundamental to all marketing and that in the case of tourism generalization is almost always favored over complexity (1994: 25). Tourism, (and particularly mass-tourism) generally acknowledges the need for simplistic heritage discourses due to the fact that tourists are unable to relate to complex ideas and heritage narratives within short amounts of time. This suggests that the commodification of culture for consumption by tourists tends to lead to cultural essentialization and an impoverishment of traditional life. This is to say, that catering to the needs of tourists promotes a monolithic cultural narrative which undermines alternative expressions of authenticity. In the case of the Yucatán, essentialized conceptions of the Maya are reinforced by the tourism industry. This is done by stressing the connection between ancient and contemporary forms of Maya culture, while deemphasizing the discontinuities which exists between pre-hispanic and contemporary Maya people (Castañeda, 2009). Furthermore, this sense of constructed continuity utilizes essentialized and exoticized images of the historical and contemporary Maya to draw explicit parallels which fulfill tourist expectations of what the Maya are "supposed to be". Graburn notes, if stereotypes that are perpetuated by cultural outsiders are not corrected or clarified by cultural insiders, there is a danger that members of the local group "may come to believe the same things about themselves or their past as the outside world does" (Graburn, 1979:19). In its extreme form, Shepherd notes that:

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This argument describes a world in which cultures have been replaced by a single monoculture, driven by a process of 'McDonaldization' and 'Disneyfication', one that transforms everything into a theme park and makes authentic travel experiences impossible. (2002:4)

Many of the criticisms directed at tourism and cultural commodification can be described as stemming from an apparent power differential between tourists on one hand and local populations on the other. Furthermore, tourism has often been compared to accounts of imperialism and colonialism. In "Discipline and Punish" Foucault identities *the gaze* as a mechanism to illustrate how relational dynamics inform and reinforce power structures. The gaze is first characterized as a sort of near omniscient overseeing which is carried out by institutions on their subjects; for example the constant surveillance and scrutiny of inmates in the prison system. In the case of the prison described by Foucault, this power is directed at improving discipline by way of engineering prisons which make it possible to observe large populations of inmates while simultaneously making it impossible for said inmates to know if they are in fact being observed. The principal assumption here is that the gaze is an aspect of power which underscores the authority of the party directing its gaze towards the scrutinized subject. Similarly, the feminist theorist Laura Mulvey (1975) argues that the male gaze is a dimension of power which creates an objectifying/unequal relationship between the gazer (the man) and the object of the gaze (the woman). Urry. (1999) suggests that this concept of the gaze and its power of objectification is directly relatable to encounters and exchanges between tourists and local populations. In this interpretation local culture and customs become not only commoditized but objectified through the gaze of the observer/gawker.

2.3 - Approaching Maya Identity

Magnoni et al. (2007) observes that in contemporary Yucatec-Maya communities there exist two traditional and clearly identifiable discursive approaches regarding Maya identity. Though these *genealogical and relational approaches* represent discourses which could be described as in competition, they are in fact best understood when interpreted as parallel narratives. This is to say that in a local Yucatecan context neither of these approaches could be described as being entirely dominant, since the presence of the other is always expressed to a greater or lesser degree.

2.3.1 - The Genealogical Approach

Firstly, the *genealogical approach* is based on the belief that Mayan identity is somehow encoded "en la sangre" (in blood) and transmitted from generation to generation. It is important to note that this genealogical transfer is not limited to genetic features, but also includes the codification of language, memory and a distinct cosmology. The appeal of the *genealogical approach* is likely rooted in its relative simplicity as a fixed identity. The long held pre-hispanic belief that there is something in the substance itself of a particular people which communicates their shared essence is likely derived from ancient Meso-american myth and cosmology. 15th century translations of the Popol Vuh (a corpus of mytho-historical narratives) provide a sequence of four efforts at the creation of human beings. According to the text, the gods made three failed attempts in fashioning humans; first as animals, then from wet clay and finally wood. Upon judging their creations to be failures (and then destroying them, except for the animals), the gods created the first of the current generation of Maya from maize (corn). Since the Popol Vuh speaks about mankind's creation in the terms of *our*

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people, it is unclear if the text is intended to suggest that all men are created from maize or just the Maya. Scholars such as Steinberg (1999) suggests that the different colors of maize known to the Maya and described in the Popol Vuh (yellow, white, red and black) represent the different temperatures at which they were created and in turn the skin color of members of different races. Given the disenfranchisement of many Maya in Mexican society, the fact that they may express their identity in terms of otherness should hardly be surprising. The narrative of cultural continuity essential to the genealogical approach is also manifest in the belief that there exists a persisting Maya esthetic which has survived (essentially intact) throughout the centuries. Castañeda (2009:134) observes that contrary to the claims of many scholars (and the claims of travel brochures), there exists no evidence to suggest the permanence of a traditional Maya esthetic after the indigenous conversion to Christianity in the sixteenth century. Though it is surprising to many that a tradition with such a long history could essentially be extinguished, this situation is understandable when one considers the horrors which accompanied the Maya "conversion" under Spanish colonialism. Furthermore, Castañeda (2009:133) notes that contemporary Maya art and handicrafts did not develop directly out of any previous living tradition and thus have no direct social or historical connection to any ancient tradition of Maya art. This is clearly not to say that there exists no relation between contemporary art/craft production and the esthetic tradition of the ancient Maya. Though the genealogical approach may be useful in relating stories and ideas regarding the rightful place of the Maya within a greater cosmological context, the usefulness of this narrative within increasingly heterogeneous societies may be limited due to its failure to account for the diverse contemporary expressions of "Mayaness" which can be found throughout Meso-America. In addition to its use in local contexts, the genealogical approach can also be seen to exert a great degree of influence in the creation and development of touristic discourses. This is likely due to the fact that narratives which stress cultural continuity and relative

simplicity are easier to market, sell and present to tourists with limited attention spans, previous knowledge and time (Ashworth, 1994:25).

Photo 3: Selections from murals by Fernando Castro Pacheco (1971-1979) depicting 1) the burning of Maya texts and Idols by Spanish bishop Diego de Landa, 2) The torture and execution of indigenous leader Jacinto Canek, 3) The Maya creation myth as described in the Popol Vuh.

The Relational Approach

The relational approach to Mayan identity considers cultural knowledge and bodily substance as undergoing continuous change in their relation to the context of the land, other human beings and animals (Hutson, 2010). The relational approach allows for a dynamic and flexible understanding of Maya identity capable of incorporating new elements as well as re-introducing ancient traditions

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and knowledge of the past. This is to say that the relational approach characterizes identity as a negotiation rather than a static cultural fixture articulated in the phrase "U ch'i'ibal maaya kaaje' kuxa'anichilo'on" meaning "Maya culture lives in us" (Worley 2010). Proponents of the genealogical approach often suggest that the commoditization of cultural products results in the corruption of traditional culture or in more extreme cases the creation of a culture distinct from the original. This is to say that introducing tourism may have as a consequence the creation of a culture which is in a sense less authentic (Boorstin, 1964: 77-117). Others such as Steiner et al. (2006) suggest that this search for authenticity is misguided and that the dynamic nature of culture is capable of internalizing such changes. Hervik (2001) notes that people in the village of Oxkutzcab (approximately 15 km south west from Santa Elena) spend quite a bit of time reflecting on cultural changes and practices but do so in a way which would be disconcerting to adherents of grand cultural narratives. According to Hervik (2001:352) talk about change is typically cast in terms of "cultural modernization of lifestyle" which is understood to provide benefits and opportunities rather than being conceived as rejections of Mayaness. Thus, while the genealogical approach presents a grand unified narrative regarding Mayan identity, the relational approach is better understood as a negotiation between the traditional and the modern. As Gaonkar (2001:15) points out, "Discourse on modernity is a shifting, hybrid configuration consisting of different, often conflicting, theories, norms, historical experiences, utopian fantasies, and ideological commitments, Each version casts a different light on modernity". This being said, while the relational approach provides a useful model for how Maya identity can be negotiated it does not say much about what Maya identity is in of itself.

While the relational approach constructs a grand narrative which highlights the importance of classical Maya language, history, esthetics and cosmology; the role

of the relational approach is then to relate this vision to lives of contemporary Maya with the context of their everyday experience and values. Therefore, the consideration of Maya identity without input for the relational approach reduces contemporary Maya peoples to a caricature of their past, while the relational approach taken in absolute isolation presents an image which does not fully acknowledge discourses regarding the importance of antiquity.

Tourism, Culture and Valorization

As governments around the world continue to stress the importance of tourism as a vehicle for greater economic and human development, there is unease amongst many would be travelers and host communities who suspect that there is perhaps something lost when culture is commoditized. From the perspective of the tourist there often exists a perception that their very presence in "an exotic faraway land" causes harm by detracting from the authenticity of host communities. Members of communities where local culture is commoditized for economic gain may feel uneasy with the transaction as they see it as potentially compromising their cultural identity. While this narrative of the high cultural costs inherent in tourism may offer some important insights, its characterization of host communities as passive victims of the forces of globalization underestimates the resourcefulness and creativity which many communities and individuals exhibit in the face of touristic expansion into their sphere.

Growing numbers of publications, television specials and other forms of media have in recent decade's fuelled international interest in Mayan culture; which has in turn contributed to the growth of cultural tourism in the Yucatán. Because of the pervasiveness of tourism and international media in the Yucatán local identities are heavily influenced by external interpretations of local culture.

Gonzales (2008) suggests that the ubiquitous nature of transnational media results in an experienced simultaneity by which cultural attitudes and ideas are spread around the globe in a roughly uniform fashion. Furthermore, new distribution methods allow for those at the margins to experience and respond to cultural products in ways which were previously not possible.

Though it may be tempting to discredit non-local discourses regarding Maya heritage, (and many rightfully are) some of these non-local sources, particularly those stemming from archeology and the arts may provide individuals with new tools with which to approach their own identity. Given this interpretation, engagement with the tourism industry may provide individuals with platforms from which to interpret their identities in ways which were previously unavailable With reference to Maori tourism management strategies McIntosh et. all (2002) points out that cultural attractions seek to fulfill a wide array of social and cultural objectives which are not limited to economic development. Furthermore, by presenting and preserving culture for the benefit of tourists, these cultural traditions are in fact preserved for all.

In his study of Mayan communities near the banks of the Mopan river in Belize, Medina (2003) identifies a link between tourism and the adoption of non-traditional sources to inform identity. With reference to Succotz, a small town across the river from Xunantunich, Medina (2003:358) observed that although the majority of villagers had abandoned their indigenous identity, they had responded to tourists demand for essentialized forms of Maya culture by utilizing new channels such as books and magazines to access traditions they could no longer access through the old ways. Some local artisans used knowledge derived from examining archaeological publications to come up with explanations for certain archaic Mayan words and ascribe significance to images or iconographic representations which were then attached to the backs of the crafts they sold to tourists(2003:362). Thus, by consulting publications of archaeologists and

epigraphers who studied the ancient Maya, locals of Succotz developed expertise in the cultural traditions of their ancestors, even though initially this had not been their motivation. Medina (2003:364) argues that through study, interpretation and search for meaning, artisans in Succotz acquired the kind of knowledge about Maya cosmological principles that the *curandero (traditional healer)* had activated in rituals of healing or thanksgiving. However, some would argue that this approach towards Maya identity is insufficient to be regarded as authentic, as "real" traditions are those that have been kept alive through the millennia, not those which are lost and then retrieved through outside materials. On the other hand villagers who developed these expertise *remained largely ambivalent about whether or not their unconventional acquisition of this knowledge provided sufficient basis for re-claiming Maya identities* (Medina, 2003:1). One member of the organization who self-identified as Maya described the art of traditional ceramic production as an innate but latent manifestation of a Maya identity, "something I had inside me." (Medina, 2003:366)

While ultimately Medina leaves the question of Succotzeño identity and authenticity open, her observations regarding the ways in which locals came to internalize traditional knowledge through their engagement with the tourism industry challenges many long standing ideas regarding the inherent cultural corrosiveness of touristic commoditization. While this is not to suggest that the effects of phenomena such as cultural essentialization ought not to be of concern, the idea that under some circumstances tourism may provide incentives which facilitate cultural revalorization provides us with a useful framework to approach similar case studies.

2.5 - Emerging Authenticity

Debates centered on the question of cultural commodification in tourism are often cast as a conflict between the incompatibilities of traditional cultures with the influences of modernity. Sofield (2003) argues that dependency theory as articulated by Marxism suggests that problems stemming from the tradition vs. modernity debate are in fact the result of a false dichotomy. In this interpretation what we would call *traditional* is not only compatible with *modernity* but is in fact *modern* since the use of the term traditionalism is in fact the result of a modernist world view. With reference to his research in Bali, McKean (1977) notes that the adaptations made by the Balinese to manage the impact of tourism on their traditional culture was simultaneously modern and traditional in its ability to legitimize aesthetic creations while simultaneously receiving economic benefits and the admiration of tourists. "It is this evolution which illuminates the peculiar characteristics of classic tradition and modernity which combine to strengthen Balinese cultural productivity and self-identity" (1977:104). McKean hints at a model through which tourism may serve the interest of traditional life while simultaneously being a source of economic income as well as pride. Although the case cited by McKean certainly presents an interesting example of cultural dynamism and adaptation, it is important to keep in mind that the local context present in the communities described may not adequately translate across cultural barriers. This is to say that it is likely that elements already existent in the culture of Bali contributed to its ability to adapt.

In tourism literature the term emergent authenticity is often used to denote the process through which products and practices (even those explicitly created for the sake of commercialization) may over time .come to be regarded as authentic cultural manifestations (Cohen, 1988). Harrison (2001: 29) notes that even in

cases of obviously commercialized or staged cultural performances, an authentic experience for both participants and observers is possible when we consider that authenticity is best understood as an emerging property rather than an objective quality intrinsic in practices, performances or artifacts.   Though this approach shares many similarities with the concept of constructed authenticity, emerging authenticity places its focus on host communities rather than tourists. The concept of emerging authenticity and the relational approach share similar non-essentialist interpretations of culture, identity and the ways in which these concepts relate to authenticity. However, emerging authenticity could be described as building upon the relational approach in that in addition to recognizing a heterogeneity of discourses and meanings, it provides a model thorough which these meaning can be validated and recognized as authentic. Understood through the lens of emerging authenticity, tourism driven cultural commoditization may in fact offer an opportunity for otherwise inaccessible cultural knowledge to come to the forefront of people's awareness. Because within the context of tourism heritage becomes something which can be monetized, cultural knowledge becomes important for a new reason. However, this is not to say that when cultural practices are commoditized they necessarily lose their previous significance, but rather that by allowing individuals to earn a living, cultural knowledge is in some cases capable of empowering individuals and communities.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 - Methodological Overview

In general terms the study of tourism has in the past focused on business analysis on one hand and growing concerns regarding sustainability on the other. However, Tribe (2005) notes that due to its multiple meanings and the interdisciplinary nature of much of contemporary research, the field is not bound by any one strict set of paradigms. Thus, more than a discipline in of itself, tourism is typically treated as a field of study informed by a variety of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, human geography and economics. As a result, despite the common use of the term "tourism studies", there is no one established approach to tourism developed with its own unique blend of theory and method. This is to say that the consensus seems to be that tourism cannot be treated in isolation, but is rather best understood as "nestling within wider domains" (Dann, Cohen 1991: 157). Thus, instead of studying tourism itself scholars engage in the study of the sociology, anthropology or economics of tourism; which in turn inform a broader understanding of phenomena, but which none the less lacks a solid framework of its own. Picking up on this fact and perhaps feeling a degree of discomfort at the idea of academically engaging in a field with such loose boundaries, scholars such as Pansiri (2005) often note that given the move towards multidisciplinarity it is imperative that tourism research be approached through a paradigm that enhances the credibility of the methods adopted. However, here again we run in to the problem of how to conceive of a paradigm capable of accommodating and doing justice to such a plethora of existing methods and approaches. In fact the truth may be that the wide scope of research tentatively grouped under the title "tourism studies" is likely to diverse to be unified in any truly meaningful way, as is evidenced by the difficulty of even arriving at a widely accepted definition regarding what tourism even is .

The methodology employed in this investigation could be described as mix of narrative/discourse analysis, visual anthropology and traditional ethnography. Because this investigation is concerned with questions of identity and the internalization of knowledge, a qualitative approach with a focus on thick descriptions is most suitable. The idea to focus on one specific informant as my primary source of information was inspired by Karen Syse's (2001) investigation into the ethical aspects of investigating a forester's perception of his landscape. Although there are many differences between the investigation undertaken by Karen Syse and the project which I here present, they are similar in that they both intend to identify underlying discourses contained within narratives which deal with questions of labor, identity and love of the land. My sessions with my primary informant (Abel Gutiérrez, 38) took the form of informal recorded open ended interviews during which we would walk around town, into the jungle and off to nearby archaeological sites. It was my intention to attempt to guide our conversations around his experiences working in the tourism industry and how (if at all) he believes traditional identities in the town have been affected by tourism. I also participated in a series of interpretative tours lead by Abel Gutiérrez, with the purpose of gaining insight into what he considered important people know about Santa Elena and the surrounding area. Though I ultimately decided to compliment this method by conducting additional interviews with a number of other informants, I found Syse's approach extremely helpful in that it seemed to help put my informants at ease and willing to enter into a much more frank discussion than what would have been otherwise possible. These interviews, though considerably shorter than my sessions with Abel Gutiérrez (which were often upwards of three or four hours) were carried out in much the same way. The selection of secondary informants was informed largely by the need to address certain aspects of touristic activity in Santa Elena which Abel Gutiérrez

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was not particularly familiar with, such as craft production and cuisine. Additionally I felt that it was important to include the insights of women working in tourism, as their overall perspectives are likely different from that of their male counterparts, given for example the different kinds of labor men and women are associated with. Therefore the method for sampling secondary informants was purposive in nature, which is to say that the research question itself largely dictated the selection of informants (Tongco 2007).While purposive sampling is desirable in that it allows for the inclusion of informants with a greater depth of knowledge than would be likely obtainable through a randomized sample, the downside is of course a potential for bias resulting from the subjectivity inherent in the   researcher's selection process (Oliver 2006). However, these effects can be reduced by being aware of the issue and acknowledging the danger of selecting informants based on the likelihood of having them tell you what you expect/want to hear. Fortunately the friendly disposition of people in Santa Elena was such that finding informants eager to speak with me was not particularly difficult and thus the pool for selecting my informants was larger than I would have initially expected. Though all of the interviews were conducted in Spanish for the sake of accessibility I have translated them all to English. Because of the nature of my informants use of language and the fact they often used Yucatec-Mayan idioms in their speech, I have done my best to clarify these meanings and present as accurate a translation as possible. With regard to place names such as relatively unknown archaeological sites there often exist several alternative spellings, thus when finding consensus to be impossible I have used spellings provided by my informants. Furthermore, where I have felt that further clarification to be necessary I have included footnotes. When citing references in Spanish, I have included the phrase "authors own translation" after the citation.

3.1 - Narrative Analysis

Narratives are used by individuals and societies as a way of understanding and ascribing meaning to the world and their experiences. Typically narrative analysis focuses on written or textual sources, but can also analyze films, photographs and other culturally generated materials such as sculpture or handicrafts. The study of narrative materials can range from personal accounts to cultural discourses which may address issues as complex as race relations, political structures or religious practice. Because of this wide scope it is not unusual for researchers to find apparent tensions between collective and personal narratives; for this reason narrative analysis often focuses on the relationship between the individual and society in an attempt to understand how these seemingly contradictory stories may in fact inform one another. Conversely, Smith (2000) notes that this type of analysis may be used to show that groups that are thought to differ in certain respects do not differ in reality. For instance Smith (2000:329) notes that stereotypes regarding perceived differences between genders or ethnic groups may not be supported by the analysis of relevant narratives from each group. To achieve this goal, researchers employ interpretive techniques which strive to go beyond what is being said to arrive at a deeper understanding of the story being told. These interpretative techniques ought to take into account a variety of factors such as the local context of gender relations or present social issues such as insecurity. When dealing with individuals it is important to keep in mind that personal biases and fears often inform the story which is being told. For instance in cases of domestic abuse informants may feel hesitant to discuss the situation in a direct way. Through an analysis of what is being said (and often what is not being said), it is often possible for the interviewer to reach an understanding of the situation. Thus an important part of narrative analysis does could be described as reading in-between the lines. Narrative analysis can be used in a wide array of

fields such as sociology, anthropology or psychology. It is likely due to the interdisciplinary nature of this method that no clearly defined parameters have been established to define a precise model for the method; however the scope of each discipline often informs the formulation of the appropriate parameters. For example when used in the context of psychological research, the parameters selected would be expected to be vastly different from those chosen by an anthropologist conducting a study centered around the meanings behind religious symbols.

At the root of narrative analysis lays the epistemological assumption that subjectivity is communicable through the analysis of language. For this reason particular importance must be placed on ensuring that the language being used for communication between the researcher and informants must be as clear as possible. By clarity I mean not only the literal intelligibility of speech but also the clarity which comes from having a firm understanding of cultural nuances and context. While my upbringing in the Yucatán prepared me for many of the linguistic nuances characteristic of rural Yucatán, some challenges regarding communication remained. The foremost challenge in ensuring clarity of language was due to the wide educational gap between myself and many of my informants and also between my informants themselves. The challenge lay in finding a way to neither over simplify speech to the point my informants may feel insulted, nor to use overly complicated terms and expressions to attempt to getting difficult points across. I first became aware of this issue when listening back to the recordings after the first couple of days of my fieldwork. I quickly came to the realization that a one size fits all approach to oral communication would not be feasible and that I must be cautious in tailoring my use of language to each informant. In a couple instances the issue was additionally compounded by the fact that while most of my informants were completely fluent in Spanish, a couple claimed to be more comfortable speaking Mayan and considered Spanish

to be their second language. While these issues were fortunately not insurmountable, an awareness of the difficulties posed is necessary since it underscores the importance of understanding and preparing for these types of factors.

3.2 - Visual Anthropology

Visual anthropology is a sub-field of social anthropology concerned with the study, analysis and representations of ethnographic sources such as performances, symbolic representations, paintings and photographs. The discipline of visual anthropology is often described as falling into two principal categories. The first of these places emphasis on the production of what could be described as ethnographic film or documentary, while the latter utilizes a more analytical approach to inform an understanding regarding the nature and meanings of observable cultural representations. (Banks et al. 1997). However in practice the distinction is not always as clear as documentation and presentation inform analysis and vice versa. For the purpose of this investigation the tools of visual anthropology are used to complement a discourse driven narrative analysis approach. This is to say that the analysis of visual culture in Santa Elena is likely to offer valuable insights into the socio-cultural makeup of the community in ways which are not likely to come up during conversations with informants. Furthermore, visual anthropology techniques such as photo elicitation are useful in helping informants open up to discussions which otherwise may seem overly abstract. For instance during my interviews with Abel Gutiérrez this approach was of great help when discussing the esthetic differences between archaeological sites/parks and the overgrown ancient mounts located in the communities fields. Regarding this technique (Harper 2002:22) notes:

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I believe photo elicitation mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews. It is partly due to how remembering is enlarged by photographs and partly due to the particular quality of the photograph itself. Photographs appear to capture the impossible: a person gone; an event past. That extraordinary sense of seeming to retrieve something that has disappeared belongs alone to the photograph, and it leads to deep and interesting talk.

This being said, it is important that the tools of visual anthropology be used in a way which is truly analytical and not simply descriptive. For instance, given the great power and persuasiveness of images it is easy to see how visual representations of culture may be erroneously interpreted. Thus, as with any analysis it is central to place the object of study within a greater context which allows for subtleties such as parody and metaphor.

3.3 - Ethical Considerations

Previous to the beginning of my fieldwork for this investigation, I spent some time in Santa Elena (proximately a couple weeks over the period of a year) volunteering with a project which aimed to support local efforts to develop a sustainable small scale tourism industry in the community. The goals of this project were 1) To help local women procure materials for the creation of artisanal products such as baskets and handbags. 2) To aid in the distribution of said products to markets in Mérida. 3) To train locals with knowledge of the countryside, flora and fauna to become interpretative guides and take tourists to rarely visited Mayan ruins. During this time I developed a cordial relationship with Abel Gutiérrez, who later became a primary informant for this current investigation. During the duration of the aforementioned project Abel Gutiérrez

and I spoke on several occasions about the best way to market his skills and make his tours more appealing to the interests of tourists. For example it was not immediately obvious to him that visitors would be interested in things such as hearing the Mayan names of local plants and animals spotted along the paths to the ruins. When I approached Abel Gutiérrez regarding my interest in his insights for this investigation he obliged and expressed interest in the opportunity to discuss questions pertaining to local identity. I also made it clear that my role conducting research in the community was in no way conditionally related to my previous involvement with himself or local tourism development efforts. However, I was still very much aware that Abel Gutiérrez may feel obliged to speak positively of his experience with the aforementioned tourism project due to my involvement with it. Though this concern remained in my mind throughout our conversations, the rapport we established combined with the data from other informants suggests that in the end this was not a major issue.

In some cases informants desired to remain anonymous and not be identified with certain ideas or opinions. In these cases I have attributed these comments in the body of the text to "informant who rather not be identified". Furthermore, I have changed the name of the informant identified in the text simply as "Carlos" in accordance to the wishes of his father (given that he "Carlos" was a minor).

Chapter 4: The Case Study

4.0 - Imagining "the indigenous": National and local narratives

The mixing of European and Indigenous peoples which resulted in *la raza mestiza* (the mixed race) is along with the legend of the founding of Tenochtitlan one of the most important and often told narratives regarding México's history and identity. As such, the story of how the mestizo race was born has been told and retold to the point that although a historical fact, it has become highly mythologized. The story most told in Yucatán regarding the beginnings of the mestizo race involves a pseudo historical telling of events which see Gonzalo Guerrero a Spanish sailor shipwrecked on the eastern coast of the peninsula in the early 16th century (before the arrival of the conquistadors). According to this narrative, Guerrero along with one other shipwrecked sailor (Gerónimo de Aguilar) was eventually found and taken to a nearby Mayan community. Though initially enslaved, Guerrero and Aguilar were eventually released, with Guerrero choosing to stay with the Maya peoples and Aguilar choosing to leave. Finding himself in this strange land, Guerrero wed a young Mayan woman known by the name of Za'asil (as she is referred to in the state anthem of Quintana Roo). According to the story this union and their resulting offspring cemented the foundations of the Mestizo race and as a consequence established Guerrero as "el padre del mestizaje" (though his wife Za'asil is seldom mentioned for her role). While this story of a man from across the ocean who finds love in an exotic land and sires a new race of people sounds particularly idyllic and even romantic, the consequences of the encounter between the Spanish and indigenous peoples of México would not be as unproblematic.

Since the time of México's conquest by Spanish conquistadors in the 16th century, relations between peoples of indigenous and European descent have been characterized by mistrust, conflict and racism. Indigenous peoples have since been subjugated by arms and ideology in ways which utilize a rhetoric of European superiority over the uncivilized and heathenish peoples of the new world. Thus the justification for colonialism quickly became a project to save the souls of indigenous heathens through forced conversion to Christianity. Ruining parallel to the Spanish program of proselytization there existed (and still exists) a discourse regarding the moral obligation of Europeans to "civilize" the indigenous peoples of the new world, all the time ignoring the fact that at the time of conquest. indigenous cities such as the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan had a population of around 300,000 people, working drainage systems and a sophisticated network of roads and waterways (Fiedel 1999:309); more than can be said for many of the European cities of the same period. Therefore despite evidence to the contrary, the indigenous is inexorably linked to nature, ancient history, and simplicity but also to poverty, conflict and disorder (Minde, 2008:30). Although colonial rule and the institutionalized cast system maintained by the Spanish has been officially defunct for two hundred years, the legacy of this system of racial differentiation remains strong in Mexican society. Though it could be argued that progress has been made, much of the national discourse surrounding indigenous peoples in México remains extremely racist to the point that the use of the term indigenous (indo) is often hurled as an insult intended to convey laziness, stupidity and backwardness. Racist attitudes and discrimination are further evidenced by the fact that 75% of the countries indigenous population lives below the poverty line and 39% survive in what is described as extreme poverty (Valdez 2010) . Despite the fact that multiple laws designed to combat racism have been enacted at both state and federal levels, the real world impact of these legislative efforts remains negligible. For example, Mijangos-Noh (2009) notes that although reforms in México's education system guarantee indigenous

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populations access to bilingual and intercultural education, the fact is that the authorities have simply not delivered on this promise.

In the context of ever growing globalization and neo-liberal policies in México, the consolidation for Pan-Mayanist movements and the explosive appearance of the Zapatista struggle offer indigenous peoples with powerful alternatives to the binary politics of the left and right. (Castañeda, 2004:37) The term Pan-Mayanism is typically associated with a cultural revitalization which began in the 1970s throughout Meso-America. During this time greater importance began to be assigned to the preservation of Mayan languages and other forms of traditional heritage. The establishment of the "Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín" was established in Antigua to provide economically marginalized Maya with access to traditional linguistic training. Warren (1998: 17) notes that this project was at its time seen as unusual for the value it placed on Mayan languages and the importance of their preservation; however in time several other programs with similar projects have appeared all over Meso-America. Though Pan-Mayanism generally acknowledges the plurality of Mayan experiences, it also in a sense essentializes Mayan identity across ethnic groups and international borders in an effort to create the image of political unity. For instance For instance; during the peace process which took place in Guatemala during the 1990s several disparate Mayan communities joined together utilizing the language of Maya unity and indigenous rights to work towards goals such as democratization and land reform (Warren, 1998). Furthermore, as a movement Pan-Mayanism has had the tendency to utilize language of "the sacred" as a tool to project cohesion and garner support, despite the fact that these characterizations of what is "scared" are commonly at odds with communities and individuals actual beliefs. For example Pan-Mayanist leaders in Guatemala have demanded free access to "sacred sites" to descendants of the Maya (Minde 2008:121). However, an articulation of what constitutes the "sacred" an who exactly should be considered

as a descendant of the Maya (since in some way this would include the vast majority of Guatemalans) remains unclear. The high degree of essentialization observable in Pan-Mayanist discourses is a reflection of the fact that these formulations are conceptualized in negation to existing dominating discourses, and as such share the same units of analysis, idoms and structures of their ideological counterpart (Normark 2004). For this reason, Fisher (2001:7) notes that "in many ways the Pan-Mayanist movent is a textbook example of a imagined community" and that as a result "ethnicity has eclipsed the importance of class identity in stimulating struggles of resistance" (Fisher in Normark 2004: 124). As in Guatemala, Pan-Mayanism has also taken on a strong political dimension in México. For instance during the 1994 campaign fought by the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN), the call for Mayan unity articulated in the phrase "Hermanos, no nos dejen solos" (Brothers don't abandon us) strongly mirrored similar formulations of unity against an oppressor as communicated by guerrilla movements in Guatemala during the 1980s and 1990s. The Zapatista movement in Chiapas was a deliberate attempt to focus the attention of the Mexican and international public on the struggle of the poor (and particularly the indigenous) in the region. However, articulations of Mayaness proceeding from the Zapatista movement have not been universally well received by Mayan peoples. For example, Castañeda (2004) notes that after the 1994 uprising of the EZLN in Chiapas, there existed a particularly strong desire amongst many Yucatec-Maya to disassociate themselves from the uprising and even go as far as to claim "we are not indigenous!". With regard to this sentiment (though not in as extreme an articulation), Abel Gutiérrez notes:

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People have the right to defend themselves, but I really don't think that taking up arms in the way that Marcos[2] did has very many positive effects or is ultimately in the peoples´ interest. After the conflict in 94 lots of people in the cities were afraid and thought that we in the villages wanted a revolution like in Chiapas. But although we here in Yucatán have many problems, we just want a little support so that we can get ahead and give our children a better life.

The difference in outlook towards the Zapatista movement expressed by peoples in Chiapas and the Yucatán are likely informed by many factors such as the relative social stability of the Yucatán and the considerably higher level of ethnic tensions in Chiapas (Whitmeyer et al. 1996). This however is an over simplification as there exist indigenous people in the Yucatán who support the movement, while there are Mayan communities in Chiapas who early on closed themselves off from the EZLN.

According to Bartra (1974) the dismantling of previously existing systems of meaning by centuries of racism and subjugation led to a sense of inferiority amongst the indigenous populations of the country which persists to this day. Mayan scholar Emma Chirix notes that presence of overt and covert forms of racism erode individuals´ sense of security and worth to the point that many begin to believe these racist discourses. With regard to this situation (and with emphasis on the experience of indigenous women) Chirix (2004:23) observes:

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2   By Marcos Abel is referring to *Subcomandante Marcos*, the pseudonym of the EZLN´s most visible leader and spokesperson Rafael Guillén Vicente.

It is difficult to act against aggression, when victimization has become
internalized there is no capacity to stand up against injustice. To be a
victim is to feel like one does not deserve to be defended. Mayan people
and particularly Mayan women have to endure so much injustice and
simply act as if nothing was wrong. (authors own translation).

With reference the Yucatán, Minellia Vasquez notes that racism is not always overt, but rather takes the form of dirty looks, snide remarks and arrogance. None the less this sort of discrimination is deeply felt and keeps individuals and particularly children from what Minellia Vasquez describes as "dejar que les aflore lo Maya" (Allowing their mayaness to bloom). Regarding the influence of racist discourses and their internalization, schollars such as Callahan (2005) note that key to understating the Maya self are two powerful emotions, doubt and shame. One common aspect of racism in both the Mexican and local context in Santa Elena, is that discriminatory actions and attitudes are not always directed in a clear cut fashion by white urbanites towards indigenous/rural peoples. Often times, Minenllia Vasquez notes that it is mestizo or indigenous peoples who see themselves as somehow superior to those who they identify as lesser (on the basis of perceived ethnicity or social status) that act out in a racist manner. While striking, this phenomena seems to be relatively common in other regions within Meso-America. For instance Chirix (2004:22) notes that indigenous peoples in Guatemala are often brutally harassed and abused by *Ladino* bus drivers and other service providers[3].

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[3]   Ladino is a term widely used in Guatemala to refer to individuals of mixed indigenous and European ancestry, but differs from the more Mexican term Mestizo in that the former is regarded as an officially recognized ethnic group in Guatemala (MINEDUC 2008). However, the term is comonly used as shorthand for "non-indigenous" as it is often used to describe both persons of mixed heritage and whites.

Falcon (2002) observes that Mexican indigenous inferiority has been re-enforced by political and economic structures such as state sanctioned clientalism which lead to a situation of dependency. In the case of Santa Elena, an informant who preferred his name not be used notes that elections are a very stressful time due to the fact that one's support of the "wrong" candidate can result in the loss of job opportunities and government subsidies. The informant notes that because Santa Elena is such a poor community and its people lack education and knowledge of how to get ahead, the only way that one can hope to substantially better his or her situation is through help from the government. To this end Abel Gutiérrez notes

> This is the end of the world (el *prix del mundo)*, here people work and struggle to make a living in the hot fields because there are not many real alternatives. We don't have much education or opportunity to better our lives; we need support from the authorities.

Paradoxically and in contrast to this reality there also exists in México a sense of admiration for the indigenous peoples of the past, which many consider to be the founders of the nation's cultural fabric. Though it is hardly surprising that the citizenry of a county with a history as long as México's would want to indulge in narratives of the "noble and glorious past", México's particularly strong brand of cultural nostalgia is perplexing given the countries long history of ethnic conflicts. As DePalma (1995) noted in the New York Times "Shrouded in mystery and myth, the heroes of México's Aztec past are honored in glorious monuments all over the country. But the living descendants of Moctezuma are not allowed to eat in some of México City's best restaurants". This distinction between the ingenious indigenous peoples of the past and their "inferior" descendants is evidenced early on in México's history. For example, pondering how the lowly peoples of the Yucatán could have achieved such feats of construction and engineering, bishop Diego de Landa hypothesized in the 16th century that the Maya of the past must have been significantly superior in size,

strength and intellect when compared to their contemporary counterparts (Webster, :1998:10). Contemporary conceptualizations of indigenous identity have thus historically been cast in reference to the perceived differences between modern day and ancient Maya identity. However, at the same time many of the practices most commonly associated with the past continue to be held in high esteem by contemporary Maya/Mestizo peoples.

When I asked my informants to point out what aspects of their culture they found most important, they repeatedly made reference to cultural practices which they consider as stemming from more ancient traditions. For instance, Abel Gutiérrez's wife, Rosa Gutiérrez (38) notes that though modern conveniences such as electrical appliances and readymade meals save a lot of time, she considers traditional foods and cooking methods to be superior.

> *Food is a very important part of our culture, here in the villages we eat many of the same things our ancestors did. But there are many differences between how things are now and how they used to be. Before everyone had to ground the corn by hand using heavy tools, now you can simply go to the mill and pick up your warm tortillas. These conveniences are nice, but whenever possible I like to do my cooking the traditional way... I enjoy cooking over an open fire, or getting my husband to dig a hole in the earth so that I can cook mucbipollo wrapped in banana leafs by burring it with hot stones. These practices are important because they are a part of our heritage, though of-course, there is not always the time!*

While informants in Santa Elena recognize some type of cultural and identity kinship with the builders of cities such as Uxmal, they are often quick to highlight the many differences which exist between themselves and their pre-hispanic ancestors. Abel Gutiérrez notes that these differences are fairly straightforward but complicated at the same time. To this end he notes:

> *In a certain way the difference between the Maya of today and our ancestors is quite simple, today we dress in modern fabrics, have many modern conveniences and watch television. But even though these things make us different to those who came before, we still have the same blood and eat of the same corn. When it comes to our Maya identity, we simultaneously are and are not.*

With this common sentiment of being and not being *(ser y no ser),* Abel Gutiérrez illustrates both the genealogical and relational approaches to Maya identity as outlined in the theoretical framework. He (Abel Gutiérrez) does so by on one hand acknowledging a sense of tangible continuity running through the past into the present while at the same time noting the many differences between ancient and contemporary peoples and the ways in which they relate to their environment and sense of identity. While under some circumstances informants may feel comfortable identifying themselves as the direct descendants of the ancient Maya, in other instances the same informants may choose to distance themselves from this idea.

Indeed the paralleling of these two discursive approaches became apparent when analyzing virtually any narrative or history expressed by informants in Santa

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Elena with regard to local culture or identity. Thus, although useful to analyze identity discourses, on their own neither the genealogical nor relational approaches to Maya identity are truly capable of articulating the complexity of contemporary Maya narratives, as they much like contemporary identities themselves *are and simultaneously are not* what they first appear to be. These two approaches despite their contradictions are then in fact most useful when considered together as part of a larger discourse, although each may be highlighted under different circumstances.

4.1 - The Case of Yaxunah and Chunchucmil

Magnoni (2007) observes that the meanings associated with tourism, heritage and its potential for archaeological and touristic exploitation may vary greatly from community to community based on local interests and historical context. For instance, though communities such as Yaxunah and Chunchucmil may seem quite similar given their local population's reliance on remittances from abroad and subsistence agriculture, Magnoni notes that their conceptualization of the importance of pre-hispanic cultural heritage is drastically different. While individuals in Yaxunah consider the archaeological site located in their *comisaria* (a sub-section of a municipality) to be an important asset and source of income for the community, people in Chunchucmil view archaeological investigation and talk of developing tourism projects as a threat (Breglia, 2006). The key difference between these two cases lay in the fact that due to its proximity, individuals in Yaxunah have a long history of being involved with the tourism industry and archaeological research (in part because of its proximity to Chichen Itza), people in Chunchucmil see the expansion of tourism and research into their sphere as

potentially infringing on their lands claims. The reason for this concern is founded in the fact that Mexican law allows for the nationalization of land deemed to hold significant archaeological resources (Ochoa, 1993). Thus, locals understand and are very aware that if archaeological investigation goes forward they are likely to lose access to part or all of their land. The analysis of these clearly distinct interpretations regarding the meanings of heritage and tourism (aside from reflecting the context of local pragmatic interests) also offer an opportunity to observe the ways in which identities are perceived in each locality. Magnoni (2007:373) notes:

> *Whereas archaeology at Yaxunah contributed to some locals' expression of their identity as descendants of the ancient Maya, archaeology at Chunchucmil has led some campesinos to reaffirm their identity as modern farmers as opposed to descendants of the ancient Maya.*

As the previous example and quotation illustrate, forces such as tourism and archeology are capable of influencing life and attitudes in significant ways. In addition the way in which these forces are conceptualized by local populations can inform local identities in very tangible ways.

4.2 - Heritage, Archeology and the Creation/Meanings of Tourism Landscapes

Aside from Cancun style "fun in the sun" type tourism, heritage tourism represents the largest attraction for most international tourists traveling to México. The hundreds of pre-hispanic archaeological sites open to the public represent thousands of years of history and tradition, however the meanings and messages communicated through these attractions vary greatly amongst tourists, local communities and individuals. While it is widely acknowledged that

archeology is important in that it offers individuals with opportunities to identity and relate with the past, the forces which direct the ways in which these messages are formulated and delivered are not always well understood or discerned by audiences. For example, the emphasis often placed on ritual sacrifice in the Mayan context is likely driven by the age old formula that sex and violence sell. Because archaeological sites are popular with tourists and represent an important source of income to many local communities (and the state) they provide an important perspective for understanding the delicate balance which exists between promoting tourism and protecting heritage. Furthermore, archaeologists and the public officials entrusted to manage archaeological resources face the challenge of justifying their budgets in terms of return on investment, while simultaneously safeguarding the cultural and historical integrity of said sites.

Though abolished by law remains of the hacienda system (similar to European Feudalism) are still existent and continue to influence contemporary attitudes towards land ownership, labor and European superiority. Here, the archaeological record has much to contribute to the discourse since the ruins of hundreds of these haciendas are known to have been built by indigenous peoples, often using the remains of ancient temples and places of worship as construction materials for their new overlord's palaces. The symbolic significance of indigenous peoples literally dismantling evidence of the past to aid in the construction of a system which would exploit them for hundreds of years is extremely telling, but the ways in which archaeological remains inform contemporary narratives regarding discourses on race and identity are not well understood.

Visitors to the Yucatán are often surprised to learn that many indigenous individuals living in close proximity to archaeological sites such as Uxmal, Dzibilchaltún and Chichen Itza have in fact never visited these sites themselves.

Some tourists may find this realization unsettling since it clashes with popular conceptions regarding the perceived importance of tradition and "holy ceremonial sites" for peoples such as the Maya. This perceived lack of interest may in fact simply be the result of an economic reality. In an interview Minelia Vazquez (cultural/educational Liaison for the *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* at Uxmal) suggests that despite the fact that entrance fees to archaeological sites are waived for Mexican citizens on Sundays, the costs associated with transporting an entire family to the site for an excursion are prohibitory for many of the residents of nearby communities. Furthermore, the majority of people I spoke with in Santa Elena who had visited sites such as Uxmal but where not directly involved in the tourism industry reported that they had visited the site as children as a part of a school trip. Minelia Vazquez noted that despite the interest which children show in archeology and history during class outings, this enthusiasm tends to fade with time given that they are typically not provided at home with resources to continue exploring these subjects. Minelia Vazquez also observes that school curriculums only aboard topics related to pre-hispanic history in a way which is extremely superficial and not applicable to regional and local specificity. This observation is confirmed by Carlos (10) who said that these topics are not really ever brought up in the classroom and that more importance is placed on historical accounts of the colonial and revolutionary periods. Abel Gutiérrez confirms that a large part of the reason that people do not visit sites such as Uxmal is economic in nature. However he also notes that there is not much interest in visiting "those places" because they are more like museums than anything else. However he acknowledges that despite this fact people are very much aware of the many unrestored and seldom visited ruins in the fields and jungle. Here Abel Gutiérrez draws an important distinction between "archaeological sites" (sitios arqueológicos) and "ruins" (ruinas). The distinction is likely rooted in the fact that archeological sites which are landscaped, supervised and administered by the state are seen as somehow being

artificial or constructed, while untouched archaeological remains represent a more naturalist conceptualization of history and the past. Abel Gutiérrez notes:

> *I really love to go out to these ruins such as Mul-Chic or Saccbé because there amongst nature and the fields one can better appreciate the way our ancestors used to live. It is very quiet... aside from the birds there is total silence and you can in a way feel the presence of the old ones. Uxmal may be impressive with all of its great constructions, but with all those people, noise and manicured lawns... the experience is simply not the same, it is something entirely different.*

Another common word used to describe the ruins of ancient dwellings and ceremonial centers is *mul*; which literally means hill or mound. This linguistic differentiation between archaeological sites and ruins or *mul* is interesting since it suggests a distinction between the *constructed archaeological sites* and the *natural mul*. During a visit to the archaeological site of Coba, a local guide noted that the largest structure in the site is known as the *Nohoch Mul* which literally means "The large mound/hill". The guide later pointed out that this was obviously not the original name of the structure (which had been lost) and that the name *Nohoch Mul* was now not truly appropriate since much archaeological work and modifications had been made to it. What is most interesting about these comments is that they suggest that this *mul* which was once covered in vegetation and integrated into the landscape was now transformed into a feature of an archaeological site. Although local people understand intellectually that archaeological sites and *muls* share the same constructed pre-hispanic origin, the meanings and narratives associated with each of these two constructs is clearly very different. This should not be oversimplified in to a discourse which simply

represents *archaeological sites* as constructed, unauthentic and non-accessible while *mul* are natural, authentic and accessible to all. For instance, while many structures exist in and around the vicinities of fields and plantations, Abel Gutiérrez suggests that the largest of these remains are considered off limits to many as they fear being accused of damaging or stealing antique carved stones slabs (which used to be often used in construction).

Furthermore the relationship between archaeological sites administered by the INAH and nearby populations is likely one of ambivalence and not simply disinterest. While this distinction is subtle it is important. For contrast; though residents of Rome may not show much interest in visiting the interior or the Flavian amphitheater, and many New Yorkers have never visited the statue of liberty, this is not to say that they are disinterested in these iconic monuments or the values and cultural messages the relay. Rather, the ubiquitous nature of these symbols is so ingrained into everyday life, culture and experience that their physical exploration may almost seem unnecessary or redundant. Rodrigo Chim (28) notes:

> *It is not that people do not care about their heritage or the legacy of their ancestors; it is just that people are completely used to see these kinds of places on a near daily basis while out working in the fields. It is like in Mérida, the great cathedral is very impressive and is important to the life of the city and its people, but it's not like people on their way to work just sit around and constantly stare at it. It is part of their environment and just because they don't visit it every day does not mean it is not important to them.*

4.3 - Labor, Economics, and Pride

Yucatecan politicians at both state and municipal levels have long supported the expansion of the regions tourism industry. According to the INEGI in 2008 Yucatán received state financing destined for investment in the tourism industry superior to 15.3 million USD (INEGI: 2011) . While the benefits from such investment may be disproportionately favorable to large businesses such as large tour operators and hotels, tourism remains important as a source of employment. The state of Santa Elena´s economy could be described as precarious at best, with small scale agriculture and tourism being the main economic activities. Visitors to the town often note the conspicuous absence of young men as large numbers of them immigrate to other parts of México and abroad to find employment and send money back to their families. Although the Puuc valley receives nowhere near the amount of tourists that resort towns such as Cancun or Cozumel, due to its relatively small population and state of under development, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that the development of the tourism industry in the region has been highly transformative. Though the majority of the population is not directly employed by the tourism industry, many of the changes which have occurred in the region over the past several decades are clearly relatable to investments made in tourism. For instance, the construction of roads and highways which connect Santa Elena to other communities and the rest of the region can be attributed (at least in part) to state efforts to facilitate tourist access to the archaeological sites such as Uxmal, Kabah and Sayil, as well as to beaches such as Celestún and Sisal. When I inquired to one of my informants Felix Cocom (79) about what he considered to be the most important change Santa Elena has seen over the past decades, without hesitation he answered "la carretera" (the highway). He continues: "it used to be the case that if you got sick you were screwed because there was no way to get to the hospitals in Muna or Ticul in a hurry. Lots of people would simply die in their hammocks". The

presence of large hotels catering to tourists wishing to overnight near the ruins in Uxmal have also likely contributed to the modernization of other infrastructures such as sanitation and telecommunications. One of my informants Carlos, noted that the first time he had ever seen a computer or heard of the internet was at a hotel, but that shortly after that small internet cafes started to spring up around the town center. Similarly and in the context of development in the small town of Coba which exists in close proximity to the Archaeological site of the same name, Callahan (2012:3) observes:

> *The coming of the roads is seen by most of the older locals as a transforming event for the village. With the roads came electricity, running water, schools, a health clinic, a public library, a full-time police force, and Evangelical temples—the sorts of things formerly isolated, rural communities all over the peninsula never had before.*

Recent reductions in the numbers of tourists to archaeological sites such as Uxmal (in part likely due to the world economic downturn) have resulted in the loss of many jobs. In spite of this reality, many local inhabitants and a handful of entrepreneurs continue to develop tourism projects which highlight Mayan culture, cuisine and a sustainable approach to tourism. However, the commoditization of both ancient and contemporary Maya culture raises many questions about the ways in which tourism is reshaping local ideas of what it means to be Maya.

While there exist a handful of small hotels and restaurants in Santa Elena itself, most locals employed by the tourism industry travel to work in the relatively large hotels which surround the archaeological site of Uxmal. Though the economic remuneration for labor in Tourism tends to be lower in small isolated towns such

as Santa Elena, the desire to work in Tourism remains high amongst residents. While this is likely the result of a general lack of labor opportunities, many of my informants noted that work in tourism tends to be much less physically demanding than work in the fields. Informants Abel Gutiérrez and Jesus Delgado Kú (42) noted that an appealing feature of working in the tourism industry was the possibility of being self employed as a tour guide or small scale artisan; however he and Abel Gutiérrez also noted that the lack of a steady paycheck also introduced a high degree of uncertainty into their lives. Abel Gutiérrez notes:

> *Working in the field is very hard work. You have to spends lots of money on seeds and there is no way of knowing if you will make your money back or not. But it also has its advantages, because even if the harvest is not that good, there is usually at least enough to feed the family. I think that working in tourism present a great opportunity, but like everything it has its advantages and disadvantages. The good part of it is that by giving a single tour I can make quite a bit of money in one day, and besides the work is very agreeable... I really enjoy getting to meet people from other countries and learn about their ways of life. But the bad thing is that I never know when there will be work. Just like sometimes I can have a really good month... if no tourists show up, I can really be in serious financial trouble.*

Though the last few decades have seen tremendous growth in the regions tourism industry, the presence of explorers and tourist to the Puuc-Valley is nothing new. Santa Elena´s proximity too many archaeological sites in the area such as Mul-Chic and Kabah made it a logical base for much of the early exploration and research done in the region. Locals in Santa Elena often note the extended presence in their town of the famous explorers John Lloyd Stephens and

Frederick Catherwood who in the 1840s conducted the most famous early accounts of the archaeological treasures in the region. Since the beginning of the 20th century but more importantly starting to pick up in the 30s and 40s, visitors chiefly from the United States and Europe began to partake in adventurous excursions to the region which commonly had their bases in Muna and Santa Elena. Although the nature of tourism in the Puuc valley has changed drastically over the years, but people in Santa Elena have long been exposed to "strange foreigners" who spend small fortunes to come to poke around in their fields. Felix Cocom notes:

> *We really appreciate tourism, because these people that come from so far away create jobs and leave money in the community. Besides, we like to show visitors all that we have here. People come to the Yucatán because there are things here which I think probably don't exist in other places... and this is a source of pride for us. If people come from so far awaay and spend so much money to see what we have and get to know us, well that says something good about our community, doesn't it?*

Here it is interesting to note that although Felix Cocom first acknowledges the importance of tourism as an economic resource, he also observes the fact that people travel to Santa Elena to explore its ruins and meet its people as a source of pride. When I ask Felix Cocom if he sees any conflict between tourism and local interests he says:

> *The people that typicaly come here to Santa Elena to visit are very respectful. Ofcourse, if people came here to treat us badly or take advantage of us, well that would be another story... but it never really has been that way with tourists. I remember that when I was a little boy,*

people would come from other countries, dressed in very fine clothes and with very nice trucks. My mother would make some food and the tourists would pay her and sometimes even leave a nice tip. It is still much the same way now.

Furthermore, Felix Cocomb commented that he is pleased to share his knowledge of traditional herbal remedies with tourists. He notes with pride of an occasion several years ago in which he tended to a Japanese tourist who had suffered a particularly nasty snake bite. He tells that the people who first found the tourist decided to bring her to him given that the hospital in Ticul was too far away, and the wound to serious to wait for much longer. According to Felix Cocomb, he was able to treat the girl using a traditional remedy and eventually cure her completely. Sometime after the incident, a Japanese television crew purportedly showed up a Felix´s home seeking a interview from the "Famed Mayan Medicine man" who had saved the life of this tourist. Felix Cocomb, notes that they were "very interested" to learn about his knowledge of traditional medicine and that before they left they gave him a expensive Japanese watch, which he still keeps as a prized possession. During a later encounter out in his garden, one of his children (or grand children) jokingly hollered out "Is the old man ranting on again about the story of the Japanese girl, the snake and television crew?" which of-course suggested that this was one of Felix's favorite anecdotes and a great source of pride for him.

When speaking with my informants in Santa Elena about their thoughts and experiences with regard to tourism and its impact on their town and identity the conversation often turned to themes about labor and its importance. While at first the connection between discussions about tourism and the difficulty of life out on the fields seemed disconnected, it soon became apparent that many of my

informants thought of tourism primarily as labor and in turn spoke of it using the language of agricultural work. Indeed, it seemed that every time I inquired about the impacts of tourism or the state of local identity informants would respond by telling me about the importance of different crops or the challenges of raising different kinds of livestock. When in a follow up interview three months after our first conversation I asked Felix Cocom why he always brought up references to the milpa when discussing tourism he observed:

> *Tourism is a good thing because it gives us work, much in the same way that work in the fields gives us corn. These two things are not that different because they both allow us to put food on the table. So the stories I tell tourists about the way things used to be are not that different from my machete which I used to clean the fields and protect my crops. We here in Santa Elena are milperos, this is what we know and it is who we are. But if people want to come to visit with us, see the ruins, take pictures of the animals, hear about our lives and try our food... we are only to happy to oblige. It is of course in our best interest, but it is also something I think many of us here enjoy.*

Similarly Abel Gutiérrez notes:

> *Before I got started in tourism, I never really thought of it as something which I could do to make a living. But now I understand that working in tourism is like any other kind of job. You have to work hard to see the fruits of your labor. It is not always easy but just like one has to work hard in the fields, one most study and learn about the past to try to recover this knowledge and then pass it on to the tourists. Besides, studying these books and learning about our history and culture is very positive because*

it also allows us to re-learn many of the things which had been forgotten for a long time. For so long this knowledge had been lost to us... I know we cannot go back to the past, but by recovering our past we also recover a part of ourselves.

Abel Gutiérrez and Felix Cocom´s use of metaphor is extremely telling about the way in which they conceive the importance and value of tourism. However, the great deal of emphasis which they place on their work also suggests that they see labor as an important part of their identity. Given the importance of labor to local identities, it would not be unreasonable to suspect that changes in labor practices may bring with them changes in the way people view themselves and express their identity. To this point, Tun Valentino (56) notes that his involvement in the tourism industry as a part time interpretative guide and archaeological reconstruction worker has informed the way he thinks about his culture and heritage.

I think that many of the people here in the village are a bit ignorant about the wonderful heritage which we have. But because I have had the opportunity of working with the archaeologists, I have been able to open my eyes to the importance of our heritage. I have through my own reading been able to learn a bit more about the past and transmit that knowledge to my children. All of this is very important and very precious to me.

Here Tun Valentino notes that although he considers that the majority of people in Santa Elena are not particularly concerned with questions of culture and the ancient past, his involvement in archeology provided him an opportunity to "open his eyes" and ascribe meaning to archaeological remains in a way which he

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would not have previously considered. However, he also expresses pride in the work itself and the esthetic appeal of a well-placed stone. He observes:

> *Modern buildings are simply not of much quality. These days people build large cement homes in ways which are really quite ugly. Through my work in archaeological restoration I have come to appreciate the beauty and craft that went into building the temples of our ancestors. The work we do is very skilled... when we are working on a restoration project we carefully cut the stones and place them with great precision and care, just like the old ones used to do. I think this is something I can be quite proud of. For example these stones we are sitting upon, I cut them! Look how perfect and clean they are... how they do not need any cement to hold them in place ... they are beautiful and fit just perfectly! I really like this type of work, and over the years it has become part of who I am. Besides, it is all quite appropriate when you think about it, its destiny... my last name is Tun! (Which means stone in Yucatec-Maya)*

Similarly, *Jesus Delgado Kú* notes that his love for the arts and Maya culture heavily influenced his decision to work in tourism as a guide and artisan. He goes on to say:

> *I do this kind of work because I love it, its my passion. If it was only about money for me I could easily make molded figures like the ones they sell for cheap in Chichen Itza and sell them at inflated prices. But I am an artisan and really care about my work. I am a resourceful person and could probably find other kinds of work... but this is what I like to do. But of course it is also a job... since first and foremost I have to make money to support my family.*

Though not all informants expressed such strong views regarding culture and their choice of labor, what is important here is not a causal dynamic were culture markedly influences economic decisions and outcomes (or vice versa), but rather the interplay of subtle powers which both economic and cultural factors exert on everyday life and on individuals sense of self.

The discourse and stories told by informants such as Abel Gutiérrez and Jesus Delgado Kú suggest that people in Santa Elena see tourism as an important economic activity which if properly developed can potentially result in considerable improvements to the quality of life of individuals and the community as a whole. Though local discourses regarding tourism in Santa Elena often center on pragmatic considerations and an understanding of tourism first and foremost as an economic resource, there does seem to exist an awareness amongst residents of the village that the cultural resources at their disposal have a value which goes beyond economics; even though they also recognize that not much attention or consideration is given to them in day to day life. Furthermore, informants such as Jesus Delgado Kú and Manuel Bonilla (44) note from personal experience that tourism is capable of making people more aware of the town's cultural heritage.

Though cultural life in Santa Elena is perhaps not as vibrant as in other communities of the region such as Muna and Ticul, teachers, instructors and volunteers in Santa Elena do the best they can with the resources they have. Though Able notes that on occasion government agencies and NGO´s such as *El Instituto para el Desarrollo del la Cultura Maya del Estado de Yucatán* (INDEMAYA) or the *Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos* (CNDH) will organize events or workshops, the local Museum aside San Mateo church and the local chapter of la *Casa de la Cultura* represent Santa Elenas principal cultural institutions. The museum holds a respectable collection of pre-hispanic

artifacts such as ceramics and stone reliefs, pieces of jewelry and clothing from the colonial period as well as four of the famous "Momias de Santa Elena". Entrance to the museum has an official cost of 5 pesos (approximately 2 NOK), but one can place a little more in a donation box if so inclined, which at 5 pesos admission is certainly not unagreeable to visitors from outside the community. As has been previously mentioned, the museum is a great source of pride for locals. Abel Gutiérrez notes that because Santa Elena is so far from Mérida and other important cities on the peninsula, many people think that they are fairly backward and do not have much to offer. He continues to poin out that although modest next to what he imagines exist in Mérida or Campeche, the museum makes the statement that Santa Elena does have things of value to outsiders.

As described by Rodrigo Chim, Santa Elena´s *Casa de la Cultura* is a nonprofit government run center with a mandate to support the local community by offering courses in things such as pneumatic tire repair and sewing. Additionally, the center helps the local school organize festivals and events, as well as stimulate the practice of traditional forms of dance, sport and craft. Rodrigo Chim notes that he sees part of his mission at the center to help the people of Santa Elena rediscover their roots and traditions, though he acknowledges that local interest in such matters is often limited. He notes that he believes there are two main reasons for this. First, the popularity of reggaeton, hip-hop and other non traditional musical styles. Second, an association which links traditional practices with ideas of backwardness and poverty; particularly amongst young people. He notes:

> *Many people these days, are only interested in the modern, in the new.*
> *They do it perhaps because they think that this will make them look more*
> *important, more affluent. They see participating in traditional activities as*

recognizing that they are Maya, and as a result they sometimes stay away. But I think that it is important to motivate people to come out so that they can learn about the great cultural legacy we have inherited... so they can come to see that we do not need to deny who we are.

When I asked Rodrigo Chim about how he felt about the commodification of aspects of local culture such as dance he expressed that while there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this type of activity, he sometimes does worry about how performing these traditions for touristic audiences can change the performances themselves. He notes:

It may sound odd to some, but traditional dances tend to be quite different when they are performed in cities such as Mérida or Valladolid than when they are staged at popular fiestas in villages such as Santa Elena or San Simon. In the cities everything is stylized ... while in the villages the performances tend to be more rustic, but also more authentic. When there is some important event like a visit of a political delegation or a large group of tourists, the dancers who tend to perform at these events are from the cities, regardless of where the event is actually held. I think this is because organizers want to promote a polished look. As a result the performances tend to be a bit more plastic and over produced.

With regard to tourism's role in the conservation of traditional cultural forms, Rodrigo Chim observed that although tourism did in a way lead to a essentialization of local traditions, it also offered people with opportunities to

engage with their own culture in ways which they had not really previously considered. He observes:

> *When I was a student, I belonged to a folkloric dance group. Once in a while we would be asked to perform at events organized by the municipal government or tourism authority. Because our group was not that big, sometimes we would call upon neighbors or acquaintances to help fill in some of the less demanding roles. Lots of people signed up because we would share the money we made from the performance with them, but with time many of these guys (and girls) started to get really good and develop an appreciation for the art form. I had people tell me all the time how happy they were that they had the chance to participate with us and learn about these kinds of traditions. While of course this was not always the case, and some were just interested in the money... over all I think that this sort of opportunity to get involved in folkloric arts is very positive and can lead people to reconsider some of their preconceptions about traditional culture.*

It is interesting to note that the process which Rodrigo Chim describes is similar in many ways to the experience of informants such as Abel Gutiérrez and Manuel Bonilla. This is to say that in both contexts individuals who had not shown much interest in traditional forms of local heritage, through tourism and an initial economic motivation eventually came to value the activity in which they were engaged in a new way.

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4.4 - Immigration Discourses

When arriving in Santa Elena, visable on the side of the road is a mural. What makes this mural noteworthy is the way in which it represents the town by displaying images of a Mayan pyramid, the local church and the golden gate bridge. While images of pyramids and churches are what many would expect to see on such mural welcoming people to the town, the presence of the golden gate bridge is puzzling to many visitors. The reason for the inclusion of this San Francisco landmark on the mural representing the town is that many locals from the village currently work and reside in California. The remittances sent to Santa Elena by these migrant workers represent an important part of the local economy without which many families and individuals would not be able to get by. The history of immigration of Yucatecan workers to the United states is often noted to have begun in the 1940´s under the hospices of bilateral Mexican-American trade agreements, however since the 1980s Yucatecan migration to the United States has seen a dramatic increase (Ramírez 2011: 179). Researchers such as Cornelius et al. (2007) speculate that there may exist a connection between the growth of tourism resorts in the Yucatán and the dramatic increase of Yucatecan immigration to the United States. Though at first it would seem counter intuitive to suggest that economic development in the peninsula would lead to a further exodus of local populations, Cornelius et al. (2007) notes that Yucatecan migration from rural communities to resort towns such as Cancun and Cozumel has in a sense served as a springboard towards international immigration.

Photo 4 Mural at the entrance of Santa Elena as seen entering from the highway (depicting Maya pyramid, the towns church and the golden gate bridge).

Given the lack of opportunities available to young people in Santa Elena it is not difficult to understand why so many choose to migrate to other regions of the country or abroad. One of the most appealing features of tourism (as described by my informants) is that by providing employment opportunities, young men and women may choose to remain in the village instead of migrating. While most academic literature which focuses on Mexican migration patterns is centered on the phenomena of undocumented immigration to the United States, the impact of internal migration is often overlooked. In the Yucatán the main destinations for migrants from the countryside include Mérida and Cancun. Though Mérida has a sizable tourism industry, it does not come even close in rivaling the behemoth of Mexican tourism which is Cancun. Castellanos (2010) argues that indigenous migration to Cancun for the sake of finding employment in the tourism industry has resulted in a high degree of social stratification and what the author refers to as "a return to servitude". Though working conditions are often difficult and salaries are fairly low (though considerably higher than in Santa Elena), my

informants offer a fairly positive view of their experiences working in Cancun. Manuel Bonilla notes:

> *When I was younger I had the chance to work in tourism and construction in Cancún and a few other communities in Quintana Roo. Life was not easy, and I really missed my family and my village... but it also gave me the opportunity to see and experience lots of things I could have never seen or done if I had stayed home. There are a few things about this time I spent outside of Santa Elena that I would change if I could, but over all I think it was very positive. If I could go back to being a single young guy, I think I may want to do it again.*

While the reports of informants such as Manuel Bonilla and Abel Gutiérrez do not refute the criticisms of critics of the tourism industry such as Castellanos (2010), their outlook on this topic tended to focus on the relatively high level of remuneration attainable in Cancun and the temporary nature of the work contracts. Abel Gutiérrez notes: "The work can be hard, they expect you to work very hard and for very long hours... but you can make some good money. Besides it's not like its forever".

While an analysis of the ways in which emigration has transformed identity and culture in Santa Elena falls outside of the scope of this investigation, the influence of this social phenomenon on narratives regarding tourism is undeniable. In Santa Elena, tourism and immigration are often spoken of using similar terms. The explanation for this is likely rooted in the fact that locals view both tourism and immigration primarily as economic strategies. For instance Tun

Valentino (56, a *miplero* and laborer at archaeological digs) notes how unfortunate it is that so many young men from the village are forced to immigrate to the United States to find work. He goes on to express his wish that more tourists would begin to visit Santa Elena so that this would create more jobs for young people and thus give them an alternative to emigration. Regarding the influence of living abroad on locals from Santa Elena, Abel Gutiérrez observes:

> *There are lots of people that go abroad for ten or twenty years and then build large houses when they get back. Many of them also change the way they speak, and some even return speaking fairly good English. But they also change in other ways, many of them come back with tattoos and really don't show much interest in what is going on in the town. But usually, with time they mellow out and go back to normal. The smart ones use the money they made in the United States to start little businesses, but the majority will be back to work in the fields before to long.*

One of the interesting effects of immigration in the context of Santa Elena is that as Abel Gutiérrez noted, many of the migrants who return to the village after years abroad do so with a good working knowledge of English, which in turn facilitates their entrance in to the tourism industry. Hilario (29) notes that although he was not able to save as much money as he would have liked during his time abroad, one of the best things about his time in the United States was the fact that he was able to learn to speak English. Once back in Santa Elena, Hilario found work at a local eco-hotel and restaurant and informed me that he enjoys the opportunity to speak English with the patrons and tell them about his experiences in the United States. However, Hilario also observed that his time in the United States also made him more appreciative of his home and local culture. He notes:

My time in the United States was a very interesting time in my life, it gave me the chance to experience many new things and see things I could have never imagined. But it also taught me to appreciate my own culture. After work I used to go to English class and I was amazed by how many people asked me questions about Santa Elena and the Maya. I was very proud to be able to say that I speak Maya because unlike in Yucatán, people there really appreciate our culture. The English teachers even asked me to put on a small presentation and teach them a bit about the Puuc and our language. This kind of thing was really nice and very rewarding.

It is interesting to note, that although Hilario's experience is likely not representative of that of most Yucatecan migrants in the United States, his account of "rediscovering" his culture while abroad is similar (in some ways) to the experiences of individuals working in tourism who "rediscover" their own heritage by engaging with this industry.

4.5 - Exposure to Outside Ideas and the Host/Tourist Relationship

Tourism affords many unique opportunities to analyze the ways in which individuals from very different backgrounds and cultures may interact, share ideas and values. While host/tourist interactions are often limited to short straight forward transactions, interactions between outsiders and local populations can have far reaching consequences. For instance, with regard to her study on the impacts of tourism on the Monks of Luang Prabang, Suntikul (2012) observed

that contact with tourists is influencing the values and aspirations of the city's monks. Furthermore, this influence has been manifest by trends such as the eschewing of traditional ways and practices in favor of western values. While this previous example illustrates ways in which exposure to tourists and outside influences can be detrimental to local cultures, not all examples of this sort of interaction are as bleak. With reference to research into cross-cultural communication in the Mexican coastal town of Puerto Vallarta, Evans (1976: 96) notes:

> *Explorers and American residents have penetrated the total physical space, utilizing local restaurants, cinemas, beaches and other recreational space. Empathetic culture brokers often invite them into community social space and develop long-term friendships and reciprocal relationships such as fictitious or real god parenthood, business ventures and marriage. Adaptation here is primarily to the host culture and where foreign innovations have been introduced, they have been modified in agreement with Mexican attitudes toward modernization.*

Though exposure to western values (and its focus on consumption) are often characterized as harmful to host communities, rather than being "corrupted" by these influences, Maya peoples have shown the ability to internalize these practices and assign them new meanings. For instance Nash (2008) notes the use of soft drinks such as pepsi and coca-cola since the 1970s in ritual ceremonies and practices amongst the Maya of the Chiapas highlands. However, this is not to say that this internalization of western practices and values is without it problems, as evidenced by México's growing obesity epidemic (Rtveladze et al. 2013).

Since in Santa Elena there are no large Cancun style party hotels, nightclubs or bars it is hardly surprising that tourists visiting the town would be distinct from the stereotype of drunken North American spring breakers. These relatively well informed and respectful tourists are usually referred to as engaging in forms of cultural tourism. Furthermore it is often noted that cultural tourism is less conspicuous in its consumption than the high end resort centered tourism developments prevalent along the north-eastern coast of the peninsula. For instance, while in Uxmal I noticed an Austrian woman packing several expensive SLR cameras she was using to photograph birds and other wildlife. A few hours later I saw her outside the home of a family in Muna where she had eaten a meal and was now snapping a few photos of the children using a small point and shoot camera. I asked her why she did not use one of her better cameras since their results would likely be superior. She answered that she felt uneasy using the larger cameras since she did not want the family to feel like she was showing off or trying to flaunt her wealth. While not all tourists exhibit such thoughtfulness, the previous example illustrates an often observable attitude fairly common amongst visitors to the region.

Maria Estela (45) notes that she believes that tourists who visit her family hotel/restaurant in Santa Elena are more interested in and are more respectful of Maya culture than people who chose to travel to Cancun. She continues to explain that the interest which these tourists show and the fact that they are willing to travel so far to experience the culture of the Puuc and Santa Elena should be a mark of pride.

> *I think that the fact that people come from so far a way to learn about our culture, taste our food and learn about our history says something very positive about us. People here in the village sometimes do not show very*

much interest in our traditional customs, but I have noticed that when
tourists speak a little Maya or show appreciation for our culture... people
notice, and feel proud. The same thing happens with food. For example
when I started cooking Chaya here in the restaurant, tourists were always
telling me how great it was and how they thought it was so fresh and
different from anything they had ever tasted. Seeing this people in the
community started to experiment again with this ingredient and now it has
become popular to eat Chaya at home again! Its funny how those kinds of
things happen.

Regarding his experiences with tourists Jesus Delgado Kú notes:

The kind of tourists that usually comes here and buys from me is fairly
knowledgeable and likes to buy things that are worthwhile. There are lots
of people who go to places like Cancun just to meet women and get drunk,
but the people who come to Santa Elena come with another mentality.
Sometimes I am even impressed by how much some tourists know about
Mayan language and culture. If they come all this way it is because they
want to experience the real México and get to see what we in the
community have to offer. I wish people here could see us the way they do...
maybe then we would be better off.

Here Maria Estela and Jesus Delgado Kú note that they appreciate tourist's
interest and respect for local culture. This appreciation and sense of pride in
having people from all over the world come to their home and refer to local
heritage in positive terms is likely magnified when put in contrast with many of
the discourses which exist in contemporary Yucatán and Mexican society
regarding indigenous/rural populations and cultures. While on one hand the

Mexican state uses images of indigenous peoples and the achievements of their ancestors to promote tourism and a progressive image of plurality to the rest of the world, in reality indigenous peoples in México have been subjects of ridicule, neglect and abuse. As a result many individuals from communities such as Santa Elena may feel uneasy in identifying as indigenous. For example, Abel Gutiérrez notes that when he and his wife travel to the state capital (Mérida) they consciously choose to communicate with each other in Spanish, despite the fact that they consider communication in Maya to be easier. Abel Gutiérrez explains that this is to "evitar problemas" (avoid problems). Abel Gutiérrez notes:

> *When my wife and I travel to Mérida, we prefer to speak in Spanish, because often times if we are heard speaking Maya people look at us funny and assume that we are up to no good. Besides, if we are in the city because we have to go to the hospital or a bank, often times the people who work there are very rude to us and say that we have to speak in Spanish. So it is just better to avoid the problem altogether and just Speak Spanish instead.*

In contrast, Abel Gutiérrez also notes that many of the tourists that come to Santa Elena show great appreciation and interest for the Maya language. Abel Gutiérrez notes:

> *I think that is really nice that outsiders value our culture and our language. Sometimes the young guys in the village don't want to speak Maya or observe our traditions; this is probably in part because they think this would make people think less of them. But when they see tourists... and particularly young women show that they are interested in local ways, they perk right up.*

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Frankly, "Tourists have the dubious distinction of serving as a target of derision for almost everyone" (Shepherd, 2002:183). However, attitudes prevalent in Mexican and Yucatecan society are put into sharp contrast with the discourse of admiration and respect for ancient and contemporary Maya culture exhibited by many tourists. While tourists are often portrayed as ignorant and rude, the anecdotes provided by my informants suggest that these stereotypes do not uniformly fit visitors to Puuc region in general and even less so to those in Santa Elena in particular. On the other hand, informants also consistently noted that this faltering image was not representative of all tourists, and particularly not of the hordes of *gringos* which depart daily from Cancun or Playa del Carmen to sites such as Chichen Itza or Tulum. The positive experiences of informants with tourists clearly suggests that discourses of admiration for local culture expressed by visitors is interpreted as a local source of pride. Though these discourses are often essentialized or simplified to a significant degree, they none the less stand in stark contrast to the messages people in Santa Elena have been hearing about their backwardness for centuries.

4.6 - Self-Representation, Authenticity and the Tourist Experience

Though pragmatism and economics often tend to dominate local discourses regarding tourism. My informants also expressed some in conformity regarding the ways in which tourism products are marketed in Meso-America. For instance Abel Gutiérrez observes that many of the tourists that come to Santa Elena, Muna or other Yucatec-Maya communities, approach the experience expecting contact with people who resemble "los antiguos", which is to say a people which share

characteristics with ancient Mayans and thus conform to an reinitialized touristic perspective of who and what the contemporary Maya are.

> *I don't think this is right, they should show us the way we are and not simply as if we were exactly like our ancestors. The past is a big part of who we are, but it is not the entire story. Sometimes I feel that the people who visit places like Uxmal want to see Maya people running through the jungles wearing loin cloths and chasing a deer. But what those people do not realize is that we no longer live that life... the only place they are going to see those kinds of images is at the museum. But I also realize that it's not their fault... they are told so many lies about us in their magazines and television shows, it's only natural that they would think that. But that is where we come in... we can show them how our life really is.*

When I asked Jesus Delgado Kú if he felt any obligation to communicate authentically thorough his works he noted:

> *The representation which artisans work with are subjective, they mean different things to different people. What I don't think is right is when people try to trick tourists and sell things which are inauthentic at places like Chichen Itza. For example, one time I saw a vendor selling figurines of a so called "Maya god of money". This makes me very mad, because those people are being dishonest and exploiting our cultural resources to trick people. But then again, sometimes I think that tourists want to be deceived... they want their preconceptions confirmed, and as a result they end up buying this kind of cheap knockoff. That is why it is important for me to transmit the knowledge I have and to have tourists see that the work I do is authentic, it is not "made in China" it is "made right here!"*

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Both Abel and Jesus Delgado Kú take issue with the way in which some tourist images misrepresent local culture, practices and beliefs, however it is interesting that Jesus Delgado Kú notes that in a sense tourists themselves may be willingly deceived, as essentialized and even sometimes fictionalized depictions of local culture appeal to them in ways which contemporary expressions do not. Furthermore, both Abel Gutiérrez and Jesus Delgado Kú place emphasis on the importance of showing tourists through their work a more accurate image of local culture which is more representative of contemporary reality.

> *I remember one time in which a woman from the United States asked me to carve her a nativity scene. She wanted the figures to be large, about fifty centimeters tall each. So I got my tools and started working at the archaeological site in Kabah like I always do. While I was working a group of tourists arrived and told me that I should not be carving Christian figurines because that is not what people want to see when they come to a place like this, they said it was not authentic. But I ask, not authentic to who? It sometimes is frustrating because people come and say they want to learn about Maya culture, but what they really want is to see a bunch of indians with painted faces run around with spears or performing exotic rituals. While the past and the legacy of the ancients does influence who we are today, so does Christianity... and besides I am not going to refuse a well-paying job simply because someone may think its inauthentic for me to take it, that is just silly.*

Though both Abel Gutiérrez and Jesus Delgado Kú take issue with essentialist reading of local heritage, given that they feel respected by tourists in a way which is not characteristic of indigenous relations with the bulk of Mexican society, they are able and willing to challenge these assumptions and help tourists

understand the complexity of local culture and identity. For example, Abel Gutiérrez notes that some of the only experiences which he has had discussing issues pertaining to local culture and identity has been with tourists, because as he puts it "they are interested in learning about our traditions and how we live. They don't ridicule us for our beliefs or culture the way many people in the cities like Mérida do".

4.7 - Festivals, Ceremonies and Myth

As is the case with virtually every community in Yucatán, traditional communal parties and celebrations are a big part of life in Santa Elena. Along with more widely observed holidays and festivals such as Christmas and Carnival, traditional celebrations such as *la fiesta del pueblo* combine elements from pre-hispanic traditions, Christian ceremonies and local customs. Though these festivities hold features which are often shared amongst many communities, individual regions and villages typically include unique local elements. For example during *la fiesta del pueblo* in Santa Elena (which is held annually from January 10th to the 24th), the procession to Santa Mateo Church is led by the disembodied head of a pig encased and carried on atop a man's head and adorned with colorful designs. Also present is the *Xic* (a man dressed up in traditional women's Maya-Mestizo clothing) who passes in front of the procession entering local businesses that donate money in turn for the promise of receiving good luck for the rest of the year. An interesting aspect of *la fiesta del pueblo* which suggests the high degree of importance with it is regarded, is the fact that many laborers working in faraway communities (and even abroad in the United States) regularly return to their village to partake in the celebrations. As a result it is not unusual to see migrants return for the festivities bearing gifts for their friends and families while perhaps accompanied by an obviously looking foreign spouse and

a mixed Yucateco-American toddler or two. Though these types of celebrations are not put on for the benefit of tourists, it is not uncommon for tourists keen on observing these types of local festivals to attempt to blend in and take in the sights. While the *fiesta del pueblo* remains a strong tradition in Santa Elena, many informants expressed concern for the waning in importance of other traditions such as the *primicia.*

When discussing issues pertaining to labor and life in the fields, my informants would often speak of the importance of the *primicia* . Though its practice is in a clear decline, the *primicia* is a sort of synchronistic ritual which combines elements of Christianity and pre-hispanic beliefs to ensure the success of harvests. During the ritual a Xaman will make demands of the winds, sing the praises of Jesus Christ and the Mayan rain god Yum-Chaac while little children scatter around the altar impersonating frogs and croaking for the rains to come. There are often also animal sacrifices which typically include the slaughtering of a Turkey which is later cooked and shared amongst the participants. While there is a strong ancestral spiritual belief in that this sort of metaphysical intervention can result in precipitation and protection from pests, all my informants agreed that the Xaman will always hold *primicias* when the conditions for such fortuitous circumstances are at their best. It is striking that although the *primicia* is described in terms which for an outsider would seem a lot more like a cultural or spiritual/religious practice, its importance to the villagers was in fact quite pragmatically related to the success of their fields. Tun Valentino notes.

> *Primicias are a way for us to ask for blessings, they are not that different from prayer in Christian churches. Lots of people believe that by putting on a successful primicia you can ensure the health of your crops and the coming of the rain.*

This is however not to say that the meanings of the primicia are not multiple (as the use of the rites imagery and ancient traditions would suggest). The importance of this distinction lay in the fact that the practice of *primicias* is chiefly associated with ensuring the success of crops. As residents of the community find alternate sources of income the importance of work in the fields has been in a sense diminished and this primicia has been reflected in the ever decreasing frequency with which *primicias* are held. When asked about this phenomena, my informants agreed that there was likely a correlation between the relative scarcity of work being done in the fields and the trend towards holding fewer *primicias,* however they also noted that the high cost of turkeys and other factors were likely in part responsible. Felix Cocomb notes:

> *I am glad you have asked me about this. Well you see the primicia is a very ancient tradition which dates to... oh, only god knows how long. But to do a primicia is very expensive and since people do not depend on the fields now as much as they used to, they see spending so much money on turkeys and other things that you need for the ceremony as excessive. But I think it is a little sad that these ceremonies are held so seldom now, I have very nice memories of attending them with my grandfather. But also I understand that people's needs are different now that they have other kinds of work.*

If there is indeed a relationship between individuals choosing non-traditional forms of labor (such as in tourism) and the reduced occurrence of *primicias* then one could justifiably hypothesize that the introduction of these new forms of labor has indeed affected local traditional customs. However changes in practices do not necessarily indicate changes in core beliefs. This is to say that just because the importance of the *primicia* is lessened by the decreased relative importance of agriculture, it does not follow that the deities invoked in these ritual are no

longer believed in. Furthermore, As Callahan pointedly observes: "For local tour guides awaiting clients at the gates to the ruins, a bout of rain may actually be the last thing they need" (Callahan, 2012:5).

While the practice of the *primicia* wanes amongst people who depend on the *milpa,* the "ceremony" is now being rediscovered and stylized to suit the tastes and interests of tourists at the nearby "Ecomuseo del Cacao". The *primicia* is also referenced on a nightly basis during the Uxmal "sound and light show" where chants to the rain god are set against the backdrop of the artificially illuminated ruins of the archaeological site. In these touristic contexts the is known by its more exotic name "Ceremonia de Chaac" and highlights the use of traditional items such as "ancient" Maya ceremonial garbs and representations of the rain god while omitting references to Christianity and other more contemporary elements. For instance while in the first image the *primicia* (near Tizimin Yucatán) centers largely around the health of crops and depicts the participants wearing contemporary clothing, the Chaac ceremony performance held at the *Eco Museo del Cacao* highlights ancient representations of the rain god and ancient Maya dress; presumably to appeal to tourists preferences for more essentialized representations of Maya culture.

Photo 5: *Contrasts between local and touristic characterizations of the primicia / Chaac ceremony.*

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The differences between the two representations of this contemporary tradition (and the fact that they are even called by different names), offer a good example of the way that the tourism industry often represents local culture by highlighting the esthetics of antiquity and suppressing more contemporary elements. Furthermore this phenomena clearly illustrates the process of historic/cultural commodification as it was described in the section "Commodification and the creation of the heritage product".

When describing archaeological sites the tourism industry, along with state tourism authorities tend to highlight the "sacred" nature of these ancient centers. It is strongly suggested that these ruins hold important religious meaning not just to the peoples who once inhabited the then great Mayan cities, but also to the contemporaneous Maya who now live in their ancestors lands. This "sacred" or "mystical" aspect of Maya heritage draws thousands of individuals each year to archaeological sites such as Dzibilchaltún and Chichen Itza to view the impressive effects of the summer solstice on the sites architectural features. In the case of Chichen Itza the alignment of the pyramid of Kukulkán with the sun during the summer solstice produces an illusion by which the shadow of feathered serpent deity appears to descend the side of the pyramid. According to official government figures, during the 2012 solstice 28,942 visitors at Chichen Itza witnessed this phenomena. Messages pertaining to the sacred nature of this type of event and the ruins themselves are highlighted by the presence of "new age" type tourists who dance around, burn incense (though it is officially not permitted) and claim to "absorb the energy of the ancients". While in Santa Elena, these types of tourist driven messages and practices are not as extreme, informants noted that they often come across tourists eager to hear about local Maya ceremonies and religious rites. Abel Gutiérrez notes, that many of these tourists become somewhat disappointed when they are told that most people in

the community practice some form of Christianity. Furthermore, Abel Gutiérrez suggests that these types of tourists tend to act in ways which he and others in the community take to be extremely odd and somewhat silly.

> *People who visit sites such as Uxmal or Kabah do not get as crazy as those who visit Chichen Itza, but sometimes you do see them around the site in their white outfits, wearing seashells, feathers and burning incense. These people believe that by being in a place which is sacred they are able to absorb the energy of the place and god knows what else. But really they end up looking quite dumb. I mean these people are not from here, they do not share our beliefs, why do they feel compelled to act this way? It is all quite absurd if you ask me, but as long as they are not hurting anyone and they are spending money... let them make fools out of themselves.*

This however is not to suggest that people in Santa Elena do not see spiritual or religious meaning in ancient material culture, but rather that their articulation of these meanings is so far removed from those of tourists that are virtually unrecognizable.

While Catholicism remains the largest and most influential religion in México (and Yucatán), other Christian denominations such as Mormonism, Jehovah's witnesses and Seventh day Adventists have in recent decades seen considerable growth in their membership (Smith 2013). While informants suggested that some tensions between these denominations do exist in Santa Elena, for the most part individuals belonging to one church do not see any need to disassociate themselves from people outside of their church as has been the case elsewhere in México such as in the case of Chiapas (Farfán et al. 2005). Furthermore, Abel

Gutiérrez notes that it is an open secret that several individuals belong to more than one church, as doing so allows them to benefit from social programs afforded by different religious organizations. Abel Gutiérrez suggests that this type of pragmatic attitude towards religion and spirituality makes it possible for people in the community to hold Christian principles and at the same time participate in traditional ceremonies which highlight their traditional beliefs. For example aside from the *primicia*, other practices which highlight pre-hispanic beliefs such as the *jets méek* and *jets Lu´um* continue to be practiced throughout rural Yucatán (Cáceres, 2004). According to my informants the *jets méek* is a form of traditional Yucatec-Mayan baptism in which the parents of the child along with his godparents pray for the infants health and support from their community in raising him or her. The *jets Lu´um* is a ceremony which typically takes place when ground for a new house or structure is being broken. The ceremony consists in placing colored objects such as coins or seeds at the corners of where the structure will stand, and thus representing each of the sacred cardinal points as understood by Mayan cosmology (Mathews et al. 2004).

Abel Gutiérrez explains that the Alux are mythical dwarflike pranksters that live in the fields and cause mischief. Felix Cocomb observes that when it comes to the Alux, one best stay away from them as they are liable to play tricks on milperos by taking their food or water and in some cases even pulling pranks which can result in injury. However, Felix Cocomb goes on to say that they are not mean spirited but rather childlike and irresponsible. Tales of the Alux and other mythical creatures have also made their way into the tourist vernacular, as books and stories telling of these creatures attract tourists to sites such as the caves of Lol-Tun. Interestingly, the Alux have also made their way to the small screen as a Mérida television channel produces and broadcasts a popular animated series called "La Gruta del Alux" (The cave of the Alux) which features Alux

characters and other mythical creatures who parody both rural and modern life in the Yucatán. While Abel Gutiérrez notes that the program is quite silly, he also observes that it is a positive thing that local traditions and folklore are kept alive, even if it is in a way which is not entirely accurate.

Chapter 5: Findings and Conclusion

While the dizzying growth of the tourism industry in the Yucatán has transformed small predominantly indigenous communities such as Tulum and Piste from sleepy villages in to tourism meccas and arguably eroded their cultural identities past the point of any likely recovery, the experience of Santa Elena has been quite different.

Although the flow of tourists to Santa Elena could be described as modest when compared to other communities in the Yucatán, its impact on the lives of locals remains significant. As it has been noted, tourism in Santa Elena is thought of first and foremost as an economic resource. Locals have sought ways to take advantage of the economic opportunities tourism presets by engaging with the industry in a variety of ways. However, unlike communities such as Piste (near Chichen Itza) where much of the population depends solely on income generated from tourism, most locals in Santa Elena which could be described as working in the tourism do not depend solely on this activity for their lively-hood. For instance many families whose members produce crafts for sale to tourists also rely heavily on remittances from relatives in the United States, as well as other activities such as beekeeping, small scale agricultural production and subsistence farming. Along with the importance of tourism as a source of income, many locals note that the industry has also been important in that it has led to improvements in the regions infrastructure, thus making it easier to access services such as schools and hospitals in nearby communities like Ticul and Muna.

While the economic impact of tourism is Santa Elena is relatively easy to quantify, its influence on local culture and identity is much more difficult to discern. While locals in Santa Elena think of themselves as mestizos they sometimes also identify as Maya, particularly in reference to their use of the

Maya language and when engaging with tourists. Interviews with informants confirm that locals in Santa Elena feel more comfortable identifying as Maya in touristic contexts than they do in everyday life outside of their own homes. This is likely due to the fact that given previous experiences with tourists and their admiration for everything Maya, locals feel safe to identify as Maya in a way which they would not in other situations given the enormous amount of racism which still exists towards indigenous people in Yucatán. However, informants also suggest that the choice to identify as Maya is often part of a strategy destined to appeal to tourist's wishes and expectations for the purpose of economic gain. As Jesus Delgado Kú notes: "Tourists don't want to buy crafts from a mestizo, they want to buy them from a real life Mayan". While some critics may characterize such representations as inauthentic, one may wonder what would constitute *authentic Mayaness* in this day and age given centuries of colonization and the violent dismantling of indigenous cultures. Furthermore, demands for authenticity in communities such as Santa Elena are particularly unproductive given the lack of a clear consistent articulation of what authentic culture in Santa Elena even looks like. In other words what may appear to be a completely authentic cultural display to one group, will inevitably be discarded as inauthentic by others given that it does not conform to specific ideas of what local culture "should be".

A common thread which runs throughout all cultural and identity discourses in rural Yucatán in general and Santa Elena in particular is that of the primacy of pragmatism. As similarly noted by Hervik (2002) in his study of the nearby community of Oxkutzcab, culture in Santa Elena exists to serve pragmatic and fairly explicit purposes. This is to say that as the needs in the community change, so do their cultural practices, as was observed in the case of the gradual abandonment of practices such as the *primicia*. Indeed, despite the seemingly contradictory discourses and narratives regarding culture and identity expressed

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by my informants, the idea that one must do whatever he or she can to ensure the wellbeing of his or her family is never far away. If this means highlighting one aspect of local identity over another, the local consensus is, so be it; there is after all little room for deep reflection or sentimentality when ones family's basic needs are not met. However this should not be taken to mean that local traditions and culture are treated flippantly or are not of real importance to the community beyond their economic utility. People in Santa Elena value their culture and traditions deeply; however the things which outsiders and locals consider to be important are not always the same. While tourists focus on the sacredness of pyramids and ancient ceremonial centers, locals find meaning in their work in the milpa, their language and cuisine. Acknowledging this discrepancy, locals in Santa Elena often times simply tell tourists what they want to hear. However informants also noted that when possible they enjoy engaging with visitors to help them understand that although local identity is strongly informed by the ancient Mayan past, contemporary life in the community cannot be reduced to it.

While local articulations of identity in Santa Elena sometimes seem contradictory, it is important to note that for the most part, individuals do not see tensions between the *ancient* and the *contemporary* or *traditional* and *modern* in the same way that many outside observers do. As Castañeda observes (2004:41) ethnographers in the Yucatán quickly learn to overcome their shock when they hear monolingual Maya speakers tell them that that they are not Maya and that all the Maya are long gone (being the ones who built the pyramids), while in the same breath proclaiming that the real Maya live in a town "just over there" where real *hach* Maya is still spoken[4]. While these inconsistencies may seem puzzling, it may be helpful to keep in mind the many contradictions which exist in our own

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[4]   In Yucatec Maya the word hach is often used to denote realness or authenticity; for example "hach ná" meaning "ones real or true mother" (Álvarez 1997:251). The term is also sometimes used as a superlative as in "hach cauin" or "very jealous" (Álvarez 1997:224).

culture. For instance, while many western societies (such as Canada or Norway) center much of their national identity around ideas pertaining to the beauty and deep significance of nature, they simultaneously exploit natural resources in unsustainable ways which threaten that which they supposedly hold so dear.

The idea that preserving traditional cultural practices is a good thing is hardly controversial. However, we must be cautious in ascribing monikers such as *traditional* and *authentic* given that meanings behind these terms may vary greatly from one context to another. From a policy perspective, the danger is that in rushing to determine what aspects of local culture are or should be important to local populations, efforts to promote cultural engagement and valorization may in fact be perceived as an imposition of outside values. This is to say that expectations of what constitutes authenticity or traditionalism in the mind of a tourists, policy makers or researchers may vary greatly from actual local interpretations. Thus, when we ask the question, "is X practice authentic/traditional?" we must ask the follow up question "traditional/authentic to whom?" Given that local interpretations regarding questions of authenticity and traditionalism are most likely to be heterogeneous, the usefulness of these terms becomes increasingly dubious. This being said, despite their limitations these types of terms are indeed useful in that they afford individuals the possibility to identify cultural themes, narratives and discourses in ways which (although ultimately to generalized) may provide important insights which can then be more carefully analyzed.

Though the erosion of local culture through processes such as cultural essentialization is a real concern, the nature and relatively small volume of tourism in Santa Elena likely reduces the impact of this phenomena; especially when compared to other communities in close proximity to major tourism destinations such as Cancun or Tulum which according to my informants tend to attract less culturally minded tourists. It is also important to note that although

life in Santa Elena has changed drastically over the past several decades, it would be unwise to assume that these transformations are solely attributable to tourism.

An analysis of the ways in which local conceptualizations of culture and identity are shaped by touristic encounters suggests that the tourism industry itself and tourists in particular tend towards focusing on discourses and practices which present an essentialized image of local culture. This is likely due in large part to tourists own time constraints and the need for marketing touristic products in ways which are clearly intelligible (Ashworth 1994). As a result locals are incentivized to present themselves and their culture in ways which they would not ordinarily. The concern is that by molding identity and cultural expressions to the preferences of tourists, local culture in Santa Elena is in fact being transformed and impoverished to suit the simple and clear-cut narratives demanded by the tourism industry. Despite their faults, touristic discourses are thus interpreted by locals as reinforcing positive messages about local culture and are therefore taken as a source of pride. Informants such as Abel Gutiérrez point out that their engagement with tourism is capable of providing tools and experiences which are conductive to a valorization of local culture and the past in ways which were not previously available. In fact, this analysis suggests that valorization of culture in relation to involvement and exposure to tourism tends to be more pronounced amongst individuals actively working in the tourism industry than compared with the general population of Santa Elena. However, it is important to note that informants also noted that it was only when they felt empowered by their work in tourism that they began to take a profound liking to the activity and began to reflect on questions pertaining to cultural heritage and the ancient past.

Though my informants came to be involved with tourism in a variety of different capacities, an analysis of their experiences suggests that the process through which they came to access and value traditional culture through the means of their work follows a similar pattern. First, the initial pursuit of the activity is

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performed for the sake of economic motivations. Second, by participating in the activity the participants (and local observers) are exposed to a cultural practice they had previously either not been exposed to or had earlier disqualified. Third, the participant begins to enjoy the activity and beings to ascribe meaning to it. Fourth, having internalized this knowledge informants develop a deeper appreciation for the practice, which may in time lead to the valorization of other aspects of traditional life. While somewhat crude and based on a fairly small number of informant's experiences, this short analysis illustrates the way in which the process of non-traditional access to traditional culture appears to occur in Santa Elena, or at least within the context of my informants. As Rodrigo Chim notes: "Learning to carve traditional crafts or dancing the dances of our ancestors can for some people act as a wakeup call that says your culture is worthwhile, you do not have to be ashamed, embrace it". In the case of cultural performances such as traditional dance, it is likely that the more the manager of the activity presents the performance in terms of its positive and unique aspects, the more likely it is that participants will feel truly engaged in the experience. However, this is not to suggest that participation in touristic activities is the only way through which locals may come to access cultural knowledge and value traditions which they had previously not considered.

Given my own feelings towards the Yucatán and my deep appreciation for pre-hispanic cultures (and particularly the Maya of the Puuc), when I began this this investigation I hoped to find a local sentiment in Santa Elena similar to my own which saw tourism as an opportunity to engage with and revitalize local traditions. While to one degree or anther my informants did indeed share this sentiment, it quickly became apparent that to the people of Santa Elena tourism represents first and foremost a strategy for survival. While in retrospect this "discovery" seems extremely obvious, I realized that my desire to celebrate something which was not quite there is after all not that dissimilar from the

attitudes of tourists who enter the village expecting to see loin cloth covered natives with painted faces. Having said this, the stories related by my informants do indeed suggest that when locals basic needs have been covered and there exists a sense of personal empowerment, engagement with tourism can indeed be conductive to cultural valorization, though the ultimate form this valorization will take is sometimes rather unexpected.

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