

Competing discourses of the “Maya Past”

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ABSTRACT

The use of the "Maya past" for tourism marketing purposes has been a successful tool for attracting international visitors to Mexico for decades. Images of the Maya zone emerge, in part, from an academic focus on the "Maya past" that includes curiosity about the so-called "collapse" of the Classic Maya civilization. The Ancient Maya are seen as "mysterious" and their society as "enigmatic". But the voices of the almost thirty million Maya people who live in Mexico and Guatemala are only vaguely heard in the discourses of tourism and of academia. This paper examines three competing discourses of the Maya and proposes that these discourses represent epistemologies that are nested in relationships of power, such that the Maya discourse is silenced. As such, the dominant discourses of the Maya past can undermine the Maya understanding of their own past, and become a self-fulfilling prophecy regarding the "collapse" of the contemporary Maya.

INTRODUCTION

I have had the privilege of visiting the ruins of ancient Maya cities of southeastern Mexico with Maya people, Mexican and foreign archaeologists, and tourists; that is, with representatives of the three distinct groups most interested in these sites, albeit for very different reasons. Although in all cases our visits were stimulated by curiosity, both the experience sought and the knowledge gleaned from these visits fit into three different conceptual schemes. The meanings of the Maya archaeological sites are different for each of these three groups because they are embedded in distinct discourses. This paper explores three competing discourses of the Maya past: the Maya discourse, the academic discourse, and the tourism discourse. It argues that they create multiple understandings of the Maya past that compete with each other creating a highly contested arena of differential power structures that correspond to the positionality of the protagonists of each discourse. The scale of this analysis is defined by international mass tourism, a global setting that, in the Yucatec Maya zone of Mexico, plays witness to the convergence on a single physical landscape of the producers of the story (the Maya), the producers of the historiography (the academics), and the marketers of the history (tourist trade).

The paper will first discuss and compare the three different approaches to the history of the region using concepts borrowed from discourse

analysis. Then, using a particular case study of a Maya town in Yucatan State, Mexico, the place of Maya history and academic historiography will be discussed in terms of tourism and the tourist illustrating the intersection of the discourses. The final argument focuses on relationships of power and the contested arena of discourse (and related practice), since each of these epistemologies implies a distinct kind of impact on the Maya.

THREE METADISCOUSES

In approaching this preliminary comparative analysis of the three approaches to Maya history, the concept of "metadiscourse" will be used. Metadiscourse refers to organizing principles that underlie a text and that, when shared between the creator and the consumer of the text, will ensure the communication of meaning. The sharing of these principles for the organization of the text is based upon a social relationship that positions both the creator and the consumer of the text (Hyland 1998). In the case of the Maya past, there are three predominant discourses:

Maya metadiscourse in the oral historical tradition

Oral traditions and indigenous knowledge systems are considered by McIsaac (2000) to be "... knowledges of experience and relationships that speak to lived, material and cosmological concerns". She emphasizes the importance of relationships of humans with their environment, spiritual relationships, and interpersonal relationships in the production of this knowledge. McIsaac situates such knowledge systems in contexts of

colonialism, and calls them "sites of resistance" to western discourse, referring not only to the content of the narratives, but to the fact that they are (re)produced through action and performance. The reliance on relationships and action in the production and dissemination of oral tradition means that this tradition is both dynamic and conservative, simultaneously based on remembering and modified by experience. This is described as "practice" by Bahloul (1996:144), who defines it as: "...the constant composition and recomposition of an experienced space: its invention, its social making by its agents, who actively inhabit it rather than occupying fixed and preestablished structures". The reflective, participatory and contextual nature of knowledge generated in this way reveals an epistemology which today might be described by academics as "postmodern" in the sense that it is changing, uncertain, relative, and diverse (Montuori 1998). In the Maya region of central Yucatan (Mexico), however, knowledge and memory are also subject to notions of hegemony, since structures of power *do* exist and through them meanings are legitimated (Mallon 1995). Relationships are revealed through the roles of teller and listener, through the landscape features that stimulate memory, and through the themes of the stories that are told. Many of the (his)stories involve incursions, invasions, and arrivals of outsiders (non-Mayas) onto the landscape, and often their eventual departure. This discourse is not designed for consumption by non-Maya who have different ways of organizing and analyzing themselves, therefore rely upon distinct metadiscourses.

Academic metadiscourse and Maya history/archaeology

In contrast to the oral history of the Maya zone, which provides the memory upon which the social relationships of the present are predicated, academic historical research on the Maya zone is divorced from such social reproduction. Most archaeological and historical research in the Maya zone has been informed by a modernist epistemology which has been described by Corbridge (1986) as “a uniquely privileged or ‘scientific’ level of discourse, in which the privilege itself...can only be demonstrated by means of the discourses that are themselves held to be privileged”. In short, the academics are talking to themselves, in a metadiscourse that is based on assumptions and understandings of the positionality of the researcher, who stands in a position of “authority” relative to the object of his/her inquiry. Therefore, the archaeological and historical work undertaken in the Maya zone creates and subscribes meanings following concepts of reason, logic and order that emanate from a very different perspective on the creation of knowledge (Cosgrove and Domosh 1993). The “unifying structure” that underlies this epistemology presupposes the possibility of attaining an “objective vantage point” from which to generate knowledge based on concepts of certainty and prediction (Montuori 1998). In further contrast to the Maya understanding of knowledge creation and dissemination, here there is a logocentricity (Escobar 1995:18) where the written version embodies not only an authoritative form of knowledge but also a dominant form of power (Ibid). Escobar warns that this project to legitimize certain kinds of knowledge

over others is fed by power relationships and is thus a political project. The writing of Maya history in this modernist model, therefore, may be seen not only as the appropriation and transformation of memory and meaning, but furthermore as a strategy within a power game. In their analysis of development literature, Doreen Massey *et al* (1999) say:

Hegemonic development discourse appropriates societal practices and meanings into the modern realm of explicit calculation, thereby subjecting them to Western forms of power/knowledge. It ensures the conformity of peoples to First World economic and cultural practices. Development has in short penetrated, integrated, managed and controlled countries and populations in increasingly pernicious and intractable ways. It has produced underdevelopment.. The Third World came to believe what the First World promulgated: development as a technical project, as rational decision making, as specialized knowledge, and as normalization.

The history and archaeology of the Maya written by academics, therefore, provides a legitimate, objective and curiosity-driven version of events of the past in the eyes of the western reader. The texts are derived from formal, rule-bound research endeavours, and approach and “accurate” portrayal of real

events. The status of the producer, the academic, is reinforced through these texts, as is that of the reader (consumer), who must share the epistemology in order to decode the intended meanings of the text. The Maya are not expected to be readers of this discourse. Neither is their voice heard in it. They have been objectified from their own history.

The Maya system of knowledge creation and discourse contrasts with the scholarly "western" epistemology. Fundamental to this is the contrast between the essential idea of action and participation in the first instance, and objective observation and disinterested analysis in the second. This has been dichotomized by Montuori (1998) as a contrast between a "participant epistemology", where the participant approach understands knowledge as "embodied", "open", complex and diverse; and a "bystander" one where knowledge is taken to be an "abstract closed system". Each approach defines data differently, treats them in unlike ways to create meanings, and relies upon a distinct set of relationships between the knowledge producer and its "consumer" in order for the message to be understood. The three parallel knowledge systems on the Maya zone identified here do, however, create *contested* meanings, and in the context of power relationships, these create highly politicized spaces.

Tourism metadiscourse in marketing Maya history/archaeology.

One way that the dominant forces use their "knowledge" of the less powerful is to create the notion of "authenticity", based on essentialized representations and imposed meanings. In relation to the native people of Australia, Wolfe (2000) has observed

that such representations translate into implicit expectations regarding the nature of the relationship between dominant society and the aboriginal people. The "metadiscourse" of the representations, therefore, comes to encode information about the relationship. Wolfe calls this "repressive authenticity", which he defines as

...a discourse that imposes on colonised people the impossible task of acting out precontact stereotypes of themselves that have been produced within the colonising culture. The task is impossible because it involves standing outside history. The penalty for failure is disqualification from the concessions that the colonising society grants to the stereotypical native of its own imagining.

This describes much of the tourism discourse, including the marketing of meanings and of the landscape to which they are ascribed. As in all areas of marketing, international tourism promotional material appropriates and transforms information, which is then legitimated through self-defined criteria for success. But, although tourism promoters use discourse, they are not marketing information, but instead are using it to market an experiential space. Inasmuch as this requires the tourist to travel, it can be understood as a "spatial strategy", in the words of Richardson and Jensen (2003), inspiring movement in to "new territories of control, new territories of surveillance and new spatial scales". Richardson and Jensen point out that the prioritizing of one form of

knowledge by default will result in the “marginalizing (of) other ways of understanding”. In the tourist marketing strategies, the social relationships implicit in their discourse on the Maya tourist area provide that one group (the consumers) is entitled to consume the information and environment of the other group (the Maya). Therefore, in several important ways, the discourse encodes a relationship of inequality and class (Crouch 1999).

Marketing discourse, furthermore, has spatial constrictions (Bruthiault 2000). The message must be conveyed in a “sound bite”, but at the same time must resonate with the reader (McQuarrie and Mick 1992). Therefore, as in the other two discourses identified above, it must rely on *existing* understandings of social relationships with the target audience, and build upon these to ensure that the reader identifies with the situation and buys the product. Inasmuch as there is a need to appeal to the reader’s “self image” (Bruthiault 2000), narrative strategies will be adopted to manipulate, such as: “ (i) withholding certain propositions, (ii) informing without ostensive communicative intention to the intended addressee, (iii) using linguistically and logically correct elements that force an unconditional and unquestioning agreement and (iv) using fallacious argumentation” (Arvay 2004). In this way, culturally-specific representations are developed with close attention to the perspective of the consumer. The attached meanings reinforce existing structures to ensure resonance with the readers, while providing credible “information” which will provide, by definition, a partial and essentialized view. In the case of tourism surrounding Maya archaeology and history, the short

promotional texts usually promote a “commercialized leisure” in “commodified spaces” (Crouch 1999).

Much of mass tourism originates from regions of the world that share the “modernist” and western epistemology. Some tourists might be informed by the academic arguments of Mayanist archaeologists and historians. Impressions of the “mysterious Maya” and the “enigma of the Classic Maya collapse” emanate from academic circles and circulate widely in North American and European regions and beyond. Marketers of tourism build upon this kind of information, appropriating and transforming it in order to persuade consumers to buy a product.

In order to ground these theoretical arguments about conflicting discourses, the next section will discuss a real case scenario by looking at a Maya town in the Yucatan peninsula (Mexico), the destiny of which is increasingly tied to the mass tourism industry.

CHEMAX, YUCATAN: A CASE IN POINT¹

Chemax and its own history

Chemax is a large Maya town in central Yucatan peninsula inhabited by descendents of Yucatec Maya people who have lived in the region for millennia. Today, the municipality of Chemax has a population of approximately 25,000, of whom 97% are mother tongue Maya speakers (XII Censo), indicating a culturally conservative population. The tropical

¹ The information in this section is based on long-term anthropological research in Chemax conducted in the years 1979 to the present. The material was collected using simple and participant observation, reflective interviews, group interview, and key informant interview. See, for example, Brown 1999.

forests surrounding Chemax have been the essential resource base for sustaining the town and region until recently, when the explosion of tourist activities on the Caribbean coast of the Yucatan peninsula has generated wage labour opportunities at a distance of slightly over an hour's travel by car or bus.² Today, a growing number of household heads derive their income from work in tourism, primarily in building construction and service-related work. Parallel to this is a decreasing economic dependence on the forests of the region and local agricultural production therein.

These forests have been key to Chemax for several important reasons, beyond their obvious use for slash-and-burn agriculture. For older people in Chemax, the forest provokes memory and stimulates dialogue about the history of the region. Place names and sites in the vicinity of Chemax have associations with events in the past. I have spent many hours listening to stories that can be traced back in terms of my own historical paradigm to the so-called Caste War uprising of the mid 19th Century, to the revolutionary period of the early 20th Century, and to other key moments of Chemax's past. The landscapes of Chemax provided the settings for these events, and today are littered with physical evidence of them. The archaeological site of Coba, at a distance of approximately 35 kms from the town of Chemax, was described to me on numerous occasions as the ruins

of a splendid city, as a city that had once been bigger and more beautiful than Cancun. Presently (and temporarily, according to the teller of this story), Coba is abandoned, as a punishment for the excesses of the inhabitants. Ruins of cattle ranches and haciendas in the forests of Chemax were described to me in terms of failed agricultural projects that tried to introduce technologies and politics from outside that were inappropriate and therefore unsuccessful due to peculiar features of the natural landscape of the region. They seem to be taken as reminders that the forest must be carefully managed or it will not provide a sustained livelihood to the local inhabitants.

Deserted settlements in the forest are numerous, and stories were shared with me about how they came to be abandoned. Some of these stories reveal the Maya organizational principles that underlie the settlement system in the region, and how defiance of such principles by individuals or small groups can result in their demise. The forests of Chemax are a key testimony of the past, and within the Maya conception of cyclical (rather than linear) time, they are also a testimony of the future. "History" repeats itself, and we move forward in a spiral-like sequence, according to this conception. Remembering, respecting, and learning from the past, therefore, provides a pathway to an improved future. All of this is encoded in the forest: in its flora and fauna, natural waterholes and depressions, imprints of past political events, ruins of abandoned economic activities, as well as the evidence of present day use and exploitation of the forest. It is an interrelated and holistic

² In the 2000 census, the economically active population of Chemax reported the following occupations: 62.7% in agriculture, cattle forestry hunting fishing; and 30.5% in construction, manufacturing, commerce, non-governmental service occupations, hotel and restaurant work, most of which would be in the tourist zone of the Caribbean Coast ("Maya Riviera") *XII Censo* 2000

understanding, providing the basis for an oral historical tradition.

Today, the oral tradition exists parallel to the historiography of the written practice, even though the Maya orality atrophied as a result of the conquest, replaced by European historical conventions as the official system for recording information and knowledge. But, regardless of this change, the landscape of the region encodes Maya meanings and stories, and, as such, it is a critical part of the cultural patrimony of the people of Chemax.

Chemax in the history and archaeology of the Maya

Non-Maya people from outside of the region, such as myself, are interested in the region for different reasons. Archaeological sites such as Coba are the focus of research projects to answer questions about how they were built, how they were sustained, and what happened to the populations that built them. Biologists search for unusual species in the forests. Historical research is undertaken in the archives of Seville, Mexico City and Merida to reach more indepth understandings of the conquest period, the Maya uprisings of the 19th Century, and the campaigns to colonize the Yucatan peninsula. Data are gathered in accordance with the research questions posed, normally generated by outside or academic interests. Although there are increasing numbers of Maya scholars involved in such research, it is still firmly positioned within a European-derived epistemology. Knowledge resulting from this research is predominantly published in books and articles far from the Maya zone both geographically and culturally. The community library in

Chemax has very few of these resources, most of which appear in European languages—certainly none appear written in Yucatec Maya, the mother tongue of nearly the entire population.

The population of Chemax, heir to the Maya traditions studied by such scholars and holders of the Maya memory which is alive today, is outside of the purview, excluded from the research endeavour and uninformed as to the research results. They are unable to access the material, never mind to have input as to how it is gathered, organized and analyzed. They have no control over how their past is represented or how the information about them and their ancestors is used. Few attempts are made to include them at any stage of the research and dissemination.

There are (at least) two parallel versions of the history of the Maya: that generated and owned by the Maya, and that generated and appropriated by outside agents. The latter, the history of the Maya, particularly that depicting their precontact and “Classic” past, reaches a wide audience outside of the zone. As mentioned earlier, from this material, stereotypes about the Maya zone are constructed, and curiosity is instilled in outsiders to visit the zone.

Chemax in the tourism marketing material

Despite the fact that Chemax is a large, Maya town, a significant proportion of the population of which works in the tourism area (Maya Riviera), the town and region of Chemax are virtually absent from tourist promotional material. Unlike other towns of the Maya zone, particularly in Guatemala, that are destinations for tourism, and whose Maya inhabitants are photographed for the tourist marketing

material, Chemax is not a tourist destination. In fact, the forested area of the peninsula is depicted in the tourism literature as "virgin" and "untouched", "natural" areas, uninhabited by humans, and therefore ripe for "ecotourist" activities. Here are some excerpts, with the terms that emphasize these images marked in italics:³

Much of the Yucatan Peninsula *was farmed at one time or another*. It is hard to imagine when you look at it now *but*

³ Here is just a partial list of "attractions" in the Riviera Maya area taken from the literature:

- Miles of **white sandy beaches** bordering on the turquoise waters of the Caribbean
- The world's second largest barrier reef, and some of **the best scuba diving and snorkeling** on the planet
- A vast network of **underground rivers and more than 100 cenotes** (naturally occurring sinkholes for diving)
- Several of Mexico's most fascinating and significant **Mayan archeological sites**
- A variety of **eco-archeological parks** with a wealth of fun and interesting activities
- Exciting **eco-adventure activities** including kayaking, mountain biking, windsurfing, parasailing, bird watching and deep sea fishing
- Thriving **nightlife, local festivals and celebrations**, gourmet dining, authentic local **restaurants**, and **shopping**, shopping, shopping.
- A wide range of **hotels and accommodations** to suit every lifestyle and budget
<http://www.destinationrivieramaya.com/>
- Certain things that turn Merida & Yucatan into such fascinating place, are the remains of its colonial past, which can be appreciated in each and every one of its villages, and the archeological sites of its prehispanic history. This region of Mexico was once the home of the old Mayas, one of the most important civilizations that flourished in America. Yucatan is home to archeological sites like Chichen Itza, the most important regional capital of this Mayan area between 750 and 1200 a.D; Uxmal, Dzibilchaltun, the Caves of Lol-Tun and Balankanche, and the colonial town of Izamal.
http://www.bestday.com/Merida_Yucatan/

hundreds of years ago the Maya occupied the entire region...
<http://www.travelyucatan.com/maya-riviera.htm>

Rugged, rustic and mostly still *untraveled*. This is where you go to find *total seclusion*. Many of the beaches are swimmable with white sand and the landscape still unchanged from the last hurricane. The Maya city of Chetumal borders Belize and the area contains some beautiful ruin sites for the explorer not to mention a greater abundance of wildlife and fauna. ...
<http://www.travelyucatan.com/maya-riviera.htm>

Just south of Cancún, the Riviera Maya is taking shape as Mexico's newest holiday land. Many people have enjoyed their Riviera Maya Vacations along the white stretches of *practically deserted* beaches. The region is filled with scenic and natural wonders, bordered by a craggy limestone shore of sugar-white, palm-fringed beaches, grottos, and tropical coves. Also, some of the most fantastic *archaeological sites* are found here. Resorts are generally all-inclusive and are confined to a few pockets of developed areas, leaving most of the *region uninhabited* and ideal for visitors seeking a Mexican-Caribbean getaway in a *secluded setting*.
http://www.bermantravel.com/riviera_maya_vacations_riviera_maya_hotels.htm

Having *slumbered for hundreds of years*, the once sleepy fishing village of Majahual, is now beginning to awaken to the attraction of eco-tourism...
Xcalak is like a *deserted island*, a small, historical seaside village, where the fishing is excellent, the scenery is inspiring, and life is easy....

Learn about *pre-hispanic and colonial history* by visiting the southern Maya route's *archaeological sites and colonial cities*. There are many other reasons to visit The Costa Maya. Its artful and delicious gastronomy, the deepness of its green forests and the beauty and diversity of its flora and fauna. Bac Halal, known more commonly as Bacalar offers the beauty of the seven colors lagoon. It is the cradle of the putunes, a tribe descendent from the Itzaes, who founded beautiful large Maya cities such as *Chichen Itza*.

If Maya Riviera is paradise. *How is it possible we could have lived so many years knowing so little about so much it has to offer?*

<http://www.akumaltravel.com/rivmaya/beyond.htm>

One site that appeared on the tourism marketing material is, in fact, located in the forests of Chemax, that is, forests over which Chemax claims tenancy. This is the site of Punta Laguna. Punta Laguna was simply a hamlet in the forests inhabited by agriculturists from Chemax until the early 1980s when it was discovered by archaeologists and biologists. This is due to the fact that there are ruins of a sizable pyramid, which is overgrown by the forest. In the trees atop the pyramid lives a colony of spider monkeys. The site sits on the edge of a lagoon, and lagoons are very unusual landscape features on the karstic (limestone) plain of the Yucatan peninsula. During the 1980s, Punta Laguna was contested between two powerful Mexican government institutions: one dealing with archaeology and the other with ecology, as they argued about who was best suited to “protect” this site, in total disregard for the fact that it already had been

managed for millennia by the Maya people of Chemax. At the same time, there were also some jurisdictional conflicts going on between the Mexican states of Yucatan and Quintana Roo, both of which claimed that the site was within their political territory. Today, the site has been privatized (“commodified”) and appropriated from the town of Chemax. It has been marked off and surrounded by a chain-link fence, has controlled access and an entrance fee, and boasts tourism infrastructure. The tourist literature on Punta Laguna stresses the “natural habitat”, in blatant contradiction to and ignorance of the fact that this forest has been inhabited and managed by the Maya Chemax people for millennia. This is reflected in the following excerpt from the tourism literature:

Punta Laguna: Spend time with spider monkeys and howler monkeys *in their natural habitat*. You can trek in the jungle and travel Punta Laguna by boat. Birds, deer, turtles and crocodiles are among the other wildlife to be seen. Punta Laguna is northwest of Coba. <http://www.travelyucatan.com/maya-riviera.htm>

The metadiscourse of this marketing literature establishes a relationship between the consuming tourist and the region that has obscured the very existence of local Maya inhabitants. On the one hand, this confirms the idea that marketing will build upon previous knowledge of the region—since the majority of previous knowledge generated by academics concentrates on the history and archaeology, with little published on the present-day Maya. The archaeological and historical importance of the region

overshadows the present day ethnographic interest. This may be due to the prevalence of archaeological sites in the region, as well as the beauty of the Caribbean beaches, which overshadow any attraction that the Maya towns and people may have. It may also be due to the fact that the rural population pattern is sparse. Finally, as mentioned earlier, marketers prioritize their messages due to spatial constraints. The Maya of the region do not "make the cut" in terms of the kinds of prior knowledge the consumer may have, and the kinds of relationships that the consumer can be expected to establish. The local population is *a silence* in this material; therefore, the consumer will not expect to have a relationships with Maya people from the region (or from Chemax).

This is ironic, given the size of the regional Maya population and the sizeable proportion of urban Maya population living and working in the tourist cities.⁴ The Maya people from places such as Chemax are key participants in the construction, maintenance and service industries relating to tourism in the area. However, the Maya are portrayed only through archaeological and historical metaphor in the tourist literature. They are not given agency in the tourist activity on their landscape, which is based upon the appropriation of their spaces, their resources, and their memory. What is worse, they are obliterated from the present. This twist of discourse renders them invisible as well as silent to the

millions of visitors to their landscape very year.

TOURISM, METADISCOURSE, AND RELATIONSHIPS OF POWER

The attitude of the tourists towards the Maya of the Yucatan is, in part, constructed through the metadiscourse of the tourism promotional material, which is informed by the academic literature. In a process that exaggerates the separation of object and subject that characterizes modernist academic archaeological and historical research, the tourism literature prioritizes and essentializes the region, and in the process erases the Maya population. This virtual 'erasure' of the region's indigenous population, if understood in terms of metadiscourse, indicates that the "consumer" of this literature is expected to have no social relationships with these people, at the same time as they will expect to find no opportunity for such a relationships when they visit the region. This construction of an area that was populated during archaeological and historical times, but is presently deserted, underpins another "relationship" which is that of the tourist with an unoccupied area that can justifiably be appropriated without disturbing a pre-existing population. The area seems to be ripe for "awakening" and colonization. The investment of tourist dollars and the populating of this area (especially if there is concern for the "eco"), is therefore easily implied as a positive contribution. The tourists' encounter with the Maya Riviera is therefore constructed as a win-win situation: bringing happiness to the visitor at the same time as it introduces

⁴ Five of the cities with the highest Maya population are on the Coast of the state of Quintana Roo (the heart of the tourist area). These are Cancun (Maya speaking population >5 years of age 51,665), Chetumal (10,734), Cozumel (9030), Felipe Carrillo Puerto (8134), and Playa del Carmen (7613). (*Perfil* 2005)

“development” to an “uninhabited region”.

Writing of the Maya archaeological and historical past by non-Maya researchers and marketers has produced meanings of the Maya projected onto the Maya’s patrimonial landscape that render them powerless and voiceless. But can their own discourse survive parallel to that of the globally powerful? What stops the Maya from simply maintaining their own oral historical tradition?

De Sousa Santos has written about the impacts and expressions of globalization in the context of power struggles and human rights. Beginning with his definition of globalization, he is concerned with relationships of power. For De Sousa Santos globalization is “...the process by which a given local condition or entity succeeds in extending its reach over the globe and, by doing so, develops the capacity to designate a rival social condition or entity as local” (1999:216). In an advancing process, globalization then moves forward to use “hegemonic scientific discourse (that) tends to prefer the story of the world as told by the winners” (Ibid:216). With this, globalization tends to reproduce itself, and imposing itself on the local in a process that De Sousa Santos calls “localized globalism” where “transnational practices” impact “local conditions that are thereby destructed and reconstructed” (Ibid:216). The reconstruction for the tourist market may result in “local specificity” which is actually exaggerated and essentialized, in a form that becomes the prototypical “authentic expression”. In his words, “(m)ost of the tourist sites today must be highly exotic, vernacular and traditional in order to become competent enough to enter the market of global tourism”

(Ibid:217). So the tourist destination has been figuratively appropriated, and discursively reconstructed, and then sold as a product for invasion and colonization by outsiders as part of the movement forward of global capitalism.

As part of this process, “local knowledge” reinvented and reconstituted becomes “global knowledge” and *vice versa*. The field of “local knowledge” becomes contested as Maya oral traditions and histories come up against official and hegemonic versions of the archaeological and historical past. Carriers of both “discourses” physically inhabit the area. But while the Maya acknowledge the presence of the tourists, the opposite is not true. The powerful, by definition, have the ability to silence the voice of the weak. Dahles (1996:241) expressed this phenomenon as follows: “In the mass tourist discourse th(e) body of global knowledge meets its local context, and in order to prevent the local context from interfering with the image and expectations that tourists hold, it is cut down to global size.” The feedback link in further developing hegemonic discourse about the Maya region, therefore, is plugged into the meanings to which the tourists are predisposed. Co-existing discourses thus exist in arenas of power.

The test of the power relations at this scale of analysis may be in the question: How can this process be stopped? A major challenge to the tourism metadiscourse would be the appearance of a Maya voice in the region. The construction of meaning in the region by the tourism sector is predicated on the absence of Maya people on the landscape. Therefore, the penetration through this discourse of a powerful and coherent voice of the Maya

people of the region might cause a strong enough ambiguity in the tourism messages so as to affect the market. This, however, was not the case in Chiapas, in highland Mexico, where the loud and violent voice of the previously silenced indigenous people accompanied an armed rebellion that began in 1994. Tourism to this region increased as a result of this. The tourists no longer visit San Cristobal de las Casas primarily to see a colonial city, to visit the picturesque highland Mayan communities, and to see the natural beauty of the rainforest. The visits of many tourists are now provoked by the curiosity to see the native people who are involved in an armed social movement. In fact, this visibility by international observers has been used by the Maya rebel movement, which uses very complex discursive practices to make such observers identify with local messages.

South of Chiapas, in Guatemala, the Maya people, have seen their daily lives, their history, and their communities re-configured as "tourist attractions". Instead of being "silenced" as they are in the Yucatec Maya example, they effectively are expected to perform a "lip sync" of the discourse produced by the tourism industry. Their own words and discursive practices have been subject to a "voice over". This has resulted in De Sousa Santos' phenomenon of the "globalized local", where the ideas attached to the powerful begin to be assumed by the weaker.

Returning to the Yucatan context, should the impact of the tourist discourse in the Maya Riviera be assimilated by the Maya, then, according to the theories mentioned earlier, they will begin to replicate the social relations that are embedded in this introduced

metadiscourse. The logical implication of this would be that the Maya themselves would begin to believe that they were dead. In response to this, they would stop reproducing themselves socially and culturally, inasmuch as they identify with the metadiscourse of the marketer of tourism, and therefore establish the social relations and assimilate the meanings systems implicit in this. This would constitute the process of "globalization of the local", and could pose the greatest challenge to the Maya oral historical and cultural traditions, epistemology and metadiscourse. Elizabeth McIsaac has identified this as a trend in the encounter of western and indigenous epistemologies, and calls the process of replacement of the latter by the former "tantamount to genocide" (McIsaac 2000:99).

Discourse may seem benign. However, it silenced Maya voices with the voice of authority in the modernist academic tradition. Now it is being used to substantiate the expropriation, colonization and occupation of the Maya region through tourism. Therefore, discourse is not benign when it is an instrument in the hands of the powerful. In contrast, discourse exists within relations of power, and it reflects and perpetuates these relations. Inasmuch as it is used as an instrument of change by providing a competitive epistemology to that of weaker groups on the global scale, resulting in their incorporation into a new knowledge system, then it is a highly destructive tool.

In the arena of conflicting and competing discourses attached to different analytical scales and power relationships, how can diversity be maintained and rights over cultural patrimony be protected? Perhaps it is

time to recognize and discuss the inequalities of power and authority in a global capitalist system in which the “playing field” is not “level”. Perhaps it is time to seriously question the assumption that the powerful are the most “fit”. In analyzing the social relations embedded in metadiscourse, it may be important to recognize that relationships should be based on a concept of human rights, respect for cultural patrimony, and sustainability. As co-inhabitants of the planet, perhaps we should adopt a “participant epistemology” and abandon the more familiar “bystander” understanding. A conscious attempt on behalf of the dominant and hegemonic to understand the knowledge systems and discourses of others will result in a more stable and tolerant world. In the end, all we have are stories. In the words of Cosgrove and Domosh (1993:37):

Our stories add to a growing list of other stories, not listed in a logic of linearity to fit into a coherent body of knowledge, but as a series of cultural constructions, each representing a particular view of the world, to be consulted together to help us make sense of ourselves and our relation to the landscapes and places we inhabit and think about.

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