

Chapter Title: Introduction: PREDATORY AND STICKY TOURISM GEOGRAPHIES

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Introduction

PREDATORY AND STICKY TOURISM GEOGRAPHIES

IMAGINE A LARGE SCREEN SUSPENDED in front of a manual slide projector. Every time the projector changes slides, the distinct sound of a click is followed by total silence. Then, a buzzing sound.

Click. Silence. Buzz. Slide 1. Cancún. A beach resort city in the Mexican Caribbean. Ata, a thirty-nine-year-old Pemex worker from Veracruz, sits in the kitchen of his small prefabricated house.¹ His wife, Ana, prepares dinner. He recalls his experience of Hurricane Wilma in the city where, in 2005, he had just migrated to work at a large national construction firm. His face is tense, his teeth grind, his hands clench in fists on the table. During the storm he had no choice, he says, but to leave several workers from the villages locked in a small industrial warehouse with just a portable radio and an insufficient supply of water. His supervisor ordered him to lock them up despite knowing that there were only a few gallons of water on hand. Feeling responsible for their well-being, Ata recalls disobeying orders and returning in his van to pick up the workers in the eye of the storm. He mutters, "I remember the silence. The lampposts and trees all over the street. . . . I remember their faces when I opened up the doors. They were terrified. The storm was not over yet. They had never experienced a hurricane before." Ata's disobedience got him fired. What struck him most was that only two days after the hurricane, those same workers were queuing up among many others hoping to be recruited by tourist resorts to clean the algae and debris from the beach. As Ata put it, "It is as if they were hungry for tourism to come back." For the next two months, the laborers worked to beautify "paradise" in a city built, purposely, to exclude them.

Click. Silence. Buzz. Slide 2. Celestún. A fishing town trapped inside a protected natural area. At the estuary of the UNESCO Ria Celestún

Biosphere Reserve, near the Gulf of Mexico coast, only five hours away from Cancún by car. The ocean breeze. The penetrating chirp of birds emanating from nearby mangrove forests. At intervals, a strong, noxious smell of putrefactive fish, garbage, and salt. Aboard a rudimentary boat, a group of eight middle-aged German tourists observe in silence with their orange life vests on and cameras in hand. They watch two fishermen shout insults and exchange punches over who will give them a ride to observe the pink flamingos at the estuary. For the tourists, this is an unexpected scene. They later tell me how they were taken aback by the violence, which was in stark contrast to the “pristine natural oasis” and “natural sanctuary” featured in the brochures they had received from their hotels. For the fishermen involved in the fight, as well as for both Lalo, a biologist working for a national conservationist NGO in the estuary, and myself, violence had become “the new normal.” Fights seemed to be the way to win a spot in the estuary in order to access fish and, more importantly, to get physically close to ecotourism’s dollars.

Click. Silence. Buzz. Slide 3. Temozón Sur. Inside an old hacienda’s *casa principal* transformed into a luxury hotel in inland, rural Yucatán. It is mid-day. Intense tropical heat. Insects buzzing. And silence. Stasis. Patricia, a middle-aged Maya indigenous woman dressed in a traditional white *terno* sits in a wooden chair fighting sleep. There are “important guests” at the hotel and she is on call waiting for them to decide if they want body massages. She won’t be able to go home that night to care for her sick mother and attend to her three children. When this happens, she says she feels “captive,” “treated like a prisoner.” Besides, she suffers because she cannot explain to others in the village that the massages she offers inside the gates of the hotel are not sexual, or that the *terno*, the traditional festive attire of Maya women, she wears to work is not meant to seduce guests. But at least, she says, the hacienda hotel gave her “a house to live in, small but a house after all,” and she does not have to commute to work or migrate to the coast or the United States, like many other local villagers. She says she is “grateful” to the hotel’s owner, whom she refers to as the “new patron.”

Click. Silence. Buzz. Slide 4. Tekit. At home at another inland town. It is dusk already. Electrical lines crisscross from house to house. The lamppost lights just went on. A *cumbia* song plays loudly on a portable radio. It is muffled and interrupted by mechanical noises. On and off, short and slow, without pause. Inside a one-room cement house, Luis and Lucía, a young married Maya couple, are sewing on Singer machines. Their heads are bent over, their

backs slightly curved toward the machines. Their eyes, watery and red, are intently focused on the needles. One hand on the needle, one hand on the fabric. Their feet, in flip-flops, are on the pedals. Behind them there is a king-size bed with a white embroidered quilt, a wooden wardrobe, a large plasma TV and radio with speakers, and a small altar with all its figurines covered with blue sheets. They tell me that these sheets protect their belongings “from cotton pollution.” Like most in town, they are assembling the regional shirt, the guayabera, coveted as a textile souvenir and ubiquitous as uniforms in the hospitality industry. They have become financially indebted and beholden to Lucía’s uncle who brings them the cloth to sew. They claim that assembling the shirts is a “true, true job.” But it generates cataracts in their eyes, asthma in their lungs, and financial and moral debts. And yet, this work is the only way for them “to have a good life,” to save money for the village’s fiesta, to stay together as a family, and to care for the land as their ancestors did.

. . .

During my ethnographic fieldwork in the Yucatán Peninsula in southern Mexico, from 2002 to 2016, I documented the region’s dramatic transformation through state-planned tourism development. The vignettes above situate the four ethnographic chapters of this book, in which I explore the livelihoods, contradictions, and sacrifices, the invisible and partial relations, the labor and sensorial landscapes that have created and sustained this region as a global tourist space since the mid-1970s. These moments illustrate how tourism pervades the region’s landscape, transforming social relations and household dynamics by erasing potentialities and displacing habitual ways of doing, living, and imagining. But simultaneously, they show how tourism opens up unexpected collaborations, spaces of hope, and opportunities for well-being that previously did not exist.

The goals of this book are to make empirical sense of the tension between how tourism destroys and how it creates, and to understand how the Yucatán’s inhabitants “get stuck to tourism” as their only route for making a “good life.” I do this through an ethnographic exploration of how people like Ata, Patricia, Lalo, Luis, and Lucía maneuver within what has become an inescapable tourism reality. Their experiences, and the buildings and landscapes they inhabit, constitute a contemporary geography of late capitalism whose importance has been underestimated.

TOURISM: AN INESCAPABLE REALITY

The everyday scenes and contradictions captured in the vignettes above belong to Yucatán, but they could easily describe other everyday lives in the many places around the world where tourism has become an inescapable component of contemporary life.

Tourism is a major force in the shift to a service economy, one that organizes the circulation of people, goods, capital, and images around the world. Services and commodities created for tourists shape quotidian and intimate acts in consumer societies, from how we make sense of and move around our cities, to how we daydream about escaping from the grind of work and everyday pressures, to how we construct personal identities. Although as tourists we rarely notice, the people who provide these services and produce those commodities are also transformed by them.

Chances are that you have been a tourist, traveling to experience new things, to learn from others, to encounter new landscapes and emotions, to give back, or to rediscover your inner self. Souvenirs from those trips might decorate your home. Chances are that you have experienced tourism, both its pleasures and its prices, crowds, and pollution. You might even have worked for the hospitality industry, as a bartender, a volunteer, a guide, or maybe you have shared your couch or rented your house to tourists.

The powerful effects of tourism are a relatively recent phenomenon. Barely a century ago, tourism was a privileged activity within the reach of the affluent alone. It was only after the Second World War, with the expansion of the consumption society and the emergence of the leisured middle classes, that tourism began to consolidate itself as an industry that has since morphed into a pervasive reality. This process began between the mid-1950s and the 1970s, when states and governments in the First World started to promote mass tourism through modernization discourses that emphasized technological and infrastructural development and economic growth as a way to help societies with “comparative advantages” in their march toward Western ideals of mass consumerism and progress (Mowforth and Munt 2015; Britton 1991). The expansion of the tourist industry accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s as part of neoliberal agendas set by states and international organizations across the world and meant to develop emergent ideas of socially equitable and green economic growth (Rojek and Urry 1997). For many countries, especially poorer countries in the so-called Third World, tourism was seen as a path that could integrate them symbolically and practically into the world community

(Enloe 2000, 3). Since the 2000s, amid ecological and financial crises, tourism has continued to grow. Governments have fostered this expansion through discourses of poverty alleviation, pro-poor development, heritage preservation, and community participation as ways of “contributing,” “giving back,” and “empowering” through “guilt-free” ethical spending and mindful travel.² The UN proclamation of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development reflects the contemporary belief that tourism is a catalyst for effective development because it enhances natural conservation and “resource efficiency,” reverses colonial inequalities, empowers marginalized indigenous people, and builds cross-cultural “corporate empathy” and “global prosperity.”³

Today, it is difficult to find a country that has not promoted itself as a tourist destination or that has not used tourism as a major economic sector and an integral part of its growth policies (Telfer and Sharpley 2015). This has made tourism the fourth-largest export sector in the world after fuels, chemicals, and automotive products. In 2019, tourism generated US\$8.9 trillion (10.3 percent of global GDP) and 330 million jobs, the equivalent of one in ten jobs in the global economy (World Travel and Tourism Council 2019). Tourism is also one of the largest catalysts of global human mobility, similar in force and manner, some authors claim, to military mobility and empire building (Baranowski et al. 2015). International tourism has been growing at an annual rate of 3–5 percent over the last ten years, outpacing the growth of international trade and other sectors of the economy (World Travel and Tourism Council 2019; UNWTO 2019b). And these numbers show no sign of abating. The World Travel and Tourism Council (2019) forecasts that tourism will grow 4 percent annually until 2030. In less developed countries, “tourism acts as an engine for development through foreign exchange earnings and the creation of direct and indirect employment” (World Travel and Tourism Council 2019). Tourism is the highest or second-highest source of export earnings in twenty out of the forty-seven world’s least developed countries (UNWTO 2017b). For many of these countries, “tourism *is* development,” as Mexico’s 2001–2006 National Development Plan bluntly put it.⁴

Tourism’s centrality to the organization of contemporary life makes it a force that extends well beyond the economic realm. Tourism also pervades the sociocultural, political, and ecological arenas. The tourist industry is one of the leading producers of global imaginaries.⁵ It is a powerful form of meaning-making: narratives of the self and other, conceptions of the past and the future, and dreams of natural and cultural encounters are produced by

tourism through desire, anticipation, and memorabilia (MacCannell 2011; Gravari-Barbas and Graburn 2016; Salazar and Graburn 2016). Over the last decades, the tourist industry has massively reorganized and repurposed the physicality of places to fit those dreams and imaginaries, recreating the untouched tropical island, the primitive native village, the pristine natural reserve, the authentic past. It has done so through specially curated built environments and infrastructures that aim to foster consumption—the oceanfront all-inclusive resort, the restored colonial building, the scenic highway, the theme park—and through discourses of contemplation, cultural encounter, heritage preservation, cultural remediation, indigenous empowerment, civic engagement, or sustainable participation (Sorkin 1992; Dávila 2016; Vogel 2016).⁶

Tourism has also become a generalized practice of statecraft. Across the Pacific and the Caribbean, tourism has been propelled by governments and tourist stakeholders as the “new sugar” (Sheller 2003; Pattullo 2005; Gonzalez 2013) and in the Americas, as well as in Chinese and Arab regions, tourism has manufactured leisure cities from scratch. This is the case with Cancún in the Yucatán Peninsula (chapter 1), Las Vegas, Atlantic City, Thames Town, and Dubai, among others. These themed cities follow the same modernist ideals that Holston (1989) described in his anthropological critique of Brasília, Brazil’s manufactured capital city in the 1960s. In Europe, Canada, and North America, urban planning is almost inseparable from tourism, and cities such as Barcelona, Palma de Majorca, Skopje, Vancouver, and San Francisco are pushed toward creating monumental architecture and cultural and natural heritage designations, and advancing gentrification in the name of tourism growth (e.g., Franquesa 2013; Mattioli 2014; Shoval 2018).

The importance of tourism is also visible in how it produces ideas and captivates hopes about collective and individual class and gender identities, ethnicities, and sense of belonging. At a collective level, international tourism is widely promoted by states, governments, and international agencies as an effective tool for dialogue and cultural exchange capable of building bridges across seemingly insurmountable political and cultural differences. As the UN World Tourism Organization put it, tourism promotes “cultural well-being, environmental restoration, peace and mutual understanding” (UNWTO 1980, 2017a). At an individual level, tourism is about having fun or getting jobs. Tourism also fosters dreams and defines values for the modern and postmodern selves. Tourism, as MacCannell (2011, 53) puts it, epitomizes the imperative social command to “Enjoy!” But tourism and traveling are also

epitomes of freedom, social distinction, and upward class and social mobility for the working, middle, and upper classes. Consumption societies legitimize traveling and spending as civic practices that foster national, regional, local or household socioeconomic good. The mantra “shop, fly, and spend,” popularized post-9/11 in the United States, exemplifies these experiences to the extent that moving around the world as a tourist has been internalized as part of what it means to be an exemplary global citizen (Brown 2016).⁷

Tourism is so integral to the tapestry of contemporary life that it is almost elevated to the rank of a human right. In fact, the UN World Tourism Organization’s 1980 Manila Declaration on World Tourism reads: “the right to access to holidays and to freedom of travel and tourism, a natural consequence of the right to work, is recognized as an aspect of the fulfillment of the human being by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that the Manila Declaration continues, “tourism is considered an activity essential to the life of nations, its development is linked to the social and economic development of nations and can only be possible if man . . . has access to creative rest and holidays and enjoys freedom to travel” (UNWTO 1980, 1). Five years later, the UN World Tourism Organization Tourism Bill of Rights and Tourism Code asserted that “the exercise of this right constitutes a factor of social balance and enhancement of national and universal awareness” (UNWTO 1985). In 1997, the UN Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET) stated that the “right to tourism” should be seen as “a right equally open to all the world’s inhabitants,” encouraging all, and in particular public authorities, to support and warrant the liberty of tourist movements (UNWTO 2007). In 2019, the GCET is still not legally binding but it has been signed by hundreds of private stakeholders and adopted as a corporate tourism governance model.⁸

Crucially, the transformation of tourism into a central feature of contemporary social life has not been smooth. The tourist-host relationship has always been an ambivalent one, fraught with tension and deception. Conflict often stems from the industry’s selective interpretations of history as heritage and from uneven land appropriation, both of which directly contribute to environmental degradation and rapid acculturation.⁹ Like traveling and travel writing, tourism engages in, and reproduces, colonial, celebratory narratives of European or North American superiority (Pratt 2007; Nixon 2017; Sheller 2003). In the Global South, tourism has acted as a form of imperialism through symbolic, embodied, and material violence (Nash 1977; Kincaid 1988; Nixon 2017).¹⁰ Tourism, like war, can reinforce prevailing ideas of

empire as well as forms of gendered and racial domination (Lisle 2016; Gonzalez 2013; Kincaid 1988; Enloe 2000). In the Caribbean for example, myths and metaphors of paradise are formed around the plantation (Nixon 2017). And while contemporary dreams of delight are necessarily reconfigured versions of privilege, so too has tourism become one of the world's most contested political arenas.

The importance of tourism for local, national, and global economies and the generalized and intense circulation of tourism imaginaries and identities have transformed tourism into a powerful geopolitical anchorage that informs, contests, and coproduces contemporary politics at international, national, regional, local, urban, and household scales. On the one hand, and in the name of securing international tourism, tourist cities and regions have become favorite grounds for the privatization of public space and for militarization.¹¹ Historic battlefields, concentration camps, bases, even nuclear plants have become landscapes of tourism expansion (Lisle 2016; Klein 2008; Enloe 2000; Sheller 2003; Gonzalez 2013). In these sites, tourism is used as a political technology and a weapon to advance nationalist ambitions and ethnic assimilation projects. On the other hand, tourism destinations and attractions, like beaches, religious monuments, and parks refashioned for tourism, have become sites where people gather to claim their rights and to protest political decisions and assaults on citizenship (Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005; Edensor 1998).

In some places, local populations have attacked tourists or fenced themselves off as ways to cope with contradictions (Boissevain 1996). Among fishing communities in the Gulf of Mexico coast, ecotourism resulted in an uptick in violence, as Lalo and I could observe, as a way to control the few jobs it provides (chapter 2). In other locations, people have exploited cultural stereotypes (Cohen 1987; Chambers 2009; Vainikka 2015) or invented and reappropriated rituals, such as festivals, for nationalist projects (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Rowen 2016; Picard and Robinson 2006). In other instances, tourism's meanings and practices cohabit with entrenched local ways of organizing, creating novel contradictions and struggles for the control of resources, cultural meanings, and physical space (Edensor 1998, 2005; Wynn 2011). Among indigenous peoples in Latin America, for example, tourism development begets new forms of servitude but also old forms of labor activism and resistance (chapter 3). In many European cities where locals have become outnumbered by tourists, like Venice, Lisbon, and Barcelona, antitourism and tourism-phobic social movements are gaining new political leverage in the larger fight for affordable housing and access to

public space.¹² In these places, citizens unite to fight “overtourism,” or too much tourism, asking for better regulations and strict limitations on tourism, not in order to demand the end of tourism but in order to regain housing affordability, public space, and quality of city life.¹³

At the same time, tourist sites and infrastructures created for tourism—such as hotels, scenic drives, museums, fairs and festivals, markets, malls, trains, or airports—have become at risk for violent attacks due to their iconic status as global symbols of Western excess and uneven capital accumulation (see Clayton and Korstanje 2012). The terrorist attacks in Barcelona’s popular Ramblas, Berlin’s Christmas market, and iconic tourist areas in London, Paris, Manchester, and Brussels are examples of this growing global phenomenon.¹⁴

In addition to its economic, social, and geopolitical significance, tourism has also become an important variable in the precarious ecological balance of the planet. In the Anthropocene, or more accurately the Capitalocene (Moore 2015), tourism is a driver of climate change.¹⁵ Tourists fly, drive, or navigate to their destinations using carbon-intensive means of transportation. Skiing, water activities, recreational hunting and fishing, mountain hiking, biking on trails, sightseeing, shopping, and eating out are tourism-related activities that contribute to environmental pollution and gas emissions. Between 2009 and 2013, the practices of traveling, shopping, and eating associated with tourism were responsible for 8 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions (Lenzen et al. 2018). Tourism-led urbanization, infrastructure development, beach development projects, and food and souvenirs commodity chains, to name just a few, also affect soil, flora, fauna, air, and water in forests, deserts, and oceans across the globe.

All these economic, political, sociocultural, and ecological variables together make tourism one of the most powerful orderings of the geographies of contemporary capitalism.

TOURISM AS AN ORDERING OF LATE CAPITALIST GEOGRAPHIES

Arguing that tourism is an ordering implies that it is an active social and geographical force that carves up the landscape and permanently recasts values and identities, as well as sociocultural, political, and ecological life.¹⁶ Tourism spaces are not already there, waiting for us to visit them. Rather, they are spaces that need to be systematically imagined, narrated, planned,

designed, constructed, performed, sustained, and secured, in both imagination and physical form, *as* tourist spaces *under* the tourist gaze.¹⁷ This is a process of production that takes place through the labor of government officials, planners, real estate agents, architects and designers, conservationist experts, development volunteers, and service workers alike (Urry 2011, 2007; Sheller and Urry 2004; Gonzalez 2013).

Tourism orderings work in practice by *re-spatializing* and *scaling-up* territory, nature, and sociocultural life for global consumption. By re-spatializing I mean creating new sociocultural relations and ecological processes through their relocation in social and geographical space (Low 2016); and by scaling-up I mean amplifying—both in discourse and practice—particular ideas about space, nature, and culture.¹⁸ These processes of tourism re-spatialization and scaling-up occur simultaneously across geographical scales at material, symbolic, ecological, and political levels.

On a material level, tourism scales up places and peoples, ecosystems and habitats as productive forces in the pursuit of profit-making. In this sense, tourism has become one of the most powerful terraforming activities in late capitalist societies. Governments and corporations engineer forests, mountains, beaches, deserts, islands, wetlands, and material infrastructures such as roads, streets, houses, hotels, pools, parks, and museums, designing them to shape new relations of people, capital, labor, and resources (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006). Tourism landscapes and infrastructure require not only new modes of circulation, but also new forms of stasis, immobility, and mooring, as well as forms of being and acting in the world (Bissell and Fuller 2013). Tourism reworks bodies and creates subservient classes of workers, especially among ethnic and indigenous minorities. Tourism landscapes and infrastructure reorient action to and through consumption; in order to enlarge the presence of markets, they promote flexible labor and intensify the extraction of land as well as natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment of a few.¹⁹

On a symbolic level, tourism creates and stabilizes iconic infrastructures and modernist architectures through which the world is apprehended and ordered according to Western cultural imaginaries of escape and encounter. These modernist infrastructures and architectures colonize imaginations of the past, the present, and the future, and manufacture neoliberal consent around embodied dispositions to serve and/or to consume.²⁰ In so doing, tourism secures territories in a sedentarist Western metric of progress, civilization, and cultural domination. For this reason, tourism's symbolic orderings are also a pervasive lens through which people view the world and each

other, and through which the very idea of the other is constituted and consumed. This tourist gaze, as John Urry calls it, has become one of the most powerful orderings, defining and reifying patterns of inclusion and exclusion, gender and racial ideologies, and understandings about nature, culture, and society at large. In many parts of the world, tourism oversimplifies indigenous bodies, politics, and places by promoting a kind of primitivism and pastoral exoticism used to reveal or conceal larger national market goals.²¹

On an ecological level, tourism orders and regulates physical environments by mobilizing and consuming natural resources like water, sand, and air for leisure and consumption, by scripting the natural world according to modern aesthetics of contemplation, management, and spectacle, and by reorganizing regionally and locally specific ecological relations between inland and coastal ecosystems alongside largely international tourist flows and desires (Urry 1995; Igoe 2017; Haldrup and Larsen 2009; Sheller 2003). Since the advent of industrial capitalism, tourism has read the landscape and exploited it for profit (Urry 1995; Macnaghten and Urry 1998). From pioneer seaside resorts such as Blackpool in Lancashire, to the largest mass resorts of the Caribbean, to Dubai's engineered Palm Islands, to incursions in the Antarctic, tourism involves material interventions in the physical landscape accomplished through recurrent shortsightedness in planning, and the enclosure of land and resources. Moreover, these tourist infrastructures—such as oceanfront hotels, malls, roads, and boardwalks—rely on activities that have irreversible ecological consequences, such as aluminum mining and smelting (Sheller 2014), or sand dredging to refill beaches and aid construction.

On a political level, tourism orderings are meaningful and powerful forces whose influence spans geographic scales. The grand tours of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, facilitated by the advent of large-scale rail transportation, moved British nobility to France and Italy in search of the roots of Western civilization. Having taken such journeys could grant them influential political positions, marriage into a higher social class, and increased social mobility after their return home (Urry 2011). In the centuries that followed, rail and steamship travel became more accessible and travel in general became more democratized. The mantra “tourism *is* development,” mentioned earlier, has more recently led to tourism informing a vast array of the relations between North and South, rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped countries. Moreover, as noted earlier, contemporary tourism orders geographical relations—urban and rural, coastal and inland—through political ideologies of consumption that enunciate, in a classist, racialized,

and gendered manner, who can move, to where, and how. Tourism and traveling are practices of statesmanship and nation building, generating new centers and pleasurable peripheries (Hall 2017; Lew 2001). They animate and legitimize discourses and practices of territorial ambition and control. Tourism imaginaries, often restrictive and stereotypical, inform a great deal of the formation of contemporary political affects, including fears about and hopes for the future (Mostafanezhad, Córdoba Azcárate, and Norum, forthcoming 2021).²²

It is important to understand tourism today not simply to learn about the particularities of the industry or the dynamics of host-guest encounters. Equally important is that tourism, like religion, family, the market, and the state, has become a key variable of contemporary patterns of sociopolitical and cultural life, racial and gender discrimination, sovereignty disputes, militarization, ecological deterioration, the circulation of commodities, the organization of labor, and uneven geographical capital accumulation. Tourism matters, in other words, because it is a powerful socio-material, semiotic, and political vector shaping how we read, move through, dwell and work in, carve out, and *interpellate* the world.

My account of tourism as an active ordering of the geographies of late capitalism is concerned with the question of *how all of this happens in practice*: How does tourism work as an agent in the production of space? Who is doing this labor? And at what costs? To respond to these questions, I have followed the perspectives and experiences of those who design, organize, manage, study, and govern tourism destinations as well as of those who work for the industry, who live in, visit, and consume tourism places and attractions.

The main finding that I develop in this book is that the contemporary re-spatializing and scaling-up of tourism orderings is creating a new type of geography of capitalist production and consumption, what I call a *predatory and sticky tourism geography*. This is a geography that naturalizes processes of extraction—of land, resources, labor, and culture—and that entraps people in contradictory situations in which predation is the only way forward.

PREDATION, TOURISM, AND EXTRACTION

My research in Yucatán shows that tourism generates a predatory geography because it operates in an extractive way. Throughout this book I show how tourism works according to a typical extractive logic, by which it invades,

plunders, and exhausts places, bodies, and resources in order to satisfy short-term consumer demands at the expense of long-term considerations for their renewal.²³

Like other extractive industries, such as mining, oil, or gas, tourism is predicated upon coordinated orderings of spatial, social, and ecological life that demand long-term, costly, and capital-intensive infrastructure development. Its logistics are multiscalar. That is, tourism orderings are simultaneously governed by actors and institutions across local, regional, national, and international scales.²⁴ Their logic is predatory because tourism works by generating an institutionalized consensus across scales and actors to govern the world through extraction—of human labor, natural and cultural resources, local wealth, and memories—for both profit and the enjoyment of those with the discretionary capital and time for leisure. As such, tourism is a coordinated form of capitalist power that, like large dams and coal or lithium mines, is reengineering the Earth in dramatic and most probably, irreversible ways.

Tourism's extractive logic is premised on territorial enclaves.²⁵ Much in the same way that oil, gas, and mining industries require offshore platforms, large pipes, and large pits in order to operate, tourism engineers and stages—materially and symbolically—landscapes to transform things into how they “should be.” In the process, there is erasure, cancellation, and the destruction of other possible worlds.²⁶ This is clearly visible in Yucatán's coastal and inland areas. The region's coasts have been reorganized by tourism as transnational global enclaves that cater to cosmopolitan imaginaries of escape and encounter with nature, while inland areas have been transformed to cater to nostalgic imaginaries of ancient Maya culture and indigeneity (chapter 4). Following this reorganization, places like Cancún are made to appear “global” and connected through recognizable symbols of cosmopolitanism, such as high-rise glass “starchitecture” (chapter 1), internationalized environmental brands (chapter 2), or gourmet culinary experiences offered in indigenous hacienda hotels (chapter 3).²⁷ Other locations, such as Tekit, must respond to a rhetoric of locality and tradition, and offer exotic displays of cultural Otherness as primitivism (chapter 4). As a constitutive form of extractive capitalism, or *extractivismo* as it is called in Latin America, tourism development reorganizes social life and its material expression in such a way that it enables and normalizes resource extraction. And like other extractive enclaves, tourism enclaves, their infrastructures, architectures, and built environments also reduce life to capitalist resource conversion (Gómez-Barris 2017; Svampa 2015; Sawyer and Gómez 2012).²⁸

Once ordered under the tourist gaze as locations one can escape to and/or where one can encounter nature or other cultures, places and people become in practice “positional goods”: goods whose value derives from their spatial position in socioeconomic fields of meaning and practice (Hirsch 1976; Redclift 2006). Maintaining this position requires reflexive inquiry (Stasch 2009; Bruner 2004), that is, an active recognition of how tourism’s imaginaries and spatialities are at work. It also requires the stability of touristic representations in time and physical space, which demands, in turn, the stability of material infrastructure for tourist circulation and consumption, and of the forms of labor and power subtending them.

Like other extractive industries, tourism relies on cheap labor (Patel and Moore 2017). We are familiar with some of its most common and visible expressions, like the hotel maid, the bellboy, the restaurant server, the cook, or the tour guide. Yet, as this book shows, there are a myriad of other less visible forms of labor and forms of labor (im)mobility acting in the shadows of the tourist stages. For example, there is the stasis and intensive family labor involved in creating souvenirs from home (chapter 4), or the stillness and fist fights that locals engage in to get proximate to tourists at UNESCO-protected natural areas (chapter 2), or the place-based re-patronages and modern forms of indigenous labor subordination at reconstructed hacienda hotels (chapter 3). Some forms of cheap labor, such as the ones that exist in hacienda hotels, find their genealogy in colonial forms of domination. Other forms of cheap labor, such as the ones that keep afloat mass beach resorts (chapter 1) or the ones that transform houses, villages, and livelihoods into factories for the hospitality industry (chapter 4), respond to contemporary forms of predatory financial capitalism.

At the same time, maintaining the position of tourist sites in the global market also requires constantly carving out and scaling-up new assets for global consumption. Just as oil and gas extraction industries seek new oil fields and gas deposits, the tourism industry constantly searches for new spaces, resources, and experiences that it can incorporate into the extractive logic of global consumption. Crucially, however, and in contrast with other extractive industries, the assets that can be incorporated into this tourist extractive logic are virtually endless. Almost anything, anywhere, can become a resource for the tourism industry: a place, a tradition, a ritual, a plant, an animal, food, bodies, emotions, solidarity, revolution, even health, birth, death, or environmental disasters (Bunten 2008; Greenwood 1989).²⁹ Tourism is, in this sense, one of the most efficient capitalist technologies,

thanks to its almost unmatched capacity to advance production and consumption through the seemingly endless creation of new zones of commodification (Moore 2015).³⁰

Tourism geographies are also predatory because tourism is carving up the planet for consumption in environmentally unsustainable ways. As noted earlier, tourism directly contributes to climate change. In addition to the environmental footprint required to sustain the massive system of mobilities organized around the tourist industry, maintaining touristic representations of destinations requires extensive natural resources. Tourism consumes places, and, like other extractive industries, it produces controversial “ecological amputations” (Gudynas 2015, 25). Tourism development might not advance through the exercise of direct, physical violence, or state and military repression, but tourism also acts in a violent manner.³¹ Its orchestrated inscriptions in the material and symbolic forms of social, cultural, and ecological life in order to render lands and peoples extractible have become so naturalized, so normalized, that they might be preventing the imagination of worlds outside of capitalism.³²

While many scholars have studied the commodification and circulation of natural and cultural elements for tourism consumption, the associated extractive processes of *maintaining* a space as a tourist space have been less scrutinized (Sheller and Urry 2004). As I detail in chapter 1, maintaining the white and powdery sands that sustain the image of the idealized Caribbean beach in Cancún requires nested processes of land and resource enclosure as well as constant dredging to remove sand from protected coral reefs. Enclosing and dredging are pervasive social and ecological practices that privatize common areas and contribute to the deterioration of the reefs and to coastal erosion, accelerating inequalities and reducing the natural barriers that coastal cities need to protect themselves from storm surges and winds. Likewise, maintaining a nostalgic representation of the past in inland Yucatán requires producing and sustaining European-inspired built environments, architectures, and forms of landscaping and taste that not only privatize local communal resources, like cenotes, and basic services like water provision, but also introduce invasive species that threaten local ecosystems and keep a colonial past (chapter 2 and chapter 3). And as I show in chapters 1, 2, and 3, tourism contributes to and benefits from ecological disasters, which the tourism industry views as propitious opportunities to maintain and expand its extractive logics. In Yucatán, such practices are evident in the aftermath of hurricanes, when state and local governments,

real estate agencies, and nonprofit organizations lead reconstruction processes that further the extractive nature of tourism through land and resource enclosure.

Tourism, therefore, is predatory because it opens up territories for consumption and profit. It does so by surrendering land and its future uses to financial whims, by prioritizing transnational corporate rule, and by dispossessing younger generations from the possibilities of making a living from their lands in the long term. Yucatán is an example of such a fragile and vulnerable landscape, where, as I show, state-planned tourism development has short-circuited citizenship by debilitating social networks of care and belonging (chapter 1), and has reorganized family life and households by entrapping them in financial debt and the cycles of the industry's seasonality (chapter 4), resulting in ecological and social conflicts across the region.

And yet, describing tourism orderings as predatory offers only a partial picture of how tourism works in practice. Tourism simultaneously invites and constrains, provides and weakens. This is evident in Ata's account of the Cancún workers' hunger to rebuild a place created to exclude them, or in Luis and Lucía's account of assembling guayaberas from home, a "true, true job" that despite compromising their health has enabled them to stay together as a family, to care for land and valued traditions, and to provide a better existence for themselves. This is the paradox that makes tourism landscapes "sticky."

TOURISM AND STICKINESS-AS-ENTRAPMENT

I describe tourism orderings of land and of ecological and sociocultural life as *sticky* because they work as forms of entrapment. They trap, capture, and entangle everyday rhythms, and with them, people's livelihoods and imaginaries. Tourism holds people in place and places in time.³³ People *get stuck* in and with tourism's predatory orderings because tourism enables, even if only in the short term, the amelioration of otherwise precarious conditions of living.³⁴

During my ethnographic fieldwork over the years, service workers, governmental officials, urban planners, scientists and common people expressed to me how they felt that they and others in the region were "stuck with tourism" (*engrapados al turismo*). They always used the expression in a bittersweet tone that indicated both the widespread, visible, material footprints of tour-

ism's infrastructure in the landscape and also the impossibility of escaping them. But the phrase was not only about the present.

Tourism's stickiness established a relation with time. Often, particularly among indigenous peoples working at beach resorts or luxury hacienda hotels, it was used to conjure up a centuries-long, thriving monocrop agro-industrial landscape that had turned to ruins, leaving people devoid of economic alternatives by the 1970s, but which people "had grown used to." Being stuck with tourism, then, also established a comparison with the way things were in the past. It evoked evoked acceptance of the lasting and potentially pervasive dynamics expected from the state-led turn towards as yet another monocrop economy tourism. Stickiness served to make sense of this present by recourse to the past. As an expression, "stuck with tourism" reminded people that state-led tourism was a long-term response to another economic and social crisis.

Since the mid-1970s, the territories and resources scaled-up for and by state-planned tourism development have become the new centers of economic, sociocultural, and political life. Tourism has become the lens through which life is apprehended and the terrain wherein life unfolds. For example, it is the roads and Cancún's international airport, both created to support international tourism, that organize the distribution of bodies, labor, food, capital, and supplies. It is physical proximity to tourism's stereotypical representations of indigenous Maya Otherness that grants some the ability to provide for their families and stay put, while condemning others to migrate (chapters 3 and 4). It is tourism's seasonality that marks the rhythms of air pollution, ocean acidification, and waste production in the region's subterranean water networks, as well as the quality of the sand, the duration of fishing bans, the presence of the military, or the migratory and feeding cycles of endangered animal species, like the pink flamingo (chapter 2).

The geographies produced by tourism orderings are not only sticky in a material, physical way or in reference to a present that echoes a past of economic dependence. In Yucatán, to be stuck with tourism is to be rooted in place, immobilized, or forced to move, hyperconnected to the global and sutured to the spaces and temporalities created by the industry's whims. Importantly, it is also about being trapped or entangled within *contradictory moral regimes*. I call these moral regimes contradictory because, as I show, they get people stuck in situations of ambivalence. While tourism's predatory ways are generally acknowledged as oppressive in Yucatán, they have become accepted and reproduced as necessary, inevitable, effective, or even good, as means to access a better life.

Acknowledging that this tourist reality is inescapable, people in Yucatán engage in strategic entanglements with the past, with family and kin organization, with former forms of labor and political activism in order to make sense of, maneuver through, and sometimes temporarily avoid or contest just-in-time and flexible modes of labor which they acknowledge they are unable to fully disengage from.³⁵ As Castellanos (2010a) notes, for example, indigenous peoples from inland Yucatán often describe Cancún as the *xtabay*, a siren who entraps wayward men and consumes them. Cancún is a place of allure and opportunity, a magnet that *is also* a place of vice. For low-wage service and construction workers like the ones Ata worked with, for city planners, or for government officials in the city, participating in tourism's predatory ways becomes a necessary condition to make a living, to govern, and to open up individual and collective spaces of hope. For example, I detail how local researchers working to mitigate receding beaches along the Caribbean have to strategically channel international funds to ameliorate urban planning provisions for coastal cities, all the while knowing that politicians and the tourist industry will use their maps and predictions to further enclose public spaces and natural resources for tourism, depriving local populations from using them (chapter 1). I also show how, for those working for tourism in inland Yucatán, playing the stereotypical Maya, like Patricia, traps them within colonial representations and old exploitative labor regimes, at the same time that it provides them with the ability to keep their families together, to upgrade their houses, and to maintain their indigenous values in place in a context of economic crisis and migration, as it did for Luis and Lucía and many others sewing from home (chapters 3 and 4).

This paradox of acknowledging loss while willingly participating in predatory practices is what makes tourism geographies sticky. In regions like the Yucatán Peninsula, which have become economically dependent on the tourist industry, this stickiness ensnares people and puts into place *sacrificial logics*.³⁶ According to these logics, participation in the predatory ways of the industry is seen as necessary even when it is done at the cost of endangering one's own health, or education, or memories of the past, or even when it risks the long-term sustainability of local ecosystems, or suspends everyday moral values about the environment, equality, or social justice. Within these sacrificial logics, enclosing public beaches for tourism, like destroying mangrove forests for new hotels and rehearsed indigeneities, "makes sense" because beach resorts, green spaces, and anachronic representations of indigenous

alterity generate jobs and these are the landscapes that keep tourists coming back.

People in Yucatán often ask, If not tourism, then what? When I posed this question to Ata, Patricia, Luis, Lucía, and many others like them, they said that it is “thanks to tourism” that people in the region do not have to “jump to the other side” and migrate to the United States (chapter 4). For Luis and Lucía, it is “thanks to tourism” that Maya peoples are able to live according to valued, inherited sociocultural ideologies, family practices, and religious beliefs. It is “thanks to tourism” that peasants can keep “the milpa alive” and intergenerational extended families together.³⁷ Tourism, many like them say, has brought “progress.” By progress some, like the fishermen in Celestún (chapter 2), mean access to food, shelter, electricity, or potable water. For others, like Ata, progress means having a seasonal job, higher education, housing, and modern services. For many, tourism is the possibility, the only possibility, of participating in and belonging to a global consumer community through access to wage labor, material commodities, or conspicuous consumption while staying at home in a place they know and feel they belong to, with people they care about.

Radically reorganized by state-planned tourism development and economically dependent on the activity, the Yucatán Peninsula is an opportune site to illuminate the agency of tourism in patterns of spatial production in late capitalism for at least four reasons. First, tourism was not an important variable in the region’s economy prior to 1974, when the Mexican state founded Cancún as a master-planned tourist city. Second, since then, tourism has been systematically legitimated and sanctioned as a development tool by governments, international bodies, corporate actors, and NGOs from international to local levels through discourses of land improvement, sustainability, and indigenous empowerment. Third, Yucatán has become a favorite testing ground for the most widespread worldwide tourism models—that is, mass tourism, cultural tourism, and natural tourism—as well as for the laboring practices, infrastructures, and backstage socio-spatial dynamics required to sustain the positions of these tourist places in the global market. Fourth, and as a direct result of these orchestrated interventions in the landscape, tourism has materially and symbolically reorganized the Yucatán Peninsula into a unique tourist geography, or “a world to escape to” that is still observable in the making. In what follows, I show that this predatory and sticky tourist geography, while new, is not a total rupture with the

region's past. In fact, tourism in Yucatán must be understood as the latest episode in a series of historical, political, economic, and sociocultural transformations that are characteristic of the way capitalism works at large.

A WORLD APART

Historians and anthropologists in the mid- to late twentieth century described the Yucatán Peninsula as a place “where Mexico dies,” as “another Mexico,” a “marginal periphery,” a “periphery within the periphery,” or “a world apart” (Redfield 1968; Re Cruz 1996; Moseley and Terry 1980; Wells and Joseph 1996).

Several geographical, sociopolitical, and economic factors inform these definitions. The Yucatán Peninsula is relatively isolated from the rest of the Mexican geography. The region lies between the Gulf of Mexico coast to the west and north and the Caribbean Sea to the east. It encompasses close to 125,000 square kilometers and includes the Mexican states of Yucatán, Campeche, and Quintana Roo, as well as the northern parts of Belize and Guatemala. Geologically, the region features unique physiographic conditions, including an almost entirely flat karst (limestone) terrain—the highest point, the Cerro Benito Juárez, rises a meager 210 meters above sea level—and an absence of rivers. These unique geological conditions provide little drainage, which causes considerable subterranean erosion, which has in turn produced the region's unique caverns and sinkholes, called cenotes. Cenotes are both sacred places in the Maya cosmology and one of the must-see natural tourist attractions of the region (chapter 2).

The Yucatán Peninsula is also considered a unique place in global history and culture. In the northern part of Yucatán, close to the port of Progreso, is the Chicxulub crater, created around sixty-six million years ago by the meteorite that marked the end of the dinosaur age. And it is a central node of the Mesoamerican culture and one of the six “cradles of civilization,” according to archeologists.

But geography and culture are not the only reasons for Yucatán's reputation as a world apart. Physical mobilities and embodied politics have also played important roles. Like many other Caribbean and North American regions, the Yucatán Peninsula has been historically forged by migration for the purposes of the circulation of resources, labor, plants, food, visual images, and venture capital (see Sheller 2003). The region has always held a difficult

position in the Mexican nation-building project, and it is still often referred to as the “free and independent republic of Yucatán.” Yucatán declared its independence from Mexico twice, in 1841 and in 1846, and it remained neutral in the 1846–47 Mexican–American War that followed the United States’ annexation of Texas. Importantly, the region was ravaged for more than five decades by the Caste Wars (1847–1901), an indigenous rebellion against heavy tax burdens, poor working conditions, and land usurpation (Stephens 2018; Reed 2001).³⁸ The Caste Wars were ultimately ended by Porfirio Díaz’s “land re-conquests,” but they delayed the start of the Mexican Revolution in the region until 1915 (it began elsewhere in 1910), and with it, the agrarian reforms that regulated communal lands through the creation of the *ejido* system (1915–35).³⁹

The other major element informing descriptions of Yucatán as “a world apart” was the agroindustry of the henequen (sisal), which ruled economic, social, political, and ecological life in the region for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Known as Yucatán’s “green gold,” henequen fiber harvesting, production, and distribution provided the region with relative economic sovereignty. In the context of nation building, henequen acted as a centrifugal force, connecting the Yucatán Peninsula to global markets and international circuits of commodity exchange while only tenuously linking the region to the nation’s fate (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987; Baklanoff and Moseley 2008; Baños Ramírez 2003, 2014).⁴⁰

Crucially, henequen production carved out an uneven and divided social landscape, characterized by a deep divide between rural and urban spaces, and among white, mestizo, and indigenous communities. Throughout the henequen times, urban centers, like Mérida, renamed “the White City,” were symbols of urbanity, cosmopolitanism, fashion, and capital connected to Europe, while rural areas were inland peripheries filled with cheap labor and cheap land from which crops were harvested for export. Henequen haciendas, and in particular their main buildings or *casas grandes*, acted as symbolic and material inscriptions in the landscape of this uneven and racialized sociopolitical and economic organization (see chapter 3).

This world collapsed in the late 1960s when nylon replaced henequen in global markets, plunging the region into a devastating crisis. The shift in the raw materials market led to the abrupt dismantling of the henequen agroindustry and it was tourism that, as locals generally point out, “placed Yucatán back in the international map.” The Mexican state considered the region’s Caribbean coast an ideal location to jumpstart tourism as an experimental

model for national economic growth. It created Cancún in 1974 as a master-planned tourist city and as Mexico's first integrally planned tourism center for development. The creation of this new tourism center was a direct response to major events at regional, national, and international levels: the henequen crisis, the Mexican debt crisis, and the international oil crisis. For many in the region and beyond, it was the rise of Cancún that "saved them" and gave them hope and enabled progress at a time when hunger and desolation ruled.

Tourism was not an important topic for Mexico's national governance until the mid-1960s. At that moment, the tourism and travel industries increased exponentially at an international level and states started to adopt tourism as the favorite tool both for planned economic growth and, concomitantly, for sociocultural and environmental thriving (Berger, 2006). Responding to the development theories of the late 1960s and 1970s, the state creation of Cancún as a master-planned tourist city (chapter 1) followed modernization ideals and theories of comparative advantage that viewed tourism as an ideal way to reconnect both the region and the nation's economies to global markets by developing infrastructural poles that could act as engines for economic growth through foreign investment.

The experiment was successful, at least if judged by the raw numbers. In less than four decades, Cancún grew from less than one hundred inhabitants to a city of more than half a million. Since the 1990s, the city has been one of the world's leading tourist destinations. By 1995, barely two decades after its creation, 1.7 million tourists visited Cancún annually. In 2017, that number reached 5 million tourists per year—more than Cuba and the Dominican Republic combined. As a result of state-planned tourism development, Cancún has one of the busiest international airports in Latin America, which services over two thousand flights daily and over 23 million passengers annually.⁴¹ Today, Cancún is responsible for almost 30 percent of Mexico's tourism income (OECD 2017) and it is difficult to overstress the importance that the creation of this planned tourist city has had at a regional scale.

Yet, even before Cancún was created, Yucatán was a region with a deep history of being used as a commodity supply zone through natural resource extraction and indigenous labor (Forero and Redclift 2006). The arrival of tourism, in this sense, did not disrupt this model. If anything, it signaled a continuity in the practices that had mobilized and captured the region's coasts and inland areas, indigenous populations, and natural and cultural goods as resources for extraction. The ideological, discursive, and pragmatic coupling of *tourism as development* that occupies this book takes place against

the backdrop of Mexico's authoritarian corporatist state using the region as a laboratory for its economic policies (Fallaw 1995; Fallaw and Rugeley 2012; Osten 2018). State-led, top-down approaches to development have propelled tourism in an effort to attract foreign financial capital in order to achieve economic growth. The region has become home to all sorts of tourism interventions, which have followed historical forms of extraction that have used the region's lands, peoples, and ways of life as resources for consumption.

Traditional expressions of Yucatán as "a world apart" have now been taken up by the Mexican state, local and regional governments, and transnational travel corporations to brand the region as a unique world "to escape to." Over the last decades, this language has been strategically appropriated by the state and local governments to brand Yucatán as a "safe place," detached from Mexico's drug war and violence.

Today, not only does the Yucatán Peninsula have the leading beach destination in Mexico and the Caribbean, but also it is popular worldwide as "the land of the Maya." Well over two million tourists annually have visited the archeological remains of Chichén Itzá since it was named one of the "new Seven Wonders of the World" in 2007.⁴² New attractions continue to pop up, like Cancún's underwater museum (chapter 1), or Maya indigenous luxury hotels and spas (chapter 3). In 2017, travelers voted the "shabby chic" city of Tulum, a few kilometers south of Cancún, as Mexico's hottest culinary destination and eco-resorts there are multiplying fueled by social media travel influencers' desire for the ultimate vacation.⁴³ Cozumel, just north of Cancún, has become the leading cruise ship destination in the world, with over three million arrivals annually (Martínez 2012).

The result of these transformations has been the organization of Yucatán around a unique tourist geography, "a world to escape to" that has left its people, as they often say "*engrapados al turismo*" (stuck to tourism): their lands, fates, and futures sutured—sometimes willingly, sometimes forcefully—to the vicissitudes of this industry and its predatory orderings of time, space, labor, and sociocultural life.

ETHNOGRAPHY IN A "WORLD TO ESCAPE TO"

My research follows a long tradition of political economy studies of the Yucatán Peninsula that are preoccupied with the historical articulation of land, labor, and capital (Brannon and Joseph 2002; Moseley and Terry 1980)

as “seen from below” (Fallaw and Rugeley 2012; Terry 2010, 256). Most of these historical approaches, however, with important exceptions aside (Eiss 2010), end their narratives in the 1970s, precisely when Cancún was created, thus leaving an enormous gap in attention to the region’s contemporary changes.⁴⁴

This book builds on and contributes to contemporary ethnographies and scholarly travel essays focused on the region by offering a comparative and historically informed ethnography of the relations between tourism, space, and capitalism. It does so by starting in the present, looking at the specifics of everyday livelihoods and their architectural milieus in the areas—coastal and inland, rural and urban—where people like Ata, Lalo, Patricia, Luis, and Lucía live and work, then putting them together as the introductory slides did, through a consideration of the regional scale.⁴⁵

The regional scale is an important analytical lens for three main reasons. First, tourism representations of the Yucatán Peninsula as “a world to escape to” are produced by mobilizing geographical imaginations of the region as a container of unique and well-differentiated attractions and staged places. Contemporary inhabitants of the peninsula, researchers, and tourists all operate and move within the territory informed by these relatively new but overarching representations of the Yucatán Peninsula for global consumption. Through infrastructure provision, architectural restorations, tourism signs and symbols, and people’s routinized movements to and from those attractions, these tourist representations become material realities that are, in turn, generative of social practices, meanings, and values, as well as political action and new forms of inequality.

Second, despite the pervasiveness of tourism transformations, and despite their salient territorial manifestations in villages, towns, and cities across the region’s geography since the mid-1970s, there has not yet been a comprehensive ethnographic account looking at how Yucatán’s coasts, inland areas, cities, and rural areas have been differently scaled-up and re-spatialized for tourism consumption *at a regional level*. Nor has there been any ethnographic account addressing the ways that common people experience, make sense of, and appropriate these spatial changes *across the region*, or the consequences of putting contrasting tourism modalities at work *simultaneously* in space and time.⁴⁶ As a matter of fact, since Robert Redfield’s (1968) *The Folk Culture of Yucatán*, there has not been any anthropological attempt to address the Yucatán Peninsula’s socioeconomic transformations using a comparative regional ethnographic perspective and without losing sight of the specificities of the practices of everyday life.⁴⁷ *Stuck with Tourism* aims to do so.

Third, in my ethnography the importance of the regional scale transcends that of area studies. Many interpretations of tourism ignore the regional scale as an ethnographic device and instead promote an understanding of the industry at a global, macroeconomic scale, or study its effects on destinations through area-specific, local micro-ethnographies of face-to-face, host-guest encounters (Smith 1977). The result is an understanding of tourism as an agent of globalization under reductionist accounts of global-local relations, impacts, and motivations. In Yucatán, however, the rapid emergence of a new regional cartography of infrastructures, architectures, social practices, mobilities, and temporalities created by tourism post-1974—what I have called a “world to escape to”—demands simultaneous ethnographic attention to seemingly disconnected practices as they happen in place while also creating space.⁴⁸

The work of feminist geographers and political ecology scholars has informed fundamental aspects of my ethnography, in particular their emphasis on the gendered nature of political-economic and ecological processes as well as the centrality of both social reproduction and the body in the theorization of capitalism (Meehan and Strauss 2015; Harcourt and Nelson 2015; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996). I approach this aspect of my ethnography by following, thinking from, and theorizing local interpretations and native categories, giving them agentic capacities capable of transforming and rearranging local relations in ways that can pose challenges to the established regional, national, and global dynamics created by tourism (Meehan and Strauss 2015, 14–15). To do so, I have used elements of three methodologies that have typically remained separate: multisited research (Marcus 1995), global ethnography (Burawoy et al. 2000), and mobile methods (Sheller and Urry 2004; Büscher, Urry, and Witchger 2010). From multisited research I take the ethnographer’s combined attention to sites, connections among sites, and sites’ imaginaries. From global ethnography, I use the politics of scale and the attention to historical processes; from the mobilities paradigm, I borrow the idea of ordering practices as socially generative practices.⁴⁹ By combining these three methodological approaches I am able to historicize and ethnographically account for patterns of spatial production outside the constraints of area studies, powerful “global” discourses, and “local” vicarious agencies.

In this book, I compare and contrast the built environment, labor, and everyday experiences of workers, urban planners, visitors, government officials, and inhabitants in Cancún, a city transformed into a beach resort

(chapter 1); in Celestún, a fishing town reimagined as a UN-defined natural enclave (chapter 2); in Temozón Sur's historic buildings recreated as luxury hotels (chapter 3); and in Tekit, a henequen town morphed into a factory for souvenir production (chapter 4). I do so through an ethnography conducted over twelve years in these four different sites, each representative cases of the planned use of tourism as a state development tool in the region and beyond. I examined mass tourism development in Cancún, on the Caribbean coast; ecotourism development in the Biosphere Reserve Ria Celestún on the Gulf of Mexico coast; indigenous luxury tourism in the inland municipality of Temozón Sur; and the domestic production of uniforms and souvenirs for the hospitality industry in the inland town of Tekit. The first three places are among the most visited and emblematic sites of the region's, and the world's, mainstream and alternative tourism models: beach resort tourism, nature tourism, and cultural tourism. Along with the archeological site of Chichén Itzá and the region's cenotes and convents, these are the sites that mass tourists, backpackers, and travelers are invited to visit when they come to the region. My ethnography about the fourth site, Tekit, illuminates the livelihoods of textile factory workers in towns where hotel uniforms and tourist souvenirs are created.

I chose these four sites for my ethnography because each case is representative of a major historical and political inflexion point in how the tourism industry has been articulated as a development strategy in the international arena (in the mid-1970s for Cancún, the mid-1990s for Celestún, and the early 2000s for Temozón Sur), and because in each site, the transformations directly associated with tourism are palpable even when tourists are not physically present (as in Tekit since the late 1990s). While many anthropologists have explored archeological tourism in the region (e.g., Castañeda 1996; Clifford 1997; Breglia 2005, 2006), less attention has been paid to the development and realities of other kinds of planned tourism, which I address in this book.

To be sure, there are other important tourist ventures in the region that I do not cover, among them archeological tourism, the fishing eco-reserves along the Gulf of Mexico, the thriving cruise industry and second residence tourism in Progreso, the emergent solidarity tourism network in inland Maya areas, the booming New Age tourism at cenotes in Valladolid and eco-resorts in Tulum, and the exclusive organic culinary and healing experiences offered in and around Mérida and the Caribbean coast. In this sense, I do not claim to offer a comprehensive account of all tourism developments taking place in the Yucatán Peninsula. But my argument is that the four case studies

in this book offer a representative sample of the labor, material, and symbolic sociospatial transformations that predatory tourism has produced in the Yucatán.

Put together, each of the four cases provides an entry point to explore how the internationally, nationally, and regionally acclaimed dyad of “tourism *as* development” has intimately changed the region’s spatial, social, and ecological relations. Each case reveals how the Mexican state anchored and legitimated tourism ventures through international and national development discourses of modernization (Cancún), environmental sustainability (Celestún), and community participation and indigenous empowerment (Temozón Sur and Tekit). Each case shows how state, regional, and local institutions implement heterogeneous tourism ventures as market-driven, engineered projects for profit. Giving ethnographic attention to how the region’s inhabitants work for, experience, and make sense of a variety of tourism models and then bringing them into dialogue with each other enables me to show how tourism development works *across scales* to produce and sustain the Yucatán as a “world to escape to.” Together, these cases show how tourism development has generated a predatory regional tourism geography that sticks people like Ata, Lalo, Patricia, Luis, and Lucía with an uneven relational set of labor mobilities, immobilities, and moorings, ones that simultaneously exhaust landscapes, resources, and bodies, and open up spaces of connection, possibility, and hope. These intersecting mobilities produce embodied spaces riven with moral contradictions because tourism’s land hunger and predatory nature affect the health and future of local populations, who sacrifice daily to work for an industry that has monopolized opportunities to carve out a good life.

In the conclusion, I reflect on the inherent contradictions of sustainable tourism and capitalist consumption in the face of climate change. I build on Train Maya, a new tourism infrastructure project that Mexico’s newly elected president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, launched in 2019 to connect the Mexican southeast. I use Train Maya to highlight the contemporary fixation, which has populated the imaginations of those on the left and the right in Mexico and beyond, on using tourism as a development strategy. I then zoom out of the Yucatán Peninsula to show how the dyad of predation and entrapment might also explain tourism’s orderings of space and social life beyond the region. In doing so, I call for a disciplinary retooling that aims to reorient the academic and institutional imagination of tourism as encounter toward a consideration of tourism’s agentive force in patterns of spatial production.

