



Nostalgia and Tourism: Narratives of Yucatán's Tangible Heritage

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ABSTRACT: Tourism in Mexico plays an important role in the country's economy. It represents almost a third of the foreign currency that is invested in the country (Banco de México, 2014). Remarkable pre-Hispanic sites, colonial cities that flourished during the colonial period, as well as those that did during the 19th century, are key to understanding the diverse tourist attractions that can be found all over Mexico. Two major and related events, in terms of strategy for touristic promotion are analyzed here. Firstly, the controversy about the recently built monument of the founding fathers of Mérida, Francisco de Montejo *el Adelantado* and Francisco de Montejo *el Mozo*. Secondly, Mérida's historical downtown *Centro Histórico's* development and the related project *Haciendas del Mundo Maya* derived from it. As I will argue, all these events are part of an anachronistic perspective that links Yucatán's modernity to its glorious past, which have as their main goal the portrayal of Yucatán as being modern, yet anchored in its past and from this, the search to promote the State, both for tourists and locals, appealing to a sense of nostalgia as the main element of attraction.

KEYWORDS: Chronological time; social time; anachronism; contested histories; modernity and historic cities.

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RESUMEN: *Nostalgia y turismo: narraciones del patrimonio tangible de Yucatán.* - El turismo en México juega un importante papel en la economía del país. Representa casi la tercera parte del ingreso de divisas que es invertido en el país (Banco de México, 2014). Los notables sitios prehispánicos y las ciudades coloniales que florecieron durante el periodo colonial y el siglo XIX, son distintivos para entender la diversidad de los atractivos turísticos que pueden encontrarse por todo México. En este artículo analizaré dos importantes sucesos en términos de promoción turística y relacionados entre sí. El primero trata de la controversia acerca del recientemente construido monumento dedicado a los fundadores de Mérida, Francisco de Montejo *el Adelantado* y Francisco de Montejo *el Mozo*, y el segundo aborda el desarrollo turístico del centro histórico de Mérida y un proyecto relacionado denominado *Haciendas del Mundo Maya*. Discuto como todos estos procesos son parte de una perspectiva anacrónica que liga la modernidad de Yucatán con su pasado glorioso, y que tiene como objetivo principal mostrar, tanto a sus habitantes como a los turistas, un Yucatán moderno pero anclado a su pasado, apelando de esta manera a un sentimiento de nostalgia como elemento central de promoción del estado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Tiempo cronológico; tiempo social; anacronismo; historias en disputa; modernidad y ciudades históricas.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism in Mexico plays an important role in the country's economy. It represents almost a third of the foreign currency that is invested in the country (Banco de México, 2014). In recent years, Mexico has been gaining increasing recognition as an important cultural destination, a big leap from the previous notion, not long ago, when the country was mainly acknowledged as a major "sand and beach destination." Remarkable pre-Hispanic sites, colonial cities that flourished during the colonial period as well as those that did during the 19th century are key features to understanding the diverse touristy attractions that can be found all over Mexico.

As in other parts of the world, the historical cities, especially *Plazas*, *Barrios* and *Centros Históricos* played a crucial role, both as a source of cultural heritage for the local community, as well as being a cultural attraction for tourists. The strategies to approach, manage and handle these cultural resources follow different intentions according to specific criteria and political interests. Similarly, when new attractions and new landmarks are developed and recognized, as is the case of some monuments and particular buildings. For instance, the monument to the *Haciendas* in Mérida, Yucatán, stands strong to play homage to the *henequen* production during the "green gold" era; and it clearly obeyed the political interest of the ruling party at the time of its execution. Although not in every case nor in the same magnitude, the erection of a new monument or the reconstruction of some building can also be seen as actions against the general interest of the population, or as a misleading touristy attraction, these could, at the same time, symbolize to some an invaluable representation that pays tribute to Mexico's founding fathers, or to the country's glorious past. In order to better understand this relationship, one has to be alert to the different groups' interests that are involved, as well as to the socio-cultural context in which these processes take place. To illustrate this further, I would like to start by referring to a conversation that reveals some of the anachronic perspectives that stand to show us how the past is connected to the present through family ties, kinship and genealogy.

While having dinner in a restaurant in Merida, the capital city of the State of Yucatán, two years ago, two upper-class male customers in their fifty's, sitting in a table close to mine, were having a conversation about the genealogy of the former governor of Yucatán, Patricio Patrón Laviada (2001-2007). One was pointing out that Patricio's last name, Patrón, was a Spanish name and the other was arguing that Patrón was actually from Italy, and that this was clear in the family's emblem. A more recent debate related Patricio Patrón to Francisco de Montejo *el Mozo*, founder of Merida the capital city of the now state of Yucatán in Mexico. Conversations like these, related to tracing someone's family background are an important topic for upper and upper-middle and middle classes in Merida today; they are also rooted in the lower classes that tend to establish relations to European ancestors who were rich but impoverished, "because of a bad investment."

The links between the henequen plantations that flourished in Yucatán from the last quarter of the 19th century and some specific names, disclose a time of aristocratic cultural and social practices that strongly connected this region to some families in Europe, particularly France and Italy. The sociopolitical context of Mexico as a whole also fomented these ideas and practices. Porfirio Díaz, president of Mexico from 1884 to 1911, was an advocate of France's high cultural environment. The influence of Europe was, therefore, expressed in many aspects of social life along the country and specially incruited in the local oligarchies such as the one supported by the henequen plantation in Yucatán.

Photographs, as well as periodic publications are very important sources that trace and document this perspective. The arrival of new European fashion tendencies, trends and the manner through which the Yucatecan oligarchy celebrated different social events, were also part of daily life during the henequen boom in Yucatán.

The idea that Yucatecans from upper and middle classes are strongly connected to a glorious past, is part of an imaginary whose consequences are strongly related to the way in which Merida's landmarks —old and new— are constituted and recreated, both to try to maintain alive the connection with this past and to build up, with a sense of nostalgia, an emotive and glorious history of Yucatán, which is, at the same time, promoted by the tourism industry of the State.

These ideas are materialized in several buildings and monuments. No one questions the architectural interventions and restorations in the 19th and early 20th century buildings, such as the restorations of many facades in Merida's historical area; however, the same is not always the case when new monuments become part of the urban landscape.

Two major and related events, in terms of strategy for touristic promotion are analyzed here. Firstly, the controversy about the recently built monument of the founding fathers of Merida, Francisco de Montejo *el Adelantado* and Francisco de Montejo *el Mozo*, and secondly, Merida's *Centro Histórico* development and the project called *Haciendas del Mundo Maya*, that is a result of this nostalgic tourist conception. To better understand the historical substrata that support the ideas of modernity as well as cultural heritage and nostalgia, some brief historical accounts are described here. As I argue, all these events are part of an anachronic perspective that links Yucatán's modernity to its glorious past, with the main goal as the portrayal of Yucatán being modern, yet still anchored to its past. What is central here is the need to promote the State to tourists and locals, trying to appeal to a sense of nostalgia as the main element of attraction.

These processes could be characterized as being a mixture of different strategies and mechanisms to bringing a version of the past into the present, establishing uninterrupted connections between a sublime past and some aristocratic families. This, in many ways, could also be read as a form of rendering respect to our colonizers, oppressors and exploiters form an anachronic point of view.

NOSTALGIA AND ANACHRONISM

Inscribed in different socially constructed ideas of time; past and future are inextricable parts of our daily life. Time can be conceptualized in different manners; Vargas Cetina (2007: 44) has synthesized, from an anthropological point of view, the different perspectives diverse societies have approached and conceptualized time; two major tendencies can be observed here, one that approaches time as a repetitive process related to the everyday live and the other that conceives time as a continuous succession of generations. These perspectives also contribute to the ideas of a cyclical time (daily, monthly, yearly) and of a lineal and sometimes spiral time in which the succession implies a repetitive time as well as ascendant one, as an accumulation of contingent and non-repetitive events.

In the same direction Fabian (2002: 22-25) distinguishes three uses of time: Physical Time, is used as an objective or neutral scale placing societies into a time line that lead to measure and contrast the human development. A second use is expressed in two related forms Mundane Time and Typological Time; the first one refers to petty chronologies, while the second is built upon socio-culturally meaningful events, establishing ages, periods and eras. The third use of time is the Intersubjective Time that emphasizes time as a dimension of the social reality. In a general sense, "No matter whether one chooses to stress 'diachronic' or 'synchronic,' historical or systematic approaches, they all are chronic, unthinkable without reference to Time" (Fabian, 2002: 24).

Two more concepts coming from Fabian's reflections are important to rescue in order to debate the idea of anachronism. The first one, is coevalness and the second is allochronism. Coevalness refers to a "persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse" (Fabian, 2002: 30). All the while he considers the "denial of coevalness as the allochronism of anthropology" (Fabian, 2002: 32).

All these ideas are related to the different ways through which time has been constructed, and also point out in a direction that allows distinguishing different interest and conflicts when dealing with time. The order of time does not follow the same velocity, nor can it be extensive to every space. The same can be applied to the way in which people feel and confront time. In his analysis of Rethemnos Old Town, Herzfeld (1991) demonstrated the strategies, disputes, and confrontations implied in promoting and developing urban and conservation policies towards the tangible patrimony of Rethemnos. Time is evaluated and negotiated in relation to specific needs and interests, and so is history. Actually, Herzfeld's first sentence emphasizes as the theme of his book "the disputed ownership of history" (1991: XI), whose attributes are fundamental to determine who and in what circumstances residents, bureaucrats, development agencies, and politicians define and relate to monuments. The conflicting conceptions of

time make them distinguish between a chronological time, as opposed to a social time.

The confronted ideas and expressions of time and history can also be observed in relation to some other issues especially those related to tourism. In his analysis of the New Salem as an outdoor museum and recreation area, Bruner (2005) develops the different conceptions toward the site distinguishing different stories that oppose each other emphasizing, manipulating, and exaggerating a variety of characteristics that shape up the place. The idea that New Salem is the place where Abraham Lincoln transformed himself to become what is now known for, a man of law, a Statesman, and from there a national symbol. New Salem is also represented as a *frontier village*, image that is reinforced through performing craft activities with log houses, never mind that historians have identified New Salem as a well established commercial town and that Lincoln's ideas, character and perspectives were indeed developed as part of his previous experiences in some other places. Different groups stress all of these stories independently of what "objective" history finds about the place and the character; New Salem and Lincoln. "New Salem has multiple audiences with conflicting interest and values. One cannot look for the meaning of New Salem within New Salem itself, but must turn instead to the people's own interpretations of the site" (Bruner, 2005: 142).

As we have seen contested stories about places that are intersected with ideas of time, the flow of time does not rule with the same speed, and is not interpreted in just one way, and should be inscribed in a power regime. In this sense anachronism plays an important role that contributes to the interpretive enterprise, both of past and present. It can be used to both, denounce and contest, but also as a strategy of imposition and domain. Anachronism, according to Fabian "signifies fact, or statement of fact, that is out of tune with a given time frame; it is a mistake perhaps an accident." (Fabian, 2002: 32), and nostalgia integrates anachronism in the present as a desirable future.

Once considered deceased, "nostalgia is today the universal catchword for looking back" (Lowenthal, 1985: 6). The idea of nostalgia and selling nostalgia is now an integral part of many touristy projects. The fascination for the past have attracted many a tourist for a long time, however there are now increased motivations to explode nostalgia as a key element to shape and reshape touristic projects. One key element that I find interesting is that nostalgia "is memory with the pain removed. The pain is today" (Lowenthal, 1985: 8). As a consequence of this, nostalgia tends to override, at least for the tourist, the contradictions and conflicts among different versions of the past, but it also serves to look at the future.

Trollinger (2012) arguments, that the Amish in the USA are attractive to tourism because they are pre-modern, exotic and live an authentic life. Also, that due to these conditions two different kinds of nostalgia can be observed, first a nostalgic sentiment for the past gone, and

second a nostalgic feeling for the future to come, a future that can be change for the best.

Nostalgia could then also be considered, a way to conceive and manipulate time, making anachronic situations plausible and desirable; by bringing the past to the present, pain is eliminated, the present is observed in a different way and understood through the glorious past. Conservation and preservation become political practices that entitled a single history, with the intention to eliminate contradictions and controversies.

PROFILING YUCATÁN'S MODERNITY IN THE 19TH CENTURY

The modernization of Yucatán is strongly related to the plantation economy and the subsidiary industries that supported the henequen production. Although the plantation of henequen started during the pre-Hispanic era, it was not until 1830 that it begun playing an important role in the economy of Yucatán, interrupted only by the Caste War from 1847-1901.

Coming from a period of intense growing during from 1777-1796, due to both external and internal demands, haciendas became one of the key elements that populated the landscape of the countryside (Patch, 1993). Cattle rising, apiculture, and agriculture were the most important products cultivated in the haciendas. In the south, sugar cane haciendas were also very important for the economy of the State. Around this same time, we have the appearance of some henequen haciendas most of which were located in the *Partido* of Merida and surrounding area. These had only a small impact in Yucatán's economy. However, as early as 1830 henequen haciendas started to play an important role and a rapid growth, exporting henequen fiber to the United States and England (González Navarro, 1979: 181).

It is noted, however, that due to the continuous political disruptions in the country and the closing of the Cuban market for Yucatecan products, many haciendas were abandoned by 1845 (Suárez Molina, 1977, vol. 1: 62) and in 1861, as a consequence of the indigenous rebellion, with the Caste War that started in 1847, most of the haciendas in northwestern part of the peninsula were in precarious conditions or devastated.

As a result of the Cast War most sugar cane haciendas could not recover. In contrast, this was a good time for the henequen haciendas to develop. Great numbers of indigenous peoples escaping from the armed conflict in the east and south of the peninsula moved to the northwest of the state. This allowed the henequen haciendas to grow in great numbers.

Another important factor took place in the middle of the 19th century for henequen production. A new invent called the *Rueda Solís*, this was a machine that speeded up the process to obtain the fiber from the henequen leaves, allowing an important increase of extensions of cultivated lands. Interests from outside also played an important role and different US banks provided capital to invest in henequen production. The concurrence and

availability of labor force, capital and technology opened up the era of the henequen in Yucatán.

In the following years the number of henequen haciendas and the increased production put henequen in first place, moving away to a second and third place the production of maize and sugar respectively. In 1883 a quarter of the haciendas in Yucatán were almost exclusively planting henequen (González Navarro, 1979).

In response to the impetuous growth of the henequen haciendas and the numbers of workers needed to fulfill all the productive activities in them, a peonage system was introduced, enforced and expanded. The most efficient way to do this was to implement a debt system that attached the peasants to the hacienda. The conditions of the debt were so hard that it made it almost impossible to pay back. As a consequence, the peasant could never leave the hacienda, and because their families inherited this debt, not even the peasant's death could free the rest of the family from working in the hacienda. The hardship and conditions of peasants in this period has also been called the *Esclavitud* (slave period).

The most important years of the henequen industry took place in the last quarter of the 19th century. The production, distribution, and pricing of the henequen were controlled by the hacendados, or hacienda owners. At a national level they were also being supported by the national politics implemented by Porfirio Díaz, who ruled the country intermittently for more than 30 years, from 1876 to 1911. México lived during this time what has been historically referred to the *paz porfiriana* or "Porfirian peace."

This period could also be understood as being a time of continuous contrasting moments. On the one hand, and attuned to many other countries in Latin America, it constituted the concentration of power in the hands of very few people, creating a growing oligarchy, moving apart from a modern political and democratic participation. On the other hand, it has also been recognized that during this time, the country moved forward and advanced towards modernity. It was from 1884 to 1911 that scientific and technological mechanisms, which in time would cope with the great national problems, such as developing the railway system to improve connectedness and communications, promote and diversify foreign investment, amongst others, were implemented. In the case of Yucatán this was manifested in the consolidation of a much-selected group that by the beginning of the 20th century controlled both, the henequen industry in Yucatán as well as the political process. The members of this group, as well as their descendants are, even today, known as the Divine Caste "*Casta Divina*" (Joseph, 1982), a term that expresses not just the political and economic power they had, but even more importantly, it refers to the aristocratic cultural practices, their links to Europe's high culture and the refined manners and way of life.

At the same time, Porfirio Díaz's vision of progress intersected with his political strategies. After having lost more than half of Mexico's territory to the United States, he managed to modernize Mexico with a national railway

system. His main goal was not only to communicate Mexico City with the northern Mexican states with the idea of improving his political control and commercial interactions, his intention was also to create an image of modernity through the exemplary use of modern technology. This idea was also introduced to Yucatán motivating new technologies that could be applicable to the henequen production, as well as the proliferation of railways across the state. A whole “*decauville*” system was also introduced in the haciendas to transport the products along the different stages in the production process. Indeed, modern technology was also part of the development of haciendas, even though they relied mostly in the peasants (*campesinos*) for labor force, much support was granted to the mechanization of some processes.

Mining, in some other parts of Mexico, was also a target for the implementation of modern technologies. The use and production of new technology was largely supported and encouraged by the national and local governments.

Modern technology as a symbol of progress and modernity became a focal point in Porfirio Díaz's regime. Thus, Mexico also sought participation in the most important world fairs that took place in the last quarter of the 19th century, and in the years that followed. The idea that Mexico was a modern country and that things were done in the right way, being a progressive country, was the main thesis that wanted to be disseminated out to the world (Yeager, 1977).

The henequen boom in Yucatán played an important role for the federal government, “Mexico City was taking increasingly large chunks of Yucatán's wealth as well stepping up its tax schedules in proportion to the rise of the regional henequen revenues” (Joshep, 1982: 68). Despite this economic contribution to Mexico's economy there was a limited political participation of Yucatecans at the federal government level, yet at the same time, there was a constant presence and intromission of this government in the political life of the State.

The henequen boom in Yucatán contributed to the modernization of Merida and of its inhabitants, specially, of course, in the upper classes. In reality, this process took place some years earlier; Reed (1998) had noticed that moving away from the colonial system and structure, by 1847 the European descendants started, mostly white population was situated in the upper level of the socio-economic ladder, and was characterized by following the European fashion tendencies and by an urban life. They were part of an urban context and acted accordingly.

The “green gold” as the henequen plant was called in the peak of the henequen boom, contributed greatly to develop a closer relation to Europe, considered a role model in terms of fashion, manners, culture, and taste. France, French language and sending their offsprings to study in France were also part of these tendencies. These cultural practices were considered refined enough not just to mark the differences with the rest of the population but also to transform Merida in a modern society.

The modernization of Merida also implied a rapid urbanization, which included newly built and paved streets, electric lighting system, and public transportation implemented through streetcars (Reed, 1998: 227). The construction and restoration of public buildings was also part of this process, the new *Palacio de Gobierno* (State governor house) was inaugurated in 1892; a renovated slaughterhouse opened up, as well as a new public hospital. Another significant improvement in infrastructure was the foundation of the port of *Progreso* in 1871, which substituted *Sisal* as the main port of the state for the exportation of henequen fiber, taking advantage of the proximity with the city of Merida. In this way Yucatán was more closely connected to Havana, San Juan, USA, and some other ports in Europe (Suárez Molina, 1977, Vol. II)..

In accordance with the new taste and tendencies, many private houses were reformed and built following the French style. Families from the upper classes and especially from the *Casta Divina*, moved from Merida's center to the north, establishing their residences in new neighborhoods (*Colonias*) and beautiful avenues, such as *Paseo de Montejo* and *Avenida Colón* were built. The expansion of the city included part of the hacienda's land and in some cases even small villages that were close to Merida. *Colonia García Ginerés* and the village of *Itzimná* are two examples of this expansion and growth.

To satisfy the continuous demand for amusement and entertainment several local companies built newly designed theaters that casted a variety of shows and spectacles, which allowed members of the elite classes to portray themselves as sophisticated as the actors and performers in the plays and performances (Suárez Molina, 1977, Vol. II).

Yucatán also participated in several of these important events, such as in the international fairs. At the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893 the State sent, among other things, natural products such as henequen fiber, *achiote* (annatto seeds), vanilla, chocolate and handicrafts such as hammocks and *hipiles*. Also present was a collection of photographs by Pedro Guerra, a distinguished yucatecan photographer and the photographs of an eminent German archaeologist, Teobert Maler, whose work focused on the *Mayan* ruins of the Yucatán Peninsula. Edward H. Thompson, former US consul in Merida, also sent papier-maché molds of different details that are present in pre-Hispanic Mayan buildings, as well as 162 photographs of the archaeological ruins of Labna and Uxmal (Delpar, 2010).

According to Delpar (2010) the ancestral splendor and the mysterious *Maya* received overwhelming acceptance, compliments and praises from the fairgoers. Little attention was paid to the handicrafts of the living Maya, despite earning several craftsmanship awards. No connection was established between the pre-Hispanic Mayas and the living Mayas, assuming that the entire Mayan population had been completely disseminated, devastated and that it had disappeared. With these actions, the idea of an idyllic past is strongly reinforced and the pre-Hispanic Mayan Civilization is seen as a modern society, where

change, technological innovations, knowledge, and wisdom were part of their living conditions, which later on, became part of the Yucatán's heritage, and was manifested in the industrious Yucatecans that developed the henequen plantations.

I would like to note here that the presence of technological devices capable of storing, transmitting and reproducing images were already an important part of Mexican (Central Mexico) and Yucatecan societies' cultural capital; in particular photography and phonography (Darius, 2002). These arts found their way and arrived to Yucatán speedily and were quickly widespread. Furthermore, in terms of photography, there needs to be an emphasis made not only on the actual content of the photographic images, but also on the presence of the photograph as a technological object. This helped reveal a modern Yucatán.

Wealth, modernity, isolation, economic independence, all are circumstances that had several effects in the Yucatecan imaginary today, these are reflected in the ways Yucatecans, mostly Meridanos, perceive themselves and in the way they want to be perceived. Based upon this history of wealth and pride in a persistent contradiction and opposition to the central government, tourism in Yucatán has rescued this history and casts it with a sense of nostalgia.

MERIDA, SCENARIO OF CONTESTED HISTORIES

There are many scholars that have written about Mérida's foundation, from chroniclers, to historians of the 19th century, as well as contemporary and prestigious historians. Some important facts that I elaborate ahead have to be delineated here, in order to depict the main characteristics of the process that provides the basis for the different interpretations regarding two of the main characters that intervened, Francisco de Montejo *el Adelantado*, and Francisco de Montejo *el Mozo*.

Merida's foundations started with the *Capitulaciones* of 1526. Emperor Carlos V provided these to Francisco de Montejo *el Adelantado* granting him all legal privileges to conquer and colonize what was supposed to be at the time, Islands of Yucatán and Cozumel. These privileges were awarded to him as a reward for all the tasks he had already performed for the Crown, and as an advance for the future tasks to be done. The *Capitulaciones* included a provision that conferred him the title of *el Adelantado de Yucatán*, and traced the way through which they could obtain the principal goal of this enterprise; which was the pacification and colonization of those lands (Peraza Guzmán, 2005).

Part of the mission involved the foundation of three Spanish settlements; one would be a Provincial city (Merida) from which the government and authorities would rule the province, and two villages (Campeche and Valladolid) acting as residence of the delegated powers form Provincial city. Following the instructions of the *Capitulaciones*, Francisco de Montejo *el Mozo* also embarked

with his father in this mission. Once, secured the area, they proceeded to found the Village of Campeche in 1541. In 1542 they founded the city of Merida, in the very place where the pre-Hispanic and previously abandoned city of T-Hó had been located. Francisco de Montejo *el Sobrino*, also took part and contributed to the colonization process securing the foundation of Valladolid in 1543.

The designation of Merida as Provincial city implied some advantages in regards to other Spanish settlements, among them: the provisions to urbanize, thus providing the most important services to the Spanish resident families by constructing the Cathedral, Royal Houses and public buildings, as well as to provide the land to properly support the conquerors and residents (*vecinos*). One of the interpretations strongly linked to these facts, is to consider Merida as a special place where just the privileged ones were admitted, in contrast to the other sites that were spatially and socially excluded (Urzaiz Lares, 2011).

Merida's urban settlement was characterized by a socio-ethnic segregation manifested by a space separation, reserving the center of the city for the Spaniards and their black slaves and the barrios for the indigenous population. The *Plaza*, surrounding buildings and houses at the center of the city, represented not just the unequal social structure, but also their association with prestige, authority, power, and wealth. Francisco de Montejo *el Mozo*, built his house right in front of the main plaza; families living in the center of the city were part of an elite. Decades later this status became an important legacy for their descendants, who considered themselves as part of a refined and sophisticated group of Europeans, contrasting their lineages with that of the poor Mayan Indigenous population, and with no links at all with the black population. However, during the colonial period and after de independence of Spain, some Spanish names started to play a more important role as markers of prestige, and good reputation. These names were, in the middle of the 19th century, related to the henequen boom of Yucatán. This economic and cultural process also had a very important impact over Merida's urbanization promoting the urban development towards the north; later on this part of the city would become the residence where the wealthy Yucatecan families inhabit.

The links between the historic city and the families that inhabited that central location and now live in the north part of the city, conform not only an integral view about the past and the future of the city, but also act together with a conservative approach that anachronically manipulates time and facts to preserve a mythical view about what is Merida and Yucatán's past. The monuments located along the *Paseo de Montejo* Avenue are a key example of this approach, as I argue.

The *Paseo de Montejo* Avenue is the most important and emblematic avenue of Merida, It was originally conceived as a boulevard, as some meridanos proudly continue to refer to it even today, following the idea of the Avenue des Champs Élysées in Paris and of El Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City. The *Paseo Montejo* Avenue

was part of an ambitious project to urbanize the north part of the city to gradually replace Merida's downtown as the settlement of the economic and political European descendant elite.

The governor of the state, Olegario Molina Solís, a hacienda owner himself, who named the avenue after the founder of the city, inaugurated the avenue in 1903. After being inaugurated, the economic and political elite of Yucatán, bankers, entrepreneurs and *hacendado* families started building luxurious and magnificent residences following an eclectic French architectural style (Peraza, 2005, 2007). Eventually they moved from Merida's downtown to the *Paseo de Montejo*.

One key issue to understanding the avenue within the city is that it was projected to break the traditional colonial trace avoiding the continuity of old times traces, breaking symbolically and spatially with a past, but at the same time it was a way to pay tribute to the colonizer and founder of Merida, from whom the white Yucatecan elite consider themselves descendants.

For more than fifty years the *Paseo de Montejo* was a living place for the wealthy families of Merida, yet, during the beginning of the 1960s as the new economic activities demand strategic places, the avenue started to attract different business such as hotels, banks, restaurants, cafés, car rentals, boutiques and some other small busi-

nesses. Indeed the commercial economic perspectives of the avenue were already previewed by the former Governor of Yucatán Álvaro Torres Díaz, who in 1928 inaugurated the first of three additions or extensions to this avenue. The last one took place during 1979.

It is important to mention that in 1938 the governor of the state of Yucatán Humberto Canto Echeverría proposed an initiative to change the name of the avenue to Paseo Nachí Cocom, to honor one of the most known and well reputed *Halach Uinic* (pre-Hispanic Provincial Ruler).¹ The initiative passed but was rejected by the Meridanos. Today there is a controversy whether the government indeed changed the name back or not; apparently there is no evidence of this.

The *Paseo de Montejo* Avenue is almost 5500 meters in longitude. There are five important monuments within its length. These monuments taken individually reveal contested histories of Yucatan at various levels. Going from north to south, the first monument—in-inaugurated in 1993—is dedicated to Gonzalo Guerrero, he is a Spaniard who came to Yucatán, married a Mayan woman and for that reason is considered as the father of *Mestizaje*. He is also supposed to have adopted cultural practices of the Mayan peoples by dressing like locals, tattooing his body and in the end fighting against the Spaniards during the conquest of Yucatán.



FIGURE 1: Monument to Gonzalo Guerrero.



FIGURE 2: Monument to the Nation.

The second one is the *Monumento a la Patria* (Monument to the nation) also known as *Monumento a la Bandera* (Monument to the Mexican Flag). This consists of one large circular carved wall divided into an inside and an outside. The half that could be considered its front, seen from the south, narrates the history of Mexico. The backside of this wall is a lower wall ornate with carved seals of every state of Mexico. In the center of the circle there is a statue of the national emblem, an eagle eating a serpent, and the center front contains several pre-Hispanic motives as to stress the relation of Mexico to its pre-Hispanic past and as Pérez Vejo (2003, 2003a) and Florescano (2005) have pointed out, with almost no connections to the Spanish heritage. The inside of this circular wall also contains carvings of the Mayan Caste war, along with other important moments in the Mayan history. Contributing to this same idea, the monument was built following an architectural style known as neo-Mayan/neo-indigenous.

The third monument was inaugurated in 1906, the same year that the avenue was opened; it corresponds to the figure of Justo Sierra O'Reilly (1814-1861) who was a well-regarded Yucatecan-born writer, novelist and historian, and whose novels and writings deploy a racist thought and tendency, especially towards the Mayan population. The *Hacendado* and governor of Yucatan Olegario Molina Solís was the one who inaugurated this monument.



FIGURE 3: Monument to Justo Sierra O'Reilly.

The fourth monument is the one depicting Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1874-1924), a socialist governor of Yucatán during the 1920s, this one was inaugurated in 1925 just one year after his death. He is known for his political measures taken to improve the living conditions of both the workers and the Mayan peasants of Yucatán. In that sense he is also regarded, just after Salvador Alvarado, governor of Yucatan (1915-1917), as a key figure to dismantle the productive structure and peonage system of the henequen Estates in Yucatán. Both Salvador Alvarado and Carrillo Puerto are thought as the responsible ones for freeing the Mayan people from the henequen haciendas. Carrillo Puerto in essence was a leader in protecting the Mayan indigenous against the injustices of the economic and political structures and for that “the reaction” was executed him by firearms. He is, in the end, in the history of Yucatán, a Martyr. In consonance with his history the monument follows the neo-Mayan architectural style. His monument depicts him accompanied with two Mayan indigenous people, a woman and a man; the three of them show their uncovered extraordinary well-shaped upper body. Taller than most of the Mayan population, Carrillo Puerto is portrayed as a protector and guardian of the Indians; and as the plate right down their feet expresses, that he is an apostle and a martyr. The whole monument is also part of the neo-Mayan architecture movement.

The fifth and last monument, which I will treat with more detail due to the controversy brought out from the moment of its inauguration, corresponds to a monument



FIGURE 4: Monument to Felipe Carrillo Puerto.

dedicated to the Montejos. This is situated in what Meridanos used to call “*el remate del Paseo de Montejo*”, the last point of the avenue, but what it is actually the beginning, since the avenue was designed to reach its extension to the north. In order to accommodate the monument the municipality had to build a traffic circle, to allocate it in the center. The statues were designed and sculptured by a Yucatecan artist, Reynaldo Bolio Suárez, also known as Pacceli, who was assisted and guided by Juan Francisco Peón Ancona one of the promoters and a chronicler of the municipality.

The monument consist of three pieces, the first one is a pedestal that supports the two statues of the Montejos, father and son in a standing position. Both statues are made of bronze; the father, *el Adelantado* is depicted wearing civilian clothes, cape, a hat with a feather, and holding in his left hand a cane; his right hand is positioned to the level of his eye brows to avoid the sunshine and to help him focus his vision to the horizon, to the north. Francisco de Montejo *el Mozo* is depicted wearing military attire; with his right arm in an upright position seems to be eloquently talking with his father about some issues related to the province while his father looks towards the horizon.

The major instance in promoting the monument was Prohispen, (*Patronato Pro Historia Peninsular de Yucatán*) a private organization founded in 1994 by Margarita Díaz Rubio, daughter of a well-reputed historian, José Díaz Bolio. This organization was founded to honor the historian and genealogist, Ignacio Rubio Mañé, whose archive, together with some others, conform the collection of the association. The fundamental tasks of the association are to preserve historical archives and to promote the history of Yucatán. Margarita Díaz Rubio is also part of one of the “decent” families of Mérida. Municipal authorities of Mérida, that at the time were members of the conservative political party PAN (National Action Party) supported the idea.

Juan Peón Ancona, one of four chroniclers of Mérida, former librarian genealogist, and writing collaborator of the major conservative newspaper of the state, delivered the opening speech, in which four main ideas were the fundamental parts. First, he conceived the monument as an action and commitment with justice and historical maturity like the one civilized nations had with their former conquerors; second, Montejos’ contribution to incorporating Yucatán to the Latin and Western civilization; third, as a genealogist, it was also important to recognize in the Montejos the ancestors of the Yucatecans, and finally he appealed to the one who opposed the monument inviting then “to move away from the historical traumas, thus allowing space to the valorization of the *mestizaje*”. Actually, he himself is considered one of the descendants of the Montejos, as some others also consider Patricio Patrón as a direct descendant, because apparently Montejo’s house was once property of his family. This view privileged ideas of greatness and pride in relation to the conquest, Christianization, and miscegenation in the history of Yucatán (www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxq7LMkRr5w).



FIGURE 5: Monument to the Monteños.

At the same time, the monument received numerous criticisms from the press. Most came from intellectuals, who questioned not only the origin and source of the money used to build the monument, most importantly, they questioned the more obvious: under what circumstances the people of Yucatán should pay tribute to the conquerors and colonizers of the Mayan indigenous population of the Yucatán Peninsula? They considered that the monument was indeed an acceptance of submissiveness and ingratitude for imposing a new culture to the subordinated Mayas. It was also seen as an expression of racism against the Maya population and an anachronism. Furthermore, it was also taken as a shameful act, because the monument was inaugurated in the same year that Mexico was celebrating its 200 years of independence from Spain. Most of these critics were local academics, historians and social scientists that were demanding the monument to be destroyed or moved it to a private place, where it could not represent an insult to the Yucatecan people. These articles and opinions were supported in a revised academic version of the role played by both Monteños in Yucatán's history². Through a written request to the municipal authorities, some other intellectuals also participated in demanding the removal of the monument.

Several actions took place during the following months; the figures were chained like the conquerors did to the Mayan people, and a new Facebook site appeared, *Los que no queremos el monumento*, where there are sev-

eral expressions of discomfort, criticisms, and repulsion against the monument and the authorities that insist not only on the preservation of the monument, but also, on the location where it is standing at the time. The most recent display of discontent took place two years ago (2013) in October during the celebration of the Independent Mayan Artistic and Academic Festival (*Cha'anil Kaaj*). People gathered together around the monument displaying cartels against it and also questioning the place that it occupies. People participating in these initiatives are the middle classes and educated groups, aware of the history of Yucatán, who are also critics of the more conservative groups and ignorance of the municipal authorities.

There are some other issues that question the composition of the monument, one of them wonders why the Monteños are looking to the north of the city instead of the center of the city, implying that the relationships are with the wealthy families that live in that area of the city, contributing further to the spatial segregation of Mérida.

To summarize, all monuments in the *Paseo de Monteño* Avenue represent pieces of the Yucatecan history anachronically organized in a way that corresponds more with the desire of the authorities to transcend through honoring these important figures and/or events, as well as contributing to the embellishing of the city; rather than with the perspective to chronologically recount the history of Yucatan, both for the Yucatecans as well as for the tourism industry. In this sense they are meant to be

watched, observed and consumed one by one, as pieces that compose a uniform and non-contradictory history in which all these men contributed, in different moments, with different ideas and acts to the benefit of Yucatan as a whole.

However, when approached as a whole these pieces of history reveal at least two contradictory histories, one represented by the monuments of Felipe Carrillo Puerto and Gonzalo Guerrero and the one represented by Los Montejo and Justo Sierra O'Reilly. In the first one the Mayan people is approached as an asset that has to be protected, guarded and comforted from the social, cultural, political and economic injustices. Our arms have to be open to include them. In consonance with this idea Gonzalo Guerrero, the father of the *mestizaje*, is also part of the defense of the Mayan Indians who are to be respected and with whom one could also marry, as he did. In the same guise the Monument to the Mexican Flag, also stresses the connection to the indigenous past as the founders and builders of the Mexican nation.

The Montejos and the O'Reilly's monuments, on the contrary, provide us an approach that tried to present facts rather than conceptions, ideas and relationships. On the one hand, O'Reilly is a contributor of magnificent pieces of literature, history, while in the case of the Montejos, their contribution is the Spanish language, their religion and their "willing to combine their blood with ours" as mentioned by Juan Francisco Peon Ancona in his opening speech on June 30th 2010. These facts are part of an immaculate history in which oppression and injustices are out of the questions, overemphasizing the products themselves rather than the content or the processes involved, producing magnificent pieces of anachronically histories for the yucatecs and tourist.

TOURISM AND NOSTALGIA: MERIDA'S CENTRO HISTÓRICO AND HACIENDAS

Most of the promotion of tourism in Yucatán from the beginning of the 20th century has been based upon the idea that the Mayan pre-Hispanic sites are the most important features to deploy and consumed by the international and national tourism. Accordingly, Yucatán has shaped an image in relation to tourism that is profoundly tied and associated to the pre-Hispanic Mayans.

In order to expand and reshape Yucatán's touristy image and in accordance with federal tourism policies, the idea of colonial cities as touristic attractions have been developing for some years as part of the promotion of Yucatán.

Three cities, Merida, Izamal, and Valladolid and most recently the henequen haciendas of Yucatán are part of the tangible heritage that has been characterized as colonial. The idea of colonial cities and monuments has been used with independence of a serious evaluation of what is actually the tangible heritage of Yucatán; in this regard, different historical moments are superimposed and recreated as a historical continuum with no contradictions and/or controversies.

Most extensively, in the case of Merida, most of the promotion is concentrated in the historical city, that means according to Bianca "as the most complete and certainly the most tangible incarnation of culture. As a sort of collective memory, they keep in their monuments the physical traces of past human aspirations, endeavors and achievements (2010: 28); in a more concrete way Calle Vaquero points out that the "historic cities (*cascos históricos*) are, par excellence, cultural spaces (...) are also part of the urban heritage and the main resource of this sort of cities" (1998: 249) and I would add spaces for touristic consumption.

The idea of *Centros Históricos* is strongly linked with a perspective of the city that establishes a indissoluble connection between the Centro Histórico and its barrios with the identity of the city, "they both constitute the most clear and certainly the truest sign of its identity, of its personality and of its meaning and history; those are the elements that characterize, define a city and make it distinguishable from the others (Urzaiz, 2011: 318-319). These conceptions have been the base to reconsider the ways through which Merida's authorities have been approaching its tangible heritage. In consonance with these concepts, several narratives of identity have been developed both by the local and State government, as well as by the private touristy agencies, the predominant identity focus extensible in the Centro Histórico and in the old *Casonas* of the former barrios of Merida. In this sense Merida's identity, as presented to the locals and the tourists, is connected almost exclusively with the wealthy families excluding the Mayas and other socio-ethnic groups who inhabited the city but were not powerful enough to contribute to today's tangible heritage.

Located in what can be considered an extension of the Centro Histórico, Montejo's monument is a case in question, as in Bruner's case about New Salem, the controversy about the way history is presented, represented, and interpreted is related to the socioeconomic and familiar background of each group, to the political perspective of the municipal authorities, intellectuals, and so on; to the construction of an image for the city, and to the promotion of the city as a tourist destination. Conceiving the monument as a tourist attraction is an idea that develops from previous actions taken in Merida's city center, where the historical buildings and houses were and are restored without questioning the social meaning and/or value that represent for the Mericanos. It is taken for granted that their restoration contributes to develop a better touristy attraction, it does not matter what are the implications of this process. The past becomes something to be consumed, and in order to consume it; it has to be in good conditions, what this means, not just well restored and/or built, but also that has to be part of the historical landscape of the city. To develop that approach, time has to be reorganized in a different sequence, and anachronism is a key instrument in doing so. The new monument intersects in time with the old buildings, as if it were part of the same landscape. The glorious past that is celebrated nostalgically, nostalgia that is transmitted to the tourists

who have come to Yucatán, looking for “much historia y cultura” (a lot of culture and history) that characterizes the State.

Nostalgia has also been rescued and put into practice as a touristy project, *Haciendas del Mundo Maya* started in 1990's, with the restoration of former henequen haciendas to transform them into hotels and restaurants. Breglia (2009) points out that the project is based upon the commodification of the haciendas but is conceived as another version of the Mayan heritage of Yucatán:

The primary developers behind the *hacienda* hotels have realized that real estate comes before hospitality. In other words, the ability of the aesthetics of the *hacienda* hotel and its grounds to transport the guest back in time crystallizes rather than obfuscates class relations between masters and servants, thereby consolidating another sense of luxury-as-leisure (Breglia, 2009: 260).

This conception works together with the very same idea of Montejo and the oppressed Mayans, as well as with the idea of their contributions to the Latinization of Yucatán and to the prosperous economy, as in the case of the henequen boom. All this is the core of the feelings of nostalgia being reproduced in many touristy initiatives promoted by private as well as public agencies to develop tourism in the state.

The henequen hacienda period in the history of Yucatán has come to represent a moment in local history where Yucatecans and Meridianos should feel pride. This conception is not only expressed in several touristic brochures and web pages but also in another, yet less controversial monument built to honor this period: the *Monumento a las Haciendas*.

This monument in consonance with the development of what is now called *turismo de haciendas* (hacienda tourism) as mentioned before, represents a way to displaying the vision, value, and prosperity of Yucatán's past and its people; it is an invitation to go deep and further into the history of Yucatán to better understand the authentic and true convictions of a group of European descendants, which allowed to position Yucatán as a world power in the market economy during the 19th and the first decades of the 20th centuries. The monument represents this period in a metaphorical way. It is a synthesis of the period, since the hacienda is both a group of buildings and a historical period, and in a metonymical way the monument consists of an ornamented hacienda chimney thus representing the whole hacienda. Out of the picture is the obscure history of the haciendas peonage system, injustice and over-exploitation of the Mayan people.

In the same token there is a tour of the city that clearly reveals this approach. The tour is built upon the temporal



FIGURE 6: Monument to the Haciendas.

juxtapositions, focusing on 48 points, most of them in the Centro Histórico. Each of these points tells the remarkable history of Merida and Yucatán. The tour integrates a narrative that includes monuments, buildings, statues, anecdotes, and even gossip, all of it somehow related with celebrated historical facts and characters. The narrative starts with Merida's foundation and the appellatives of the city, as the *La Ciudad Blanca* (White City) or *La Ciudad de las Veletas* (the City of the wind mills), and goes on to articulate the tangible heritage with the nostalgia of a past gone. Every point covers a simple explanation; however, the connections amongst the various references are not quite well enough developed. Everything is situated in a magnificent past where Yucatecans acquired their pacific character and hospitality. The historical discontinuities are also a mechanism to incorporate what is useful to promote and what can be excluded, in that sense all the marginal barrios are excluded from the tour as well as any disputed historical events. This unpolluted history shows the process that supports most of the tourist projects in Merida.

With the tour, the Montejos at the beginning of the *Paseo de Montejo* Avenue, the conquerors are connected with the henequen boom, what emphasizes the relationships between the former conquerors with the most recent ones; the henequen oligarchy, and establishes a continuum, from the past to the present, that should find their way in the wealthy "decent" families of the northern part of the city.

The tourists' image of Merida is built upon a process that socially, spatially and culturally de-contextualizes the city generating spots that are good to gaze, ignoring the rest of the city by exaggerating the selective and selected past and the future to come, as an outcome of that very past.

It is a synthesized and abbreviated history told with doses of nostalgia, longing and desire. It is a tour of fragments of history that reduces or eliminates historical periods, segregations and inequalities. It is a controlled social time and space developed with the intention of generating a specific touristy image of the city.

Anachronism and nostalgia in Merida's touristic promotion play together the same game in order to produce a modernity that cannot go beyond the past. Trapped in its supposed magnificent past, Merida's modernity cannot escape from a shadow of nostalgia, as though its future could only be constructed with the same basis, despite its controversial and contested history.

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NOTES

- 1 Nachi Cocom (1510-1562) was member of the Cocom Lineage, ruled the province of Sotuta during the conquest of Yucatán. He is considered a regional hero for having fought against the Spaniards. Despite his army's defeat, he managed to develop a relatively autonomous province. Some years ago the municipality of Sotuta built a monument to honor him.
- 2 Vallado, Iván (2010) "El monumento a los conquistadores Montejo". Por Esto! http://www.poresto.net/ver_nota.php?zona=yucatan&idSeccion=1&idTitulo=27478 y Vallado, Iván (2010) "Los cristianísimos Montejo". Por Esto! http://www.poresto.net/ver_nota.php?zona=yucatan&idSeccion=1&idTitulo=38293.

VIDEO

Juan Francisco Peón Ancona presenta monumento a los Montejos. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxq7LMkRr5w). [Accessed 09/July/2014].

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