Producing Mayaland

Colonial Legacies, Urbanization, and the Unfolding of Global Capitalism

Claudia Fonseca Alfaro

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Producing Mayaland

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Claudia Fonseca Alfaro

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Series Editors' Preface

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List of Abbreviations

AAGR	Average Annual Growth Rate
AMLO	Andrés Manuel López Obrador
BANRURAL	National Bank for Rural Credit *(Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural)*
CANACO	National Chamber of Commerce, Services, and Tourism *(Cámara Nacional de Comercio, Servicios y Turismo)*
CANAIVE	National Chamber of Commerce of the Garment Industry *(Cámara Nacional de la Industria del Vestido)*
CEPRODEHL	Center for the Promotion and Defense of Human Labor Rights *(Centro de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos Laborales)*
COPARMEX	Confederation of Employers of the Mexican Republic *(Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana)*
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
FONACOT	Institute for the National Fund for Employee Consumption (official translation) *(Instituto del Fondo Nacional para el Consumo de los Trabajadores)*
FONAES	National Fund for Social Enterprises *(Fondo Nacional de Empresas Sociales)*
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMMEX	Manufacturing, Maquila and Export Services Industry (official translation) *(Industria Manufacturera, Maquiladora y de Servicios de Exportación)*

INAFED	National Institute for Federalism and Municipal Development *(Instituto Nacional para el Federalismo y el Desarrollo Municipal)*
INDEMAYA	Institute for the Development of Mayan Culture in the State of Yucatán *(Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Cultura Maya del Estado de Yucatán)*
INEGI	National Institute of Statistics and Geography *(Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía)*
INFONAVIT	Institute of the National Housing Fund for Workers *(Instituto para el Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores)*
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCTY	Yucatán Scientific and Technological Park *(Parque Científico y Tecnológico de Yucatán)*
PROFEPA	Federal Attorney's Office for Environmental Protection *(Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente)*
SE	Economy Secretariat *(Secretaría de Economía)*
SECOFI	Secretariat of Commerce and Industrial Promotion *(Secretaría de Comercio y Fomento Industrial)*
SEDATU	Secretariat of Agrarian, Land, and Urban Development *(Secretaría de Desarrollo Agrario, Territorial y Urbano)*
SEDUMA	Urban Development and Environment Secretariat *(Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Medio Ambiente)*
SEFOE	Economic Promotion Secretariat *(Secretaría de Fomento Económico)*
SEMARNAT	Environment and Natural Resources Secretariat *(Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales)*
SENER	Energy Secretariat *(Secretaría de Energía)*
SEP	Public Education Secretariat *(Secretaría de Educación Pública)*
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
TEU	Twenty-Foot Equivalent Unit
UADY	Autonomous University of Yucatán *(Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán)*
ZEE	Special Economic Zone (Mexican context) *(Zona Económica Especial)*

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Malmö

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1
Introduction

> [W]e fall into the trap of treating space as space "in itself," as space as such. We come to think in terms of spatiality, and so to fetishize space in a way reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities, where the trap lay in exchange, and the error was to consider "things" in isolation, as "things in themselves."
>
> *Lefebvre (1991, p. 90)*

A View from Motul, Yucatán

Motul is the center of the world, the *tuch* (navel) of the universe, or so say its residents. Known as the birthplace of the socialist governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto, famous for its breakfast dish *huevos motuleños*, and alluring to tourists because of the Sambulá *cenote* (sinkhole) – Motul is located in the southern Mexican state of Yucatán (see Figure 1.1).[1] The city has 23,240 inhabitants (INEGI 2010), and it is well connected to other corners of the region. A four-lane highway links the municipality to the capital and economic engine of the state, Mérida, and to other logistically significant places in the peninsula, such as Progreso, the third most important seaport in the Gulf of Mexico (CentroEure 2014; SEFOE 2011). Motul has been a regional center since the nineteenth century, when it was known as the "pearl of the coast" (Buenfil y Méndez 2011; Dzul Sánchez 2015), and continues to be prominent even today. The city provides "urban" services (i.e. education, transport, healthcare, retail, and finance) to 35 *comisarías* (villages) and neighboring municipalities in a radius of up to 20 km (COESPY 2013).[2] The pearl of the coast is also notable for the existence of Montgomery Industries, the biggest employer in the city and the largest *maquiladora* factory in Yucatán.[3] Montgomery manufactures jeans and other denim products

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Figure 1.1 Map of the state of Yucatán with regional centers and some settlements. *Source:* Victoria M. Jiménez Esquivel. Reproduced with permission.

for clients in the United States, Italy, and Japan, and it has been operating under the special duty-free tax regime of the Mexican maquiladora program since it was inaugurated in 1995. A survivor of calamities such as hurricanes (e.g. Isidore in 2002) and economic downturns (e.g. 9/11 and the 2008 financial crash), the factory is a remnant of the state's maquiladora boom-to-bust chapter, the period between 1990 and 2001. This short interval saw Yucatán become one of the fastest growing regional economies among member countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; it also signaled the definite ending of *henequen*, a type of agave that, as a sought-after commodity, had sustained Yucatán's economy for more than a century (OECD 2007). In Motul, Montgomery is regarded as a company that has left a mark in the

fabric of the city and that continues to be vital for the economy. Local residents, *motuleños,* have the perception that *everyone* either has worked there or knows someone who has. The company is considered by some inhabitants as the driving force that "detonated" the local economy in the last few decades and helped Motul transform from a rural to an urban society – a watershed in the history of the city. Others, such as maquiladora workers and ex-workers, are less enthusiastic when talking about economic growth but recognize that Montgomery brought job opportunities close to home. Regardless of what they perceive makes the factory important, *motuleños* agree on one thing: "Motul was one before and after Montgomery," as phrased by the city's mayor (Interview from 30 November 2015).

The maquiladora is considered as the trigger, if not the main factor, of the transformations that Motul has seen in the last 30 years. For instance, connectivity to Mérida improved; new neighborhoods were constructed; modes of transportation were transformed; modern food such as pizza became available; and nationwide supermarket, pharmacy, retail, and bank chains arrived. Maquiladoras have left a mark at the state level as well. The expansion of the industry prompted, for example, huge investments in infrastructure (e.g. roads network and airports). The factories also led to an increase in formal employment, transformations in commuting habits, and changes in migration patterns. Having been important players in the recent economic history of Yucatán, *motuleños* are proud of the development of their city, but truth be told, theirs is far from an extraordinary story in the context of globalization.[4] However, if we were to borrow a pair of postcolonizing glasses and were to look at Motul – perhaps not as the navel of the universe but as a center – what could the city teach us about global capitalism and urbanization? What could we learn about how the *global* in global capitalism actually unfolds at the level of the everyday? What could be said about the influence of the region's historical context and colonial legacies? The aim of this study is to explore precisely these questions through the case of Montgomery Industries in Motul but taking in the wider context and history of the maquiladora boom-to-bust chapter in Yucatán. Before we begin, let me shed light on the significance of this approach.

Old Frontier/New Frontier

Maquiladora (or *maquila* for short) is a unique term to describe a factory throughout Latin America and the Caribbean that imports materials or equipment duty free in order to assemble or manufacture

products for their subsequent export. However, the services offered by this type of Export Processing Zone (EPZ) are far from remarkable (Engman 2011; McCallum 2011; The World Bank 2008).[5] Described by Werner (2016) as the "global factory" that fills the "seemingly endless store shelves" in the global North, what I refer to as *the Zone* – following the work of Bach (2011) and Easterling (2012) – is a common instrument of global capitalism that exists to provide a space for capital to operate under special tax regimes, concessions, subsidies, or regulations. The Zone can exist in one of many permutations in addition to EPZs, for example, as a Special Economic Zone, Free (Trade) Zone, Exclusive Economic Zone, or Economic Development Zone. The use of different names not only is a matter of preference but may imply differences in size and variations in regulations, concessions, and subsidies offered by the host country.[6] Despite the distinctions, Zones share a dominating characteristic and purpose. These are enclaves that ensure the fluid circulation of capital and goods and sustain global supply chains (International Labour Organization 2014; The World Bank 2008) through localized strategies of "reterritorialization" (Bach 2011) carried out by governments to create "zones of exception" that, according to Roy (2011a), "both fragment and extend the space of the nation state." The history of the Zone is centuries old. For scholars like Bach (2011) or Easterling (2012), the precursors of the modern Zone are the free ports of antiquity and the entrepôts of the colonial period of European expansionism. Early Zones – like Mayaguez, Puerto Rico (1951); Shannon, Ireland (1959); or Kaohsiung, Taiwan (1965) – are prime examples of the first experiments in combining features of industrial estates and free trade zones to promote export-oriented economic growth (cf. The World Bank 1992, 2008).

Mexican maquiladoras were created by the government in 1965 as assembly plants that could only be located on a 20-km strip along the border with the United States (Iglesias Prieto 1997; Plankey Videla 2008). The intervention was a response to rising unemployment levels in the northern border caused by the end of the *Bracero* initiative – an agricultural guest-worker scheme for Mexican laborers willing to travel to the United States that ran between 1942 and 1964 (Núñez and Klamminger 2010). As such, maquiladoras were part of the Border Industrialization Program, which, in addition to promoting trade, aimed at increasing living standards (Alvarez-Smith 2008). In 1972, the Mexican government transformed the maquiladora experiment into a nationwide scheme, legally allowing maquiladoras to be set up anywhere in the country (Sklair 1989; Zarate-Hoyos and Albornoz Medina 1999). Despite the ease in restrictions, by 1985, only 10% of all maquiladoras in the

country could be found in non-border locations (Alvarez-Smith 2008). Mexico's accession to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and the devaluation of the peso the same year changed all this (Bair and Gereffi 2001). Economic reforms taken by the state in the 1980s – switching the Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) policies of previous decades for the Structural Adjustments or neoliberal reforms suggested by actors such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – had paid off, making Mexico attractive for foreign investment by the 1990s (Dussel Peters 2003; Harvey 2005).[7] Mexico became known as a country that could offer stable macroeconomic conditions (Dussel Peters 2003) and advantages over other manufacturing sites: a highly productive and low-cost labor force, preferential tariffs and quotas for American companies, transport and communications infrastructure of acceptable quality, and geographical proximity to the United States (Spener et al. 2002). By the year 2000, the Mexican maquiladora model had boomed, becoming the engine running a big chunk of the economy: 29% of the country's gross domestic product and almost 50% of all manufacturing exports came from maquiladora activities (Bendesky et al. 2004).[8] It was in this context that maquilas came to Yucatán, first as a hesitant wave and then as a tsunami, transforming the state into the *new frontier* of the maquiladora industry – at least for a while.

Tales of Boom-to-Bust: Green Gold and Blue Jeans

The bumpy maquiladora story in Yucatán starts in 1973, when two maquiladoras began operations in Mérida only to close a year later (Canto Sáenz 2001). The state was at a crossroads. The engine that had sustained the region for almost a century, the henequen fiber economy, was facing its most severe crisis (Quintal Palomo 2010). The creation of a state-owned company, Cordemex S.A. de C.V., in 1961 had not prevented a continuous downward spiral in yield levels and a decline in production. Despite government subventions, investment in modern machinery, and promises that the quality of life of *campesinos* (peasant farmers) would improve, the attempts of Cordemex seemed unsuccessful (Canto Sáenz 2001; Yoder 2008). Yucatán has a long and dependent history with henequen (*Agave fourcroydes*), a succulent plant endemic to the peninsula that had been cultivated at a small scale since before the colonial era. During the late nineteenth century, the big-scale commercial production of henequen fiber was successfully developed by *hacendados* (hacienda landowners), responding to an increased demand for binder twine and ropes created by technological advancements in

agricultural production and the growth of world shipping (Moseley and Delpar 2008; Wells 2006). By the turn of the twentieth century, Yucatán had become a dominant player in the market, supplying up to 90% of the demand for hard fiber in factories in the United States and Canada (Wells 2006). The success made henequen Mexico's main agricultural export (Zuleta Miranda 2004) and Yucatán's "green gold" (Baños Ramírez 2010). The region was transformed from one of the poorest to "the wealthiest and most industrialized state in the entire country" (OECD 2007). This period (1880–1915), considered the golden age of henequen, came to an end with the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, when modifications to land tenure forced landowners to distribute substantial portions of their land among the peasant population (Canto Sáenz 2001; Moseley and Delpar 2008). Changes in global markets also accelerated the end to the bonanza, as competing fibers came into the picture, for example, sisal (*Agave sisalana*), also endemic to the peninsula but harvested and produced by rivals in Kenya and Java, and cheaper synthetic options such as polypropylene (Wells 2006).[9] Despite new competitors and the decline in production levels, the Yucatecan henequen industry still had peaks in demand during the Second World War and later the Korean War (Canto Sáenz 2001). However, by the 1970s, Yucatán could no longer ignore its dire economic situation: it was one of the poorest states in the country, and its economy was supported to a large extent by federal subsidies (Moseley and Delpar 2008). Yucatán had been extremely prosperous, but the famous green gold had only stayed in the hands of a few – namely, the *casta divina* (divine caste), an oligarchy that had failed to distribute wealth among *campesinos*, a mostly Mayan population that had worked in slave-like conditions (Canto Valdes 2017).[10] After a henequen boom-to-bust cycle, the Yucatecan economy in the 1970s found itself in the same spot it had been a century before.

By the 1980s, it had become obvious that a monocrop henequen economy could no longer sustain the state (Baklanoff 2008a). In 1984, the governor at the time, Víctor Cervera Pacheco, launched the Henequen Restructuring Program and Comprehensive Development of Yucatán, a strategy that projected a diversification of the Yucatecan economy toward an industrialized future and that included, among other measures, prospects for the development of a maquiladora industry (Canto Sáenz 2001). After the unsuccessful experiment with maquiladoras in the 1970s, a factory arrived in 1981 – Ormex, a manufacturer of orthodontic supplies – triggering what is considered to be the beginning of the maquila chapter in the state (Canché Escamilla 1998; Canto Sáenz and Cruz Pacheco 2004; Sklair 1989).[11] In the 1980s, the government began

to organize conventions (Rivas F. 1985) and pay for advertising campaigns to attempt to put Yucatán on the map as "the new frontier" or "the other frontier" of the maquiladora industry in Mexico (Canto Sáenz 2001; Castilla Ramos and García Quintanilla 2006; Sklair 1989). By 1987, 11 maquiladoras were in operation. While this, in part, contributed to the state's vision of a Yucatecan industrial future away from the henequen agro-industry, maquiladoras were welcomed but not considered a priority.[12] At that point, the Yucatecan government was more interested in improving and expanding the *existing* industries that already played an important role providing goods and services to the entire peninsula (cf. Gobierno del Estado de Yucatán 1983). This might be one of the reasons why, by 1990, only 13 maquiladoras were active. There were also more pressing issues troubling the state. The same year, 1990, the government took the first steps to "reorganize" Cordemex according to market criteria – in line with the wider neoliberal reforms that were being introduced throughout the country. It would not take long before the process was completed and by April 1991, the divisions of Cordemex that had not been reprivatized had been liquidated (Baños Ramírez 2010). This not only represented a great economic loss for the state, but the impacts on the labor force were alarming. For example, 40,000 *campesinos* formerly employed at Cordemex had lost their jobs by 1992 (Canto Sáenz 2001). In this landscape of unemployment, by 1996, there were reasons to be moderately optimistic. Forty maquilas had begun operating (INEGI 2015a), but the government was still not convinced that maquilas alone could create enough jobs to absorb the large unemployed labor force. A mix of maquiladoras, tourism, and investments in construction were believed to be the solution (cf. Gobierno del Estado de Yucatán 1996).

Three years later, things had taken an unexpected turn: the maquiladora industry had become *the* developmental vision of the state. It is not hard to see why this came to be. By January 1999, the number of maquiladoras had reached 74; by the year 2000, 109; and by 2001, 131 (see Figure 1.2). To put this amount in percentages, between 1990 and 2001, the growth in the number of factories had been 1007% – mostly in garment maquilas (Biles 2004; Castilla Ramos and Torres Góngora 2010). Newspaper anecdotes captured the frenzy of the moment. For example, in 1999, the president of the CANAIVE (a garment chamber of commerce) was quoted saying there were so many unfilled job positions in the garment industry in Mérida that if a plant with 300 workers suddenly closed, all 300 people would have jobs "in less than two hours" (Diario de Yucatán 1999c). In the year 2000, the city of Valladolid had to "import workers" from surrounding villages

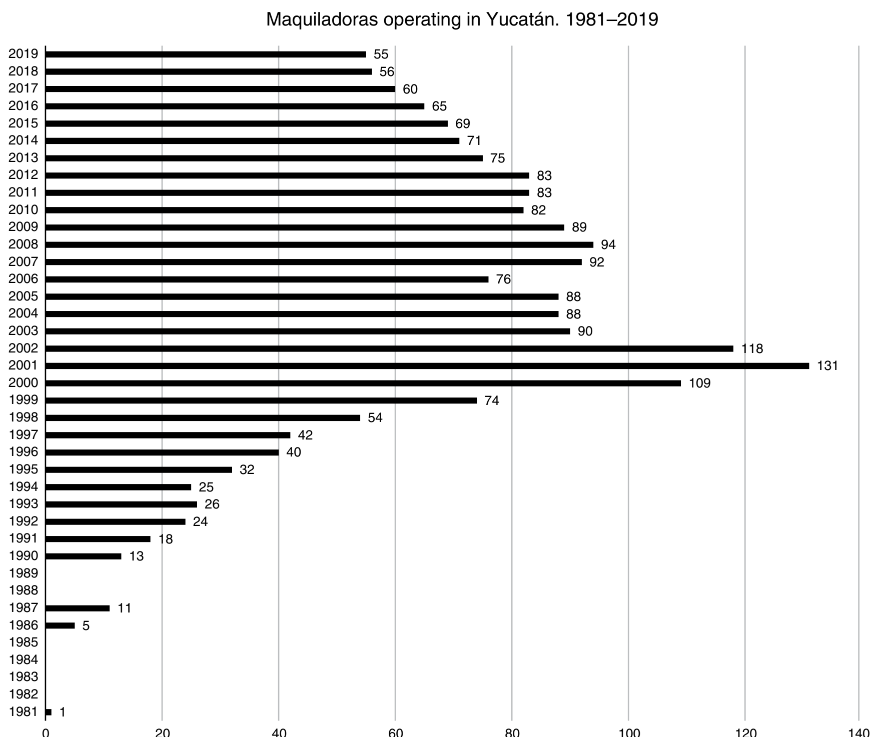

Figure 1.2 Maquiladoras operating in Yucatán between 1981 and 2019. Values captured as of January in the years 1990–2006 and 2008–2019. The value for 2007 is from July. *Source:* Adapted from Canché Escamilla (1998), Canto Sáenz (2001), Canto Sáenz and Cruz Pacheco (2004).

since the unemployment rate was 0% in the city (Diario de Yucatán 2000c). These were not isolated examples but representations of what was happening throughout the state: the unemployment rate in Yucatán was 1% in the year 2000 (Gobierno del Estado de Yucatán 2000). Even though maquiladoras had continued to be concentrated in the north of Mexico, Yucatán had become one of the states that had the highest number of new plants in Mexico's interior (Baklanoff 2008b). The decline then came as unexpectedly as the boom began. After the highest peak of 2001, the number of maquiladoras fell drastically the following two years, stabilized, had a slight peak in 2008, and then continued its trend in dropping every year (see Figure 1.2). Between the years 2001 and 2003 alone, about 18,876 jobs were lost, which represented 30% of the posts that had existed in 2000 (Castilla Ramos and García Quintanilla 2006). As of 2019, there were

55 maquiladoras operating in Yucatán, employing 24,048 workers (INEGI 2020a). Yucatecan maquiladoras continue to produce what has been common since the mid-1990s: garments (mostly jeans) and textiles for clients in the United States. This is followed by jewelry and, to a lesser extent, orthodontic supplies and electronic accessories (Becerril et al. 2012; SEFOE 2010). Important maquiladoras that arrived to the state during the boom period and survived the decline include Maquiladora Lee (located in Izamal) and Hong Ho (in the city of Valladolid) – both garment manufacturers – and Montgomery Industries, the most important blue jeans producer in the state.

Producing Mayaland

There are several approaches to the scholarly exploration of Zones. Examples include studies carried out within sociology, economic geography, political economy, and development studies based on Global Commodity Chains (GCC), Global Value Chains (GVC), Global Production Networks (GPN), or World-System frameworks. A second set of examples include the approaches developed within cultural geography and anthropology, such as Arjun Appadurai's "follow the thing" approach or Anna Tsing's "ethnography of global connection" (Bair 2014; Beyer et al. 2020). There is a vast body of work in English on maquiladoras within the Mexican and Central American context. For example, there are studies of the maquiladora genesis (Iglesias Prieto 1997; Sklair 1989), unacceptable labor conditions (Bickham Mendez 2002; Prieto and Quinteros 2004), labor-related social movements (Knight and Wells 2007; Williams 2003), community unionism (Collins 2006), transnational cooperation networks (Bandy 2004), workers' perception of their wages and working conditions (Horowitz 2009), gender and subject formation within the factory floor (Cravey 1998; Iglesias Prieto 1997; Salzinger 2003; Wright 2006), and life stories of workers based on ethnographic approaches (Broughton 2015; Fernández-Kelly 1983). Despite its location outside the traditional maquiladora border region, academic studies of the Yucatecan maquiladora phenomenon also exist to a moderate extent. In Spanish, the work of Beatriz Castilla Ramos, Beatriz Torres Góngora, Othón Baños Ramírez, and Rodolfo Canto Sáenz is important to highlight. In English, scholars like Eric N. Baklanoff, James J. Biles, Maria France Labrecque, and Manuel Navarrete have made significant empirical contributions.

Inspired and informed by the interventions of this body of work within ethnography, human geography, and political economy – but guided by

the aspirations of postcolonial approaches and critical urban theory – *Producing Mayaland* takes a different approach. I question the lack of attention thus far given to spatial transformations, urban processes, and racializing practices and suggest these are important to understand with more nuance the maquiladora phenomenon in Yucatán. With 50% of its population considered Mayan (Gobierno del Estado de Yucatán 2019), Yucatán is a state that has been historically judged to be underdeveloped, poor, indigenous, and only partially linked to the circuits of capital (therefore in need of more economic integration) because of its location in the southeast of Mexico. Against this background, a colonial perception of modernity, a capitalist vision of development, and a classical understanding of the urban–rural divide have seen the state carry out policies that racialize and marginalize. Comprehending these processes is vital to understanding the *local* unfolding of global capitalism. With this in mind, in this book, I begin my analysis with abstractions and then zoom in to the level of the everyday. I explore how the state built infrastructural veins to support maquiladoras, and I highlight how it tried to sell the idea of Yucatán as an exotic, business-friendly paradise where *Magical Mayas*, the suitable workers of the land, await. I then tell the story of how people in the city of Motul (mainly maquila workers and ex-workers) experienced the boom, bust, and then decline of the maquiladora industry in their state. I give snapshots of how it was to live within the sphere of influence of Montgomery Industries, how people's everyday changed, and how their city transformed. This approach allows me to show how global circuits of capital emerge from its centers and materialize into the local, increasing our knowledge about one of the many underbelly cities that support the commodity chains of global capitalism – what Choplin and Pliez (2015) call the "inconspicuous spaces of globalization." There is also a bigger tale in this book. This study is an analysis of the relationship between colonial legacies, urbanization, and global capitalism. I hope to show how capitalism exists in tension between a tendency to homogenize and a propensity to thrive in differentiation. Through the power of abstract space, capitalism attempts to make everything homogenous, but at the same time, it cannot refrain from operationalizing local difference. Abstract labor and abstract space hide this homogenization/differentiation tension through twists that I call *instances of magic*.

Before I expand on the meaning of instances of magic in the next section, I would like to situate the theoretical framework from which I develop my argument and the contributions that this book offers. I start from the postulate that it is fruitful to study global capitalism through its connections to the urban process and the premise that every mode of

production produces its own space and reproduces itself through space (Harvey 2006; Lefebvre 1991). Lefebvre's (1991) theory of space – in addition to his concepts of the urban (Lefebvre 2003) and planetary urbanization via the work of Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid – helps me to reflect on the relationship between capitalism and urbanization. However, mindful of both Eurocentrism and the local context, I complement the Lefebvrian lens with a postcolonial approach.[13] While Lefebvre enables me to uncover the production of space, a postcolonial strategy allows me to, first, analyze the archeology of the colonial scripts present and, second, understand capitalism through an acknowledgment of "historical difference." I draw on the work of Chakrabarty (2000) and Roy (2016a, 2016b) to establish the difference between global and universal when studying capitalism and urbanization. As argued brilliantly by Roy (2016a), it is vital to consider that while capitalism might be *global* in scope, it is not *universal* in the way it unfolds. I complement my understanding of capitalism through Quijano's (2000) *coloniality of power* – a concept that insists traces of colonial domination continue to perpetuate its effects even in places where colonialism as an official political order has been eradicated. Coloniality of power is not a thing of the past but one of the organizing principles behind capitalism, enabling racial distributions of labor and the continuous coexistence of different modes of production. The coloniality of power framework allows me to ponder on a certain rawness of capitalism and helps me reflect on how racialization, gendering practices, violence, and colonization play a role in its unfolding. Finally, to have access to robust tools that help me understand the particular colonial scripts and legacies in Mexico, I rely on a broader coloniality toolkit – an understanding of the postcolonial condition from a Latin American perspective (cf. Moraña et al. 2008).[14]

Producing Mayaland contributes to the field of maquiladora studies by deepening our understanding of the role that racializing practices have in subject formation and by expanding our knowledge of the impact that maquiladoras have on the urban and built environment. In addition to its contribution to maquiladora literature, this book advances three areas: Lefebvrian scholarship, urban studies, and postcolonial urban theory. First, the study attempts to strengthen the understanding between space, difference, and everyday life – concepts that have been studied separately in previous appropriations of Lefebvre's work; in this sense, the work is thus framed within the "third wave" of Lefebvrian thought (cf. Kipfer et al. 2008a). Second, the book offers valuable insights into the continuous debate of "the urban question": What is the urban? What is the relationship between the so-called urban and rural? How do we study the particularities of "the urban"? From a Lefebvrian

perspective, the book contributes to the study of urbanization at a global scale, and by providing an additional empirical example of the usefulness of planetary urbanization within the context of the global South, it contributes to the current debate unfolding within the field of urban studies.[15] In taking this approach, I also avoid what Angelo and Wachsmuth (2015) have criticized as "methodological cityism" – an analytical and empirical approach where the traditional understanding of the city takes precedence over other aspects of urbanization – and instead recognize that "the city as a site" is something different to "urbanization as a process."[16] Third, the book contributes to the project of postcolonial urban theory. In addition to avoiding methodological cityism, the book rejects the idea of the city as a transparent, clearly demarcated, and coherent site of research that is mostly found in the West or in the megacities of the global South. In my approach, I acknowledge and address the need to construct theory about cities that were not forged by the industrial revolution and are outside the Anglo-American and European heartland (Parnell and Robinson 2012; Roy 2009). Through this movement, the book contributes to what Sparke (2007) calls "mapping back," which consists of presenting the human geographies of the global South in "more grounded, embodied and accountable ways."[17] As a form of "repossession" (Sparke 2007), this practice is reminiscent of what Rabasa (1993) calls "decolonization of subjectivity" – dismantling canons of truth and creating counternarratives in order to destabilize "the dominance of Western institutional fictions."

Instances of Magic

To interpret the analytical significance of the material explored in the book, I rely on what I call *instances of magic*. These are (i) moments where it becomes evident there is a tension between capitalism's propensity toward homogenization and differentiation and (ii) occasions where we can detect how abstract space or colonial legacies veil, and sometimes obscure, the everyday and the daily. In short, cases of these instances of magic offer us a window to understand how a reality ruled by the rationality of capital is produced. The colonial legacies that shape Yucatán will be explored throughout the study, and a short discussion of capitalism will be developed in Chapter 2. Here, it is important to give a brief explanation of *abstract space*. In contrast to the inclination to understand space as something that gets filled with things or an object where events simply unfold, Lefebvre (1991, p. 26) famously proclaimed, "(social) space is a (social) product." A society does not *inhabit* space but forges

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