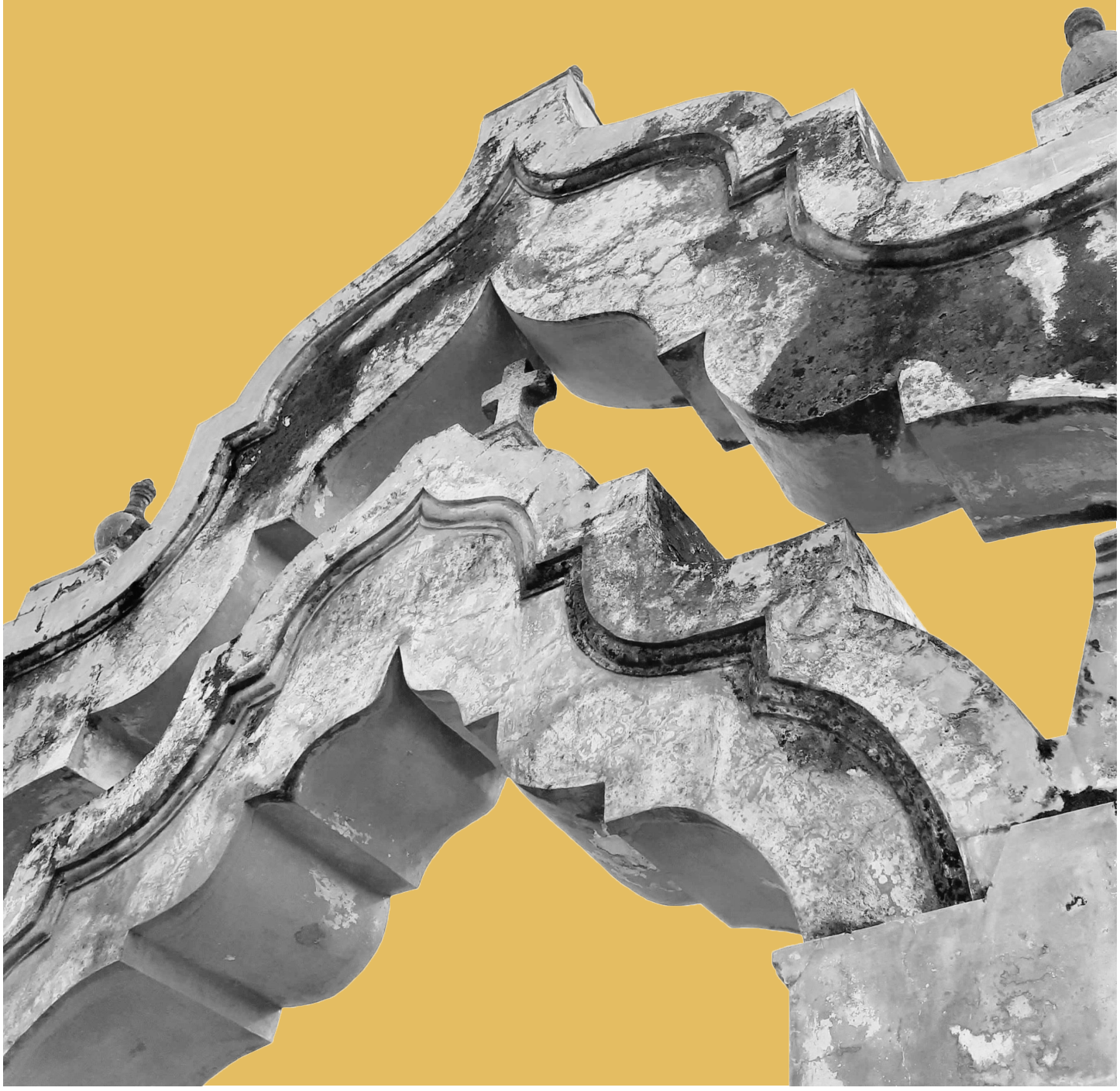
Good Intentions, Colonial Mindsets:

HOW COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN SOUTHERN MEXICO MIRRORS SOCIETAL POWER DISPARITIES



Tourism Master Thesis
With a specialization in Global Tourism Development
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Abstract:

This thesis seeks to explore how participants in community-based tourism projects, unfolding in Maya villages around Mérida (Yucatán, Mexico), interact and how these interactions might be affected by ascription and persisting neocolonial tendencies. The commodification and appropriation of Maya culture will furthermore be touched upon, viewing it from an angle, critical towards neoliberal tendencies within the tourism industry. The ethnographic data collection that, supported by relevant secondary knowledge, serves as the foundation for this thesis, has consisted of participant observations, as well as formal and informal interviews. It has been the aspiration to add to the body of literature that attempts to illuminate the lack of acknowledgement and respect towards host communities' cultures that often appear in tourism settings and furthermore to explore how non-Western ideologies might inspire the contemporary conduction of tourism. The thesis concludes that although community-based tourism can be seen to have certain positive manifestations, the way it is carried out in this part of Mexico is still affected by societal stratification and unequal power dynamics.

Keywords: Mexican Mayas, neocolonialism, neoliberalism, community-based tourism, power relations.

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1. Introduction

In a globalized world, driven by capitalism, the tourism industry is no exception. Tendencies regarding travelling framed as ethical and conscious towards sustainability, have gradually been appearing, perhaps as a counter reaction to the dominant capitalistic agenda, with tourists desiring to justify their escapism through "good" tourism. This has created a market for so-called sustainable tourism, containing a variety of subgenres; eco-tourism, community-based tourism (CBT) and rural tourism, to name a few. Tourists (or travelers) seeking out these alternative types of tourism are likely doing so with the hopes of generating positive impact and companies promoting and facilitating this market are highlighting the benefits for involved, local communities. Despite this, a growing focus on negative manifestations caused by parts of the alternative tourism industry has congregated in recent years (Blackstock 2005, Saarinen 2014, Wang, Carter & Low 2016, Higgins-Desbiolles 2018).

From September until the end of December (2019), I had the opportunity of collaborating with the ecotourism organization EcoGuerreros (EG), located in Mérida (Yucatán, Mexico), while they developed and gradually implemented a CBT project named Camino del Mayab, a 100 km hiking route, running through and involving several Maya communities in the area (Camino del Mayab, 2020). Taking part in their ongoing fieldwork allowed me to witness the process, as they navigated many of the potential challenges that CBT encompasses. As I returned to Mérida in February 2020, I intended basing my thesis on the organization, digging deeper in potential issues regarding their conduction of CBT and analyzing how Mexican legislation and politics might affect alternative tourism. This initial notion gradually altered during my additional five weeks of field work, as new perspectives emerged. Focusing primarily on EG as a case study gradually began to seem insufficient as my attention started to shift towards themes such as structural, systemic racism and neocolonial patterns in contemporary society, illustrated in all clarity in the Mexican tourism industry. The Maya communities that I have engaged with all have varying, internal power struggles and consist of individuals with differing hopes and aspirations. This might seem unnecessary to point out, but given the way in which other rural communities have been subjected to the so-called tourist gaze (Urry, 2002), resulting in commodified representations, underlining such facts can be deemed somewhat necessary. A scenario I witnessed, was how tourism agencies sought to align behavior and habits in some of

the communities with what might be expected by tourists. In one instance a community was being "taught" not to drink Coca Cola because it was inauthentic (Appendix 4 (A4), interview: 6/3-20). In other communities, community members would be instructed by tour agencies to change from their regular daily-day clothing into more traditional garments before tourists would arrive (Fieldnotes 10, 26/3-20). This does not only illustrate clear, staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973), but might also point towards underlying neocolonial tendencies; can it perhaps be said that the tourism industry - including the tourists participating - use countries in the global South as arenas of spectacle and entertainment? As places where they can consume culture as they wish, subsequently leaving these destinations behind together with any potential damage they might have caused, while defending their choices by pointing out, that these countries need their money, in the form of the revenue that tourism generates, to survive?

This chain of thought should however not stand alone. While it might be possible to point out irresponsible and invasive tourist behaviors, the autonomy of indigenous people in the Mexican tourism sector must not be forgotten. Victimization can be seen as adding a passiveness to those in question, which is unacknowledging of the agency that Mayas can be seen to possess in the industry. Litka (2013) explains that:

> *"The Maya are able* [to] *market their heritage and modern culture for financial profit and global recognition. While actively participating in tourism, the ejido*[1] *enables the Maya to assert a sense of agency (…)"* (p. 362).

Mayas should be viewed as active participants, who seek to reap the benefits of tourism, but despite this, the imposed, capitalistic dominance originating from the global North must in my opinion be questioned and challenged.

Thoughts like these have motivated me to change the aim of my research, from being an examination of the complexity of conducting CBT in a specific setting, to looking beyond and seek to identify how, or if, societal stratification and neocolonial patterns effect and shape the way in which tourism is carried out.

[1] *"Communally-owned land"* (Litka 2013, p. 350). The term will be further elaborated on in this chapter.

1.1 Research aim and objectives

Based on the above outlining of what this thesis will be exploring, I have devised the following research question:

- *How does neocolonial and neoliberal tendencies affect the way in which community-based tourism is conducted in Yucatán, Mexico?*

For the purpose of answering this, I will explore two different, but interrelated topics, outlined in the following research objectives:

- *How does power relations and cultural differences affect how the different participants in the Yucatecan tourism sector interact with each other?*
- *How can Maya culture be seen to be framed and/or appropriated?*

1.2 Structure of the thesis and reading guidance

After introducing the intended scope of this research, I will for the sake of overview shortly outline the structure of this thesis. Firstly, as part of the current chapter, an outlining of the situational context of the thesis will be provided.

My methodological and theoretical chapters were created in a constant interaction between my empirical data and my theoretical considerations. This synergy has deepened my perspectives, embedding my own experiences in theory, as well as seeking out more knowledge on the basis of the wondering my data gifted me with. Whether to introduce method or theory first is a topic I have been deliberating. What I have ended up deciding, is to start off with my methodology, because even though my theoretical chapter is important for the conceptualization of certain terms, it was my fieldwork that ended up defining what theories and preexisting knowledge this thesis should include. Real-life encounters have steered my theoretical direction, and I therefore deem it appropriate that these are introduced first. After these two chapters, the chapter of findings and analysis follows, where empirical data and theoretical knowledge are synthesized in order to answer my research objectives, subsequently leading to an illumination of my research question. Finally, before a last summarization in the conclusions chapter, a discussion will elaborate on some of the more philosophical and ideological thoughts I have had throughout the writing process that I have not deemed fitting for the analytical chapter. A list of appendices can be found at the end of the thesis, after the list of references. All fieldnotes can be found in appendix 1 and will be referred to as *"Fieldnotes",* followed by a number indicating

where in the appendix they can be found (e.g. Fieldnotes 1) and the date of writing. Appendices are generally referred to as A2 through to A8 and if the appendix in question is an interview, this will be stated as well, followed by the date of conduction.

1.3 Context of the study

In the following, I will outline certain historical events related to colonialism and the marginalization of Mexico's indigenous population. This is done in order to provide a proper foundation of knowledge, which I deem needed in order to grasp the complexity of stratification, structural poverty and racism in contemporary Mexican society (Villarreal, 2010). Afterwards I will touch upon the tourism industry in the country, including an introduction to the case study of EG, as well as the presentation of a more established tourism project, which will serve as an exemplification of what more developed community-based tourism could look like in the Yucatán region. Again, this background information will provide essential context and serve as a framework to the rest of this paper.

Maya culture was predominant both in the Yucatán Peninsula, Guatemala and Northern Belize up until the Spanish invasion in early 16th century (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). Gradually, the Spanish colonizers started to occupy more and more areas that had been inhabited by the indigenous population and the last independent Maya city was overtaken in 1697 (Jones, 1998). What followed was a systematic repression of the Mayas, which is clearly illustrated in the facilitation of henequen production in the Yucatán in the late 19th century, where it has been documented how many indigenous people were stripped of the rights to their lands and subsequently had to move to Spanish owned haciendas for work (Alston, Mattiace & Nonnenmacher, 2009). Turner (1910) described rough working conditions as well as how the bond between Maya workers and hacienda owners often were far from voluntary:

> *"Debt and contract slavery is the prevailing system of production all over the south of Mexico (…) Debt, real or imaginary, is the nexus that binds the peon to his master"* (p. 92-93).

Figure 1: Abandoned Hacienda in the Maya community Uayalceh (author's photo).

A decentralization of ownership of land came about after the Mexican Revolution (approximately 1910-1920) and today almost 50 % of the country's territory *"(…) is held by a communal form of agrarian organization called the ejido (…)"* (Signet 2010, p. 481), which is defined as *"(…) the indigenous' social and economic organizations (…)"* (Ibid., p. 490). Ejidos are legislation-wise inferior to municipalities but do still possess some amount of decision-making power and will generally be involved in initiatives regarding management of land (Fieldnotes 2, 10/10-19). A larger degree of co-determination and rights in terms of ownership can therefore be detected amongst the modern-day Maya population in the Yucatán region. It is although important to underline that indigenous people in contemporary Mexico still are exposed to considerable repression, identifiable in several ways; limited political representation, devaluation of indigenous languages and cultures, discrimination and an ongoing struggle to secure the rights to their own land (Minority Rights Group International,

2019). This structural stigmatization can be said to steer how indigenous people are positioned within society. Looking towards the tourism industry, examples of this are identifiable as well. Jamal and Camargo (2018) points towards how tourism governance in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo is organized in favor of governmental institutions and private investors and businesses. Policies and decision-making regarding tourism happens in coordination with a tourism Advisory Council. This council has been seen to systematically exclude local citizens and favorize big profit businesses and when it comes to Maya residents, this exclusion is absolute:

"Indigenous Maya people are excluded from decision-making through institutional arrangements that have denied them formal representation, voting rights, and meaningful consultation through which they can exert influence. Onsite research revealed narratives of tourism government officials that linked this political marginalization to cultural racism and ethnic prejudice against the Maya, who are deemed as inferior and incapable of participating in tourism governance" (Ibid., p. 207).

Other than the somewhat apparent grotesqueness of stigmatizing a minority within a society in a fashion such as the above, the injustice that this specific example portrays, can be viewed as even more conspicuous when taking in to consideration that prehistoric Maya culture, as well as present-day traditions and knowledge, is such an important part of the Mexican tourism product. Ramos & Prideaux (2014) point out that Maya *"(…) legacy of archaeology, culture and nature (…) now provides the raw material for the creation of a world-class ecotourism experience"* (p. 461). The cultural significance of Mayas is also clearly noticeable when reading through the extensive list of World Heritage Sites in Mexico; approximately one third of the 35 sites are related to pre-Hispanic culture, being predominantly Maya (UNESCO, 2019).

The tourism sector in Mexico is quite substantial, accounting for 8,5 % of the country's GDP, with approximately 35 million tourists visiting in 2017 (Luebke 2019, Flannery 2018). Although the revenue generated from the sector is boosting the national economy, OECD (2017) has pointed out that:

"Tourism's potential to promote local and regional development remains largely unrealised, and the sector faces competitiveness and sustainability challenges. Attention to date

has mainly focused on the development of highly concentrated coastal resorts, which in turn is reflected in tourism demand, marketing and promotion. Mexico will need to evolve this model to compete in the changing global tourism marketplace, and to spread the economic and social development benefits more widely" (p. 2).

A relentless focus on growth and profit maximization can be seen exemplified in the development of tourism in Quintana Roo's coastal zone, where both environmental and socio-economic consequences are very present; in Cancun, a reliance on tourism exists, with 65 % of so-called economically active citizens, depending on the sector for work. The city furthermore has *"(…) the highest rates of inflation and cost of living for tourism areas in the country (…)"* (Murray 2007, p. 346). Groundwater contamination has been detected in the municipality of Tulum and has been directly linked to the excessive number of tourists in the area (Saint-Loup et al., 2018). Even though, projects aimed at bringing more tourism to the regional area of the Yucatán peninsula are being developed, most prominently the Tren Maya, which in the governmental *"Plan Nacional de Desarollo 2019-2024"* is described as the most important project, both in terms of infrastructural, socioeconomic and touristic development. This project has been framed as both mindful of the environment, as well as inclusive towards the opinions of the Maya communities that will be directly affected by the project, with Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) stating that the project would only be implemented with a majority of support from the indigenous population in the area (Harrison-Cripps, 2019). This support was "proved" in mid-December 2019, where a referendum was held in the five states of Campeche, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Tabasco and Yucatán with a vast majority of the voters supporting the project. Something worth noticing is that out of the total population of approximately 12 million people in the five states (INEGI 2020), only 100.000 voted. It has also later been revealed that a report conducted by an extensive team of scientists, predicting elaborate, negative consequences (both socially and environmentally), due to the implementation of the train route, was consciously hid from the public in order to not affect the result of the vote (Carabaña, 2020). It is therefore arguable that the support towards the project might have been different if these research results had been accessible knowledge. An example like this highlights some of the issues within the Mexican tourism sector; both what might seem as a prioritization of financial gain at the expense of the environment, as well as possible issues in regards of proper, democratic processes.

EcoGuerreros (EG) is an eco-tourism organization that I, as earlier mentioned, collaborated with during my internship and additional fieldwork in Mérida, Yucatán. They were founded in 2016 (EcoGuerreros, 2020) and have since 2017 been developing the CBT project Camino del Mayab; the mission of the project is stated as the following:

"[to] *Contribute to the conservation of bio-cultural heritage through sustainable tourism, nature sports, activities of citizen participation, environmental education and the design and operation of projects that promote local development."* (A6, p. 2).

They furthermore state that they wish to contribute to:

"(...) creating an integrated regional sustainable tourism product that generates new governance mechanisms and broad and equitable regional economic benefit (...)" (A6, p. 2).

It can therefore be argued that the aim of the project has a double connotation: 1) to assist in the empowerment and development in the involved Maya villages, 2) to strengthen the protection of the area's natural habitats.

Figure 2: Cenote X-Batun (author's photo).

The intentions behind developing Camino del Mayab seem overall altruistic and well-intended, although certain issues in the organization's approach became apparent to me over time, which will be elaborated on in the analysis part of this paper. What makes EG somewhat insufficient as an exemplification of CBT in the area, is the fact that their project, at the time of writing, is not fully established and still being developed. The unique perspectives it has given me to witness a *development* project in the midst of its' own development, makes EG an indispensable case-study to my research, which is empathized even more when considering the advantage my close collaboration with them has given me in terms of knowledge acquisition. Despite of this, in order to illustrate how fully established CBT projects, conduct their business, I also chose to turn my attention to and gathered data about another company as well[2]. What I witnessed here was a financially, struggling social enterprise, surviving mainly on funding (A4, interview: 6/3-20). It can however be argued that their existence is still justified, due to them serving as a more idealistic alternative to commercialized tourism in the region, seeking to ensure the participation of their Maya associates in decision-making processes (Ibid.). One of their collaborating communities, that I visited, had succeeded in establishing a self-sustaining CBT product, providing the involved community members with employment, rooted in their community and culture (A5, interview: 16/3-20). Although this might seem promising on the surface, signs of neocolonial thinking were seemingly represented, both in the mindsets of the Mestizos (non-indigenous Mexicans) working in the company, as well as the Mayas involved (see A4: interview: 6/3-20, A5: interview: 16/3-20, Fieldnotes 9: 16/3-20). This discovery prompted me even further to explore the problematic structures that arguably are embedded in cultural understandings, as well as in the tourism sector of Mexico.

It is my hope that the research carried out in this thesis will help illuminate, what I believe to be cultural and economic exploitation of indigenous ("exotic") cultures and how neocolonial ideas are indirectly assisting both travelers and tourism industries in justifying such tendencies.

[2] The identity of the company and its' representative protected by a non-disclosure contract. These will be referred to as the company and the informant.

2. Research approach and methods

In the following the methodological approaches of this thesis will be outlined, along with ontological reflections and my positioning as a researcher.

2.1 Research design

The research approach applied to this thesis has been of a qualitative, ethnographic nature and has consisted of both primary and secondary data gathering. Due to the objective of obtaining knowledge of and pursue to comprehend elements of a foreign, cultural setting by gathering empirical data through qualitative research, it can be argued that this investigation places itself within an ethnographic research design (Pedersen, 2020).

Due to the fact that the fieldwork and data gathering, that has served as the foundation for this thesis, was conducted in two parts (as mentioned in the introduction), I have deemed it necessary to describe the approach of the two periods separately; the aim of each of them has varied, which has affected how fieldwork was conveyed.

I first started my research in Yucatán concurrent with my internship on the 9th semester. The collaboration with EG gave me the valuable opportunity of experiencing the complexity of implementing and organizing CBT in real-life. I served as a consultant in relation to implementation and monitoring of their CBT-project Camino del Mayab, which therefore led me to acquaint myself with a substantial body of knowledge on this specific topic. Due to these efforts, I established a solid, theoretical foundation, in which I was able to mirror, evaluate and identify my hands-on experiences working together with EG. Leaning on my secondary data, I experienced a deepening of the nuances within my area of research as I conducted my primary data gathering, mainly consisting of interviews and observations. Being able to witness my theoretical knowledge unfurl in real-life experiences has been gratifying but has also challenged my existing ideas and expanded my critical thinking. The both unique and subjective reality that development work (which in best-case scenario will be the role of CBT), unfolds in has become empathized to me and although certain, recognized guidelines can be perceived as useful tools in the facilitation of it, no objective, universal answer exists to its' conduction; this should ideally happen in close collaboration with the involved stakeholders of the project, while taking the specific situational setting into consideration and seeking to understand the cultural context (Mikkelsen, 2005).

My data-gathering and fieldwork expeditions were conducted from early September until medio December 2019. During these months, weekly meetings were carried out, in order to evaluate on both EG's progress as well as my inputs. This routinely participation in their work life rewarded me with an insight in regards of their organizational methods and culture. In addition to this, I participated in four fieldtrips: three equivalating the length of a regular workday and one being an elaborate four-day mountain bike trip, running through the majority of the involved communities and following the planned route of Camino del Mayab.

These trips gifted me with an opportunity to observe the culture and everyday life of the Maya communities. It furthermore visualized and contextualized the settings of the tourism product that EG are developing (the project is planned to be fully established in December 2020). The report that concluded my internship ended up focusing on the way in which cultural understandings and settings characterizing the differing, involved Maya communities would manifest, as well as how these would affect the implementation of EG's project.

When returning to Mérida for approximately five weeks (from February 21 until March 28), my ideas about what I wanted to explore were somewhat abstract. I therefore initiated an exploratory data gathering within the context that I had already familiarized myself with. Gradually, through additional field trips, new observations and informal talks, my interest towards certain underlying constructs was aroused, and I began to question what I already knew. Even though EG came across as having the best intentions, small indications of power inequalities between them and the Maya community members became clearer.

Guided by my acquired data I started to identify certain issues and, on this basis, I began viewing my research setting through a neocolonial lens, discovering patterns of for instance appropriation and racial stratification. Using my data as a point of departure, while seeking to extract theoretical patterns from it and thereby attempting to generalize on the basis of specific observations, adds an inductive touch to my approach (Andersen, 2013). To say that my research strategy has been of a primarily inductive nature does although not seem sufficient, considering that my main aim hasn't been to formulate absolute truths, but rather exploring the cultural context that initiated my wondering. This leads me to conclude that abduction has characterized my approach predominantly and when considering the following quote, this assumption seems even more plausible:

"(...) what distinguishes abduction is that the theoretical account is grounded in the worldview of those one researches. Abduction is broadly inductive in approach but is worth distinguishing by virtue of its reliance on explanation and understanding on participants' worldviews" (Bryman, 2012, p. 401).

In the time between my two data gatherings, I travelled through Guatemala, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Despite the leisurely aspect of this trip, my enhanced awareness considering tourism and its' effects, made me constantly aware of my own position and role as a tourist. The seeming arrogance that I sometimes observed towards the host communities from other Western tourists, became impossible for me to ignore. One observation that made a noticeable impression on me, was a sign in a hostel in Lanquin, Guatemala, owned and founded by an Israeli man:

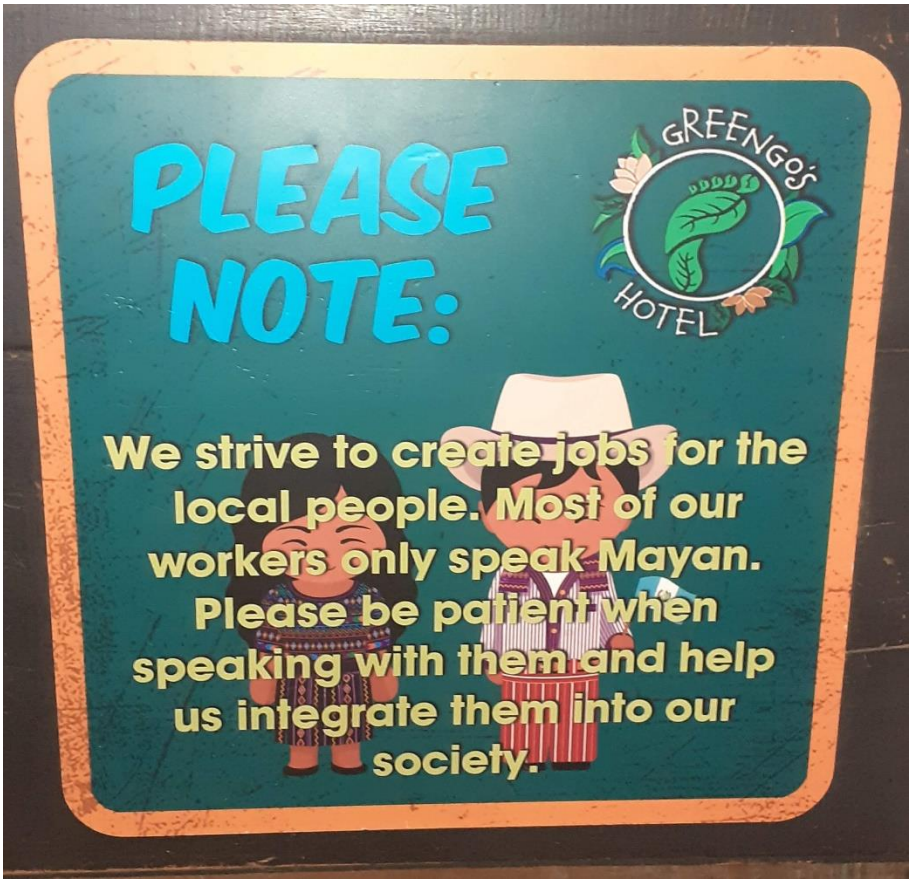

Figure 3: Author's photo.

When I in agitation pointed out the sign to my fellow travel companions, they were at first puzzled towards why I opposed it. To them it seemed like an act of social consciousness to employ Mayas, but to me the formulation of *being patient with them* stood out as deeply

patronizing and the notion of *integrating them into OUR society* was a complete disregard of the colonial history of the country; Mayas are indigenous and suggesting that they need to integrate into their own country is an illustration of neocolonial thought. When returning to Mexico, experiences like the one described above, had taken the perspectives I initially had gained through fieldwork with EG, and both contextualized and broadened them. My critical stance towards the Western and capitalistic mannerisms that can be seen to guide the tourism industry was reinforced, which I carried with me in to the second part of my fieldwork.

During the first interview I conducted in this portion of my fieldwork, my Eurocentric approach was challenged. If I were to truly grasp Maya perspectives and remain critical towards my own Western biases and privileges, I needed to illuminate my topic from more than one perspective and seek out different discourses than those that were dictated by my part of the world. The importance of attempting to comprehend the worldview of *"those one researches",* as Bryman (2012) had put it, became abundantly clear to me and throughout the rest of my data collection, this realization guided my approach. That research approaches often are dominated by Western ideals (Collyer, 2018) should therefore be taken into consideration when investigating other cultures. So-called *counterhegemonic possibilities* have been suggested by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014), encouraging epistemologies outside the *Western-centric* tradition. Understanding *"(…) the incompatibility of many development projects with indigenous worldviews"* (Escobar, 1995, p. xi), can be considered key when examining tourism and development work in Latin American countries. The Western idea of economic development, that we often choose to weigh foreign countries up against, differs greatly from more collectivistic philosophies of many Mayas in today's Mexico (A3, interview: 3/3-20).

Patterns within certain articulations made about indigenous people, framing them as less capable than Mestizos, stood out to me as my fieldwork progressed and so did the manner in which society and tourism businesses are framing Maya culture. Towards the end of my stay in Mérida, my initial ideas of what knowledge I would discover were completely overturned. I felt as if I had worked my way from an aspiration of conducting an enlightening case study of a single eco-tourism organization, to feeling as if I had discovered a pathway leading to a whole new theoretical arena, with unknown bounds of knowledge – both to obtain as well as contribute to.

2.2 Philosophy of science

This thesis explores certain racial power relations affecting the shape of the Mexican tourism sector. It furthermore seeks to challenge the constructs evoked by neocolonialism, that has placed indigenous people in a situational context where they have found themselves needing to adapt their ways of life and belief systems.

Mayas have through history been subjected to social and cultural constraints, made possible by political and linguistic structures (Alston et al. 2009, Castañeda 2004, Turner 1910), and oppressive mechanisms can still be seen within contemporary Mexican society, also in the arena of tourism (Cocom 2005, Jamal & Camargo 2018).

Social constructivism encompasses the ontological perspective that social reality is a construct, which is interpreted by people through their interactions with both each other, but also the social systems they are included in (Teater, 2015). This aligns well with several positionings in this paper, for instance the conceptualization of Maya culture within the tourism industry, which *constructs* the perception of Maya people in the eyes of tourists (Tegelberg, 2013). That the conditions of tourism are everchanging and depending on the context they unfold in, being interpreted by its' different participants (e.g. tourists and locals) (Meethan, 2005), would furthermore support the choice of social constructivism as my philosophy of science, but due to the societal criticism that this thesis contains, I have chosen to support this by adding a poststructuralist perspective. What makes this approach relevant to my research is its' questioning of existing power structures and the idea that people's behaviors are substantially affected by cultural conditioning and that nothing therefore is naturally inherent to human nature (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Poststructuralism also propose the notion that power and knowledge are highly intertwined; Foucault spoke of so-called *regimes of truth,* that seeks *"(…) to define and produce knowledge, and thereby ensure the continuity of an institution or a social system"* (Mikula, 2008, p. 161). I believe that it is possible to argue that this perspective can be seen clearly illustrated in what Collyer (2018) refers to as *"(…) global inequalities in academic knowledge production"* (p. 69), where underlying mechanisms in the scholarly world *"(…) allow knowledges produced in the global South to be systematically marginalised, dismissed, under-valued or simply not made accessible to other researchers"* (p. 69). It has also been argued that newer, postcolonial theory development has been both affecting and affected by poststructuralism, due to the latter's emphasis on power structures within language and

linguistics, which can be associated to the postcolonial interest in dominance between cultures (Sauerberg, 2020). I therefore believe that I through a shared lens of these two philosophies, will obtain the most nuanced perspective of the subject at hand.

2.3 My positioning as a researcher

Certain considerations became obvious to me while conducting my fieldwork. Through the close engagement with EG, I became embedded in this part of my research object in a quite personal manner. This has ensured a high level of trust between me and the employees of the organization, which has meant a willingness from their side to share knowledge and insights with me to an extent that most likely would not have happened if I had been an outsider. This positioning has on one hand been of tremendous value in terms of gaining an inside perspective, but it has also posed challenges in the form of a positive bias towards the organization. Understanding and being aware of one's own biases, while remaining thoroughly reflexive while examining them, can be regarded as highly relevant within the qualitative research approach in terms of research validity (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). In other areas of my research, this introspect has also seemed nothing less than necessary. Examining notions of tourism through the lens of poststructuralism and neocolonialism, my own privilege of being white and able to afford the expenses of travelling has become illuminated to me in the strongest sense. Studying cultures "less fortunate" than my own (from a Western perspective), has made me question the relevance of myself as a narrator of the subject at hand. The discursive dominance of the global North seems somewhat repeated through the fact that I am yet another Westerner trying to examine a cultural setting that I do not belong to. Due to these reflections, I began attempting to view my own approaches and thoughts "from above", repeatedly seeking to evaluate them while considering my privileges and possible biases. This process of self-reflection has brought an autoethnographic element to this paper, which I believe has been irreplaceable in terms of seeking to turn my positioning into something useful rather than it being an example of the "first world" arrogance that I have sought to unveil in my investigations. Baarts (2010) points towards autoethnography as allowing one's background and experience to reflect on the research one chooses to carry out. Seeking to understand the unique perspectives that this can bring to the research can be viewed as utilizing biases and positioning in a constructive way - while as a matter of course, being fully observant of the subjectivity that this will allow to the process. By accepting the circumstances related to myself

as a researcher, I have come to terms with my role and position and have subsequently attempted to employ it as a strength in my aspiration towards uncovering possible Western arrogance and exploitation of the global South.

2.4 Observations and fieldnotes

A combination of differing degrees of participatory observations was chosen and conducted for the data gathering for this thesis. This approach seemed natural, considering that I on one hand worked together with EG in a professional setting, thus integrating me into their group, giving me the advantage of being able to freely interact in work tasks and lessening the effect my presence might have on other group members. On the other hand, I still remained somewhat an outsider, being of a different nationality, struggling with language barriers and having a more lose association with EG than other employees. When joining their fieldtrips, my physical appearance, being typically Scandinavian, most likely stood out in the Maya communities, still being relatively unaffected by tourism, which presumably made community members notice me to a greater extent than other team members from EG.

My participation during these fieldtrips has been of differing degrees. Using Spradley's (1980) indexation, these can be characterized as:

1. Passive participation, where activities were observed within the given setting, but with no participation in activities. One example of this was an assembly of ejidatarios (members of the ejido) held by EG in order to distribute information and gather support. I was embedded in the setting as part of EG's team, but my role was passive and I sat in the periphery of the area, taking immediate fieldnotes (see Fieldnotes 6, 9/12-19)
2. Moderate participation, where activities again were observed, but with close to full participation in the activities at hand. This was the most common level of involvement for me, including taking requested pictures of meetings, small-talking with community members, partaking in meals and inspecting improvements (for instance cenote[3]-cleaning, see Fieldnotes 8: 14/3-20). In these instances, being present in the social situations was necessary and fieldnotes were conducted as soon as possible afterwards.

[3] Cenotes are naturally occurring freshwater sinkholes and are found all across the Yucatán peninsula, where they often are considered points of interests and used for swimming and diving activities.

3. Complete participation, where observations were made while I was completely immersed in the context. This was the case when I was part of EG's four-day mountain bike trip, serving as a pilot-drive of Camino del Mayab. On this trip I served as a consultant and my observations were directly required. Here fieldnotes were also conducted as soon as time and place allowed it (see Fieldnotes 6, 10/12-19 to 13/12-19).

Figure 4: Fully immersed participation - mountain biking Camino del Mayab (author's photo).

Participatory observations can be viewed as a useful method for data collection in ethnographic fieldwork due to several factors: it facilitates involvement in cultural activities that the researcher most likely wouldn't have been included in elsewise, it reduces the risk of the involved people reacting, or acting, in a specific way when being aware of being observed and can both help broaden or deepen the researchers understanding of the culture (Bernard, 1994). It is although relevant to underline that certain disadvantages of participatory observation also exist. Kawulich (2005) explains that:

"(…) the information collected by anthropologists is not representative of the culture, as much of the data collected by these researchers is observed based on the researcher's individual interest in a setting or behavior, rather than being representative of what actually happens in a culture" (p. 15).

Observations will ergo most likely be biased by the researcher performing them. The embeddedness in the culture, due to the active participation, can in itself also create a bias, as the researcher might become less critical due to personal involvement (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998). Therefore, it might be advisable to remain reflexive towards one's own observations throughout the fieldwork. The ambivalence that becoming familiar with the subjects of one's observations can cause, has been very noticeable to me. As before mentioned, it has both created a level of trust, causing EG to share valuable information with me but has also made me somewhat reluctant to criticize or spark discussions due to the feeling of friendliness that has evolved between the employees and myself.

Since my association with EG started several months before I defined my research aims and objectives, I never observed focusing exclusively on the topic of this thesis. Through my observations, I attempted to grasp the general, cultural environment, seeking to create a base of information that I then would be able to draw on when reaching the process of writing my thesis. This has caused my observations to be of an exploratory nature, illuminating a wide scope of knowledge, which eventually guided me towards the topic at hand. At times, this has had the consequence, that certain observations have remained so-called headnotes; the plentiful impressions, that an ethnographic researcher is exposed to, will likely entail that not every detail of their surrounding environment is written down. Sanjek (1990), with reference to Ottenberg, explains it the following way:

"We come back from the field with fieldnotes and headnotes. The fieldnotes stay the same, written down on paper, but the headnotes continue to evolve and change as they did in the field" (p. 93).

I have although supported my observations by documenting many of them through fieldnotes. This has been conducted to provide support to my memory and to ensure that important details of my acquired knowledge were not lost. Fieldnotes can be viewed as essential in this context and are considered a useful tool in regards of documentation (Delabrer, 2017). Despite the

method's benefits, both being discrete and practical (no reliance on any technical equipment and can be carried out in the field during most circumstances), its' limitations should not be overlooked. The researcher performs a selective process while taking fieldnotes, meaning that only the observed parts of the context that are regarded as important, are written down. Fieldnotes can therefore be said to only represent fragments of the observed reality and not the entirety of it (Atkinson, 1992). This points back to the somewhat subjective, biased role of the researcher, which should prompt a critical stance towards one's own data and opinions.

2.5 Interviews

Interviews have served as an important source of data in my thesis writing and have helped me cover knowledge gaps. Both semi-structured and informal interviews were conducted.

2.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

An interview guide was constructed before each interview (see Appendix 7). These all had differing structures and formulations (although sharing a common denominator of consisting of open questions), due to the variated roles the interviewees possess. The literacy that I hoped to acquire from the individuals was therefore of differing natures. Another relevant factor in this regard, was that I did not aim towards being able to clinically compare the answers from each person to those of the others, which points back to the notion of seeking out different knowledge from each stakeholder.

I chose the semi-structured interview method due to its' flexible frame, which enables the interviewee to freely articulate their personal understandings and experiences (King & Horrocks, 2012). This creates a fluency, where the interview can transform and move in unexpected directions, opening space for reflection, both for the interviewee and interviewer (Galletta, 2013). By allowing the participant to affect the conversation and to elaborate on what he/she believes is essential, the detailed insights of their point of view, will more likely be expressed (Bryman, 2012). While letting this spontaneity unfold in my interviews, I concurrently leaned on my interview guides, ensuring that none of the subjects I wished to ask about, were forgotten. The semi-structured interview has a qualitative nature; it is not measurable and does not aspire to obtain standardized answers but seeks to explore the lifeworld of the interviewee and thereby extract the specific, inherent knowledge that the certain individual possess (Andersen & Lund 2020, Kajornboon 2005).

All semi-structured interviews were recorded and later transcribed. This was carried out for the purpose of documentation and to enable the option of quoting and referring to the interviews. Transcription is a time-consuming task, that might be complicated by external factors, such as noise disturbances, but also because transcribing can be described as almost a type of translation: talked and written language are two very different linguistic disciplines. Verbal sentences are sometimes not fully completed, or they might make a sudden change in direction, why foreseeing where they might end can be difficult, which is something that can slow down the task (Brinkman & Tanggaard, 2010). Another example was an interviewee that had the habit of speaking very rapidly. Such instances caused a lot of pausing and rewinding while transcribing, but this should simply be viewed as a necessity and a small nuisance compared to the irreplaceable knowledge I gained from these interviews.

2.5.2 Informal interviews

Informal interviews, or talks, were also conducted. These can be described as conversations with no specific structure, that occur spontaneously if an opportunity suddenly arises, which means that neither interview guide nor recording devices are present (Aarhus Universitet, 2020). Whenever this would happen to me, I aimed at writing down derived knowledge in my fieldnotes as quickly as possible in order to not forget anything essential. Such informal talks have felt like a natural part of my exploratory research, where obtaining knowledge from my surroundings have been key.

2.6 Limitations

In the first phase of my fieldwork, that ran simultaneously with my internship, my time was primarily occupied by tasks related to my internship. Data collection was therefore a secondary task, limited to certain days and events. Had I not had responsibilities in regards of interning, my gathering of data could have been far more extensive. It is although relevant to point out, that conducting said internship was what enabled me to go to Yucatán, Mexico for an extended period of time.

My perception of EG has been primarily based on interactions with the organization itself and the information that I have retrieved has come from its' own employees. Also possessing different views of the operation would have been preferable, which is why the importance of staying critical towards my data becomes even more important.

My limited Spanish proficiency has also been a substantial limitation on more than one level. In the most tangible sense, it hindered me from engaging in deeper conversations with the local community members involved in Camino del Mayab. Hearing their opinions, expressed by themselves, would have been of enormous relevance, especially when considering the community-based aim of the project. In order to obtain a perspective from an indigenous community member working with CBT, I had to reach out to a more established tourism project that were able to connect me with one of their collaborators of Maya decent that spoke English. My lack of language proficiency also affected day to day interactions and made me feel less embedded in the Mexican culture, which is why I believe that a more philosophical limitation also exists in this context. It can be argued that:

"The study of languages other than one's own cannot only serve to help us understand what we as human beings have in common, but also assist us in understanding the diversity which underlies not only our languages, but also our ways of constructing and organizing knowledge, and the many different realities in which we all live and interact" (Derkun, Rayuskaya & Kresova, 2010, p. 75).

Language and culture are closely connected, and I therefore believe that a full fluency in Spanish would have immersed me further in the local culture.

The COVID-19 outbreak ended up having a direct effect on my data collection. Two major interviews with government officials, connected to tourism in the Yucatán state, became impossible due to them not being able to fit a meeting with me in their schedules because of the crisis that the country's tourism industry was suddenly in. The biggest event of the Mexican tourism sector, Tianguis Turístico México was supposed to be held in Mérida from March 22nd-25th 2020 but has been postponed until September due to the pandemic (Tianguis Turístico México, 2020). This would have been an ideal opportunity to see how alternative tourism projects are being represented in official, public settings in Mexico and it would furthermore have utilized possibilities of general observations and informal talks with stakeholders from the tourism industry. This loss of data is undoubtedly troublesome, since it would have provided me with unique perspectives, but it has although not made the execution of this thesis impossible. Due to the explorative and abductive nature of my research, I did not venture out to collect a specific set of data, but rather aimed towards investigating a broader subject, which consequently lead me to a more defined topic based on the underlying issues that were

gradually revealed throughout the process. I believe that I have succeeded adequately at covering the knowledge gaps that this has caused through theoretical substitution.

3. Theoretical review

This following chapter outlines the relevant theoretical knowledge, that together with the acquired empirical data serves as the foundation of this thesis.

3.1 Community-based Tourism - obstacles and opportunities

It is arguable, that CBT has become a somewhat central perspective within the arena of sustainable tourism development. This can most likely be accredited to its' anticipated goals of pro-poor development, strengthening of sustainable and environmental practices, as well as the empowerment of local communities, both financially and socially (Salazar, 2012). When organizations attempt to carry out CBT projects, these aims are generally pursued by seeking to ensure high levels of community involvement; especially in regards of decision-making processes, as well as how to develop and facilitate the tourism product itself (Strydom, Mangope & Henama, 2018). Because CBT seeks to include the communities that the concerned tourism project unfolds in by *"(…) encompassing the active participation of communities in the planning, implementation and management of tourism in order to provide wider benefits for the community"* (Novelli, Klatte & Dolezal, 2017, p. 261), it can be interpreted as a tool for development and an alternative to mass-tourism. Although such initiatives can seem fundamentally positive, especially when compared to other parts of the tourism sector less concerned with benefitting and empowering locals, critical viewpoints towards CBT, and in general the idea of sustainability within tourism, are fairly extensive (Moscardo & Murphy 2014, Lee & Jan 2019, Cornelisse 2019). Blackstock (2005) points towards multiple significant areas in which CBT projects can be seen to not fulfill their proclaimed aims, which include *"(…) a focus on economic profitability not local empowerment"* (Ibid., p. 41). She furthermore mentions that *"(…) advocates of CBT are working from a stereotypical idealization of community (…)"* (Ibid., p. 42), quite likely leading them to presume *"(…) shared interests and a consensus on the preferred tourism outcomes (…)"* (Ibid., p. 42). She also underlines that *"(…) most communities are heterogeneous, stratified and sites of power relations"* (Ibid., p. 42), a point that also became inherently clear to me while I conducted fieldwork alongside EG and one that therefore arguably should be taken into consideration in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of sustainable tourism efforts.

It can therefore be viewed as essential to understand that the diverse, cultural manifestations and varying, internal power structures in any given community, can, and most likely will, affect the way in which development work (in this context CBT) should be carried out (Mikkelsen, 2005). I saw this manifested in the way that EG worked together with the different stakeholders from the involved Maya communities; engaging with a broad number of locals, gaining trust through daily-day interactions and listening to the wishes and needs of those involved and thereby attaining insights about the uniqueness of the community and its' individuals (Fieldnotes 1, 13/9-19). Keeping Blackstock's point of stratification and heterogeneity in mind, such fieldwork is vital to grasp how (or perhaps if) CBT processes should play out in a specific context. It can therefore be said that the cultural setting should act as a steering tool for CBT effort. UNWTO (1999) states the following in their *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*:

"(…) stakeholders in tourism development and tourists themselves should observe the social and cultural traditions and practices of all peoples, including those of minorities and indigenous peoples and to recognize their worth; Tourism activities should be conducted in harmony with the attributes and traditions of the host regions and countries and in respect for their laws, practices and customs" (Article 1, subsection 1).

Considering the cultural differences between oneself and the people engaged with when collaborating in the development of tourism, is not only indicating respect, but will most likely also lead to new perspectives; learning from non-Western cultures can challenge and inspire our Eurocentric way of thinking (Collyer 2018, Halvorsen 2019), and thereby the way in which tourism is conducted. In the context of Mexican society, where Mayas are treated as a minority (Minority Rights Group International, 2019), the above quote touches upon an important point, which can be deemed very relevant in terms of the collaboration between EG and the different Maya villages. The majority of EG's employees are Mestizos and all live far away from the communities, which is why they can be viewed as belonging to the Mexican majority, as well as stemming from a more privileged demographic than those they seek to include in their tourism product. A deep awareness of the unjust, societal advantages they themselves possess, *should* ideally be present in their mindsets, when working together with the members of the different communities. This also points towards a possible power dynamic between EG and the Mayas they collaborate with. Yanes, Zielinski, Cano & Kim (2019) notes that:

"(…) CBT development is often not something that can be easily decided by local people and then executed. It requires recognition from powerful, multi-dimensional, and in many instances, anti-participatory stakeholders that dominate lives or local people (p. 2).

Although EG might aim toward democratic processes, they are still the instigators of Camino del Mayab and the implementation of the project still depend on their decision-making and ability to gain appropriate funding and support, ultimately placing them in a position of power; the involved community members are stigmatized members of society, relying on EG's assistance in order to realize the project. Such power dynamics might be relevant to explore through a lens of neocolonialism, which will be elaborated on in the analysis.

Another important point to make, when considering the cultural differences between the coworkers and the local Mayas, is that enforcing own ideals and perspectives should be avoided and the importance of a free articulation of culture should furthermore be underlined:

"The touristic requirement that a group internalize an "authentic" ethnic identity, even if the resulting image is widely held to be a positive one, is no less a constraint than the earlier form of negative ethnic stereotyping. Conforming to the requirements of being a living tourist attraction becomes a total problem affecting every detail of life" (MacCannell, 1984, p. 389).

Leaning on the above quote, it can be extracted that cultural settings should be considered essential and that these should shape the implementation process of any given tourism project. Culture can furthermore be viewed as something both fluent and everchanging, making it somewhat unfit for measuring. Static, rigid implementation frameworks can therefore on this basis be deemed counterproductive; the culture of a community will always be unique, which should guide how both CBT, and sustainable tourism in general, are facilitated.

3.1.1 Measuring participation

As already mentioned, the participation of community members and their influence on decision-making can be seen as key in terms of CBT succeeding in serving as a development tool. However, definitions of participation and co-determination can be viewed as relative and can materialize differently depending on the organization. In order to concretize and illustrate how the CBT organizations touched upon in this thesis conduct participation, Pretty's (1995)

"typology of participation: how people participate in *development programs and projects"* (p. 1252) will be briefly applied in the analysis chapter. This typology categorizes participation in seven different levels: *"1. Manipulative participation, 2. Passive participation,* 3. *Participation by consultation*, 4. *Participation for material incentives*, *5. Functional participation*, *6. Interactive participation*, *7. Self-mobilization"* (Ibid., 1252). At the lowest level: *1. Manipulative participation,* participation is pretense and no real decision-making power exists, whereas the highest level: *7. Self-mobilization,* entails that participants act independently of any external stakeholders (in this case the company and EG), to actively evoke change in systems. According to Pretty (1995), *Self-mobilization* can potentially *"(…) challenge existing distributions of wealth and power"* (p. 1252). Applying a tool for measuring participation is done to add clarity and transparency of the internal processes in the organizations but will not be a focus due to its relatively inflexible nature.

3.2 Neocolonial tendencies within tourism: Is tourism the new colonialism?

The history of colonialism is paved with the ruthless subjugation of indigenous populations, where colonizing nations could be seen exploiting the land areas they invaded and forcing their culture and language on the people they encountered (Santos 2014, Blakemore 2019). So-called decolonization began after World War 2, only to be replaced by neocolonialism, which amongst other things can be seen illustrated in the ongoing nurturing of dependence that old colonizing states perform between themselves and their former colonial territories (Dige Pedersen, 2020). According to Hall & Tucker (2004) tourism *"(…) both reinforces and is embedded in postcolonial relationships"* (p. 2), which for instance can be detected in the increasing popularity that former colonies have been seen to gain as tourist destinations (e.g. in Africa, South America and Asia), where imprints from colonial times and the culture of indigenous people are turned into tourist attractions (Palmer, 1994). To say that tourism and neocolonialism are merely connected to each other, is not the only perspective in regards of this topic. For years, scholars have drawn direct parallels between imperial and colonial traits with that of tourism, for instance in the subordination of locals by tourists in the service/leisure context, as well as the strengthening of the host society's financial dependency (Nash 1989, Crick 1989). Brown (1999) has described how the overwhelming amounts of tourists in some Mexican cities can be seen to almost mimic colonial settlement; although the tourists do not stay forever, their presence as a group is constant, making them:

"(…) a permanent population, despite the fact that the individual inhabitants change, characterized by consumption patterns which contrast with those of the Maya, the original inhabitants of the zone. This is the appropriation of space for the production and reproduction of nonlocal cultural behavior, and it is at the expense of access to and use of this space by the local inhabitants" (p. 302).

Although it is continuously underlined that tourism can contribute to local economies, it has also been pointed out that financial leakage back to wealthier nations is quite common, and that tourism can be seen to transfer revenue out of host communities to non-local enterprises, such as huge multinational hotel chains (Brenner & Aguilar 2002, Brown 2013, Truong, Hall & Garry 2014). This can again be compared to the colonial pattern of colonizers exploiting resources in colonized countries and subsequently leading the gained wealth away and back into their own economies (Burns, 2008). These tangible implications that makes tourism and colonialism comparable, are not the only focus points of scholars, but also the cultural consequences that tourism can have, adds to the notion of neocolonial traits. Palmer (1994) explains how the "exotic" characteristics of locals and their lifestyle has been utilized as selling propositions when promoting destinations. She states that:

"The extent to which colonialism was able to both create and encourage stereotyped ethnic and cultural images is crucial for an understanding of the relationship between tourism and colonialism; for the tourism industry often relies upon these same images as a means of promoting destinations (…) although the colonial era in its more obvious form no longer exists, the prejudices and racial discrimination that were part of its underlying ideology, may still have an impact on the tourists' and the locals' perceptions of each other" (p. 800).

It is arguable that this depiction of *otherness* and orientalism (for an elaboration of these terms see: Said, 1978) can assist in the deepening of the divide between Western tourists and local people. The way in which tourists can be seen to consume the culture of destinations they visit, somewhat reinforces an idea that because of their "superior" position, they should be allowed:

"For the monied tourist, the tourism industry promises that the world is his/hers to use. All the "natural resources" including cultural traditions, have their price, and if you have the money in hand, it is your right to see whatever you wish" (Greenwood, 1989, p. 179).

This notion of having a right to travel and consume culture can be perceived as mirroring colonial thinking, where conquering was justified as almost being a favor towards the "exotic" nations it affected. Maybe much like tourists sometimes can be seen to point out how they contribute to the local economy through their vacation. To view their leisure time as almost a noble deed, can seem quite naïve when considering the long range of consequences that tourism can have on host nations. That the financially capable visit those with less, in order to carelessly enjoy themselves, is not all innocent and it is worth noticing that *"(...) international tourism investment is not benign, but rests upon, reinforces, and cements hierarchical relationships of power"* (Brown, 2013, p. 192). Neocolonial thinking in regards of financial superiority seems quite present within the contemporary tourism industry, which might suggest that large parts of the sector is assisting in the repression of the global South by the global North.

3.4 Alternatives to neoliberalism in tourism

Although neoliberal capitalism has become the dominant way of structuring the global economy, it remains under critical scrutiny (Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013). In the following, neoliberalism will be outlined, along with examples of its' manifestations within the tourism industry. Subsequently, certain alternative agendas, opposing it, will also be touched upon.

3.4.1 Outlining neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has developed as an ideology throughout the 20th century and has as a term been used in a variety of ways, which is why a fully concretized definition of it is difficult to pin down (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009). Despite this, it can be characterized through its' focus on sustained, economic growth as the primary way to enhance human progress, free markets as the ideal allocation of resources, minimal state involvement in socio-economic matters and freedom of both trade and capital (Smith et al., 2017). The question regarding whether the neoliberal agenda has benefitted or harmed our world is ongoing, and the outcome of the answer is evidently different depending on the philosophical outlook of the person or organization you choose to ask. The International Monetary Fund released an article stating both positive and negative outcomes of the neoliberal approach. Most prominent of the positive statements were that:

"The expansion of global trade has rescued millions from abject poverty. Foreign direct investment has often been a way to transfer technology and know-how to developing

economies. Privatization of state-owned enterprises has in many instances led to more efficient provision of services and lowered the fiscal burden on governments" (Ostry, Loungani & Furceri, 2016, p. 38).

The authors venture on to point out troubling results of the agenda, being that increased growth has seemingly not been the same for all countries adapting to neoliberalism (which might not be that surprising when considering how political and economic landscapes differs), and the unavoidable results of this, have been prominent, increased inequality. They further argue, that such inequality is damaging to both the level and sustainability of growth and encourage that seeking a balance between regulation and free market forces is crucial and that economic policies must be adapted to the surrounding context because *"(...) no fixed agenda delivers good outcomes for all countries for all times"* (p. 41). A need for adapting current financial approaches therefore seem pressing.

Other perspectives on neoliberalism go much further in their criticism of it, with some noting that it can be seen to put financial gain above social wellbeing, for instance due to the neoliberal idea of a minimal state, which *"(...) is less able to protect the rights of its citizens in the workforce, particularly if these rights are perceived as being contradictory to free-market-oriented policies"* (Blanton & Peksen, 2016, p. 487). Peck & Tickell (1994) goes as far as referring to neoliberalism as *jungle law* and calls it an *"(...) expression of capitalism's predatory, and ultimately self-destructive, dynamic"* (p. 320), claiming that it is both *"(...) socially, economically and geographically unsustainable (...)"* (Ibid., p. 324), subsequently encouraging a search for alternative approaches - containing higher levels of governance, in order to lessen uneven development and protect poor regions.

3.4.2 Neoliberalism and the tourism industry

Within the context of tourism, neoliberalism is also a highly debated topic. Being a huge industry, moving enormous amounts of both people and capital every year, the tourism sector has of course also been subjected to the neoliberal world order. Due to the positioning of this thesis, having adopted a partially poststructural angle and opposing neocolonial tendencies, a critical stance towards neoliberalism within tourism has been chosen. I believe this to be a sensible extension of the already outlined idea of promoting higher levels of equality for indigenous minorities.

According to Higgins-Desbiolles (2006, 2008, 2010, 2018), the neoliberal agenda is strong within the global tourism industry, having created wide-spread opportunities for tourism industry leaders *"(…) to harness tourism's opportunities for their own private wealth accumulation and commandeer scarce community resources for their purposes* (2006, p. 1193). She further claims that this has led to the neglection of utilizing tourism as a social force (2006), although she also questions its' usefulness in such a matter, due to an ongoing, over expanded economic growth within the industry, as well as the tendency of tourism corporations exploiting the terminology of sustainability in order to create better images for themselves and thereby generate more revenue (2018). The possibilities of negative manifestations in tourism due to adherence to capitalist ways have also been empathized by Wearing (2002):

"Tourism in a free market economy can exploit natural resources as a means of profit accumulation, and consequently has been described as the commercialization of the human need to travel. The notion of unlimited gain has led to the exploitation of host communities, their cultures and environments" (p. 238).

This quote points out what can be viewed as a central concern in the debate regarding neoliberalism and tourism – that the free market forces can cause inequality (Ostry et al., 2016). As Salazar (2012) points out:

" *The economic benefits of tourism may be unevenly distributed but the costs, the intrusion, congestion and rising prices will affect both those who support and those who hate tourism"* (p. 12).

That tourism can be seen to have negative socio-economic effects has prompted debate and is likely also the motivational background to large parts of the sustainable tourism scheme. It should although be noted, that a CBT project like Camino del Mayab still should be considered part of the general tourism industry, and also contains an objective of generating income. Therefore, sustainable tourism variations, like CBT, should not be viewed as being outside the context of capitalism. It should although be added, that when viewing EG's attempt to partially redistribute revenue streams, into the hands of marginalized people, by assisting in establishing a somewhat locally controlled tourism product, such projects can still be viewed as seeking out more altruistic goals than that of tourism conducted by large, private companies.

In the following, alternative ideas opposing the current neoliberal agenda will be outlined. This will not be done relating directly to the tourism industry, but rather with a broader, systemic focus. I have chosen to do so because tourism is conditioned by the world around it, which therefore makes it relevant to explore the more all-encompassing debate about capitalism, neoliberalism and the possibility of objecting them.

3.4.3 Questioning the neoliberal status quo

Challenging the existing norm within economy is happening in a variety of academical directions, although the majority of them *"(…) critiques notions of modernisation and development premised on the narrative of an all-powerful capitalism that transforms noncapitalist socioeconomic forms"* (Curry & Koczberski, 2013, p. 338). It is worth remembering, that Western belief systems and capitalist agendas often have been enforced on indigenous cultures during colonial periods and that some communities seek to find hybrid ways of life, where they attempt to adapt, but doing so while partially preserving their traditional ways of life and resisting full-blown capitalism (Ballengee-Morris, 2002). Very different perceptions of wealth and poverty, which meanings we take for granted in the global North, exists; Truong et al. (2014) documented such alternative perceptions in the Vietnamese region of Sapa. Here, many inhabitants are rice farmers, and when asked to define the meaning of *poverty*, a majority answered that they related it to *"(…) not producing enough rice to feed their families"* (p. 1076), with one participant answering *"I think poverty means having a lack of rice. I do not know the poverty criteria that are applied by the local authority"* (p. 1076). Keeping in mind, that societal perceptions are not universal, as the example regarding poverty above illustrates, should help underline that different ways of life, which might be taken for granted by the individual, are all relative and constructed. To explore alternative economic approaches can therefore be deemed highly interesting.

Within the academic context of alternative, economic thinking, scholars are, as previously stated, moving in many different directions. According to Zademach & Hillebrand (2013) these thoughts can roughly be categorized in two directions:

1. *The political economy perspective:*

   Which views alternative economies and their manifestations *in relation to* capitalism. Instead of viewing capitalism as a complete opposite, it suggests alternative practices (such

as for instance social enterprises), that may function within existing mainstream structures, which thereby will lead to the two co-constituting each other. This perspective argues *"(…) that many economic practices considered alternative still center on the production, exchange, and circulation of commodities (…)"* (Ibid., p. 14) and deems "(…) *material success necessary to sustain people and society; yet, life-sustaining value is not merely esteemed in terms of economic success, but also in terms of social beliefs, objectives and values"* (Ibid., p. 14). The perspective does not seek to overthrow the current economic world order but still *"(…) reveals the possibility for various forms of economic coordination and political contestation (…)"* (Ibid., p. 15), thereby offering a socially embedded alternative to capitalism.

2. <u>The poststructuralist approach:</u>

Which seeks to extend the notion of alternative (or diverse) economies *beyond* capitalism. This perspective has a post-capitalistic outlook and strives towards constituting different economic realities. Zademach & Hillebrand (2013) put it the following way:

> *"It* [the poststructuralist approach, red.] *intends to reveal the various forms of economic practices that already exist in the everyday economy. Instead of creating new distinctions within dominant conceptions of capitalism, the concept of diverse economies focuses on what makes our common ground for new political and economic imaginaries. By this means, it terms an epistemic break in challenging modernist conceptualisations of the economy and shows how personal efforts might play a powerful role in demonstrating the possibility of alternative economic futures."* (p. 19).

This approach seeks out alternatives to capitalism, instead of ways to operate within it, and can therefore be perceived as a more radical wish to change the status quo, where the economy for instance is not dictated solely by the elite.

Both directions can be said to contain interesting viewpoints in relation to the topic of this thesis. The most prominent to mention in regards of this specific context will be outlined in the following.

I believe that it is plausible to say, that within the *political economy perspective* scholars are working towards *varieties of capitalism*; they accept its' existence but not its' dominant focus on markets and capital. In this research arena, it is relevant to mention one of the most

prominent sources of inspiration, Karl Polanyi, that had a strong focus on the *embeddedness* of economic practices in political and social systems (Bohannan, 1965). Parts of Polanyi's philosophy are almost Marxist, and he believes that the working class should have a strong influence on the structuring of society and the economy (Block & Polanyi, 2003). He does although also recognize that market forces play a central role in human life, but that these are not universal, but constructed and therefore can be reformed; the idea of *free* market forces are, according to Polanyi a danger due to the selfishness of capitalist businesses, and he believed that societies *"(…) must construct elaborate rules and institutional structures to limit the individual pursuit of gain (…)"* (Block & Polanyi, 2003, p. 297), which is why he underlined that *"(…) the economy has to be embedded in law, politics, and morality."* (Ibid., p. 297). Polanyi's ideas can therefore be seen as essential in the negotiation of capitalist structures - towards varieties of it. Another relevant topic within this context, is the perspective of so-called hybrid economies, which can be seen to highlight:

"(…) the co-constitution of society and economy and has stressed the significant role that indigenous economic logics and social values play in shaping contemporary forms of socio economy following engagement with capitalism and markets" (Curry & Koczberski, 2013, p. 338).

This perspective furthermore *"(…) recognises there are social as well as material gains to be gained from engaging with capitalism through a process in which indigenous economic and social forms condition introduced elements of the market economy*" (Ibid., p. 338). The idea of hybrid economies can therefore be seen in direct line with the Maya villagers of Yucatán, seeking to balance their traditional values with capitalism.

Within the *poststructuralist approach*, I have focused on so-called *post-development.* This theoretical direction criticizes the practice and concept of development for reflecting the dominance of ideologies originating from the global North over the vast majority of the rest of the world (Crush, 1995). Escobar (1995), who can be deemed a central scholar in this field, points out that a certain Western discourse characterizes modern development theory. This can be seen exemplified in the choice of phrases like *underdeveloped countries* and *advanced societies,* as well as the idea of *first and third world countries.* He further outlines how the success criteria that any country is held up against, is based on Western values, which can be

viewed as both arrogant and Eurocentric. In the words of J.K. Gibson-Graham (2010), what a post-development approach has to offer is a decolonization of capitalism:

"When the prevalence, density and efficiency of capitalist economic relations are not used as the gauge of development we are free to apprehend social spaces in many different ways. Places are not situated within a hierarchy of valuation in which cultures are modern or primitive and economies advanced or backward" (p. 228).

Gibson-Graham have also been a noticeable voice within the *poststructuralist approach*, with their critical, feministic stance towards capitalism (Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013). In order to illustrate the myriad of ways in which the economy unfolds, they constructed a framework titled *"A diverse economy"* (pictured below):

Transactions	Labor	Enterprise
MARKET	WAGE	CAPITALIST
Alternative Market Sale of public goods Ethical "fair-trade" markets Local trading systems Alternative currencies Underground market Co-op exchange Barter Informal market	*Alternative Paid* Self-employed Cooperative Indentured Reciprocal labor In-kind Work for welfare	*Alternative Capitalist* State enterprise Green capitalist Socially responsible firm Nonprofit
Nonmarket Household flows Gift giving Indigenous exchange State allocations State appropriations Gleaning Hunting, fishing, gathering Theft, poaching	*Unpaid* Housework Family care Neighborhood work Volunteer Self-provisioning labor Slave labor	*Noncapitalist* Communal Independent Feudal Slave

Figure 5: Copied from J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006) [4]

[4] The authors state that: *"The figure is designed to be read up and down the columns, not across the rows. Thus, for example, noncapitalist activity may be market-oriented"* (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xiii).

According to Gibson-Graham (2006), they constructed the framework to underline that substantial amounts of the economy happens outside the capitalistic system and they furthermore explain that:

"Representing the diverse economy is a deconstructive process that displaces the binary hierarchies of market/nonmarket and capitalism/non-capitalism, turning singular generalities into multiple particularities (…)" (p. xiv).

Zademach & Hillebrand (2013) explains in more praxis-oriented phrases, that the framework most often is used *"(…) for the identification of economic activities in a particular locality and for approaching the relatedness of different elements in any given practice or social location"* (p. 18). For the purpose of this thesis, the framework will serve both as a practical tool, in the above-mentioned way, as well as a more ideological source of inspiration. Theory on post-development will be utilized as part of a discourse questioning the neoliberal agenda that is seemingly identifiable within rural tourism in the Yucatán.

3.5 Appropriation and cultural commodification

During the data collection for this thesis, the conceptualization of Maya culture as a commodified product became apparent in some of the interviews I conducted (see appendices 3 and 4). The phenomenon of certain cultures being exploited and framed in specific ways to generate revenue, is not unheard of (Gibson 2010), and should arguably be viewed through a very critical lens. It can be detected as appropriation, where people not being members of a culture adopts elements from it to their own advantage, but also happens when those inside the culture frames and shapes their own art and traditions, so it aligns with desired traits dictated by the tourism industry (Ballengee-Morris, 2002). Both instances will be addressed in this section.

When moving through the city of Mérida, I encountered numerous representations of Maya culture, focused towards gaining the attention of tourists, many of them not being put forward by actual Mayas. One example is that of the popular restaurant La Chaya Maya, located in the center of the city. Its' owner is not of Maya decent but is seemingly just appropriating the name to earn money (A3, interview: 3/3-20). Maya culture is being utilized as a popular selling proposition (Tegelberg, 2013), also by those not belonging to it. When the cultural articulation is taken out of the hands of those belonging to it, they can be said to lose control over parts of

their self-expression. Greenwood (1989) reminds us that *"The commoditization of culture does not require the consent of the participants; it can be done by anyone"* (p. 180), and also comments on how he believes that those focused on the capitalist perspectives of tourism in some cases can be identified to have *"(…) appropriated facets of a life-style into the tourism package to help sales in the competitive market (…)"* and further points out that *"Treating culture as a natural resource or a commodity over which tourists have rights is not simply perverse, it is a violation of the peoples' cultural rights"* (p. 179). In Mexican society this appropriation and commodification of Maya culture almost seems like part of a double sided exploitation: The tourism industry and governmental institutions generating income on the cultural heritage and expression of the Mayas, while on the other hand discriminating them in several, societal and social instances, one of them being the tourism industry (Jamal & Camargo, 2014). Ballengee-Morris (2002) studied the artistic expressions of indigenous people in both The United States and Brazil and stated that:

"When art is commodified, it adheres to marketing rules and, in the case of tourist art, the consumer's expectations figures into the artistic process. (…) Their visual culture is profitable. Determining authenticity is problematic due to reasons why and who is making the determination" (p. 241).

She believes that this can lead to unwilling, cultural altering and says that:

"Stereotypic representations, the predominant use of outsiders to represent insiders, and the institutional representatives' emphasis on romanticized heritage versus the reality of cultures has placed cultures and visual forms in danger of extermination" (p. 242).

This quote outlines the problematic aspects of appropriation and points out that the commercialization of a people's culture can limit it and almost force it into certain desirable shapes.

When touching upon the subject of cultural appropriation within tourism, I believe that it is important to also turn attention towards the indigenous people who portray their own culture to tourists. Solely viewing the commodification of tourism with a focus on appropriation, would be neglecting the perspective of the members of the culture as well as not acknowledging their agency. Mayas choosing to make a living on the basis of their cultural heritage, has an obvious right to do so and it can be seen as a positive manifestation when the cultural tourism industry

actually financially benefits those it is focused on. These people are obviously self-determined individuals, but this does not make their participation in the portrayal of their culture unproblematic. It might be justifiable to say that a certain coercion sometimes exists in terms of indigenous people and tourism, because it simply seems to be the lesser evil or unavoidable. The choice *"(…) to reject tourism as a development option"* (Blackstock, 2005, p. 41) might not fully exist when an individual is part of either a group or a society that adheres to tourism as a solution. Often the way in which a culture is framed (as touched upon in the above) is also a choice that quite often is guided by touristic requirements, which according to Salazar (2012) can restrict free cultural expression:

> *"When the tourismified definition of a community identity prevails, the group is frozen in an image of itself or museumized"* (p. 9).

Although many Mayas most likely benefit from the industry and choose to engage with it, the effect that tourism might have on their culture should be considered. Greenwood (1989) claims that cultural traditions can lose meaning to its' participants when they are being commodified to tourists for financial gain. Ballengee-Morris (2002) seems to share this conviction and quotes the chief from an indigenous Brazilian community in the following way: *"Because the emphasis has now been changed - to make money, our traditional routines are quickly being ignored by our young"* (p. 239). The authenticity of old traditions therefore might lose significance over time, as the primary objective of them gradually becomes financially embedded.

3.6 Ethnic groups and ascription

It is arguable, that the oppression and stigmatization of Mayas throughout Mexican history can be seen to affect parts of the country's societal structures even today (Castañeda, 2004). To gain a more fundamental understanding of this still existing ethnic stratification, Barth's (et al.) (1969) theories on boundaries and ethnic groups within societies will be addressed in the following section.

A central term in this context is that of ascription, which within sociology refers to inherent characteristics (such as one's gender or race), as partially structuring a person's social position or status, due to specific abilities or traits being attributed to said characteristics (Barfort, 2020). Ascription can, not surprisingly, cause inequality within a society, as it is also clearly

identifiable in the case of Mexico (de la Peña, 2011). It can therefore be termed as ascriptive inequality, which simply means *"(…) inequality across groups defined by some ascriptive characteristic, such as sex, race, or age"* (Reskin, 2003, p. 2). The Maya villages outside of Mérida can be viewed as an example of how ascription, and thereby racial stratification, assists in the preservation of ethnic groupings.

Barth et al. (1969) describes how ethnic boundaries can be seen to structure social life and that to identify as being part of a group is not the sole aspect of significance when it comes to keeping this collective identity intact, but also:

"(…) a dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, [which] *implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgement of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest"* (p. 15).

The continuing marginalization and discrimination of Mayas carried out by the Mexican state (Cocom, 2005) can be interpreted as preserving the idea that egalitarianism is not a given and that the individual's options are somewhat predestined due to his or her ethnic orientation. Consequently, Mexico can be categorized as a so-called *polyethnic society "(…) under the control of a state system dominated by one of the groups (…)"* (Barth et al., 1969, p. 16). Barth et al. (1969) further outlines how this affects and shapes society:

"What can be referred to as articulation and separation on the macro-level corresponds to systematic sets of role constraints on the micro-level. Common to all these systems is the principle that ethnic identity implies a series of constraints on the kinds of roles an individual is allowed to play, and the partners he may choose for different kinds of transactions. In other words, regarded as a status, ethnic identity is superordinate to most other statuses, and defines the permissible constellations of statuses, or social personalities, which an individual with that identity may assume" (p. 17).

Siverts (1969) further explains that such perceptions are not only upheld by the dominant group in a society, but also the one being oppressed; in *"Ethnic Stability and Boundary Dynamics in Southern Mexico"* (Siverts, 1969), it is outlined that just as Mexicans with Spanish heritage might view Mayas as being inferior (e.g. in an intellectual sense, due to indigenous

people often having a lower level of formal education, which paradoxically can be associated to Hispanic dominance within educational legislation, limiting indigenous equality in the school system (Mijangos-Noh & Cardos-Dzul, 2011)), prejudice also exist the other way around. Mayas are described as having viewed Mestizos as ruthless, ill-intentioned and as lacking connection to nature. This is perhaps another reason why Mexican Mayas to this day often can be seen to form ethnically based communities outside of larger cities (Fieldnotes 1, 13/9-19). Another example that might support the notion that ascription shapes contemporary society, is that tone of skin color is considered a big deal, where whiteness is a preference, also amongst the indigenous population:

"Individuals with darker skin tone have significantly lower levels of educational attainment and occupational status, and they are more likely to live in poverty and less likely to be affluent, even after controlling for other individual characteristics" (Villareal, 2010, p. 671).

Socio-economic status therefore seems directly linked to the inherent characteristic of skin color, which hints towards a profound social stratification on the basis of race in contemporary Mexico.

3.7 State of the art

This chapter serves as documentation of relevant parts of the already existing theoretical knowledge connected to my topic. I furthermore wish to outline what literature I have found inspiring, as well as the field of research I hope to contribute to. It is important to emphasize that this of course will not be a presentation of all possible, relevant literature connected to my topic, but rather will serve as a framing of my positioning towards it. The different subsections in this theoretical chapter effectively highlights the overall topics that constitutes the foundation of knowledge that I have utilized in this paper.

Firstly, I have deemed it highly relevant to acquaint myself with critical and contemporary inputs in regards of CBT. The opinions on this topic are highly varied (from outstandingly positive to quite the opposite) and it has therefore been important to me to attain information from innovative approaches, highlighting the issues regarding CBT and seeking to further agency, local ownership and benefits for community members (Yanes et al. 2019, Cornelisse 2019, Strydom et al. 2018).

Viewing the conduction of tourism through a colonial and neocolonial lens have provided me with an illumination of underlying societal structures and power relations. I have naturally read up on colonial history and neocolonial tendencies from a broader angle, but the academic perspectives I wish to highlight here are those that have linked tendencies in tourism with neocolonialism (Brown 2013, Amoamo & Thompson 2010, Ballengee-Morris 2002). I have found that even though this is not a neglected topic, it would seem as if it would benefit from more scholarly attention. The reason for this can perhaps be the persistent dominance of Western knowledge production (Collyer, 2018), and that exploring connections between tourism and neocolonialism therefore perhaps would require a certain amount of introspection from Western scholars.

In terms of neoliberalism and tourism, I have investigated articles highlighting the neoliberal tendencies within the industry (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010, 2018), as well as the commodification and appropriation of local culture for the sake of tourism (Tegelberg 2013, Gibson 2010). In regards of opposing neoliberalism, I have chosen to concentrate my focus on perspectives of so-called alternative economic approaches and critiques of the current neoliberal dominance in our globalized world (Zademach & Hillebrand 2013, Gibson-Graham 2006, 2010, Curry & Koczberski 2013, Santos 2014). This focus is due to an aspiration of linking the opposition to Western hegemony to the tourism industry, with the hope that these ideological thoughts might be applicable in the way tourism is primarily conducted.

4. Analysis/findings

In this following analytical chapter, I will unfold my empirical and secondary data so that they underpin each other and form a research inquiry, ultimately resulting in resolving the research aim of this thesis. This will be operationalized by seeking to answer the stated research objectives, which will also serve as a compartmentalization of the analysis, causing it to be divided into logical, clear subchapters, each guided by one of the objectives.

4.1. Cultural differences, power discrepancies and their effects on interaction

This initial subsection will explore how differences in culture and the power relations that the stratified nature of Mexican society encompasses, manifest, as well as how they might affect, how the different participants in the Yucatecan rural tourism sector engage with each other. The participants that I have chosen to focus on have been divided in three overall categories:

1. Mestizos seeking to implement and organize tourism projects.
2. Local Mayas participating and collaborating on said projects.
3. Tourists engaging with the tourism product.

As it has been outlined in the preceding chapters, the Mayas of Mexico *"(…) have suffered degradation and severe deprivation of values"* (Wiessner, 1999, p. 88) throughout colonial history, which still transpires in modern day time where the *"(…) struggle for indigenous rights remains an important part of contemporary politics (…)"* (Harvey 2016, p. 18). It is arguable that ascriptive tendencies exist, for instance when considering the persistence of exclusively Maya communities outside of larger cities (Fieldnotes 1, 13/9-19). Another relevant point is that *"(…) a sizable unexplained earnings gap between indigenous and non-indigenous populations, as well as large differences in educational attainment and access to health services"* (Canelas & Gisselquist, 2018, p. 382) has been documented in several Latin American countries, including Mexico. The ascription in Mexican society seems linked to its' colonial past (Siverts, 1969) and can therefore be seen as a signifier for the existences of neocolonialism as a partially structuring societal factor. I believe that this can be seen to manifest in various ways in the interactions between the different participants in the tourism sector. These will be outlined separately in the following subsections.

4.1.1. Indigenous suspicion towards outsiders

This section will touch upon how Mayas seemingly can be observed to show mistrust towards Mestizos suggesting the introduction of tourism to their communities.

In the case of EG, the organization had a strong focus on transparency and trust-building processes in their CBT implementation efforts (see A2: interview: 25/11-20, A6, Fieldnotes 1: 13/9-19, Fieldnotes 4: 6/11-19, Fieldnotes 8: 14/3-20), but were still struggling to gain the confidence of some communities at the time when I concluded my collaboration with them. During my interview with their coordinator of sustainable development, Alberto Cervera he described a general suspicion towards EG, that seemingly increased the further away the villages were located from Mérida. The communities that were in closest proximity to the city, who subsequently can be identified as more urbanized, were the least mistrusting, with the opposite being the case for those furthest away. According to Cervera, said urbanization could also be viewed as having an effect on the preservation of cultural heritage:

"(…) the communities near to the city, they are losing their traditions, because many of the people that inhabit the communities work in the city, so they don't pass a lot of time with their children and all of the knowledge of the Maya culture is transposing through oral knowledge from generation to generation. This is an information that is not in books, it is in the oral knowledge of the community, so the people that have the communities near to the city are losing this knowledge, these traditions and the other ones they keep still having this kind of traditions" (A2, interview: 25/11-20, p. 2).

That a larger amount of suspicion towards EG's employees can be seen in correlation to a more powerful sense of cultural identity, seems to be relatable to Barth's (1969) theories on ascription as being a strengthening component in an ethnic group's collective identity, which subsequently might result in a strengthened distinction of belonging to different groups.

When concurrently keeping the oppression and discrimination of Mayas in mind, it is arguable that such a distinction almost naturally will equal suspicion. It is therefore derivable that the marginalization that Mayas have faced (and still face) can be viewed as manifesting into an overall lack of trust in authorities, also including an externally, imposed CBT project like Camino del Mayab. This is also something that EG themselves have pointed out, noting that skepticism amongst community members, due to both present-day societal structures, as well as historical events, should be expected (Fieldnotes 5, 20/11-19). Identifying with being systematically repressed, offers an explanation to why these people remain cautious towards Mestizos entering their community, seeking to implement tourism, especially when considering that they belong to a more privileged, societal layer than the Mayas themselves. The development of EG's CBT project has in consequence slowed down, which has entailed a need for an even further-reaching trust-building process, in order to convince the communities that the implementation of CBT will not be yet another case of exploitation.

4.1.2. Underlying attitudes of superiority

The two companies facilitating CBT in Mérida, that I have been into contact with (EG and the company), can be seen to represent a less exploiting (compared to large, private, multinational companies) part of the Mexican tourism sector, due to their attempts to ensure high levels of participation (A2, interview: 25/11-20) and democratic processes (A4, interview: 6/3-20). The

informant from the second company explained to me how Mayas are directly represented in the enterprise and have a significant amount of influence in terms of decision-making. She outlined certain structures of the enterprise in regards of Maya representation and participation:

"[we have] *an administration board formed by a president, a secretary and a treasurer, so they are the ones, when we have events or we have some meetings with authorities, they always go (…) the three of them are Mayan and they have to agree"* (A4, interview: 6/3-20, p. 12).

Although this bear witness of a company seeking to include their indigenous collaborators in the decision-making, the informant also mentioned details about organizational proceedings that seemed less inclusive and less equal. She explained that assemblies were conducted every six months, where one representative from each of the Maya communities they collaborate with attends. Here, the administrative department of the company (consisting of Mestizos), presents possible options for funding and development projects to the Maya representatives and ask them which ones they wish to pursue (A4, interview: 6/3-20). Considering that one meeting every six months seems rather infrequent and that the information passed on to the attending representatives have been picked out by the administration of the company, the level of co-determination no longer seems as significant. Some might argue that there is a plausibility in the administrative group, possessing a larger background knowledge of the tourism industry, gets to steer the CBT process, but if the aim truly is to strengthen Maya agency, it would be relevant to pave the way for educating community members so that their capabilities would be actualized and they could participate on all levels in the decision-making processes. When restricting participation, the company can be seen to remain in control over power dynamics, thereby ensuring their own agenda.

Somewhat similar tendencies seemed to be present in EG's decision-making processes. Although they would highlight their efforts to offer their Maya collaborators choices, these again seemed limited in certain directions already marked out by the organization. Cervera for instance stated the following:

"(…) the process has been participative with the community, the objective, the results, the goals of the project are the goals that the community also wants, so it is not an imposed project in which we go out to the communities and we say: "Yeah, we have this and we will do this with you". It is more like: "Okay, we want to do this, what do you think, how do you want to do it" (…)" (A2, interview: 25/11-20, p. 3).

When actively requesting the opinions of the involved, it seems as if EG are *attempting* to obtain a bottom-up approach in regards of decision-making, but the sentence *"We want to do this, what do you think"* might be considered noteworthy; choosing to present an already formulated idea could be viewed as indicating top-down management. If EG were to ensure a fundamental feeling of empowerment and ownership of the CBT project throughout the communities, they should have included the involved Mayas already in the stage of conceptualization, and not simply presenting them with a fixed idea. On this background, the actual influence that locals can be said to have is reduced to a matter of compliance or non-compliance with the project and certain details of its' execution.

To contextualize and operationalize the level of participation, that is known to be one of the most empathized goals within CBT (Novelli et al., 2017), that the Maya collaborators of these organizations perform, Pretty's (1995) *"typology of participation"* will serve as scale.

When reviewing the above-mentioned processes in the two organizations in terms of CBT, they can both be placed within the 5th level of the typology: *Functional participation,* described in the following way by Pretty (1995):

"Participation seen by external agencies as a means to achieve project goals (…) People may participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project. Such involvement may be interactive and involve shared decision making, but tends to arise only after major decisions have already been made by external agents" (p. 1252).

This is in line with how both companies filter the choices and knowledge presented to their Maya collaborators, thereby restricting the level of participation to *predetermined objectives,* and how shared decisions are confined to follow after larger decisions have already been made by the companies. The forming of groups, that Pretty mentions, is also relatable to the way in which EG for instance have chosen to organize work-groups related to Camino del Mayab. These

were specifically outlined to meet the needs of the tourism product and were formulated by EG to fit all involved communities and not in participation with any of them. The groups that included: "*Guides, Cooking, Transport, Places of interest (e.g. milpas[5], cenotes), Trash management* [and] *Marketing"* (see Fieldnotes 3, 1/11-19) would be presented to community members that subsequently would join whichever group they deemed interesting. To restrict active participation ensures that the majority of control remains in the hands of those in charge (in this case the organizations developing and facilitating CBT) (Cornwall, 2008). A wish to do so can be said to point towards a neocolonial mindset, still viewing indigenous people as less capable and in need of management.

In EG's case, there also seems to be an uncontested conviction that tourism is the right development option for the communities and that those who at first rejects the project simply needs to be *convinced.* In one village, that already had some experience with tourism, although not financially successful, EG faced a substantial amount of resistance: *"We see like a wall in the community, they do not allow us to enter, so we use the local cooperative like a center of entrance"* (A2, interview: 25/11-20, p. 7). Instead of accepting the general disinterest, EG chose to ally themselves with community members managing the already existing tourism cooperative. By doing so they became validated in the eyes of the rest of the community and thereby gained enough acceptance to implement Camino del Mayab. Another example can be found in their approach towards a community that consistently rejected the collaboration. Cervera said:

"(…) we are still trying to make a different strategy which we can convince them, but we conclude that we need to wait until the other communities begin with the work and then when they see the benefits from working on the project, that are the benefits that are produced of the project, then maybe we get engaged more easily" (Ibid., p. 3).

By so stubbornly believing that their project will have a positive manifestation, EG seem to almost not consider the right of the communities to dismiss the idea. This is relatable to a critical comment on how efforts to implement CBT are sometimes conducted:

[5] Milpas are the traditional way of Maya agriculture and can be defined as *"(…) an open-field polyculture centered on maize (…) that rotates with woodland vegetation in a cycle of around 10 to 25 years"* (Nigh & Diemont 2013, p. 45).

"The community is co-opted into supporting tourism through an illusion of power sharing but they are not empowered to reject tourism as a development option" (Blackstock 2005, p. 41).

If the sole aim was to support communities in preserving their culture and protecting their natural areas (the goals EG have stated to be the primary objectives of implementing CBT, see A6), trying to find other remedies than tourism when it is rejected, would be an appropriate direction for EG to take. If the reason for not adopting this approach is due to an idealistic tunnel view and subsequent focus on gaining funds and succeeding, or if more selfish reasons, such as personal recognition or financial gain, remains unknown. It would although be arguable that if EG have the communities' best interest at heart, accepting their rejection would be considered the most constructive and respectful solution.

A supercilious attitude is also detectable in some of the statements that the informant from the other company made:

"We are actually working with our communities because before they used to buy their vegetables and everything from the local people and now, they are buying in the supermarket. So we are saying: No it's best if you buy it from the local people" (A4, interview: 6/3-20, p. 4).

Even if the intention of convincing people to shop locally and thereby channel money back into their own communities is good, the arrogance of educating Mayas to avoid supermarkets, a concept initially imposed by the surrounding society, can be deemed obvious. Another comment that stood out to me, which already has been mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, was one the informant made about explaining their Maya collaborators to not drink Coca Cola because tourists would find it inauthentic (Ibid.). Attributing the opinion of tourists with great importance can also be observed in a comment she made about Maya cultural identity:

"People used to be embarrassed or afraid to say that they are Mayan or to talk Mayan and now because they have tourists and because tourists value that and they are interested and they ask questions, they find the value in their own culture" (Ibid., p. 13).

Although so-called psychological empowerment, which can be defined as *"(…) the self-esteem of community members, caused by the outside recognition of the uniqueness and value of their*

culture (Cornelisse 2019, p. 3), has been attributed to tourism (Scheyvens, 1999), I find that the underlying layers in this context needs exploration. The racial stratification (Villarreal, 2010) and ongoing discrimination of Mayas (Cocom, 2005) detectable in Mexican society could be liable explanation to why someone of Maya decent would hide their ethnical origin. It furthermore seems relatively logical that someone would underline their cultural heritage if it became a selling proposition, a point supported by Urry's (2002) theory of the tourist gaze, where the expectations of tourists co-determines how locals portray themselves: traits being deemed desirable by tourists is highlighted by the locals. By not taking such underlying themes into consideration, it becomes easy to uncritically delegate a large amount of appraisal to tourism as a tool for cultural empowerment.

During my interview with the informant, the risk of CBT causing inequality and conflict in communities, because it often only employs a small group of inhabitants, was touched upon. Although the uneven distribution of benefits that CBT can entail is a widely recognized problem (Sebele 2010, Wang et al. 2016, Cornelisse 2019, Yanes et al. 2019), it was brushed off as a matter of choice; the informant exemplified how one community had been presented with the opportunity of CBT (A4, interview: 6/3-20): Government officials had seen the touristic potential in a nearby cenote and promised funding to the community after the cenote was cleaned up and made publicly presentable. This option was laid out to the entire community, who in unity said yes, but after a while, with no tourists and no funding, people gradually abandoned the project. Only a few persisted, so when the funding finally arrived, only those left cashed in on it and remained in control of the cenote as a tourism product. In regards to this, she stated the following:

"So yes, it is a small group, but all the rest they say they didn't want to be a part of the project, that they didn't want to work" (Ibid., p. 11).

To say that those who abandoned the project simply *didn't want to work,* seems simplified. Many unknown factors in such a situation might be at play, for instance having to prioritize a paid job to provide for a family. This disregard of circumstances does not seem to take the overall community wellbeing into consideration.

The intentions of Mestizos collaborating with Mayas in the CBT industry in Yucatán might be well-intended, but the underlying structural systems of Mexican society become obvious in these encounters between the two groups.

4.1.3 Tourist behaviors and Mayas' perception of them

As previously stated, my Spanish adequacy is limited to a very basic level, which is why conducting interviews in this language, regarding as complex subjects as this thesis deals with, has not been deemed possible. Because English is not widespread in rural areas of Mexico, I have not had the possibility to spontaneously engage in informal interviews with community members as I encountered them. To ask employees from EG to translate my critical questions regarding CBT has neither seemed very fitting and not knowing the accuracy of their translation back to me, would count as a liability. Thankfully, I had the opportunity to meet with Carlos Héctor Ciua Noh, president of the Maya tourism cooperative in the community of Yokdzonot. While conducting my interview with him, he repeatedly underlined the positive effects of tourism in the area and when asked if he had encountered culturally inconsiderate or rude behavior from tourists, his answer was: *"Maybe at times when some tourists come and say: Why do I have to pay to enter to see the cenote"* (A5, interview: 16/3-20, p. 3) but said that as soon as he explained *"(…) that we are working, that we are a cooperative, that we are working for the community, they understand"* (Ibid., p. 3), and said that this was the only example he could think of. He insisted that tourism had brought great change and that *"(…) everybody is happy (…)"* (Ibid., p. 2) throughout the community. Jealousy towards those cashing in on tourism in the community, from non-participating community members (an issue priorly documented in CBT contexts; see for instance Wang et al., 2016), was something he said was only present in the initial phase of the project's success. When asked if he felt that Mexican politics could be discriminating towards Mayas, he rejected having encountered it (A5, interview: 16/3-20). Subsequently to the interview, I visited the cenote that the community is known for, a place characterized by tranquility and natural beauty. After I had been swimming for 10-15 minutes, a group of approximately 15-20 younger (seemingly college age) North American tourists arrived. The scene that unfolded is described the following way in my fieldnotes:

Figure 6: Yokdzonot Cenote (author's photo).

"They arrived yelling and screaming, jumping in the water making huge splashes, seemingly unaware of whether their behavior was disturbing to other visitors or not. I observed one guy pulling and hanging in the roots of the trees growing atop of the cenote (the roots grow long and extend down to the water of the cenote) and another one that accidentally flew his drone into one of these trees" (Fieldnotes 9, 16/3-20).

The situation was in itself unpleasant and prompted me to leave shortly after the tourist group's arrival, but when considering that cenotes in ancient Mayan times were places of worship and to this day *"(…) remain sacred spaces, portals that provide access to the forces within the earth (…)"* (Russell 2016, p. 7) in Maya culture, the above mentioned behavior can be interpreted as inappropriate and disrespectful. This made me wonder about Ciua Noh seemingly being unwilling to criticize tourists' behaviors. One thought that occurred to me was if he perhaps was trying to avoid sounding disapproving of those who can be said to constitute his livelihood (working in the tourism cooperative is his full-time occupation), but another option is also plausible; that he might not deem such behavior problematic. On one hand this could mean that

I have ascribed more meaning to the situation than it actually encompasses. This option should undoubtedly be considered; to impute my theories to Ciua Noh should be done with cautiousness, in order to avoid mimicking the *"(…) Northern hegemony in the knowledge system (…)"* (Collyer 2018, p. 69), representing a Western arrogance that I have sought to remain critical towards throughout this thesis. To assume to understand the opinion of others better than themselves, is dangerous territory, especially in a context where ethnical stigmatization and white hegemony is evident. Keeping this in mind, I do although deem it relevant to explore the option, that he did not believe tourists to behave badly due to an internalized idea of inferiority. The Maya population has been stigmatized and discriminated ever since the Spanish invasion of their territories (Turner 1910, Wiessner 1999, Alston et al. 2009). During my interview with Professor Pedro Pablo Chim Bacab, who as a child had fled to Mexico, from the genocide on Mayas in Guatemala (see Ibarra, 2013 for information on this matter), this notion was highly debated. He for instance stated the following:

"(…) we have been educated to feel inferior. Consequently the superiority of many Europeans, the complex of superiority and the complex of inferiority match together and there is a kind of codependence; we are feeding the superiority of Europeans [tourists, red.] *by feeling inferior and behaving like if we are inferior (…)"* (A3, interview: 3/3-20, p. 5).

He continued to mention how the racism, that can be seen as a result of colonialism and neocolonialism in Mexican society, damages the self-esteem of indigenous people. This made me associate to the concept of *internalized racism*, which according to Speight (2007) amongst other things can be related to cultural imperialism where *"(…) subordinate groups come to internalize their oppression"* (p. 129). The ethnical dynamics in Mexican society are complex, encompassing significant power dynamics between the different groups, something quite relevant to gain understanding of in relation to tourism and how it plays out between visitors and locals.

4.2. Cultural framings for the sake of profit gain

Tourism has been named one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world and have until recently continued to do so year after year (UNWTO, 2020). In the light of the global COVID-19 crisis, international travel faces an unknown future, but prior to this the expansion was steady. It has been pointed out that even though tourism as an industry contains potential in regards of economic development and improvement of quality of life in host communities,

the neoliberal growth agenda seems to be the dominant steering device for how it is conducted (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006, 2018). The free market forces have landed large parts of the revenue that tourism generates, in the hands of large, multinational corporations, instead of contributing to local development (Brenner & Aguilar 2002, Brown 2013, Truong et al., 2014). In the *Plan Estatal de Desarollo de Yucatán 2018-2014* (state development plan for Yucatán), a dominant focus on economic growth within the tourism sector is obvious as well. It should although be added, that the development of sustainability within the sector also is highlighted in the plan and that sustainable tourism initiatives, like the company I was able to interview, have been invited to and participated in the Tianguis Turístico México for the first time ever in 2018 (A4, interview, 6/3-20). Despite this, my informant claimed that even though CBT is catching the attention of governing powers, the local empowerment that it potentially can prompt, is not the main focus:

"(…) they do want to help the communities, but the most important thing is to actually promote a different kind of tourism that actually now is a trend" (Ibid., p. 5).

She furthermore explained how the attention of the Yucatecan tourism board, quite quickly shifted from organizations like her own, where CBT is not defined by tourist-interaction with community members, but rather *"(…) on an organizational basis (…)"* (Ibid., p. 10) where projects are *"(…) owned by the community (…)"* (Ibid., p. 9), to others that worked with more rural representations of Mayas: *"(…) small communities where the people still wear the traditional clothing and they don't have anything modern and they don't have modern houses (…)"* (Ibid., p. 4) were according to her sources, the image of Maya culture that were of biggest interest to the board and that it was projects promoting this that received state funding. Her company is currently receiving international funding from the United Nations Development Program due to the lack of attention from local authorities (Ibid.). Tourism development in colonial settler states, such as Mexico, can often be seen to be:

"(…) controlled by non-indigenous peoples and dominated by power structures that have originated through colonialism (…) This process has been criticized as reinforcing colonial relationships through adherence to processes of economic globalization and increasing neo-liberal tendencies. In this respect touristic representations have tended to stereotype particular characteristics of the local community with images that cater to 'exotic' and 'primitive' depictions of 'otherness'" (Amoamo & Thompson, 2010, p. 37).

This statement seems very relatable to the interest that tourism projects, where Mayas dress traditionally and live in non-modernized villages, receive from the Yucatecan tourism board. It has before been pointed out how *"(…) the active pursuit of peoples with cultural traits that tourists classify as exotic"* (Tegelberg, 2013, p. 88) can be deemed almost thematic for parts of the tourism sector. Chim Bacab told me how a Maya community he had been in contact with, had been instructed by the tourism agency they collaborated with, to change from their regular clothing to traditional garments before tourists arrived to their village (Fieldnotes 10, 26/3-20). MacCannell (1984) has referred to this as *reconstructed ethnicity* and criticizes it for being *"(…) the artificial preservation of local ethnic groups and attractions so that they can be consumed as tourist experiences"* (p. 385). As Amoamo & Thompson (2010) point out, such representations are made to cater to the expectations of tourists and can be linked to neoliberal tendencies. Framing local communities, as mentioned above, in order to generate revenue, can be seen as a process of cultural commodification. Ballengee-Morris (2002) explains that *"The selling of traditional cultures and arts has become profitable (…)"* (p. 238) and that *"(…) individuals from the dominant culture become experts and judges, who then redefine the culture and the arts through institutional policies that determine who and what will be a part of the institution"* (p. 238), as seen when Yucatecan authorities choose to subsidy those tourism projects that envision the image of Maya culture that they deem most profitable. The notion of profitability in regards of Maya culture is seemingly also detectable in the appropriation of the name; EG includes it in the title of their CBT project: *Camino del Mayab* and the company also includes a variation of the word *Maya* in their name. That Maya culture is being appropriated and utilized as a selling proposition (Tegelberg, 2013) was articulated by Chim Bacab in the following way:

"(…) Mayan culture is now an international mark, like Nike, like Samsung, like McDonalds, Burger King. Consequently, the Mayan culture is turning to be a Disney Mayan world. The best example: Chichen Itza, another example: Playa Del Carmen. They call it Riviera Maya, but it looks like Mallorca from Spain. Nothing to do with Mayan ways of life, Mayan culture. It is an international mark and when you call Maya-something, it is business" (A3, interview: 3/3-20, p. 13).

The informant also stated that *"(…) everything sells as Mayan (…)"* (A4, interview: 6/3-20, p. 14) and explained how she had observed other tourism companies labelling everything in their

tours as *Maya* and how her own organization had felt compelled to use the same tactic in certain instances (Ibid.). A concrete example of the above mentioned tendency, is the Tren Maya project, founded by the Mexican government, appropriating the name, when it concurrently is doubtful if the Maya population will really benefit; my informant explained that the project *"(…) is mainly being funded by private companies (…)"* (Ibid., p. 6) and that the route of the train therefore primarily will *"(…) link to the private projects (…)"*, (Ibid., p. 6) of said companies, which subsequently have resulted in their Maya collaborators being *"(…) afraid that after all, it will only help to bring tourists to these tourism sites that are owned by private companies"* (Ibid., p. 6). That the Mexican government are promoting Maya culture and heritage is in itself not negative or wrong, but considering that the establishment of the train route is likely to have damaging consequences both socially and environmentally in the areas it runs through (Carabaña, 2020), the distribution of economic resources gained by it should also be ensured to benefit local communities.

The above statements link to the earlier mentioned quote by Greenwood (1989), that: *"The commoditization of culture does not require the consent of the participants; it can be done by anyone"* (p. 180). This highlights that the control of the representation of Maya culture surely does not belong to the Maya population but is being widely commodified.

The Maya population of Mexico have had to adapt to the capitalistic mechanism of society, while systematically being repressed by it. As the trend of CBT and sustainable tourism is sparking the interest of the national tourism boards, Mayas find themselves being instructed to imitate desired parts of their traditional ways of life in an effort to please tourists. Once, Spanish colonizers would constitute themselves as *"(…) pioneers of civilization who defeat and subdue savage man and nature to construct towns and modern society"* (Jacobsen 2016, p.185). This positioning of looking down on the indigenous population has, in the context of CBT and rural tourism, somewhat shifted:

> *"As the rhetoric of hostility toward minorities is replaced with a rhetoric of appreciation, the circle of their potential exploiters is dramatically expanded (…) All with a clear conscience under the rubric of the development and preservation of culture"* (MacCannell, 1984, p. 389).

Although a commodification of culture in the tourism industry might seem as the lesser of two evils compared to *hostility*, Jacobsen (2016) views this from a different angle:

"(…) indigenous subjects are recognized for "preserving" a pious and traditional way of life that is celebrated precisely for (ostensibly) not operating according to a wider economic and political context. Indigenous agents thus face a "repressive authenticity" (…) that grants them a societal role as cultural objects that obstructs their social participation as economic and political subjects" (p. 228).

It is here pointed out that the appraisal of traditional indigenous culture in a context of commodification can be seen to objectify the minorities involved; treating them like elements that are part of a larger tourism product might act as a pacifying element, placing them in a niche of society with a specific role and purpose. Chim Bacab spoke about what he called *"(…) the relation between subject and object (…)"* (A3, interview: 3/3-20, p. 1) in the Yucatecan tourism industry, *"(…) where the subject are the people who control tourist business, who get the benefits and the people who enjoy it and consume it - and the objects are the natives, exotic objects to attract tourists, that can be helped or educated, treated like tourist attractions"* (Ibid., p. 1).

The degradation of locals to objects is according to Chim Bacab an alarming process and that even when pointed out as uncomfortable by locals, some tourists can be seen to reject entering a dialogue:

"(…) in the villages they are taking pictures; many indigenous they are saying: "You are making me feel like a monkey in the zoo". Then the Europeans complain and say: "It's not true, it is just your interpretation" or "Don't complain, I am bringing money to this country"" (Ibid., p. 8).

To reject the perception of someone else or undermine the importance of it by pointing out that your actions should be tolerated because you are financially contributing to their lives, can be seen to relate to neocolonial thought of superiority. Palmer (1994) explains that:

"(…) for most people a holiday is seen as a time to be pampered and spoiled and empowers the visitor by placing him/her in a position of superiority, by virtue of having paid

for the privilege. The purchasing power of the tourist turns him into (…) a 'self-created hero'" (p. 806).

Such justification of own cultural insensitivity can be viewed as upholding and reinforcing stereotypes of white superiority and indigenous inferiority. Can tourism therefore be seen as yet another example of neocolonial patterns being repeated in different packaging? Jacobsen (2016) points out that an intrusion in the cultural identity of indigenous people can be identified *"(…) following its increasing configuration as a national economic and political resource (…)"* (p. 228), which he relates to a point made by Patrick Wolfe: That invasion shouldn't be viewed as an event, but as a structure. That neocolonial power relations seemingly are being renewed in the capital driven, neoliberal arena of tourism, seems supported by such notions. Going further in this direction, the claim laid out by both Chim Bacab and Palmer (1994), that the capital infusion tourism brings can be utilized as an excuse by tourists to justify whatever behavior they might perform, can also be related to the Westerly dominated economic approaches that are structuring most of our globalized world. Capitalism was inserted into the lives of the indigenous population of Mexico by the Spanish settlers (Salvucci, 2010), and the focus on capital is therefore in its' point of origin not Maya, but has still come to affect their way of life. Many Mayas in Yucatán can be seen to still protect aspects of their traditional way of life (see Fieldnotes 1, 13/9-19), but being self-sustaining (through for instance traditional agriculture, e.g. milpa), might not be an option and therefore getting involved in tourism can seem like a viable alternative, especially compared to tougher physical work (such as construction) or having to commute to bigger cities for work every day, which is the reality of many Mayas living in indigenous communities (A2, interview: 25/11-19). By engaging in CBT projects, locals open up their villages to strangers out of necessity, being subsequently "invaded" by tourists. Ballengee-Morris (2002) makes the following comment in connection to the commodification of the culture of the indigenous Guaranis of Brazil:

"Opening their reservation to outsiders, by policy or physically, is an extension of colonialism through the development of a tourist industry" (p. 240).

To collaborate in CBT, consequently allowing tourists in their communities, is of course a choice that locals have agreed to, and Ciua Noh for instance expressed happiness with no longer working far away from his community and being able to spend more time with his family (A5, interview: 16/3-20). Despite this, it might be considered relevant to keep in mind that the

neoliberal agenda behind tourism, do not align ideally with traditional Maya philosophies of collectivism and self-sustaining communities. On this background, an exploration of alternative economic approaches and how they might be seen to manifest in this context will be included.

4.3 Polanyi, governance and social enterprises

Polanyi's notion that economic systems should not be guided by free market forces, but by strong governance (Block & Polanyi, 2003), can in part be related to how CBT is conducted in Yucatán; instead of CBT businesses being private companies, it is required of them to have the legal status of a social enterprise in order to receive funding (A4, interview: 6/3-20). Social enterprises, that are defined as having specific socially embedded objectives as their primary purpose, while also seeking to maximize profits (Barone, 2020), can be said to be a hybrid organizational form due to its' mixed aims of profitability and social aspects. According to the OECD (1999), social enterprises can be seen to build bridge between the private and the public sector, *"(…) re-integrating disadvantaged groups into the labour market (…)"* and that they furthermore *"(…) draw on the local environment to enhance their economic and social performance"* (OECD, 1999[6]), which can be seen in the way the company as well as EG, conduct their CBT projects. My informant directly pointed out that the legal figure of an NGO had not been chosen specifically so that *"(…) legally, the company can have some profit"* (A4, interview: 6/3-20, p. 1). Both the company and EG operate as social enterprises and within this structure, several indigenous cooperatives collaborate and contribute (A4, interview: 6/3-20, A6). Even though, as earlier discussed in this chapter, certain issues might exist in terms of democratic processes, participation and decision-making in the facilitation of CBT by both organizations, the active engagement with local communities can be seen as favorable, in a development perspective, to large, private companies cashing in on the commodified representations of Maya heritage.

4.4 Indigenous economics logic and hybrid economies

The hybridity in CBT can also be detected in the focus on the participation of local communities. Indigenous peoples can be seen to integrate surrounding societal expectations, while concurrently preserving their own values:

[6] https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/socialenterprises.htm

"(…) the role of local agency has revealed how indigenous economic and social structures have shown remarkable resilience and a capacity to accommodate change while retaining and even enhancing indigenous socioeconomic practices and values that people hold dear to them" (Curry & Koczberski, 2013, p. 336).

By participating in the conduction of CBT, communities can generate revenue by showing tourists their way of life, for example by introducing them to traditional gastronomic features or their connectedness with nature. This allows for an opportunity to not bending backwards to Mexican societal norms, due to their own heritage becoming a point of interest, but at the same time not rejecting said norms all together. This can be viewed as seeking a *variety of capitalism*, because while accepting capital as a necessity, neoliberal individuality is replaced with more collective approaches; in Yokdzonot, the tourism cooperative in the community would give 10 % of their earnings to the local ejido, so that the tourism brought to the community would not just benefit themselves (A5, interview: 16/3-20). Within Gibson-Graham's (2006) *Diverse Economies framework* (see figure 5 in chapter 3.3.3.), the CBT projects touched upon in this thesis can be placed within the categories of *Alternative Market, Alternative Paid* and *Alternative Capitalist:* they are integrated in the tourism market, seeking to do so in a more ethical way, they are distributing pay through cooperatives and can lastly be interpreted as alternative capitalist due to their shared focus on profit gaining and social development. Gibson-Graham & Roelvink (2011) state that the aspiration with the framework is to highlight the diversity of the economy and furthermore underline how important regional, non-capitalist, informal economies are to the contexts they play out in. By validating the importance of alternative economies, the understanding of economy as a whole might be broadened, ideally paving the way for imagining possibilities of new social enterprises and experimentation with new businesses (Ibid.). That examples of alternative approaches exist within the Yucatecan tourism industry, can be viewed as a positive tendency, but certain Western norms and rhetoric might still influence how projects are carried out.

Generally speaking, knowledge production and epistemological concerns are still today dominated by Western standards (Halvorsen, 2018). Chim Bacab pointed out how this also manifested in intellectual circles in Mexico, where a neglection of the voice of the indigenous population is obvious, which according to him should be opposed:

"(…) the first nations, we need to build, to create one discourse to resist to this colonialist discourse. That is why we need a dialogue instead of this monologue that was established on top of the first nations the last 500 years by the Europeans" (A3, interview: 3/3-20, p. 3).

Even though CBT projects set out to ensure active participation and the respect of local customs and norms (Yanes et al. 2019), they are often implemented by outsiders, which is the case with both of the companies that are used as exemplifications in this research context. Something significantly important to notice in connection to this observation, is that the perceptions of indigenous people often are grounded in other values than those of the societies surrounding them, or as Dana (2007) puts it: *"(…) the culture of indigenous people is often incompatible with the basic assumptions of mainstream theories"* (p. 3). He explains how this often can be detected in a very differing approach to the conduction of entrepreneurship (in this case CBT), as well as what they perceive to gain from it; hopes of profit maximization that Western cultures often can be seen to articulate, is according to Dana (2013) often not the objective of indigenous community members and that indigenous economic logics often *"(…) display elements of egalitarianism, sharing and communal activity, contrasting capitalism as it is known in the West"* (p. 33).

What I furthermore detected was that not only were those evolving the CBT projects not members of the local communities (according to Moscardo (2014), a key criteria for the success of tourism development is that *"(…) it emerges from initiatives developed within the destination community"* (p. 355)), but those in charge could also be categorized as belonging to privileged, influential groups. The general director of EG has a background in both state and federal governmental institutions (respectively the *Secretaría de Desarollo Sustentable de Yucatán* and *Comisión Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad*) and one of the main actors in the founding of the other company is a French university professor, who initially arrived to Mexico as part of a French NGO (A4, interview: 6/3-20). Such elitism within sustainable tourism might hint at an unfortunate inclination in Mexican society of low social mobility, which seems consistent with the ascriptive tendencies earlier described in this paper. Other research projects concerned with discrimination and stratification in Mexico have found that *"White group advantages and indigenous disadvantages are constant across the region (…)"* (Campos-Vazquez & Medina-Cortina 2018, p. 339-340) and that it is plausible *"(…) to*

conclude that skin color is still a key variable in social inequality and intergenerational mobility" (Ibid., p. 340). Returning to Chim Bacab's statement on discourse in the light of stratification, prompts me to go further into an exploration of alternative approaches to the status quo. That people with certain social statuses can be seen to utilize this in order to better the situation of those in marginalized positions, might bear witness of a positive development, but that privileged outsiders still have defining influence on how progress in marginalized communities proceeds, makes it relevant to touch upon post-development theory. This will take place in the following chapter, that will constitute this paper's discussion. I believe that this will add an explorative nuance to this thesis, that due to its' stretch beyond what I believe I can conclude on the foundation of the acquired data, as well as its' slightly philosophical approach, is more suited to adhere to the shape of a discussion, instead of being placed within an analytical chapter.

5. Discussion

Throughout my thesis, themes regarding neocolonialism and neoliberalism have been explored, and it has been pointed out how stigmatization and capital gain seem to have significant influence on how self-proclaimed sustainable tourism initiatives are carried out in Yucatán. Societal systems in our globalized world are often scheduled around Western norms, pointing back to the effects of colonialism and capitalism. The global North has succeeded in dictating large structural systems across the world, without taking the culture or social circumstances of differing nations into consideration (Nabudere, 1997), which I have argued is clearly visible in the tourism industry. The rhetoric of modernization and development are being contested (Escobar, 1995), which is why I deem a discussion of the direction of tourism relevant. The neocolonial tendencies and neoliberal growth agenda that guides large part of tourism today, can in terms of both environmental and social sustainability be viewed as problematic.

Indigenous cultures have had Western notions of development and progress inserted into their ways of life, and it seems as if even sustainable tourism initiatives, such as CBT, are colored by this rhetoric. Chim Bacab states that:

"(…) we need a Mayan intellectuality to defend the Mayan identity against those capitalist discourses. The conception about progress is relative to the Western way of life (…)" (A3, interview: 3/3-20, p. 7).

To recognize that equally relevant knowledge systems exist independently from those of Western origin, is being empathized by numerous scholars, as well as how certain concepts, (such as *progress* mentioned in the quote above) are defined according to Eurocentric perspectives (Escobar 1995, Santos 2014, Dana & Anderson 2007, Cave & Dredge 2018, Clausen & Velázquez 2018). Perhaps it is time that knowledge and philosophies from the global South bring about an alternative to the existing world order, where relentless growth and individual pursuit seem to be dictating the future of tomorrow, something that I believe is perfectly embodied in the majority of the tourism industry, *"(…) wherein business-as-usual capitalism has dominated"* (Cave & Dredge, 2018, p. 474).

The manners in which the culture of so-called *underdeveloped* countries and indigenous people could inspire a different approach to both tourism and the broader structures of the world, are numerous, and I can and will not attempt to exhaust this thought, but will on the contrary supply a few well-considered examples.

During my interview with EG's coordinator of sustainable development, he pointed out how democratic processes, bordering on direct democracy, can be identified in many Maya communities, where decision-making power is decentralized in the context of the *ejido* (A2, interview: 25/11-20, Fieldnotes 2: 10/10-19). Even though the entire community is not included, "*The majority of families have at least one relative who is an ejidatario (…)"* (Litka, 2013, p. 354), providing them with a certain amount of representation. These systems are not without complexity and internal disparities certainly do exist. Litka (2013) for instance explains that the position as ejidatario *"(…) normally* [is] *passed down from father to son (…)"* (p. 354), which illustrates persistent patriarchal tendencies within the communities. Such power structures are worthy of a study on their own, and the topic reaches beyond the scope of this thesis, which is why it will not be further elaborated here. What I do wish to emphasize, is the ideological background for Maya democracy in ejido context; the focus on communitarian solutions can perhaps be viewed as an opposition to the strong individualism that can be seen to dominate Western societies. In the global North, voting is considered an individual decision.

The ejidatario that votes on a motion, can be said to vote on behalf of his relatives*; the common good* is not a fluffy concept, it is directly present in their existence. To attempt to adopt such approaches in our society is not what I am pleading for, but on a more philosophical level, the approach of collectivism above individualism might entail some interesting inspiration. Even the notion of collectivism *vs.* individualism can be contested by first nation worldviews. Lituchy, Oppenheimer, O'Connell & Abraira (2007) explain how native Canadian *"(…) cultures in fact see the good of the group as identical to the good of the individual (…) indicating a reconciliation of group and individual interests rather than a subjugation of one to the other"* (p. 382). This again highlights how culturally conditioned perceptions can limit our take on the world.

When viewing how differently some concepts are defined depending on one's cultural reality, the ontological direction that this thesis has followed, increases in relevance. Firstly, because social constructivism underlines that perception of reality is relative and therefore negotiable, and secondly because the poststructuralist angle concedes this perspective but adds that dominant discourses can create oppressive power structures, and that said power structures should be challenged. In line with this, post-development theory points out the ideological dominance of the global North, which has prompted a development project thrust upon the so-called *underdeveloped* countries, where *"(…) the goal of material prosperity and economic progress"* (Escobar, 1995, p. 4) has been the steering device and measurement for success. Escobar (1995) further elaborates that this can be viewed as *"(…) the process by which, in the history of the modern West, non-European areas have been systematically organized into, and transformed according to, European constructs"* (p. 7). The idea that countries from the global South should be 'developed' into the same shape as these constructs, has undermined the worth of indigenous approaches and values. Even within the context that this thesis has explored, where indigenous culture is framed positively, as it is the case in CBT, somewhat patronizing attitudes towards the Mayas still remained; if they rejected tourism, they were doing so because they did not know any better, and furthermore that CBT functions as a legitimization of their culture and knowledge – that because these were suddenly profitable entities, the inherent value of them increased as well. Mestizos working with CBT in Yucatán most likely have good intentions, but the neocolonial structures within Mexican society would seemingly have affected their perception of the relationship between themselves and their Maya collaborators;

where they are the ones who know better and help strengthen the Maya identity. The principles of CBT are admirable, but in order to be fully achieved, those seeking to implement it would probably need to realize their own biases and consider the possibility that their plan to foster development from a Western perspective in local communities, might not be plausible at all. In order for tourism to become beneficial for host destinations, I believe that the concept of development might benefit from being redefined; redefined in whatever context it unfolds in, by those living that specific reality. Mayas involved in CBT in Yucatán should serve as experts – not on how tourist enterprises might be implemented the easiest, but on their own needs and culture. Indigenous peoples were alive and well long before colonization and will be with or without tourism. When facilitating it in the future, I plead that we should stop imagining that we are doing host communities a favor by bringing them tourism and start paying attention to what we might be able to learn from their perspectives. This statement also encourages a furthering of research on tourism and diverse economies; in a search for how the industry might be able to let go of the *"(…) focus on tourism's contribution to growth, where profit and economic diversification are somehow linked to socio economic progress and, perhaps, even the happiness and well-being of local communities"* (Cave & Dredge, 2018, p. 473), and perhaps instead turn towards developing non-financial resources such as *"(…) social capital, community cohesion, reflexivity, creativity, problem-solving, and so on, that contribute to broader notions of progress, and move us towards sustainable development"* (Ibid., p. 474).

In the last moments of this chapter, I wish to grant the voice to a representative of the Maya community. When commenting on what he believed could be done to lessen oppression of first nations Chim Bacab said:

"We should stop learning "That the Europeans discovered me, that's why I exist – thanks to them". I have to stop learning in the school or teaching, "That I have a civilization because the Europeans bring me the civilization". We should change it, we should stop learning that, because it creates a lowering of our self-esteems (…) we have to change the way how we educate our kids, we have to change the way how we perceive the white people (…) they are not superior than other people, they just have more choices, they only have more privileges" (A3, interview: 3/3-20, p. 9).

6. Conclusions

Throughout this thesis, I have sought to explore how neocolonial and neoliberal tendencies can be seen to affect how CBT is conducted in the Yucatán region. This aim has been operationalized by examining power relations and cultural differences between the various participants in the tourism situation and how this influences how they interact with each other. It has furthermore been explored how Maya culture has been framed and appropriated in order to profit from it.

An ethnographic research design, consisting of participant observations and both formal and informal interviews, has served as my empirical data gathering. I have viewed my findings from a part social constructivist and part poststructuralist ontological perspective, seeking to uncover the relativity of cultural perceptions and illuminate the repressiveness of dominant societal discourses.

I believe that it is derivable, that interactions between Mestizos seeking to implement and facilitate CBT projects and their Maya collaborators, are conditioned by underlying societal stratification and ascriptive tendencies. The Maya communities that EG have worked with showed a significant amount of suspicion towards the employees of the company and an enforced trust-building process was needed to ensure cooperation. The cautiousness shown by local community members towards outsiders has been linked to theory of ascription and the historical and ongoing legislative discrimination of Mayas.

In the attitude from the involved Mestizos towards the involved Mayas, a feeling of superiority was detectable. Although both the examined companies had certain measures in place to ensure participation and decision-making power, these only amount to a restricted level of influence, where Maya collaborators are inquired with *"(...) after major decisions have already been made (...)"* (Pretty, 1995, p. 1252). EG displayed an assurance that CBT was the right development option for all communities in question and dismissed doubt as being an illustration of community members not knowing any better. The other company explained how they had instructed their Maya collaborators to perform certain behaviors they deemed more sustainable and/or traditional. Such an attempt to restrict a free behavioral and cultural articulation is in line with neocolonial thought, and so is the arrogant mindset of 'knowing better' than involved locals that EG displays. An underlying attitude of Mayas being somewhat inferior seemed to saturate how the involved Mestizos approached the facilitation of CBT, in spite of seemingly having good intentions of increasing community wellbeing.

I found it arguable that an unwillingness from Mayas involved in CBT to criticize inappropriate tourist behaviors was present in the interaction between the two groups. This has been interpreted to be either connected to an avoidance of disapproval of the people (tourists) that constitutes the involved Mayas' source of income, which can be argued to showcase dependency - or to a blindness to rude behavior due to an internalized idea of inferiority, caused by centuries of marginalization and repression. Such assumptions should although be made with caution: If I were I to claim that I understand the lifeworld of an indigenous person better than themselves would, especially in the context of me being white and from the global North, mimic the Western hegemony that I have sought to criticize in this thesis. I therefore underline the interpretational nature of the above.

All in all, the interactions between the different participants in the arena of Yucatecan CBT seem affected by neocolonial tendencies, constituting an uneven power balance which arguably should be contested.

The neoliberal growth agenda that is ascertainable in the tourism industry at large, is also present in the approaches to tourism in the context of Mexico and Yucatán. It is seemingly identifiable that to support this hunt for revenue gain, Maya culture and heritage is being commodified and appropriated. This can be seen in the preferential treatment (equaling funding) that the Yucatecan tourism board gives to CBT projects showcasing Maya communities that are particularly traditional and non-modernized. To prioritize the furthering of stereotyped representations perhaps hints towards an emphasis on what sells and not necessarily on what might benefit communities the most. Appropriation of Maya culture does also seem detectable in the context of companies using the word *Maya* in their names, while not being owned by anyone of Maya decent. Examples also exist on governmental level, with the Tren Maya project, that is utilizing Maya culture and destinations as selling propositions, while being funded primarily by private investors who's large businesses are likely to be prioritized in terms of implementing the train route. The private sector would ergo cash in while indigenous communities are at risk for being overlooked. It is argued that the commodified, and sometimes romanticized, image of Maya culture hinders its' free articulations and fosters a new variation of exploitation.

A parallel is drawn between tourism and colonialism; Western tourists can be seen to almost invade host destination, concurrently defending their leisurely activities by pointing out that

the countries they visit are dependent of their money, while consuming the local culture and ultimately returning home leaving the damage of tourism behind them.

In order to contest the detected neocolonial tendencies in the Yucatecan tourism industry, as well as seeking out alternatives to neoliberal economic thinking, theory on alternative economies has been explored.

The way in which social enterprises, which is the legal model adapted by both CBT companies included in this thesis, can be seen to share their focus between profit gain and social aspects, places them in a category of organizational hybridity. Such hybridity can furthermore be detected in CBT when considering the participation of local communities, where these can be seen to preserve their own values and customs, while also integration surrounding societal expectations. This places the CBT projects in an alternative capitalistic category, which can be deemed as favorable to big privately owned companies. However, it does seem as if Western norms to a large extent affects how CBT is conducted in the region. This should be considered problematic when considering that *"(…) the culture of indigenous people often* [is] *incompatible with the basic assumptions of mainstream theories"* (Dana, 2007, p. 3). Indigenous economics logics "*(…) display elements of egalitarianism, sharing and communal activity (…)"* (Dana, 2013, p. 33), which can be seen as opposing *"(…) the western-inspired consumerism that promotes individualism (…)"* (Clausen & Velázquez, 2018, p. 565). That outsiders often can be seen to implement and facilitate CBT in rural communities, is in this context made increasingly interesting when realizing that those in charge in both companies belong to somewhat elitist societal groups. On the foundation of the above findings, I conclude that the conduction of CBT in Yucatán is affected by the ethnical stratification visible in Mexican society, highlighting neocolonial tendencies. It is furthermore derived that the quest for financial gain and profit maximization has paved the way for commodification and appropriation of Maya culture, illustrating how neoliberalism has affected the Mexican tourism sector. On this background the thesis turned to a philosophical discussion to highlight the independent existence of equally relevant knowledge systems outside of the dominance that Western ideologies can be seen to have in the world. Notions of modernization and development, defined by the global North, has been the measurement for how well a country can be said to be doing, without taking cultural or social circumstances into regard. This has

prompted me to suggest, that it might be time that knowledge and values from the global South transpires as an inspirational source to how markets and societies are structured in the West.

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7.1 List of Appendices

Appendix 1 (A1): Fieldnotes.

Appendix 2 (A2): Interview with Alberto Cervera, coordinator of sustainable development in EcoGuerreros (conducted: 25/11-19).

Appendix 3 (A3): Interview with Pedro Pablo Chim Bacab, Professor in linguistics, Maya author and translator (conducted: 3/3-20).

Appendix 4 (A4): Interview with manager of a local community-based tourism organization, referred to as "the informant" and "the company" (non-disclosure agreement has been signed) (conducted: 6/3-20).

Appendix 5 (A5): Interview with Carlos Héctor Ciua Noh, President of the tourism cooperative in Maya community Yokdzonot (conducted: 16/3-20).

Appendix 6 (A6): Corporate presentation of *Camino del Mayab.*

Appendix 7 (A7): Interview guides.