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Introduction

[W]e fall into the trap of treating space as space “in itself,” as space as such. We come to think in terms of spatiality, and so to fetishize space in a way reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities, where the trap lay in exchange, and the error was to consider “things” in isolation, as “things in themselves.”

Lefebvre (1991, p. 90)

A View from Motul, Yucatán

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

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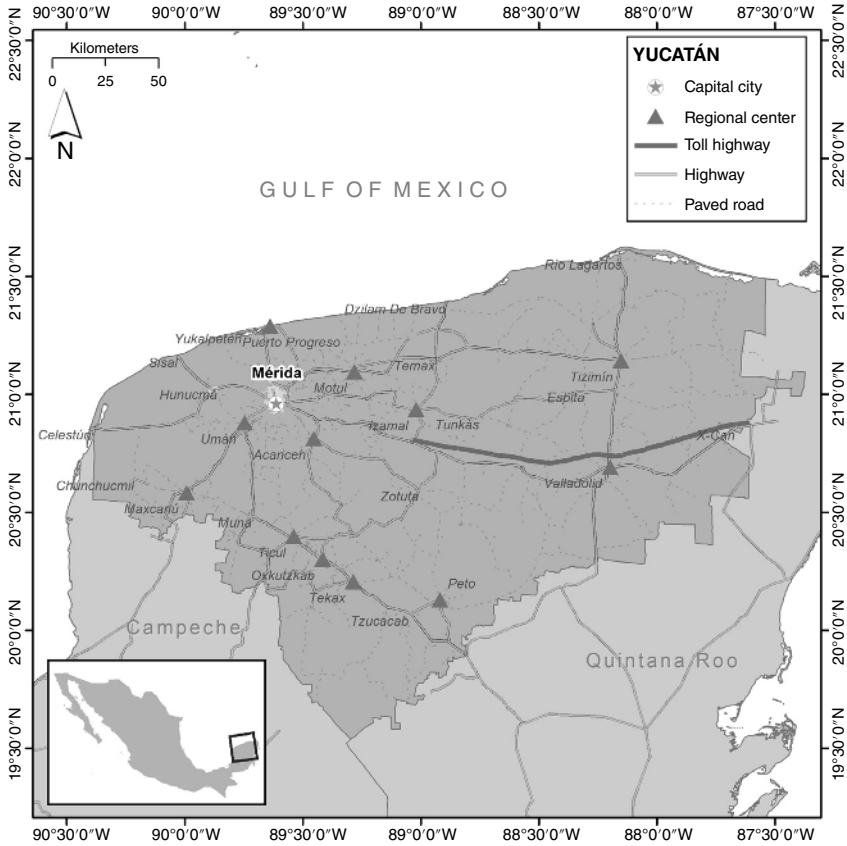


Figure 1.1 Map of the state of Yucatán with regional centers and some settlements. *Source:* Victoria M. Jiménez Esquivel. Reproduced with permission.

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

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

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

Old Frontier/New Frontier

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

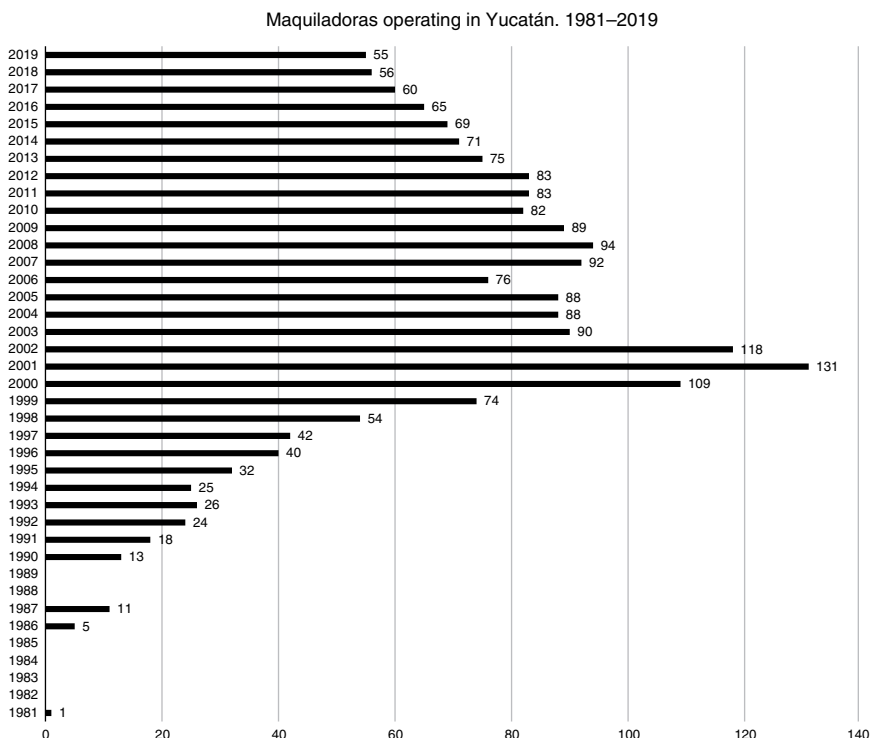


Figure 1.2 Maquiladoras operating in Yucatán between 1981 and 2019. Values captured as of January in the years 1990–2006 and 2008–2019. The value for 2007 is from July. *Source:* Adapted from Canché Escamilla (1998), Canto Sáenz (2001), Canto Sáenz and Cruz Pacheco (2004).

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

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

Producing Mayaland

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Instances of Magic

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

spatial practices and representations, appropriating and *producing* its own space. In other words, a society's mode of production, along with the social relations of production and reproduction, creates "the rhythm of daily life" – thereby shaping signs, codes, culture, and the built environment, for example. Space is "at once a precondition and a result of social superstructures" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 85) and, as such, is produced by social reality: productive forces, means of production, technology, knowledge, division of labor, demographic pressures, the world market (e.g. commodities and capital), and so forth. This means that a capitalist mode of production will create capitalist space in a continuous self-reinforcing process. However, it also implies that a noncapitalist mode of production can create its own space and vice versa (i.e. a noncapitalist space can create its own mode of production). In Lefebvre's view, a problem is that the true nature of space is concealed from our eyes, and we come to think of it as innocent, neutral, or independent. What needs to be remembered is that space is an abstraction, shielded by the illusions of "transparency" and "natural simplicity" (Lefebvre 1991). Theorizing through a Marxist perspective about the role that the commodity plays in capitalism, Lefebvre argues that space is fetishized because it hides the concrete and abstract labor embedded in its production and obscures how it facilitates the flourishing of capitalism. When space turns into a commodity, Lefebvre calls it abstract space – or the medium that enables the "capitalist processes of production, distribution, and consumption" (Stanek 2008, p. 76). As the space of capitalism, abstract space is the dominant form of space. It is the space of power, where the state puts governmental strategies into effect (turning the production of space into a political tool). With abstract space often comes violence: the forces of abstract space, as enablers of capitalism, seek to mold in their image and do so by reducing the obstacles and resistance they encounter. However, abstract space has no power in *itself*; it is always collectively produced by someone or something. According to Lefebvre (1991), there are certain groups in society that have more power to produce space, but no single entity (e.g. the state) or individual is the sole agent of the production of space. Consequently, unpacking how space has been produced is difficult. As I will explain in the next section, Lefebvrian theory offers a method to attempt to de-fetishize space, but what is important to highlight at this point is the interplay between instances of magic and abstract space. In an analysis of the production of space like the one carried out in this study, instances of magic are moments when the fetishism of abstract space becomes clear in our eyes.

To understand the theoretical potential of instances of magic, I would like to situate the concept within a wider intellectual tradition. My

inspiration to develop the concept came from JanMohamed's (1985) notion of "magical essence" and McNally's (2012) interpretation of the monstrous and fantastic in the work of Marx (i.e. Marx's propensity to use depictions of monsters to illustrate how capitalism works).¹⁸ Thinking with the context of *realismo mágico* (magical realism) – the literary style associated to Latin American literature and criticism that mixes the fantastic and the realist (Bravo 1995; Hutcheon 1995) – also influenced the theoretical framework used in this book. While the literary origins of magical realism are important, in this book, I mostly follow the understanding developed by the Lefebvrian scholar Merrifield (2011, p. 12), who gives a Marxist twist to the concept:

Magical Realism has as its muse actual reality, yet converts this often stark reality into fantasy, into fantastic and phantasmal subjective visions that become more real than objective reality itself. These visions are like little fibs that bizarrely tell the truth, that invent new truths or lay bare truths we somehow relate to, almost instinctively, almost without being able to see them.

Throughout the book, I provide examples of "fantastic and phantasmal" visions and "fibs that bizarrely tell the truth" – not because there is an absolute *truth* out there with a capital T, but because there are imaginaries and "common-sense" logics that only become visible as something subjective when laid bare. These are the instances of magic that hide the logic of capital and only become unveiled through an analysis of what lies behind it. This approach answers McNally's (2012) call, who argues there is a need to develop a "capitalist monsterology," that is, the study of "the monstrous forms of everyday-life in a capitalist world-system." If the role of critical theory is to expose how capital hides its own monstrosity under a cloak of normality, then "disruptive fables of modernity," "de-familiarizing techniques," and "ways of seeing the unseen" are needed (McNally 2012). With its juxtaposition of the fantastic and the real, magical realism can serve as inspiration to carry out a capitalist monsterology. There are empirical examples of this approach. For example, Wilson and Bayón (2017) develop the concept of "fantastical materializations" as a critical tool to expose the "uncanny dimensions" of capitalism in the case of the Manta-Manaus project in the Ecuadorian Amazon. In an example closer to this study, I would argue Wright's (2006) *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* uses the concept of "the myth" in a way reminiscent of magical realism. According to Wright (2006), who draws on Roland Barthes, a myth uses "fantastic characters" or "extraordinary figures" to explain and validate

social reality in a depoliticized way. Wright finds examples of mythification in the way female workers are constructed within EPZs in Mexico and China. The narrative surrounding the Zones establishes that a character, a third world woman, exists in an “amorphous region,” the third world, and set ups the rule of how this “third world woman should look, act, and be treated” (Wright 2006). The myth also decides her fate, which is disposability. Through this approach – the mix of the fantastic and what appears to be real – Wright criticizes the logic behind the myth. The word “magic” in instances of magic serves as a tool to highlight the fantastic, the hidden, the bizarre “truths,” and the myth-making that occurs in the place I refer to as *Mayaland*.

There is something else to highlight about the usefulness of thinking through magical realism and the need to rely on the idea of *Mayaland* when Yucatán could simply be used. While magical realism can be a powerful narrative strategy to tell a type of story that puts “fantasy” and “reality” into sharp contrast, the concept also embodies a tension that, in this case, is productive. Pratt (2008a) has argued that magical realism exhibits traces of essentialism and exoticism in the way Latin America is portrayed.¹⁹ Chanady (2008), who agrees with Pratt, illustrates this point with two examples. Alejo Carpentier, a Cuban novelist and one of the precursors of the literary movement, coined the expression *lo real maravilloso*, “marvelous reality,” to refer to what he considered were the incredible things found in the continent in terms of “luxuriant vegetation, imposing geography, [and] ethnic diversity” (Chanady 2008, p. 429). Gabriel García Márquez, another member of the movement, claimed that the “Latin American continent is more marvelous than any fiction” (Chanady 2008, p. 433). These statements, which attempt to explain the uniqueness of the Americas vis-à-vis magical realism, actually mirror the Eurocentric myths of what is called the “invention of America.” Authors like O’Gorman (1995 [1958]) and Rabasa (1993) have argued that, contrary to the belief that America was “discovered,” it was actually “invented” through the eyes of European colonizers. The invention of America began as soon as Christopher Columbus stumbled upon the continent in 1492 thinking he had reached the West Indies. America was formulated and described through a European gaze that could only understand what it saw through prejudices and a sense of superiority. What occurred is that the *idea* of America came into existence as things materialized in the fantasies of the conquerors: unheard-of, marvelous, exotic flora and fauna; a benevolent climate; a feminized landscape that could be named and penetrated; the noble savage, the *Indio*²⁰; and perhaps even the Earthly location of paradise (Rabasa 1993). This is the exoticism attached to the “New World” that is sometimes

reproduced via magical realism. Through the use of Mayaland, I seek to highlight the instances of magic in the study that reflect the exoticism and “marvelous reality” that can be found in understandings and descriptions of Yucatán. New World exoticism can be glimpsed in these depictions and, for this reason, it is important to establish a conceptual difference between Yucatán and the mythical place Mayaland. As we will see in the chapters that follow, Mayaland is a region where there are enigmatic creatures like *Magical Mayas*, cosmic *Indios*, ghosts, white elephants, dragons, swallows, and flamingos; and wondrous places like *cenotes*, pyramids, blue moons, old frontiers, new frontiers, and paradise-Zones.

Mobilizing Lefebvre’s Triad

I began this study with an eye on Lefebvrian theory – without knowing that the postcolonial component would become essential. Long before my readings of critical urban theory were informed and shaken by fieldwork, I was already facing a tremendous task: carrying out an analysis of the production of space is nothing less than the opening of Pandora’s box, a researcher’s nightmare of basically trying to study the totality of existence. As I previously mentioned, Lefebvre’s solution to challenge abstract space is to appropriate the production of space. However, before this can be done, abstract space needs to be exposed, decoded – the fetishism destroyed. In order to do this, Lefebvre (1991) proposes a tool, what he calls a “two-fold conceptual triad,” to explore the inner mechanisms of space and, in turn, open the possibility to imagine how to produce something else, for example, differential space (cf. Harvey 2006; Merrifield 2006). Lefebvre’s triad can be imagined as a triangle where each corner is composed of two elements or *moments* (as Lefebvre named each dimension of space). *Spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation* are the moments that embody the semiotic aspects of space. The rest of the moments – *perceived, conceived, and lived space* – refer to the phenomenological features (Lefebvre 1991; Schmid 2008).²¹ To help readers that might not be familiar with the triad, *spatial practices* and *perceived space* represent the material dimension or what society’s production and reproduction secretes (e.g. buildings, monuments, and the networks that connect daily life such as highways, roads, and paths). It is also the dimension of space that we can grasp with our senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting (Lefebvre 1991; Merrifield 2006; Schmid 2008). *Representations of space* and *conceived space* are the moments connected to abstraction and the production of

knowledge, generated by, for example, scientists, urban planners, assorted professionals, and bureaucrats and conceptualized in definitions, descriptions, scientific theories of space, maps, plans, and signs. Representations of space are created at the intersection between the production of knowledge, ideology, and power. As such, it is the dominant space in society (Lefebvre 1991; Merrifield 2006; Schmid 2008). Spatial practices can be experienced physically because their notion was first *conceived* – defined and demarcated by a design, map, concept, or scientific theory (Schmid 2012). *Spaces of representation*²² and *lived space* embody the symbolic dimension of space, a moment where the production of meaning takes place (Schmid 2008). It is a fragment that embeds the world of the daily and not of specialized language (e.g. dreams, fantasies, fears, childhood memories, symbolic works, and the clandestine) (Harvey 2006; Lefebvre 1991; Merrifield 2006). Lived space denotes the way the world is experienced, felt by people in their everyday life. The “nature” of or “feeling” in a city (e.g. safe, dangerous, successful, or vibrant) can be understood within this moment.²³

Despite the apparently neat divisions within the moments in space, the conceptual triad is not meant to represent space or project a disjunction. The triad should be understood as a guiding principle, a clue for developing an analytical method to help us see the dialectical relationships within space and “rediscover the unity of the productive process” (Lefebvre 1991, p. 42). To avoid falling into the trap of the model, we should remember that the conceptual triad should not be understood as something mechanical, static, or compartmentalized. Schmid (2014, p. 37) explains it clearly:

[The conceptual triad] is not a set of three independent dimensions, but an ensemble of three contradictions and thus interdependencies between three poles. Therefore the goal cannot be to use the three dimensions like drawers to be filled with the corresponding empirical examples or as a scaffold that serves to order the abundance of social reality.

Thus, the moments of the triad exist in tension and in need of each other. Trying to look at only one moment would make it an abstraction since the other moments are needed for understanding. In Merrifield’s (2006) interpretation, “each instance internalizes and takes on meaning through other instances.” At the same time, the moments cannot be synthesized or brought together. The dimensions of space exist in conflict and without hierarchies (Schmid 2008; Stanek 2008). It is also important to remember that to analyze the productive process of space is to deal with layers of history. However, common-sense historical periodizations need

to be avoided. Furthermore, since space exists in dialectical nature, the contradictions arising in space need to be emphasized if we want to learn anything about the productive process of space. Changes from one mode of production to another are of particular importance since they imply a change from one type of space to another. Examining the transition can reveal contradictions and illuminate how “fresh space” is generated, planned, and organized.

When I attempted to operationalize the triad, one question that gnawed at me for months was, if the “moments” of space overlap with each other, and space is continuously created, how does one draw the borders of the chunk of space under analysis? My first attempt to chart the triad of space resulted in a table that showed space in a demarcated and schematic way: a static inventory of things in space. It took me some time to understand that Lefebvre’s theory, after all, is exactly that, a theory not a method (Schmid et al. 2014). Before I describe how I carried out this study, I would like to share a few reflections on the methodological challenges of putting to work Lefebvre’s triad of space in empirical research. This discussion is important because it sets the stage for understanding later on how a *postcolonial* analysis of the production of space is possible. (I expand this argument at length in Chapter 2.) Let me first share the ways that I found of working through the mess of Lefebvre’s triad of space. First, one must understand that Lefebvre’s triad points in the direction of what needs to be analyzed in order to unpack the dialectical relationships of space, but it does not explain exactly what to do methodologically. Instead, Lefebvre helps set the general guidelines for a research design, but the actual unmasking of space – in other words, the analysis of the material gathered – needs to be carried out with additional conceptual tools. Schmid (2014, p. 37) argues that a researcher cannot “adopt Lefebvre’s theory ‘as it is,’ but must advance it conceptually in sustained interaction with social reality. This is why the theory must also constantly be further developed: what is needed is an open and creative way of handling it.” Second, the *here* and *now* must be the focus of analysis. History becomes inscribed in space as the past leaves its traces on a place, forcing us to focus on the present. This means that an analysis of symbolic and relevant materiality (e.g. buildings, monuments, and landmarks) can show part of the production process and the product itself. Lefebvre (1991) explains that analyzing the production of space is like looking at a construction once the scaffold is taken down and the blue print is thrown away. For Merrifield (2006, p. 105), it is like “revisiting an abandoned construction site, delving into the wastebasket of history, retrieving a crumbled draft.” In other words, analyzing the production of space of something means reconstructing

the process of its creation. There is only the product left as a clue, embedding the very activity that created it. This challenge must be remembered. Third, the demarcation of the production of space – namely, choosing what parts or aspects of the overall production of space will be studied – should be carried out by reflecting on the specific urban process one wants to study. Doing this helps prevent demarcating the analysis of space production through arbitrary means based on the urban-as-form, such as municipal city limits. Brenner and Schmid (2015a) propose an “urban process” can be defined through an exercise of theoretical abstraction – choosing a specific demarcated place in either thought, representation, imagination, or action. An example of this approach is carried out by Stanek (2014), who analyzes the case of Nowa Huta near Krakow, in Poland. Stanek (2014) chooses this object of study not because Nowa Huta is “an administrative or spatial whole” but because the name stands for “a set of representations strongly embedded in various social practices.”

In my case, I defined the object under analysis as the urbanization processes generated by or linked to the “maquiladora industry in Yucatán.” Both Yucatán and Motul are specific places delimited by state and municipal boundaries. However, the “maquiladora industry” is not a spatial whole or a specific, demarcated entity. I have chosen to talk about and investigate “the maquiladora industry” because that is the concept of theoretical abstraction used in the representations of space found in academic literature and governmental reports. In regard to the “city of Motul,” I did not study Motul as a municipal site. Following the work of Angelo and Wachsmuth (2015), I kept in mind that the urbanization process taking place in Motul is not limited to the official boundaries of the city (or the state of Yucatán for that matter). While located in Motul, I took into consideration wider regional, national, and global processes that were impacting the production of space in the city. Finally, I learned that when carrying out an analysis of the production of space, time and scales can be managed by taking “snapshots of reality,” of everyday life. An empirical example of operationalizing the theory behind the production of space is Bertuzzo’s (2014) work in the streets of Dhaka. Bertuzzo (2014) uses Lefebvre’s “regressive–progressive procedure” and focuses on *instants* instead of sequences in spaces. The regressive–progressive procedure consists of first describing what there is; then bringing to light its historical determinants; and finally, through its historical determinants, creating an alternative narration of the present. This is important because, as highlighted by Bertuzzo (2014, p. 54), Lefebvre argued that “in order to see . . . we must first make the center of our vision void of the usual representations.” By zooming in and out

of places – the private, the neighborhood, the urban level – Bertuzzo was able to show the present interrelatedness and contradictions of different scales without disregarding important historical milestones. Bertuzzo's zoom-in/zoom-out strategy guided me to develop the research design that I put to practice.

Capturing the Production of Space

I carried out two fieldwork periods in Yucatán comprising a total of 13 weeks.²⁴ The first was a pilot study that was four weeks long and took place in September 2014. I spent most of my time in Mérida but also carried out day trips to Progreso, Motul, Umán, and a former henequen hacienda in Yaxcopoil (located halfway between Umán and Muna; see Figure 1.1). During that time, I focused on gathering three types of material: photographs, interviews, and documents. In the case of the visual material, I took photographs of the seaport in Progreso (from the beach since access to the actual quay was restricted) and four industrial parks.²⁵ I conducted five semi-structured interviews with local academics and government officials working at the state level.²⁶ The interviews informed the choice of material that I subsequently gathered. I collected articles, books, policy documents (i.e. state development plans), government reports (i.e. *informes de gobierno*, annual reports that the governor in office presents to the local congress), websites, and advertising material aimed at maquiladora investors (i.e. SEFOE brochures).²⁷ This material, along with the photographs and interviews, was classified as examples of representations of space and interpreted through discourse analysis.

My second fieldwork period comprised of nine weeks split into two sections: five weeks between 23 November and 27 December 2015 and four weeks between 11 January and 8 February 2016.²⁸ I decided to focus on one specific place, Motul, because of the reasons already explained – particularly because the city hosts the biggest maquiladora in Yucatán. In contrast to Mérida, where there are additional types of industries and several maquiladoras, only two maquilas arrived to Motul during the boom era: Montgomery Industries and Mayan Palace. Mayan Palace stopped its operations in the early 2000s, but Montgomery Industries remains in Motul. Zooming-in on Motul allowed me not only to consider the urban process happening in the municipality but also to reflect on the spaces of representation – the world of the daily – in an area that has been greatly influenced by a maquiladora presence (cf. Castilla Ramos and Torres Góngora 2009; Navarrete 2008). There was

no time or resources for an in-depth ethnographic study; nevertheless, I continued to rely on general ethnographic methods and took inspiration from urban ethnography to carry out (i) interviews, (ii) walking interviews (cf. Evans and Jones 2011), and (iii) explorations through industrial ruins (cf. Edensor 2008). I also carried out participant observation, which led me to go on spontaneous walks or drive-alongs in routes determined by the research participants (cf. Kusenbach 2003) and to take part in festivities (e.g. Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe and San Juan Bosco). Through a long chain of family acquaintances, I managed to meet a gatekeeper in Motul. The gatekeeper is a local politician and government employee who helped secure interviews with actors that would otherwise have been hard to reach (e.g. the mayor and a manager at Montgomery Industries) and introduced me to two research participants who became key informants. With the legitimacy and trustworthiness bestowed upon me by the gatekeeper, I carried out snowball and purposive sampling until theoretical saturation was reached (cf. Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Blaikie 2010).²⁹

During the second research period, I carried out 36 semi-structured interviews in Motul and Mérida in the informants' workspaces or homes. The average time of the interviews was 46 minutes, but the conversations ranged in length from 10 to 105 minutes. I recorded 32 interviews with the interviewees' consent.³⁰ I used two types of interview guides. The first type was oriented toward organizations, institutions, and experts. The second type was oriented toward *motuleños* and their perception of Motul, and it comprised of two sections. The first section was meant to tease general information (e.g. age, place of birth and residence, and job description) and opinions about the changes they had seen in Motul in the last 15 years. These open-ended questions permitted the interviewee to give as much or as little information as desired and allowed me, in some cases, to ask specific questions about working hours and salary. I made appropriate follow-up questions if the interviewee had connections to a maquiladora or if an issue not included in the interview guide was raised and seemed important. Depending on the eloquence and personality of the interviewee, sometimes I allowed the interview to flow and just prompted the interviewee with short questions to keep the conversation going. If the conversation staggered at that point, I continued with the second section of the interview, which focused on asking research participants about their memories of Montgomery's inauguration and the Motul from their childhood, in addition to their perception of what makes their city modern and urban. Depending on time, context, and the degree of comfort I perceived in the interviewee, I mixed both interview guides or shortened the number of

questions. The interviewees included maquiladora workers and ex-workers, a maquiladora manager, members of the local elite (e.g. the mayor, a journalist, and business owners), *motuleños* living in Mérida, and government officials working at the municipal or state level.³¹ In addition to the qualitative methods already described, I also kept a diary, took field notes, and relied on jotted notes when the situation required it. Newspaper records from Motul (i.e. *La Voz de Motul*) and Mérida (i.e. *El Diario de Yucatán*) and photographs of Motul's everyday life and built environment (e.g. roads, houses, and buildings) serve to complement my material.

Chapter Outline

Firmly located in the city of Motul, but guided by a cross-scalar approach, *Producing Mayaland* aims to study the local unfolding of global capitalism through a postcolonial analysis of the production of space of the maquiladora industry in Yucatán. With an exploration of snapshots of the industry's spaces of representation, spatial practices, and representations of space, I attempt to elucidate the connections to coloniality of power and urbanization. Without forgetting about the everyday, I also explore the contradictions that emerge through abstract space – the logic created by the space of capitalism. Thinking with the concept of *instances of magic*, I highlight the tensions of homogenization and differentiation inherent in capitalism and attempt to unveil its attempts at creating realities where the rationality of capital rules over the everyday and the daily. Having introduced my theoretical framework and general objectives here, I address a pressing question in Chapter 2: how is a Lefebvrian analysis of the production of space that acknowledges historical difference possible? After offering a strategy to navigate Eurocentrism, I clarify my conceptualization of capitalism vis-à-vis a conversation with the coloniality of power. I then turn to a discussion of space, everyday life, and urbanization to sketch the openings within the concepts that, in my view, allow us to follow a postcolonial approach or do anticolonial work. In the chapters that follow, I guide the reader from abstractions to the level of the everyday. In Chapter 3, I begin the exploration of Mayaland through an analysis of the assets that this mythical maquiladora paradise offers: (i) geographically privileged and abundant tropics, (ii) dutiful workers, (iii) roads paved for business, (iv) no hurdles for capitalism, and (v) “good living” for investors. Relying on discourse analysis, I argue that these assets are framed in terms of New World exoticism. I then turn to analyzing the traces of

abstract space that start to emerge, hoping to capture how the maquila paradise of Mayaland exists in sharp contrast to Yucatán, the “backward south,” creating a duality. Based on an analysis of representations of maquiladora operators found in academic literature and government reports, in Chapter 4, I explore the colonial roots of the Magical Maya – the dutiful worker that can be found in Mayaland. I argue that this character is part of a myth that racializes maquila workers in a process of subject formation that occurs through *transfiguration*. My discussion also explores the Magical Maya as an embodiment of Mayaland and vis-à-vis the needs of capital. In Chapter 5, I introduce the reader to the Zone – the officially demarcated maquiladora territory – through an account of Montgomery Industries’ arrival to Motul and a description of its operations. Delving into it, I explore two different deployments of abstractions: (i) the workings of fetishism and mystification of Montgomery as a factory and (ii) the enhanced abstract space that is enabled through the factory’s special legal status as a Zone. After highlighting how the Zone has a global presence, I argue that the portrayals of Mayaland and the Magical Maya are attempts to differentiate the maquiladoras in Yucatán within the vast Zone landscape and conclude that, despite its ethnic and exotic twist, the Zone-as-Mayaland is actually generic in the world of capital. Its existence displays nothing more than homogenous difference. Chapter 6 exposes the *maquila leftovers* – the remains and effects of the maquiladora on the surroundings – through an analysis of spatial practices, environmental degradation, hidden circuits of capital, and imaginaries that refuse to disappear. I argue that these leftovers are invisible because of abstract space’s intrinsic fetishism and capital’s power of common-sense-making (a force that can be deployed, for example, via policy instruments that subscribe to *capitalism qua development*). However, representations of space can also render the maquila leftovers visible when it suits capital. This creates a context where remnants help produce more abstract space, sometimes in a cyclical manner. I end the chapter with a reflection on the practice of colonization vis-à-vis abstract space and the power of the state. In Chapter 7, I then turn to a second manifestation of invisibility – one that is created by Eurocentrism and a provincial practice of urban studies – to reflect what it means to theorize the urban from a peripheral location and broadly analyze how urbanization is understood in Yucatán. Hoping to finish unveiling abstract space by showcasing the way spatial practices and representations of space permeate the everyday, in Chapter 8, I present snapshots of how it is to live with the maquila through snippets of the life stories of four maquiladora workers and ex-workers. I explore the interplay between everyday life and

colonization thinking through their stories and provide an overview of how life changed in Motul since the maquiladora arrived. In order to not ignore the possibilities embedded in everyday life, I also attempt to capture potentialities by analyzing examples of minimal difference and highlighting their importance in relation to differential space. The chapter ends with a reflection on an alternative outside capitalism qua development. In the conclusion, I collect and summarize the main instances of magic to offer the reader a panorama of how colonial legacies, urbanization, and global capitalism unfolded in the land of the Magical Maya.

Notes

- 1 Do not confuse with the Yucatán peninsula, which comprises the states of Campeche, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo. For a hydrological, geological, and sociological description of *cenotes* in the Yucatan peninsula, see Melo Zurita (2012).
- 2 In Yucatán, a *comisaría* is a village or settlement that is under the jurisdiction of a municipality, where the seat of local government is located. Motul is the main settlement in the municipality of Motul.
- 3 The name of the factory has been changed.
- 4 Yucatán's history of transition from agriculture to maquiladoras through a boom-to-bust trajectory is not unique either. Just like maquiladoras became the biggest job creators in the state after the collapse of henequen, maquiladoras played a similar role in Torreón, the north of Mexico, after the region's cotton production crumbled (Bair and Werner 2011). A similar story can be found in the Dominican Republic after the demise of the country's sugar industry (Werner 2011).
- 5 Reports from the World Bank classify maquiladoras sometimes as an EPZ and other times as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Following the International Labour Organization (ILO) (see ILO n.d.) and the work of Xiangming Chen (in Easterling 2012), I categorize maquiladoras as an EPZ.
- 6 See Singa Boyenge (2007) or The World Bank (2008) for a review and discussion of different Zone types.
- 7 Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) was a popular economic model in Latin America implemented between the 1930s and 1980s. It sought to foster national industries through subsidies or tariff protections (Harvey 2005; Tafunell 2007). In contrast, Structural Adjustments reforms included liberalizing trade, privatizing state companies, increasing labor flexibility, and privatizing *ejidos*, among others (Harvey 2005; Portes and Roberts 2005; Spener et al. 2002). For an overview of the history of neoliberalism in Mexico, see Ávila (2006).
- 8 Critics called it the "the *maquilization* of Mexico" (Bair and Gereffi 2001). For an analysis of the 1990s maquiladora boom in Mexico, see Bair (2002) or Dussel Peters (2003).

- 9 Henequen fiber is sometimes referred to as sisal. However, according to Wells (2006), this is incorrect. The confusion might arise because Sisal is the port from which henequen fiber was shipped in the nineteenth century (before the construction of Progreso). While both plants are endemic to the Yucatan peninsula, henequen (*Agave fourcroydes*) is different from sisal (*Agave sisalana*).
- 10 According to Moseley and Delpar (2008, p. 28), the *casta divina* (divine caste) was a “group of thirty to forty families of planters and their banker-merchant cousins and allies. Below them were some three hundred families who owned small or medium-size estates.” Also, see Wells (1982) for a historical review. For a description of the harsh henequen labor conditions in haciendas and a nuanced discussion on whether the term “slave-like” is appropriate, see Evans (2007) or Mattiace and Nonnenmacher (2014).
- 11 With the exception of the maquiladoras located in Motul, all factory names are real.
- 12 For an overview of the henequen agro-industry, see Baños Ramírez (2010).
- 13 The mixing of Lefebvrian and postcolonial approaches, of course, entails tension, but these frictions can be productive as long as they are addressed. See Chapter 2.
- 14 The classic works from postcolonial studies are helpful; however, as a theoretical toolkit, the concepts cannot simply be applied to Latin America without any sort of reflection. In some cases, using concepts from the field of coloniality is more fruitful. For example, the path to decolonization is different in places that experienced administrative colonialism, like India, or settler colonialism, like Australia and the United States (McLeod 2010). Places that experienced *mestizaje* (racial and cultural mixture), like Mexico, require other theoretical lenses to understand colonial scripts and legacies (Pratt 2008a).
- 15 Interventions within the planetary urbanization debate include Davidson and Iveson (2015), Shaw (2015a), Walker (2015) in *City*, and Shaw (2015b) in *Planning Theory & Practice*. There is also a special issue published in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* titled “Placing planetary urbanization in other fields of vision” (Peake et al. 2018). Recent contributions in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* include Simone (2020) and Streule et al. (2020) in Volume 44 and a symposium (Oswin and Pratt 2021), article (Vegliò 2021), and intervention (Angelo and Goh 2021) in Volume 45. See Chapters 2 and 7 for a discussion of planetary urbanization.
- 16 Also, see Harvey’s (2014b) intervention *Cities or Urbanization?*
- 17 I follow Santos (2011) and Werner (2016) in my understanding of the global North and global South. Reminiscent of Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff’s (2012 in Roy 2016a) argument that the South is a “*relation*, not a thing in and of itself,” both Santos and Werner argue the global North and global South do not presume a fixed geography. Rather, both concepts are an exploration of the relational and on-going construction of North–South divides as we witness the acceleration of uneven development and the fractured sociospatial divisions that are constructed through this

process (Werner 2016). According to Santos (2011, p. 35, my translation), the global South is a “metaphor for human suffering caused by capitalism and coloniality at the global level and the resistance to overcome or minimize it.” Even though a great majority of the global South lives in the Southern hemisphere, with a relational conceptualization, we can also reflect on the existence of a South within the global North and an Imperial South within the global South (cf. Santos 2011).

- 18 It is not within the scope of this study to analyze, in detail, the role of the state vis-à-vis the production of space or colonial legacies. For readers interested in this link within a Latin American postcolonial context, sources of inspiration in the English language that also operationalize understandings of magic include Taussig’s (1997) *The Magic of the State* and Fernando Coronil (1997)’s *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*.
- 19 For a critique of magical realism within literary analysis, see, for example, el *Manifiesto del Crack* (the Crack Manifesto) formulated by the writers Ricardo Chavez Castañeda, Ignacio Padilla, Pedro Angel Palou, Eloy Urroz, and Jorge Volpi. See Redondo-Olmedilla (2016) for an overview.
- 20 Spanish for Indian. The word was used when Christopher Columbus discovered America and thought he had reached the Far East, the West Indies (Rabasa 1993). The term was a racial category during the colonial period in Mexico. According to Ramón Gutiérrez (2009, p. 177), “Inventing Indians was to serve an important imperial end for Spain, for by calling the natives *indios*, the Spaniards erased and leveled the diverse and complex indigenous political and religious hierarchies they found. Where once there had been native lords, warriors, craftsmen, hunters, and farmers, the power of the conquering Spanish armies was not only to vanquish but to define, reducing such peoples as the mighty Aztecs to a monolithic defeated Indian class that bore the pain of subjugation as racialized subjects.” *Indio* is now a derogatory word in the Mexican context, and the correct term is *indígena*. However, I use the word *indio* to highlight the colonial scripts and racialized policies that continue to exist in modern-day Mexico (cf. Saldivar 2014).
- 21 Lefebvre developed his three-dimensional dialectic in conversation with Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. The common Hegelian or Marxian dialectic only contains two movements (thesis and antithesis) and a synthesis where the contradiction ends, sublates, and gets solved. However, Lefebvre disagreed with this view. He believed the “resolution” of the thesis and antithesis does not end but transforms itself into a higher level. The resolution also has within itself the seed of a new contradiction. Lefebvre also argued there was something else between the two movements (thesis and antithesis): a possibility for failure or an opening. Finally, Lefebvre’s dialectics dictated the contradictions arising could not end or get resolved in a synthesis as space is always being produced and reproduced (Merrifield 2006; Schmid 2008). The moments Lefebvre proposed reflect the contradictions and interconnections he saw in social reality: material social practice via his engagement with Marx, language and thought from his understanding of Hegel, and the creative, poetic act from his readings of Nietzsche.

Lefebvre's second source of theory comes from French phenomenology, which also served as a frame of reference to establish the two-fold nature of the triad (Schmid 2008).

- 22 Following Schmid (2008), I use "spaces of representation" instead of the term "representational spaces" used by the translator Donald Nicholson-Smith in *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre 1991).
- 23 According to Lefebvre (1991, p. 42), the affective core of lived space consists of and speaks through "ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house" or "square, church, graveyard." However, Lefebvre cautions, not all lived experience can be theoretically analyzed. There will always be a residue that can only be expressed through art, poetry, or photography (Harvey 2006; Schmid 2008).
- 24 I am aware of space's fluidity and that I become an actor in the production of space. My researcher's gaze has created glimpses of Yucatán – a patchwork, a collage of fragments. I have attempted to provide a nuanced, generous, and empathic account and analysis of "the field" being aware that an academic product is shaped by the research's personal history, the research participants, and a presumed audience (cf. Farahani 2010; Mullings 1999). Haraway (1988) raises two important points that I kept in mind while doing fieldwork: the crucial role of being aware of "situated knowledges" and being responsible with "the power to see." My vision and legitimacy to see come from my conformity with two systems: one in Mexico, my homeland, and one in Sweden, my adoptive country. In Mexico, I am part of a racial hierarchical system that continues to oppress indigenous cultures, exclude them, and force them to assimilate to the hegemonic Spanish-speaking mestizo nation (cf. Moreno Figueroa 2010; Saldívar 2014). As I am a light-brown-skinned mestiza, a degree of advantage, expressed through my body, was implicit during fieldwork within the hierarchy of skin color and phenotype that exists in Mexico, even if I grew up in a low-middle income family (cf. Flores and Telles 2012). In Sweden, I become an active participant of the global North's accumulation by dispossession of the global South by living and consuming in this society while hypocritically researching and criticizing that same system. The systemic violence within the process of accumulation carried out by the global North by dispossessing the South needs to exist in order for the comfortable life of the global North to exist (cf. Žižek 2009). Of course, my vision and legitimacy to see come with some limitations because of my gender and race/ethnicity, but as an official member of academia, I am still allowed to make knowledge claims. Thinking with Haraway (1988) and Grosfoguel (2016), my power to see was crafted with the blood of the people below me in the socio-economical and racial hierarchy. To avoid doing research from viewpoints of "the cyclopean, self-satiated eye of the master subject," the researcher needs to avoid the "serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions" (Haraway 1988). Thus, my "Mexicanness" does not make me an expert when researching Mexico. As Farahani (2010, p. 121) argues, "an insider does not – simply because she shares some cultural, linguistic, and historical background – have access to everyone and is not entitled to

- (re)present the voice of the whole community.” I was careful to follow these feminist reflections during the different stages of the research project.
- 25 The industrial parks that I visited were *Parque Industrial Yucatán* (formerly known as *Parque de Industrias No Contaminantes*, Park for Non-Polluting Industries), BODEYUC, *Parque Industrial Umán*, and *Parque Industrial Motul*.
 - 26 The interviewed academics were from *Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán* (UADY). Two belonged to the Economy Faculty and were members of the research group Economic Reorientation of Yucatán. They were interviewed independently. The third interview was with a sociologist and a research assistant, a local historian. Both are experts in Yucatecan maquiladoras. In regard to the government officials, one was the Director of Investment Promotion at the Economic Promotion Secretariat (SEFOE). The fifth interview was with the Director of Sustainable Urban Development, Territorial Planning and Built Heritage, and the Head of Integral Sustainable Urban Management at the Urban Development and Environment Secretariat (SEDUMA). I took notes since the interviews were not recorded.
 - 27 The articles analyzed are Albornoz-Mendoza and Ortiz Pech (2000), Becerril et al. (2012), Biles (2004), Canto Sáenz and Cruz Pacheco (2004), Castilla R. and Torres G. (2000), Castilla Ramos and García Quintanilla (2006), Castilla Ramos and Torres Góngora (2007), García de Fuentes and Pérez Medina (1996), Gravel (2006), Navarrete (2008), Ramírez (1994), Rivas F. (1985), and Zarate-Hoyos and Albornoz Medina (1999). The list of books or book chapters consists of Canto Sáenz (2001), Castilla Ramos (2004), Mendoza Fernández (2008), and Morales et al. (2000). In terms of state development plans, the documents that are part of the study are Alpuche Pinzón (1982), COESPY (2013), Gobierno del Estado (2007), and Gobierno del Estado de Yucatán (1983, 1996, 2001). Two *informes* (Cervera Pacheco 1987; Gobierno del Estado de Yucatán 2000), both from the administration of the powerful governor Víctor Cervera Pacheco, were analyzed. Information was taken from websites that advertised the state’s industrial parks. The two brochures from the *Secretaría de Fomento Económico* (SEFOE – Economic Promotion Secretariat) under analysis are *Guía del inversionista* (SEFOE 2010) and *Yucatán. Tierra de negocios* (SEFOE 2011). SEFOE no longer exists and has been replaced by *Secretaría de Fomento Económico y Trabajo* (SEFOET).
 - 28 I received a grant from the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography (SSAG) to carry out my second fieldwork period.
 - 29 Access or entry to the “field” is gained through “some combination of strategic planning, hard work and dumb luck” according to Van Maanen and Kolb (1985 in Bryman 2008, p. 405). Meeting the person who became gatekeeper was a combination of luck and asking around my network in Mexico. However, during the fieldwork, I used strategies that I thought would increase my chances of being accepted among the people I met. For example, following the advice of Harrington (2003), I adjusted myself to “fit in’ in a manner instrumental to gathering data” by performing the role of a respectable middle-class woman according to the gender and social

norms in place. In contrast to Werner (2016, p. 26), who reports that her “gender and youth often circumscribed the depth and quality of information” shared by the mostly “male business elites” working within Free Trade Zones in the Caribbean, my gender and perceived “youth” turned out to be an asset in Yucatán. Research participants positioned me as a student in her early twenties (despite the fact that I was thirty). This meant that I was either harmless or a prey within the hetero-patriarchal system in place. Being harmless meant that sensitive information could be shared with me since I was a mere female and young student with no sinister intentions, simply working on her doctoral dissertation, which gave rise to some males wanting to help me in a fatherly way. I played along the role of being a harmless female (e.g. I did not disclose I had previous work experience visiting and assessing maquiladoras’ compliance with corporate codes of conduct) to not insult their “generosity.” This, ultimately, played out to my research advantage. See Mazzei and O’Brien’s (2009) feminist discussion of “deploying gender” in the field (e.g. not challenging the gender script of a “young woman in distress and in need”). There were other power relations at play as well. I am aware that the two women that became key informants only began to help me because the gatekeeper, their boss, had asked them to “give me a hand.” Perhaps at some point they continued to be research participants because it was their choice and there was a sense of friendship. However, I cannot disregard that the way we began our interaction was a power issue – a polite order from a superior – and that I benefited more from our interaction than they did.

- 30 Some interviews were not recorded because the circumstances did not allow me to take out my recorder (e.g. the interviewee started to talk right away and I did not wish to interrupt the flow of the conversation). In the case of the interviews that were not recorded, I took notes during the conversation and wrote down or recorded my impressions as quickly as it was possible (usually at the end of the day).
- 31 At the state level, the interviewees were representatives from the Institute for the Development of Mayan Culture in the state of Yucatán (INDEMAYA). At the municipal level, the interviewees worked at the Department of Public Services and Urban Image (*Dirección de Servicios Públicos Municipales e Imagen Urbana*), the Rural Development Department (*Dirección de Desarrollo Rural*), the Economic Development Department (*Departamento de Fomento Económico*), and the Tourism Department (*Departamento de Turismo*).