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Matilde Córdoba Azcárate ^a

^a Department of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology, University Complutense of Madrid, Spain

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Between Local and Global, Discourses and Practices: Rethinking Ecotourism Development in Celestún (Yucatán, México)

Matilde Córdoba Azcárate

Department of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology, University Complutense of Madrid, Spain

This paper proposes a new way of looking at development theory. Its specific aim is to problematise post-development theories by thinking through an ecotourist development strategy put into practice in the Biosphere Reserve Ría Celestún (Yucatán, Mexico). Post-development studies have tended to rely on a narrow theoretical perspective in which development is understood as a global discourse resisted by local Others. A focus on discourse has abstracted the lived and conflictual experiences of development ethnographies. This article claims that moving between the study of discourses and the study of practices, 'complex mobile connections' and 'multi-sited global ethnographies', furthers considerably our understanding of development. This attention to both discourses and practices may enable new ways of thinking about how development is empirically, locally and materially performed. The complex practices through which Celestún is performed as an ecotourist destination, as a place undergoing development, and as a fishing community provides empirical evidence for the main theoretical points explored in the article.

Keywords: Celestún, discourses, ecotourism, practices, post-development

Introduction¹

Post-development theory is under scrutiny. Its influence has permeated underdeveloped spaces, cultures and people to the extent that it appears difficult to move in a definitive way beyond its postulates. This paper is an attempt to upset the dominance of post-development theory. I wish to overcome the stagnation of the theoretical field of development by embracing a new theoretical and methodological proposal to rethink the *underdeveloped Other*. To this end, I examine – empirically, locally and materially – the ecotourist development strategy put into practice in the Biosphere Reserve Ría Celestún (Yucatán, Mexico).

In my first section 'Navigating the post-development era' some of the problematic premises of post-development thinking regarding the conceptualisation of both development and the anthropological Other are outlined. The reliance of post-development paradigm upon discourse analysis, distal thinking and pristine Others has driven the field of development studies to a cul-de-sac. In it, development is theorised prior to any encounter and the Other is imagined in a reductionist, paradoxical and problematic manner. The section 'A move towards practices' aims to challenge post-development's

deficits by engaging with a performative and non-representational way of thinking Celestún, its Biosphere Reserve and the implementation of ecotourism there as a development strategy.

Deeply informed by authors as Latour (1993, 1999, 2004), Law (1994, 1999, 2002), Pickering (1992, 2002), Sheller and Urry (2004, 2006), I demonstrate that thinking through practices can further our understanding of how development works in a situated scenario. Rather than apprehend the way development works beforehand, I explore empirically the risks implied in playing with ecotourism as a developmental tool in Celestún by following different agents in their practices.

The last section '(Dis)connecting sites and agents', shows Celestún not as a homogeneous community suffering the imposition of a hegemonic development discourse through an ecotourist strategy as post-development would picture it. Instead, Celestún appears as a tripartite locus brought into being sometimes as a place undergoing development, sometimes as an ecotourist consolidated destination and sometimes as a complex fishing community. Following the connections and disconnections among words, animal species, different kinds of tourists, fishers, and power networks it will be clear how Celestún is unfolded as a complex gathering 'to play and in play' (Sheller & Urry, 2004) at different times and for different purposes. It will be empirically shown then, how by following heterogeneous agents in their practices, Celestún is brought into being in multiple ways. This way of approaching development allows the researcher to better understand and plan ecotourism as a development strategy for the port of Celestún. It identifies crucial agents which have been hidden by post-development rhetoric of global discursive impositions and local resistances.

Navigating the Post-Development Era

Mostly identified with the works of Escobar (1995), Rahnema and Bawtree (1997) and Sachs (1992),² the post-development paradigm was born in the 1990s as a radical reaction to the dilemmas of development and to the ways in which it had been theoretically addressed. To quote Nederveen Pieterse (1998: 360) 'perplexity and extreme dissatisfaction with business-as-usual and standard development are keynotes of this perspective'.

Post-development studies are concerned with development institutions, their discourses and generative practices. For the first time, development is singled out as an object of study and academic scrutiny in its own right and not, as it had been considered until then, as a necessary and unquestioned stage every society was supposed to undergo.

Against the postulates of modernisation, dependency theory and the human development turn, post-development paradigm understands development as a Western hegemonic regime of representation (Escobar, 1995; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997; Rist, 1997; Sachs, 1992). Appropriating the colonialist move as exposed by authors like Bhabha (1994) or Mohanty (1985), development is more accurately conceptualised as a Western process of conquering, mastering and ruling the Other through discursive procedures. According to post-development writers, during the 1990s development became the major and

ultimate standard by which the West measures non-Westerners and by which difference is disciplined and rendered manageable. Other minds (Rahnema Bawtree's (1997) 'mental colonisation'), their realities (Escobar (1995, 1998) 'colonisation procedures'), Other possible stories (Esteva's (1999) 'colonising anti-colonialism') become disciplined and ordered wherever and whenever development is at work. In other words, for post-development authors development is colonisation by other means. Development discourse, as Escobar (1995: 9) asserts, 'is governed by the same principles (as colonisation), it has created an extremely efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about, and the exercise of power over, the Third World (...) a *space for subject peoples* that ensures certain control over it'.

From this viewpoint, development discourse, as it is articulated through development projects, inevitably entails the perpetuation and the expansion of global inequalities and the disqualification of all 'non-western knowledge systems' (Everett, 1997: 137). The latter, post-development paradigm states are portrayed by major development texts and agendas as 'in need of development'. As a consequence of this portrayal, these other non-Western spaces and peoples become infantilised and discursively represented in terms of their 'lack of' knowledge, science, progress, education, environmental awareness, etc. Local knowledge systems as Hobart (1993: 2) puts it, 'have been systematically linked with the production of regimes of ignorance and at various times (...) the peoples of much of the world have been portrayed as savage, decadent or merely pagan and unenlightened (...) static, passive and incapable of progress'. For post-development thinkers this representation of the Other is necessarily fraudulent and deceitful. Furthermore, it is fully produced through discursive procedures against which the Other (geographically located in non-Western scenarios) counter-acts, talks back and fights against. Only by refusing to talk in the terms set by the development language it is possible, post-development writers affirm, to listen and to valorise these (silenced) other worldviews *in* and *by* themselves (see Shiva, 1989). Because 'development stinks' (Esteva, 1985: 78) it is time to search for alternatives in those other non-Western scenarios silenced and oppressed by the 'Frankenstein-type dream development is' (Escobar, 1992: 419).

Informed by these post-development assumptions, development ethnographies have been concerned with how this representational game is put into practice by the development's machinery.³ By considering discourse itself as the main global agent whose 'uniformity stretches across both time and space' (Everett, 1997: 2), to conduct post-development ethnographies has been the hunting of vicarious, counter-practices, (pre)supposed to be locally at work. Beautiful discursive analyses have been undertaken to unmask powerful metaphors, deceitful representations and their local resistances. However, none of these works seem to have noticed that post-development writers have betrayed themselves by falling into the same representational subtleties they have been trying to deconstruct. The idea of an Other that is different from the one development institutions draw but still fully accountable, as well as the conceptualisation of development as the automatic and sleek translation of fraudulent discursive representations into a set of resistances to be found at the spaces of the Other (see e.g. Escobar, 1998; Rahnema & Bawtree,

1997; Shiva, 1989) rest in several problematic epistemological premises. Here, I will analyse four of the most controversial ones.

First, what I will call the premise of over-performativity. Development is theorised as a powerful, normative and unquestioned discursive unidirectional cause that, once written and enunciated, automatically generates a series of concatenated practical effects. These effects are systematically conceptualised as resistances that spring automatically as reactions to discursive impositions. Abracadabra! And objects, communities, collectives to be developed are created and subjected to control, doubly localised (in discourse and in reality). This theorisation of discourse leads post-development authors to what Bourdieu (1990) denominated the 'scholastic fallacy', that is, the belief that a change in the order of discourse immediately brings a change in the order of reality. Trapped in this fallacy, post-development writers state that what is needed in order to overcome the fraudulent and oppressive discursive representations of the Other, is a process of deconstructing false representations to be able to reconstruct the real ones.

Second, behind the infantilised Other development discourses represent, post-development theory assumes the existence of a pristine real Other that remains choked as if the last layer of a millefeuille. I will call this the premise of the pristine Other. This 'real Other' is thought of as existing already there, paradoxically outside discursive formations, waiting to speak its otherness, waiting to emerge. This real Other post-development arguments count on, is conceptualised as existing in itself in self-contained and closed traditional loci where endogenous alternatives (uncritically thought of as good in themselves) are to be found.⁴ These endogenous alternatives are implicitly equated in post-development theory with the pure and the authentic, with the original and the local (e.g. Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 361). In this way, post-development writers end up creating and romanticising their real a-discursive Other while proclaiming themselves as their only legitimated spokespersons. That is, they unmask representations while creating others: another Other, the real one. This romantic imagination of the Other, as Spivak (1999: 408 quoted in Kapoor: 2004: 637) asserts, is directly linked to the politics of representation in which 'denying subaltern's subordination, in effect, reinforces their subalternity (...) as being made to unspeak is also a species of silencing'.

Third, it is crucial to observe post-development reliance upon the premise of distal thinking. A distal way of thinking the *Other*, as Hetherington (2002: 3) puts it, is a way of thinking mainly concerned with 'an ontology of being in which the "thing" being known is assumed to be in a stable and finished state and thereby amenable to representation for a subject that is able to independently focus on it'. For post-development thinking, the West, incarnated in development institutions, appears as the knowing subject capable of constituting the Third World as that kind of fixed, stable and finished totality to be acted upon. What is more, the West and the Third World continually appear in post-development lexicon as global and local substances or essences. Hence, the global and the local become (re)presented sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, as the two Euclidean poles of attention, both rendered approachable from a romantic look that presupposes the global acting fiercely (colonising, penetrating, annihilating) into the local (the theorised space *in* which the *Other* is

intensely fighting against the development colonisation). Development ethnographic accounts are still conceptualised in post-development informed approaches as the capture of 'refractions generated by the intersection of global/local processes (...) in which actors re-position themselves vis-à-vis various intervening parties (...) and alternative visions of the world' (Arce & Long, 2000: 27).

And fourth, post-development leads us to the homogenisation of development and to call for the end of the anthropology of development. Monolithic and static, development is thought of as landing equally and smoothly as a 'poisonous gift' (Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997; Rist, 1997) in every underdeveloped space. Development, in the post-development agenda, becomes nothing but an instrument serving the 'westernisation of the world' (Escobar, 1995; Sachs, 1992). By deciphering and decoding the *Other's* culture to development agencies, the development anthropologist, they argue, paves the way for the colonisation machinery. As a consequence, some of them affirm, no anthropological fieldwork in the name of development should be carried out (Grillo & Stirrat, 1997). Although this extreme position has been nuanced by post-development major internal critics (e.g. Arce & Long, 2000) its main consequences are nevertheless still haunting applied studies where development is often condemned to discourse analysis, the researcher to a deconstructivist task and the world, as Burawoy (2001) maintains, to a balkanised existence.

In my view, the reliance of post-development informed approaches on the aforementioned premises has severely restricted the understanding of *how* development works in practice. It overshadows the practice and play of place by over focusing the attention on discourses. What is more, the analysis of development in practice becomes reduced to a summary of expected counter-practices to be found at the ethnographic field, that space of the Other.

In the next section I assert that by paying attention to performative practices, 'complex mobile connections' (Urry, 2000, 2002) and 'multi/sited global ethnographies' (Burawoy, 2000, 2001; Gille, 2001; Marcus, 1995) it is possible to see how certain realities are made (i.e. Celestún as an ecotourist destination) and how different kinds of enactments of such realities interfere with one another in practice. Rather than theorise development as post-development paradigm does, prior to any encounter, and rather than conceive local practices as counter-actions automatically responding to a previous discursive stimulus, the emphasis is placed now on the relational practices and discourses that bring forward certain realities at a given moment, in a particular location and due to the performances of heterogeneous human and non-human agents. By considering the modes and moments in which ideas of space and otherness are materially produced and regulated as well as locally and relationally maintained (Law & Urry, 2003) we gain insight, without any doubt, in how Celestún is constituted as an ecotourist destination, as a fishing port and as a place undergoing development.

A Move Towards Practices, 'Complex Mobile Connections' and 'Multi/sited Global Ethnographies'

To open this section, there is an image I want to recall. Oxymoronically, the image is a motionless one but it is made up of pure movement. Speeds,

vibrations, textures, words, smells and noises are part of it. In the image there is a man inside a tiny and quite isolated *tendejón*.⁵ The *tendejón* is located right in the middle of Celestún's main avenue, between the estuary, which indicates the entrance to the Biosphere Reserve of Ría Celestún, and the beach. The man rests arm-crossed over the counter. His eyes are fixed in the avenue. Tourist buses pass by, two, three or even four together. They are packed and they move quickly, rhythmically and silently. Rented tourist cars pass by. National and international car plates can be observed. Couples inside, they go slowly trying to find evidence of being already in Celestún. Uniformed schoolchildren walking to and fro school pass by; they go in groups, filling the avenue with human noise. You catch bits of conversations, laughs, shouts, intervals of silence and laughs again. It is very hot and they sweat. Researchers and authorities in their 'labelled' cars and vans pass by. We are left with flashes of several institutions working in the area: Pronatura, Semarnat, Cinvestav, Dumac, Segarpa, Jica – glimpses of Mexico DF, Merida, Washington, Japan. Lots of old local battered cars packed with people pass by. They are commuter workers during the week, whole extended families during the weekend. Car noise, car smoke, human density, regional diversity. Bicycles pass by too. They go at different speeds, with different numbers of people on them, with different purposes: filling a tank of oil for the tourist boat rides to admire the pink flamingo at the estuary, transporting local crafts, going to the church or to the market in the main square. Fishermen walking with their carts and nets pass by. Silence, weight, fatigue and fishy smells are left behind. At intervals there are no passers-by at all; the avenue remains desolated, the *tendejón* seems to be disconnected from the village, from the world. Only the strong smell of the close by deserted saline remains intact; the heat.

The *tendejón*, along with the area wherein it is located, do not appear in official maps. It is not amenable to official representations of the port and thus it is not officially silenced according to a post-development interpretation. Officially, the *tendejón* stands in a lagoon and in lagoons there are no commercial establishments to be found. Walking there, one can nevertheless appreciate that the lagoon is no more a lagoon but a rubbish covered area in which lots of paper houses have been built. Statistically and discursively, the people inhabiting the houses are nonexistent and so are their movements, illnesses or the strong smells and varying water levels surrounding the area. In official discourses and statistics, no paper houses, illnesses or bad smells are to be encountered, much less photographed or remembered. Needless to say, no trace of this reality would be ever found in tourist promotional brochures. According to these documents (texts and images) Celestún is just an underdeveloped place re-converted into a successful ecotourist resort, into a Biosphere Reserve. And it must continue to be so.

Taking the *tendejón* as a starting point and following the various elements that compose its daily reality (vehicles, labels, people), conventional ideas of the ethnographic field and the post-development imagination of a romanticised closed Otherness become blurred and problematised. From this point of view, the *tendejón* stands as a knot whose assemblage, to paraphrase Pickering (2002), is better approached 'if paying attention to the performances and dances of human and non-human agencies'. To put it differently, if we are to understand

how Celestún is considered, referred to and maintained as a place undergoing development through an ecotourist strategy, we need to follow the relations among the man in the stand, the tourists, the fishermen, their stories, the buses, the cars, the bicycles, the road, the smells, the noises, the fishing tools, the labels and of course, development discursive representations.

The look I am advocating implies to work with a non-representational mode of thinking the Other, in this case the Biosphere Reserve Ría Celestún. It implies a way of thinking Celestún in which we do not try to see it as an already given reality amenable to representation, but one in which we see how this reality emerges. The trick, as Pickering (1992: 415–418) asserts, is to conceive of ‘the material, the social, the conceptual, (as) continually tuned and retuned in the struggle of fields of agency’. From this standpoint, development comes to be studied as the product of several materialisations, translations and displacements (Latour, 1999) in which discourses or words are not the only agents. To approach development in this way is to recognise that we are dealing with a chorus of movements instead of almighty discursive impositions. It is as well to assume that we are dealing with processes of making objects that cohere (Law, 2002: 3), such as an underdeveloped Celestún or an ecotourist privileged site. What is more, it is to acknowledge that ‘notwithstanding the dreams of dictators and normative sociologists, there is no such a thing as “the social order” with a single centre, or a single set of stable relations. Rather, there are orders, in the plural’ (Law, 2000). Places (like Celestún) are not finite entities as post-development would draw them or pieces in a broader mosaic as in the ‘westernisation of the world’ picture. Rather, places are ‘emergent from the hybrid and uncertain performances in which subjects and objects “dance” together in ordinary and familiar ways’ (Hetherington, 2002: 6). In this framework the anthropological task is transformed, since the objective is not to unmask a homogeneous discourse but, to paraphrase Latour (2004: 246), ‘to detect how many participants are gathered in a thing to make it exist and to maintain its existence’. That is, the relevant questions are now: what is needed for Celestún to stand as an underdeveloped place *and* as an ecotourist favourite destination?

An engagement with practices and not only with absolutist discourses sets the rules of the game. Such an engagement liberates us from the rigidity of imagining substantialised or essentialised entities (such as global discourses or local underdeveloped Others) inviting us to conceive them as dynamic and fluid realities that become materialised as well as stabilised through specific localised practices. These practices do not take place within pre-established frameworks; rather, they perform these frameworks. In other words, they are not practices that are framed in pre-assigned locales (global or local) but they are those framing practices that produce these locales. From this stand point, there are not global or local fixed co-ordinates, no global/local metaphor, but rather a set of ‘complex mobile connections’ (Urry, 2000, 2002) ‘more or less intense, more or less social, more or less “networked” and more or less “at a distance”’ (Dicken *et al.*, 2001: 102–04 quoted in Urry, 2002). The study of development through the study of the ‘connections, disconnections and reconnections’ (Burawoy, 2001: 156) of chains of words, sites, objects, imaginaries, species, smells or sounds also requires, methodologically speaking, a

commitment to a multi-sited global ethnography (Burawoy, 2000, 2001; Gille, 2001; Marcus, 1995). Applied to the development field, this multi-sited sensibility enables us to escape from 'single-sites *mise-en-scene* ethnographic research' (Marcus, 1995: 99) as well as from post-development celebrated cartographies of struggle to favour multiple sites of observation and participation. Furthermore, when arriving at the space of the Other, at the anthropological field, and when being surrounded by multiple ways of performing this otherness, one can neither hold essentialised conceptions (about the field or the Other) nor well-defined and unique research positions (either in or out the field). A global issue such as 'development through alternative tourism' becomes a proper object of ethnographic study because it is inseparable of the located re/dis/connections (Burawoy, 2001) that form it: sometimes displacing it, sometimes diverting it.

Looking at local practices it is possible to see how Celestún is being brought forward not by a global discourse implemented locally but through the specific practices and discourses of different and heterogeneous groups that shape and translate the big narrative (development through ecotourism in the port) into a series of complex and different performances of the same place: sometimes as an ecotourist paradise, but at the same time as an alternative destination to the Caribbean as a family Sunday-break site, as a fishing port and as place undergoing mainstream development. Impossible to be reduced to any of these actualisations, Celestún becomes the continuous interaction among them. In a word, the proposed look enables us to best address the ecotourist development strategy as it is implemented *in practice* in Celestún. Ecotourism thus understood, does not appear as a vehicle for the imposition of a homogeneous Western discourse but as an 'imbroglio' (Latour, 1993) composed of words, indeed, *and* statistics, graphics, photographs, technologies, smells or passers-by as the image of the *tendejón* gathers together. Their relationships, in all their concomitant variations bring this place into being as a connected/disconnected site convolutedly and heterogeneously performed. Approaching in this way how development works in practice, it is crucial to detect and follow those different agents that produce and sustain Celestún as a complex gathering of mobile connections. The *tendejón* stands as the starting point to follow and trace the practices of some of these agents in the next section.

(Dis)connecting Sites and Agents at the Biosphere Reserve Ría Celestún

Hardly any ecotourists have ever walked or cycled to the area wherein the *tendejón* and the paper houses are placed. *Ecotourists* only pass by this area in big glossy and air conditioned buses or rented cars moving along the main avenue. They pass quickly performing a highly patterned 'ecotourist Celestún' organised in a pendular movement from the estuary, where they stop to admire the pink flamingo in organised boat rides, and to the beach, where they enjoy eating fish at restaurants in front of the sea. This itinerary through which ecotourists perform Celestún is widely corroborated when touring virtually Celestún on the web or when addressing it from ecotourists' experiences, guidebooks and promotional brochures. In the latter

we continually read: 'the principal attraction of the place is the pink flamingo and boat rides to admire this spectacular species are available by local guides after which you can enjoy eating wonderful fish dishes at the restaurants from the beach' (Yucatán Today, Celestún, February 2004). These eco-packaged tourists bypass the Celestún in which the *tendejón* is located. Celestún, in these practices, is centred upon its being a Biosphere Reserve. Formally declared in the year 2000, the Biosphere Reserve Ría Celestún (BRRC) is located in the northwest side of the Yucatán Peninsula and, along with El Palmar State Reserve and the Biosphere Reserve of Los Petenes, it is part of the World Wildlife Fund 'Ecorregion number 50' – a top marine protected area containing one of the world best-preserved coastal wetlands. The BRRC covers an area of 81,482,33 protected hectares and it is home of a spectacular biodiversity said to be (Batllori, 1986) of macrocosmic ecological importance.⁶ This rich biodiversity has become not only the main ecotourist attraction but the object of specific conservationist plans by international, national and regional governments and agencies as the World Wildlife Fund, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Ducks Unlimited Mexico AC (Dumac), or NGOs such as Pronatura Yucatán. It has also become the subject of special scrutiny by national and international scientific communities such as the Centre of Research and Advanced Studies (Cinvestav), Yucatán Scientific Research Centre (CICY) and the Yucatán Autonomous University (UADY). Although its declaration as a Biosphere Reserve is less than five years old, the conservationist itinerary of Ría Celestún can be traced back to 1979 when it was explicitly declared the Wildlife Refuge for the Pink Flamingo by the Mexican federal government (SEMARNAT, 2000). Since the 1980s, the BRRC is also one of the favourite ecotourist resorts in the Yucatán Peninsula attracting tourists from all over the world.

Despite of the much praised biodiversity in conservationist, academic and ecotourist discourses (projects, plans, policies, brochures) what it is interesting here is to highlight how the BRRC and the ecotourist activities implemented in the area are above all interwoven with the peculiarity and distinctiveness of the pink flamingo. Celestún was, and still is, one of the only two sites in Mexico where this exotic species nests, feeds and breeds. The flamingo's uniqueness once justified its protection, and later on, the ecotourist promotion of the port of Celestún. More interestingly, it did so within a global context marked by the 1980s and 1990s academic and political debates demanding more participative, sustainable and environmentally-driven types of development for the South – the almighty discourse post-development writers refer to. To preserve nature while developing economies and societies was the adage. Ecotourism in Celestún managed to articulate, fetishise and congeal (Sheller & Urry, 2004) the pink flamingo in various complex ways. Stylised while flying, the pink flamingo stands nowadays not only as the municipality's global face but also as one of Yucatán's most distributed marketing images. Becoming Celestún's global banner, it is not very risky to claim that since its very beginning the BRRC was coloured pink: its *raison d'être* is still today to protect, preserve and 'show' the pink flamingo. Following these tourists in their toing and froing from the BRRC to the beach, we see how Celestún has become a destination constructed through ritualised practices revolving around the pink

flamingo in conjunction with a global context that promotes development in the area through ecotourism. From these discourses and practices, globally in the web and locally once at the port, Celestún or 'the ultimate Mexican escape' (as it is specifically depicted by some tourist brochures) gets shaped in a stable manner. The estuary and the beach, the pink flamingo and the restaurant's fried fish become the 'obligatory points of passage' (Latour, 1993), the inevitable nodes articulating the pink-packaged Celestún that passes by the *tendejón* in big glossy buses.

Back in the *tendejón*, we soon notice *other* tourists passing by in national cars and battered vans. They shape an officially invisible but fully lived *other* tourism whose practices enact the underdeveloped representation of Celestún in development agendas. By following these *other tourists* in their practices and narratives, complex processes of marginalisation and effacement emerge and Celestún unfolds as something more than the 'pinkish resort' ecotourists' practices and official documents bring to life. By tracing the connection of these *other tourists* to the port, Celestún is unveiled as a historical regional holiday beach resort. These *other tourists* I am referring to, have been continually dispossessed of their traditional practices and spaces since 'pink package tourism' has been gaining prominence in Celestún and different institutions have been making profits out of this situation by raising prices, privatising areas or by co-opting clients through specific networks. In a more detailed look, this collective can be analytically divided into two different categories.⁷ On the one hand, we can find (a) the 'tourists of the beach and restaurants' and on the other hand (b) the 'tourists of the villages'.

Traditionally linked with Merida's middle-classes expelled from the Caribbean when its beaches were dramatically privatised, the 'tourists of the beach and restaurants' were connected to Celestún's beaches, fish eating practices and boat rides to admire the flamingo before any almighty discourse 'invented' the place as an ecotourist destination. Nevertheless, once the Biosphere Reserve was inaugurated, and once ecotourism was globally promoted in the port, this collective was forced to enjoy Celestún in a different way. Strangled by the oppressive prices imposed by different international institutions which take care of showing locally the flamingo while collaborating to preserve a global natural heritage site, these tourists begun to generate a whole set of alternative strategies together with local guides and birdwatchers in order to make use of the estuary (to see the pink flamingo) and the beach (to eat fresh fish). By arranging non-official boat rides and unprinted and more affordable restaurant prices, these tourists and their practices shape a less patterned and more informal Celestún; a Celestún that can be consumed regardless of its categorisation as a Biosphere Reserve and where fish can be endlessly demanded and eaten 'under the counter'.

Openly contrasting with pink packaged tourists and with the 'tourists of the beach and restaurants' by their guise and practices, the 'tourists of the villages' are an economically deprived and family-oriented tourism, which floods the municipality during specific festivities. Enjoying the beach fully dressed and always in numerous groups, they assemble family tents to spend the whole day on the beach. Since they cannot afford the high prices of the restaurants or a boat ride to admire the flamingos, these families carry their own food

and beverages on their eight-hour trips. A whole range of spontaneous and non-official local infrastructures (mini-fish and beer-selling stands along with private toilets turned into basic public services) are arranged to assist them. Loud music coming from locally-funded beer festivals at the beach as well as the lack of garbage collecting services act here as subjective and material barriers for those ecotourists who travelled to Celestún looking for a pristine nature and a relaxed atmosphere 'where birds are the only thing you would listen to' (Yucatán Today, 2004). Following the heaps of uncollected rubbish left behind by these tourists, it is possible to trace the enactment of Celestún as an underdeveloped place in need of developmental institutions that raise the environmental awareness of its population. Paradoxically enough, these tourists legitimise the existence and action of conservationist institutions in the port. The need to preserve an endangered *global* natural heritage site *locally* situated, serves here as the element through which international and national monetary resources are channelled to the port and through which new local hierarchies are, as well, getting shaped.

Although none of the three kinds of tourist collectives analysed here do normally stop at the *tendejón*, they and their different practices are an active element mobilised in the *tendejón's* owner narratives and everyday gaze. By sharing his biography and by following his stories, Celestún appears connected to other sites and processes: the henequen crisis that devastated the whole Peninsula of Yucatán during the 1970s and 1980s, or official policies such as 'La Marcha al Mar'⁸ that brought him, along with thousands more, from the interior of the peninsula to a new life on the more profitable coast. Explored in close detail, Celestún's socio-demographic structure unveils a community highly influenced by migratory processes and closely linked not only to tourism but also to fishing practices. A new configuration of the port emerges; in it, Celestún is disclosed as one of the few places where the demographic lethargy of the Peninsula reverses its negative numbers (INEGI, 2000; SEMARNAT, 2000). Unfolded in this way, Celestún appears as the second biggest village of the Yucatán coast and as its second fishing port (INEGI, 2003). This is a re-presentation that is absent from the ecotourist promotion of the port where Celestún remains depicted as a small traditional community undergoing development through ecotourism. It is a representation also absent from those development nature-centred agendas implemented in Celestún and where immigration is not deemed a relevant issue (see Cervera & Fraga, 2003).

By walking with their fishing crafts from the paper houses to the estuary, early-riser local fishers help us to disclose Celestún as a fishing village. Following these agents in their practices, Celestún is unveiled as a port closely connected to distant points such as Mérida and Japan (where they export their captures) as well as a port closely connected to villages of the interior of Yucatán (whose families move to Celestún during specific fishing periods). More importantly, by following these fishermen, the powerful and veiled patronage system⁹ dominant in Celestún gets openly disclosed offering a very different actualisation of the port. Ignored by international ecotourist promotions and by those development funds raised by NGOs and academic institutions, this patronage system is presided by an ex-fisher who has become the inevitable mediator between a community with a weak civil

society and a strong global presence. This inevitable mediator dominates the economic structure of the port owning more than half of the fishing boats of the port (and thus the main source of living for the population), the only petrol station supplying fuel to the boat rides ecotourists use to admire the pink flamingo, several restaurants and hotels and the only company that provides the port with potable water. The network deployed by this agent inevitably arbitrates the translation of every global development strategy or discourse into the local context of Celestún. And vice versa, that is, this patronage network mediates how, when and through which elements local issues become objects of global concern. In this way, it is possible to understand the intersections created by this system between global and local orders, for example, when 'eco-hotels' and restaurants in Celestún are indiscriminately built on coastal protected endemic dunes; when restaurants in the area do not respect protected species in order to meet tourists demands and when boat rides to admire the pink flamingo disturb and endanger this species (see e.g. PRONATURA, 1997) but benefit directly the patronage oil, fishing and tourist business. Had we followed a post-development theory which only registers global discourses and local resistances, the implications of this patronage system would have remained unaccountable. Back in the *tendejón*, we are now able to account for the local kids rushing on their bikes dragging tanks of oil (bought at the cacique's oil station) to feed the boat rides of global ecotourists. Following their incessant toing and froing it is how we begin to understand the practices through which the local and the global are daily woven in Celestún.

By paying attention to practices and discourses it is then possible to disclose and identify agents that play a crucial part in the consolidation of Celestún as an ecotourist destination, as an underdeveloped place and as a complex fishing port. In short, by following tourists, local people, birds, objects like rubbish or oil tanks, categories as that of the Biosphere Reserve or controversies as the one posed by the lack of environmental awareness, it has been possible to understand the importance of everyday practices through which those local and global orders in which Celestún inhabits are simultaneously performed.

Conclusion

This paper has illustrated how the commitment to the study of practices can leave behind post-development major deficits. According to post-development writers, the 'development gaze' (Escobar, 1995) was to be understood as a mimesis of the colonial gaze: a systematic gaze in its functioning and discursive in its procedures. The confidence in a representational way of thinking the *Other*, the romanticisation of non-developed spaces and peoples together with the homogenisation of development, led post-development informed writers to infantilise and reify the very *Other* they were fighting to hear while condemning the development researcher to deconstructivist endeavours and to the theorisation of development in a highly problematic frame of pre-ordained global and local stances. However, thinking through practices and discourses without emphasising one above the other, has allowed us to follow and register agents and realities that otherwise would have remained invisible. By following these agents in their complex mobile connections it

has been possible to show how Celestún is multiply and heterogeneously performed as an ecotourist destination, as an underdeveloped community and as a fishing community with a complex socio-political structure. The case of Celestún has demonstrated that, when 'local' nature becomes a 'global' issue of concern, there are more than discourses at play. Ecotourism, from this viewpoint, is no longer conceived as a one-way global developmental tool but as a set of practices to be locally and empirically studied through exhaustive ethnographic accounts.

Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Matilde Córdoba Azcárate, Department of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology, University Complutense of Madrid, Campus de Somosaguas 28223, Madrid, Spain (matile4@yahoo.es).

Notes

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2. Post-development is by no means a homogeneous corpus of knowledge. Nevertheless, the critiques outlined here are equally applicable to all post-development informed ethnographies. Other major references in the post-development trend are Ferguson (1994); Grillo (1997); Grillo and Stirrat (1997); Rist (1997) and Shiva (1989). For a more insightful account on post-development deficits see Nederveen Pieterse (1998, 2001) and Gardner and Lewis (1997).
3. See especially the works compiled in Arce and Long (2000) and Viola (1999).
4. See Escobar (1998) and Shiva (1989) for an ethnographic account of this point. For a critique see Brigg (2002).
5. *Tendejón* is a Mexican vernacular word for a small, family-oriented commercial establishment equipped with minimal infrastructures. The goods found at *tendejones* are strictly dependent on the specificities of the area wherein they are located.
6. Further exploration on this aspect can be found in Batllori (1986) and INE, SEMARNAP (1999).
7. The following depiction is based on a number of semi-directed interviews, group discussions and participant observation conducted at Celestún (February/May 2004).
8. Beset by the 1970s henequen crisis Yucatán's economic system – basically dependent upon this monocrop – completely collapsed. As a consequence, tourism and emigration to coastal areas were promoted as economic alternatives for a dispossessed population. *La Marcha al Mar* ('The way to the sea') refers to a governmental programme set in the area to redirect people to coastal areas. See Cervera and Fraga (2003) on this topic.
9. This patronage system is specifically denominated *sistema caciquil*. It is headed by a *cacique* (chief) who deploys his power through a clientelist structure. Further exploration of this aspect can be found in Gledhill (2000).

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