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"12th Street is Dead": Techno-Heritage and Neoliberal Contestation in the Maya Riviera

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Abstract: In 2017, the Beats Per Minute (BPM) electronic music festival was banned from Playa del Carmen following a horrific shooting that left five dead and fifteen injured. The city's response was to crack down on electronic music, arguing the scene posed a unique danger to the safety of the city and that electronic music was not part of Playa's cultural identity. Those in the scene argued something else was underway, suggesting that the scene was being pushed out of the city to make room for higher end, luxury tourism development. The ousting of electronic music from the city raised important questions about the city's cultural identity and the direction of tourism development the city would take. This essay takes a critical look at these events, tracing the way Playa's particular electronic music scene grew to global notoriety as both a cause and consequence of the Maya Riviera's impressive tourism expansion over the last two decades and how those in the scene believed themselves to be an essential part of the city's heritage. The city government's decision to oust BPM reveals how struggles over cultural heritage are at the very heart of how urban space is organized in tourism zones. Using the concept of "contestation", this ethnographic account demonstrates how disputes over heritage and culture frame important questions of neoliberal, political-economy and can lead to counterintuitive outcomes.

Keywords: cultural heritage; neoliberalism; contestation; Maya Riviera; electronic music

1. Introduction

It was the sound of construction work on the south block of 12th Street between 1st Avenue and the beach that made me think maybe the clubs were coming back. What was once the vibrant center of electronic music in Playa del Carmen (Playa) had been shut down by the city government after a shooting at the BPM (Beats Per Minute or Bartenders, Promoters, and Musicians) music festival just a year before. The violence had left five dead, including three visiting tourists, and the events made international news and shocked the electronic music scene, which has long cast itself as promoting peace, love, unity, and respect. Standing there watching construction crews move lumber and pour concrete, I immediately texted Martin on WhatsApp letting him know the news.

"I think they're building a new set of clubs," I wrote.

"no, guey, es un hotel. La calle 12 esta muerta".

A google search revealed that the land where some of Mexico's most renowned electronic music venues once existed had been sold off to a luxury hotel developer (Martinez 2018a). Other clubs shut down after the BPM tragedy were also sold off to high end restaurants and boutiques, leaving the scene to scatter to new locations inside and outside of the city. Online forums and public conversations rumored that the closing down of the clubs had been planned all along, part of the city's efforts to push out the electronic music scene from its centrally located position and replace it with high end tourism development. Just like the small shops and craft vendors who eventually gave way to

international clothing brands in its shopping district, Playa's bohemian urban center was in a process of transformation.

Yet, the decision by the mayor of Playa to end the BPM festival, and close down the associated electronic music clubs, was not justified on economic grounds but was instead done for reasons of security and culture. Officials in Playa characterized the scene as closely affiliated to the city's drug economy and a main driver of its presence in Playa (Martinez 2018b). Reinforcing these assertions was also the claim made by the mayor that "Playa needed to think about who it wanted to be", the implication being, that it was not a city for electronic music (Varillas 2017). It was this statement that highlights the way claims over the tourist city do not fall principally on economic arguments over the most efficient and profitable use of land but are instead entangled in local battles over belonging and heritage. To the Mexican DJs and Mexican electronic music fans who frequented these spaces, the idea that electronic music did not belong in Playa was absurd, yet the Mayor's statement resonated with the city's older elite who could not see electronic music's value and did not want electronic music in Playa.

Such competing claims over who belongs to the city are not unique to the neoliberal era (Jordan 1995), or even to tourism (Napolitano 2002), but they do underscore the points of contestation (Leitner et al. 2007) that shape Playa's particular trajectory of neoliberal urbanization. Closing down the BPM festival in Playa, and displacing the electronic music scene, was a costly move for the city. So much so, that the festival organizers reported to me that the city asked them to return (which they declined to do). The situation points to the contingency of neoliberal urban arrangements, and the way cultural claims remain embedded in market relations and drive political decisions (Graham 2002; Napolitano 2002; Johnson 2014; Su et al. 2018) that can appear counterintuitive (or even mistaken) when judged against more deterministic accounts of neoliberalism (Harvey 2005). This is not only illustrated in the city reversing course and attempting to court electronic music back, but in the empty lots on 12th Street where hotel construction is rumored among residents to have been delayed for over a year. Yet, unlike in typical accounts of disputes of cultural ownership in tourism spaces that pit local residents against global forces (Castañeda 1996; Castellanos 2010; Juarez 2008), the BPM tragedy reveals these categories as already blurred. Leite (2017) argues that such blurring is a feature of heritage construction in a globalized world as people draw links between communities separated across time and space as a way of articulating belonging in a specific locality.

This essay tells the story of electronic music's presence in Playa del Carmen, how it grew along with the city, and how its demise following the BPM festival lends insight into the way competing claims of cultural heritage can come to contest neoliberal forms development. Playa's particular electronic music scene grew to global notoriety as both a cause and consequence of the Maya Riviera's impressive tourism expansion over the last two decades. The scene itself could be described as a diverse collection of DJs, promoters, graphic designers, and club owners from across Mexico and all over the world who cultivated both a shared aesthetic and shared set of ethical commitments. "Playa owes its growth to electronic music," was a refrain I heard in interviews with local DJs challenging the myth that the Maya Riviera's development was simply the result of foreign direct investment in luxury hotels and resorts (Redclift 2009). Instead, Playa's electronic music scene represented a vibrant counterculture that made the city a charming alternative to Cancun and attracted electronic music fans from all over the world. For those who consider themselves apart of the electronic music scene, the music and its accompanying set of values are said to be part of Playa's cultural heritage and thus foundational to the city's identity. The city's response to the BPM tragedy revealed such claims were not shared by everyone, and that for these residents the city's culture and its heritage were to be found somewhere else. More deeply, though, the removal of the city's electronic music scene and the attempt to replace it with more traditional forms of high-end tourism highlights the points of contestation within neoliberal forms of capitalist development. The violence that precipitated these events suggests, at least in Mexico's Maya Riviera, that the stakes of this contestation are high even if the consequence of the violence failed (as of now) to achieve its desired end.

2. Cultures of Contestation under Neoliberalism

"Contestations," writes Leitner et al. (2007), "were critical to the emergence of neoliberal regimes". In this historical reading, neoliberalism can be understood as a counter-hegemonic reaction, though not the only one, to Fordist models of political-economy. Proponents of neoliberalism offered an alternative to the authoritarianism inherent in Fordist state organizing by shifting power to the private sector and privileging the market as a fairer institution of regulation (Leitner et al. 2007). Neoliberalism was once a marginal idea, a point that necessitates scholars pay attention to neoliberalism's similarly open points of contestation not simply understood as resistance to neoliberal political and economic orders, but to neoliberalism as itself a discursive order contesting the "imaginaries and practices" that preexisted it and are thus "resilient to and rework neoliberalism" (Leitner et al. 2007, p. 6). The analytical significance of this move is to decenter neoliberalism, offering space to appreciate its historical and geographic specificity as bottom-up, top-down, or even simultaneous paths of origin in particular locations. At the same time, it suggests that in the face of what might be called neoliberalism's hegemonic order fractiousness abounds, setting the stage for neoliberalism's transformation into something else entirely as alternative discursive regimes gain traction and seize power (Laclau and Mouffe 2000; Greenhouse 2010; Morton 2003). More typically, however, contestation accounts for the diversity of neoliberal orders which are informed by previous political and economic regimes and shaped by competing cultural systems (Su et al. 2018; Muehlebach 2012; Martin 2007). Among the many places in which contestation might occur, this paper focuses on the role of heritage construction in the context of tourism development and way the BPM tragedy was used by local policymakers to marshal a vision of heritage that both undermined neoliberal market relations in one instance and extended them in the next.

These points of contestation must be understood as taking place in a capitalist economic order defined by its unevenness (Gill and Kasmir 2016). Under this framing, capitalism does not follow a linear historical progression inclusive of all under its domain but is instead an ever-shifting topography in which development in one area of the world occurs at the detriment, exclusion, or exploitation of another (Tsing 2005, 2015; Makki 2015; Howard 2018). The staying power of capitalist systems of value extraction are as indeterminate as their imagined benefit, since such systems can deteriorate over time due to localized resistance (Cornet 2015), the emergence of new zones of extraction (Mitchell 2013), or through the strains and externalities created by the exhaustion of an area's resources (Holleman 2017). Tourism development is subject to all three. Local communities will often pass laws to slow down tourism's growth (Cornet 2015), especially where tourism is said to upset local markets (like in housing) or when tourists themselves are believed to pose heavy burdens on locals. At the same time, tourism is a highly competitive industry and locations often compete with one another within a global market in which "undiscovered" destinations increasingly hold a premium (Voase 2006). This can result in tourist destinations experiencing quick boom periods followed by long periods of stagnation and decline. Finally, capitalist tourism development can be the source of its own undoing as tourist destinations experience heightened strain on local infrastructure, growth in illicit activities that exacerbate crime and corruption, severe environmental damage to sensitive ecological areas that can ruin a location's natural beauty, and land speculation that raises the local cost of living and makes tourism destinations vulnerable to economic collapse during cyclical downturns in the market. Neoliberal tourism development, in a sense, is simply one iteration of what tourism can look like under capitalism, but it is not the only one. Indeed, neoliberal policies across the globe have altered tourism and travel markets, destroying local tourist destinations that once catered to regional, industrially employed, middle-classes, as in the case of Atlantic City in the United States (Simon 2004), and yet driving the development of new tourism markets in places like the Maya Riviera (Stargardter 2016; Muñoz et al. 2010; Guardado 2010).

The role of neoliberal policy in the creation and transformation of urban space is well documented (Peck 2004; Dinzey-Flores 2017; Goldstein 2004) and best conceptualized as policy aimed at three specific goals (Leitner et al. 2007); (1) shifting the city's focus to the creation and expansion of the private sector,

or what Emerson and Smiley (2018) call a "market city," (2) the privatization or semi-privatization of municipal services, and (3) the fostering of urban citizenship that emphasizes the need for individuals to behave responsibly and contribute positively to the economic welfare of the city. The touristification of urban centers can be understood as a kind of neoliberal economic development strategy in which a city engages in both public and private investment in tourism via the growth of the hospitality industry, the revitalization of public spaces for private use, and the marketing of a city's history and cultural heritage for consumption (Little 2015; Guardado 2015; Gregory 2007). This form of tourism-oriented urbanization is understood as a response to previous urban decline due to deindustrialization and urban evacuation typically found in the global north (Keating and Frantz 2004). Tourism on Mexico's Caribbean coast, however, has been driver of urbanization in a region once defined by its sparse population. In the early 1970s less than 80,000 people called the state of Quintana Roo home, yet by 2015 urban centers like Cancun boasted more than one million inhabitants, and cities like Playa del Carmen exceeded 200,000 residents (INEGI 2015).

Mexico's Caribbean coast has been part of a more than half-century tourism development scheme initiated with the planning and construction of Cancun in the late 1960s (Torres 2002). In this period, Playa grew slowly as an "off the beaten path" alternative to the more commercialized tourism offerings of Cancun. It was not until the early 90s, when the state of Quintana Roo created the municipality of Solidaridad (Solidarity), that foreign investment in the construction of hotels and resorts along the coast and within the city center began in earnest. Such large-scale tourism development sparked intense migration to Playa del Carmen, leading to an exponential pace of growth. These demographic shifts have resulted in the rapid transformation of the city's urban spaces, creating strains on the city's weak infrastructure, causing tensions between longtime residents and recent arrivals, producing heightened relations of inequality, and bringing new problems of security to the once quiet city. Whereas Cancun might be described as part of a "Fordist" model of tourism development (Torres 2002), in which its spatial organization is characterized by the top-down planning and segregation of commercial and residential areas, Playa's spatial organization has been viewed as exemplary of the neoliberal tourism development model with mixed commercial and residential development, market facilitated segregation between social classes, and the transformation of Playa's once bohemian urban center to a space now replete with shopping malls, high-end foreign boutiques, and luxury dining experiences (Manuel-Navarrete and Redclift 2010; Ontiveros and Torres 2010).

Electronic music has followed this transformation, arriving in Playa before the city's boom period, but expanding with it via the growth of its local scene that culminated with the creation of the BPM festival and the city's reputation as a major electronic music hub. But electronic music's origins are rooted in the global north, with their sounds were inspired by the deindustrialized urban centers of the United States and Germany (Reynolds 1998). The parallel and entangled development of electronic music in cities like Detroit, Chicago, and Dusseldorf in the 1970s led young people to reclaim abandoned warehouses and factory spaces for underground, and often illegal, parties (Che 2009; Rietveld 1998). As electronic music traveled across the world it has become popularly characterized as emblematic of neoliberal globalization, and yet encapsulated in the spirit of the genre is a radical defiance to the social stratification that defines neoliberalism (St John 2004). This is found in electronic music's ethos of radical inclusivity and collective belonging, what St John calls "a revolutionary culture", that owes its origins to the queer communities of color who developed the musical style and helped it spread to new locations (St John 2004; Apollo 2001; Reynolds 1998). Studies of electronic music often mischaracterize it as a world music dominated by Europe, a perception that tends to gloss over electronic music's particular national and local origins, the role played by queer people of color in the United States in its development, and the diversity of producers and DJs who make and perform electronic music. Of the few ethnographic investigations of electronic music, their focus has been on the cultural particularities of electronic music as a genre without attachment to specific locations because of the universality of its synthesized sounds (Borneman and Senders 2000). This essay takes a different approach, analyzing electronic music as a cultural phenomenon that drove particular political–economic relations in the

urban development of Playa del Carmen. Electronic music was both cause and consequence of Playa's touristification, one that competed against traditional forms of tourism development and tragically lost.

The BPM tragedy, and the city's response, raised the question of whether electronic music could be considered part of Playa's cultural identity. Those I spoke with affirmed that it was, believing their long-time presence in the city as sufficient evidence of this fact. On top of that, they insisted that the city's welcoming posture owed its origins to electronic music's spirit of inclusivity, an inclusivity now under threat as the city pushed to further gentrify its urban center. The question of belonging is analogous to the *Marranos*, or Jews forced to convert during the inquisition, in Leite (2017) ethnography. Leite (2017) demonstrates how these descendants actively work to connect themselves to a Jewish ancestry they seek to reclaim, leading Leite to observe how globalization fosters rather than diffuses claims of heritage, allowing people to link themselves to others across time and space. The DJs that spoke to me did something similar, situating the BPM tragedy and the state's response into a longer history of electronic music's relegation to the social margins. "They call it House music because before we had clubs, we played in warehouses," stated Roberto, a longtime Maya Riviera DJ, when I asked him about the fallout from BPM. Statements like these forced me to follow electronic music's history back to the 1970s and appreciate Playa's scene as an extension of this legacy illustrated in the beliefs and actions of its members. While the events that unfolded in Playa offer insight into the way heritage in tourism zones is deployed to serve political ends, the sense of resiliency that the scene's members carry forward speaks to electronic music's capacity adapt in the face of recurrent attempts to marginalize it.

3. Methods

While this essay takes as its point of departure the BPM tragedy in Playa del Carmen, it is in many ways a "thick description" of the city's electronic music scene—a scene that came before BPM, and while in some diminished capacity, continues after it (Geertz 1973). This approach offers an elaboration of electronic music's signification in Playa, one best understood through an historical and ethnographic analysis that follows electronic music back to its origins and accounts for the way it arrived in Playa and shaped its urban development. In this way, the method offered here is an inversion of Madrid (2008) study of "Nor-Tec" music in Tijuana. In that study, the blended electronic music style of Nor-Tec, and the accompanying culture that followed it, is argued to be an outgrowth of larger borderlands culture and emergent from the political-economy of this region of Mexico. Unlike Tijuana, Playa's touristic urbanization period ran parallel to electronic music's arrival and growth in the city, playing a role in the way urban space was organized from the beginning and generating a distinct attraction for visiting tourists that contributed significantly of the city's economy.

To tell the story of Playa's electronic music scene, I spoke with a diverse array of DJs, promoters, graphic designers, club owners, and patrons who actively contributed to and participated in electronic music in Playa. These conversations took place during various visits to the city, beginning in the summer of 2016 and lasting until the spring of 2018, more than a year after the festival had ended. I also attended electronic music performances around the city, starting in the summer of 2016, when the electronic clubs on 12th Street were still in operation, and continuing to follow the scene as new venues were opened after BPM was expelled. In addition to conversations with those in the scene, I also spoke with longtime Playa residents about the BPM festival, the tragedy, and the city's response to the event.

I use the term electronic music scene to denote the familiarity between its members and highlight the sense of connectedness and shared aesthetics within this diverse group. The term also captures the fact that the scene was not defined by one prevailing genre of electronic music, like house or trance, but instead included a range of electronic music sub-genres like neo-disco, jungle, down tempo, psy-trance, acid, and techno—just to name a few. While the DJs I spoke with had their preferred genre, most "spun," or played, a variety of electronic music styles depending on the club, crowd, and time of day. Indeed, Playa's tourism economy demanded this kind of versatility as a DJ can go from a beach club in the afternoon spinning "daytime disco", to an evening rooftop event later on, and end in their night playing the last set of a psy-trance jungle rave. The term scene here captures this diversity of styles and

includes a broad range of symbols, practices, and ethical commitments that define Playa's electronic music culture. That said, the ubiquity of the genre goes beyond those who are fans of it and who produce it, since it can be found in supermarkets, car rental shops, and even blaring from the carts of *ambulantes*, or street vendors.

My conversations were supplemented with digital archival research where I examined local news publications, online blogs, and electronic music message boards to better trace the historical development of Playa's electronic music scene and follow the creation and eventual demise of the BPM festival. These conversations cued me into the local development of the scene and the way that development translated into the construction of electronic clubs and other venues where DJs would perform. It also allowed me to understand the way DJs brought the electronic influences from their native cities to Playa and the way those scenes came about through the pirating and circulation of electronic music into Mexico from the United States and Europe. As noted earlier, DJs made constant reference to the origins of electronic music, imagining themselves as part of electronic music's rebellious and alternative origins. This also made the scene characteristically diverse, comprised of different races, genders, age groups, and sexualities, and composed of members from just about every social class in Mexico. This degree of diversity was also reflective of the scene's openness, an openness that was embedded in the cultural and economic life of a city that made its money on welcoming newcomers. It was this sense of openness that seemed foreclosed after BPM, a point I address below.

4. From Detroit to Playa del Carmen: 40 Years of Electronic Music

Electronic music's emergence in the 1970s in various parts of the world was the result of advances in Fordist production of electronics technology from Japan that allowed for new forms of music production (Che 2009). The availability of these instruments led to experimentations in music styles that brought synthetic sounds into popular genres like rock, pop, funk, and disco. The development of these musical experiments into electronic music happened in the 1970s and two particular locations are credited with the creation of electronic dance music—Dusseldorf and Detroit (Che 2009; Reynolds 1998). Both cities had gone through a Fordist, industrialization model of development, but by the late 60s and early 70s had experienced deindustrialization and decline. In Dusseldorf, this led to the emergence of the group Kraftwerk, whose industrially inspired electronic music became popularized in Germany and across the world (Borneman and Senders 2000). In Detroit, the Fordist production styles in the automotive industry would be adopted to musical production. Motown Records founder Berry Gordy claimed the label's production system was inspired by his time working the auto plants in the city and the success of this method turned Detroit into a global center for music (Che 2009).

It was middle-class, African American youth, the sons and daughters of autoworkers, who would take the experimental sounds of groups like Kraftwerk and bring them into conversation with funk and disco (Che 2009; Reynolds 1998). What emerged was Detroit techno, a musical genre that reflected Detroit's shift to deindustrialization and expressed both the "realism" of Detroit's economic decline and the "escapism" that found hope in technology and "beauty in decay" (Che 2009). This style of music soon spread to places like Chicago and New York, embedding itself in urban subcultures (Apollo 2001). According to Reynolds (1998), house music emerged from the "double exclusion" faced by black and Latino gay men in the city of Chicago in the early 80s. The scene's fascination with the aesthetics of disco was embodied in the persona of icons like Donna Summers, whose more electro-heavy disco tracks like the 75-min long "Love to Love You Baby" exuded a sex-positive, queer ethic that cleverly subverted the homophobic and racist policies of politicians like Ronald Reagan and his "moral majority" (Reynolds 1998). The name "house music" itself came from the gay warehouse parties that took place in Chicago's increasingly abandoned industrial section of town, representing not simply the racial and sexual exclusions that typified American society at the time, but the class stratification that seemed to follow American deindustrialization and neoliberal policy (Reynolds 1998; Rietveld 1998). It was in these underground spaces that a larger ethos emerged and took shape in electronic music, that is, one of radical inclusion (St John 2004; Apollo 2001). At these raves you could

be whoever you wanted, escaping into the collective dance experience that seemed to contrast the harsh reality that awaited attendees after they left these parties.

It was this ethos that allowed electronic music to supplant itself in cities around the world, helped along through the movement of its fans and through the circulation of electronic music records (St John 2004). This was further accelerated in the late 80s and early 90s with the rise of the internet and the popularity of rave culture. Electronic music was not just a phenomenon to be found in the deindustrialized landscapes of the urban north, but also in urbanizing zones in the global south. Unique electronic music scenes emerged in large urban centers in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa, blending local sounds with electronic rhythms and production techniques. At the same time, western travelers brought electronic music to growing seaside destinations like Bali, Ibiza, and Goa (D'Andrea 2004). In Mexico, electronic music arrived in the county's larger, urban centers. Here, the end of the Important Substitution Industrialization (ISI) model gave way to an export-oriented, border zone industrialization that inspired a range of local, electronic music scenes in places like San Luis Potosi, Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Tijuana (Madrid 2008). One example is described in Madrid (2008) "Nor-Tec Rifa", which provides a compelling examination of the "Nor-Tec" style of Tijuana. Madrid illustrates how this hybrid form of electronic music in which Norteño sounds are mixed with house and techno beats is a reflection of the borderlands and an outgrowth of free-trade industrialization that occurred during Mexico's neoliberal transition. These various scenes illustrate how the transnational trajectories of electronic music are not diffuse and universal in the sense characterized by Borneman and Senders (2000) but are rather mediated in such a way as to produce distinct regional sounds illustrative of the artistic collaboration and moments of exchange similarly found in other transnational musical genres like hip-hop.

DJs who got their start in older, urban centers in Mexico would eventually find themselves building a scene on the Mexican Caribbean. Some came to Cancun first, where the city's bustling tourism industry offered DJs regular employment in the city's growing club scene. Arriving in the 90s and building on a global craze with raving and rave culture, these early pioneers of electronic music would perform at beach parties and large night clubs. While it was easy to get a job DJing in Cancun, many who were there at the time described Playa as a not-yet-commercialized alternative to Cancun, where DJs were freer to experiment with electronic music sounds and hold parties that catered to more niche and discerning electronic music fans. Others came directly to Playa, following the footsteps of older generations of counterculture members, like the hippies who arrived in Playa in the 70s from Merida. Daniel, for instance, described his evolution as a DJ in the late 90s from his studies in sound engineering in San Luis Potosi. In that city, a small band of electronic music fans would hold house parties and trade tracks they downloaded from the internet. He came to Playa thinking he would find work in the entertainment industry as an engineer and DJ as a hobby, but that hobby quickly turned into his main source of income. Another DJ, David, was from a working-class neighborhood in Mexico City. He recalled being inspired by the electronic sounds he encountered in his neighborhood, with electronic music being blended with cumbia. This would lead to an obsession with house music that eventually led him to save up his money to buy a turntable and perform at underground parties around Mexico City before deciding to move to Playa.

A number of factors came together to create the seeds of Playa's electronic music scene. In the early 90s, the town was formed into its own municipality called Solidaridad and tourism development quickly began to the north and south of city with the construction of high-end resorts. Playa's tourism market was always framed as an alternative to the American-heavy Cancun and attracted tourists from Europe, Canada, and other parts of Latin America. At the same time, Playa also situated itself as a gay-friendly alternative to Cancun, that is, a town welcoming of gay couples particularly from the United States but across the world. According to many of the longtime DJs in Playa that I met, it was both the influence of gay visitors and the presence of European travelers that helped the scene grow. In Playa, travelers could find a burgeoning electronic music scene, with Mexican DJs spinning a range of electronic music genres along Playa's beaches, nearby jungles, and quickly emerging electronic music

venues. Among Mexican DJs, Playa's reputation grew through word of mouth and online message boards which encouraged many to visit the city, play a set or two on vacation, and in most cases eventually stay. Juan told me the story of coming to Playa for two weeks to play a couple sets. "At that time [2000] Playa was still small, but it was busy with tourism and it was so easy to get a gig spinning music. So, after visiting for two weeks I made the choice to return home to gather some more things and come back and try my luck. I've been here ever since".

Studies on Playa's urban development have remarked on the city's market-oriented planning and the way in which huge investment in the city in the early 2000s quickly transformed Playa's urban center (Manuel-Navarrete and Redclift 2010; Lomelí 2015). Land was sold off to the highest bidder which divided the city up into sections that would eventually harden along class and racial lines as more people and businesses arrived in the city (Lomelí 2015). The center of Playa, and the long commercial street known as the 5th Avenue, would eventually lose its "local character" as Mexican and foreign investors established luxury boutiques, high end restaurants, and fancy shopping malls. From 1998 to the present, construction in Playa has occurred at a tremendous pace, with Playa earning the designation as one of Latin America's fastest growing cities. Business and real estate investment in Playa dramatically increased the price of land in the city center, resulting in new neighborhood investment further inland and across the federal highway. Both high end gated communities and shopping centers as well as working-class settlements emerged, resulting in Playa's urban core principally catering to tourists. Yet, in practice such spatial class divisions were much more porous, and electronic venues were able to form along 12th Street, Playa's main center for clubbing. Hotels and fancy restaurants filled the urban center, but the center continued to house many of the city's working-class residents as well, allowing the city to remain integrated. Many of the DJs I spoke with made enough money to continue living in Playa's urban core, either working full time spinning music, or through jobs as bartenders in one of the many watering holes along 5th Avenue.

While entertainment venues and bars formed around the city and along the beach, 12th Street (and later 10th Street) became known as the center of the city's nightlife. Noise ordinances and special business permits allowed the nightclubs on 12th Street to stay open until 4 a.m. on the weekdays and 6 a.m. on weekends. The street was host to a number of different nightlife venues and clubs playing hip-hop, reggaetón, Latin pop, and mainstream electronic music, but between 1st Avenue and the beach a collection of clubs on the south side of the street opened that played exclusively underground electronic music. In 2003, Grupo Santanera was formed, a local bar and restaurant venture that in 2004 opened La Santanera, an electronic music venue located at the corner of 5th Avenue and 10th Street. In its thirteen years of operation it became one of the most well-respected electronic music venues, attracting world-class talent to Playa. As one person affiliated with the group told me, "it was easy to attract talent to Playa at that time. In exchange for a set, we would offer them a little vacation to paradise for a weekend, and when they showed up, they'd have an amazing time and always made plans to return". Grupo Santanera would open other venues in the city, but it was the Canadian owners of a club located on 12th Street and the beach known as the Blue Parrot, who would eventually create the BPM festival.

In 2008 Craig Pettigrew and Phillip Pulitano put together the first ever BPM festival, a festival designed to connect electronic music lovers, industry professionals, and world-renowned DJs in one spot. In 2012, the festival had grown to nearly 35,000 attendees and by 2016 was drawing nearly 70,000 to the Maya Riviera for the 10-day extravaganza. The presence of the festival only added notoriety to the growing scene. Playa became a central hub for the playing of house music and other electronic genres, but as many DJs recounted, it was also a space of music production and experimentation as well. DJs began to produce electronic music variants similar to the Nor-Tec sounds, taking traditional Mexican music, Latin American hip-hop and reggaetón, indigenous rhythms, and Caribbean inspired soundscapes to create unique tracks representative of the aural estuary that Playa (and increasingly the rest of the Maya Riviera) had become. The effect on the wider Playa soundscape has been noticeable. These scene's developments made electronic music a staple of the area and to this day is found at most

beach clubs, restaurants, and can be heard thumping from the cars of locals. While these sounds often compete with reggaetón, top 40 pop, and even rock music, a walk-through Playa reveals electronic music as central to the city's soundscape and a testament of the legacy of this scene on Playa's identity.

But as many DJs recounted to me, the electronic music culture not only shaped the way Playa sounded but shaped the way the city was organized. This was true of 12th Street especially, whose popularity grew as new electronic music venues were open. In addition to the scene's impact on Playa's nightlife geography, DJs also pointed to the culture of inclusiveness that Playa was known for. They noted how many of the electronic music clubs that opened up on 12th Street never required covers, but going back even further, they recalled the free all-night beach parties, the attempts to keep ticket prices low when they had to charge, or the fact that formal dress codes and informal racial codes were non-existent at electronic music parties. For the DJs who migrated from older Mexican cities where social status determined where one could party and what music one should listen to, Playa always felt like an alternative to those rigid social hierarchies. "In a rave you can wear whatever you want, look like whatever, be gay, or trans, or have tattoos, and you can always be included," remarked Beatriz, a DJ and event promoter in the city.

The perspective, of course, reflects the middle-class sensibilities of the DJs themselves, who seemed otherwise less attentive to the visible forms of social segregation that took root in Playa during the period of electronic music's growth. But electronic music's presence in Playa always stood in opposition to this kind of stratified and segregated growth, even as the local tourism economy's expansion facilitated both at once. Indeed, contrary to spatial analyses of Playa that paint the city's urban development as driven principally by luxury tourism (Lomelí 2015), the electronic music venues in Playa were always able to make a profit without charging a cover or raising their drink prices. By the time they were ousted from 12th Street in 2017, the land they sat on was worth much more than what the club owners had paid for, and yet they still maintained a culture of inclusivity that offered locals and visitors alike an inexpensive night out. This sense of inclusivity had its limits, since the scene rarely appealed to the rural, working-class Mexican migrants who labored in the nearby hotels and resorts. Even so, many could be found in the electronic music clubs and the fact remained that the DJs and producers who came to Playa defiantly stood in opposition to the larger changes taking in the city center, a reason many in the scene point to in explaining why the BPM tragedy happened.

5. The BPM Tragedy

In the early morning hours of Monday, 16 January 2017, on the last night of the BPM Festival, gunshots broke out at the Blue Parrot nightclub in Playa del Carmen. Four people were shot dead, another was killed after being trampled by fleeing club-goers, and fifteen were injured. The festival was in its 10th year of existence and in that time had gained a reputation as one of the best electronic music festivals in the world and had earned a number of distinctions and awards over this period. In 2013, the festival welcomed 35,000 visitors to Playa for the weeklong event in January, but by 2017 that number had doubled, generating tens of millions of dollars for the local tourism economy (Stargardter 2017). The news of the shooting spread quickly and was covered by major publications around the world, with reports surfacing that among those killed were several foreigners working with the festival including one Canadian and one Colombian. Locals were shocked by the events, most notably because the Yucatan had largely avoided much of the violence that has plagued the rest of Mexico and many believed that the region's strong tourism economy would keep things safe.

The cause of the shooting continues to remain a mystery. A day after the tragedy, a message written on a blanket appeared in a public park in Playa allegedly placed there by the Zetas drug cartel, who took responsibility for the shooting after claiming one of the festival organizers, Philip Pulitano, had not complied with the cartels demands (Gómez Leyva 2017). Initial statements from government officials alleged that the shooting was caused by a dispute between competing cartels, though this story would later change, with the state alleging that the cause of the shooting was a dispute between the BPM festival and one of the cartels operating in Playa (Martinez 2018a). The

festival organizers remained quiet in the beginning, refusing to talk to the press until the investigation had concluded. They eventually released a public statement alleging that the cause of the tragedy was the result of government officials working with drug cartels. They claimed that after the ruling party in Playa had been ousted from power in state elections in 2016, competing cartels now fought for control over territory and influence, and that the BPM festival was simply one casualty in this war. These allegations resonated strongly with Playa locals who over time realized that many of the city's concerns over security were half-hearted and disconnected from the electronic music scene. Sandra, a graphic designer in Playa, pointed out how the drug dealing continued on the 5th Avenue, "in the middle of the day, usually across the street from police".

Soon after the event, the mayor of Playa del Carmen, Cristina Torres, announced that BPM would no longer be welcomed in Playa and that future electronic musical festivals, including a festival planned for February of that year, would be cancelled. Her statements were supported by members of a local business council who alleged that the electronic music scene in Playa brought drugs and insecurity to the city and that at the end of the day Playa had to control its image. These policy changes were not just motivated by concerns over security, they were also steeped in stereotypes about electronic music that painted the scene as foreign to the city and outside of Mexican culture. Locals were divided, some supported the ban and welcomed an end to electronic music festivals in Playa, while others thought the ban went too far and did little to address the security concerns and drug problems the city faced. Returning in the summer of 2017, after the ban had gone into effect and the electronic music clubs had been closed down, the city still contained a vibrant open-air drug market on the 5th Avenue, and many of the mainstream clubs were still hotbeds for drug dealing. In that same summer, there was an uptick in violence in the city with shootings happening regularly both outside of the city center as well as on the 5th Avenue in broad daylight. Those in the electronic music scene pointed to this as evidence that the BPM shooting, and the ban that followed, were about more than just violence between cartels. Many I spoke with came to agree with the BPM festival's statement, that the attacks were likely ordered by government officials, sparking a number of competing conspiracies about the motivation for the shooting and those who stood to gain from the ban.

Those involved in electronic music slowly began to reorganize. A new electronic music club was opened on 10th Street and another followed, while plans were made to find new venues for weekly electronic music parties. But these ventures were different, often requiring expensive entrance covers with bars that served, as one patron put it "overpriced and weak [alcohol content] drinks". Those I spoke with understood these new practices as attempts to upscale electronic music in Playa, catering the scene principally to higher spending Mexican and foreign tourists and pushing the working-class members of the scene elsewhere. At first, these new clubs would not allow drug dealers to enter, but by the end of the summer of 2017 this practice had returned. Though some stayed in Playa, the majority of the scene moved south to the city of Tulum where a growing electronic music scene was already underway, and until very recently, remained largely unbothered by the city. The changes to Playa's scene led those I spoke with to suggest that the BPM shooting had been about moving out the electronic music clubs from their coveted spot on 12th Street and replacing them with higher-end nightclubs or developing the large lot into a hotel. When the buildings on the lot were eventually demolished, and it was announced the land had been purchased by a hotel group, suspicion grew. "It's obvious that the city wanted the clubs out of there and when the club owners refused to sell, they took matters into their hands," speculated one DJ I spoke with. Despite the rumors, information remains murky and even after two years no one is certain about what actually happened.

The BPM tragedy reinforced a widely shared feeling in Playa that the state was in cahoots with narcotraffickers, who locals believe have as much control over decision making and city planning as foreign investors. It reflects what in another context Sobering and Auyero (2019) call "legal cynicism", or the belief shared by community members that law enforcement does not merely turn a blind eye to crime, but that it is part of it. Others viewed the events that unfolded less sinisterly, instead pointing out that the reason the ban worked was because a sizable share of the city, particularly the city's elite,

could not see the value of electronic music and agreed that it was not part of the city's heritage or a feature of Mexican cultural expression. Speaking with one of the official historians of Playa del Carmen about the BPM tragedy he remarked, "they say it's music [using scare quotes while speaking], but it's just party and drugs and that's not culture". He went on to add that a city like Playa, "shouldn't encourage this kind of tourism," since it, "brings the wrong people to the city". By "wrong people" he means those who travel for fun and for party, the very kind of tourism that was first marketed by places like Cancun but has spread to other parts of the Maya Riviera and the Yucatan region. But "wrong people" also meant something else, as described to me by Carlos, a prominent business leader in Playa. It referred to the fact that the young people who came to Playa to partake in the region's electronic music scene were not the high spending tourists who ate at luxury restaurants and stayed at all-inclusive resorts. Instead, these tourists slept in cheap hostels, ate street food, and consumed very little during their stay in Playa. "This economy only works when tourists come to spend a lot of money," he stated a-matter-of-factly, "and so obviously when there was opportunity to kick the [electronic music] festivals out of the city, officials took it".

A year following BPM's ousting from Playa, the festival organizers announced they would be moving the festival to Portugal. In conversations, DJs described the move as tragic, representing not only the loss of a scene for themselves in Playa, but the end of an era in the creative life of the city. Symbolically, the move seemed to reinforce the idea that electronic music was a European creation, its brief presence in Playa a failed experiment never to be repeated again. It signaled cultural rifts in the Playa community that reflected deeper claims over what the city stood for and who it was designed to serve. Observing these developments, it became easy to see how electronic music and the devoted fans who produced the scene in Playa were subject to a displacement typical of highly commercialized tourism development and thus reflective of the double-edged sword of heritage itself. Was Mexico a country that listened to electronic music? Is that the kind of image it wanted to present to the rest of the world? These questions undergirded the quick decision by policymakers to remove BPM and crack down harshly on the electronic music scene in Playa, but it also revealed important contradictions around debates over the way discourse of heritage are deployed to achieve particular political and economic outcomes. The implications being that the lines of demarcation as to what counts as heritage test the limits of culture itself, illustrated most aptly in the observation made by Fernando, a DJ in Playa, who routinely pointed out that the men paid to dance in Maya costumes for visiting tourists reflected less the culture of Playa than his two hour house music sets at the Mezcalina, one of the electronic music clubs that was closed down. My point is not really to determine whether Fernando is right, as such a task is impossible, but to note how such sentiments regarding who belongs are filtered through existing relations of power that are often translated into policy that determines how tourism zones are spatially organized (Graham 2002).

Discussion

The electronic music scene in Playa, and the BPM festival that emerged from it, offer some important points for considering the way touristification can unfold in urban zones. As noted earlier, Playa grew in a "post-Fordist" model of development that was a reaction to the state-led efforts that resulted in the founding of Cancun in the 1970s. By the 90s the Mexican state was unable to pursue such ambitious development schemes, like founding a city from scratch, and the orthodoxy around tourism development in Mexico had shifted to a market-based approach. Domestic legal changes that accompanied the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) made it easier for foreign direct investment to enter Mexico and for foreigners to purchase land along Mexico's Caribbean coast and within Playa del Carmen's urban center. In the absence of a top-down urban planning strategy, those wishing to open up clubs and set up night life venues benefited. Playa's 12th Street took shape within this context. First a quiet residential street with local restaurants, it would eventually become the core of the electronic music scene in the city (and Mexico). As one local, Barbara, recounted, "in the early 2000s the 5th Avenue only went to 12th Street and this was the outskirts of the

city center, but by 2010, 12th Street was the center of town and 30th Street was the end of the Quinta. Now [2018] the Quinta goes all the way to 110th Street". The city's electronic music scene, and the BPM festival that grew from it, were a tremendous economic boon for the city. But as Playa grew, the clubs that were once situated in the urban margins were now located in the city center next to luxury shopping malls, boutique hotels, and high-end restaurants. Two images of Playa denoting two distinct paths of growth were now proximate to one another—Playa as a bohemian, countercultural haven and Playa as a smaller and more luxurious version of Cancun. While the former could make room for the latter, the opposite proved to be less viable.

Following the BPM tragedy and the city's response, the electronic music scene's ability to "pack up and leave" to new locations denoted both its rootlessness and its particular means of accumulation. Brought into existence from the deindustrialization that took place in the global north, electronic music found new ways to appropriate otherwise abandoned space and create value. In Playa, a similar path of accumulation took place as electronic music venues helped to transform the city's urban core and bring new signification to a region whose tourism market was built on its proximity to sand and sun. The city's decision to oust electronic music and opt for more traditional forms of tourism based in luxury real-estate development underscores the contestation within capitalism. Further, such distinct paths of economic development help to illustrate the unevenness of touristification not simply at the macro level as the electronic music scene moved from Playa to Tulum (and Portugal), but at the micro level as a large, vacant lot on 12th Street waits to be developed. In response to the city's decision to ban BPM, residents of Playa became skeptical about the government's leadership ability and when drug sales and gang violence continued after the scene left, Playa's reputation as a safe location free of the security troubles that plagued the rest of the country soon deteriorated. In the winter of 2019, when tourism visits were lower because of the presence of large, foul smelling seaweed invading Playa's beaches, locals confided to me that they wished BPM, and rest of the electronic music scene, were still around.

The use of culture as justification for the ousting of BPM suggests that rather than take questions of authenticity for granted, tourist researchers should attempt to understand the political–economic interests that are entangled in these claims. This means moving past thinking of cultural heritage as a term that denotes a set of "local" practices and beliefs under threat from touristic consumption and exploitation (Pi-Sunyer and Thomas 2015), as is often described, and towards thinking of cultural heritage as a site of contestation itself (Graham 2002; Leite 2017). Such contestation may concern questions of who belongs and who does not, but as this case study reveals, it may also be a discursive tactic that obfuscates more complex political–economic relations. Electronic music in Playa blurred the distinction between global and local to the extent that many in the scene considered Playa their home and were, as one DJ put it "here from the start". For some locals, this cast doubt on the mayor's claims regarding electronic music's "foreignness" and whether that was in fact an issue, especially when one considered, as Carlos put it, "the extent to which the Quinta is filled with so many non-Mexican companies. In ten blocks you can find four Starbucks!". The mayor's claim to represent the interests of locals also blurred with the global to the extent "local" stood for the creation of a particular tourist market replete with luxury, foreign brands.

This essay's focus on electronic music illustrates the way that this scene became a site of tensions in the community, a process that is potentially applicable to other distinct cultural communities in Playa who may, for any given reason, become similarly vulnerable to ousting and marginalization. While newer urban settlements bring these questions to light, it is likely that older cities under tourism renewal may experience these conflicts as well, as political leaders channel their particular biases into policy. In the case of electronic music in Playa, local leaders and the city's elite relied on a discourse that painted electronic music as foreign, but if Fernando had been in charge, one could imagine the deployment of a different metric for inclusion in the city's identity. In that case, Playa's electronic music scene might be thought of as a more "authentic" representation of the city, while the commodified indigenous representations and Mexican nationalist symbols one normally finds in the city center

might be marginalized for their lack of authenticity. The story of electronic music in Playa suggests that accounts of neoliberal tourism development, which often rely on an over-determined notion of market rationality, miss the way that rationality is set within ongoing struggles over how to assign cultural value in the market (Polanyi 1957; Graeber 2001).

After several years without the shooters being identified or anyone being held to account, conspiracy theories about what "really happened" abound. Such conspiracies are best understood not as likely explanations for what occurred (which is also outside the scope of this essay), but instead as a form ready for content and indicative of the normalization of violence in economic relations in Mexico (and likely elsewhere). While the BPM tragedy is the subject of this paper, other acts of violence following the shootings have been connected by locals and are used to speculate on how the economy, and the local real estate market, works. While normally such thinking is read as reflective of the powerlessness of certain groups, the conspiracies that emerged from BPM functioned as a source of knowledge capable of cutting through the "bullshit," as one local described it, and fostering a political reaction to the mayor and her party through the democratic opening made available in the 2018 municipal elections. In 2018, the city voted to remove the mayor from power, replacing her with a left-leaning community organizer, and attempts were made (unsuccessfully) to court BPM back to the city. The events illustrate the way violence can both repress and provoke, leading to frustration and skepticism among locals that can transform into viable political alternatives when such political channels are available. While the BPM tragedy was not the only cause for this political shift in Playa, it highlights how in democratic settings, policymakers must still be accountable to local voters and how such accountability can constrain their attempts to advance certain interests or claim to represent "local" interests. Moments of cultural contestation can spill over into the political and lead to different outcomes.

Finally, the BPM tragedy, and the state's response, reveal the way violence and authoritarianism are part of the touristification process. Attention to the role of violence and authoritarianism in other contexts of neoliberal development in Mexico are well-documented, including in the extractive industries (Toledo et al. 2013), export-oriented industrialization (Arriola 2006), and in conflicts over the control of urban space (Jenss 2019). Tourism, especially in Mexico's Maya Riviera, has been principally understood to follow market-oriented paths of development that represses outbursts of violence because of the obvious danger it poses to the image of a location and the safety of tourists. The city's immediate ousting of BPM and its demand that electronic music venues close because of concerns over security were undermined as violence continued in Playa after the tragedy, and as drug dealing remained an open and accepted part of Playa's nightlife. If neoliberalism is supposed to introduce technocratic and market-oriented policy responses rooted in the respect of property rights, how do we explain the state's behavior here? Martin (2007) suggests such authoritarian practices are integral to neoliberalism's emergence in Mexico, with neoliberalism as both a response to older forms of authoritarianism inherited from the post-revolutionary consensus in Mexico, and yet in practice relied on to ensure the successful execution of neoliberal economic policy. The BPM tragedy, and the state's response, suggests these practices still continue into the 21st century, though as noted above, not without resistance and contestation in the political and economic arenas. This essay encourages tourist researchers to attend to the role of violence within tourism zones not simply as a means of keeping tourists safe or making foreign investment in tourism projects possible (Gregory 2007), but as a tactic for securing power that cuts in many different directions.

6. Conclusions

The end of the BPM festival in Playa, and the closing down of the electronic music clubs along 12th Street, provide important insights into the way urbanization along Mexico's Caribbean coast has instigated fighting between different sectors of the capitalist class. Electronic music's early arrival to Playa and the scene's ability to stake a claim over city space proved fortuitous as the city's tourism market grew and the land the electronic music venues sat on increased in value. That growth was owed

in part to electronic music's success in Playa represented best by the BPM festival. But it was also that growth that made the electronic music scene, and its thrifty devotees, vulnerable to removal when that scene clashed against the economic interests of other locals in Playa. To those familiar with the broader global history of electronic music, the situation described here is not surprising. The warehouse parties in Chicago and New York City in the 80s eventually gave way to gentrification, helped along by the enforcement of drug laws and building codes that were conveniently used by the city to make room for upscale real-estate investment, and especially in the case of New York, urban tourism.

Playa's scene both dispersed and reorganized, with some DJs playing in the new upscale clubs that took the place of the older scene, while others sought to form free parties in newer venues in less desirable areas of town. While in their infancy, these parties are growing quickly, and reshaping areas of the city normally excluded from Playa's nightlife. The movement of electronic music to new venues on the outskirts of Playa perhaps signals the recurrent pattern of electronic music's precarious claim over urban space, one that since the days of warehouse parties in Chicago, always seems under threat. I ask Raul, an older DJ who came to the city in the late 90s and took a job at one of the upscale clubs, what he thinks about the scene. "it will go on, that's what electronic music does, it finds new places. My generation found Playa and now as the city starts to grow, I bet there are young people here who are creating their own scenes, their own house parties. House music is inclusive and adaptive, we've always had to be this way, and there's no reason why that's going to stop".

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