

## **The Reef as Multiple: Coral Reefs between Exploitation and Protection along the Mexican Riviera Maya**

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**Abstract :** Sargasso algae currently threatens both livelihoods and marine eco systems along the Riviera Maya in Mexico. While the area was previously known for its white beaches, pristine waters, and intact, colorful reefs, the algae has turned the beaches into 'stinky stretches of sand,' made the water brown, and has led to reef degradation causing coral colonies to die off in vast amounts. Drawing on ethnographic research in the area, this paper shows how the reef was exploited for tourism before the Sargasso algae landed, and reef protection played a minor role among hoteliers, tourists, and tour operators. However, since Sargasso began arriving in large quantities, the reef has taken on new significance. Both natural science research and the everyday handling of Sargasso along the coast show that an intact reef provides a natural barrier for the algae and keeps them from reaching the beaches. Clean beaches are important to various local actors-among them, hotel operators, tourists, environmentalists - and against the backdrop of beach commodification, reefs are now taking on new meaning. The paper consequently discusses the commodification of beaches as more-than-human entanglements and illuminates which new human-environment relationships are currently emerging in the Anthropocene.

**Keywords :** anthropocene, human-environment-relations, fieldwork, mexico

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