A Second Look At My Trip To The Philippines

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What's more fun than travelling with friends to an exotic, unknown place? Delving into a culture that is so contrasted to your own? For the average consumer, the answer is probably nothing. I experienced something new every day of my trip and upon reflection, the days which I have included in this piece are those which I feel impacted me the most during my time in the Philippines. This reflection will critically explore the tourist gaze, consumption and globalisation, and the impact these have on an eastern country like the Philippines. This reflection is important, as it will not only critique the actions of the traveller, but will examine the various effects it has on the place travelled to.

Day 1

Tourism is linked to the idea of pervasive consumerism, a reason, whether I was consciously aware of it or not, why I felt compelled to go to the Philippines. The media had influenced my *yearn* to travel. I saw people's trips abroad, trekking in Cambodia and posing on the Great Wall of China; blog posts that persuaded me to explore the east. Ritzer (cited in Edensor, 2001) suggests there is a performative need for people to have an 'authentic' travelling experience, bound up with a thirst for fun and enjoyment. For many Europeans and Americans, 'doing Asia' is a bucket list achievement. Buying harem trousers and eating authentic cuisines posted to Facebook and Instagram to legitimate the trip.

The tourist gaze suggests that the tourist experience involves a particular way of seeing

imagery and myths that are captured through particular fantasies (Southerton, 2011). Such gazes, which for me included an award winning beach on the island of Borocay, create anticipation in travellers about what they will see (Ibid.). Before reaching those white sand beaches, I needed to take 1 train, 3 planes, 3 cars and 1 boat, and the same on the way back. This impacts the environment through the large amounts of CO2 emissions, water vapour, soot and diesel pumped into the atmosphere, which is ironic as I was using these modes of transport in order to see an unspoiled and beautiful part of the environment (Guardian, 2010). Urry (2002) noted that transport accounts for 24% of greenhouse gases, which is expected to double by 2050. Air travel has increased by approximately 256 million in the past 22 years, in which 60% of those are tourists (United Nations Environment Programme, n.d.). One study estimated a single transatlantic return flight emits almost half the CO2 emissions produced by all other sources i.e. lights and gas, by an average person annually (Ibid.). This impacts the local country, not just by the noise of increased planes, cars and buses, but on the land, for example acid rain affects the soil and consequently food production (Ibid.). This is bad for the Philippines, as they are massive food exporters to countries around the world (Ibid.).

One aspect of the tourist gaze involves people and places being commodified (Southerton, 2011). Knowledge of my holiday with my friends was transported through technologies and conversations, attracting more tourist attention, consequently influencing two more friends to follow on in 2015, travelling and experiencing more than we had in 2013. Too much tourism can have negative effects on the local environment, such as more litter, waste and overcrowding (United Nations Environment Programme, n.d.). Nevertheless, tourism has become central to globalisation, luring more people in and creating the desire of an enriched life. The relocation of economic growth is made possible through tourism and trends, such as travelling, which help to grow global affluence. (Cohen, 2012). Cohen (2012) argues that trends, such as travelling, help growing global affluence. My trip impacted the economy of the Philippines and China, as I participated in the consumer society of those

countries. However, this may not have been the case if I travelled earlier on in the 20th century, as I would be most likely to travel within Europe, but the last quarter of the 20th century saw the relocation of focus for economic growth from the West to the "emergent economies", namely Asia (Ibid.).
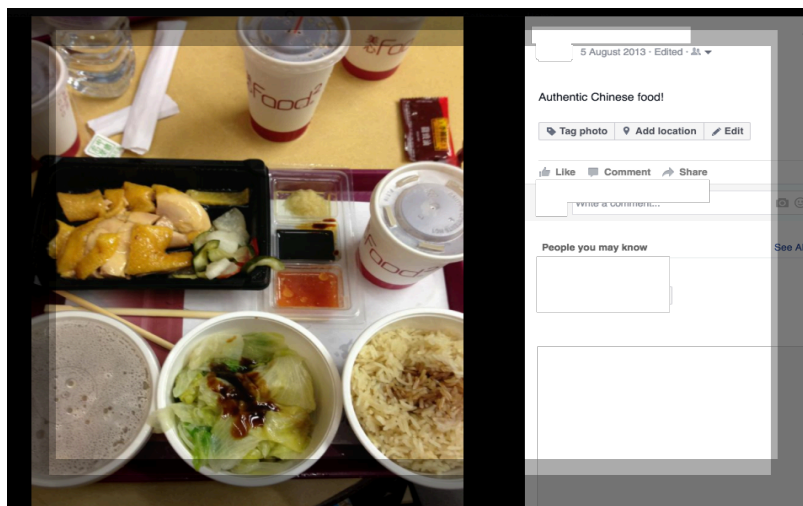
Day 2

When I arrived in Iloilo, I went to my friend's family and they made us dinner. Unlike dinners that I would usually cook, everything on my plate came from local sources; the vegetables were seasonal and they told me it was the first time they had made the meal that year because the vegetables were seasonal. When I step into a supermarket in December, I see strawberries or bananas imported from countries with hot climates and I used to buy them without a second thought. However, this now makes me think about our limits to growth. This commodity fetishism we are so enshrined in, especially but not explicitly in the West, is soon, according to Marx, going to be the denouement of our planet (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2015). Stewart Udall (1980), quoted in *Limits to Growth,* suggests that humans have lost a sense of limits and awareness of the Earth's resources,

something we need to remember if we are to help our planetary system.

Overshoot, according to Meadows et al (2005), could lead to two things; either a crash or a turn around. A worldview can be hard to change as its one's own version of reality (Ibid.). However, it may lead to a disregard of information, crucial to understanding blind spots that cause individuals to overlook the consequences of their actions (Ibid.). For example, I would never have thought about the impact of purchasing tropical fruit in English winter and that it is damaging to the environment, it's not a necessity; just a product of pervasive consumption. Overshoot could be resolved by a conscious effort to reduce humanity's demand on the planet (Ibid.). Travelling may help a country's mobility, but also the formulation of a system perspective, as individuals would be thrust into a culture that is unbeknownst to them (Ibid.).

Social processes are one-directional and hard to overcome and Meadows et al (2005) proposes the human ecological footprint is increasing, but awareness in the matter is low. Evan (2011) believes that understanding consumption through an ecological lens will reduce hostile environmental impacts, but political support for change to bring our ecological footprint down is limited (Meadows et al, 2005). This affects semi-peripheral countries like the Philippines, or peripheral countries that are exploited by the wealthier nations, as it is in those countries where the majority of production takes place (Wallerstein, 1974). Sustainable consumption can be achieved by reducing the quantities of goods and services, but also individuals consuming less, which will have positive effects on future generations (Meadows et al, 2005). However, in a changing economic climate, opposing responses are socially embedded in our westernised, neoliberal consumer cultures

(Ibid.). In the face of technology, it is unlikely that a reduction of consumption will be seen, as it is easier to consume via technology and it will take individuals to create normative environmentally friendly attitudes. We are now fighting against a bigger consumer society than ever before, and if Americanization is successful, there will no longer be a need to travel because there would essentially be a world culture.

Day 16

I was excited by the idea of Manila's shopping mall and wanted to visit it, as I was told it was one of the biggest Malls in Asia. One thing that many westerners love is familiarity; Starbucks, McDonalds and a plethora of American food and shop outlets to make us feel right at home. Globalization essentially marks the increasing cross-border flows, which in turn, makes things more generic, and turns products into what Ritzer calls *nothingness* (Guillén cited in Held et al, 2001; Ritzer, 2002). Nothingness is a product of globalisation, as it functions to spread market economy through commodification (Ritzer and Ryan, 2002). *Somethings* (culture, localised goods) are being lost through homogenised, neo liberal specifications (Ibid.).

Gereffi (1994) writes about global "commodity chains", where production takes place on a global scale. McLuhan (1964) believes in a global village, where tastes and desires are homogenized. Structures such as the mall are American and homogenised, but the shops inside weren't all chains (Ritzer, 2002). This shows flexibility within globalisation, where the global meets the local (Ibid.). During my time in the Philippines, I went to six shops and restaurants that I knew. One thing that I had never noticed or seen before was an example of Robertson's glocalisation; in the Filipino McDonalds you can have McSpaghetti, which shows a consideration for both the local and global chains (Ritzer, 2002). Ritzer (2002) argues that the homogenization of the fast- food industry appeals to wider audiences and is accepted by the locals, but this causes a displacement of local businesses (Ibid.). I was sat in Starbucks later on in the day and I wondered why I would rather get a drink from there than go to the family run juice bar on the beach. My attitude was problematic as it highlights the lack of distinctive substance and loss of culture, which is a direct effect of tourism (Ibid.). Ritzer (2002) argues that the human desire for diversity is being suppressed by uniformity and predictability, leading into an isomorphic form of governance, which Barber calls a "McWorld" (Ibid.).

There is a certain irony that I set out to portray, which is we travel for the uniqueness of a place, which paradoxically makes it less unique and more elusive. As soon as we feed into the global neoliberal system we become part of the problem. However, it is possible to become part of the solution by being aware of your impact as a tourist, working to reduce your ecological footprint and being aware how your journey affects others.

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