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CRUISE SHIP TOURISM IN COZUMEL, MEXICO: “FRIOS COMO LA NATURALEZA DE LOS GRINGOS LO DICE”

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Cruise ship tourism is a dynamic site of inquiry within the anthropology of tourism. Its history and current social manifestations concerns millions of localities around the globe that combine to form a transnational entity like no other. Billions of dollars and tourists’ bodies transverse oceans every year and the historical, social, and political processes that follow these flows of money and people are appropriately complex for ethnographic engagement. Applied anthropology, as a method and theory dedicated to problem solving, seems is ripe for the study of cruise ship tourism.

The localities where each cruise ships docks, referred by the industry as port-of-calls, are local communities with substantial stake in the economic prosperity of cruise ship tourism. Cozumel, a popular cruise ship port-of-call and island off Mexico’s eastern coast of the Yucatán Peninsula, welcomed nearly 1,000 cruise ships with an estimated three million cruise ship tourists disembarking in 2012-2013 (El Semanario Cozumel 2014:7). Cozumel is home to a unique blend of tourisms and tourists: from temporary cruise ship tourists who tour the island for a few hours each day while docked; all-inclusive, stay-over hotel guests; backpackers from the mainland; and those “running away from something,” in the form of longer-stay, expatriates, as an expatriate school director alluded to naming this group in one of our conversations (interview, 30 November 2011). All converge and blend in this thirty-mile-long island of approximately 100,000 permanent residents.

One particularly dynamic site of applied anthropological inquiry pertains to an economic climate of competition that exists in Cozumel. My work is centered on the argument that the U.S.-based cruise ship

industry, formed by Carnival Corporation & PLC and Royal Caribbean International, forces such a climate upon locally owned and operated businesses, including their owners, operators, and employees. This climate is tangible among island residents working in the service sector: from timeshare salesperson at a highly rated all-inclusive resort to a non-Spanish speaking (who is fluent in only Maya) kiosk vendor selling souvenirs from a pushcart in Puerta Maya cruise ship terminal. The legalities surrounding each agreement between local business and cruise line is ripe for further study in questioning the industry's motives and assessing local negotiation. Yet, as applied anthropology searches for answers to help the local population, we must agree the forces behind such economic processes are transnational conglomerations, corporate entities who operate beyond U.S. legislation and therefore beyond the law in most cases. Furthermore, cruise ship tourists seem to revel in the current schemata: balloon hats and yard-long margarita cups, inappropriately lewd tee shirts for sale, 1970s disco blaring while dining on \$11 guacamole just steps from where their ship is anchored for the day. As cultural anthropologists, we must therefore ask, what can applied anthropology lend to such a discussion, analyzing a constructed space as cruise ship tourism port-of-calls, especially in terms of socio-economic ecology?

Cozumel as a Constructed Space

Vendors, restaurateurs, hotel workers, timeshare sellers, and tour operators all work extremely hard to produce an experience for each tourist they encounter. For example, there is a new-wave Maya spiritualist from Mexico City, working as part-shaman, part-tour guide for a sweat lodge tour for cruise ship and stay-over tourists, to a native New Jerseyian, working to establish herself as a private chef and food tour guide. Each local Cozumeleño is focused on providing a service that stands out from the rest of the competition. Competition comes from other tourism destinations in the Riviera Maya, the Caribbean, and Mexico; from pre-booked shore excursions offered upon ticket purchase as well as onboard each of the cruise ships; and among other local businesses as positive reviews and rankings in locally produced marketing publications or online travel sites, like Trip Advisor, are prized commodities.

International tourists staying for longer-term vacations (as opposed to the daily arrival and departure of cruise ship tourists) and the expatriate community on the island are also dynamic forces. These populations are important contributors to the pulse of the local community. Working, either in tourism or not, along with community outreach or volunteering is commonplace. Facebook groups and email listservs provide opportunities for these populations to become entrenched in local life and establish a voice and identity of their own on the island. Beach clean ups, charity dinners, pet adoptions, and specific details of larger island-wide events (e.g. February's annual carnival celebration or the Iron Man triathlon) are regularly transmitted and shared community information.

While such communities and activities are vibrant and widespread, the physicality of space on the island is divided. A mere two blocks heading eastward, away from the busy main tourist artery of Melgar Avenue where each of the three cruise ship docks are located, you are suddenly transported into a different

landscape. This is the majority of San Miguel, Cozumel's most populated main city on the island, where there are no U.S.-owned shopping or dining choices like Margaritaville, Hooters, Starbucks, or Harley Davidson. Locally owned and operated dive shops, car, bike, and scooter rental companies, regional and local construction and remodeling stores, hair and nail salons, and *comidas economicas*, are interspersed with private residences.

This description is not intended to label the non-cruise ship tourist zone of the island as “authentic” Mexico, as that romanticized notion is a false social construct and debates over authenticity in tourism studies have aptly waned in recent years (see Leite and Graburn 2009 for a concise description of the debate). Rather, its description is to highlight the ways in which these two environments, the cruise ship tourist zone of Melgar Avenue and basically everywhere else on the island two blocks east, converge daily through the lens of tourism but in very segmented ways. Above all, tourists mainly operate in the structured confines of the tourist zone as manufactured by the cruise ship industry. Specially, such constructed spaces are the three cruise ship piers, terminals, and associated retail and dining centers on the island: Punta Langosta, International Cruise Terminal, and Puerta Maya, each located on Melgar Avenue. These piers are physical manifestations of boundaries intended to satisfy cruise ship tourist's desires of an accessible and identifiable experience on land while keeping profits during cruise ship tourists' disembarkation in the hands of the cruise ship industry.

Royal Village: The Mall as a new Tourist Borderzone

On Tuesday, January 14, 2014, six cruise ships are docked in Cozumel carrying 14,282 cruise ship tourists. International Cruise Terminal, a pier owned by Carnival Corporation to dock their fleet of ships, has two of its ships docked: the Carnival Paradise and Celebrity Solstice. The scene around this pier is similar to a frantic beehive: cruise ship tourists climbing in and out of taxis, local tour guides yelling for tourists to choose their excursion, crossing guards blowing their whistles and motioning for the next amassing of cruise ship tourists to safely cross the congested two-lane street. Yet even before these cruise ship tourists set foot on pavement, they must first make their way off of the ship, which is an exhausting trek in and of itself. As one tourist proclaimed, “It was like a maze trying to get off the ship!” (interview, 14 January 2014). International Cruise Terminal, along with the immediate cruises ship piers of both Punta Langosta and Puerta Maya, house a labyrinth of indoor shopping with seemingly thousands of vendors calling attention to their wares, tour services, and restaurants. At International Cruise Terminal, they will wake their way through the pier, emerging into the outside air, to finally cross the gate and take their first steps on the island.

Welcoming them across the street from the cruise terminal and pier is *Royal Village*, a newly constructed “shopping center” that was first erected in January 2012 and opened August 2012. This center was constructed through an agreement with the island's government and the cruise ship industry (interview, August 2012). Two years later after its initial inception, the mall is not filled to capacity with stores,

vendors, or restaurants. A 15-foot structure of a guitar looms above the mall, advertising Hard Rock Café, yet there is not such a restaurant on the grounds. Rather than a bustling zone of tourist activity, as depicted in its promotional renderings as displayed on giant posters throughout the complex, today, even with over 14,000 cruise ship tourists docked mere feet away, *Royal Village* is nearly deserted. Soft music and a warm breeze off the ocean fill the space where tourists do not.

This purposefully designed and erected physical space for cruise ship tourists confronts Edward Bruner's theory of touristic borderzones (2005). Bruner defines touristic borderzones as environments in the tourism landscape where guest and host rarely share other than to "coexist in a specially constructed locality, a performance space" (Bruner 2005:251). Spaces created by the cruise ship industry are a "specially constructed locality" yet not necessarily built for *performance* rather such specifically segmented spaces in the scope of cruise ship tourism are built for *sale*. Further, this space is specifically calculated and intentionally manipulated for a specific type of sale, intended to profit the multinational corporations or the few locally owned businesses in agreement with the U.S.-based cruise ship industry—not for the majority of the island.

In cruise ship tourism borderzones, performance is practically a non-entity as shopping centers, easily identifiable and familiar to cruise ship tourists mainly hailing from the U.S., Canada, and Western Europe, have replaced displays of indigeneity. Although small groups of mariachis or "Maya Warriors" (local young men and women dressed as stereotypical representations of indigenous Maya, Aztec, or Inca) perform for tourist dollars are both common examples of performance at each of Cozumel's three cruise ship piers. Such borderzones more glaringly entice cruise ship tourists to spend their money in such retail spaces that are purposefully designed to shield profits from the majority of island residents. In a recently published newspaper article, one Cozumeleno writes,

Existe la apreciación de que las empresa de cruceros, usan el Puerto de Cozumel para hacerse de dinero y no está siendo corresponsables con los habitantes de esta isla. Los tres muelles de cruceros que hay en Cozumel ... deben darle más a Cozumel. Es cierto son buenos aliados, pero creo que se aprovechan de sentirse indispensables para nuestra economía, creo llegó el momento de adoptar otra actitud y posición frente a las navieras y veamos porqué. Si somos socios, nosotros le damos el mar y las bellezas de la isla, seguridad y recoja de basura para sus pasajeros y ellos, ¿Qué le dan a Cozumel? ¿Solo traen sus barcos?... Pero además, que obra o acción social, o donación le conocemos a esos tres muelles. Ninguna y no vemos que este en su proyecto construir algun parque, campo deportivo o donar alguna obra para beneficio de la gente de Cozumel ... son duros, son injustos, insensibles, frios como la naturaleza de los gringos lo dice. A la Carnival, al muelle SSA internacional [International Cruise Terminal] y la muelle de Punta Langosta, hay que exigirles más, que colaboren, que aporten, que ayuden más al pueblo (El Semanario Cozumel 2014:18).

"There is an appreciation for the cruise ship industry, they use the Port of Cozumel to make money and

are not being responsible with the inhabitants of this island. The three cruise ship piers in Cozumel ... they should give more to Cozumel. It is true they are good allies, but I think they take advantage of being indispensable to our economy, I think the time [has] arrived to adopt a different attitude and position on shipping and we see why. If we are partners, we give you the sea and the beauty of the island, security and collect garbage for the passengers and them? What do they give Cozumel? They only bring their boats?... But moreover, what work or social action, or donation do we know of at those three piers? Not one and we do not see this in your project to build any park, sports field or donating some work for the benefit of the people of Cozumel ... they [the cruise ship industry] are tough, they are unfair, insensitive, cold as the nature that the gringos say. At Carnival, the pier international SSA [International Cruise Terminal] and Punta Langosta pier, we must demand more, to collaborate, to contribute, to help more people” (El Semanario Cozumel 2014:18). Author translation.

As demonstrated in this powerful statement, the cruise ship industry is not giving back to the local population as they continue to reap millions of dollars of money generated from cruise ship tourism. The relationship between the U.S.-based cruise ship industry and Cozumel is unequivocally unequal.

Authoritative Power and Cruise Ship Tourism

A tension exists in Cozumel between locally owned and operated businesses, island residents, and cruise ship conglomerates' expectations for economic success on land. It is the cruise ship industry that ultimately prevails as the island's premier source, the center of authoritative power, of tourism to Cozumel. Max Weber (1947) defines authoritative power as power that is legitimated, conforming to the law and rules, and therefore accepted by society as authority. The massive earnings reaped from cruise ship tourism at the industry level (specifically by the U.S.-based cruise ship industry) in Cozumel are used to maintain legitimacy through the continued maintenance and establishment of new centers of commerce (e.g. *Park Royal*). Such practices therefore can be seen as tools to promulgate authoritative power as the industry works both within the framework of local government, in terms of construction agreements, as well as building to accommodate tourist expectations of the familiar (i.e. Urry's tourist gaze, 1990).

A further example how the cruise ship industry establishes itself as an authoritative power is seen through its ability to work beyond the confines of law. U.S.-based cruise ship industry operates autonomous from U.S. law, as many cruise lines are registered in countries other than the U.S. (e.g. Liberia, the Bahamas, Panama, et cetera), and therefore are not accountable to U.S. regulation, environmental and labor laws, or corporate taxation. Non-U.S. flag registries, commonly referred to in the industry as “flags-of-convenience,” dominate because

U.S. laws are generally the most restrictive of all maritime nations. Convenience registry critics feel that cruise lines choose developing nations' registries because as flag states, these nations are not only reluctant to discipline major contributors to their economies, but also do not have the resources to enforce regulations or even punish polluters [Gupta et.al. 2012: 276; see also Wright 2007].

As the aforementioned newspaper article attests and as Weber theorizes, “authoritative capitalism remains and trumps supreme hegemony over local community” (Weber 1947:327). Although this sentiment is exemplified throughout cruise ship port-of-call communities in the Caribbean, this is the piece of the puzzle where applied anthropology can be employed as nuance, dynamism, and mobility shape most constructs of social consciousness.

Conclusions

It is imperative to note that there are degrees of agency among the local community of Cozumel, as power, even authoritative in nature, is not completely hegemonic. As Foucault asserts, “Power must be analyzed as something which circulates.... It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth” (Foucault 1977:98). Individual and collective agency, concepts that Sherry Ortner (2006) uses to critique the way Bourdieu (1977) and Sahlins (1981) have omitted both (individual and collective agency) from their descriptions of power is useful in describing cruise ship tourism. Ortner describes agency as not merely a form of Western individualism but a shifting force embedded within cultural construction. It is the focus of this research and perhaps a call to applied anthropology to expand Ortner’s conception of the way agency is “shaped, nourished or stunted” under different regimes of power (Ortner 2006:137). Focusing on the social construct of power in terms of regimes, whether they are multinational, political, or social in nature, is extremely useful when analyzing tourism borderzones. Moreover, this line of thinking works in thinking how applied work can answer community questions on how to best “support, collaborate, and help” the local population of Cozumel under the theoretical guise of authoritative power.

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