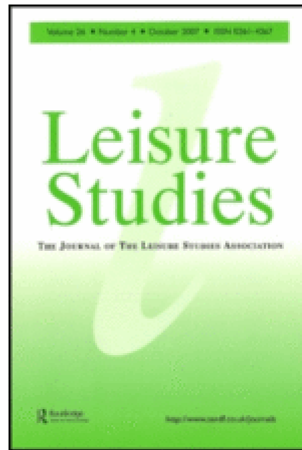

The Capitalist Voyeur: Commodification, Consumption and the Spectacle of the Cruise

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The Capitalist Voyeur: Commodification, Consumption and the Spectacle of the Cruise

Abstract

This article explores the pervasive forms of consumerism which underpin the cruise experience. Drawing upon Baudrillard, among others, we examine the process of 'magical thinking' utilized by passengers to mask the hidden social, economic, environmental, and cultural harms that surround the international cruise industry and which in turn serves to reinforce inequalities and structural harms between the Global North and South, particularly in developing and 'exotic' destinations. In doing so we aim to unpack the construction of leisure cruising in contemporary western society, arguing that it has become the epitome of the normalization of banal capitalist consumption which underpins the current global neoliberal capitalist system.

Key words: Baudrillard, capitalism, commodification, cruising, global inequalities, 'magical thinking'

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Introduction

The space and experience of the cruise ship is sold as the pinnacle of consumption and leisure (Steel, 2016). Cruise tourism reports celebrate increasing numbers of ships, routes, passengers, and the addition of bigger and better vessels as current and projected profits continue to rise (CLIA, 2018). However, this framing misses the significant social, economic, environmental, and cultural harms surrounding the industry (Terry, 2017). While other researchers have narrowed their attention to specific harms or events (i.e. infectious diseases on cruise ships or the risk for theft of passenger possessions), our focus here is on the role of consumption as it is ingrained and celebrated within the current global neo-liberal capitalist system. The cruise therefore, is used to examine the epitome of profit making as vacationers, from both the US and the UK, 'safely' view foreign lands in what has been deemed a culturally appropriate way. This is done with little acknowledgement of the hidden exploitation, harms and inequalities. Both symbolically and with real implications, we argue that 'the cruise' in all its spectacle, is a signifier of the normalizsation of banal capitalist consumption within the current global neoliberal capitalist system.

'Cruising' the literature

Before providing an overview of the literature on the cruise industry, it is worth briefly addressing the concept of "tourism," a term that has received considerable attention. Boorstin (1964) distinguished tourism from the travelling that occurred in prior centuries, as being something that "carried more people to distant places…the experience has become diluted, contrived, prefabricated" (p.79). Others have criticized this assessment situating their critiques in analyses of modernity and the emergence of industrialized societies where value has become increasingly disconnected from work and more readily connected to culture (MacCannell, 1976;

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3 Leiper, 1990). Tourism, and the attractions that draw visitors, through this lens is less an escapism and more a result of purposeful decision-making directed by tourists own motivations. Here we view tourism as less of a prefabrication as insisted by Boorstin (1964) and more a result of the spectacle of modern life, what Debord (1994) saw as a transition away from being into having, and then again to appearing. Debord (1994) argues that,

> Boorstin cannot see that the proliferation of prefabricated 'pseudo events' – which he deplores – flows from the simple fact that, in face of massive realities of present-day social existence, individuals do not actually experience events…pseudo-history has to be fabricated at every level of the consumption of life (p.141).

For Debord (1994), through the domination of appearances or what he referred to as signs, the only thing that is produced and reproduced is the spectacle itself, with tourism becoming an important commodity sign in a society dominated by consumerism:

> The spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something added to the real world—not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality…the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing mode of social life (Debord, 1994, p.13).

Beyond early definitional debates, there is a large scholarly literature from leisure studies that examines the evolution of leisure time as a result of industrialization. This has included varying analyses of tourism and tourist attractions (Breathnach, 2006; Evans, 2003; Prentice, 2001; Rojek and Urry, 1997), geographically centered studies that examine the emergence of tourism in certain parts of the world (Ghimire, 1997), international tourism patterns and flows (Scheyvens 2002), as well as domestic tourism both as a viable alternative for visitors and as a form of economic growth in marginalized regions of the world (Archer, 1978; Carr, 2002; Keyser, 2002;

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Turner and Reisinger, 2001). Other studies have focused on individual impacts of tourism such as processes of self-transformation (Breathnach, 2006; Noy, 2004; Selwyn, 1996), or religious pilgrimages as tourism catalysts and revenue for growth (Barkin, 2001; Rao and Suresh, 2001; Winter, 2004). Others still, focus on the cultural significance of tourism (Munt, 1994; Prentice, 2001), taking varying approaches to examine the influence of cultural landscapes as well as cultural consumption and commodification. This literature. too large to address here, is beyond the central focus of this study; that of the cruise ship industry.

While Ritzer (1999) has characterized modern cruise ships ~~in modern times~~ as 'cathedrals of consumption' (p.9), there is little scholarly literature that directly addresses the role of consumption and the cruise industry (see Sprague-Silgado, 2017 for the exception). Noy (2014) suggests that a lack of detailed scrutiny of the running of 'mega-cruise ships' (p.61) is in part because of the heavy gate-keeping exercised by cruise ship management. There is, however, a growing body of ethnographic and autoethnographic accounts. Yarnal (2004) has explored group trips and interactions on cruises through the lens of 'play,' while Tomaselli (2012) examined the tensions arising between smokers and non-smokers to understand perceptions of environmentalism and pollution on board a cruise in the sensitive Antarctic environment. Symes (2012) meanwhile draws attention to the 'slow' nature of life at sea through an opportunistic study as a passenger on board a long-distance cargo ship. Perhaps of most interest here is Rocha et al.'s (2017) discussion on the role of ritualisation and consumption among cruise passengers from Brazil's emerging middle classes. They note the way in which new members of the Brazilian middle classes learn to read the signs and signifiers of the cruise in their search for belonging in the idealized upper classes.

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Much of the research on cruising ~~tends to focus~~ focuses ~~on providing a historical overview~~ the history of the industry itself as it relates to space and place (Steel, 2016), environmental harms caused by its expansion (Caric, 2011), security risks to passengers (Hickey, 2012; Leesfield & Rose, 2016) including crime (Anderson, 2000; Lewins & Gaskell, 2013), the threat of maritime terrorism (Gilbert Stowell, 2015; Zagami, 2013), and the treatment and experience of employees of cruise ship companies (Končar, 2017; Macbeth, 1992; Terry, 2009; Thompson 2004). Steel (2016) provides an overview of the historical development of the cruise industry, questioning the value assigned to touring the exotic, especially when viewed within a framework that acknowledges its colonial roots. She argues that by examining histories of cross-cultural interactions, the voyeuristic tourism can be viewed as evidence of shifts in indigenous/European cruise passenger power relations. Vogel (2004) also argues that the emerging popularity of cruises can be attributed to 'the cruise vessel's function as a protective, emotionally reassuring, complexity-reducing "cocoon"' (as cited in Papathanassis & Beckmann, 2011, p.154)~~. This construction~~ which not only attracts consumers but provides ~~for~~ the 'safety' necessary for cruise travel.

There also exists ~~12w~~considerable research from the fields of hospitality and tourism. A meta-analysis of literature produced between 1983 and 2009 shows a focus upon passenger desires, motivations, decision-making behaviours and satisfaction (Papathanassis & Beckmann, 2011). Though much of this literature focuses on ways to improve the cruise passengers experience (Lynn & Kwortnik, 2015; Sun et al., 2014) and the profitability of the industry more generally (Chen, 2016), there are a few articles of note. Lester et al. (2016) emphasise the increasing size of cruise ships and the implications that accommodating such large vessels has on destination economies, exposing the decision-making that pits projected tourism revenue against the economic costs of

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dredging and environmental damage such as that caused to coral-reefs. Likewise, in a sociological analysis of wider tourism practices Jaakson (2004) discusses the impacts of globalization and neocolonial tourism on local communities, while Cabezas (2008) has sought to build on this, situating cruising within wider discussions on the impact of tourism in the Dominican Republic. This has marginalised and excluded many smaller, local, and regional economies in favor of the larger supply chains utilised by multinational tourist-focused organisations.

Another literature focuses on the environmental harms that would need to be addressed if the industry were to be both sustainable and 'greener' in their operations (Johnson, 2002). Vogel and Oschmann's (2013) analysis of the coincidence of the rise of consumer cruising with the shift to 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000) argues that cruising reflects contemporary life and society, suggesting that it can provide a refuge from the insecurity and unpredictability of day-to-day life, while allowing people to 'live for the now'. They conclude that 'liquid modernity was a precondition for the cruise sector to grow out of its tiny elitist niche and to become the global business it is today, and that the phenomenon of cruise ship tourism is a manifestation of liquid modernity' (Vogel & Oschmann, 2013, p.77). Despite the growing body of zemiological literature focusing on the need to place greater emphasis on the role of environmental and social harm in particular, (see for example Hillyard & Tombs, 2017; Pemberton, 2015; Raymen, 2019), there is little ~~commentary or~~ analysis of~~n~~ the contradictions that exist when examining the burgeoning cruise ship industry within the context of neo-liberal commodification and the harms and inequalities that result. It is this, ~~that~~ we argue, is deserving of further examination and extrapolation among critical scholars.

Theoretical frame

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Baudrillard (1998) argues that consumption is both an objective process and lived as a myth creating what Ritzer (1998) terms a 'fantasy world of goods and services' (p.17). This process of what Baudrillard (1998) has termed 'magical thinking' (p.31) expands upon Debord's (1994) 'spectacle' by exploring the disconnect between how and by whom the product is made, alongside the larger social meanings it may have (i.e. divorced from the harms and inequalities necessary for the purchase). ~~Debord (1994) has argued that,~~

~~The spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something added to the real world – not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality…the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing mode of social life (para 6).~~

The spectacle, then, distracts us from exploitative conditions and ingrained inequalities, ~~. This is~~ especially ~~the case~~ when metrics for success in modern society are commonly defined within capitalist parameters (Merton, 1938; Messner & Rosenfeld, 2007; Wacquant, 2009). Consider that in the United States, the United Kingdom and many other countries across the globe, 'success' is achieved through acquiring material wealth. The consumption of goods, such as houses, cars, or a cruise are symbolic of having 'made it.' The consumer is being sold a luxury cruise to fulfil their desire to travel, to be exposed to differing cultures, and vacation in comfort. Not only are the wants of the passenger fulfilled, but it conveys a message to others – i.e. 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen, 1973).

As argued by Veblen (1973):

> The possession of wealth confers honor; it is an invidious distinction. Nothing equally cogent can be said for the consumptions of goods, nor for any other conceivable incentive to acquisition, and especially not for any incentive to the accumulation of wealth (p.35).

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At the structural level, consumption becomes a form of language - a mode of discourse that conveys messages and symbols ~~6y~~to communicate (i.e. success). Through this process the commodity becomes greater than its intended use as its value becomes associated with what it signifies.

Expanding on Baudrillard's (1998) notion that this enables the consumer to read the system of consumption (i.e. knowing what to consume and when), we argue that the language of consumption has greater applicability. ~~It is~~ T~~t~~hrough consumption, ~~that~~ broader ideologies and structures can be broadcast and reified, supporting unequal power structures that value some groups over others (i.e. employee versus passenger, cruise liner versus indigenous businesses etc.). Capitalism is promoted as *the* system of success, creating a *Zerrspiegel* - a distorting mirror enhancing certain images while suppressing others. In the case of the cruise ship, capital accumulation leads to the massive social harms, inequalities, and economic exploitation (Bauman, 1998; Nagle, 2008) that are hidden beneath the shiny veneer of material possessions, status identity (including conspicuous consumption), and entertainment. This is not questioned by the consumer (i.e. the passenger) due to the pervasive nature of the neo-liberal system whereby consumers act willingly while living the myth, governed by the 'magical thinking' disconnecting them from the reality of their consumption. The 'magical thinking', becomes a form of seduction: 'the paramount tool of integration (of the reproduction of domination) in a consumer society' (Bauman, 1998: pp.221–222).

We are further able to understand the embedding of these behaviours, or their banality, through May and Finch's (2009) second iteration of Normalization Process Theory which 'is concerned with the social organisation of the work (implementation), of making practices routine elements of everyday life (embedding), and of sustaining embedded practices in their social contexts

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(integration)' (p.538). Their theory consists of three core elements: a) Material practices become routinely embedded in social contexts through people working, individually and collectively, to implement them; b) Implementation is operationalised via four generative mechanisms (coherence; cognitive participation; collective action; reflexive monitoring), and; c) The production and reproduction of a material practice requires continuous investment by agents in ensembles of action carried forward in time and space (May & Finch, 2009, p.540). Through these processes – implementing, embedding, and integration –a false consciousness comes to exist about the origins of the goods that are selected for purchase and the violence, harm and oppression used to produce them in their mass quantities. This creates a gross irony whereby the consumer, through their false consciousness, purchases material goods for the status identity that they convey, remaining ignorant to the pain, abuses, and hardships suffered by others in their production. They consent to banal, disavowed, depoliticised and normalized violence, accepting the commonsense ideology that has been 'negotiated by unequal forces in a complex process through which the subordination and resistance of the worker is created and recreated' (Simon, 1982, p.64). Consumption becomes pathological, driven by fantasies disconnected from reality, where 'consumerism may go so far as consum[m]ation, pure and simple destruction' (Baudrillard, 1998, p.43). For the subordinated this takes the form of inequality and violence against the producer's body (i.e. exploited workers, indigenous populations) alongside more banal forms of everyday oppression that are masked within the broader neo-liberal cultural (re)production.

Methodology

Echoing Noy (2014) our discussion of the impact of this consumer driven, neoliberalised spectacle is informed by a 'structured accident' forged through 'a coincidence conditioned by

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[one's] social position' (Blommaert, 2004, p.46); one of us (Mahoney) spent ten days on a medium-sized cruise ship operated by TUI (formerly Thomson) around the Mediterranean in 2017 on a family vacation. Collins meanwhile has previously been on a leisure cruise to the Caribbean and this experience further enhances our argument. Like others before (Noy 2014, Symes, 2012), fieldwork was not the intention of these trips, however 'being there' presented opportunities to analyse a context where time and space are 'out of joint' as the experience unfolds (Symes, 2012, p.57). Ethnography facilitates 'a sensitivity to meanings and values and an ability to represent and interpret symbolic articulations, practices and forms of cultural production' (Willis, 1977, p.3). The emerging body of ethnographic and autoethnographic work examining experiences at sea underscores the importance of the approach ~~plays~~ in understanding the experiential nature of life in the short term (i.e. for the passenger), or medium-to-long term (for many staff) in the maritime industries.

Autoethnography, 'concerned with producing creatively written, detailed, local and evocative first-person account of the relationship between personal autobiography and culture' (Grant, Short & Turner, 2013, p.2), takes this a step further. Highly reflexive, it 'uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices and experiences' (Adams, Ellis & Holman Jones, 2014, p.1). A vital role of autoethnography 'is to expose the "elephants in the room" of cultural context: social and organisational practiced which beg robust scrutiny and critique but which are taken for granted as unquestioned, normative "business as usual"' (Grant, Short & Turner, 2013, p.5). An autoethnographic approach facilitates the exploration of the hidden relations and harms embedded within cruise tourism, and we seek to draw attention to these normative social and organisational practices.

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Ferrell (2004) has argued that ethnographies 'are profoundly inefficient, all but guaranteed to seduce the researcher out of professionally appropriate schedules and into a temporal netherworld of dawdling and delay' (p.9). Cruise ships are a 'slow community' (Symes, 2012, p.61); 'dawdle and delay' are fundamental to the cruise experience with passengers engaged in continual and rampant consumption in order to stave off the banality of their trip. By their very design, they are an ideal setting to employ such approaches. It is with this in mind that we turn to analyse the experiences of the passenger experience on board a contemporary leisure cruise.

The cruise ship experience

Cruising is often portrayed as 'a family friendly, pleasurable and quite affordable recreation' (Noy 2014, p.52); a space and experience advertised as a central location of convenience, luxury, and comfort. It offers the world's abundance and the exotic with ships 'serving as microcosms of neoliberal narratives of freedom as enacted in the marketplace' (Kohlberg, 2013, p.5).

Inside and out the ship is a spectacle to behold. Registered in Malta de to its relatively low tax rates, at 264 metres in length, and a gross cargo weight of 69,130 tonnes it was comprised of 11 decks, 918 cabins accommodating up to 1,830 guests, 753 crew and staff, nine lifts facilitating access, seven restaurants, seven bars, two pools, a casino, theatre, climbing wall and numerous duty-free outlets. Towering over all but the largest tankers and container vessels it is difficult not to be overawed by such a floating metropolis packed with thousands of people and crammed with countless amenities and entertainment; all of which are geared towards facilitating continual consumption by the passengers, including of the 'exotic cultures' visited throughout their trip.

From the outset, passengers are put at ease, encouraged to consume with minimum effort, so much so the act of purchasing goods and experiences become banal – the normative every day

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'behaviour' of the cruise passenger. The inconvenience of attending a fifteen-minute welcome and safety briefing is mitigated with complimentary drinks as a carnivalesque atmosphere is meticulously crafted by the entertainment team, culminating in an all-inclusive top-deck departure party replete with poolside disco and laser light show ~~to mark the~~ marking the beginning of people's vacation, before enjoying a day at sea to recover ahead of the first shore excursions.

Meanwhile staff busily deliver luggage to rooms, saving passengers from the exertion and reality of the labour involved. Everything is done to normalize the cruiser's experience, settling them into a routine and distracting them from the exploitative labour, harm and inequalities that underpin the consumerist experience. While some have been on previous cruises or 'read up', learning how to interpret the signs and 'behavioural norms of a cruise' (Rocha et al., 2017), it is here that the cruise passenger begins to read the system of consumption, knowing what to consume and when through their introduction to a number of activities that represent the 'cruise experience.' The safety briefing marks the beginning of May and Finch's (2009) processes of normalization whereby a variety of tools and measures are deployed to disconnect the passenger from the reality of his/her consumption. Passengers are subtly scheduled into varying activities under the guise of choice. They develop a routine with breakfast followed by shore excursions before returning to the ship for dinner, seeing a show, then enjoying one of the numerous onboard evening activities (all the while served by the same staff who get to know their preferences and facilitate their comfort), before ending the night in the onboard nightclub, repeating similar 'behaviours' throughout their trip (embedding). All the while they consume – food, sights, sounds, experiences and cultures – facilitated by the cruise provider and the staff, who alongside the passenger are active and complicit in this process of normalization whereby behaviours are shaped towards the facilitation of continual and ongoing consumption in their daily practices throughout the cruise (integration).

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Assisted by the process of 'magical thinking' (Baudrillard, 1998) this discourages critical engagement with the implications of passengers' practices and experiences on the cruise, whereby the consumer is focused on receiving the experience itself as opposed to the labour, resources, harm and inequality that have gone into, or resulted from, their purchasing decisions. The centrality of the consumerist logic to the cruise experience (i.e. to be entertained means to spend money) becomes so normalized it not only becomes a form of seduction (Bauman, 1998), but masks the true banality of their experience – the mundane reality of being sat on the cruise liner every night - with alcohol and entertainment readily available in multiple bars, restaurants, clubs and venues on board. The sheer volume of activities available every day means that it is only possible to be bored on a cruise ship if you work at it (Berger, 2004, p.54).

This process is further reinforced through the introduction of payment systems that minimise cash transactions. Many cruises (including this one) offer all-inclusive packages, with upgrades for a 'modest fee' often amounting to hundreds of pounds/dollars per cabin but with all bills applied to your account to be settled at the end of the trip (Princess Cruises, 2018). This is combined with a cashless system that charges everything straight to your room with the swipe of a keycard (Celebrity Cruises, 2018; Royal Caribbean International, 2018); the whole spending process is simplified and distanced from the reality of the cost of the purchases. The upshot of this for the cruise provider is ~~a rise in~~ increased onboard revenues which often exceed the cost of the cruise in the first instance (Vogel, 2011), with casinos and photographs providing two of the main onboard revenue streams (Noy, 2014).

The realities of the avid consumerism and its resulting inequalities are nowhere more evident than in the stark differences between the experiences of the staff working on the ships and local ports, and those of the cruisers (Chin, 2008; Oyogoa, 2016; Vogel & Oschmann, 2013).

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Through operating in international waters, much of the legislation surrounding working conditions and fair pay has limited impact on cruise liners (Wood, 2000). Due to cruise companies being able to utilise the practice of flagging their ships from countries that not only have lesser labour protections but lack the enforcement capabilities for the ones they do have (termed 'flags of conveniences'), state regulations can be easily circumvented and labour more readily exploited (van Fossen, 2016). Staff work for extended periods~~ with little time off~~, remaining away from their families for months at a time. Shifts are normally split with employees working long days with few hours off and so, like many others working in service and hospitality industries, receive little downtime (Terry, 2009). Meanwhile, for entertainment staff, there is constant pressure to perform a variety of routines and activities, with multiple performances each day to maximise the opportunity for passengers to enjoy consuming the spectacle as it is presented to them.

Moreover, many crew members are reliant on customer tips. Increasingly, however, companies expect tips to be prepaid, essentially including them in the overall fees paid by the customer (Calder, 2017). This simplifies the cruise experience and ensures that staff are tipped for the service they provide with all service related staff receiving a share, however tips are increasingly regulated, further shifting the balance of power from workers towards employers and consumers.

Staff inequalities are further exacerbated by recruitment patterns. Jaakson (2004) noted that while many ships are registered in developing countries due to comparatively low regulations compared with more industrial nations (for example the Bahamas and Caribbean), staff are often not recruited from there due to the relative strength of the unions. Instead many are recruited from South East Asia, particularly the Philippines and Thailand, or Eastern Europe where labour protections are weaker~~ they are afforded lesser labour protections~~. They occupy the roles of

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maintenance, security, catering and service workers, regularly interacting with the passenger, however always from a subservient position performing low-wage menial tasks (Boyce, 2003). In contrast, officers and senior staff are drawn from the ranks of industrialised nations, reflecting ingrained colonial and neocolonial standards and practices, and reinforcing globalised inequalities upon which contemporary neoliberalism relies. In the Caribbean this has been termed 'plantation tourism' (Weaver, 2001, p.166) where the resorts and cruises replicate the labour-intensive models of plantation agriculture, where former colonial peoples (i.e. locals) are exploited in low-wage jobs that are reserved specifically for islands residents.

This cruise was no exception. Arguably the two most visible and recognisable roles from the passenger perspective - the cruise director was English and the captain Norwegian (both were ~~Caucasian~~White European) - putting passengers at ease from the outset (the cruise director actively celebrated serving familiar British cuisine to ensure that everyone 'felt right at home'). In contrast, excluding the entertainment team who were predominantly recruited from the UK - again employed to generate familiarity - the majority of the other staff on board were recruited from South East Asia and Eastern Europe, particularly the Philippines and Bulgaria.

Inequalities are exacerbated for female staff who tend to be younger, single, separated or divorced, and subject to repeat sexual harassment (Thomas, et al., 2013). They are less likely to be employed in officer roles (Belcer, et al., 2003) and often occupy lower status hospitality positions which provide poorer working conditions and pay (Belcher, et al., 2003; Thomas, et al., 2013), something compounded by housekeeping and hospitality staff generally receiving a lower proportion of the (increasingly company controlled) tips (Carnival, n.d).

While labour-relations on cruise ships replicate race, ethnic, gender and class divisions Kolberg (2013, p.4) has drawn on Leach (1993) to argue that leisure cruising, led by Carnival

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Cruises, the largest leisure cruise ship operator in the world, have sought to annihilate the concept of class through what Veblen (1973) has termed the 'democratization of desire'. Rocha et al. (2017) further suggest that leisure cruises temporarily suspend social hierarchies; all can consume to excess in a carnal celebration of abundance and waste. The reality, however, is less clear cut. Leisure cruising has become much more affordable than it had been historically when it remained the preserve of the rich. The cruise market is generally divided into three sectors; the budget sector consisting of older ships operated by local travel agents and smaller companies; 'contemporary cruises' (to which this cruise arguably belongs) include some of the more oft associated companies including Disney, Carnival, Royal Caribbean, Princess, and Norwegian amongst others (Najafipour, Marzi & Foroozanfar, 2014) and include the mega ships associated with large profits (Vogel, 2001); and lastly the 'premium' segment targeted towards a more upscale, older demographic which tends to be destination orientated. Operated by many of the companies in the 'contemporary' market such as Holland America, Orient, and Celebrity, there are little differences in the cruise vessels themselves. Therefore, the type of cruise one purchases holds symbolic meaning conveying material wealth and class status – a form of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1973).

People from a range of social classes mix on each ship, however, the stratification of provision on board still carries signifiers of distinction for those who can afford it. As argued by Klein (2002) the once discarded class-system on cruise ships is steadily returning and 'subtle but nevertheless clear-cut distinctions (from the perspective of each faction) continuously emerge, as individuals try to determine their standing in relation to others' (Rocha, 2017, p.631). While many can now afford a cruise with its all-inclusive packages covering food and a range of drinks, passengers are able to choose their level of privilege on board. Upgrades can be purchased,

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including premium drinks packages, while cabins range from those in the heart of the ship with no natural light, through rooms with a view, to those with a balcony or even a suite. Each comes with a corresponding price tag and provides increasingly private views, despite being able to gain precisely the same views from the ship's public areas. These cabins, represent the 'cultural objects' discussed by Riesman, Glazer and Denney (1961) and drawn upon by Baudrillard (1998, p.92) to represent the symbolic nature of the consumption of these cultural objects.

On a cruise that enables all passengers free and open access to a range of open-air views around the ship, cabins with balconies provide nothing more than an increasingly private experience. There is little point to having such a luxury on a ship beyond the self-reflexive affirmation of status afforded those with said balcony. Each room is within walking distance of public galleries, and such is the anonymous nature of cruising that most on board will never know who is in each cabin; this status can only be for the benefit of the individual passenger and their family. The room and its associated status become greater than its intended use, as its value becomes associated with what it signifies. Like all passengers, one is able to withdraw into their own private space, however in being able to afford the luxury of better, more spacious rooms with a view (and often access to the open air), they can retreat into private space and enjoy the luxuries of the cruise in isolation, away from the objectless anxiety forged through the potential for undesired interaction with others in the communal areas of the ship.

~~Beyond the aforementioned harms, t~~The cruise industry's environmental impact has also received increased attention. Cruise ships generate the equivalent level of harmful emissions as 1 million cars (Channel 4 Press, 2017); an unwelcome reminder of the wider environmental harms caused by passengers' consumption practices. There are ~~already~~ 448 ships in operation, with another 96 anticipated to be added in the coming years (CLIA, 2018). Environmental harms are

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exacerbated by poor practices on ships, identified by whistleblowers reporting failures with the dumping of rubbish overboard (United States Department of Justice, 2016). Schmidt (2000) estimates that, over a week-long voyage, a large cruise ship creates 210,000 gallons of sewage, over one million gallons of grey water (from bathroom usage, laundry, and galleys), 130 gallons of hazardous waste, 25,000 gallons of bilge water, and eight tons of solid waste. In 2001 European powers agreed to target the cruise industry for pollution violations and inspections began in 2003 (Klein, 2002). While there is some indication that the industry is beginning to take environmental harm seriously, there is a protracted history of pollution violations that have led to numerous companies being subjected to fines (Najafipour, Marzi & Foroozanfar, 2014). These harms are only likely to grow with time without significant action to address the leisure classes consumer practices; something unlikely given the profitability of tourism globally, the reliance of developing economies upon it, and the continuing domination of the neoliberal order.

These environmental harms are not advertised by the cruise companies, but nor are they hidden from public view (i.e. the Carnival corporation received considerable media coverage after they were fined $40 million for the dumping oily water off the coast of England in 2013) (D'Angelo, 2016). Passengers readily experience this pollution and the harms associated with it throughout their trip, accepting it as a normal part of their experience. On the cruise of focus here, a number of passengers were unable to access balconies without being greeted by the overpowering smell of diesel from the vents and chimney stack which haunted various public and private areas of the ship. While the crew facilitated a move on health grounds for a pregnant member of our party, others were less fortunate, having to either keep their door to the outside world closed, or grin and bear it. We witnessed a daily reminder of the wider harms caused by cruise-oriented consumption practices which some fellow travelers assumed to be part of the experience and

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sought to ignore. Where noticed, the environmental impact was minimised and the role of the consumer in the ever-growing industry justified or excused; one fellow passenger commented that there are millions of cars on the road and thousands of people on the ship, so their personal impact is minimal. Vogel and Oschmann's (2013) assert that, because of the increasing uncertainty of the future in an increasingly fluid and liquid society, many engage in increasingly 'myopic decisions, securing benefits for the present and leaving the costs to the future' (p.72). This mitigates for one's culpability in unsustainable Western consumption practices while reinforcing the associated harms such is the short-term focus on daily entertainment and immediate gratification.

Willfully ignorant of the impact of their actions, in an attempt to sate the desire for immediate gratification cruise passengers experience 'the anxiety to pull out of the experience as much as possible [as] part of the process of the extraction of meanings from the cruise and the transferring them to their *own* selves' (Rocha, et al., 2017, p.473). Cruise companies exploit the unease experienced in people's day-to-day lives, providing a safe, predictable environment in which to explore the exotic in a guilt-free manner. Vogel and Oschmann (2013) suggest that this routinised stability and predictability is desirable for some. Such activities and approaches provide a temporary sanctuary for the consumer who is increasingly tired of the uncertainties of day-to-day 'liquid life' (Bauman, 2000).

This is particularly true of the daily tour itineraries which mean that the day's sightseeing and consumption of the 'exotic' is planned for them; passengers can know what to expect, when and where. This desire for predictability is capitalised on by the cruise line with passengers funneled into company-controlled markets, often at the behest of the people and economies of the destination ports. The spectacle is presented in such a way that passengers willfully believe they are experiencing local cultures, shopping for indigenous wares, rather than consuming an

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experience cultivated and owned/controlled by the transnational cruise ship company itself. The domination of the cruise companies means they control the geographies the passenger's access including creating physical enclaves (erecting gates and fences), company approved taxi and bus services, and company associated tours (Sprague-Silgado, 2017). In encouraging people to go on organised tours and paying the cruise provider to facilitate these experiences, the provider not only benefits financially through dictating the cost of the tour, but can use the considerable weight that the financial incentive associated with bringing a large group of visitors to an attraction can generate to negotiate substantial discounts, thereby further advancing their own profit margins**.**

Excursion companies can operate in multiple ports, while concessionaires conduct business directly from the ships or operate regionally. Concessionaires provide more specialised services and to secure their ability to operate pay a sizeable fee to the cruise companies to be able to do so (Sprague-Silgado, 2017). Sprague-Silgado (2017) emphasises the problems privatised ports cause to local industry by drawing attention to the Carnival owned Amber Cove in the Dominican Republic where taxicab drivers can no longer afford monthly vehicle payments as Carnival associated operations keep all the money from passengers. Despite this, cruises are marketed to potential customers as a way of 'sampling' a number of locations and cultures with advertising slogans such as 'Ride the savings into the sunset' (Carnival, 2018), 'choose fun' (Carnival, 2018), and 'Discover your adventure personality' (Royal Caribbean, 2018) cultivating an image of cultural-consumerism (Sklair, 2002). Beyond the immediate financial impacts mentioned above, this combination of 'grazing behaviour' and participating in predictable, organised tours, has significant ramifications for host ports in destination countries.

As noted elsewhere (Cabezas, 2008), the trips out enable the cruiser to 'consume' the best elements of the 'exotic' cultures which they are visiting in a safe and friendly manner. Willfully

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sidelining local cultures, regulatory regimes are circumvented and workers and locals exploited. Time is given over for souvenir shopping as part of a strictly scheduled day, thereby enabling the cruiser to collect mementos and or gifts to reinforce the fact that they have visited said exotic location to their friends and relatives. Moreover, in being encouraged to 'graze' their way through multiple destinations, there is little incentive to engage with these 'exotic' cultures in any meaningful way. This was viewed as preferable by some passengers who revealed that they did not wish to be reminded of their relative privilege when on holiday by witnessing or experiencing deprivation or poverty. The magical thinking involved in cruise tourism enables the experience of a carefully crafted, guilt-free and largely sanitised experience, cultivated to enable visits to sites deemed to be of interest to the passenger, before continuing to the next while engaging in the consumption of the delights available at exotic ports of call, ignoring the impact of their actions upon the communities that they visit.

Consider in the beginning of the 2010s, Royal Caribbean increased its operations in the Haitian port of Labadee, included leasing five beaches and a peninsula from the state. Cruisers disembark for a day of watersports, souvenir shopping and beach barbecue style food before returning to the ship for the night. The day is staffed by 300 local low-wage workers with more employed indirectly. The Haitian state receives $6 per passenger from Royal Caribbean to allow them access to the port (Booth, 2010). Drawing on Marx (1992), Sprague-Silgado (2017) argues that:

> wealthy and middle strata passengers experience pleasurable vacations, they are subsumed within a highly advanced and segmented capitalist society that socially alienates them through the reality they experience and the ability to conceive of or determine the true character of what they temporarily interact with and inhabit (p.102).

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This leaves passengers no time to engage in 'ethical tourism'; the spending of money in local stores, restaurants and exhibits not frequented as part of the standard tour itinerary (despite such ideas underpinned by precisely the same consumer principles). Such excursions are increasingly subject to a backlash from residents of a number of desirable locations. There is resistance emerging in many regions (see Jaakson, 2004) to tourists and cruisers, especially from communities and key destinations in the Global North including Barcelona, Dubrovnik and Venice. Barcelona has introduced a levy for each passenger remaining in the city for less than 12 hours, while Dubrovnik has followed Santorini in limiting the number of cruise ships allowed into its waters each day (Edwards et al., 2017). Much of this antimony towards tourists and particularly cruise passengers stems from the their consumption of the sights but, because they can to get their meals included on the ship, invest little into the economy beyond souvenirs and tours, thereby limiting the range of people that their expenditure benefits. The ability of these popular destinations to vent their frustrations and have some of their concerns addressed speaks to their existence in the Global North and their embeddedness within first world economies. This sits in stark contrast to those of many communities in the Global South who lack the same degree of economic or political capital and willpower, to affect meaningful change in consumer cruising practices and alleviate the harms inflicted upon their local economies and environment, or to rebalance agreements in favor of the populace (Brown & Hall, 2009).

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Conclusion

We have sought to highlight the globalised inequalities and associated harms that occur throughout the cruise experience which the spectacular role that the cruise experience plays in distracting its willing passengers from confronting. From replicating racialised neo-colonial labour

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relations to the volume of environmental pollutants, cruise companies engage in numerous harmful practices to provide the ultimate consumer experience. Harms are masked by the illusion that the tourist is pursuing the ultimate leisure adventure and investing in the local economies when taking part in organised trips; what Baudrillard (1988) would term 'magical thinking'. The reality, however, echoes Harvey's (2005) argument that the unequal global distribution of capital accumulation follows a neo-imperialist agenda.

The unequal accumulation of capital reflects the unequal distribution of power in a globalised neoliberal society and reflects the fact that, while anyone can theoretically be a tourist, in reality 'only some people are able to travel and experience a respite from the crushing banality of their lives; others, too poor to go anywhere, are relegated to servicing the needs of foreign travelers' (Cabezas, 2008, p.21). Cruise liners reinforce these global divides and such a position is compounded by competition from other destinations keen to exploit tourism revenues. This competition, combined with their own large supply chains drives down prices for cruise operators, provides further evidence of the imbalance of capital and power between those reliant upon tourist revenues, the tourists as representatives of the more affluent global classes, and the multinational corporations facilitating their visits.

This is hidden from the cruiser who reads the language of consumerism (knowing what to consume and when) and only sees a range of sights and sounds seductively constructed by the cruise companies: 'the paramount tool of integration (of the reproduction of domination) in a consumer society' (Bauman, 2003, p.98). Utilising processes such as May and Finch's (2009) Normalization Process Theory, the consumer willingly lives the myth, governed by the 'magical thinking' (Baudrillard, 1998) disconnecting them from the reality of their consumption. This facilitates the broadcasting and reification of broader ideologies and structures of neoliberalism

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and capital accumulation, supporting unequal power structures that value some groups over others – passengers over employees, cruise companies over local economies, and profit-making over the environment. The pathological and pervasive role of consumerism, needs to be both exposed and recognised as it relates to the cruise experience. It is only then that the neocolonial practices, exploitative social inequalities and resulting harms that exist behind the shiny veneer of material possessions, status identity (including conspicuous consumption), and entertainment that make up the cruise experience, can be addressed.

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