Cruise Ship Tourism in Labadee, Haiti

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Cruise Ship Tourism at Labadee, Haiti: an Analysis of Tourism Discourse and its Effects on the Host Gaze

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SUMMARY

This research focuses on the relationship between the tourist gaze and the host gaze in cruise ship tourism in Labadee, Haiti and uses the theory of the tourist gaze developed by Urry (1990) and refined with Larsen (2011) as a theoretical framework. The Labadee peninsula leased to Royal Caribbean by the government has developed as an anomaly compared to the underdeveloped tourism industry in the rest of the country. Labadee has been constructed as ‘mass tourism’ attraction exclusive to cruise passengers. The fenced-off nature of the leased compound means that local populations are excluded from the entertainment and activities of the area and are usually only granted access for work purposes. This “private island” model is not unique to the cruising industry but has resulted in the development of a peculiar dynamic between tourists and locals. The research contends that the tourists are subjected to a standardized theme-park experience with very little exposure to local culture, which only promotes and perpetuates generalized, romantic and colonialist cycles of representation of the Caribbean. Furthermore, in some passengers, the lack of exposure to local populations has created dissatisfaction and a sense of disenchantment. In parallel, working under the gaze has developed a local attitude echoing historical processes. I argue that unequal power relations and the tourist gaze have direct effects on the sense of self and identity of the host population yet some forms of agency do remain. The research concludes that Haiti finds itself at a threshold with a tourism industry in its infancy. The government and also the people must make the decision of whether they wish to follow the standard path and reproduce colonial patterns or develop more ethical tourism and a new way of experiencing a Caribbean country, to wish a few suggestions are proposed.

1 – INTRODUCTION

“[The tourists] pay for their freedom; the right to disregard native concerns and feelings, the right to spin their own web of meanings. ... The world is the tourist’s oyster... to be lived pleasurable – and thus given meaning” (Bauman, 1993: 241)

Tourism is, statistically speaking, the number one industry in the world, accounting for approximately 9.8 percent of the world’s GDP and provides 1 in 11 jobs on the planet, accounting for 277 million employments in 2014 (http://www.wtce.org/research/economic-impact-analysis/). These numbers represent the fifth year of consecutive growth for the tourism industry. Furthermore, the forecast looks quite positive with an expected growth of 3.8 percent annually for the next ten years. The reason the tourism and travel industry benefits from such an important growth is due to the place that it has acquired in society, and particularly in Western culture. Sketching out the history of tourism in Urry and Larsen’s The Tourist Gaze 3.0 (2011), the roots of mass tourism can be traced back to the nineteenth century, the development of the seaside resort and the belief that downtime, engaging in pleasurable activities or simply doing nothing, was considered not only good but necessary for the maintenance of good mental and physical health. This democratization of travel was further extended during the twentieth century with the development of faster modes of travel, such as the
car, high-speed train and airplane. Globalization and technological developments have further condensed the world, from the largest of continents and countries to the smallest remote islands. Tourism has therefore thrived in the conditions brought about by the world’s increased mobility and interconnectedness.

As a consequence, tourism has come to be interrelated to definitions of modernity and cosmopolitanism. One who travels is considered worldly, mobile and cultured. However, the result of the modern form of tourism is what Urry has defined as a “consuming of places” (2011; 24). Accordingly, prominent tourist destinations have also developed as “products” of the tourism industry, succumbing to representations in de media and so on; a subject we will go into further detail later on in this research. Nonetheless, no other sort of tourism embodies the consumption of places - and in such a compressed amount of time - quite the way cruise ship tourism does. Cruise ship tourism has managed to successfully compress space and time in order to maximize experience: through the organization of “must-see” sights and resorts at docking ports and relatively short windows of time, not allowing tourists to wander too far, cruises have effectively constructed tourist bubbles. This has allowed cruise ship tourists to visit a large number of places, often in Third World countries, such as the Caribbean, all the while diminishing the amount of risk involved. The question of “authenticity” however, is something we will need to discuss further.

Cruise ship tourism holds the position of the largest growing segment of the leisure and travel industry, and its growth has been exponential over the last few decades. Between 1970 and 2004 the number of passengers has increased by 2 200 percent (Klein, 2006: 261). However, in spite of these remarkable numbers, cruise ship tourism remains a niche market. Considering that cruise ships are nothing short of floating, traveling hotel resorts, they account for only 0.6 percent of hotel beds offered worldwide (WTO, 2003). Nonetheless, in Haiti, the country on which this research will focus, cruise ship tourism is the most important source of tourist arrivals. The reason for this is that in 1985, the Royal Caribbean Cruise Line signed an agreement with the Haitian government, then headed by dictator Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier to lease a small northern peninsula called Labadie, on which they built, in the 1990s, a private resort to cater exclusively to their passengers. This area, secluded from the rest of the country, has remained relatively unaffected by the roller-coaster of political, social and economic turmoil that the country has been subject to over the last three decades. As a consequence, its tourist arrivals have been impervious to the negative impacts, from coup d’état, to uprisings, to natural disasters. In fact, the number of tourists has steadily increased since 1995 (Wilkinson, 2006: 173). Labadie and Royal Caribbean make for an interesting case study; it is therefore my belief that this aspect of tourism deserves to be studied, especially in a field as under-studied as Haitian tourism. Also, considering that the present Haitian government is in the midst of signing another agreement, this time with Carnival Cruise Lines in order to lease a beach on an small island off the coast of Les Cayes in the southern peninsula, it is only fitting that research is undertaken to further our understanding of cruise ship tourism in Haiti, focusing not on the obvious economic impacts but socio-cultural impacts on the tourists, the locals and Haiti’s overall image.

Discourse plays a crucial role in tourism. What is said, written, read and heard about a destination is probably more important than the destination itself. In order to understand tourist discourse we must first look at tourism discourse as a whole and the historical intricacies that shape it. Therefore, this research is an attempt at giving a comprehensive description of the
conversations from either sides, the tourist and the local, all the while underlying the processes that influence them. As a consequence, this research will be twofold: first in trying to understand how cruise ship tourists see their “island paradise” during and after their vacation and the elements that shape their views and commentary; and second, in return how the locals perceive the tourists of Labadee and what shapes their perceptions. As mentioned above, we must first take a look at the official tourism discourse for Royal Caribbean and Haiti as a destination and the official discourse from Haiti to which the locals are exposed in order to understand the backgrounds that influence the discussion. In the end, the aim is not to predict outcomes or suggest solutions but simply to provide a better understanding of social processes at play in order to have better perspective in the future.

This research is something between a qualitative and quantitative research. The aim is not to focus on one or a few case studies but also not of producing statistical data and generalizations. The research aims to be representative in the sense that enough data have been gathered in order to form a holistic view of the discourse on the subject. However, the goal was not to collect all the possible accounts that are out there. I have focused on reviews by tourists made in the year 2015 on Tripadvisor.com for reasons of time constraints and due to the sheer number of repetitive entries. The research will also rest on analyses of longer blogs and articles from individual travel blogs that date back further through the years. Yet, due to their scarcity they provide invaluable critical insight and more detailed accounts of the experiences of tourists and interactions with locals. Consequently, my sources are mostly web based. It is only fair to mention that this research reflects my own way of interpreting the data utilizing the theories at my disposal. My views are somewhat those of a local as I am a Haitian native from the capital of Port-au-Prince. As a consequence, this research also relies on my own personal experience of the destination in question, which I have visited on three separate occasions, although I define myself as being a “touris lokal” or local tourist since life in Labadee is far from my own everyday reality. Nonetheless, this research relies upon my own cultural affinity with the country in question and my anthropological background.

This research draws on the theoretical ideas of the “tourist gaze” developed by sociologist John Urry (1990) and further refined in collaboration with Jonas Larsen (2011). In order to understand the tourist gaze we must first define the gaze itself. Larsen argues that: “to depict vision as natural or the product of atomized individuals naturalizes the social and historical ‘nature’, and the power relations, of looking. Our eyes are socio-culturally framed and gazing is a performance that orders, shapes and classifies, rather than reflects, the world” (Larsen, 2006: 245). In sum, gazing is not simply the act of looking but it is a learned pattern of seeing meticulously constructed and learned through circumstance, it involves “the cognitive work of interpreting, evaluating, drawing comparisons and making mental connections between signs and their referents” (Larsen, 2006: 247). As a result, there exists different ways of gazing. The theory of the “tourist gaze”, in this research and explored by Urry and Larsen, suggests that tourist experience places through a learned way of seeing based complex social, historical and cultural processes that is distinguished from the everyday gaze and enables the categorization of a holiday as extraordinary. However, it is based on Western conceptions of tourism, travel and leisure, hence the importance, in my opinion, of also addressing the question of the host or local gaze.
Tourism in Haiti

Until the disastrous earthquake that hit Haiti’s capital in 2010, the country was in many ways invisible to the rest of the world for many decades. However, it wasn’t always so. The 1940s and 1950s are known as the golden years of tourism in Haiti. It was during this time that the country developed its touristic infrastructure such as the hotels Kinam, El Rancho and Oloffson, particularly in anticipation of the capital, Port-au-Prince’s bicentennial celebration. After dictator Francois Duvalier’s rise to power in 1957, tourism waned slightly. Yet, according to Orenstein:

In the 1960s, Haiti attracted the rich, the famous, and the adventurous. Guests like Mick Jagger, Ali MacGraw, Kurt Vonnegut, and Harlem dance legend Katherine Dunham caroused Haitian hideaways like Dunham's sprawling hammock-slung voodoo temple at Habitation LeClerc, established on the land of Napoleon's brother-in-law; or the Hotel Oloffson, back then the Grand Hotel Oloffson [...] Graham Greene set his novel The Comedians there [...] and they once kept alligators in the pool (1997).

The 1970s and 1980s brought about a reconstitution of tourism in Haiti and its extension beyond the capital. For instance, in 1981 the French megacorporation, Club Med, opened its doors in Cote des Arcadins. However, following the 1986 ousting of Jean-Claude Duvalier, successor to his father, the political situation deteriorated quickly and the tourism sector followed along. Ever since then, tourism has undergone a series of ups and downs due to the persistent insecurity and instability. In 1991 the military coup against President Aristide led to violent conflicts between political groups, which resulted in a United Nations trade embargo that ended in 1994. In 1996, Club Med closed its doors and left Haiti due to the insecurity. The bicentennial of Haiti’s independence in 2004 brought about yet another coup and more discord that resulted in the intervention of the United Nations Peacekeeping mission, known in Haiti as the MINUSTAH. Foreign governments issued official travel warnings while many foreign organizations repatriated their staff. For instance, the U.S.A, Haiti’s main trade partner, issued the following: “The Department of State warns U.S. citizens to defer travel to Haiti and urges American citizens to depart the country if they can do so safely” (https://www.osac.gov). The 2010 earthquake disaster that took the lives of many Haitians in the capital and its surroundings only exacerbated an already precarious situation. The highly centralized country was crippled by the events as the central piece of its nervous system, containing not only nearly a quarter of its total population but also its only international airport, major hotels, government buildings and so on were devasated. Yet, the post-earthquake government, elected in 2011 saw this catastrophe as an opportunity for the country to rise from its ashes, or quite literally from the rubble.

The normal chain of events would dictate that destination arrival would drop significantly following a disaster or crisis. However, this disaster attracted a lot of media attention from around the world but also a lot of post-disaster tourism and the income of an unparalleled number of international aid workers and aid grants. For the first time in decades the arrivals were no longer a majority of Haitian diaspora but first-time visitors from all over the world. The country was no longer invisible to the rest of the world… Yet, even though Haiti finally got center stage in the media and attracted international attention, the initial images that were

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1 Statistics show that tourism arrivals did in fact decline between 2009 and 2010 from 387 220 to 254 732 and from 826 275 to 792 510 including cruise ship arrivals. However, the 2009 numbers were exceeded within the first 9 months of 2014 (840 108) indicating an upward trend.
projected were mainly those of devastation. Nonetheless, the amount of foreigners coming to Haiti generated, on the one side, a renewed campaign to promote tourism in Haiti by a government that had previously neglected the issue and renewed interest by the private sector with the developments such as new hotels and a secondary international airport in Cap-Haitien; and on the other hand, a multiplication of third-party reviews and articles on the once forgotten island nation such as “Is Haiti The Caribbean’s Best New Destination?” (www.huffingtonpost.com) and “Haiti vacation: 10 reasons why you need to visit now” (experience.usatoday.com) in addition to the official discourse by governments and the formal media.

**Cruise ship Tourism**

As previously mentioned, although cruise ship tourism is considered a niche market it is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry. The most popular destination for cruises is the Caribbean accounting for around 46 percent of destinations offered. Between 1970 and 2003 cruise arrivals in the Eastern Caribbean increased by 1,061.5 percent (Wilkinson, 2006; 179). The reasons for this dramatic increase are certainly diverse but from a socio-cultural point of view, as explained in research by Miller and Grazer, “As life becomes more stressful, a cruise becomes the ideal way to alleviate the problem. As indicated by a sociologist, a cruise is relaxing. You can spend a good deal of time eating, wandering, reading and engaging in activities that take you away from your daily routine. It is a kind of forced relaxation” (2006; 83) especially when the package offered includes the “Holy Grail” or trifecta of mass tourism: sea, sun and sand.

Cruise ships have been docking at Haiti’s ports since the beginnings of the industry in the 1970s as evidenced by table 1. The significant drop in 1986 corresponds to the political problems under the Duvalier regime. In fact no information was available for periods between 1981 and 1986 and 1986 to 1995. It is safe to assume that cruise ship activity was practically nonexistent during those times due to insecurity issues. The year 1995 corresponds to the beginning of Royal Caribbean’s development of the Labadie peninsula into a private port. Since the company’s arrival in the country, the number of cruise tourists has quickly and steadily increased. Before 1995, the main docking ports were Port-au-Prince and the northern city of Cap-Haitien, located just 10 kilometers away from Labadie. In fact, in 1976 Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haitien ranked number 5 and number 13 respectively as ports of call in the Caribbean (Wilkinson, 2006; 177).

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Source: Wilkinson; CTO; BUST

With the development of Labadie by Royal Caribbean, the second largest cruise group in the world behind the Carnival Corporation (Dowling, 2006; 9), the company created a private,
fenced-in beach resort able to accommodate the ships’ passengers for day excursions all the while providing safety and security in a volatile country that lacks the proper tourist infrastructure. The new destination on Royal Caribbean’s itinerary was also renamed (and trademarked) Labadee®. A change made to facilitate pronunciation for the mostly North American customers but that also distinguishes the destination from the nearby village of Labadie (named after the French marquis who had settled there during the colonial era).

Inside the 260 acres of leased land within the double fence, Royal Caribbean has created a sort of theme park both for adults and children. However, this phenomenon is not uncommon and not exclusive to Royal Caribbean, see Disney’s Castaway Cay or Carnival’s Princess Cays among others. The reason this “private island” concept is popular is because it provides a number of benefits (Klein, 2006; 265): it gives cruise companies fortunate enough to get their hands on a good deal an alternative to the congested ports of the Caribbean. It also allows bypassing the inconvenient Sunday closings of shops and attractions at ports of call. It provides a “captive market”, meaning the cruise companies encounter no competition from local businesses and can pocket all the profits from the offered attractions and services. It allows cruise companies to increase passenger satisfaction by creating a secure and controlled environment with a carefully manicured appearance, a proper “environmental bubble”, diminishing or eliminating any negative aspects that do not comply with the themed experience. Finally, the private island concept provides companies with a mediator port between two distant ports, for instance between Miami and the smaller Eastern Caribbean islands, allowing for slower cruising speeds and by consequent generates fuel economies for large cruise ships.

Source: www.cruisecritic.com
The details of the deal between Royal Caribbean and the Haitian government have never been released to the public. However, the contract has, in recent years, been extended to 2050. The company is there to stay, and in late 2009 it invested 55 million at Labadee in renovations and the construction of a new dock capable of receiving Royal Caribbean’s new ships, *Allure of the Seas* and *Oasis of the Seas*, the world’s largest passenger cruise ships with capacities of more than 5,000 tourists and staff. As of March 2015, the government renegotiated its deal with RC for an increase from 10 US dollars to 12 US dollars tax per tourist. It is also known that the company employs around 230 locals for various jobs on the private grounds such as security guards, beach monitors, waiters, cleaners etc. and approximately another 200 to 300 people benefit indirectly from the tourist arrivals by selling their wares or other services. Beside the area called “Artisan Market” where Haitians sell local trinkets all purchases are cashless and made through the cruise ship cards provided to each passenger, from the Dragon’s Breath Zip line to the drinks are the bar.

It is important to mention that the Royal Caribbean has been the subject of much criticism and controversy for its involvement in Haiti. On the one hand, it is said, “Royal Caribbean shamefully exploits the Haitian landscape while paying an ineffectual and corrupt government who certainly is not trickling down economic gains to the population” (Hil, 2015 at tourismconcern.org.uk) and on the other hand it is said to provide invaluable employment to the people of the tucked away village of Labadie and some Cap-Haitien natives. Surely, the situation is more complex and exceeds in many aspects the subject of this paper. However, in order to understand the greater narrative surrounding cruise ship tourism and particularly Royal Caribbean it becomes necessary to put these observations into context. The Royal Caribbean has been the subject of many scandals over the years that have tarnished the company’s reputation and given much work to its public relations department. In 1999, RC (Royal Caribbean) was fined 18 million dollars for illegally dumping tons of waste oil and chemicals into United States waters, after which they quickly created their “save the waves” campaign; and more recently in 2014, while one of RC’s ship was docked in Rotterdam, the Netherlands issued the company a 600,000 euro fine for violating labor laws and the International Maritime Convention for underpaying and overworking their staff. This is just two of many scandals, which include murder, drowning, molestation, and tax avoidance (despite being a U.S. based cruise line the company is officially registered in Liberia, a tactic used by many cruise companies to avoid paying high taxes on profits) (www.cruiselawnews.com).
2 - IMAGE AND REPRESENTATION

“Would you still want to travel to that country if you could not take a camera with you” – a question of appropriation (Waheed, 2013)

As life gets more stressful cruise ships have become the epitome of a relaxing vacation. Essentially, the tourists are reverted to a childlike state, handing over their worries and the stress of planning a vacation over to travel agents, the onboard staff and destination guides. However, this alone is not what sells so many cruise vacations. Urry and Larsen argue: “tourism necessarily involves daydreaming and anticipation of new or different experiences from those normally encountered in everyday life. But such daydreams are not autonomous; they involve working over advertising and other media-generated set of signs, many of which relate to complex processes of social emulation” (2011; 51). The daydream therefore involves active invoking of the senses by marketing specialists: the feeling of the sun on your skin, the taste of a cocktail, and the sound of the ocean… But most importantly, the creation of anticipation relies on vision, the images of “paradise” in brochures, websites, television and so on. In short, cruise ship tourism thrives on constructed fantasies which do not necessarily reflect reality.

The official discourse from Royal Caribbean’s website describes the Labadee port of call as follows:

Only Royal Caribbean can take you to the private beach destination of Labadee. Our private paradise sits on the north coast of Haiti, surrounded by beautiful mountain slopes and exotic foliage. This exclusive destination offers pristine beaches, breathtaking scenery, incredible thrills and spectacular water activities. Regardless of where you go, you'll find yourself embraced by the beautiful landscape. Labadee's native charm, along with its natural beauty, make this a destination not to be missed. It's impossible to choose just one thing that's special about Labadee. The inviting beach, coral reefs and exciting amenities provide a perfect place to relax and have fun.

Such a representation is closely tied to history and ideological underpinnings of the relationship between natives and foreigners and the Caribbean and the Western world, particularly the impact and influence of colonialism and slavery. The Caribbean is often, if not always, marketed as landscapes of pristine and deserted white sand beaches, azure blue sea all tied together with iconic palm trees. According to Weeden and Lester (2006), this iconic “product” and imagery can be traced as far back as the late fifteenth century and the discovery of the Americas: “the sudden realization of the existence of a far-away wild and undiscovered land with its profusion of tropical and exotic ‘Otherness’ was presented to European imagination as a luxuriant utopian fantasy. […] From this, Europe’s fixation with the fantasy of ‘Paradise’ emerged, and thus began the consequent imagining of the Caribbean as a Garden of Eden” (Sheller in Weeden & Lester, 2006; 97). And so, the Caribbean became a romanticized Eden whose larger-than-life image overshadowed the actual reality. In fact, this paradisiac destination represented in media and marketing today is still a perpetuation of the historical romantic construction of the Caribbean. It is an invention, a sexualized “place-myth” (Urry & Larsen, 2011; 68). Royal Caribbean’s very
own description of Labadee fits into this imagery, as made obvious with the use of words such as “paradise”, “exotic” and “pristine”. By using such descriptors, RC perpetuates the concepts of “Otherness” but also of this untouched, virgin land, which feminizes the landscape and adds significant sexual enticement to the destination. Furthermore, these descriptors along with words such as “private” and “exclusive” fall into colonial discourse, especially when the tourists are mainly white Americans and Europeans, preserving the idea that the Americas were scarcely inhabited (and if so by wild, untamed beings) but also touches on the notion of appropriation and ownership, indicating that the area is unshared, or meant to be unshared with any others.

But as phrased by Urry and Larsen (2011; 119): “A pile of appropriately textured sand is nothing until it is turned into a sandcastle”. Therefore, Royal Caribbean’s ownership of Labadee alone does not create this anticipation. Actually, in order to endow the destination with anticipation, nostalgia and romanticism a lot of work was put into creating the destination in order to fit the generic image of the Caribbean and become a ‘tourist place’. Essentially Labadee has been turned into an extension of the ship, providing tourists with activities, excitement but also fun and relaxation. All these concepts are explicitly mentioned in their description and substantiated by photographs. As a result, Labadee has been turned into a theme park simultaneously supplying tourists with a standardized experience while catering to personal preferences, a key element of all-inclusive resorts (Urry & Larsen, 2011; 54). Moreover, this standardization extends to images of the Caribbean. At Labadee, RC maintains the romantic view of the Caribbean as a homogenous place, emphasizing its landscape and “natural beauty”, for instance, by alluding to the palm tree: one of the most connotative tourism icons. By doing so the uniqueness of the place is drowned among symbolic representation of “paradise”.

RC refer’s to “Labadee’s native charm”, however, upon analysis it is easy to see that very little of the port of call can be classified as native. In fact, the company has effectively created a sterile environment to welcome their passengers, a “tourist bubble”. RC mentions: “regardless of where you go, you'll find yourself embraced by the beautiful landscape” (see above). However, in reality the tourists aren’t really given the option of going everywhere, they are literally confined to the bubble with a double fence separating them from the “native experience”. By providing a safe and secure environment the cruise allows passengers to visit a country that they would not dare to visit on their own. However, it also effectively distances them from the local people, the history and the reality. In actual fact, the media has crafted Haiti’s image into a homogeneous representation of poverty, despair and charity, a depiction that does not exactly evoke fun and relaxation. Therefore, until recently Royal Caribbean described Labadee as its own private island - in spite of its 2009 renovations, nearly every aspect of Labadee fits into the romantic and colonial narratives. Haiti is the sight of the only successful slave revolution in history, resulting in the country’s independence in 1804. Furthermore, 95 percent of the population is black. However, the country’s African heritage is absent from Royal Caribbean’s official discourse. Surely, allusions to a black revolution and

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2 I could not determine the exact moment this change was made but I believe I have been able to narrow it down to sometime between 2008 and 2010.
slavery do not market well to a predominantly American and European audience. And so, RC manages to conceal the harsh reality of Haitian life and culture by cultivating the colonial theme. For instance, this is obvious in the place names given to the different spots of the destination such as “Columbus cove”, “Bucaneer’s bay” and “Arawak Aqua Park”. These names can be traced back to the country’s colonial past: its discovery and conquest, the North coast’s history with pirates, especially at île de la Tortue or Tortuga island (represented in the Pirates of the Caribbean movie franchise) and even represents one of Haiti’s native “Indian” population the Arawaks, who were eventually wiped out due to disease and slavery brought on by the Spanish, yet this earlier chapter of history remains obscure and can be easily overlooked. In addition to place names, the architecture of the new buildings at Labadee also invoke colonialism as they mimic the eighteenth century pre-independence architecture of Haiti during French rule. Aside from the “Artisan Market” the cruise ship tourists at Labadee have very little contact with current Haitian culture and its African heritage.
This theme is no coincidence and not exclusive to Haiti but reproduced throughout the Caribbean. Yet, Haiti remains the poorest country of the Western Hemisphere with an underdeveloped tourism industry compared to its neighbors. The country suffers from an image crisis that has been decades in the making due to a volatile socio-economic and political situation, but also results from an unequal power relation between, media corporations, foreign governments and the local government. Pressley-Sanon (2011; 8) sums up Haiti’s image problem as follows:

Some of the iconographic images that define Haiti are negative: Violence, “voodoo”, and disease. Yes, there is violence in Haiti, but the history behind that violence is both long and complex and the violence that takes place in Port-au-Prince is not typical of the
country as a whole. Yes, Haitian people do practice Vodou, a religion that honors spirits and requires sacrifices, but the image of cannibalism is merely the stuff of Hollywood fantasy. And yes, there is disease in Haiti, but while the Food and Drug Administration blamed Haiti for spreading AIDS in the United States it was later revealed that the pandemic began stateside. For the viewer who is fed these images along with the rhetoric of Haiti as a “carnival of barbarism,” the challenge becomes how to resist the resultant ideological bias when this is all that she can see in the media.

That being the case, Royal Caribbean is not the only one to blame in constructing the fantasy at Labadee. Although it is based on romantic ideals established as far back as the fifteenth century, the tourists also play an important role in the construction of the official discourse. As Weeden and Lester explain: “the images presented to tourists are a response to what the tourists want and expect from a destination, which in turn has been shaped by advertising” (2006; 98). The events that shape Haiti’s image are very real and often very tragic. However, the sensationalist nature of the media has contributed to reducing an entire country’s portrayal to specific and localized events. As Pressley-Sanon mentioned the realities of Port-au-Prince are often far-removed from the rural areas. However, as far as tourists are concerned the dominant worldview is mostly accepted as truth, and for the minority who know anything about Haiti, it is a sad and poor “basket case” nation. As a result, tourists have come to expect the Caribbean to look like Paradise and Haiti’s image just doesn’t seem to fit into that box. So the question here is had Royal Caribbean not constructed a fenced-off and secure beach in Haiti would tourists have booked a Caribbean cruise that stopped there? In addition to this, the collaborative relationship of image building also includes the local private sector and even the government. For instance, the now defunct beach resort Ibo Beach would give its return address as "Cacique Island. The Caribbean” (Orenstein, 1999). Also, the new and improved Ministry of Tourism has been doubling its efforts after the 2010 natural disaster in order to turn Haiti’s image around. Yet, it seldom manages to escape the romantic discourse. Just a glance at its website (www.haititourisme.gouv.ht) reveals images of white sand beaches, clear blue waters and palm trees and descriptions of “belles plages” (beautiful beaches) and “beau soleil” (beautiful sun). Nonetheless, an effort is made to emphasize the country’s complex cultural background and historical sites. For economic reasons, all those contributing to the official discourse cannot escape the romantic representation. Caribbean tourism is deeply engrained in the marketing of Paradise, so what would an island be without its beaches?

Tourism and Photography

Because of their realism as compared to other types of visual representation, images are usually considered to present the truth as evidenced by the saying “the camera does not lie”. However, in reality images do not present but represent, they are world making, they allow the establishment of realities, the creation of ‘imaginative geographies’ (Urry & Larsen, 2011). As we have previously explored, the branding of the Caribbean as a Paradise destination is a constructed concept not always representative of reality. Images are a main contribution to the creation of this fantasy. But why is there such an emphasis on the visual?

The development of new technologies, camera and video, and the ever-increasing methods of delivery of visual productions have created within societies, particularly Western societies, a
growing separation of the senses and an increased centrality to the sense of sight. Nowadays, consumption has become mainly visual through advertisements, television, the Internet and so on. The visual has gained a privileged place in our culture. Consequently, photography has become synonymous with objectification as stressed by Sontag: “[photography’s] main effect is to convert the world into a department store or a museum-without-walls in which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption, promoted into an item for aesthetic appreciation” (1979; 110). In tourism the first encounter with images is through promotional material such as brochures, advertisements, commercials, websites etc. The effect of promotional images of the Caribbean, in general, is twofold: firstly, it creates anticipation and desire for a first-hand experience of the destination, performing its sales role; secondly, promotional images represent romanticized places and tourist experiences contributing to the creation of a ‘place-myth’ and become very influential in directing the tourist gaze.

Although the effects of media images on the tourist gaze, experiences and behaviors is an empirically underexplored area (Weeden & Lester, 2006; 102), from a sociological and anthropological point of view, many academics seem to agree that there is a link between visual media and the tourist experience. Urry and Larson agree: “the gaze is constructed discursively and materially through images and performance of photography, and vice versa” (2011; 155), and Bruner (1995; 233) concurs: “the touristic mode of experiencing is primarily visual, and to have been there, to have ‘seen’ it, only requires presence. The tourist ‘sees’ enough of the [local] ritual to confirm his prior images derived from the media, from brochures and from National Geographic.” These statements are very much in line with Beaudrillard’s (1995) theory of the simulacrum and media culture stating that we have lost the distinction between reality and the simulated and we increasingly see the world through the filter of media images. The “vice versa” aspect touched upon by Urry and Larson also hints at Jenkins’ theory on the “circle of representation” illustrated in the form of a diagram in Table 2: Tourists’ “ways of seeing” and interpreting have been caught up in a sort of vicious hermeneutic circle where they reproduce the iconic images of the Caribbean produced by the cruise companies and travel agencies in their
own photography of destinations. The official images and brochures then serve as symbolic visual reminders to the tourists who in turn are converted into semioticians interpreting the visited landscapes through those established symbols. The media images themselves are influenced by historical circumstances and reproduce stereotypes of deserted sandy beaches and palm trees. However, they are built on cultural biases shared (and somewhat expected) by the individual tourists, creating a vicious cycle of representation and interpretation.

Table 2: Circle of Representation

![Diagram of Circle of Representation]


Romantic and colonialist discourse in photography

Nowadays, when we book vacations we have a pretty good idea, thanks to promotional material, of what to expect. In fact, we rely on images in order to make a decision, we want to know and see beforehand where we are going to sleep, what we are going to visit and how much of it we can experience in the limited time that we are away. Consequently, travelling has become synonymous with a search for the already pictorial, the photogenic (Larsen, 2006: 243): we often search for destinations that are the most visually pleasing or engaging to our particular situation. In anticipation of a vacation we usually have “consumed” the place at a distance through visual material. With cruise ship tourism in the Caribbean, the consumer has already been seduced by the images of paradise and relaxation prior to booking the holiday and subsequently goes in search of those particular things. Urry and Larson have then argued that: “much tourism becomes, in effect, a search for the photogenic. Sometimes it seem that tourist travel is a strategy for the
accumulation of photographs” (2011; 178). Indeed it seems unimaginable to go on holiday without a camera or without compulsively taking pictures of what we see and do. However, previously consumed photographs of destinations - either from the industry of travel and tourism or from other tourists - have in a way coached the prospective tourists, guiding their eye to what is worth capturing for personal consumption. The importance of the photographs taken mirroring the idealized images is then to insert oneself into the ‘imagined geography’. The necessity to be a part of the image that we have already seen through the various forms of media comes from a desire to appropriate: “to photograph is in some way to appropriate the object being photographed. It is a power/knowledge relationship. To have visual knowledge of an object is in part to have power, even if only momentarily, over it” (Urry & Larsen, 2011; 169). Not only do photographs allow us to appropriate a certain place, landscape, moment etc. they allow us to have a material manifestation of an experience and a feeling, and even when the image is in a virtual/digital form it plays essentially the same role. Thus, photographs of vacations are a way for the tourists to revisit and relive the fun, excitement, relaxation or whatever other emotion of a holiday. They allow us to capture the good moments and the beautiful landscapes while literally excluding the negative by simply keeping it out of the frame or away from the camera. As a result, photographs fulfill the individual’s nostalgic desire entrenched in Romanticism, allowing him to never fully disengage with his tourist persona. Similarly, photographs of the Caribbean often perpetuate the nostalgic nature of the destination, framing it in a way to not include too much “modernity” or western inspired symbols into the framed landscape and preserve the ideology of a pristine paradise.

While analyzing photographs posted by individual tourists of Labadee on Tripadvisor.com it is easy to notice how many of the photographs look very similar. Most images are framed as such to include the sea, the sand and the sky mostly representing the white sand, the blue ocean and the clear skies. The pictures of bad weather are practically nonexistent because anything else would shatter the illusion that the “sun always shines” in the Caribbean. Most images offer a bird’s eye view of the landscape either from the top of the mountain at the Dragon’s Breath Zip Line or from the cruise ship deck. In addition, the cliché image here is one of the tourists in or near the water with the cruise ship and ocean as a backdrop. What is surprising is how little we see besides that. The local is nearly absent from the visual representations of Labadee. The already circulating promotional material of Labadee as a destination have essentially turned the coastal landscape of Haiti into a sort of ‘lens’scape where the environment is meant to be looked at and admired for its untainted beauty over actually engaging with it. The most prominent activity at Labadee is lounging on the beach and staring towards the ocean. The attractions offered are either man-made, for instance aqua parks, roller coasters and other thrilling activity for those tourists who cannot sit still, or cruising the coast visiting other “deserted” nook and cranny beaches or snorkeling. The exchange with the landscape then remains primarily visual and photogenic; there is not exposure to bustling coastal towns, to the realities of Haiti’s environmental degradation or even a simple trek through the surrounding mountains. Any of the aforementioned activities might trigger something other than the “oohs” and “ahs” of the visual and shatter the carefully constructed image. This representation fits into the colonial mindset that is generally used by Western countries to define the Caribbean in tourism discourse: “visitors are encouraged to view the islands much as they might view Disneyworld, as places that deserve only a bland and cursory look. Visitors are not encouraged to see the islands as complex real places to be experienced with intellectual engagement” (Pulsipher & Holderfield, 2006: 303). Indeed, in our case there is not much difference between Disneyworld and the constructed theme
park that is Labadee. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the tourists interact so superficially with the environment. The destination is not the centerpiece of the cruise, in fact the ship is. As a consequence, Labadee (and other Caribbean destinations) is used simply as a backdrop to the tourists’ cruise ship experience and not as the main attraction.

Of the total 867 (and counting) on Tripadvisor.com I have counted 34 photographs of locals and that number does not include photographs of a larger landscape that just happens to include a local employee of Royal Caribbean. Of those 34 photographs, the most popular theme is that of the Haitian band or ‘Troubadour’, as they are called locally, that welcomes the passengers as they step off of the ship and entertains them as they lounge on the beach. I have classified the images of local Haitians into six themes or categories of representation: (1) performance, including the pictures of the band but also of what seems like a folklore dance performance by men and women on the cruise ship dock; (2) service, including waiters and tour boat pilots; (3) cultural, meaning photographs taken during the Cultural Heritage tour where local villagers perform the traditional ways of making kassav (a sort of cracker made of manioc root) or peanut butter. This could also be included into the category of performance, however we will leave it as so for now and discuss the cultural tour in further detail in another instance. (4) Artisans, meaning the few pictures taken at the Artisan Market that are not of the art and wares but of the sellers; (5) security: this includes just one picture taken of the armed guards that patrol the compound; and finally the fishermen (6), meaning the locals who are not employees of Royal Caribbean at Labadee, usually photographed on their boat at sea. These representations of the local people of Labadee and their scarcity demonstrates how they rarely fit into the image of Labadee promoted by Royal Caribbean and expected by the tourists. The three pictures posted of the fishermen show them on their small wooden boats, with their oars and are mostly shirtless. In addition, what is compelling is the distance from which the pictures are taken; neither the tourists nor the local fishermen approach each other showing us that there is very little opportunity or desire between the two to interact. My understanding of the lack of representation of Haitians in the photographs of tourists found online is due to a number of factors. Firstly, coming back to tourism ideologies, this ‘lack’ illustrates an intertwining of both the romantic and colonial discourses. On the one hand, Caribbean beaches are supposed to be devoid of people as was reported by the first settlers in the area. Whether these assumptions were true or not are still highly debated but leaning towards the fictitious (empty lands are after all easier to claim). On the other hand, the presence of locals shatters the romance and sensuality behind the privacy and exclusivity of Labadee as it is marketed to the consumers and therefore diminishes its “appropriatability”. Haitians in photographs of Labadee are meant to signify localness, induce some romanticism from their exoticism but they cannot or should not overpower the frame. Therefore, they are represented in positions of service to the tourists, or ‘frozen in time’ during the cultural tours, once again embodying the nostalgic aspect of romantic and colonialist discourses, or as “Other”, elusive and only seen at a distance. However, it could also be argued that their representation as such is simply due to the restrictive nature of the Labadee resort but that would be too simplistic of an explanation. The absence of photographs of tourists posing with locals is evidence of this and implies a predetermined unequal relationship.

The photographs at Labadee posted on Tripadvisor.com therefore seem to promulgate and perpetuate the iconic imagery of the Caribbean that is conceived through established discourses spread through visual media. However, it is not that the tourist has become blind to those sights that do not fit the stereotype but simply that they choose to ignore it, mostly unconsciously, and
are reluctant to break away from their own expectation and rather preserve the fantasy over the reality. However, that one image of patrolling armed guards is a good example of a crack in the fantasy that happens every so often and serves as reminder of the existence of the tourists’ agency.

Another dimension of tourist photography grounded in discourses of appropriation is that of prestige. Tourists take photographs to appropriate but also to demonstrate, or as proof of their travel. If in our modern culture travel is a symbol of cosmopolitanism and it establishes the individual as being cultured and sophisticated, as already stated, photographs allow tourists to literally collect places and amass cultural capital. The importance of inserting one’s self into a landscape is then a way to show that one has “been there” and “done that” and to define one’s self as a traveller. To be considered a traveller by others is a source of prestige for the individual. As a consequence, cruise ship travel is seen by the tourist as a way to collect a number of places in a short period of time, collecting photographs and as a result amassing status and esteem among peers back home. I have addressed the aspect of tourist photography for nostalgic purposes and the reliving of emotions and experiences. Yet, tourist photographs are also taken in order to be displayed in the home, to be shared with family and friends upon return. The sharing quality of the photographs is enabled and simplified through modern technologies with applications and websites such as Facebook and Instagram. The traveller is then capable of sharing his visit to a foreign land with a wider public and consequently elevates his status in his wider network. The traveller can also share his experience with complete strangers all over the world through review sites such as the aforementioned TripAdvisor, which awards reviewers with badges and titles based on the number of places they have visited and reviewed. In her book “On photography” (1977) Susan Sontag addressed the issue of the tourist’s compulsion to photograph, essentially turning ‘reality’ into a touristic item of visual consumption (Larsen, 2006: 242):

It would not be wrong to speak of people having a compulsion to photograph: to turn experience itself into a way of seeing. Ultimately, having a experience becomes identical with taking a photograph of it, and participating in a public event comes more and more to be equivalent to looking at it in photographed form… Today everything exists to end in a photograph (Sontag, 1977: 24).

What is most interesting is that Sontag’s observations precede the age of digital technology and instantaneous sharing. De-materialization of photography in the digital age, which makes photographic practices swift and erasable, has also increased its choreographed aspect. Instantaneous sharing has elevated photographs from proof of having “been there, done that” to “I’m here, doing this” with an included caption to describe and possibly aggrandize the situation. Photography thus is being turned into an end in itself, not simply a means to collecting memories (Urry & Larsen, 2011: 208). In this case, Labadee allows the tourist to increase his prestige by visiting one of the most coveted destinations from a Western perspective, the Caribbean, but also to experience it in a (somewhat) private and exclusive manner. These pictures meant for display should then be instantly recognizable to everybody else. As a result, it is only fitting to frame the images in already existing representations of the destination: just like a photograph of a subject posing in front of the Eiffel tower is instantly recognizable as Paris, white sand, palm trees and turquoise blue sea symbolize the Caribbean. Tourists then use clichés in order to make connections between the new environment and what they’ve already seen or know. Not only does it allows them to make sense of the world around them in an unfamiliar setting, it allows others to
recognize the symbols and, being hardwired as we are as human beings, to make associations and establish context. As a result, as much as tourist photography reflects or mirrors pre-existing images, it serves as a world-making medium. Photography connects the photographer or subject to a place, to people, to situations and transforms him/her: it allows people to produce social relations with those sharing the moment being photographed either bodily or virtually. The subject is framed and choreographed, thus emphasizing the performance aspect of photography. The idea of performance returns some agency to the tourist photographer: his compulsion to photograph is then not mindless and disordered but carefully thought out and executed. The tourist then becomes a producers as well as consumers by creating media products (photographs, web pages, film etc.). However, as much as a photograph can be framed and choreographed, the compulsion remains. As categorized by Taylor, the cruise ship passenger can be classified as a “tripper” who sees things in blinks, blurs or snaps or a “tourist” who collects shallow glances, as opposed to the “traveler” who gazes contemplatively (in Urry & Larsen, 2011: 187). This is mostly due to the short time spent at destinations and the restricted nature of Labadee. As a consequence, unless the photographer is an enthusiast or professional, the meaning often remains abstract and/or superficial. What this means is that, even when an image is not “sterile” or ideal, for instance the image of the armed guards patrolling Labadee, it is not necessarily thought out as to what it may mean to the tourist, the viewer or about the destination itself. Therefore, photographs do give us an insight into the tourist gaze and how he/she represents the world yet it does not allow us to know the reflexivity of the tourist, how self-aware he/she may have been during their time at the destination. “Different tourists look at ‘difference’ differently” (Larsen, 2006: 247), for this reason, it becomes necessary to analyze the written texts produced and published by the tourist of Royal Caribbean at Labadee in order to get a better insight into the interpretation of what is being gazed upon.
First off, before we begin analyzing reviews made by tourist who visited Royal Caribbean’s Labadee peninsula in Haiti, we must keep in mind two things: one, it is important to take these reviews with a grain of salt, as argued by Berger:

I have found that the Internet reviews by cruise takers of particular cruises they have taken fall into two camps: one group of people loved the cruise and was positive about the cruise and another group hated the cruise, did not like much about the cruise, decided never to cruise on that line again and so on. I would imagine that most people fall in between, and it is only those who were generally positive or generally negative who bothered to make their comments available to others (2006: 128).

She concludes nonetheless that “some of them are very revealing, suggesting that a study of Internet cruise reviews might lead to some important insights” (idem). The reviews might be numerous and often repetitive but among the heap there are a few that are detailed, thought out and critical and offer a deeper understanding of the tourist experience at the particular destination. The second thing to keep in mind is that the cruise ship is the direct competitor to the destinations. It is not in the cruise industry’s advantage to have the tourists wander off too far from the dock as this simply curtails the amount of money made by cruises, as the money that could be spent on entertainment on the ship is being spent elsewhere. As a consequence, based on a study conducted by Pulsipher and Holderfield (2006) on cruises to the Eastern Caribbean, onboard the ship the passengers are given very little information regarding their upcoming destinations. The brochures provide give little more than basic information on currency, language and weather conditions. They are not informed on geography, current government, recent history or any information of that kind. As a result, the researchers have remarked that because of their low level of knowledge about the places they are visiting, tourists rarely ventured from the structured itinerary and stayed close to the docks (2006: 309), they confined themselves to a self-imposed “tourist bubble” and shared a level of disinterest for the destination. Of course, these are generalizations and do not suggest that all cruise ship tourists exhibit this behavior. At Labadee’s closed tourist territory the ship passengers are not given much of a choice to escape the so-called bubble, and in turn this erases or diminishes the need to think or worry about venturing away from the ship or the need or desire to gather knowledge about the destination.

There is always in most reviews a mix of different aspects of gazing. Tourists hardly stick to one way of looking at things but tend to evaluate their experience from different standpoints: from a mediated point where they view their experience through media and promotional material, from an economic standpoint, from a cultural standpoint seeing how the experience can enrich their own lives and understanding, and from an ethical point of view, evaluating how the experience relates or not to their moral principles. However, what is compelling is that the ability for tourists to post their own experiences of particular destinations online for the whole world to see makes them become active members of the place branding process. By being given such a loud ‘voice’ tourists are now full participants in the “place making and experience evaluating process” (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 60). Therefore, tourists are granted more agency towards the way they get to experience their holiday and can increasingly affect how media represents and markets particular destinations. As a consequence, tourists, even those engaging in mass tourism like cruising, can
become agents of change for the better and can create better accountability and honesty from the side of the media and the corporations.

The pre-trip perception:

Kosherica.com is a website which specializes in providing information concerning Kosher cruises and destinations, therefore appealing mostly, if not exclusively, to a Jewish audience. The purpose of the Kosher Cruise Blog section of this website is to review cruise destinations, sites and excursions for potential future customers. However, they post a disclaimer that they simply suggest top Kosher cruises and are not responsible for any bookings made with the companies mentioned. On this website, during my research I have come across a somewhat lengthy review of Labadee written in the form of a first person narrative. What is interesting about this review is that it is written prior to the actual trip and is consequently based entirely on information gathered through the media. The fact that the website is specifically geared towards a Jewish audience is not particularly relevant here. What is more relevant is that it is written by an American woman for (Jewish) Americans and gives a review of Labadee as a port of call during a special Royal Caribbean Kosher cruise. It is interesting as a blog post and for our research because it allows us to see how the writer (who remains unnamed) perceives her destination before heading there with the ship and what sort of information she may find interesting during her initial research.

The writer informs her audience that she has booked a seven-day Kosher cruise vacation scheduled to depart from Fort Lauderdale, Florida on the sixteenth of January 2016 with stops in Mexico, Jamaica and Haiti. Therefore, the cruise has not yet happened and we are unfortunately currently unable to compare the pre-trip review to the post-trip review and see where perceptions diverge. Nonetheless, the text retains its value. The writer informs her audience that her motivations for booking such a trip was her desire to once again travel on board the Allure of the Seas, one of the two largest cruise ships in the world owned by Royal Caribbean, and her desire to “infuse the north-Eastern winter with warmth and sunshine”. Despite having two other destinations on her itinerary the writer focuses her review on Haiti. A very valuable piece of information offered is that she informs in a single line: “I have been to Haiti before, but this will be my first time in Labadee”. This is surprising because Haiti is not generally a popular Caribbean destination. However, the writer does not elaborate on her past visit, the purpose and duration or where she stayed and what she visited. It might be that such information exceeds the purpose of her article; the reasons are much too vast to speculate. Yet, what is important is that whether the writer had prior knowledge of Haiti, or at least the part of Haiti that she has visited, she had no knowledge of Labadee as a cruise destination and undertakes a short research on the port of call. She describes it as follows:

Haiti is poor, the government is often corrupt, and despite having some assistance from Humanitarian resources, has constant unrest, corrupt governments and the aid sent to help, goes into the wrong pockets. The country is immensely lovely, with a tropical climate, and French and Creole Heritage, but it's people are struggling to survive in this contradictory place, which was graced by great beauty cursed [with] great hardship and violence. This is the reason for the guards and fences, which are there to protect Labadee and to make it an isolated, safe haven. The resort is completely tourist oriented and it is
impossible to enter the paradise-like resort, unless one arrives on one of the contracted luxury cruise ships. This is, so tourists can enjoy the exquisite peace of the place. All food and drink supplies, come from the docking liners, and passengers are not allowed to leave the area and venture out into the rest of Haiti. For a taste of the Hispaniola Island, the resort has a Haitian flea market, where tourists may buy goods made locally.

In this description, we encounter once again the dissociation between the country and its people. The writer justifies the use of fences at Labadee by explaining that it constructs this so called “safe haven” within which the tourists are able to enjoy the nature of Haiti without the disruption of its poor, corrupt and violent people. The illusion that is created here is that outside the barb-wired fences of Labadee there is a chaos brewing that threatens the safety of the tourists. She goes on to glorify the landscape in the following paragraph, stating that: “All sources I perused, reported that the place, located on the North coast of Haiti, is stunning, elegant, with an exclusive beach front, embracing arriving seafarers in a cradle of great beauty. It combines the best nature has to offer: turquoise waters, white sandy beaches surrounded by beautiful, sloping mountains and exotic foliage”. Although her prose is very eloquently put this praise is still a repetition of western colonialist discourse where the landscape is to be consumed, to be made use of, otherwise it would simply go to waste in the hands of the local people who do not know how to manage it or market it. Without the Royal Caribbean they (the tourists) would never discover this paradise destination. This mentality assumes then that the world is at the disposal of the West to be “discovered” and appropriated, transformed, marketed, consumed and capitalized for its beauty, yet almost entirely disregarding its substance. In addition, in order to properly embrace its beauty the landscape must be distanced from its inhabitants, making the experience of culture a choice to be made by the tourists through a pre-selected flea market. The writer phrases her article in a way to give reasons for Labadee’s highly guarded enclosure. An element of fear is sown into the reader in order to discourage any desires to venture outside of the compound; she even goes on to mention an attack on a crewmember in 2001, which she describes as an “apparent robbery”, and also the 2004 political unrest that caused Royal Caribbean to take the decision to temporarily halt docking its ships at Labadee. She describes Haiti as a contradictory place that is poor and desperate yet stunningly beautiful. Her opinion is not false, yes indeed Haiti is the poorest country of the Western Hemisphere, riddled with socio-political problems and as a Caribbean island with an insignificant tourist industry compared to its neighbors, most of its beaches remain untouched by foreigners. However, what the author does here is glorify the Royal Caribbean for finding a solution around this contradiction by simply excluding the inhabitants, who may cause disturbances, in order for the foreigners to properly enjoy Labadee’s nature in peace and quiet. She continues by citing initiatives taken by Royal Caribbean in the area such as the 55 million dollar update of the port, the creation of jobs for locals and the 1 million dollar donation “to help Haiti survive hunger, famine and poverty”.

What is most striking is that all of these affirmations come from somebody who claims to have visited the country prior to writing this article. Yet, what is dominant here is a discourse heavily influenced by media texts and images. What the writer does in her article is simply a reproduction of cycles of representation discussed above. She provides very little personal opinion or experience and contents herself with repeating information readily available on any web source promoting Labadee as a holiday destination. Her choice of words indicates the dominant culture of appropriation that is present in promotional material pertaining to the area. Labadee is an exciting destination because it offers a “tropical” and “exotic” landscape of turquoise waters and
sandy beaches, but mostly because it provides an “exclusive”, “private” and “luxurious” experience with private cabana rentals, ready-to-serve attendants and “food fit for royalty”. This is in line with the closing comment made in the article that the peninsula was named after a French nobleman the Marquis de La Badie who owned the area in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, she describes that the exclusion of locals is done in order for the tourists to be able to enjoy “the exquisite peace of the place”. However, in reality, when a tourist arrives at Labadee he/she does so accompanied by 3000 to 5000 other passengers, and sometimes during high season the port receives two cruise ships at the same time. All of these people are sharing the beaches, participating in thrilling activities (zip lining, roller coasters, jet skiing etc.) and excursions, standing in line for the lunch buffet and so on. All of this goes against the romanticized paradigm of a Caribbean holiday of peace, quiet and relaxation described in this article and sold to customers elsewhere. In addition, she mentions the inability for locals to enter the compound unless they arrive on board the ship but this does not take into account the 200 to 300 Haitians working at Labadee in positions of service to the tourists. Also, family and friends of employees are allowed at Labadee under special circumstances and just like any place in Haiti, if you have sufficient money and network connections you can enjoy Labadee just like any of the tourists who arrived by sea. Not unlike the tourist pictures mentioned above, the tourist text prior to the actual visit is framed within an already established context. The article uses the same language found in promotional brochures and websites of Royal Caribbean and the travel industry in general. Whether the discourse will change once the area is visited in person still remains to be seen. However, not unlike the Tripadvisor.com pictures, the official texts play an important role in framing the way future passengers will experience a destination. In the beginning of her article, the writer explains her busy schedule and her desire for a “sunny break” and decides on a whim to book a Caribbean cruise right after sending her first article on Royal Caribbean’s Allure of the Seas cruise ship to be published. She is then struck by a nostalgic desire and seduced by her past memories of her previous holiday. As a consequence, the writer decides to reward her hard work with a return to the sea and the Allure. She describes the moment when she books her vacation as a “magic act”, as if she has already momentarily escaped reality awaiting to be transported. What our writer expects of her vacation is a warm sunny paradise and as a result, it is likely, based on her writing that she will experience Labadee as such and bask in its beautiful landscape and exclusivity. This “through the looking glass” effect is very common of visitors of Labadee as made obvious by further, shorter Tripadvisor.com reviews where the destination received a total of four out of a five-point rating with a majority of people rating their experience as “excellent”. The fact that Labadee is the first or last stop on the Caribbean cruise, due to its proximity to the departure and arrival ports in Florida, passengers are particularly eager to experience this “paradise”. There feelings are heightened because of their desire to begin or end their vacation in the manner that they were seduced when booking the holiday. As a consequence, many reviewers who fully enjoyed their day at Labadee use language reminiscent of the official description of the port of call on Royal Caribbean’s website discussed earlier. For instance: “slice of paradise (SRQPam, Florida, May 12, 2015), “private island paradise” (tripsahoy222, Canada, April 22, 2015), or “relax and soak in the sun and warm Caribbean blue water” (Scott D, Florida, May 16, 2015). Many reviewers mention the cleanliness of the place and overall lush landscape phrased like the following review by Donald R from Wisconsin:

The scenery was breathtaking. You're away from civilization for the most part, and able to just relax on beautiful white beaches. On one side you have a tranquil cove and the other side you have crashing waves, so you get the best of both worlds just a short walk from
each other. And there is plenty to do, from ride down a really long zip line to jet skis to
boat rides. (January 23, 2015)

This type of discourse falls in line with the cycle of representation and is notable for its lack of
mention of population and culture. What are seductive in these instances are the beauty of the
beaches, the weather and the private nature of the area. However, most reviews usually fall
somewhere in between the perfect paradise and disillusionment and most passengers who
disembark at Labadee display characteristics of postmodern tourism.

The post-tourist

there are three distinct features of post-tourism: the first is that nowadays the post-tourist is able
to travel to different places without leaving the comfort of his home, through TV, video and
Internet. He can travel virtually and experience elements of the tourist gaze. As a consequence,
the sense of authenticity and the once-in-a-lifetime feelings are diminished as places can be
visited and revisited time and time again. Moreover, post-tourism allows individuals to
experience places through various gazes not just the tourist gaze. In addition, the mobile
characteristic of our present society means that most people are tourists most of the time as that
they are constantly travelling either physically or virtually. Secondly, the post-tourist is conscious
of the amount of choices he is given when choosing to travel. He can travel in order to broaden
his horizons, to learn something new, to simply relax, or just because he is bored and wants a
change of scene. In postmodern societies there is not just one way to be a tourist. Finally and
most importantly, the post-tourist is very conscious of his tourist status and is aware of the playful
and constructed nature of tourist geographies. He engages in ‘typical tourist behavior’ with an air
of playfulness and irony embracing his condition as a foreigner. In the end, much like the sights
he is gazing at there is an atmosphere of performance to his comportment and as a result he can
partake in and appreciate ‘tourist traps’ even with his level of self-consciousness. Yet, all the
while he can retain a certain distance from the situation and his skepticism. For instance, at
Labadee, many of the Royal Caribbean passengers are very much aware of the artificial nature of
the area but that does not deter them from enjoying they’re stay:

This area is private property and is heavy guarded. You don't see this and you won't see
many natives. The people working in the area are from the boats. This is like an
amusement park on the beach. In my head, I was calling it Disney, Haiti. During the rest
of the cruise, several others commented similarly. It's nice but not real Haiti.
(Tripadvisor.com, FizzgigBites, Florida, February 18, 2015)

Why are people complaining that you don’t see the “real” Haiti? R.C. does not bill this as
a tour of Haiti. It’s a private beach for the ship. That’s what it is, that’s all it is. For that
purpose, it is nice. (Tripadvisor.com, CarolyninAtlanta, Georgia, April 6, 2015)

In the end, these passengers are mindful that this is a ‘Disneyfied’ destination constructed by their
cruise providers but that does not really prevent them from rating their holidays four to five stars.
As one passenger puts it: “though it might not be a true representation of Haiti, it is certainly a
gorgeous place to visit” (Tripadisor.com, tripsahoy222, Canada, April 22, 2015). They are able to
enjoy Labadee in all its inauthenticity precisely because they have become aware of this destination as a cookie-cutter resort and self-aware of their positions as partakers in mass tourism. It does not matter if they have prior knowledge of what “a true representation” is, they already detect the commercialization and decide to ‘just go with it’. These are post-tourist engaging in hyperreal pseudo-event and accepting their positions in the game that is modern tourism.

The Ordinary Traveler

The ordinary traveler, as the writer has entitled her blog, writes in her travelogue about her experience at Labadee during her Caribbean cruise with Royal Caribbean in an article entitled “Labadee, Haiti – More Than Meets The Eye”. She expresses in her introduction: “I wasn’t really sure if I would like this stop on our Caribbean cruise, since the thought of a port built by Royal Caribbean sounds extremely commercialized” conveying her doubts about the port of call. However, she continues and refutes by stating: “My initial reaction to a huge cruise ship company leasing a portion of an untouched paradise is to automatically assume the worst, but it’s important to see the bigger picture and learn how it can actually improve the lives of some of the locals”. It is apparent that this travel blogger has done her research although she cannot be praised for her thoroughness listing Wikipedia as her main source of information. As the writer lists all the good deeds that Royal Caribbean has done in the area in terms of employment and education and the capital that such tourism brings to the Haitian government, there is a sort of tacit confession emerging between the lines of the writer’s guilt; a feeling that she is trying to rid herself of in order to justify her enjoyment of the destination when she is aware of the realities of the country in question and the involvement of large corporations in Less Developed Countries in general. However, by doing so, the writer falls back into the all too common established romantic and colonial discourses. Her father “an extremely generous guy”, booked for her and the other thirteen members of her family a shore excursion to a privately owned cove known locally as Malfini. The excursion is only limited to 25 people at a time and is “just a 20 minute boat ride away from the main beach” by catamaran. The writer describes that at this spot you can find “Cheap beer and fresh (straight from the tree) coconut water” and ends the log of her trip to Labadee by describing her and her family’s experience of the shore excursion as their “own private beach” and a “little piece of heaven”. In her description she suggests two things: That the excursion is pricey though she does not mention the price (60 US dollars per person according to Royal Caribbean’s website) and that it is exclusive. Three photographs of the writer and her family on location at Malfini accompany the written text in the blog post; they depict a woman in a bikini lounging in a floating mat in the sea with a local beer (Prestige), the second is similar to the first but with a small child laying on the woman’s stomach, and the third is that of 2 men an older larger man and a younger man both with local prestige beers, sitting in the shade with a view of the beach and surrounding mountains. We can assume that the older man is the “generous father”. The focus points of the photographs are the beer and the sea. They all seem happy, relaxed and smiling in their swimsuits enjoying a quintessential Caribbean vacation of doing nothing and taking it all in, soaking up the sun.

The writer, Christy Woodrow, is an experienced travel photographer and professional blogger on a quest to find “off-the-beaten-path” destinations. Labadee as a destination can’t really be considered as off-the-beaten-path since it is so heavily constructed and staged by Royal Caribbean and receives such a large number of visitors. However, Woodrow distinguishes
herself here from her fellow cruise ship passengers by booking a special tour to this private beach and writes as if she has discovered a hidden gem at the port of call. However, the excursion itself is not out of the ordinary for a cruise passenger stopping at Labadee, it can be easily booked in advance through RC’s website or on site with the tour guides. The official online brochure from RC describes the excursion as follows:

   Escape and unwind on a quiet getaway to the private beach at Malfini. Enjoy a day of pure relaxation as you explore a secret paradise among Labadee’s many wonders. Your sweet escape promises pristine white sands, hidden in a remote cove surrounded by lush tropical vegetation. Swim or lounge on a floating mat, and sample the delicious "Malfini Punch" as you indulge in tranquility.

The tour itself is called “Castaway at Malfini” because it is meant to give you a feeling of being cast away on a deserted island as you are dropped off by boat to the remote cove for three hours (bar, bartender and lounging mats included). The name of the cove, Malfini, is the Haitian designation of the Ridgway’s Hawk, a critically endangered bird of prey that is native to the island of Hispaniola. However, as an expression in the native language the name becomes much more unattractive to denote a sweet escape or relaxation as it literally means, “wrong turn” or “end badly”. Yet, this has no consequence to a mostly North American, Anglophone customer base. “What people see is selective, and it is this focused gaze that is central to people’s appropriation” (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 111). What Woodrow does in her blog post and during her entire experience is engage in selective gazing. In spite of being aware of and slightly concerned with the realities of Haiti (she did some quick research on the relationship between RC and the native people and government and even links to a charity to donate to), she is quick to dismiss them in order to take pleasure in her holiday. In addition, the writer does not inform the reader whether this “seeing of the bigger picture” was done before, during or after her stop at Labadee. She engages during her experience in what Boorstin has defined as the “pseudo-event” (1964) where “isolated from the host environment and the local people, mass tourists travel in guided groups and find pleasure in inauthentic contrived attractions, gullibly enjoying ‘pseudo-events’ and disregarding the ‘real’ world outside” (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 8). The writer is fully aware of the commercial and constructed nature of the port and with the information she is given beforehand by the Royal Caribbean she expresses the skepticism she felt before disembarking at Labadee. However, she retracts these feelings by stating: “While the port is definitely geared towards selling tours and souvenirs, there is much more to Labadee than meets the eye”. I believe that Woodrow fits into the framework of post-modernist tourism and qualifies as a post-tourist during her experience. Although, I believe that the writer here would define herself as a cultivated traveller or destination pioneer over a tourist. She is aware of the inauthenticity of her experience at Labadee and that it is all part of a hyper-commodified system built by the Royal Caribbean; however, she embraces openly this experience. The only unsure aspect that causes hesitation to fully qualify Woodrow as a post-tourist is whether the touch of irony common in post-modern tourist exists in this situation. Despite being somewhat informed about the destination after her visit, there is no hint of sarcasm made in her writing, instead she comes of as naïve and superficially concerned. It is clear that the writer enjoyed the landscape visually, which resonated with her emotionally. She does not go into further detail about the rest of her day at Labadee once she left the beach at Malfini. There is also little evidence of contact beyond the landscape with the local culture. This point is significant because the writer establishes herself as
being a traveller, someone who generally seeks out and engages in deep cultural experiences. The only encounter mentioned is with the driver of their tour boat as she explains:

In Haiti, going to school isn’t a birthright. Parents must pay up-front for their children to attend school and it’s not cheap. The boat captain who led our shore excursion in Labadee was extremely grateful to have a job so he could send his children to school that year. Free education for children is something we often take for granted and it surprised all of us to learn this unfortunate fact about the education system in Haiti.

This is a point that particularly strikes the tourist as she links her readers to a charity to support education for Haitian children. In the end Woodrow’s review of Labadee is generally positive, yet remains contradictory to some extent as she vacillates between skepticism, criticism, guilt and enjoyment; this is maybe because the traveller herself, in spite of being seduced visually by the destination, has a hard time interpreting her own sentiments about the escapade and reconcile her feelings in the moment with her preset moral values.

If we take as a comparison a secondary shorter review from another travel blog from a woman calling herself English Mum we can see the difference with Woodrow’s review. Firstly, English Mum reviews her entire five-day Caribbean cruise stopping in Florida, Jamaica and Haiti. However, the short part about the stop at Labadee and the Malfini excursion is worded as follows:

I’ll be honest, geography not being my strong point, I’d not heard of Labadee. I had, however, heard of Haiti, in fact, I’d raised money for it three years ago when it was struck by a horrendous earthquake and 1.5 million of its inhabitants were left homeless. Royal Caribbean has done sterling work with the people and infrastructure of Haiti (something it’s too modest to let me talk about), and Labadee is basically RCI’s own private part of Haiti […] We climbed aboard a motorboat and headed out to Malfini, a tiny, privately owned stretch of beautiful white beach, azure water and lush green shady spots. We lazed, swam, drank Malfini Punch out of coconuts, and basically had the most glorious beach day imaginable (www.englishmum.com).

It comes as no surprise that this blogger has never heard of Labadee. From a Haitian point of view it is only a small fishermen’s village since the tourist attractions remain inaccessible to most, and from an international tourist point of view, Labadee is an exclusive destination of the Royal Caribbean marketed as such. You will never hear of it outside of the cruise setting particular to that one corporation. It is not like other ports of call of the Caribbean with large resorts such as Nassau in The Bahamas or La Romana in the neighboring Dominican Republic: you cannot book Ladabee individually as a holiday destination, unless you do chose to stay at neighboring beach hotels such as Norm’s Place or Cormier Plage which operate in the same bay area but are not technically Labadee and do not benefit from the numerous activities offered to cruise passengers. Therefore, it is only made visible to the tourists who decide on a cruise ship vacation in the Caribbean with the Royal Caribbean and its affiliates (Celebrity cruises and Azamara Club Cruises). On the other hand, this blogger has heard of Haiti as a whole but definitely not as a tourist destination. Based on her comment, it is safe to assume that prior to the earthquake of 2010 for which she donated money to an unnamed organization, English Mum had little to no knowledge of Haiti, corroborating the deductions made in the introduction about the effects of the earthquake on Haiti’s international image and overall visibility. She is made aware
about Royal Caribbean’s development of Labadee, employment possibilities and general charitable donations to causes in Haiti. However, her comment: “something it’s too modest to let me talk about” remains unclear and deserves further explanation. She does not indicate whether the blog post was sponsored by the Royal Caribbean or not, although that comment does seem to hint at this possibility. If the blog post was sponsored by RC this does not really present a “tell it like it is” review but a more biased or one-sided account. Whether RC is being modest about its involvement in Haiti is doubtful simply based on prior knowledge of their very vocal public relations campaigns promoting development and sustainability such as their “save the waves” concept. More likely is the fact that mentioning Haiti’s low level of development does not really fall in line with creating the enchantment of a relaxing and breathtaking Caribbean cruise in “paradise”. What struck most about English Mum’s review of the Cast Away at Malfini Beach at Labadee is the fact that she described the $65 US dollar price tag of the twenty minute boat ride and three hour stay at the cove with twenty five other people (drinks not included) as “bargainous”, whereas Woodrow implicitly stressed the high cost of the excursion. Tourist experiences are undoubtedly relative and variable, and where one, for instance a native Floridian, might think it's a steep price to pay in order to laze around on a small beach, others, for example a Canadian or English tourist, might find it to be a steal in order to experience so-called paradise, sipping cocktails from fresh coconuts and having “the most glorious beach day imaginable”, forgetting for a couple of hours the rest of the world that is constantly buzzing outside of the enclave of Malfini or Labadee in general. For a large part, many of those who have described their time at Labadee as excellent - in spite of being aware of their positions as tourists and the constructed nature of their participation - have been those who have booked special packages or excursions in order to add to their simple beach day. For example these two short reviews from TripAdvisor.com:

My husband and I had a wonderful day in Labadee. We have been to several private beaches on cruises, and this was the best one! We were on the private Barefoot Beach since we were staying in a suite on the cruise ship. We rented a private over-the-water cabana, and it was well worth money spent ($250). Even with 2 ships there, Barefoot Beach was not crowded at all. The lunch was fantastic. We had fresh grilled vegetable kabobs, grilled fish, jerk chicken kabobs, roasted potatoes and so much more! Our cabana included 2 floats, a cooler of Evian & soft drinks, a wrap around sofa, and two cushy lounges. We also had a private butler to assist in any way...bringing drinks, extra towels, etc. (teniseetraveler, January 25, 2015)

Later in the day we had our sand bar island excursion. It was only $50 a piece. I absolutely loved it!!! You take a little catamaran out to the sand bar. They anchor by the sandbar and you hop off into the water. There are floaters to lay on and such. The sand and water is so nice! You can have drinks too which was not expensive. 4 beers for $10. They will play music. The people taking care of you are great people. It was an awesome tropical paradise feeling of relaxation. The excursion was like an hour and a half. I wish it lasted all day! This place is top of my favorite things I have ever done.

In reality, in order to have an amazing experience at Labadee passengers must be able to cough up the cash that will allow them to experience the place truly in an exclusive or luxurious manner. Otherwise, most passengers find themselves complaining about the crowd, the lines and the exorbitant prices regardless of the beauty of the landscape in front of them or the sweetness of the
weather. Of course, this could simply be a sales tactic from Royal Caribbean in order to sell their expensive ‘extras’ to their passengers promising a heightened private affair. However, for those passengers who feel as if they’ve already been had by the company, these sorts of tactics simply create a mild dissatisfaction and do not encourage many return customers.

The question of authenticity

In spite of the fact that postmodernism has brought about post-tourism and that many people just seem to play along with this mass tourism game, there are still individuals who are in search of the so-called ‘authentic’ in their travels. First off, the whole concept of the authentic experience is tremendously relative and its very existence is highly debatable. However, the goal here is not to try to define authenticity or debate whether there is such a thing as an authentic experience. The observations based on the reviews of Labadee written by tourists have revealed that perceived authenticity is a factor in the enjoyment of and overall satisfaction with their holiday. What is clear is that there is a general feeling among a large number of passengers that there is something inherently inauthentic about Labadee the way it has been constructed by Royal Caribbean. The problem is that visitors are told as they disembark that they are going to visit Haiti. On the docks they are greeted by dancers and bands of Haitian folk music, and yet, once on the beach they realize that they are in fact confined to a fenced area where their only contact with local people and culture is through service and organized tours. As one cruisegoer comments: “End of day if you are on a RCI or Celebrity Cruise and this is a port of call you are somewhat beholden to the little world that the cruise lines have created in Labadee” (GRFD40, New jersey, January 27, 2015). He has become aware that this is a constructed reality and there is no escaping the tourist bubble. He continues to comment that it is still a nice place to visit but is highly commercialized. Another passenger expressed his disappointment with the lack of culture, stating: “I Know the Island has issues and is a dangerous place but I was expecting a little bit more. Only one person on a boat cruise discussed history and politics. I will never return” (Tripadvisor.com, jdreynoldsjr, Los Angles, January 2 2015). One RC customer comments via Tripadvisor.com on the standardized nature of the beach resort:

Beach Club at anywhere

Royal Caribbean built a nice and neat structure in Labadee, Haiti. There are clean rest rooms, plenty of beach chairs, bar and restaurant areas and some activities (paid) for their cruise guests. However, the place could be anywhere. The cost is beautiful but you have no clue of the country you are. They brought a few musicians and some art work but that is far away from experiencing a little bit of the island. For someone looking for comfort it works just perfect but if you like to get a more real perception of the local culture forget it (LyaMachado, Georgia, April 12, 2015).

In the end, Labadee comes off to many passengers as not really being a place so much as it is a product, created out of a consumerist fantasy meant for mass consumption, and for many this dampens their cruise experience as a whole. However, years ago when Haiti’s image was much more on the rocks and Royal Caribbean didn’t even inform their passengers that they were setting foot in the country for marketing reasons, there was no mention of Haitian culture or politics, no cultural tours and folklore dances. As a result, we can see how the opinions of
tourists have positively affected Labadee as a tourist destination. Although small, there is still now an emphasis on Haitian culture and it is through popular demand from inside and outside the country that Royal Caribbean has carried out these changes. For instance, one individual on Tripadvisor, Hanabanna23 from Miami, Florida was pleased to notice that this was one of the few destinations where the souvenirs for sale were produced locally and not “made in China” (January 1, 2015). More positive changes may be coming in the future considering the fact that the earthquake has generated such a buzz in the media and brought awareness to Haiti and that more cultural involvement by Royal Caribbean is being demanded from passengers.

In another instance some passengers are in search of another type of perceived authenticity, what they assume an authentic Caribbean destination should look like. This has nothing to do with Haiti itself but more to do with the generalizations made about the region through the media. Some passengers find themselves disappointed when Labadee does not hold up to their expectations of a tropical paradise. For instance many reviews mentioned the amount of coral, rocks and algae in the water as opposed to the white sand they were expecting or that the water wasn’t blue enough or clear enough for any good snorkeling. For instance, in one lengthy review from a man calling himself Gambee on cruisewithgambee.com, a website dedicated to the author passion for cruising, he comments on the quality of the beach a Labadee stating:

> It was very hard to walk in there, a good pair of water shoes are a must in that beach. I am not sure how the other ones are on the other side of the peninsula, but this one was pretty bad. A guy next to me said somewhat loudly “you figure if they are buying a beach they would buy one with sand in it”, he could not had said it more perfectly.

These comments are understandable since most advertisements about the Caribbean do present it as turquoise blue oceans and endless sandy beaches, brushing over the reality that the sea is full of plant and animal life and corals are not just populated by colorful fish but also sea urchins, jellyfish and slimy algae. However, some comments where borderline comical as some reviewers complained that it was too hot and too sunny since: “My wife is a cancer survivor and tries to limit her exposure to the sun (Tripadvisor.com, Dixie21228, Maryland, February 16, 2015); or that “the water is very salty. VERY salty” (Tripadvisor.com, Barbara D, Reno, February 3, 2015). Comments such as these show the extent of the gap between perception and reality. A Caribbean native is then left dumbfounded reading things such as these thinking where exactly these people thought they were going. However, when the media presents to you in texts and images, people enjoying the Caribbean sun with a soft breeze blowing through their hair or their clothes, not an ounce of sweat visible, or of people snorkeling in clear waters visibly unbothered by the salty sea, your perception becomes distorted. As a consequence, the authentic tropical experience that these people were expecting is not (or only partially) realized at Labadee.

**Shattering of the Gaze: Beggars denied at Labadee**

Every so often, among the mass tourism travel that constitutes and perpetuates cruise culture, passengers find themselves disenchanted with the destinations they visit and there is no place where that could be truer than in the clean-cut, ‘Disneyfied’ theme park that is Royal Caribbean’s Labadee. They are seduced by images of paradise, yet once at their destinations they find themselves put in the middle of situations that leave them uncomfortable in a morally grey
area and with confused sentiments about the cruise industry and their holiday. A good example of this ‘shattering of the gaze’, this deviation from the mediatized texts and images is the article by Jason Cochran on his own Internet blog, jasoncochran.com, entitled “Beggars denied at Labadee, Royal Caribbean’s private paradise in Haiti”. After introducing the ‘grey area’ where the cruise industry usually operates, between providing economic opportunities to less developed countries and “unleashing environmental mayhem” and exploitation, Cochran goes on to explain the agreement between Royal Caribbean and the “desperately impoverished” and “notoriously corrupt” nation of Haiti, which we have already discussed above. The use of these expressions to describe the host country already paints it in the same light at the media, categorizing and entire population as disheartened and making overt generalization. This is possibly a tactic to gather pity for the Labadee locals as he elaborates on his experience. Nonetheless, he calls out Royal Caribbean on its gross tactic of appropriation at Labadee by ‘anglifying’ the name and affixing it with a SM service mark “to protect its investment”.

The writer describes his own time at Labadee while aboard his cruise and explains his moment of disillusionment as follows:

Nomadic Matt and I, who were transfixed by the barbed wire fence from the moment we saw it, were sampling the abundance of the Columbus Cove buffet when we noticed a young man in the woods. The youth was carrying an empty white dinner plate, and he mimed eating from it before gesturing purposefully to his right. He’s hungry, he was telling anyone who happened to notice him, and would like someone to toss him some food from around the back of the nearby toilet block.

The two men then decide comply with the young man’s request and bring him and his friends bananas at an area where they could easily be transferred to the other side of the fence. He states: “we can’t shake the feeling that we’re doing something sneaky. But they’re only bananas!” Yet, just then a local guard meets them at the fence and pleadingly demands of them in broken English to “not ‘make trouble’”. Cochran states that this man who obviously gets his paycheck from the Royal Caribbean would surely like this ambiguous situation to be avoided in order to not jeopardize his own job and livelihood. The guard informs the two men, concerned with whether these begging men have enough to eat, that there are restaurants available to them on the other side of the fence to which Cochran reflects: “The image of a Haitian restaurant full of beggars, reading menus and smoothing napkins on their laps, feels ridiculous […] It reminds me of what they tell you at Yosemite: Don’t feed the bears or they may become aggressive. At Labadee SM, you may not give a man a banana”. Although Cochran means well and sides with the locals in his article, the last comparison causes a bit of dissension. Comparing these men to animals in a sort of zoo-like setting does carry some racist undertones and colonialist undertones towards people of color, whether this was his intention or not. In particularly, considering the signification behind associating a black man with bananas in order to liken him to an ape. In addition, to the attached picture he writes the caption “do not feed the humans”, reinforcing the comparison to a zoo. Yet, the ironic twist is that in this association the tourists within the compound would technically be the caged animals with the locals engaging in some sort of voyeurism watching them indulge and laze around on the beach. However, this could have very well been the intention of the author as a way to implicitly denounce an injustice and racial segregation present at Labadee without necessarily using those specific words. By alluding to symbols the author successfully places this concept into our minds causing us to analyze the situation with colonialist and imperialist discourses in mind and considering it critically and from a moral standpoint. In the end the men decide against throwing fruit over the fence and instead
share their bananas with a seller at the artisan flea market of Labadee, explaining that the moment they walked away “either out of hunger of furtiveness, one of the vendors has stuffed it into his mouth before we’re more than 20 feet away”, hinting that there may still be a clandestine element to sharing food from the abundant buffet with the locals, whatever side of the fence they may be standing on.

“As Cochran and his travel partner wanted to understand more about this relationship between Royal Caribbean and the locals, they asked “a Haitian employee if cruise passengers could visit Labadee village, which is just a quick local ferry ride away, the local became visibly uncomfortable and began to sidle away from the conversation. Outsiders are not to be exposed to the “real” Haiti, no matter how seasoned they are”. They made a careful choice of asking this question to a man they had previously engaged in conversation with and who had been praising the work of Royal Caribbean in the area, yet they quickly realized that their trust and complicity only extends to the limits of the fence at Labadee. As Urry and Larsen explain, the tourist gaze is conditioned to be selective and with their behavior and questions the writer and his friend break away from this selective gaze since “ideally one should not be gazing upon other people, whether workers or other tourists” and in this case especially the workers (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 111).
Furthermore, the reaction of the locals Cochran and his friend Matt is a strange combination between hospitality and hostility (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 96). Because, precisely as is explained in Urry and Larsen’s chapter “working under the gaze”, the behavior of locals towards tourists is carried out through a calculated performance that included “emotional work” (2011: 78). However, this choreography of service and smiles ends for the local on the other side of the fence where he can return to his home unconcerned with the foreigners’ gazes, and therefore, he can drop his script and service persona. As a consequence, avoidance and feelings of discomfort at the thought of the tourists penetrating the “inner circle” is a normal reaction, whether the tourist considers himself to be “seasoned traveller” or not. Cochran explicitly distinguishes himself from his fellow passengers in his desire to experience Haitian culture and interact with locals. He elaborates that:

Most cruise passengers didn’t have the presence of mind to notice any of this. A fair number seemed in a stupor about their current location in the universe. (“I hear Haiti is supposed to be a really poor country,” offered one rum-tipsy passenger as she rearranged her lounge chair.) A few others probably noticed but decided there was nothing they could do. The very few who notice and try to help are told not to. Tropical islands are not tropical paradises, no matter what off-the-shelf consumerist fantasy you want to believe when you grip that cold mai tai.

The tone of his paragraph is one of reproach and his disillusionment is real and tangible. He has not been seduced by the warm weather and sandy beaches, the fantasy of paradise has not been sold to Cochran as reality seeps its way through the cracked façade. His feelings of helplessness only create frustration and disdain as he comments on other passengers getting tipsy and innocently (or rather ignorantly) enjoying their day at Labadee. He stresses the need for tourists to believe in the consumerist fantasy that presents the romantic view of the Caribbean as a paradise. However, his reproach isn’t particularly aimed at individual tourists but more importantly at the Royal Caribbean for allowing this segregation to continue and promoting Labadee as a destination of paradise and exclusivity in spite of the reality in Haiti, and in general in the Caribbean as a whole. He acknowledges that the situation is not so plainly black and white: “so you see: As with everything, the story is murky. The cruise line does good things, and yet it cannot do enough, and it has no room for your own outreach efforts. The system is inflexible, as massive systems must be to operate predictably”. In the end, is capitalism or big corporations to blame in Cochran’s opinion? The answer is not entirely clear, in the same way as many reviews concerning Labadee. The situation is too ambiguous to decide. The author blames Royal Caribbean for its inflexible system and its lack of possibilities for tourist to venture outside of the compound. Yet on the other hand, he understands that predictability is an important factor in such a business when you are charged with dealing with thousands of “rum-tipsy” tourists who are not always particularly well informed. The other side of the fence holds another world that is outside of Royal Caribbean’s control and much too volatile to allow passengers to explore or allow exceptions to the established rules, whether they are knowledgeable about the situation or not. He goes on to condemn the company as a whole, not just at its Labadee destination, for the way it treats its employees who are often overworked and underpaid. As he explains, gratuities are highly valuable to cruise ship employees and to locals working at Labadee. However, he was frustrated with Royal Caribbean setting standard amounts for tips that were completely inflexible even when a passenger wanted to pay more for the services. He protests the way tourists are not allowed to “demonstrate charity or adventurous
curiosity in Haiti” and even onboard where a completely cashless system is put in place, yet the only way to be more generous with your waiter would be with cash. In the end, he concludes with a suggestion to his readers: “which is why when you take a Royal Caribbean cruise, you should bring lots of extra cash, but don’t bother with bananas”.

Many other tourists stopping at Labadee for the day expressed similar opinions and feelings of disenchantment, for instance from Tripadvisor.com you can read quite a few similar comments:

If you want to go exploring local villages forget it as the area is fenced off and no options to leave the area was offered by Royal Caribbean. I had a chat to one of the sales assistants and she told me that a local village was approximately 15 minutes away by car but we were not allowed to go there. Like me If you like to explore the local area, be it good or bad this place is not for you. You may as well call this place a transit lounge (beach) for the wealthy. (SPTravelling, June 12, 2015)

So Labadee is the privet section of Haiti that is only for cruse customers. All of the staff on site have been vetted and security checked and apart from the Wight House it might well be the safest place on earth. It is really nice. The water is clear the beaches are clean the staff are friendly and if you like that type of stuff then this island will get 5* from you..... I on the other hand am 28 male and quite adventures. This did not come even close to my expectations. I wanted to meet some locals, eat local food, have a local beer. I wanted to get out and see some stuff. That was a big no, no. The food and drink was unloaded from the boat at the start of the day, the few locals that where there where in a "local market" and you got the distinct impression that they did not make the over priced stuff they where selling. Like I said it was nice but it was not Haiti.... Not for me thank you! When I go to a country I want to see it I do not want to be penned in by the cruse ship and given a cleaned up, over priced, western interpretation of it. (Alastair S, Oxford, UK, January 18, 2015)

The poverty is stark. The discomfort of watching poor fishermen in rickety boats nearby fish their daily food as we sat perched from the comfortable seats on our motorized catamaran gave me pause. I likely will not return to vacation here, to this beautiful little peninsula on the hard luck island. It is not a vacation spot. It is a country and a people that beg for help. I likely will return to do just that. (VaporK8, Michigan, February 2, 2015)

Yet many people, despite their feelings of discomfort, still seek out seeing how the “other side” lives.

Cultural tours: staged authenticity and institutionalized voyeurism

MacCannell argue that tourists are on a “quest for authenticity” and therefore, in this respect, tourist spaces are organized in a way to provide “staged authenticity” (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 10). What does this mean for Labadee? For a long time Royal Caribbean has subtly avoided any mention of Haiti in its promotional material due to the country’s poor image. However, over the last five years Royal Caribbean has been slowly letting in Haitian culture into their compound.

3 All spelling and punctuation in the reviews have been kept as is.
Also, they have found that the increased demand from their passengers for authentic cultural experiences has provided them with a great opportunity to capitalize on exposing tourists to Haiti, its people, customs and history. Because of the fenced off nature of Labadee, RC is able to completely control what and their passengers are exposed to and to what extent they get to experience Haitian life. Among its options of cultural activities the most interesting is for this research is the “Haitian Cultural Tour at Paradise Cove”. Royal Caribbean’s website describes the shore excursion as follows:

Discover the unrivaled natural beauty of Haiti and the complex culture of its people. Relax and sunbathe on idyllic beaches at Le Village in Paradise Cove, and visit a typical Haitian home to learn about the Haitian lifestyle. You'll have ample time to enjoy the scenic waterfront on the white sand beach and catch a glimpse of a local fisherman as he finds his catch of the day. Transfer back to ship via water taxi.

This idyllic picture painted by RC is in fact at a beautiful beach in the Labadee area called Cadras or Kadras and is a private property, which the passengers of the ship make use of during their excursion through an agreement between RC and the owners. The Village, as previously mentioned is a sort of pioneer village staging rural Haitian life for tourists. This sort of activity fulfills what Urry and Larsen have defined as “institutional voyeurism” (2011: 105), allowing the tourists to temporarily transgress the boundaries between different societies and observe a people’s way of living. This activity satisfies their curiosity and craving for something different while on their holiday, it breaks their cycle of everyday banality by witnessing strangeness or “Otherness”. In addition, for many of these middle-class to affluent Westerners, going back to basics allows them to gain a renewed appreciation for their own lives, essentially fulfilling one of the many aims of going away on holiday to foreign places. Most people had very positive things to say about the excursion calling it relaxing and informative. The tour consists of two parts, a first part touring the Village where people demonstrate the old fashion Haitian ways of building houses, making cassava crackers, peanut butter and wood items; and a second part where participants are left to lounge on the beach with bar service of local beer and rum. However, one review stands out from the rest because of the level of dissatisfaction from the participant:

The guide showed us a couple of trees, told us something about plants that grow there (but we couldn't see them anywhere near). Then they took us to a Haitian "village". That part is absolutely absurd. It is clear to any person that all of those 10 people who "lived and worked" in that village were actually coming there for the tour (just like the tourists did). There is only 1 "building" there and no place to sleep. There is a nearby village with a couple thousand people living in it, so I suspect they come from there. What they showed us was REALLY artificial.

One guy was hammering rocks for us (apparently, he had no reason to do that). Another guy was splitting wood with a machete and couldn't wait to stop. Couple ladies were making peanut butter. One more was boiling water. Two guy were frying a kind of a large tortilla made of some starch-containing plant. In all, it is so artificial that you will learn absolutely nothing about the life of Haitians (RoyalCaribbean.com, EugenePhD, Minnesota, February 2015).

It is true that the initial description from RC is misleading in this instance. This participant believed that he was going to experience the “real” Haitian way of life, instead he found himself
witnessing a scripted performance. His high expectations were not met. This excursion promises an anthropological gaze into Haitian culture, instead what it provides is yet another pseudo-event. This staged authenticity on the part of the locals provides the extravagant displays (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 8) and an “inversion of the everyday” (Idem: 13) that the tourists desire. On the other hand, this staged character of the Village at Paradise Cove removes the possible consequences of the tourist gaze on the local. As Urry and Larsen argue: “staged authenticity may have the effect of keeping out what may be deemed the intrusive eye while providing visitors with what seems properly ‘authenticated’” (2011: 22).

Making of kassav during the Cultural Tour at Paradise Cove – Source: www.tripadvisor.com, Tammy H, October 2013

It is a common belief that tourists who partake in cruises usually fit a certain specific demographic. The assumption is that most cruise passengers are of a certain age, or “baby boomers […] seeking leisure travel experiences that are customized easy, exotic, exclusive and which provide value and choice” (Dowling, 2006: 6). The question is then why would they bother with cultural experiences if cruise tourism is not geared towards ‘travellers’? The individuals that seek time away from the stress of home and work and just wants a relaxing all-inclusive experience that does not require any planning, worrying or even thinking beyond what to eat and what activities to partake in are usually participating in mass tourism and are content with ‘superficial’ experiences. However, as explained by Nomadic Matt (2012), his observations of
cruise passengers are that they usually associate vacation with travel. However, considering himself to be a traveler, he finds this erroneous since most people on cruises hardly leave the ‘resort’. He elaborates: “There’s absolutely nothing wrong with a vacation, but to think that heading to a mass consumer destination is the same thing as travel is not a good thing. […] It sterilizes the destination and hides the local culture”. However, because this a rare moment where individuals get to ‘travel’ and head to ‘exotic’ places, some passengers do desire experiencing the world and not just lazing around. In addition, as he also observed many cruise passengers book such vacations as part of a family holiday or even a large family reunion simply because it provides an organized and easy way to all meet up in one place, as opposed to say a trip to Paris that demands much more individual planning and coordination. As a consequence, the demographics on cruise ships vary largely from seniors to small children to young adventurers participating in a (out of character) family holiday. This is further confirmed by Dowling’s study of cruise passengers: according to him passengers come from all segments of the population, are younger than ever and many are first-time cruisers, also an important segment of the cruise industry are families (2006: 5). In fact in the seven year period between 1996 and 2000 demand for cruising grew by 50 percent (Idem). In all, this demonstrates that cruising is evolving from a small niche market to a more popular option among prospective tourists. As a consequence, cruisers seek out new experiences and look forward to discovering new destinations, and so, exposure to different cultures becomes increasingly important to passengers.
4 – THE HOST GAZE

“An ugly thing, that is what you are when you become a tourist, an ugly empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste that, and it will never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused cannot stand you, that behind their closed doors they laugh at your strangeness.” (Kincaid, 1988: 17)

This opening statement by Jamaica Kincaid might be thought of as controversial, inherently biased and bitter, and at first glance it is probably not incorrect to think so. However, in order to understand it, it must be given context. This quote from Kincaid’s book entitled *A Small Place* is part of a longer narrative that explores Antigua’s tourist industry, government corruption and British colonial legacy. The hatred she expresses in this statement is not one born out of conflict or xenophobia but is described as such:

Every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. Every native everywhere lives a life of overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom and desperation and depression, and every deed, good and bad, is an attempt to forget this. Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. But some natives -- most natives in the world -- cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere. They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and they are too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place you, the tourist, want to go -- so when the natives see you, the tourist, they envy you, they envy your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself. (1988: 18-19)

This description properly encapsulates, in my opinion, the sentiments of local Haitians, in particular since the country has, for so long, remained off the tourists’ maps. Foreigners entering a country as poor as Haiti, no matter if they do not venture outside of their imposed tourist bubble, create within the locals complex feelings of curiosity, desire, admiration, envy, disdain and hatred all at the same time. And understanding this is necessary to understand the local gaze directed towards the tourists. Moreover, Haiti is a small country, in reality just a fleck on a map. However, at one point in time this small peninsula of around 27 000 square kilometers was once the pride of France and the richest colony in the world by the end of the eighteenth century. In addition, as Haiti gained it independence it became the first independent nation of Latin America and the Caribbean, the only nation in America to have defeated three superpowers, the French, the Spanish and the British, and the only nation in the world to have ever established a successful slave revolution. In spite of the fact that these events took place centuries ago, and that since becoming a sovereign nation Haiti has followed a trajectory often described as tragic, they remain vital to understanding the Haitian identity as a whole and continue to persist in the psyche. Due to its complex history Haiti finds itself pulled simultaneously in different directions: towards France and the francophone world due to its colonial past, towards the United States due to its proximity, past military occupation and general dominance in the area, towards the Hispanic world through trade and media and towards Sub-Saharan Africa considered the
‘Motherland’ and the source of much of Haiti’s culture and heritage. Haitians are a people that are perpetually concerned with race; this is of course linked to slavery and colonialism. However, Haitians are also constantly reminded of their ‘blackness’, in particular by their next-door neighbors, the Dominicans. Most Dominicans are of mixed heritage, including African, yet they persistently describe themselves as being “Indios”, enhancing their attachment to Hispaniola’s first inhabitants, Amerindians, as the cause for their tan skin and subsequently rejecting their African heritage. This has also caused a desire for Dominicans to distance themselves from Haitian “blackness” that sometimes culminates violently. For instance, in October of 1937 during the regime of Dominican president Rafael Trujillo genocide of Haitians was set in motion as the Dominican government ordered the killing of the Haitian population living on the borderlands between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The number of total deaths is still officially unclear and highly debated. What is known is that these incidents only aggravated the relations between the two nations, which continues today. Even presently these tensions continue: the Dominican government has voted a law that allows the stripping of citizenship of one quarter of a million Dominicans of Haitian descent who as of July 2015 are being deported from the Dominican Republic. However, the Haitian government has agreed to receive these stateless people. Despite being denounced for their injustices and human rights violations by the international community these events continue and anti-Haitian sentiments have only increased. In February and June of 2015 Haitian men were publically lynched in Dominican towns. Whether officially stated or not, these events are clearly understood as being racially motivated and xenophobic as made obvious by the existence of xenophobic organizations such as ‘El Ciruelito’. This sort of racial segregation continues within the country as the social elite in Haiti is usually lighter skinned than the rest of the population. This difference is an inheritance of the French colonial system where ‘metis’, or mixed-blood children of French colonizers with their slaves were usually recognized, included and given an education by their white parent. As a consequence, after independence when the masters fled the country, the metis educated minority found itself at the top of the social ladder and this system is still perseveres in some form today. As a consequence, there is a direct correlation in the Haitian psyche between skin color and affluence. As a result, a foreigner is generally perceived as a wealthy individual and is called a “blan” by local populations (meaning white in Haitian Kreyol) regardless of the color of his skin. As a result, these racial differences and the self-awareness of the Haitian person’s ‘blackness’ has caused a sort of inherent inferiority complex in the Haitian psyche which I hypothesize as being a condition of the internalization of complex historical processes, existing representation of Haitians and of the gaze of foreigners.

Internalization of the Gaze

One example of this internalization of representations of Haitians through texts comes from my own experience. On my last trip to the city of Cap-Haitien and Labadee in December of 2014 I was accompanied by some family and some foreign friends from the Netherlands and Canada. One morning, my partner (a tall and blond Dutch man) and I decided to visit the ruins of the French colonial fort, Fort Picolet. The walk was around one and a half kilometers of rocky roads from our hotel, during which we were subjected to curious stares by the local people. However, once we reached the fort there were no guides, population or official tourist infrastructure. We were alone with the exception of one young man who gazed at us curiously and followed us from
a distance. Although he did not seem aggressive we were still uncomfortable with this so we proceeded to quickly walk around the ruins and take some pictures. At a certain point, we crossed the man on a narrow staircase where he proceeded to stick his hand in my pocket and grab my smartphone while saying “banm sa”, meaning give me this. I quickly reacted by grabbing back my phone and my partner pushed the man away. At this point I was surprised and angry. As I walked away I scolded him in Kreyol for ruining what could have been a great experience. He was visibly startled that I spoke his language and he then simply asked that I give him 100 gourdes, the equivalent of roughly two euros. I told the young man I had no money and we quickly walked away. He did not follow us or threaten us any further. Reflecting on the incident, I realized that this man was no thief at all but simply a man who saw two ignorant tourists toting around their large camera and expensive smartphones. There was a clear distinction between us as foreigners and him as a local. A distinction on which he decided to act on out of opportunity, envy, resentment, curiosity or a combination of emotions. This falls in line with the concept of ‘role theory’ or “role-contained expectations for behavior in social situations” (Canziani & Francioni, 2013: 20, emphasis their own) which explains characteristic, expected or stereotype responses to situations and events. Once realizing I was a native he was caught in the act and dropped his role for another. I am not attempting to justify that his actions were right but analyzing a simple situation like this allows us to better understand its underlying causes. In addition, I believe that I can also be held accountable for not showing more cultural sensitivity and modesty when I was well aware of the condition of my own country. However, incidents like these justify Royal Caribbean’s decision to keep their tourists secluded even though it does not contribute to bringing about social change.

The ‘internalization of the gaze’ is something that is commonly discussed in international development studies. It is often used to explain the perpetuation of victim mentality and some social problems that plague certain minority groups. Canziani and Francioni explain the effects of the tourist gaze on the host from a theoretical point of view:

A theoretical model of the influence of the tourist gaze on host self-concept has been presented whereby the tourist gaze has been conceptualized as a force that operates through the institutionalization of role behaviours that benefit tourists. Hosts are exhorted to comply with tourist expectations through the imposition of legitimate authority and sanctions that operate differentially across occupations and between occupational and resident roles (2013: 29). And so, the nature of the power relation between host and tourist create the internalization of feelings of inferiority and powerlessness among populations like the one at Labadee where the cultural and economic gap between the passengers and the locals is so wide. The following excerpt from a poem by Haitian writer Félix Morisseau-Leroy properly demonstrates these feelings:

Tourist, don't take my picture
Don't take my picture, tourist
    I'm too ugly
    Too dirty
    Too skinny
Don't take my picture, white man
Mr. Eastman won't be happy
   I'm too ugly
Your camera will break
   I'm too dirty
Too black
Whites like you won't be content
   I'm too ugly
I'm gonna crack your Kodak
   […]
Tourist, I'm barefoot
   My clothes are torn as well
Poor people don't look at whites
   But look at my hair, tourist
Your Kodak's not used to my color
Your barber's not used to my hair
   Tourist, don't take my picture
You don't understand my position
You don't understand anything
   About my business, tourist
   "Gimme five cents"
And then, be on your way, tourist. (1953)

*Translated from Haitian Creole by Jack Hirschman*

Haitians generally have an aversion to being taken in pictures, which is understandable after discussing the intrusive nature of photography and the tourist gaze. For instance, in the picture below: don’t be fooled, the man is not waving hello, instead he is gesturing “No” as we tried to photograph these fishermens’ boat. They proceeded to get angry causing us to quickly put away our camera and apologize. In the analysis on photography, tourists’ lack of pictures of locals was noted and analyzed from the tourist point of view. However, from the point of view of the local the reason might be simply that they do not want to be photographed and either refuse or avoid
the attempts. There is a Foucauldian meaning to the aversion from the gaze relating back to the theory on the panopticon and self-regulation. Tourist photography leaves the local feeling exposed to judgments and opinions towards which he already feels much too aware.

Furthermore, as explained above, Haiti’s colorful social and political history cannot allow for the host gaze to be simply reduced to what is visible. The local Haitian’s gaze carries a heavy weight in its background that is made up of a web of events, emotions, unresolved issues, heritage, aspirations and the list goes on, which brings us back to Kincaid’s comments on tourism in Antigua. In addition, the tourist gaze forces the Haitian to be confronted with his own identity. As explained by Canziani and Francioni: “the tourist gaze, like Foucault’s (1973) clinical gaze, obliges a host community to view itself from the perspective of its visitors in order to sustain a viable position in the world economic or social order” (2013: 20). In this respect, the power rests in the hands of the tourists and the local is confronted with his own poverty and self-concept and adopts a defensive stance in order to protect himself from possible feelings of shame and discomfort.

Reversal of the gaze

One very interesting instance that was documented by a foreign woman living in Haiti was the moment the tables were turned and the gazer became the gaze. In her blog post, the woman
documents her feelings as she and her daughter were approached by a young Haitian man and captured on camera:

While at the beach the other day, Dalencia and I were approached by a complete stranger and his camera. Sitting on my lap and enjoying the relaxing waves of the ocean, me and my girl were minding our own business when a young gentleman came and stood no further than two feet away from my face. He smiled, tilted his head to the side as if to show us he thought we looked cute together, and stood there admiring us for a minute, camera prepped and ready to shoot.

Unsure of his next move, I began to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, and degraded, because now I had at least a dozen new eyes starring at me- for we were causing quite the scene. I felt insecure, unsafe, and pressured. And those were just the feelings I felt about me. You should have seen how tight I was holding on to Dalencia. Knowing full well he was going to take a picture of us, my mind began to race. I never knew so many thoughts could run through my head so quickly. How dare this stranger take a picture of my daughter? What will he do when he looks at this picture later? Will he print it and hang it up in his room? Will he fantasize about me? About Dalencia? After all, she is in her bathing suit. Oh God, how can I protect her? Should I run? Where is Hunter?

Then without permission this perfect stranger leaned in even closer and snapped our picture (jilliansmissionaryconfessions.com, 2015).

The woman reacted to what she felt was a violation of her privacy and personal space by interjecting and asking the man, in Kreyol, why he was snapping a picture of her. The man answered in English that he found them pretty. He then elaborated:

Well, you Americans are always doing that to us. You come here to visit and “help us” (using finger quotes) and you guys are always taking pictures of us with our kids in our homes, in our streets, and in our poverty, and you don’t know us either. And you all NEVER ask us if it is okay to take our picture. No, you just take it. So I thought I would try doing the same to you (idem).

The woman then understood that this young man was simply carrying out a social experiment. As a local “blan”, and not a visitor, she shared his feelings about photographing Haitians and found his motivations intriguing. But for a moment she experienced what it was like to be on the other side of the lens and the embarrassment that came with it. As a consequence, the goal of the young man was met and he was able to engage in a conversation with this understanding stranger. She promised him then that she would share his message, which she paraphrases for the title of her article: “If you ever come to Haiti, which someday I hope you do, bring your camera. […] But also bring some respect”. Why is it so important to be careful when capturing Haitians on camera? Because, for decades the media has captured the poverty and the pain and suffering of Haiti’s people, especially after the earthquake, and has capitalized on it, has commercialized it as products to be consumed. Haiti, even just the word itself, because of those images, was turned into a generalization that Westerners were to donate money to in the name of charity. After the earthquake photojournalists under the pretext of spreading awareness exposed the pain of others. But the Haitian people were already aware of their pain and for them it was all too real and much too personal to be plastered on the front page of newspapers as anonymous examples of events
taking place. As a consequence, the aversion to the gaze is even stronger than it had been. The social experiment carried out by the young man towards a woman who was not in a state of poverty or despair only demonstrates how harmful the tourist gaze can be. Urry and Larsen explain that “the reverse gaze wounds because self-proclaimed travellers, with their anthropological gaze, feel that it turns them into mere tourists and performers of voyeuristic gazing, precisely because photographing is a mocked and questionable tourist activity” (2011: 215). Consequently, the reverse gaze brings the camera, a staple accessory of the tourist/traveller, into perspective, laying bare its intrusive nature. Another way that Haitians are regaining their agency is through social media as young Haitians and young Haitian diaspora use applications such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook in order to retake control on their country’s representation. Through the hashtag “thisisHaiti” numerous people post images of the beauty that can be found in the country and instances that represent what they feel is real Haitian culture in order to counteract all the negative images and texts that are published by the media (see http://fusion.net/story/21256/hey-now-haiti-young-haitians-flip-the-script-on-instagram/).

Local Agency

The aforementioned case illustrates the agency of the local towards the foreigner gaze. By reversing the gaze the young man also reverse the power relation that usually has the foreigner at the top and by opening up a space for alternative representations, young Haitians are capable (though on a small scale) to counteract the institutionalized gaze. However, most Haitians working under the tourist gaze do not always find the proper channel to show their agency of make their voices heard. Even in the above case, the story of this young man has to be told through the words of an American woman. Although some prominent Haitian voices such as Edwidge Danticat use their voices to speak out about moral and ethical issues and injustices, the everyday working man or woman does not have access to the proper channels to have his opinion heard. At Labadee, where the Haitian employees working for a large corporation are aware of that they are easily replaceable, agency is practices in everyday acts. For instance, many of the Tripadvisor.com reviews warned future travellers of the risks of entering the Labadee artisan market area due to the behavior of the sellers:

The only thing I would suggest you stay away from is the market. The people that run their stores are very pushy to the point one of them would not get out of my way until I pretty much walked right through him. (Derek B, Edmonton, January 7, 2015)

They are overly aggressive and you cannot walk 5 steps without being yelled at or accosted. They make seeing this area very uncomfortable. Eliminating this section would make the stop at Labadee far more enjoyable. (Bolte59, Brantford, Canada, April 12, 2015)

It should be noted that these vendors are kept very much in their vendor area, almost as if there’s an invisible line that they cannot cross into the main island area, so don’t let my warnings scare you from this beautiful area… Just be prepared if you enter the well-marked ‘Vendor area’”. (Veronica B, Michigan, May 2015)
These sale tactics are all part of a game of manipulation by the locals and a way for them to exercise their agency. The pushiness and aggressiveness are precisely intended to make you feel uncomfortable. They are not concerned with making the experience enjoyable to the tourist, simply to make a sale and go home with some cash. Consequently, they engage in manipulative tactics to make you purchase their wares as quickly as possible without giving you too much time to barter and bring the price down. Just as Veronica B describes, the vendors are confined to the market area and this is the only space at Labadee that they can exercise their individual agency. Outside of the “invisible line” they return to a subordinate positions where they are given the opportunity to sell their crafts on the Royal Caribbean grounds. Inasmuch, the vendor area allows them momentary lapses where the power relation is reversed. The vendors then overwhelm you in order to maintain their control and prevent you from exercising yours. These small demonstrations show the existence of an active stance in the cognitive grasp of the gaze and their own behavioral response to tourism. Other more subtle ways for the locals to exercise their agency at Labadee is through professionalization (Canziani & Francioni, 2013: 30). This means that the employed locals in positions of service as bartenders, waiters, tour guides and so on use an emotional buffering tactic in order to take of some of the emotional weight of complying with tourists and Royal Caribbean’s rules of acceptable behavior. This professionalization is evident in the previously mentioned article of Jason Cochran as his tour guide dodged questions about the village of Labadie. Despite praising RC for all their work in the area he depersonalizes the exchange between himself and the tourist by refusing to talk about his personal reality and maintains his role as a guide.

In 1997 Catherine Orenstein wrote and article that is still invaluable today while studying tourism at Labadee because she went directly to the source in order to get a representation of what is was like for the traditional fishermen to live side by side with this busy tourist spot:

The men claim that the ship scared off the fish and they describe the ongoing battle over their crawfish traps: They set them on the ocean floor each day. and every now and then the ship staff dive down with knives and rip them up. (The traps ruin the snorkeling, according to Doug, one of the dive instructors.) It's a symbolic but otherwise pointless quarrel. since the locals tell me they never catch much in the traps. and it's not a great beach for snorkeling anyway. Every so often the territorial battle heats up. "One day I went too close to the ship beach," says one of the fishermen. The guards handcuffed me and put me in the jail. You know what that means in Haiti. I didn't get out for three days."

The men begin to denounce the ship -- it took their beach, they say; it only hires the local boss's friends; the fish are all gone. (l. 51-56)

These petty battles between the fishermen and RC’s employees showed a relentlessness to give in to the corporation. Whether these fishermen are still setting their crawfish traps is now unknown but fishing is definitely still practiced in the area. Unfortunately not every inhabitant of Labadie can get a job working for Royal Caribbean. However, when they were asked what they wanted, the fishermen all agreed on more ships at Labadee. Why? Because the current situation has created a vicious cycle where the people have come to depend on the work that the ships provides and the hope it brings to the inhabitants of the area. In 1997 Haiti was barely recovering from political trauma, a vicious military regime and a trade embargo. Yet, after protests from the inhabitants demanding more jobs, which caused a suspension of RC’s travel to Labadee an
agreement was reached and service was resumed. Nowadays the political situation is much different and dockings at Labadee have only become more frequent and have brought an ever-increasing number of tourists to Haiti’s northern shores. Yet, very little has changed in terms of the way activities are carried out. What the activities at Labadee have caused for those living at Labadie village and the surrounding areas is a distortion of everyday reality and a fissure between life on the northern coast and in the rest of the country. My own observation at Labadee and Cap-Haitien is that people involved in the service of tourist have very little grasp on the regular prices of things even when compared to the capital of Port-au-Prince. Royal Caribbean’s presence has created an inflated economy where everything is measured in dollars and from a tourist perspective. This makes it very difficult for a regular Haitian to enjoy a vacation on the north coast without burning a whole through his wallet. In addition, the North still remains difficult to access by land as routes stretch over mountain after mountain with stretches of unpaved dirt roads and potholes. This puts Cap Haitien and Labadee at anywhere between a five to eight hour drive depending on traffic from the capital. This difficulty of access only causes more separation between the north and the ‘rest’. Moreover, the way Royal Caribbean operates also has a direct effect on the comportment of the local inhabitants. Many of those who truly benefit from the presence of the Royal Caribbean are those who need it the least, those who have enough money to make business agreements and those with good network connections to get some work or a contract to lead an excursion. Furthermore, the fact that Royal Caribbean can, instantly and without warning, change its mind about Labadee or indefinitely suspend its service puts those who depend on the ships in a precarious position. Demanding for better treatment and more involvement is possible but to have a repeat of 1997 means that this may also be accompanied by a lack of income. The hosts once again react according to role theory as “host consideration of role expectations infers contemplation of the suitability of behaviours culminating in choice: acquiescence, compromise or refusal to act in accordance with scripts” (Canziani & Francioni, 2013: 29). In many cases, acquiescence seems like the safe option to choose, to continue with the staged cultural tours, the segregation and to indiscriminately praise the corporation in order to retain the economic advantages all the while carrying out small everyday forms of resistance. This does not mean that locals are not aware of their position and what their country has to offer. As one Labadee native explains during an interview:

‘I would like to get on one of those big ships and see what America is like,’ he says. He pulls down the donated Royal Caribbean baseball cap he, like about half the villagers, sports: ‘... and then I would like to come home immediately.’

‘All these tourists come here,’ he points out, ‘because they, who have seen a lot, know that there is no lovelier place in the world than my country.’ (Harman, 2006)
5 – CONCLUSION

Nou lèd men nou la (We are ugly but we are here) – Haitian proverb

All things considered, the question is not whether Royal Caribbean’s presence in Labadee is good or bad because in reality, after so many years, the people of the area would not be able to survive without the ships. The disadvantages are clear and many would define the relationship between the corporate giant and the Republic of Haiti as exploitative. Back in 1986, when the deal was stricken between the two parties, Royal Caribbean came out with a good deal and it seemed the best Haiti could do all things considered. Nearly thirty years later the situation has improved with increased taxes per passenger, increased employment and some community involvement. One of the most important developments that Royal Caribbean has brought to the area is the foundation of a school, the Ecole Nouvelle Royal Caribbean, offering free education to 270 students from kindergarten to seventh grade. Free education is not a given in Haiti and this school, which is run by the local NGO prodev is entirely funded by RC (www.prodevhaiti.org). Although many criticize Royal Caribbean for not doing enough, in the end it is a business whose most important goal is to make profits. Therefore, their aim is not charity and their profits at Labadee will never be reinvested into the community to the point of disturbing their earnings. However, RC retains most of the money spent at Labadee and even the food served to tourists is not sourced locally. Indeed, Royal Caribbean provides valuable income to the Haitian government and opportunities for development but much of this does not trickle down to the population concerned. As Urry and Larsen remark “development for whom” (2011: 74. Emphasis their own)? In fact, as the government is remunerated millions for the tourists at Labadee, the state of the city of Cap-Haitien has only degraded in the last decades with facilities unable to cope with the overpopulation, the road to Labadee is still unpaved and there is still no land access to Labadie village, unless on foot. Thirty years of mass tourism should have yielded higher levels of improvement than electricity and one free school. In addition, following a set pattern of tourism presence in poor countries, “much employment generated in tourist-related services is relatively low-skilled and may reproduce the servile character of previous colonial regimes” (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 74). As we have seen in this research both the comportment of Royal Caribbean and its passengers, following a pattern of representation, still reproduces colonial discourse and borderlines imperialist tendencies. However, in such an established system the viable alternatives seem meager, especially when they can put the livelihood of hundreds of people at stake. The possibilities lay with the Haitian governments possibility and willingness to negotiate. The fact that the details of the agreement were never made public makes it difficult to hypothesize ways that the relationship could be improved because the flexibility of the contract is unknown.

Haiti finds itself in a privileged position compared to its neighbors in the Caribbean. It has an under-developed tourist industry and is turning into an up-and-coming tourist destination, particularly among young adventure seeking travellers. There is a large possibility to learn from the mistake of others with the development of mass tourism in the Caribbean and do better. All-inclusive resorts and unrestrained tourism have cause environmental damage, social tensions, exploitative relations, crowded destinations and the commercialization of cultures. In many cases,
it leaves countries richer yet depleted socially, culturally and environmentally, and in corrupt
Caribbean nations the wealth acquired hardly benefits the larger population. In addition, our
postmodernist societies provide an opportunity, if done properly, to engage in “postmodernist
interactionism” (Ankor and Wearing, 2013: 187). What this means is that rigid definitions can be
discarded opening up a space for tourists and travellers to question their own self and their
identity, “and so the tourist can discern the other and the host can set aside the cultural
imperialism of the tourist” (idem). However, from the very beginnings of Haitian president
Michel Martelly’s administration the motto of the country has been: “Haiti is open for business”.
The goal was to stabilize the political situation of the country and create opportunities and
legislation that would serve to attract foreign investment to the country. These motivations are
noble and very much needed in this highly indebted country. However, the face of the
administration has also rested on the quick and intensive development of the tourist industry. The
goal of tourism minister Balmir-Villedrouin and her office is to turn Haiti into the next big
Caribbean destination. Problems arise when this is done hastily and in a standardized manner. As
a consequence, escaping colonialist and romantic representations have proven difficult, therefore
running the risk of repeating the same patterns of mass tourism observed throughout the
Caribbean. At the moment, the Royal Caribbean is an exception to the rule in Haiti. As this
country is only recently coming to terms with fully accepting all parts of its heritage - embracing
the parts of its culture it has usually kept in the shadows or been ashamed of such as the Kreyol
language, Vodou and its African heritage – developing a model of tourism that would only
proliferate all-inclusive resort and luxury vacations could wreak havoc on the communities
affected and their perceptions of self and identity. The Martelly administration is nonetheless
going ahead with their plans of transforming the small coastal island of Île-de-la-Tortue into a
luxurious resort complete with “1,000 hotel rooms, 2,500 villas, a golf course, a new $13 million
airport, and the dredging of the port were just some of the proposed developments. Boutique
style accommodation, a tourist village with restaurants, cafés and shops and a plan to introduce
an underwater museum also featured prominently in blueprint designs” (Ulrik, 2015).
Developments for the local communities are also included in the plans but many of the decisions
were made without consulting the islanders. Furthermore, as the project is being carried out
many locals are being displaced in order to accommodate construction. It is on that same island
that Carnival Cruise Lines has expressed interest creating a new port for their passengers,
although obstacles over land ownership have slowed the progression of the deal (see Charles,
2014).

The aim of this research was to demonstrate that there is very much work that needs to be done
in Haiti in tourism studies, particularly if the country wishes to stand out and seize the
opportunity to develop sustainable and ethical tourism that takes into account not just the beauty
of the landscape but also the country’s rich and complex culture. My research was restricted to
second-hand information that was sometimes outdated. Nonetheless, it only proves that further
study needs to be conducted in order to get a deeper understanding of tourist behavior and host
behavior in Haiti, and not just at Labadee. However, Labadee is a good starting point in order to
learn of this model’s shortcomings so that better decisions can be made in the future. Big
corporations are not the only ones to point the finger at in producing neocolonial patterns.
Haitian people must also take responsibility for letting themselves be inaccurately perceived and
not treated as equals: “the colonizer’s model of the world can last only so long as the victims
allow colonizing perceptions of them to persist” (Pulsipher and Holderfield, 2006: 310). There
are alternative ways of following the path of development and engaging in touristic activities
than those of Western countries. For instance, as Haiti makes new deals to attract visitors it must also make demands that employment is sourced locally but also that experts and educated individuals can be hired in order to give a holistic and realistic view of the country and its culture. Also, it is vital to encourage cruise passengers to partake in in-island trips such as to the Citadelle Laferriere and Sans-Soucis palace so as to create meaningful and unique cultural experiences. It can also be demanded that the ministry of tourism has a say in the publishing of brochures and promotional material and be able to counteract any standardized and generalist depictions. Lastly, on the long-term, the government and private sector should come together in order to properly train and educate local people so that they can escape the cycle of low-skilled employment. By doing this, the power relation between host and tourist can be shifted to a more equal relationship where both parties are able to engage intellectually and break down the preconceived and objectifying gazes.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


