

Globalization and the “Fast Food” Industry

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It is often said that one of the most exciting aspects of being immersed in foreign culture is the mixture of different herbs and spices, meats and fish, fruits and veg that you explore every day. It is a sad fact that food is becoming more traveled than we are. Eating local or traditional food in big cities is proving to get more and more difficult as a result of the globalization process. The quality of French cuisine can be seen almost everywhere, as well as low quality adaptations of traditionally Italian dishes, and San Pedro Sula, in Northern Honduras is a classic example of when the American fast food culture meets classic Central American fare.

During my first half an hour of being here in San Pedro Sula, I find myself engulfed in a conversation with a taxi driver, in which we discussed a number of topics, from the prominence of cartel gun crime to the total domination of American fast food companies, a conversation that could have erupted in Guatemala City, San Salvador, Managua or almost any large Central American city. This domination is clear to see with the aggressive advertising techniques utilised by these restaurant chains. The pinnacle of these ugly and intrusive visuals is used by Coca-Cola, who decided that they are going to prop up an advert that you can see from miles away. The City is swallowed by rolling hills that surround its four corners, so ... Coca-Cola decided to put a huge sign up in the hills in the style of the classic ‘Hollywood’ sign of Los Angeles. The sign can be seen from the city centre clearly and can be seen from the main strip of restaurants and fast food outlets ... it even lights up a hideous red when the sun goes down.

The hard sell attitude of the fast-food industry is self-evident all over the world. For example: MacDonald’s and Coca-Cola were two of the nine major sponsors for the 2012 Olympic Games, a strange oxymoron. MacDonald’s accounted for less than 2% of the total revenue for the Olympics, but still splashed out a cool \$100 million for the four year period, they have been major partners for the last 40 years. They built a 1,500 seat restaurant on the London Olympic site, the biggest in the world and stated that they are trying to “raise brand awareness”, as did Coca-Cola. I just wonder who these people are, sitting watching the Olympics, that are unaware of the existence of MacDonald’s and Coca-Cola, the stagnant branding of these chains and couldn’t draw the infamous golden arches (I know it’s hard to believe, but it is just an “M”).

The point is, aggressive advertising is deconstructing food cultures that out-date us by millennia and have been a huge part of the formation national identity. This for me is depressing, and when travelling now, in certain areas, it’s near impossible to find and immerse yourself in the flavours of the nation, this is a sad fact that is becoming more and

more apparent.

And remember – by calling your restaurant “Burgermeister”, burgers do not suddenly become part of local or even German cuisine, although, they do still taste nice...

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