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TOURISM AND THE *Negrificación* OF CUBAN IDENTITY

This article analyzes the ways contemporary understandings of skin color and foreign-ness in touristic interactions challenge revolutionary conceptualizations of what it means to be Cuban. In particular, the essay explores the tensions and contradictions of post-Soviet era Cuba's use of tourism, a fundamentally capitalist tool, to sustain its socialist economy. In light of the revolution's humanist and egalitarian objectives, the paper theorizes the emergent commodification of raced, gendered, and sexualized Cuban bodies as well as the deepening of class cleavages that have been exacerbated by the legalization of the U.S. dollar. Moreover, it analyzes the new and complicated ways race and racialization have become means to gloss emergent status hierarchies in contemporary Cuba.

KEYWORDS: Cuba, tourism, racial constructions, national identity, culture commodification

WELCOME TO CUBA

Two days after arriving in Cuba for the very first time in 1999, I joined a group of students on my study tour to indulge in Havana's much acclaimed nightlife. Within a few steps of leaving our hotel on the El Prado boulevard, two young men from the group were approached by a couple of *jineteros*—street hustlers. The hustlers led us to a bar in Central Havana's Chinatown. Once there, our group of twelve all opted to order mojitos—the tourist 'welcome' drink of fresh mint and sugar, ground with a pestle and mixed with rum, seltzer water, and ice. As people got their drinks, everyone commented on how delicious they were. But when I finally tasted my mojito—the last one served—I could not understand the praise I had been hearing since mine tasted like seltzer water with a little mint in it. I tasted a few other people's drinks and became furious when I realized that only my drink had been watered down in this way. I sent the drink back twice

but it remained unacceptable. Indeed, my first mojito experience did not make me feel at all "welcome." I became angry when I realized that I was involved in a racial situation, for I was the only African American member traveling with this group of White American students. Dressed in casual summer attire like everyone else, only my race distinguished me from my colleagues. Certainly, I thought I had prepared myself for the Cuban racial context by reading about it beforehand, but I had come to understand that racism was practiced rather subtly in Latin America's "racial democracies." Yet even growing up in the U.S. South, I had never been made to feel my skin color so poignantly before. My colleagues could not console me until I was eventually introduced to the *jineteros*—who had, by then, attached themselves to our group. When they learned that I, too, was American, the embarrassment was visible. "Oh my goodness," one of them exclaimed as the other disappeared, "we thought you were Cuban!" I asked if that was why my drink was unpalatable. Ashamedly, he nodded yes. When I asked why, he told me that since I had kind of tagged along toward the back of the group, and most of all because of my skin color, they assumed I was a *prostituta*.¹ From that point on, I always placed myself in the center of whatever group I was with, but it made no difference. Walking into a hotel nightclub, the security guards would let the others pass without incident but step directly in my path, asking me where I was going. I quickly learned to look confused and to respond in my best American-accented English that I did not understand because I did not speak Spanish. Only on very few occasions, in encounters with the police, did I have to prove my foreigner status by showing the photocopy of my passport that I had learned to keep with me at all times.

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Over the course of my field research in Cuba from 1999 to 2003, I would hear time and again how "Cuban" I looked or how "Cubanized" my actions had become. While I was there, I seldom intellectualized much about such exchanges, given that even home in the U.S. people frequently attributed my dark complexion and my

then dreadlocked hairstyle to a Caribbean heritage. It was only when I returned from the field and began to think about the data I had collected in light of my initial research question—"How has contemporary tourism changed Cuban culture and society?"—that I began to recognize what it meant to be (or to be mistaken for) Cuban in the context of Cuba's increasing reliance on tourism as a means to sustain its socialist system. It became clear to me—as a Black female foreigner (see Simmons 2001)—that Cuban identity was being racialized—blackened, if you will—vis-à-vis the (White) foreign Other in a way that conformed to traditional (that is pre-revolutionary) Cuban understandings of race.

Although racial ideologies have played a significant role in shaping Cuban social relations through the present, race tends to be written out of analyses of Cuba's past and present politico-economic processes due to the pre-revolutionary policy of "whitening" and the revolutionary position that removing class exploitation would also eradicate racial discrimination. As I will discuss in more depth shortly, whitening or *blanqueamiento* is the attempt in many Latin American contexts to eliminate evidence of an African presence from their societies both physically (by such means as miscegenation and importation of Europeans) and culturally (by elimination "Africanisms" in such areas as religion, music, and dance). Further, like Brazil's imagined racial democracy, Cubans celebrate their *mestizo* or mixed heritage and consider discourse that posits racial discrimination to be unpatriotic due to a founding nationalistic mythology of racial harmony (McGarrity and Cárdenas 1995, Twine 1998, Wade 1993, Wright 1993).² In more recent scholarship, Blacks are generally perceived to be among the greatest beneficiaries of the revolution, especially given Fidel Castro's proclamations that Cubans are an "Afro-Latin" people (de la Fuente 2001) indeed, my field research found that the general populace seems to accept the position that *el color no importa*—color doesn't matter—despite realities of racial discrimination and prejudice in day-to-day practice (see Twine 1998).

In this article I analyze interactions between Cubans and tourists in order to consider how global capitalism articulates at the local level in today's socialist Cuba. Drawing from my ethnographic research among both Cubans and foreign tourists, I argue that in day-to-day practice, the same tourism that props up the socialist system also presents significant challenges to the system's ideology by reasserting pre-revolutionary meanings of race and class on a transnational, yet intra-personal plane. Specifically, I find that international tourism racializes not only individual Cubans and foreign tourists, but also the collective countries of origin. That is, if Europe and Canada—as well as the many other

countries from which tourists come—are understood to be White (as demonstrated through the usage of the colloquial term "*yuma*"), I submit that Cubans perceive themselves to be onerously Black by comparison (see Yelvington 2001).³

Given the increasing reliance on mass international tourism for any number of developing countries, the processes that are re-energizing racial meanings as described here have relevance in contexts as geographically near to Cuba as the Bahamas and as far away as Thailand (see Dupuy 2001 and Clarke and Thomas 2006). Certainly each locale has its own unique history and differentiated understandings of raciality (Yelvington 2001, Holt 2000, Harrison 1995), but I propose that one of the consequences of importing large numbers of wealthy foreigners to tour in previously colonized lands is a reinvigoration of notions of entitlement: Who is allowed where and what are they supposed to be doing in those spaces? Under what circumstances are those boundaries crossed? What are the consequences of being where one does not belong and who enforces the dividing lines? These questions that relate to issues of race, status, and belonging are replicated in the touristic context, yet further complicated by a new nationalist impetus (see Sørensen 1997). In both historical moments, a (largely) White minority group is wealthy and privileged in comparison to a (largely) Black majority of working people who are outsiders to the sites of leisure and power.

Tourists are invited to "see the country" and "see the people," but most hosting countries would prefer to contain the interactions between "the hosts" and "the guests" primarily due to the transnational imbalance of economic power between the two (Smith 2001, Cohen 1995, Cheong and Miller 2000). Put simply, because the tourists have spending power, they are (perceived to be) constantly in danger that a member of the comparatively impoverished host population will seek access to that money, whether forcibly or more creatively—and lest we forget, the state seeks as much of the economic capital for itself. With the desire to continually attract more tourists, foreigners are seldom chastised for violating the borders; rather, the local population more frequently reaps the consequences (Alexander 1997, Kempadoo 2001, Gregory 2003). Police, security guards, and others who work in official capacities support the state's efforts to keep tourists and hosts as separate as possible, even if they occasionally seek to benefit from their nearness to tourists themselves. As in the colonial era, race matters in the local context, but the Cuban case in point exemplifies how it is magnified and frequently distorted in the global context of transnational economic imbalances. When Cuban racial understandings are considered in the context of tourism,

skin color and nationality often become conflated such that the category of “tourist” is recognized as White (one who is comparatively wealthy and belongs in sites of privilege and leisure) and the category “Cuban” is alternately recognized as Black (one who is comparatively poor and does not belong).

My interviewees repeatedly told me that non-Cuban “Others”—called *yumas* in popular parlance—were easily recognizable by their clothes (especially their shoes), their hairstyles or facial hair (for men), their skin colors (especially obvious attempts at tanning), and their entire *forma de ser* (their way of being). Because the majority of tourists come from Canada and Europe—especially Spain, France, Germany, and Italy—*yumas* are presumed to be White. Non-White *yumas* who travel to Cuba from elsewhere in the Americas often have their foreign-ness scrutinized through a performative lens that closely considers such cultural markers as clothes, hair, skin color, and comportment. Only after those behavioral cues have been accurately interpreted are these Black and Brown tourists recognized and treated as *yumas* in a way that parallels the prospect of cultural whitening described below. Also tellingly, the monied “race” of *yumas* was distinguished from foreigners from developing countries who were in Cuba to benefit from its international socialist outreach programs in medicine and education. Russian teens, for example, though often phenotypically *rubios* (blondes), were quickly dismissed on-sight by hustlers with such comments as “they’re just Chernobyl victims here for medical treatment.” Visibly outsiders, but also easily recognized as non-monied, this intermediate group might be “raced” *mulato*. For their part, Cubans were continually treated as criminally as well as culturally suspect, paralleling what I shall describe as Cuban understandings of *negros*.

RACIALITY IN TODAY’S CUBA

José Martí, one of Cuba’s national heroes from the late nineteenth century’s War for Independence against Spain, is the originator of Cuba’s racial ideology. Martí promoted a platform of anti-racism and race-less Cuban nationality based on the multiracial deaths in service to the aspiring nation (Ferrer 1999). The constant refrain that *el color no importa* (color doesn’t matter) has its roots in this hypothetical Cuban racial democracy. Still, Blackness and skin color are important in Cuba, and increasingly so in today’s era of revived international tourism.

Indeed, for a people who claim not to assign import to skin color, many foreign visitors are surprised by how frequently Cubans invoke terms that refer to phenotypical distinctions in the course of ordinary conversation. When asked, people I spoke with quickly defended the practice with answers such as, “no, it is

just descriptive—like ‘the fat one’ or ‘the one in the red shirt.’” Nonetheless, upon closer analysis of Cuban racial terminology, a pattern becomes clear that, in general, Blackness and Black identifying features are denigrated in comparison to Whiteness or features identified as “whitened.”

Figure 1 illustrates the broad range of race and color terms used today in Cuba (and elsewhere in Latin America). The *blanco* or “White” category almost exclusively describes hair color, with the significant exceptions of olive-skinned *trigueños* and *lechosos* who have a complexion described as “milky white.” The different gradations of *negro* and *mulato*—featuring dark and light color variants and also considering hair texture and facial features—address the extent of discernible African ancestry. From the back, what may appear to be a *trigueña* with straight black hair and naturally tanned arms, may be revealed a *mulata clara* when her full lips or nose are visible. Significantly, what was explained to me as a “special category” of *mulato* called *jaba(d)o* may be among any of the lighter complexions—including *lechoso*—often with hazel, blue, or green eyes but are considered non-White because they have some prominent “Black” associated feature, most notably *pasas* (“nappy” or what is called “bad” hair).⁴ There is also a “special category” of *negro* called *moro*, which describes a dark complexioned person with what is considered a “good hair” texture—resembling a North African Moor. While this color-continuum is clearly anti-Black, as relates to tourism my broader argument is that White-skinned Cubans do not have any more right to touristic spaces than do Black-skinned Cubans, though in practice some may occasionally “pass” as foreign Whites.

In addition to these terms that refer to phenotypical features, there are also relational uses of racial terms that imply familiarity. Within any Cuban household—Black or White—the darkest member is often referred

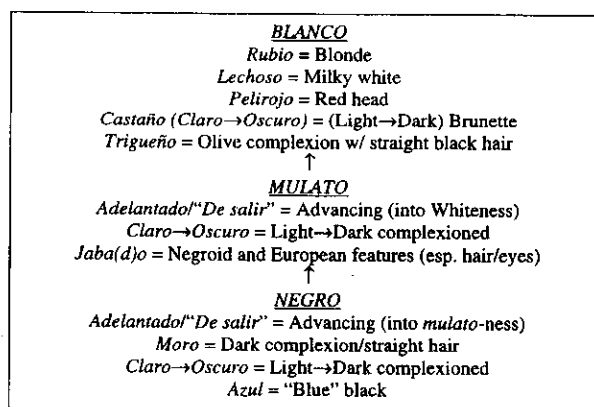


Figure 1. Race-Color Continuum

to affectionately as “*negro/a*.” A White *castaño* Cuban-American high school student, who was born in Havana, fondly reminisced: “My grandmother used to hug me and call me ‘*mi negro*.’” Only after it was repeatedly explained to me within my Cuban family that the term was meant “lovingly” and not as a slur, I eventually ceased months of protesting being called “*Negra*” or “*Negri*” (a shortened form of *negrita*) as though it were my name. Nonetheless, I recognized the significance of status in such usages when María Teresa, a 62-year-old *jaba(d)a* was relaying a story about her ex-husband, who is classified racially as *negro*. When speaking in her husband’s voice, she repeatedly referred to herself as “*Negra*,” to which her niece who was present repeatedly corrected “*Mulata*.” It seemed her niece was concerned that I—a foreign observer—might recognize the importance of race and status within the family to extend beyond the color of a particular individual’s skin despite the popular nationalist dictum.

As Peter Wade (1993) explains the common Latin American phenomenon, my family nickname was *Negra* because “as a friendly term of address to people easily classifiable as ‘black’ . . . intimacy is implied by the ability to use a potentially derogatory term without derogation” (260). Similarly, when María Teresa—a blue-eyed *mulata*—was called “*Negra*” by her husband, the term of endearment also conveyed the power differential between men and women that parallels that between Blacks and Whites. In this case, “the connotations are of intimacy but also of paternalism, dependence, and service” (260). And in the case of the White *castaño* high school student, he was called *negro* by his grandmother because he was a junior family member, such that the implicit hierarchical difference was age. Wade summarizes, “*Negro*, then, may not convey disrespect, but its various meanings as a term of address are underlain by a central concept of lower position on a hierarchical scale” (Wade 1993:260). In this way, these examples from the Cuban context show how a biologically or ancestrally based “race” can be detached from Black bodies and relationally applied to close friends, female lovers, and younger family members without undermining the fixed meanings about the lowly status of Blackness in comparison to Whiteness.

Perhaps more telling about the construction of race in Cuba than the broad range of terms are their progressive or “evolutionary” usages. Just as the arrows in Figure 1 (above) that point upwards from Blackness toward Whiteness symbolize the perceived “advancement” of the Cuban people through historic policies of *blanqueamiento* (whitening), within each non-White category there is a “sub-race” of “*adelantados*”—literally, advancers, that is, into the next category up—also called “*de salir*.” *De salir* translates as “leaving from,”

so one could be “leaving” Blackness or *mulato*-ness. For example, Yeshua—the chestnut-brown-complexioned son of a *jaba(d)a* and a *negro*—once explained to me that he considers himself *negro*, though due to both his soft hair texture and his mild manners, people generally refer to him alternately as a *negro adelantado* or a *mulato oscuro*. But Nadine Fernández (1996) submits an alternate meaning of *de salir*—that the Black or *mulato* is “good enough” to be out in public with despite his or her biological race. I, for instance, am a dark complexioned *negra*, who was accepted by my fair complexioned in-laws largely because they saw me as a *negra de salir* due to my high level of education and “cultural refinement”; indeed, I was regularly introduced to people they wanted to impress as a “doctoral student from the United States.” This alternate meaning speaks to the possibility in Cuba, and elsewhere in Latin America, to be socially accepted as though one were White (or *mulato*) depending on one’s position in society (Wade 1993, Twine 1998, Wright 1993). In other words, skin color and ancestral descent are not the only determinants to race; such class-based considerations as property ownership, occupation, and education also come into play as elsewhere in the Caribbean and North America.

This racialized quest for “respectability” also has a gendered component. Similarly to the way Gina Ulysse (1999) describes the recognized distinctions between a “lady” and a “woman” in the Jamaican context, Cuban women are expected to be attractive and are idealized primarily through their domesticity—in their roles as faithful wives and mothers (Rosendahl 1997). The current trend, in which many young women participate in *jineterismo*, or sex tourism, is frowned upon due to the violation of these feminine ideals. Men, on the other hand, are understood as somewhat less tame especially in the Cuban context where a machista construction of masculinity is frequently celebrated and performed (Rosendahl 1997, Ramírez 1999). Linking the raced and gendered aspects of social acceptance, then, we can infer that—as is common elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean—White femininity is held in the highest esteem, while Black masculinity is devalued as base (Ulysse 1999, Hernández-Reguant 2006).

In *Nationalizing Blackness*, Robin Moore (1997) sheds light on not only the policy of racial or physical whitening, but also aspirations for cultural whitening. He explains that, rather than strictly follow the Darwinian evolutionary race model—through which non-Whites were conceived as a lower order of species than Whites—in the early decades of the twentieth century, the newly independent, racially mixed nations of Latin America, including Cuba, came to prefer the cultural evolution school of thought, which conceived of Blacks and Whites as potential equals, though Blacks’

"traditions and modes of behavior were influenced by earlier stages of cultural development" (Moore 1997:32). From this perspective, Blacks could be equal to Whites if they would only Westernize. In this way, the lower sectors of society were motivated to "improve" themselves culturally. That is, they were encouraged to forsake norms and behaviors associated with the African-descended Blacks of the lower classes and instead adopt the European standards and mores of the upper classes in such cultural areas as religion, speech, music, and dance. Both *blancos* and *negros*, at least conceptually, could slide up and down this culturally based scale.

Today, under a revolution that proclaims to have eliminated both racism and classism and purportedly celebrates Cuba's "Afro-Latin" inheritance, those same Eurocentric premises nevertheless continue to define an individual's cultural designation. Nadine Fernández (1996) explains that "Culture, in this sense, implies a social hierarchy: one group with high culture (*más nivel, alta cultura*) and the other group with low culture (*menos nivel, bajo [sic] cultura*)." Specifically, *nivel de cultura* alluded to an individual's (or his/her family or community's) "level of formal education, public manners and etiquette, and . . . degree of social refinement" (Fernández 1996:147). Because "'High culture' is associated most often with whites, while 'low culture' connotes poverty and blackness," this socially relative understanding of culture is also raced (Fernández 1996:147).⁵ My own ethnographic research demonstrates that these ideas about cultural levels persist into the present and have implications in the context of Cuba's international tourism.

Visiting tourists are incorporated into this racialized schema because in addition to measuring individuals on this cultural scale, the cultural evolution model also considers collective foreign countries in this way. Still following the nineteenth-century paradigm, the "White" nations of Europe and the U.S. predictably comprise those with "higher cultural levels," closely followed by the not-quite-White nations of Asia, while the "Brown" nations of Latin America and the Caribbean and Black nations of Africa are lower on the spectrum respectively. Prior to the revolution, I would contend that Cuba considered itself, at best, *blanca*—White but powerless in its female-ness, or at worst, a *mestizo* nation nearly, but not quite, White. Under the revolution they would view themselves as, at worst, a *mulato* nation, darkened by their difficult economic situation, but whitened by the cultural advances of their educational, medical, and social system. At best, the revolution fancies itself to be race-less. But no matter the era, Cubans would never conceive of themselves as *negros* or Black.⁶ I argue that through tourism they have rejoined the global political economy, at precisely that reprehensible level.

THE REVOLUTION'S SPECIAL PERIOD

The 1959 Triumph of the Cuban Revolution sought to uproot a relationship of total political dependency on and economic exploitation by the United States. Two years later, following the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion by CIA-trained Cuban exiles, revolutionary leader Fidel Castro announced the revolution's socialist orientation. With Soviet military and financial backing, then, between the time the U.S. economic embargo was instituted in 1961 and until 1989, Cuba was on an occasionally unsteady path toward the Marxist-Leninist ideal of Communism. Castro led the Cuban people in their belief that they could achieve a new type of society that would ensure that all of its people had enough to eat, decent housing, and free access to education and medical treatment. As the poorest sector prior to the revolution, Blacks benefited more than any other group from the revamped system and many pledged—and have continued to pledge—their support to the revolution and to Castro (Pérez 1988, de la Fuente 2001).

Following the exodus of some 200,000 among Cuba's largely White middle and upper classes between Fulgencio Batista's ousting in 1959 and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 (Pérez 1988), the late 1960s were heady times in which people actively sought to actualize Ché Guevara's New Society, in which Cubans would not require material stimuli such as money to work, but should willingly engage in all activities in order to build a better society for everyone. Castro repeatedly tried to assert Cuba's independence from the Soviet Union, but eventually Cuba's economic situation led them closer to the socialist camp. From 1970 until the mid 1980s, what are today recalled as "the good old days" of Cuban socialism, featured heavy-handed Soviet economic guidance.

But after Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika reforms hit home for Cubans in 1989—combined with the effects of the U.S. blockade—the Cuban economy was left destitute and desperate. Many of Castro's detractors began to proclaim the end of his socialist regime (Oppenheimer 1992).⁷ A year later, in 1990, Castro announced that Cuba had entered what he called "A Special Period in a Time of Peace." He explained that given changes in the global economy, the Cuban people would experience hardships—including severe rationing of both food and public services such as transportation and electricity—in order to continue to guarantee such basic needs to all Cubans. Moreover, policies that had previously been associated with bourgeois capitalist practices—such as private investments, entrepreneurship, limited taxation, tourism, and later a peso-dollar dual economy—were implemented nationwide. These historical transformations and policy changes were interpreted by many Cubans as necessary evils that would help maintain Cuba's socialist system.

Yeshua, a tourism worker, described the Special Period in this way:

Well, now I've got to use my memory, because the Special Period was declared about 12 or 11 years ago. First, since the Revolution came to 1988, we had the support of the Soviet Union. Once they failed, we were alone, and Cuba was still suffering the American blockade—well, they say the embargo—so we had a very special situation, in which [we] . . . did not have resources to produce anything. We didn't have any other country to help us. We had to take different measurements to make sure that the Cuban revolution that was going on continued. And so we called that moment, we call it *periodo especial*—Special Period, which means that we're gonna fight for . . . we're gonna struggle for saving as much as we can; we're being really efficient; we're gonna . . . It's like saying 'okay, we're going to do things right.'

To be clear, despite the capitalistic nature of some of the Special Period's reforms, Cubans who believe in the revolution continue to see themselves on the socialist path to communism, even if a detour through capitalist territory was necessary. As Yeshua put it, they are hoping to "do things right" this time.

Another interviewee, Hermina, articulated some of the tremendous creativity and improvisation that I perceive to be a prominent feature of surviving the day-to-day difficulties of the Special Period. "We youths always searched for an alternative," she said, explaining that she and her classmates would stay on campus studying in order to eat for free with those who had late classes. In addition, rather than wait interminably for overcrowded and often unreliable public transportation, Hermina joined the ranks of *botelleras* (or hitchhikers) in seeking rides with whomever might be going her way.

Others—like the young men from my opening narrative—opted for the *jinetero* lifestyle wherein hustlers and sex workers sought their fortune through illegal associations with tourists. *Jineteros* are most pervasive on the periphery of tourist establishments such as hotels and nightclubs. Depending on the context, *jineteros* may offer any service a tourist might need—"guide to the city? A restaurant? *Una chica linda*—a pretty girl?" "You know there's no better lover than a Cuban." *Jineteros* may or may not ask for any kind of payment—sometimes access to tourist locales is sufficient payment, while at other times it is more important to develop relationships of reciprocity and trust (Elinson 1999, Hodge 2001). Some hustlers are said to grow accustomed to the lifestyle one can achieve *jineteando* in an addiction-like manner, while many others are searching

for that lucky relationship that will get them a visa out of Cuba (Hodge 2001, see also Brennan 2003 and 2004).

The popularly invoked term *lucha*—which can take either the noun or verb form of "struggle" or "fight"—encompasses all of these means of surviving in the Special Period of the revolution. Certainly, the term gains much of its strength, as well as a degree of irony, from the way *luchar* is grounded in discourse from the independence struggle against Spain and the revolutionary struggle against U.S. domination. The irony in the everyday usage of the term in today's Special Period is that it often involves either minor or major illegalities within the revolution's moralistic system—activities racialized in the Cuban context as Black. One could even consider the government's decision to implement some capitalistic mechanisms to be an example of this creative *lucha* to survive by any means. And indeed, today Cuba's economy has improved to the point that the Special Period has officially been deemed over, assisted greatly by the hard currency generated by the revamped tourism industry and the legalization of U.S. dollars in 1993.⁸

DOLLARS AND TOURISM IN THE SPECIAL PERIOD

Many researchers have begun to theorize that the legalization of dollars is one of the prime contributors to the deepening class and race divisions in socialist Cuba (Bengelsdorf 1997, Fernández 1999, O'Connell 1998). As mentioned earlier, the majority of the early waves of those who fled the revolution were White, and many of those exiles sent money to their (largely White) families who remained in Cuba. When dollars were legalized, those family members became instantly wealthy by mere possession of dollars. Hannah Elinson (1999), who conducted extensive research on *jineterismo*, describes the societal inversions that accompanied the advent of U.S. dollars:

The new elite included those previously at the bottom of the pyramid, such as maids, taxi drivers, and waiters, all of whom could legally retain dollar tips from foreign visitors. Individuals with relatives in exile, who had previously been treated as ideologically suspect, also entered this new elite by receiving remittances from abroad. Meanwhile, professionals such as teachers and doctors who continued to be paid in Cuban pesos slipped to the bottom of the economic hierarchy. (Elinson 1999:2)

While many Whites accessed dollars from their families abroad, others who hoped for the lifestyle dollars could provide had to seek them from within. One such person, Marco, told me about his illicit experiences from the early Special Period:

Before I left [Cuba for Switzerland], I was a *buscador de vida* [lit. one who searched for a living], at

23 years of age I moved about very quickly because back then, dollars were still illegal and if they caught you running around for whatever reason, [the consequences] would be terrible . . . I don't know, I believe that those who went about with dollars or searching for dollars back then were *ya un poco fuera de la sociedad*—already something of social outsiders. The powers that be acted like you were in the U.S. running around with ten grams of cocaine. . . . Having ten grams of coke there would be the same as having two or three dollars here, back then. So you had to move about at super-atomic speeds, and *ya tu sabes* [you know how it is].

In this passage, Marco referred to himself as a *buscador de vida*, which I imagine to be a euphemism for *jinetero*. In fact, the only differences that I am able to discern between the early *buscador de vida* and today's *jinetero* is the legal access to dollars and who his "clients" might have been. Back then, Marco likely exchanged currency for the few foreigners around who might want to "slum it" by shopping in a peso market. However, to benefit from the exchange, the foreigners would have to make whatever purchases he wanted for him since at that time he was not legally permitted to carry or spend dollars.⁹ True to Marco's characterization of a *buscador de vida*, *jineteros* remain "something of social outsiders" who engage in activities beyond societal parameters. And although increasing numbers are university educated, collectively they are perceived to be *de baja cultura*—of a low cultural level. However, despite their low social standing—which is understood to be racialized, as described above—*jineteros* are often among a barrio's wealthiest individuals.

Yeshua and I once had a discussion about why Cubans were not allowed in hotels. I had been wondering if the restriction was really about prostitution or if it was an effort to shield everyday Cubans from direct contact with the capitalist materialism in their socialist midst as—having observed the worlds of difference between tourists and Cubans—I had begun to hypothesize by that point. Yeshua preferred the *jinetero* explanation:

[A] random Cuban can't pay for a room at \$60–70. . . . And . . . if they do have the money—there's something dark about that money . . . because it's not possible if you are a Cuban, living in Cuba, working like a Cuban that you can make that kind of money. . . . Most of those cases have to do with prostitution. . . . Because they [that is, the government] want a really, I might call it, healthy tourism. . . . They want their tourists to meet Cuban socialism, Cuban people—I mean what we might consider "the real Cuban people," not prostitutes.

Yeshua was disturbed by the possibility that a "dark" class of Cubans might use ill-gotten money to "buy" access to tourist locales. Because Cuba's socialist system pays its legally working citizens peso wages that equate to about \$20/month, what Yeshua calls "the real Cuban people" cannot afford to associate with the dollar tourist industry at a then 22 pesos-to-1 US dollar exchange rate.

Still, it seemed to me discriminatory that all Cubans were prohibited when it was only a very small percentage of the general population—the *jineteros*—that were the problem. Rather than counter that similar policies are employed throughout the Caribbean, Yeshua argued that exclusion was valid to protect the image of the revolution abroad: "Can't you see," he shouted, "that the only way to fight that [exportation of negative images] is to prohibit [all Cubans]. No Cubans! No Cubans! No Cubans!" With those words, I became alarmed by language that resonated of U.S. or South African enforced racial segregation—and certainly, I was familiar with the literature on "tourism apartheid" that separates foreigners into what a Spanish interviewee of mine aptly called "tourist ghettos." What felt inconsistent to me was that such language was being used in the name of a revolution that purportedly sought to create an egalitarian Cuba. The apparent contradiction was only resolved when I began to unpack the nature of the relationship between tourism, race, and class in today's Cuba.

RACING CUBANS AND TOURISTS

I return, now, to reconsider my opening narrative, where I was raced as Cuban and found myself outraged and humiliated at my exclusion. I also witnessed Cubans treated similarly, but without the foreign passport to bail them out. For example, Yeshua works in tourism and frequently leads guests from his hotel on excursions into the city or to the beaches. Even wearing his uniform that demonstrates his legal association with tourists,¹⁰ the police constantly harassed him for his *carnet identidad* (identity card) to see if he had ever been arrested for *andando con turista*—the punishable offense of "going around with tourists." Throughout my year of research, Yeshua would walk away from such encounters with the police shaking his head and making the excuse to his Italian, Canadian, or French clients that "they [the police] must have been confused."¹¹ While he never specified what the source of confusion might have been, I suggest that his skin color—like mine at the Chinatown bar—identified him as Cuban and 'not belonging' in close proximity with foreign (White) tourists.

I also witnessed Javier, one of the first people I interviewed, interacting with this harassment in an

unapologetic and less graceful way. As my first field trip was coming to an end, he had ridden with me from Central Havana to my hotel in the suburban tourist district of Miramar. Concerned about the workers' reaction to his Rastafarian appearance, he refused to enter the hotel, saying he would wait outside for me to bring the gifts of razors, t-shirts, and used sneakers that I wanted to give him. I found him on a bench some distance from the hotel entrance. As I handed him the plastic bag containing the presents and was preparing to give him a *besito* air-kiss on the cheek to bid him farewell, a gray-uniformed policeman, who had been circling in the shadows, approached and asked for both of our *carnets*. I explained that I was a guest in the hotel and that Javier was an invited friend of mine. The officer turned to address Javier, asking for his ID, which Javier surrendered—asking the cop if he knew the meaning of 'revolution' and did he know who Bob Marley or Malcolm X were. The policeman ignored him as he called Javier's data into his walkie-talkie. Javier continued his tirade against the injustice of what he perceived as the "Black man" being harassed by the "colored man" (the policeman would be classified as a lighter *mulato* than Javier, a *java(d)o* who's dreadlocks "darkened" him further still). Once the policeman had brought Javier's ID back and departed with the admonition that he stay away from tourists, Javier paced a few steps and then burst out in tears at the humiliation: "This happens to me all the time—and it's just because of the way I look." As was described earlier, race in Cuba is based not only in a color-continuum, but also a cultural one. Javier's dreadlocked hair is a physical feature that affirms

his linkage to his African ancestry, despite the Whiteness of his mother with whom he could—and in the Cuban cultural context that values *blanqueamiento should*—choose to racially identify. Rather, as evidenced through his comments to the policeman, he allied himself with the Black Power ideologies of foreign-born Blacks and thus rendered himself an outsider not only to the spaces of tourism but to Cuba's racial ideology as well.

For my part, I could easily have avoided the problems I regularly encountered if I would only have resided in hotels and resorts rather than in private homes, as the Cuban government would have preferred. In a legal tourist establishment that brought hard currency directly to the state, I would be tagged as foreign by the brightly colored hospital-style bracelets that identify most tourists. On my occasional ventures into the Varadero peninsula, the famous tourist resort area, I constantly worried that I would lose my wristband while on the beach or out dancing and be physically removed from the tourist zone. Based on my own experiences, combined with conversations and observations with a wide range of Cubans—including *negros*, *mulatos*, *jaba(d)os*, and *blancos*—I found the crux of the discriminatory treatment to be the presumption that compared to wealthy tourists, Cubans are recognized as members of an unwelcome poorer class. *Yumas* belong in these spaces; Cubans do not.

Gender adds another dynamic to the construct of race in the touristic context. It can be argued that Cuban women, regardless of their phenotypical race, tend to be *mulaticized* by association with the tourist industry. Hair politics are critical here. For example, in the exoti-



Figure 2. Tropicana dancers (Author's postcard collection)

cizing floor shows, women often wear elaborate head-dresses that conceal the hair textures and colors that might race them otherwise (see Figure 2). In this way, with their hair covered, *rubias* become *jaba(d)as*, with light colored skin and eyes, and even the darkest *negrita*—a rare sight in even low-caliber cabarets—can pass for a *mora* who's naturally straight hair is hidden from view. Throughout such shows, their winding hips and glistening bodies—often clad in g-strings and sequined brassieres—vivify nationalist poetry of earlier epochs as well as contemporary salsa lyrics that celebrate (and exploit) the sexualized image of the *mulata*. In this way, non-White Tropicana dancers are placed at the consumptive disposal of a foreign (White) clientele from the safe distance of the stage. Through these performances, then, an idealized racial dichotomy is put forward by the State wherein Cubans (Blacks) constitute a separate class of service providers whose sexualization attracts much needed financial resources to the “Big House” of the revolutionary government.

In contrast to the Tropicana, the unsanctioned (and thus “unsafe”) street context features women who have a less glamorous association with foreigners. Italian male sex tourists are popularly said to seek dark complexioned women who wear their hair in braided extensions—a style that Africanizes them and simultaneously obscures their *pasas* (or coarsely textured hair) with long styles that swing freely. Also, while it is popularly believed that the majority of Cuba's sex workers are of African descent, statistics show that the majority is actually either White or *mestizo* (Fernández 1999). Nadine Fernández (1999) suggests the confusion here evolves from the “strength of association between Afrocubanas and sex . . . [such that] sexual encounters between white Cubans and tourists seem invisible” (Fernández 1999:87). In other words, as Coco Fusco nicely summarizes “Even though not all of today's *jineteras* are actually *mulata* . . . the [sexualized] stereotype still carries enormous power, so much so that to engage in sex work practically means to assume a *mulata* identity by association” (Fusco 1999:155). While *jinetero* literally translates as “jockey” or “rider” and (as mentioned earlier) is a slang term that describes street hustlers, in the feminine, *jinetera* is often translated as “prostitute.” I resist this translation, however, because there is little difference in the activities of men, and especially White men, who pursue the hustler lifestyle. Rather, I suggest that *jineteras* are merely tapping into their most exchangeable form of cultural capital—their sexuality (Bengelsdorf 1997; Fernández 1999; Kempadoo 2001; Gregory 2003; Fusco 1998).

In the same way that female sex workers are *mulatinized*, many Cubans talk about the majority of *jineteros*

(male or female) as though they are non-White. Given the fact that many Whites who live outside of the national territory send remittances to their families in Cuba, this is a reasonable, if simplistic, assumption. In the absence of statistical data, I contend that *jineteros* are likely “blackened” more by their culturally interpreted behaviors than by their phenotypical color.

With regard to skin color designations, I found an interesting gender breakdown when I informally surveyed 20 people about their racial classification. With the exception of two men who quickly identified themselves as Black (a dark complexioned man nicknamed “El Negrito” and a Rastafarian with a propensity for Black nationalism), all of the White (one *rubio*, one *trigueño*) and racially mixed (two *mulatos*, one *negro colorado*, and one *creole cubano*¹²) men responded that their race was “Cuban” before I clarified that I was asking about color designations.¹³ By contrast, all but two of the women (very light complexioned *jaba(d)as*) answered without any hesitation at all (one *blanca*, two *mulatas*, three *jaba(d)a*, one *negra*). I interpret this as part of women's more ready acknowledgement of the stakes involved with one's physical appearance.

For example, Cari was a blue-eyed *rubia* (blonde)—considered attractive by most—whom I first met in the summer of 2000. At the time, I assumed her to be a worker at the Havana hotel in which I resided since she would participate with the rest of the entertainment team in encouraging the guests in their merry-making. I later found out she was not officially employed there at all, but was essentially a more gentrified hustler who was seeking tips from the men who found her salsa dance movements enticing.¹⁴ When I met her again three years later, she had just returned from traveling in Europe for a year with one of the Tropicana's international dance troupes. Whereas in the past she allowed her wavy sun-damaged hair to move freely about her head and frequently wore mini-skirts or snug-fitting jeans with blouses that revealed her midriff, now she was dressed in a sleek black bathing suit with a matching sarong, wore expensive chic sunglasses, and had her hair smoothly pulled back in a chignon. As we talked by the pool at one of East Havana's beachfront hotels, I detected an Italian accent to her Spanish that led me to verify with a mutual friend that she was, indeed, Cuban. Cari and I laughed at the irony of how she was frequently mistaken for European and allowed access to tourist locales in Cuba if she carried herself and spoke a certain way, while I was mistaken for Cuban and regularly patrolled as inadmissible. Indeed, Cari recognized—and, as a struggling *luchadora*, mobilized her available resources in order to

benefit from—the significance of skin color in the context of today's tourism.

CONCLUSION

Tourism was introduced to Cuba's political economy with the objective of saving the revolution's socialist system. In this way, Cuba was also reinserted into the capitalist global economy. Even more significantly, tourism had the potential to put everyday Cubans in touch with global capitalists at the interpersonal level. To deter street hustlers from harassing the country's foreign guests, the Cuban government has followed any number of tourist destinations in limiting the extent of interactions between its citizens and tourists. These barriers are necessitated by transnational economic imbalances that force developing countries to rely on the tourist industry while developed nations export the tourists. The difference posited by the Cuban context is a socialist orientation that purports to uphold an egalitarian ideal.

Moreover, as I have attempted to show here, based on a deeply rooted history, Cubans tend to read inequality through a racial lens in which the dispossessed party is understood to be "Black" and the privileged party is recognized as "White." If Whiteness, here, is defined through foreign-ness and access to dollars, by corollary, Cuban identity becomes racialized as non-White and classed as non-monied—a (dis)honorary "blackening" that I call *negrificación*. By this, I mean that the intensification of the tourism industry has produced a new racial situation within Cuba. Now, class outweighs color, but not only in terms of the longstanding practice of *blanqueamiento* or cultural advancing as described above, but also in a way that privileges all non-Cubans over and above all Cubans,¹⁵ based on the assumption that the former have expendable U.S. dollars and a foreign passport, and the latter do not (see Gregory 2003). That is, at the same time that tourism re-solidifies traditional racial hierarchies—through job allocations that tend to place whiter-skinned Cubans in both prestigious managerial positions and high tourist-contact positions that have greater potential for U.S. dollar tips, while darker Cubans perform on stage or cook and clean behind the scenes—it has also ushered in a new meaning of race whereby foreign-ness outranks any class or shade of Cuban-ness.

NOTES

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1. I later learned that my (comparatively) expensive clothes and shoes were part of why I was identified as a

prostitute, since sex work was presumed to be the only way a dark-complexioned woman could access goods that were clearly foreign in origin. Also, my dreadlocks were read as braided extensions—a popular hairstyle among Black sex workers.

2. Whereas in many Latin American contexts the *mestizo* racial category is interpreted to involve a mixture of Whites with the indigenous population, in Cuba, where the native peoples were exterminated relatively early in the colonial period, the term usually connotes indeterminate racial mixture. Unless otherwise noted, all of the italicized racial terms in this text employ the Spanish spelling (i.e., *negro*, *mulato*) in reference to Cuban racial categories.

3. As I clarify later, Blackness is a negative identity in the Cuban context such that many individuals of known African ancestry choose "softer" terms on the Black-White racial continuum. While the national symbol is *La Mulata* (a female of African and European ancestry), Cuban national identity—as exemplified in politics, the media, and my own interview responses—is largely *mestizo* (a whitened racially indeterminate male).

4. In U.S. racial parlance, many *jaba(d)os* would generally fall under the category of Blacks "passing" for White. I should also note here that because this is primarily a colloquial term that is seldom written, I insert the parenthetical (d) because in verbal usage it is generally inaudible (like so many consonants in spoken Cuban Spanish). In common usage, the feminine sounds more like *jabá*, while the masculine sounds like *jabáo*.

5. And again, this aspect of culture is usually recognized through female behavior and propriety.

6. See note 3 above.

7. See also <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/asce/index.html> for annual "Cuba in Transition" conference proceedings of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy.

8. Nonetheless, I propose that the "Special Period" concept remains relevant for the purposes of this paper precisely because these capitalist tools, unorthodox to Soviet-era socialism, feature significantly in overcoming the national crisis.

9. Since November 2004, in an attempt to capture as much hard currency as possible, the Cuban government has mandated that all U.S. dollars must be converted to the Cuban convertible pesos at a one-to-one exchange rate.

10. To be clear, though his official job permitted his association with tourists, these interactions with tourists outside of the hotel were not officially sanctioned, but comprised a form of hustling.

11. Donna Goldstein (2003:107–108) describes a similarly "confusing" situation in Brazil when the Black daughter of a governor was physically assaulted

for holding up an elevator in an upper-class (White) apartment building.

12. Both of these latter two men were of a similar golden brown complexion, but the one who identified himself as a *negro colorado* (colored Black) had a thick, wavy hair texture worn in a closely cropped "high-top fade" haircut, whereas the man who identified himself as *creole cubano* (Creole Cuban) based on the identity card he showed me, had a finer, straighter hair texture that he wore shoulder length. Both felt the need to tell me their parents' racial designations as well.

13. My initial question was "¿Cómo se identifica racialmente?" (how do you identify yourself racially); I would clarify as needed by prodding with a few of the above categories (e.g., *blanco*, *trigueño*, *jaba(d)o*, *mulato*).

14. One night I joined the entertainers in a night out on the town and ended up paying Cari's way home because the Mexican men she had been dancing with all night left her otherwise stranded when she would not accompany any of them to their hotel rooms.

15. The many non-Cubans in the country to benefit from the outreach programs in education and medicine (like the Russians mentioned earlier) are grouped with the Cubans here, as they also circulate primarily in Cuba's peso-economy and are therefore understood to be non-monied.

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