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Tourism, Social Change, and *Jineterismo* in Contemporary Cuba

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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, Cuba has undergone rapid and dramatic social and economic changes. The economic re-structuring involving the country's reinsertion into the global tourist market has had profound effects on the national economy and on everyday life. The growth of tourism has brought back some pre-revolutionary features, such as sex tourism, and restrictions on access to tourist facilities for Cubans.

In this paper, I shall focus on the phenomenon of *jineterismo*, literally horseback riding, but used to indicate hustling or prostitution. *Jineterismo* is a much debated issue in Cuba, and is most often seen as a consequence of tourism. The government has taken a rather ambivalent stance on the phenomenon, and only recently has it admitted officially that prostitution exists at all. It is also eager to stress that no Cubans are forced to prostitute themselves out of poverty. Since Cuba was before the revolution known as "the brothel of the Caribbean", prostitution is often associated with the pre-revolution era and is therefore a sensitive issue for the socialist government.

I shall propose that the problem of *jineterismo* is a complex social phenomenon that brings not only notions of morality, but also issues of race, class, gender, and nation into play, ultimately challenging the revolutionary narrative of social and racial equality. I discuss *jineterismo* from the point of view of young Afro-Cuban women who sometimes engage in activities that could be deemed as *jineterismo*. They are often faced with police harassment and stigmatisation from the authorities, but they themselves have a more nuanced view of their situation and activities. For them, *jineterismo* is but one livelihood tactic in what they call *la lucha*, the daily struggle to make ends meet. *Jineterismo*, for them, is a practice that an individual may engage in to obtain desired goods, currency, or an option to leave the country. For the authorities and elite groups, however, *jineterismo* is a symptom of a lack of morale and of anti-social behaviour, which must be suppressed. I examine the official approach to *jineterismo* as an expression of the refusal of the government to address issues of race and social inequality. In dominant discourse these issues have been displaced into a domain of "cultural level", which averts any indications of marginality being a product of social structures and processes.

The paper is based on fieldwork carried out at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Old Havana in 1998.

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, Cuba has undergone rapid and dramatic social and economic changes. Some of the changes have been sparked by global phenomena, most notably the breakdown of the former Eastern Bloc, which had a devastating effect on the Cuban economy as well as ideological repercussions. The mass exodus of 1994 when tens of thousands of Cubans took to the sea in fragile homemade rafts and produced an international refugee crisis as well as embarrassing questions of government legitimacy in Cuba is another example of a sudden and dramatic event with far reaching implications. Lastly, the economic re-structuring, known as the Special Period in Peacetime, involving the country's reinsertion into the global tourist market has had profound effects on the national economy and on everyday life. The growth of tourism has brought back some pre-revolutionary features, such as dollar based consumer culture, sex tourism, and restrictions on access to tourist facilities for Cubans.

In this paper, I shall focus on the phenomenon of *jineterismo*, literally horseback riding but used to indicate hustling or prostitution with obvious sexual and economic connotations of riding the new economy and / or the tourists¹(cf. Fernandez 1999: 81). The individuals engaging in *jineterismo* are called *jineteros* (men) or *jineteras* (women), literally meaning jockeys. *Jineteros* are people who sell sex, company, goods, or services to foreigners in exchange for dollars, a meal, a night out, or desired consumer goods. Many women engage in *jineterismo* in the hope that a foreigner will marry them and take them out of Cuba. New Cuban ex-pat communities have in fact emerged in Europe based on such trans-national marriages (see e.g. Wimmer 1998). The *jinete* has been around in Cuba since the 1960s, when the term was used to indicate a person who used his or her personal connections to obtain goods and services in short supply (Pérez-López in Fernández 2000: 115). It seems, then, that *jineterismo* has been a product of the revolution, although the meaning of the term has changed over time. *Jineterismo* is currently a hotly debated issue in Cuba, and is in the media most often seen as a consequence of tourism and as an affront to revolutionary morality.

The family and sexual policies of the socialist government have always been infused with middleclass, patriarchal values (Smith 1992: 188), which are obviously flaunted by the women who engage in sex with foreigners. In Cuban media, *jineterismo* is consequently perceived as being a problem particularly regarding female *jineteras* (Cabezas 1998: 84). *Jineteros* are not in the same way seen as transgressing moral boundaries, although they are just as exposed to policing.

The popular stereotype of a *jinetera* is a black or *mulata* woman soliciting male tourists in the streets. While AfroCubans do often seem to be in the majority of those who roam the streets in search of tourists (see also Fernandez 1996b: 112-3), two recent Cuban studies, however, concluded that the majority of *jineteras* were white or *mestiza*, mixed race² (Fernandez 1999: 86). The government has taken a rather ambivalent stance on *jineterismo*, and only recently has it admitted officially that prostitution exists at all. It is also eager to stress that no Cubans are forced to prostitute themselves out of poverty. In Cuba's new tourist zones, such as certain districts in Havana, the police routinely carry out identity checks and arrests aimed at containing *jineterismo*. Because of the racialised connotations of *jineterismo*, young AfroCubans who, for whatever reasons, are present in touristy areas are particularly exposed to harassment, which further cements the association between AfroCubans and illicit activities. The vagrancy law is used against those accused of *jineterismo*. After three warnings, a woman faces up to eight years in gaol (Fusco 1998: 165).

While some scholars tend to see *jineterismo* as a clear-cut issue of prostitution (e.g. O'Connell Davidson 1996; Strout 1996; but see Cabezas 1998 for critique), I argue that it encompasses a range of activities and that it is not at all obvious how to define who is a *jinetero/a* or not (see also Fernandez 1999). During my fieldwork in Havana, I did not encounter anyone who auto-identified as a *jinetero/a*, but I met many informants who had been accused of *jineterismo* by the police. It is

in other words not a positive social identity, but a label that some actors may apply to others.

I shall focus in particular on that aspect of *jineterismo*, which involves encounters between Afro-Cuban women and foreign men. I shall propose that the question of who the *jineteras* are, point to a complex interlocking of discourses of morality, race, class, gender, and nation ultimately challenging the revolutionary narrative of social and racial equality. I attempt to unpack the construct of *jinetera* by approaching it both through the views of young, Afro-Cuban men and women, and through media representations of *jineterismo*. It is in other words not the Cuban-tourist encounters as such I analyse, but the contestations over who the *jineteras* are, and what that tells us about race, class, and gender in Special Period Cuba.

First I should like to introduce two women from my fieldwork, in order to give an impression of how the issue of *jineterismo* is played out in everyday lives.

Vignette #1: Yusleidis

Yusleidis was 28 years old, and the mother of a 12-year-old boy and a younger daughter. She lived with her partner and children in central Havana. She was outspoken, intelligent, clearly very frustrated with her situation and sharp in her critique of things she found unjust. She was well dressed, wearing a new watch and new clothes.

The individual homes in the building Yusleidis lived in consisted of a small room with kitchen and bathroom in a corner, and a *barbacoa* used as bedroom (a *barbacoa* is the room created when an extra floor is constructed in a room, thus lowering the original ceiling). There was a large balcony shared by all inhabitants, where smaller children would play, and laundry was hung on lines to dry. Often a group of adults would play dominoes in the hallway. Yusleidis had organized a cleaning plan for the building making sure the balcony, the communal toilets, and the stairs were regularly cleaned. She also tried to have the water pump fixed, in order to ensure running water for everyone. She did this mainly to help her mother who lived in the same building, as the mother could not afford to pay for someone to bring water up to her water tank.

Yusleidis had started secondary education but left it to work:

"Look, I was studying during the Special Period, but I had to leave school because I couldn't go on studying, I would have starved to death then. I had chosen industrial chemistry, I was in the first year and I had to leave."

She said that now she did not have the time to finish her education, and that she also had to make money to feed her children and keep them clothed. During the early 1990s when a single US-dollar would cost up to 130 Cuban pesos, more than her monthly wage, she decided to abandon paid employment:

"This was when I said: 'I will not work any longer! For Fidel, I will not work any more!' And what I did was, that when I had money, I would go to a shop and I would buy things cheaply and sell them more expensively. That's what I do".

Many Cubans engage in such small-scale buying and selling. Absenteeism, pilfering and theft from work places are also common practices, as Cubans have to engage in *la lucha*, literally the struggle. *La lucha* means making money "in the street" as opposed to through regular employment. It covers a wide range of livelihood practices. Yusleidis found it unfair that her buying and selling was illegal, as she was not stealing from anyone, nor was she doing anything wrong as she saw it. She was indignant about the restrictions imposed on Cubans in tourist areas:

"Look, if I go to the Cathedral [a tourist area within the UNESCO World Heritage Site] right now, if I go like this, perhaps they won't say anything. But if I dress up a little bit, the police will ask me straight away what I'm doing there. ... The day before yesterday I was waiting for a friend of mine, and I sat down in the little park around the area, and the police came and told me to leave. I said: 'wait a second, I'm waiting for a friend of

mine, ... I sat down in the park because I'm tired'. And he [the police officer] said: 'I don't care if you're tired, you can't be here', and I had to leave. Now, what kind of thing is this? I must say that I'm disappointed."

Stories of police harassment like Yusleidis' was one of the most commonly voiced complaints raised by young AfroCubans when I asked them about problems in their everyday lives. Young AfroCubans hanging out or passing through touristy areas were particularly likely to be targeted by the police. Even getting home after work was in some instances problematic especially for those who lived or worked close to tourist areas. A young AfroCuban man said that all he wished to do was "to party, sing and walk freely in all of Havana", when I asked him what he would like for his future. Days before he had been rounded up in a street near to his home and fined twenty pesos for no other reason than being in the street.

Yusleidis did not consider herself a *jinetera*, but she had been arrested several times for being one:

"It was one evening that a friend of mine had fractured an arm, and I went to see him, he begged me to go and get some painkillers for him. I said 'you must be mad, going out this late', but I went back to my house anyway to get them. A man stopped me in the street, a plainclothes policeman, and took me to a new police station they've made, only for *jineteras*; it's next to the men's prison in Villa Blanca. I explained to the police officer that I was going to deliver some medicine to a friend and I showed him my *carne* [identity card that all Cubans must carry with them at all times]. I've still got a stamp in it as if I were working, and I told them I was working, but they didn't care. I was there for eight days, and you can't receive any visits there. I was desperate to see my son. My mother brought him, but I could only see them through a window."

Yusleidis would like to leave Cuba and hoped to marry a foreigner, but she did not want to leave her children behind. Perhaps that was why she and a friend wanted me to find foreign wives for their partners so that they at least could leave Cuba, and thus support their families from abroad.

Vignette #2: Lucy's Choice

Lucy was a 26-year-old AfroCuban woman who lived in a rundown part of Old Havana. Lucy was born in Oriente, the Eastern part of Cuba, but moved to Havana at the age of 16, on her own. By then she had already had her first child, a son. Lucy also had a daughter who was 7 years old. Lucy did not hold a job when I interviewed her. She seemed to live partly in her ex-husband's house and partly with relatives. A few newer objects in the house showed that either Lucy or her ex-husband would have access to dollars every now and again: a smart clock on the wall, a new TV. The sofa was falling apart in the one-room apartment. Lucy dreamt of having her own house where she would be in charge of things. She thought of tourism as a positive thing, and said she had met many foreigners and learnt many things from them about life elsewhere. She was, however, frustrated by what she felt was police harassment of her. To get in to certain nightclubs Lucy said she had to date a foreigner lest she would be accused of being a *jinetera* soliciting. But going out with a foreigner would sometimes lead to the same accusations.

When I asked her what she thought of the touristy bits of Havana close to where she lived, she replied:

"I don't go there often, because anyone who goes there will be cheated by the police. They say you're a *jinetera* ... All of the zone there is a tourist zone, if you dress up for instance, they'll say you're a *jinetera*, and everybody likes to dress well. Like for instance if I see someone selling a great dress, and if a *jinetera* wears it, should I not wear it? And if I wear it and I go to one of those places, it's certain ... even if I swear and say I wasn't involved in anything, the warning will stay with me"

In her reply, Lucy highlighted two important tenets in popular constructions of *jineteras*, namely that *jineteras* dress in flashy clothes, which is only available for dollars thus confirming that they must be *jineteras*, and that *jineteras* encounter foreigners in the streets. Because of the racialisation of *jineteros*, young, smartly dressed white Cubans were more likely to pass as *extranjeros*, foreigners, themselves. The Cuban notion of *extranjero* normally includes Europeans

and North Americans who are implicitly assumed to be white. A white Cuban woman in the company of a white foreign man can thus often pass as a foreigner herself. Conversely, Cuban patrons automatically perceived a black British woman, whom I met in a bar in Old Havana in the company of her white Swedish male partner, as a Cuban *jinettera*. They thought only her partner was a tourist, and classified their relationship as *jinettera*-foreigner.

When I met her, Lucy was contemplating a marriage proposal from a 39-year-old Spanish man who had spent a month in Cuba. All of her friends had told her to say yes, but she was not sure what to do. Only her mother had advised her to consider it thoroughly. Lucy liked her suitor and thought he was a good person, but she was not in love with him and did not think she ever would be. He had what she called a "physical defect" with his hands and his legs. Lucy said she was growing old, and that his offer might be her last chance to get out of Cuba. Of Lucy's five best female friends, three had married foreigners and lived outside of Cuba, one had left for the U.S.A. with her husband, and one was still in Cuba.

Lucy was well aware that some would see her as a *jinettera*, but she did not consider herself to be one. For her, dating foreigners was a tactic meant to get her out of Cuba. It was a way of forging instrumental alliances (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 475), a project she did not regard as morally tainted. Considering Lucy's situation: no education, no job, nowhere to live, no spouse and two small children, dating foreigners seemed a rational tactic (de Certeau 1984: xx), which is not to say the choice she faced was simple. If she stayed in Cuba, she would have limited options for exercising influence over her own life and shaping it the way she would like – that is having a house of her own, dressing smartly, going out. On the other hand, she was not in love with her Spanish suitor, and would have to leave her family behind and go to live in a foreign country.

Lucy's and Yusleidis' stories poignantly show the fluid boundaries of who may be seen as *jinetteras*, and point to the power relations inherent in the act of labelling someone a *jinettera*. Their stories also show that dating foreigners is a choice that some women make in order to improve their economic situation as well as to integrate themselves into the now growing consumer economy in Cuba, which they were both attracted by.

Cuba and Tourism

In the 1950s Cuba was known as the "brothel of the Caribbean" (Pattullo 1996: 90), and 10,000 sex workers are estimated to have operated in Havana alone (Schwartz 1997: 122). Many casinos and hotels were run by U.S. mobsters, and catered to the large numbers of North American tourists who visited the island.

When the rebel army, led by Fidel Castro, triumphed on January 1, 1959, it was on a programme of national revival, social equality, and land reforms. The new government wished to eliminate prostitution, racism, and gender inequalities. It quickly initiated a programme for the rehabilitation of prostitutes, which was largely successful³ (Lewis, Lewis and Rigdon 1977: xvii). In the decades after the revolution tourism was discouraged for its associations with gambling, prostitution, and US-dependence⁴ (Schwartz 1997: 198). Tourism almost disappeared, but for visits from friendly socialist countries.

Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Castro's close collaborator, envisioned a "new man" who would be egalitarian, selfless, co-operative, hardworking, and morally pure (Eckstein 1994: 4). As the shaping of the "new man" started, a certain social rigidity was instituted: homosexuality and rock music, for example, were banned as expressions of a bourgeois and decadent life style (Fernandez 1996a: 134ff). Camps where undesirables, such as homosexuals and counterrevolutionaries, were "treated" for their deviance through hard work, were founded (ibid.: 135).

Since the breakdown of the former Soviet Bloc, her foremost trading partner, Cuba has been going through a severe economic crisis, known as the Special Period in Peacetime, *Periodo Especial en Tiempo de Paz*, declared in 1990. Already in 1982, the Cuban government attempted to bring the

island back into the tourist industry, but with the Special Period the need to attract tourists became urgent (Schwartz 1997: 205-6). The now rapidly growing tourist sector has been kept separate from the rest of the economy (Espino 1993), with all tourist facilities operating in US-dollars, while most Cubans are paid in Cuban pesos, and with restrictions on access to tourist facilities for Cubans. Jobs in the tourist sector are highly coveted for the access to dollars that they bring.

While until 1993 Cubans were not allowed to be in possession of US-dollars, it is now legal (Segre et al. 1997: 228). Many everyday household items are no longer available for Cuban pesos, making dollars indispensable in households and creating economic differences between those who have access to dollars, and those who do not. Remittances have become increasingly important in many households, but are not distributed equitably in the population. The migration waves in the early years after the revolution consisted mainly of white upper and upper middle class Cubans and consequently more white Cubans than Afro Cubans now receive remittances from relatives abroad. Since Afro Cubans tend to live in more rundown and densely populated neighbourhoods in the cities (Perez Sarduy and Stubbs 1993: 11), they have fewer chances of inserting themselves into the new dollar based economy through renting rooms to foreigners or opening front room mini-restaurants, the two main opportunities for private enterprise for Cubans. Furthermore, the new joint ventures and state run hotels and other tourist facilities, tend to apply racially discriminatory recruitment practices – which are of course illegal - excluding Afro Cubans from access to this job market.

In short, economic disparity is growing in Cuba. Those segments of the population who do not have affluent relatives abroad or connections within the tourist industry are at a marked disadvantage, racialising the effects of the economic crisis. However, since a "policy of silence" has been de rigueur on race in Cuba since shortly after the revolution, this aspect of the crisis has not been addressed nor acknowledged in public discourse (Fernandez 1996a: 13; 124ff). The official line on race has been that racism was an attribute of capitalism. Consequently, racism would vanish once the structural base of class privilege was eliminated.

Since women carry out most household chores, regardless of their relatively high incorporation into the workforce (Fernández 1998: 225), the crisis has also had a gender bias. Tasks such as shopping and cooking are extremely time consuming when goods are scarce, queues long, and when electricity cuts are frequent and unpredictable. Serious water shortages also make cleaning and laundering difficult. Women's participation in the workforce has consequently diminished since the onset of the Special Period (Fernández 1998: 222). Most women have to engage in *la lucha*, the daily struggle to make ends meet and put food on the table.

Apart from these very palpable economic effects of the crisis, what one could call the moral economy of the society has similarly been shaken. Many Cubans felt the social implications of the crisis urgently as a lamentable change in interpersonal relations that had led to a loss of dignity and personal honour. When reflecting on the Special Period to me, many informants were particularly concerned with the changes in morality and values they believed it had brought along: people were not as helpful to each other any longer, each would only think of his or her own best; social solidarity had decreased, and had been substituted with a narrower sense of obligation and exclusive solidarity towards the immediate family. Many young Cubans felt that the only chance for improving their lives was to leave Cuba.

The changing significance of the expression *antes de*, before, is rather telling. *Antes de* used to mean before the revolution, but it is now also used in the meaning of before the Special Period. In both of its meanings *antes de* indicates a dividing line, a significant break, between a before and a now: *antes de*, when everything was different from now. More than just a change in the use of an everyday expression, the new use of *antes de* speaks of a novel conceptualising of the past. That is, a fading of the revolution as an absolute dividing line. In official letters, and on the front page of *Granma*, the official daily of the Communist Party, dates are still measured from the revolution, as in: 1998, *Año Aniversario 40 de las Batallas Decisivas de la Guerra de Liberación*, 1998, the 40th Anniversary Year of the Decisive Battles of the War of Liberation. In social usage, however, 1998 was just as likely to be counted as the eighth year after the declaration of the Special Period⁵.

The Special Period, in short, constituted a turning point for people, a dividing line between a known and ordered past, and an unknown and disordered present, in which moral standards were no longer shared and agreed upon, and where personal benefit was more important than honour and collective values. The Special Period has thus presented a challenge of legitimacy for the revolutionary narrative. It is in this context that *jineterismo* is seen as a visible symptom of a moral crisis of the nation.

Definitions and Contestations of *Jineterismo*

For the reasons explained above, white and professional Cubans are more likely to have access to dollars through their jobs or remittances, but when they do engage in *jinetero* activities, they are also more likely to have access to hotel bars and lobbies, and are thus not as visible in public spaces as Afro Cubans are⁶. Class coded images of white Cuban women and of Afro Cuban women respectively, make for different interpretations of encounters between Cuban women and male foreigners. Longstanding sexualising and exoticising images serve to cast relations between Afro Cuban women and male foreigners as purely sexual (cf. Fusco 1998), while relationships between white Cuban women and foreign men are more likely to be seen as romantic and devoid of economic connotations (Fernandez 1999). Whether a woman is seen to be a *jinetera* or not by others depends thus not only on the kind of exchanges or encounters taking place but also on her race and class position. Professionals are sometimes said to be *jineteando* if they specifically try to gain invitations from abroad through their work, but this kind of *jineterismo* does not elicit police harassment or social stigmatisation.

Two different strands can be detected in the authorities' ways of dealing with and representing *jineterismo*. One is the moralising argument, in which the authorities and elite groups represent *jineteras* as lacking in morality, and as hit by a rare "consumption virus, which is alien to the spiritual values of the revolution" (Fernández 1998: 225). Reporting from a "Centre for the Reception, Classification and Processing of Prostitutes" in the province of Cienfuegos in central Cuba, a male journalist writes:

"our prostitution is unique, it is probably the only kind of prostitution in the world exercised only for the satisfaction of luxurious tastes" (Cinco de Septiembre 02/04-1999, my translation).

Bearing in mind the desperate economic situation of many Cubans; the small remuneration received for regular employment, and the necessity of a dollar income, "luxurious tastes" would in this case have to include soap, detergent, meat, and cooking oil, among other everyday goods and objects.

It should not be overlooked, however, that for Cubans who have been used to austerity and scarcity, the new dollar-shops and the tourist consumer economy are powerful symbols of the capitalist world outside of Cuba. Many young Cubans are attracted to what one could call the "pleasurable consumerism" (Fusco 1998: 163), which the revolutionary "new man" was supposed to eschew. For the journalist, such desires are unacceptable:

"when I pried into the depth of their cynicism, I found solvency in the home, but relatives who worshipped the insubstantial, vanity, egotism, and ambition, all disastrous ingredients that produce a criminal destiny." (Cinco de Septiembre 02/04-1999, my translation).

This moralising argument against *jineterismo* seems to have become dominant in the late 1990s (see also Cabezas 1998; Kempadoo 1999).

In another strand of argument about *jineterismo*, Cuban women's bodies are packaged for consumption. The government has for example been keen to tap into Western images of debauched Havana of yore, and sensual *mulatas*. In 1992, Fidel Castro commented that Cuban

women become *jineteras* because they like sex (in Fusco 1998: 161). The government also allowed *Playboy* magazine to feature "the girls of Cuba", contingent on coverage of the island's tourist facilities (Cabezas 1998: 79).

Many white Cuban professionals find it confusing and incomprehensible that white European men should wish to have relationships with or even marry Afro-Cuban women. White middle-class Cuban men would rarely consider marrying a dark-skinned woman (see Fernandez 1996b; Safa 1998: 15). One white female professional said in exasperation to me "but these women have faces like slaves!" She and other professionals saw *jineterismo* as an expression of what they called the "low cultural level", *bajo nivel cultural*, of the *jineteros*.

The concept of "cultural level" is related to a whole host of indicators including an ethos of moderation, decency, and restraint such as not raising one's voice in public and abstaining from public drunkenness. It includes emphasis on non-promiscuous behaviour, and preferences in style and taste of music, food, hair and clothing. Afro-Cuban religion and music are often seen as expressions of a low cultural level. Also related to cultural level is a hierarchy of "good" and "bad" accents, which is clearly racialised. "Good" accents coincide with middle-class *Habanero* accents, and "bad" accents are those from Eastern Cuba, which has a higher proportion of Afro-Cubans. To have cultural level coincides with high culture and white elite values, but it is presented as a choice, open to all individuals, irrespective of social background. The discourse of cultural level has, in other words, become an idiom in which to articulate racialised and class-ed ideas of morality and behaviour, without acknowledging it as such. Roaming the streets in search of tourists clearly does not conform to having a "high cultural level", but the thorny issues of discrimination and economic inequality are effectively and conveniently eclipsed by the discourse.

For 80-odd-year-old Maria Cristina, *jineteros* were lazy people who had been spoiled by a lenient state. "I don't like the attitude of these people. They expect to be given everything and not have to work for it", she told me. She herself received a thousand dollars US a year as retirement benefit from the Spanish state, because she had been born in Spain⁷. Raúl and Patricia, a young, white, middleclass couple who transcribed taped interviews for me, were very upset at Yusleidis' story, and were convinced she was a liar. Patricia claimed Yusleidis must have psychological problems. Raúl, who was a member of the Communist Party, said she was extremely negative and that he was shocked at her "lack of culture". He also said he was sad the government had not been able to explain properly to people how difficult the economic situation is. He thought all *jineteras* should be sent to re-education camps, such as those, which existed for homosexuals in the 1970s.

In marked contrast to these condemning views, many Afro-Cuban informants expressed empathy and social understanding with *jineteras*. The participants of a focus group discussion carried out in Old Havana, discussed *jineterismo* this way⁸:

Male: "Well, the majority of girls today are only interested in this [*jineterismo*] because they have no clothes to wear, there is nothing, there are no places to go"

Male: "The parents don't have any possibilities of giving them anything"

Male: "There are many tourists who themselves offer things to them. Like a normal girl who goes out of here to go to the *bodega* [state run shop]"

Female: "who doesn't have this mentality"

Male: "and someone says to her: 'look, you don't have any trainers, I will buy you a pair of Puma, a pair of Adidas, and a pair of Nike, I will give you this and that' - and she will corrupt. Like that, a hole has been opened"

Female: "without wanting it, without really wanting it"

The excerpt from the discussion shows the fluid boundaries between being a *jinetero/a* or not. The participants did not see it as an inherent quality of a particular person, but as a practice that especially young women might sometimes engage in, perhaps to obtain certain desired consumer goods. They stressed lack of opportunities as causes of *jineterismo*, and saw *jineteros* as victims of economic scarcity. They did not condone *jineterismo*, they too saw it as something deplorable,

which preferably should not exist. By stressing the in-voluntariness of the *jineteras* and the role of tourists in fostering *jineterismo*, they simultaneously protected themselves from the vilification that *jineteros* are exposed to in the media and in "cultural level" discourse. They also re-claimed a place for themselves within the moral economy of revolutionary Cuba. Noticeably, they did not condone *jineterismo* by arguing that possessing smart clothes or going to nightclubs were legitimate desires or wishes. They did not, in other words, explicitly challenge revolutionary morality. One young Afro-Cuban woman saw the state as an active agent in pushing women into *jineterismo*. Why, she asked rhetorically, would the state open dollar-shops with objects that are clearly intended for consumption by Cubans, when they still pay employees exclusively in pesos:

"What they [the government] are doing is to order the girls to *jinetear* ... they [the girls] are obliged to do it, I don't blame them, nor do I criticise them, because people want to buy shampoo."

One middle-aged Afro-Cuban man dryly stated that "*jineteras* sell their bodies, other people sell other things".

Conclusion

The phenomenon of *jineterismo*, while being an activity that many Cubans regardless of race and class position engage in, has been racialised to the extent that young Afro-Cubans have come to be seen almost automatically as *jineteros* in certain contexts. They are consequently exposed to intense police harassment, aimed at containing *jineterismo*. While the state is complicit in packaging Cuba as a destination of licentious and sensual Afro-Cuban women, it simultaneously tries to contain their activities and projects anxieties over fading legitimacy onto Afro-Cuban women.

Jineterismo has become a social problem in Cuba, exposing issues that the revolutionary government is reluctant to address, such as growing economic disparity and racialised inequalities, both of which were supposed to have disappeared with the institution of socialism. *Jineterismo* is thus not only embarrassing to the state but decidedly subversive, as it exposes a social reality that is not as it was supposed to be.

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NOTES

¹ This paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Old Havana, Cuba, in 1998.

² Any kind of racial categorization in Cuba is necessarily highly complex and problematic due to the fluid and ambiguous boundaries of racial categories, which fall within a continuum ranging from *negro prieto*, dark-skinned black to *blanco*, white. These racial categories are hierarchically related, placing whiteness and features of European derivation as the most highly desired, and blackness and features of African derivation as the least desired.

³ A life story of one former prostitute who had gone through the government rehabilitation and re-education programme is presented in Lewis, Lewis and Rigdon (1977).

⁴ The government was willing to accept tourism because of the need for hard currency, but was ideologically against it (see Schwartz 1997).

⁵ On meanings of *antes de*, see also Fernandez (1996a: 227-228) and Rosendahl (1997: 126).

⁶ It was a young, Afro-Cuban artist who brought my attention to this. He expanded by saying that white, middle-class Cubans were more likely to have a telephone, which is helpful for a woman if she has established contact with a foreign man. She would not have to wait outside his hotel for instance, but could call him from her home.

⁷ An average Cuban wage would equal about seven dollars a month.

⁸ This focus group discussion was directed by a Cuban sociologist who invited me to participate. The participants were neighbours and all knew each other.

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