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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

School of Modern Languages

Jineterismo in Havana: Narrating the Daily Struggles of Afro-Cuban Jineteras

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
SCHOOL OF MODERN LANGUAGES
Doctor of Philosophy

JINETERISMO IN HAVANA: NARRATING THE DAILY STRUGGLES OF AFRO-CUBAN *JINETERAS*

By: Dina Sebastiana de Sousa e Santos

Jineterismo, frequently used as a synonym of prostitution, became a widely used term in Cuba in the 1990s. Perceived by some as a social problem that needed to be eliminated, and as a liberating economic strategy by others, the term is discussed in major studies on contemporary Cuba and often mentioned by travel writers outside of Cuba. Some scholars define *jineterismo* as the new female strategy adopted by young women to obtain hard currency, on the other hand, an influential Cuban politician, criticised *jineteras*, stating that they were immoral and embarrassing to Cuba.

This study seeks to understand the meanings and practices of *jineterismo* from a bottom up perspective. Using ethnography to locate answers about *jineterismo*, I explore the meanings of the concept based on the views of those that Cuban society labels as *jineteras*.

The central argument put forward in this study is that *jineterismo* has to be analysed as a diverse set of practices caused by a diverse set of factors, and that it involves a heterogeneous group of individuals. *Jineterismo*, I argue, ranges from the struggle to obtain hard currency to the practices involved in developing and maintaining romantic relationships with tourists, and is strongly informed by the desire to emigrate abroad.

While *jineterismo* currently appears to be embedded in discourses of prostitution, this thesis highlights the romantic side of *jineterismo* and brings to the fore young Cuban women's perceptions of Cuban men and life in Cuba, views that contrast significantly with their positive images of Europeans and the Western world. More importantly, the thesis improves our knowledge of *jineterismo* by offering a new perspective into the reasons that lead young Cuban women to seek relationships outside Cuba.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Dina Sebastiana de Sousa E Santos, declare that the thesis entitled

Jineterismo in Havana: Narrating the Daily Struggles of Afro-Cuban
Jineteras

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission.

Signed:

Date:.....

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents for their encouragement and unconditional support. Witnessing their commitment to complete their degrees after their six daughters were born was truly inspiring, and I thank them for giving us an exciting, but intellectually-stimulating childhood. Saudades mamá...Acorda e melhora pf. In addition, I must thank my son, Denzhel, for being amazingly independent. I was able to write and rewrite this thesis and read extensively, while he wrote his 'PhD Stories' on his laptop. I am indebted to him for allowing my books to take over the space that he should have occupied during all those years of research, which were the first years of his life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

26 de Julio: Victoria de las ideas (26th of July: Victory of Ideas)

(Cuban slogan)

1.1. Introduction

A day in July 2007: the streets of Vedado, one of the most prosperous neighbourhoods in central Havana, are filled with people. Policemen stand in the corners of the main tourist hotels while numerous Cubans queue for buses in *Calle L*.¹ On the other side of the road, opposite the Habana Libre hotel, hundreds of Cubans queue outside *Coppelia*, an ice-cream rank on the same street, while pedestrians try to cram into taxis that already have quite a few passengers inside. Tourists are sightseeing taking photographs of the city and walking around. I notice that the ‘typical’ tourists are immediately visible to the majority. With their backpacks, sandals, light clothes and pale skins, tourists stand out from the crowd.

In one of the dollar restaurants² a couple is seated having a drink; she appears to be a young Afro-Cuban woman and he could be a Western tourist. They do not talk much and do not show openly any sign of affection towards each other. People passing by rapidly spot them and many stare at them. In the evening I see more inter-racial couples walking in the city. It is impossible not to associate them with a specific cliché about sex-tourism in Cuba, which is generally assumed to materialise in the following constellations: young, female, black and Cuban with older, male, foreign and white.

Down at the *Malecón*, a sea-wall that stretches along the neighbourhoods of central Havana (see image 1), two white female tourists walk unhurriedly, admiring the Cuban sunset. They are stopped by a young white Cuban man on a *bicitaxi*, who offers to give them a ride around the city. After refusing, a black photographer, who is about fifty, approaches them with an old Polaroid: ‘*Desean fotos al momento?*’ (Do you want photographs on the spot?) One of the women takes her digital camera out of her bag to show him that she is taking her own pictures and thanks him.

¹ *Calle L* and *La Rampa* (the latter is also known as *Calle 23*) are the central streets in Vedado. The entrance to the hotels Habana Libre and Colina are in *Calle L*.

² Restaurants that used to accept mainly hard currency; now they only accept *Pesos Convertibles* (the Cuban equivalent to dollars). While many Cubans now eat in these places, it is mostly only tourists (and Cubans that live abroad) who can afford to do so.



Image 1³
(The *Malecón*)

Half a kilometre later, one of the women sits on the walls to rest whilst the other takes photographs of the skyline. Suddenly, a young black Cuban man walking in the opposite direction swerves abruptly in the direction of the woman taking a break: ‘Excuse me, could you tell me the time?...Thanks, what’s your name?’, he asks. ‘Do you speak English?...Where are you from?’ The woman does not reply. As if nothing had happened, he turns around and keeps on walking along the *Malecón*.

Not long after, an ordinary-looking white Cuban man in his forties stops in his *Panataxi*:⁴ ‘Taxi!’, he cries out. The women shake their heads and, probably bothered by the amount of offers they receive, decide to cross the main avenue towards *La Rampa*, an area where the presence of the police is more evident.

All that time, I was walking behind them and I had not been harassed once by any of the ‘service providers’. My black skin had transformed me into an invisible local. In fact, during that one-month visit in the summer of 2007 I was invisible to Cubans on the

³ Picture by Dina Santos

⁴ *Panataxi* is a group of taxis that accepts hard currency (dollars)

street at all times. However, I was clearly visible to some male tourists, who would smile at me in a flirtatious manner, and the Cuban police, presumably for the same reason. Both saw me, a young black woman with long braids in a dollar bar as a potential *jinetera*.

1.2. *Jineterismo* – The Roots of the Project.

Cubans call (mainly) black Cuban women that walk hand in hand with foreigners in Havana *jinetas*. As for the men that offer a variety of services to ‘foreigners only’ they are labelled *jinetos*. I started inquiring about the meanings of this term in 1998 when I first travelled to Cuba.⁵

My arrival in Cuba in the summer of 1998 coincided with the time when the Cuban government started taking action against *jineterismo*. At that time, dollar nightclubs and bars were closed in central Havana and young Afro-Cuban women were swept off the streets of Havana (Fernández Holgado, 2002). During that period, I was often barred from entering tourist hotels and stopped frequently by police officers on the streets of central Havana to show my identity card. Sometimes, when they heard my accent, the police officers believed that I was a Cuban from Oriente (Eastern provinces of Havana), and my case was aggravated due to an abundance of stories of *Orientales* coming to Havana to become *jinetas*.

On one occasion, after being stopped four times on four consecutive street corners of Vedado, a policeman explained to me that he had to stop me because ‘*jinetas* are out and about’. When asked to clarify why I could pass as a *jinetera* and why white Cuban women and tourists walking past us were not being stopped, the officer refused to answer. Similar encounters took place in that same year and only one policeman openly stated that because I was a ‘black woman’ with ‘long braids’, ‘fairly new clothes’ and ‘looking around in a tourist area’, I could only be a *jinetera*. He went as far as suggesting that I was ‘pretending to take photographs’, and ‘trying too hard to pretend that I was a foreigner’.

⁵Students on certain degrees in the UK are required to spend a year in the country that they are studying. Between 1996 and 2000 I was registered as an undergraduate student reading Spanish and Portuguese Studies. As part of the year-abroad scheme I travelled to Cuba for six months (July 1998-January 1999). I had however previously travelled to Cuba on numerous occasions in the 1980s for family holidays.

The experiences I had with *jineterismo* made me question its implications for those Cubans who find themselves labelled *jineteras*. Its criminalisation and association with prostitution and the tourist economy seemed to narrate a story about Cubans' relationship to the outside world, and the wider meanings of nationalism, race and gender in contemporary Cuba. Thus far, very little is known about how *jineteras* perceive their own relationships with foreigners and how they establish contact with the non-Cuban world. I want to gain a deeper understanding of the causes and implications of *jineterismo* and, more specifically, to shed some light on the lifestyles and daily lives of the individuals defined as *jineteras*. More specifically, I endeavour to understand how tourism, migration and globalisation have an effect on Cubans. Due to their increasing relationship with the outside world, black *jineteras* appear as the most appropriate social group for this research.

In order to understand these issues from various perspectives I have used ethnographic methods; and the following four larger questions have guided my research:

- 1) What are the meanings and practices that Afro-Cuban women attribute to *jineterismo*?
- 2) Why do these practices help us to understand daily life in contemporary Cuba?
- 3) What do we learn about Cuban politics of race, gender and nationalism through an exploration of the practices of *jineterismo*?
- 4) How do Afro-Cuban women's narratives about *jineterismo* relate to wider discourses of tourism, migration and globalisation?

I use data from fieldtrips to Cuba between 2005 and 2007, which include personal diaries, interviews and conversations, notes from observations and personal video recordings. Furthermore, I re-examine personal field diaries from my stay in Cuba between 1998 and 1999 as well as interviews, video-recordings and personal diaries from trips to Cuba between 1999 and 2007 and those carried out in the UK.

It is crucial, before starting to address these questions, to understand how *jineterismo* has been used in academic, Cuban political and literary contexts. In the sections that follow, I introduce an overview of the literature on *jineterismo*, examining different

academic and official views on its emergence, as well as literary interpretations. This section is followed by an analysis of the term in popular culture and its portrayal by the tourist industry. In the second part, I discuss how ethnography helps me to engage with the research questions; and finally, I conclude the chapter by presenting the outline of the thesis.

1.3. An Overview of the Literature: The Origins of *Jineterismo*

The term *jineterismo* is referred to in almost every study focusing on contemporary Cuba (Kapcia, 2005; De la Fuente, 2001; Fernández Holgado, 2002; Smith and Padula, 1996; Fernandes, 2003; Saney, 2004). Most studies suggest that it is a relatively new phenomenon: Kapcia (2005: 182-83) discusses *jineterismo* briefly in a section that focuses on post-1989 Cuba. Hence, like most Cubanists (Facio, 1998; Rundle, 2001; Elinson, 1999; Fernández Holgado, 2002), he suggests that this is when it emerged. In fact, most scholars argue that *jineterismo* appeared as a result of a series of socio-political factors, ranging from the collapse of socialism in Eastern European countries and the ex-USSR, to the tightening of the US embargo. These external issues impacted on Cuban society and the political sphere, and forced the country into the so-called ‘Special Period in Time of Peace’ – a period marked by general shortages of almost every basic article from food to hygiene products, and the collapse of the transport system (see Kapcia, 2005: 182).

At the national level, De la Fuente (2001: 318) identifies the economic measures implemented by the Cuban government to ease the crisis as the possible causes of *jineterismo*. These measures include the development of the tourist industry, the promotion of foreign investment and the legalisation of dollars, farmers markets and self-employment. Whereas at the global level these changes reflect a crisis in socialism worldwide, at the national level the changes implied a transition (Suchlicki, 2002: 199) to a grey area yet to be credibly defined. Indeed, scholars argue that the crisis struck at the core of Cuban society, reviving social problems like racial inequality (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, 2000), extreme poverty (Hodge, 2001) and prostitution (Pope, 2005). All these factors, with perhaps a greater emphasis on tourism, are mentioned in the literature as being implicated in the origins of *jineterismo*, and lie at the heart of its current definition.

1.4. *Jineterismo* in Academic Discourse

Most authors define *jineterismo* as an activity revolving around the tourist industry (Kapcia, 2005: 183; Rundle, 2001). Abiodun (2001: 25) confirms the relationship between these two concepts – tourism and *jineterismo* – stating that ‘with the rise of tourism came the creation of the *jinetero*.’ Similarly, O’Connell Davidson and Sanchez Taylor (1996:1) state that ‘in Cuba, the link between tourism and prostitution [with reference to *jineterismo*] is perhaps more direct than in any other country’.

In academic writing, *jineterismo* is often constructed as an activity which involves the exchange of sex for money (Cabezas, 1998). For instance, in a book chapter entitled ‘Discourses of Prostitution’, Cabezas (1998: 80) emphasises that ‘*jineteras* is the name given to sex workers.’ Similarly, Fusco (1998: 151) starts out his chapter on *jineterismo* by defining *jineteras* as ‘women who exchange a range of favours, including sexual ones, for money from foreigners’. In the same light, O’Connell-Davidson and Sanchez Taylor (2002: 4) agree that, ‘*jineteras* [is the] Cuban slang for prostitutes’.

The ex vice-president of the Cuban newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*, Rosa Miriam Elizalde, shares the definition above. In her article ‘¿Crímen o Castigo?’, Elizalde (2003: n. 122), one of the most prominent writers about *jineterismo* inside Cuba, defines the *jineteras* as prostitutes, arguing that the term is used to disguise an illegal activity.

Elizalde wrote in the Cuban online magazine *Jiribilla*:

Jineteros were, in the first instance, those that exchanged Cuban pesos for dollars on the black market (illegally), when having dollars was penalised. The term was extended to typify various attitudes of a marginal and heterogeneous group, which young men and women who put a price on their body were part of.

(Elizalde, 2003, my translation)

From this definition important points emerge. First of all, *jineterismo* does not involve a single activity; and second, it is not, in her view, a new phenomenon as other Cuban scholars imply. In fact, Elizalde asserts that *jineterismo* began before the fall of

Socialism in Europe and the former USSR. This view is supported by Alejandro and Osmani,⁶ who both affirmed that they had often heard the term *jinetero* during the eighties and both defined themselves as *ex-jineteros* (De Sousa E Santos, 2004: 28). I asked both men to describe the practices that they defined as *jinetismo*. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Alejandro in which he explains his daily routine during the eighties:

Cuando yo empecé la secundaria yo tenía 12 [...] Mi abuela me ayudaba a ponerme el uniforme y yo salía de la casa y doblaba la esquina así (gestures). Me iba pa' casa de Agustín, un amigo mío, que ahora está preso. Me cambiaba y me ponía unos *jeans*, *popis* y me iba pa' la calle a jinetear. Cambiaba dólares. Todos los días [...] íbamos pa'el Vedado [...] a engañar a los turistas.⁷

(Alejandro (39) Interviewed in the UK/ July 2004)

Alejandro's actions confirm Elizalde's point that *jinetismo* is not a new development. For instance, he recalls exchanging dollars (illegally) with African diplomats and students. Both Alejandro and Osmani stress that in that era there were very few white tourists in Cuba, which is why they 'hustled' mostly Africans and nationals of other 'Third World' countries. This shows that the term *jinetismo*, which today is almost inseparable from Western white tourism, was used initially to describe the contact Cubans had with foreigners in general.

If *jinetismo* is not a new concept, one point that cannot be ignored is that the way it was practised in the 1980s differed a great deal from how it is exercised now. For example, before the early 1990s Cubans were not allowed to own dollars and, thus, could not enter *diplotiendas* (dollar shops) and buy products in hard currency (Stubbs, 1993).

⁶ Alejandro and Osmani, participants in my previous research, married British tourists in the late 1990s. They both got divorced within two years of arriving in the UK and now reside there.

⁷ When I started secondary school I was twelve [...] My grandmother would help me put my uniform on. I'd leave the house and bend the corner like this (gestures). I'd get into Agustín's house, a friend of mine, who's now in jail. I'd change into jeans, trainers, and I took straight to the streets to *jinetear*. I'd exchange dollars. Everyday [...] we went to Vedado [...] to cheat the tourists.

During that period, the interactions between Cubans and tourists were different. Cubans depended on tourists to fulfil their consumption needs: that is, they would obtain dollars and ask foreigners to buy products in the dollar stores on their behalf. These days, if they have dollars, Cubans consume independently in dollar stores – a facility that will prompt some Cubans to question their consumer rights in Cuba and the way the government provides goods to the population (see Chapter 5).

1.5. The Evolution of the Concept

Elizalde makes a useful contribution to the understanding of *jineterismo* when she says that the concept includes ‘various attitudes’ and *jineteros* are a ‘heterogeneous group’. However, a few pages later the author concludes that the term *jinetero/a* only serves to disguise prostitution because it is not a term as stigmatised as the word *prostituta*. The author says that ‘[a]s it means the exchange of sex for money, this commerce fits neatly into the concept of prostitution’ (Elizalde, 2003: www.lajiribilla.cu). Therefore, in her concluding remarks, *jineterismo* is equated only to prostitution.

The Cuban writer Valle (1996) follows a similar approach. In his unpublished manuscript ‘*Habana Babilonia*’⁸ the author collects a rich and useful number of interviews with Cuban prostitutes, pimps, and other members of the informal network. In the end, Valle defines *jineterismo* as prostitution with a different, Cuban name⁹.

Abiodun (2001: 24), an African-American exiled in Cuba, agrees with Valle and Elizalde. As she puts it:

Jinetero is the modernization of the word *jinete*, which means ‘jockey’. The use of this Havana slang to describe a prostitute or hustler softens or disguises the truth. Many women who will openly say that they are *jineteras* would be insulted if you called them prostitutes.

⁸ I was able to obtain a version of this manuscript (in disk format) in Cuba through a Cuban scholar.

⁹ Valle is now in exile in Berlin- he claims Cuban officials will not give him permission to return to Cuba. His writings, which were already controversial, have since become more critical of the State.

Fernández Holgado (2002: 240), who also defines *jineterismo* as prostitution, argues that the origins of the concept are uncertain, stating that for some it derives from the Mexican use applied to people who earn a living illegally, whilst others associate it with the term *jinete* (jockey). The word *jinete* suggests an easy ride (O' Connell Davidson and Sanchez Taylor, 1996: 4); or as Fernández Holgado (2002: 240) states, '*la mujer que cabalga febril y magistrosamente sobre su generoso cliente*' (The woman that rides feverish and majestic on her generous client).

Valle (1996), Elizalde (2003), Abiodun (2001) and, to an extent, Fernández Holgado (2002) share a definition of *jineterismo* which implies clear, separate gender roles for men and women. For these authors, women are defined as performing a sexual role and men as being 'entrepreneurs'. In Abiodun's definition, for example, the word hustler is used to describe males. However, ultimately the author focuses on women, whom she describes as being the ones performing sexual roles. Correspondingly, in her definition Elizalde points out that men were called *jineteros* when they exchanged dollars illegally, but, in her view, the term now refers to female prostitutes. Likewise, Fernández Holgado (2002: 240) opens her section on *jineterismo* by describing it as 'the "new" feminine strategy'.

As shown in the work of these writers, definitions of *jineterismo* have changed. Before the 1990s, *jineterismo* was employed to describe male hustlers; whereas in the 1990s it came to be perceived mainly as a female activity. Likewise, the activity is shown as changing from a business transaction (exchanging dollars) to a sexual activity (selling sex for money). Nevertheless, each act implies competing with the government as both the *jinetera* and the government rely on hard currency from foreigners.

1.6. State Discourses of *Jineterismo*

The Cuban government has openly blamed foreigners for bringing their 'vices' to Cuba. Part of the government's concern, as suggested by Moses (2001), is that contact with foreigners may lead to the corruption of Cubans' belief system, with negative

implications for the future of the Revolution.¹⁰ As Moses (quoted in Snodgrass, 2001: 213) states, the Cuban authorities, fearing that capitalist ideology may influence Cuban society, has made ‘efforts to impede the flow of ideas’. Of similar importance is the fact that, as Rundle (2001: 2) implies, because of its strong association with dollars and tourism, *jineteros* are often depicted by the Cuban media as an ‘affront to revolutionary morality’.

The FMC (Federation of Cuban Women) has by far the most unsympathetic viewpoint on *jineterismo*. The leader of the organisation, Vilma Espín, once stated that *jineteras* are individuals with ‘low moral values’, who are ‘greedy’ and ‘covetous’ (O’Connell-Davidson and Sanchez Taylor, 1996: 5). In her prominent statements on *jineterismo*, the late Vilma Espín¹¹ blamed the family for not supporting these ‘decadent’ women. In her opinion, *jineteras* are ‘weak women’, who come from ‘families without ethics’. Espín eventually concluded that these women are ‘embarrassing’ to Cuba (Fernández Holgado, 2002: 258).

The Cuban government’s attitude towards *jineterismo* needs to be analysed in a wider context. Firstly, Cuba claimed to have eradicated prostitution, as Chapter 2 demonstrates; secondly, as Elizalde passionately contests, foreign governments persistently (and in the author’s view unjustifiably) accuse the Cuban government of promoting sex tourism (www.la.jiribilla.cu); and thirdly, the foreign media blames the ‘causes of prostitution [...] in the stupid socio-economic organisation introduced by the Communists’ (Montaner, 2003: www.firmapress.com). This demonstrates that accusations of promoting *jineterismo* are seen as humiliating by the Cuban government.

In a speech in Tampa on the 16th July 2004, George Bush said that ‘[t]he Havana regime, one of the greatest violators of human rights in the world, now commits other crimes [...] the dictator now welcomes sex tourism’ (article in Spanish; my translation <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/us-cuba/lures.htm>).

Years later, Cuban journalist Elizalde wrote an extensive article in response to a report written in 2007 by the U.S. government in which the governments of Cuba and

¹⁰ The term Revolution is used in capital letters here as an attempt to convey Cubans’ personification of the concept. When Cubans talk about the Revolution, the concept is almost treated as a living/ independent entity.

¹¹ Vilma Espín, Cuba’s first lady and a hero of the Revolution, was the wife of Raúl Castro (Fidel’s brother). She died in June 2007.

Venezuela are accused of allowing sex tourism and child trafficking to flourish (http://creatividadfeminista.org/articulos/2007/mitos_cuba.html). Elizalde defends the Cuban government, discussing the role of the foreign media in promoting sex tourism. She mentions the Italian magazine *Viaggiare* which proposed awarding Cuba an award for being the best sex tourist destination, and also writes about a Mexican magazine, *Deep*, which showed pictures of semi-naked Cuban women beneath the headline ‘Cuba, sensualidad caribeña’, or ‘Cuba, Caribbean sensuality’.

The definition of *jineterismo* as prostitution is perhaps one of the only areas where the Cuban government agrees with the U.S. government and the foreign media. In a speech to the National Assembly in 1992, Fidel Castro controversially pointed out that ‘Cuban women become *jineteras* because they love sex’ (Pope, 2005). Never ceasing to take the opportunity to publicise the triumphs of the Revolution, Fidel Castro points out that Cuban prostitution is different and safer than prostitution elsewhere in the world.

There are no women forced to sell themselves to a man, to a foreigner, to a tourist. Those who do so, do it at their own convenience, voluntarily, and without any need for it. We can say that they are highly educated hookers and quite healthy because we are one of the countries with the lowest numbers of Aids cases [...] Therefore, there is no prostitution healthier than Cuba’s [...]

(Fidel Castro speech in 1992)

Some of Fidel’s interpretations of *jineterismo*, like many academic definitions, need to be problematised. One analysis that requires further development is the correlation between *jineterismo* and gender, race and sex work. Such interpretations have hitherto been unremittingly reinforced by the media, the travel industry, and by the Cuban government. An area that has been problematised in the past is the Cuban government’s ambivalent position on *jineterismo* (Cabezas, 1998; Eckstein, 2003). Eckstein (2003: 614) states that the government had a role in selling Cuban women to the

outside world, after ‘Cubatur, Cubanacán and Cimex (Cuban tour operators) hosted a Playboy trip [...] to feature an article on the “girls of Cuba” in the early 1990s’.

In this project, I give voice to those that are perceived as being *jineteras* by Cuban society in order to grasp the complexities of their lives and the practices of ‘daily struggle’ they engage in to make ends meet. If notions of *jineterismo* dominated by the Cuban official discourse are defined from above and used as a political tool to re-stigmatise mainly Afro-Cubans in contact with foreigners, *jineterismo* remains to be defined ‘from below’, taking into account popular societal discourses and, more importantly, the discourses of the women who are identified as *jineteras*.

1.7. Popular Culture and *Jineterismo*

It is important to explore the academic and official discourses on *jineterismo* in order to understand how the Cuban elites, party officials, writers and non-Cuban academics define the term. However, as this study centres on local women who are perceived as *jineteras*, and on the meanings and practices associated with them, it is also vital to briefly discuss how *jineterismo* is represented in popular culture.

In the early nineties, two influential Cuban musicians introduced in their albums songs about the *jineteras* of Havana: one sang mainly to audiences in Cuba, the other to Miami audiences. At the time when their songs were released, *jineterismo*, as it is commonly believed, was in its early stages. In the first part of the 1990s, the economic crisis was in its worst stage and the authorities seemingly turned a ‘blind eye’ to *jineterismo*. As shown later, it was not until 1998 that the authorities played a more active role in tackling *jineterismo*.

In his 1994 album, Silvio Rodríguez, one of the most popular singers and composers in Cuba, was one of the few that attempted to depict the world of the *jinetera*, without using the term *jineterismo*. His song ‘*Flores*’ portrayed the *jinetera* as being part of a dark underworld:

The night flowers of Fifth Avenue open
For those gentlemen who go to the hotel [...]
Flowers that go through forbidden doors

Flowers that know what I'll never know
Flowers that string their dream of life
In garlands without faith
Flowers of sheets with eyes
Disposable flowers
Doorbells of desire
Flowers eating the leftovers of love
(in Chomsky, 2003: 602)

While Rodríguez's song describes the *jinetera* as a 'disposable flower' – unable to obtain the full love of a man and experience a lasting life – Willy Chirino's song 'La Jinetera', from his 1995 album *Asere*, offers a rendition to Cuban women who sell sex in exchange for 'a few dollars':

Cuando la tarde se pone en el Malecón,
Eva se está preparando para la acción,
Acechando a los turistas que hay en la Havana,
Por unos dólares, les vende su manzana.
[...] Ábranle paso a Eva, La Jinetera.¹²

Chirino is a Cuban exile, who left the island in the 1960s as a child during what was known as 'Operation Peter Pan', a US sponsored programme, where approximately 14.000 children were sent to the United States, as their parents feared that Communism would take their children away from them. Chirino plays frequent concerts to the Cuban community in the States and his song 'Ya Viene Llegando' (It's almost arriving) has become linked with the experiences of Cuban refugees. Chirino sings about the return of Cuban exiles to a free (from Castro) Cuba as well as nostalgic songs about the loss of

¹²When the Sun sets over the *Malecón*.
Eva is preparing for her action.
Attacking the tourists that are in Havana,
For a few dollars, she sells her apple.
[...] Give way to Eva- the *jinetera*.

Cuba to socialism; his song about the *Jinetera* sent strong political messages to the Cuban State.

Contrary to the images of ‘vulnerable’ and ‘desperate’ created by Rodríguez and Chirino, the Cuban rap group Orishas¹³, in their song ‘*Atrevido*’ (Daring), present the *jinetera* as a woman that is neither lonely nor unreachable. It is important to include the voices of the Hip Hop movement in this study on *jineterismo*. Despite the apparent differences between the two practices, for instance, Hip Hop being an artistic/musical collective movement and *jineterismo*, perceived as an individualistic practice (see Chapter 4), the growth of both practices is linked with the 1990s, and both are associated with black Cubans’ attempts to find a voice or space in contemporary Cuba. Furthermore, the geographic location is also relevant as both (respondents and the Hip Hop movement) are based in Alamar. More importantly, both develop comparable narratives of live in contemporary Cuba, and complement each other, in that they both have consumption anxieties (see Chapters 5 and introduction to Chapter 6) and share concerns about racism in contemporary Cuba (Chapter 6). In 1999, I watched as a mainly black audience cheered when Obsesión Mambi, a two-piece Hip Hop group, opened the concert in Alamar with a theme about *jineteras* and rappers. The female member rapped about ‘looking for a foreigner’ to help her get out of all the financial problems she was facing’. The theme ended with the chorus: ‘I will not stop blacks, I will not stop *niches* (blackies)’- with reference to the Cuban policemen, who are notorious for stopping black Cubans on the streets.

Because of their own background – Afro-Cubans who are temporarily based in Europe – Orishas offer a depiction of the *jinetera* different to Rodríguez (a white Cuban who is one of Cuba’s oldest celebrated singers). They focus on the foreigner, whom they call *Atrevido*. Unlike the ‘unloved’ and the ‘desperate’ *jineteras* introduced by Rodríguez and Chirino, Orishas’s *jinetera* is shown having a great time whilst taking advantage of the tourist:

¹³ Orishas were initially a popular Rap group within Hip Hop circles. Since their arrival in France (where they produced their album ‘*A lo Cubano*’ (The Cuban Way), they became widely known outside of Cuba; but their popularity in Cuba waned, as many Hip Hop listeners perceived them as becoming too commercial (for a complete discussion on this see Fernandes, 2003).

Todo lo que le pedía, el punto se la gastaba,
Una linda habitación en el Cohiba, el punto se la gastaba,
Un vestido pa' ella, y una camisa pa' mí, el punto se la
gastaba,
Si quería ir a la playa, el punto se la gastaba,
Ya la cuenta no le daba, no le daba,
Y el punto se la gastaba,
Al concierto con Orishas, a vacilar...
Eso te pasó por no saber que todo tiene su precio atrevido,
eso te pasó por no saber, atrevido [...] ¹⁴

Fernandes (2003: 291)

The examples above demonstrate the various ways in which the *jinetera* has been depicted in popular music. While Rodríguez's lyrics partly reflect Cuban elitist perspectives, even to the point where the term *jineterismo* is omitted, Chirino's Eva echoes Cuban-exile discourses, implicitly highlighting the 'failures' of the Cuban Revolution by indicating that in Cuba there are women that have to sell sex in exchange for a 'few dollars'. Orishas, on the other hand, offer a version of *jineterismo* that brings us closer to popular perceptions of the *jinetera*. Far from Rodríguez, and Chirino's nostalgic reference to *jineterismo* that depicts *jineteras* as women 'forced' by their economic circumstances to sell their bodies, Orishas rap about Cuban women that adopt these actions by choice. They present *jineterismo* as a vehicle through which young women cunningly make use of the opportunity to gain access to entertainment and goods in Havana.

¹⁴ Everything that she asked for, the idiot paid out. A pretty room in the [hotel] Cohiba, the idiot paid out. A dress for her and a shirt for me, the idiot paid out. If she wanted to go to the beach, the idiot paid out. He was running out of money, but the idiot paid out. To have a good time at a concert with Orishas, the idiot paid out. This only happened to you because you don't know that everything has a price, *atrevido* [daring]...

1.8. *Jineteras* Portrayed in Literary Texts

In addition to the constructions of *jineterismo* mentioned above (which are mostly ‘white’ Cuban depictions of the phenomenon¹⁵), *jineteras* also feature in several works of fiction created in Cuba, which highlights that *jineterismo* is not a practice that has been constructed from the top, but rather, the concept is construed at various levels: by artists, musicians, intellectuals, inside and outside of Cuba. Indeed, a recent study by Vincenzo Perna (2005) suggests that modern Cuban style Salsa (Timba) played an important role in eroticising the Cuban mulata and making them visible to foreign tourists. Perna confirms that popular Timba groups (i.e. NG La Banda), not only developed images of *jineterismo*, but he also stresses the link between Cuban popular music and *jineterismo*. In terms of literary interpretations of *jineterismo*, it becomes evident that these discourses are dominated by ‘white’ Cuban interpretations.

‘*Trilogía Sucia de la Habana*’ is a semi-autobiographical novel published originally in 1998, the year when the government became more engaged in the fight against *jineterismo*. The author, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez (2001), based the novel on life in Havana in the nineties- a period that some Cubans describe as the worst in *jineterismo* because *jineteras* were out openly on the streets of Havana’ (Osmani: interviewed in 2004). One of the characters that Gutiérrez meets during the worst years of the Special Period, Luísa, becomes a *jinetera*. They soon start dating but later on, faced with an incessant poverty cycle, Gutiérrez, a white Cuban, sees no other option but to send Luisa to the *Malecón* in search of tourists.

One afternoon I grabbed Luisa and got right down to business. “All right, enough of this sitting around and being hungry. You’re going to Malecón to hustle!” I made the right decision. For a while now, that mulatta’s been bringing home up to three hundred dollars a week. At last. To hell with poverty!

Pedro Juan Gutiérrez (2001: 219)

¹⁵ Orishas are an exception as they are an Afro-Cuban Hip Hop group.

In Gutiérrez's book, Havana is portrayed as a decadent city – united in perversion, drugs, and alcohol abuse – and *jineterismo* is presented as an easy solution to poverty. Gutiérrez, who previously worked as a journalist, and currently presents himself as a disillusioned journalist (<http://www.pedrojuangutierrez.com>), wrote his novel in *Centro Habana*, his place of residence, and a convenient neighborhood for Cubans seeking relationships with foreigners, because of its proximity to tourist hotels (see Chapter 3).¹⁶

In 'Dirty Blonde and Half Cuban' by Lisa Wixon (2005), Alysia, a white Cuban-American who travels to Cuba in search of her Cuban father, becomes a *jinetera* when all the money she brings is stolen within weeks of her arrival on the island. In this novel, Alysia demonstrates that *jineterismo* is an effortless option and she shows the role of the family in supporting and even encouraging women to get involved with foreigners. The woman that initiates Alysia in *jineterismo* is an important heart surgeon who 'acquired a handful of foreign boyfriends who deposit money into her account each month' (7). One of the messages put across by Wixon is that while most *jineteras* she meets tend to be dark-skinned, white women, such as blonde Alysia and her Cuban friend, are 'rare commodities', for whose services tourists are prepared to pay more. The image of a 'dirty' Havana offered by Gutiérrez (2001) and Wixon (2005) evokes the image of the 'corrupt', 'immoral', and 'insatiable *mulata cubana*', who has been the protagonist of many classic Cuban novels, such as the renowned '*Cecilia Valdés*' (Mangual, 2004). Valdés, the *mulata* protagonist of Cirilo Villaverde's (1882) novel of the same name, represents a woman of irresistible sensuality, whose actions revolve around stereotypes of insatiable Afro-Cuban sensuality.

There is a perceived link between Afro-Cuban sensuality and Afro-Cuban religion: for example, the seductive *mulata* is also embodied in the image of Ochún, the Afro-Cuban Goddess of Love and Femininity in *Santería* (Hagedorn, 2002; Bolívar, 1990). In Afro-Cuban religious mythology, Ochún is helplessly flirtatious. This Goddess is described by Cuban writer Natalia Bolívar (1990: 116) as a playful beauty who loved jewellery and wealth. In the author's words, she is 'represented as a beautiful *mulata*, who is friendly, a good dancer, likes partying and is eternally happy'. This depiction

¹⁶ Interestingly, Pedro Juan Gutierrez was relatively unknown as a writer in Cuba, and this book had been rejected by a Cuban publisher, before a 'foreign' friend took it abroad and Anagrama decided to publish it.

suggests a correlation between Afro-Cuban religions, (mis)interpretations of Afro-Cuban sensuality and *jineterismo*. In fact, Cubans perceived as ‘*coquetas*’ (flirtatious) and ‘*enamoradas*’ (systematically falling in love) are said to be ‘daughters of Ochún’. In the same way that the tales linked to Ochún revolve around her sensuality and materialism,¹⁷ the official discourses of *jineterismo* mentioned earlier also succeed in linking it with the insatiable character of Cuban women (cf. Fidel Castro’s speech above, making reference to Cuban women’s love of sex), and/or the materialism associated with these women (cf. Head of the FMC’s accusation that *jineteras* are ‘greedy’ and ‘covetous’).

Interestingly, many contemporary Cuban novels are populated by *jineteras*, without ever making them the central characters of the story. Even more intriguing is the fact that characters such as Luísa appear in most texts as occupying different social spaces to the rest of the population. This point is also evident in María Elena Llana’s (2004) novel ‘*Ronda en el Malecón*’, where the *jinetera* is relatively distant from most Cubans (Llana, 2004: 10). Indeed, this white Cuban writer represents the *jinetera* as a ‘social outsider’ – almost unreachable and invisible to most Cubans.

The excerpt below from Llana’s (2004: 10) novel serves as a very good example of how, through literature, Cuban established writers dehumanise *jineteras*, and reproduce the image of the *jinetera* as a human commodity populating Cuba’s dollar world where she is effectively for sale to foreigners. Llana, a journalist, born in 1936, who works for the *Instituto Cubano de Radiodifusión*, offers a depiction of *jineterismo* that is supportive of Vilma Espín’s view of *jineteras*.

La Habana de las *jineteras*, pero ¿dónde están las *jineteras*?
No las ves porque no coincides en su mundo. Andan por
hoteles, piscinas, niteclubes, discotecas y playas. Como
tantas otras cosas, son productos sólo asequibles a los
extranjeros y a los nacionales que manejan dólares.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ironically, Ochún is syncretised with the *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* (Cuba’s Patron Saint).

¹⁸ The Havana of the *jineteras* but where are the *jineteras*? You do not see them if you are not part of their world. They roam hotels, swimming pools, bars, nightclubs, and beaches. Like many other things, they are a product that only foreigners and nationals who own dollars can afford.

Llana's theme is followed up in a novel published in Cuba by García Verdecia's (2004) '*Vicisitudes del Triángulo Isósceles*'. In this short story, the reader is invited to enter the invisible world of the *jinetera*. She is part of a triangle composed of the *jinetera*, the *jinetera*'s boyfriend and the Italian tourist. Verdecia shows that the *jinetera*, who is initially taken to tourist areas by her boyfriend, is ensnared by the material things with which the Italian man, who flirts overtly with her ignoring her Cuban boyfriend, provides her. In this particular case, the Italian man is portrayed as the one attracting the Cuban woman to his world, luring her with things and eventually converting her into a *jinetera*. In this case, we are presented with a different perspective, where it is not the role of the Cuban man to initiate his girlfriend into *jineteterismo*; instead, the connection between *jineteterismo*, tourism and a woman's desire for materialism is stressed.

In a country where artistic output is controlled by the government, Cuban authors writing from the island echo the official viewpoint on the most sensitive issues, of which *jineteterismo* is no exception. Although to mention the *jinetera* involves a certain amount of risk, these novels nonetheless offer official readings of *jineteterismo*. That is, *jineteras* are stigmatised as prostitutes, practising an illegal activity, and falling victim to consumerism.

'Cuba Diaries' is a travel novel written by the North American author Tattlin (2002: 37), who lived in Cuba for four years in the 1990s with her children, to accompany her husband who is a foreign diplomat. In her book, the *jineteras* are highly visible, confirming Llana's point that they are mainly visible in the dollar world and part of the tourist experience.

We see them on the Quinta Avenida [...] and on the Malecón [...] We see them lingering on the curbs in latex spandex hot pants, halter tops, bike shorts, tube dresses, and sometimes décolleté, full length evening dresses [...] It is said that they are not out-and-out prostitutes because they do not talk about price right away and say no if they do not like the man's face; if police stop, they tell them they are hitchhiking, for Cuban women tend to dress revealingly

anyway and hitchhiking has become a common means of transportation since the beginning of the *período especial*, when bus services were seriously curtailed.

The idea that *jineterismo* is an activity practised mostly by women is also maintained by Cuban artists and writers in exile or residing abroad (Valdés, 1996). In his song '*Eva-La Jinetera*', Willy Chirino, a Cuban exile, creates an analogy between the *jineteras* in Havana and the beautiful and deceiving Eve, echoing the biblical tale. Chirino's Eva is supposed to become a prostitute in order to get 'a few dollars' and feed her young baby. Once again, we see the connection of *jineterismo* with economic circumstances, although this view is sometimes denied by Cuban officials. After all, to admit that Cuban women are selling their services to tourists implies a failure on behalf of the Cuban Revolution at different levels: namely, the inability to eliminate the class system through the introduction of communism; the failure to eliminate prostitution; and the admission that the system produces dependencies on Western tourists.

Space, both physical as well as imagined, serves to explain the current constructions of *jineterismo*. As *jineteras* enter a tourist area, even though it is still within the boundaries of Havana, they become outsiders, the 'isolated' *jineteras*. However, as ethnographic research has demonstrated (Facio, 1998; Rundle, 2001), as these women embark on relationships with foreigners and re-enter Cuban spaces, mainly Cuban residential areas, their identity in the eyes of their families shifts and they become *luchadoras*. Therefore, the *jinetera* offers two opposing portrayals: to 'white' elitist groups she is the distant, suffering woman; whereas to Cuban rappers, ethnographers and her own family, she may be portrayed as 'ordinary' and/or a '*luchadora*' (fighter); ultimately, the latter is the view that the ethnographic data presents, that these are ordinary young women seeking relationships with foreigners as part of their *lucha* (struggle) to achieve a better life or the *lucha* to find their ideal partners.

1.9. Tourist Literature

The construction of the Cuban *jinetera* by the tourist industry is based on traditional notions of prostitution, and on the racial and gendered connotation associated with Cuba

as an 'exotic' destination. A website called 'Travel and The Single Male' describes Cuba as a 'hot destination for single adventurer males' (cited in Fernández Holgado, 2002: 246); and, as Fernández Holgado mentions, in 1997 the Italian magazine *Panorama* displayed images of Cuban *mulatas* on its front page, and included as its main article a piece entitled: 'Sex and Che'.

In the 1996 edition of Calder and Hatchwell's travel guide to Cuba, the authors warn tourists that they are likely to meet various *jineteros/as*, 'a term to describe Cubans whose main aim in life is to take advantage of tourists' (Calder and Hatchwell, 1996: 34). These writers suggest that there is a distinction between male *jineteros* and female *jineteras*, a distinction that is based on the roles each is said to perform:

Male *jineteros* exist most commonly as touts, who will offer to change money or sell you cigars [...] Some *jineteros* simply want to be treated to a few drinks and free meals. This is often the goal of their female counterparts, *jineteras*, though Cuban women find themselves involved increasingly in more conventional prostitution.

(Calder and Hatchwell, 1996: 34)

The authors stress the link between *jineterismo* and race, explaining that '[p]rostitutes are about the only black people allowed into hotel lobbys' (35). Likewise, in an article published in the Sunday Times in 1998, A.A. Gill compares Cuban sex workers to Ferraris, stating that they are 'enthusiastic' and 'top-of-the-line Formula One hookers' (quoted in Eaton, 2003b: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/cuba/cuba-prostitution-11-03.htm>).

Aside from the images portrayed in travel guides, there is a vast amount of websites with images of women that want to meet foreign men. (See, for example, www.friendfinder.com, www.latinamericancupid.com, www.cubandolls.com, www.2-brides.com/Cuban-brides, www.romancelinks.com/Cuban_women.html) There are also websites where people share their experiences of Cuba and Cubans (www.cubamania.com). In [cubandolls.com](http://www.cubandolls.com), there is a 'tip' for men looking for Cuban

women: 'If you see any of these Cuban girls that you are interested in, don't wait too long to communicate with them. The more attractive and educated they are, the sooner they will find someone for marriage' (assessed on 24/02/2006).

The images presented in tourist publications offer little insight into the realities of young black Cubans in contemporary Cuba labelled as *jineteras*; and fail to highlight the potentially exploitative relationships that (sex) tourism can generate. Instead, they raise a number of questions about the practices associated with *jineterismo* and the wider impact that they may have on Cuban society. Hence, tourism literature joins a range of local elite and popular discourses in perpetrating a powerful image of the sexually available, yet morally dubious and materially self-interested '*mulata*'. This thesis questions these sexualised images of blackness, and emphasises other models of blackness based on kin and love relationships. Therefore, as opposed to focusing on sexual identities, this thesis shows Afro-Cuban women as mothers, daughters, neighbours and girlfriends or wives. In sum, literary texts published in Cuba, the images of *jineterismo* offered by the tourist industry, and certain portrayals of *jineterismo* in popular music (Rodriguez & Chirino) help us to conclude that the various constructions of *jineterismo*, as well as the stigma linked with *jineterismo* are recreated at various levels and spaces- not only by the Cuban revolutionary leaders. Nevertheless, this thesis contests these images and constructions, and introduces the narratives of young Afro-Cuban women to construct a definition of *jineterismo* from 'below'.

1.10. Ethnography – A Working Methodology

Understanding the phenomenon of *jineterismo* requires a deeper understanding of Cuban society. This study based on ethnographic research aims to offer a wider reading of *jineterismo* by exploring local views and the views of individuals involved in relationships with non-Cubans. It builds on previous fieldwork research, which has fruitfully attempted to understand *jineterismo* in Havana (Rundle, 2001; Cabezas, 1998; Facio, 1998; Elinson, 1999 and Pope, 2005).

Ethnographers recognise that 'real life' can be studied by using a variety of methods that enable the researcher to get as close to the respondent as possible. Ethnography chooses not to rely on quantifying individuals' responses (Hammersley and

Atkinson, 1983: 26), but to make the messy, complex quality of everyday life the focus of research. In other words, the ethnographer takes the opportunity to observe social interactions – for instance, contradictions or agreements – and to see changes in behaviour as individuals move between various contexts. Another strong aspect of ethnographic research is that, whereas with other data collection methods, the encounter between researcher and respondents tends to be formal and limited, ethnographic research blurs the lines between official and unofficial settings (as well as research and daily life) as interviews can bear a resemblance to informal conversations. Therefore, the researcher gains access to very useful data, which enables an analysis of the bigger picture from a bottom-up perspective.

Most contemporary studies of *jineterismo* fail to focus on the *jineteras* in their residential areas, only making them visible in tourist zones. This approach prevents us from seeing the full scope of the phenomenon. By using ethnographic research, I hope to gain an insight into contemporary Cuban society, especially daily life in ordinary working class districts such as Alamar. I am specifically interested in understanding the practices that Cubans define as *jineterismo*, and how Cubans who are involved in or seek relationships with foreigners challenge or accommodate to stereotypical images of *jineterismo*. This can only be done by using a method that allows me to immerse myself in the daily lives of these Cubans, and that enables me to build good relationships with these individuals in a very short period of time. As a result, I have been able to collect data that addresses my research questions.

Ethnography has been used successfully to understand change in post-socialist societies. Dudwick's (2000) research on pre-war Armenia, for example, discusses the limitations of carrying out research in these societies. Dudwick suggests that the writer lacks 'freedom of movement' and requires 'authorisation [from the authorities in question] to move in and out of town' (Berdahl, 2000: 16). As Berdahl points out, the difficulty of carrying out research in post-socialist societies has led many scholars to attach themselves to official institutions (Barsegian, Brown, Dudwick). Fortunately, this is a decision that I was not forced to make.

Although Cuba remains ideologically Socialist in economic terms, since the depenalisation of the dollar in the early 1990s, we could define it as a type of post-

socialist society. Kuehnast's research in Kyrgyzstan (cited in Berdahl, 2000), and Berdahl's (2000) research in East Germany are two of the many examples of successful ethnographic research in such societies. Indeed, as Berdahl states (2000), ethnography is particularly useful for the 'study of socialist societies and post-socialist transitions,' as ethnography has the ability to 'focus on the fine-grained detail of everyday life' (9). Examples of ethnographic research in Cuba include Mona Rosendhal's (1997) book 'Inside the Revolution: Everyday Life in Castro's Cuba'. Hodge's ethnographic research on male sex-workers or *pingueros* in central Havana (2003) has also been insightful, in which he examines how male Cubans commercialise their own bodies, offering it to male tourists, while at the same time retaining their own masculinities. He mentions cases of males in heterosexual relationships with Cuban partners, who work as sex workers because of their 'addiction to money' and material goods. The use of an ethnographic methodology enables Hodge to effectively demonstrate that these Cubans 'package' and 'mould' their sexualities in a flexible manner to match the sexual desires of the male tourists they meet. More importantly, ethnography allows Hodge to understand why the young males become *pingueros*, and to directly observe how the men interact with each other and behave in tourist zones. Hodge's research differs from this research as it focuses on male sex workers in tourist areas; whereas this study seeks to gain a broader understanding of the lives of those Cubans labelled as sex workers. Similarly, while Hodge's participants are involved in relationships with other males, this study chooses to focus on heterosexual relationships between Cuban women and foreign men.

Anna Cristina Pertierra (2007) has written an interesting self-reflexive account on her fieldwork research in Santiago de Cuba, during which she married a Cuban man who now resides with her in London. Her discussion explains the dilemmas of falling in love, marrying and organising a wedding in the field. In her article, Pertierra reflects upon the ability of the researcher in separating 'the field' and her own personal emotions, dilemmas that I have found particularly relevant as I was also married to a Cuban during my research; and unlike Pertierra, who studied media consumption, I was writing a thesis on a topic that was sensitive to both of us, as we both had been at some point labelled *jineteros* and harassed by the Cuban police.

The ethnographic methodology chosen for this thesis not only enables the researcher to write about a specific way of life, but also to partake in the activities of the participants whilst closely observing their behaviour. This method may raise questions about ethics, but in carrying out overt observation – that is, introducing myself as a researcher, protecting respondents' confidentiality and asking for their consent to record and use the interviews – I have ensured that I do not breach ethical guidelines. As part of the University regulations, an ethical approval form was completed in the early stages of the research and approval was given to carry out the project.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, and in order to protect my respondents' identity, I have had to make the decision to conceal my research topic from members of the neighbourhood, and I have consciously refrained from discussing academic or research issues with neighbours.

Only one person in the neighbourhood, who is not a key respondent, was aware that my central aim is to understand the lives of Cubans involved in transnational relationships. With regards to the respondents, in the early stages of the research, I stated that my research was on contemporary Cuba. That enabled me to apply a flexible interview format, which explores various aspects of the respondents' lives, as well as aspects which appear irrelevant to them, but repetitive enough to enable me to recognise discursive patterns. However, in the latter part of the research, and at the end of the interviewing stage, the aims of the research were shared with the respondents. Once respondents were fully aware of the nature of my research they were asked if they still gave the researcher consent to work with the interviews and if necessary publish the findings. The respondents introduced in the empirical chapters all gave me consent to use the interviews, as long as the research maintained their anonymity.

By spending time with various members of the neighbourhood, including those labelled as *jineteras*, I have been able to 'play down' my role as researcher; but I have also managed to produce highly rich data from *jineteras* as well as their families and neighbours. As far as the interviews gathered are concerned, they have been useful to carry out content analysis. I have been able to pick up patterns, key terms and issues across the interview extracts, which has enabled me to develop the main themes of this research and to organise the chapters around these themes.

1.11. Advantages and Disadvantages of Researching *Jineterismo*

Jineterismo is seen as a sensitive topic for the Cuban authorities and as a result very little has been written about it in Cuba by Afro-Cubans. In fact, the influential discourses of *jineterismo* emerge from ‘white’, ‘middle-class’ Cubans and the global tourist industry. In Cuba, data on the topic is not only limited, but also difficult to obtain: if, for example, I had entered Cuba ‘officially’ as a researcher, I would not have had access to the same amount of data as there would have been serious restrictions on the people I could have interviewed.

When I explained to a Cuban consulate worker over the phone that I was interested in researching *jineterismo*, the diplomat’s reaction was extremely defensive, prompting me to change my approach and apply for a family visa instead. In Cuba, I witnessed similar reactions from Cuban scholars. For example, when I mentioned to an Afro- Cuban University lecturer whom I interviewed that my thesis was on *jineterismo*, the Cuban intellectual – and a clearly avid supporter of the Cuban Revolution – pointed his finger angrily at me and stated:

Prostitution in Cuba is not really prostitution! Prostitution exists in capitalist societies, where the system only benefits a few. Our problem is that foreigners are always trying to find weaknesses in the Cuban system and only seek to underestimate the (Cuban) Revolution.

Nonetheless, because of my background, and the fact that I speak Cuban Spanish fluently, I was able to explore beyond the discourses of the Cuban elite and attempt to understand the wider population’s view of the concept.

My knowledge of Cuban Spanish enabled me to sustain meaningful conversations with Cubans, while at the same time understanding colloquial language and popular Cubanisms, allowing me to gain an ‘insider’s’ insight into the respondents’ realities. Just as the linguistic aspect was an advantage, so was my marriage to a man defined by his Cuban identity card as a *mulato*.

It soon became obvious to me that going back to the neighbourhood where my husband grew up and where his family still lives proved advantageous. Many locals were willing and eager to engage in conversations with me. In fact, as we soon discovered, my husband's 'successful' experience of emigration (he was able to travel abroad within two months of applying for his permit to leave Cuba) led many Cubans to believe that he was familiar with the migratory process. Neighbours would visit us from time to time with visa application forms or with questions about the information they needed to know in case they or their acquaintances were invited for interviews at different embassies. My husband's 'perceived' knowledge of migration rules became a valuable asset for this research, where the respondents are embedded not only in local discourses of *jineterismo*, but also in discourses and desires of migration.

I was often perceived as someone who *parece cubana* (looks like a Cuban) because of my appearance, linguistic ability and temporary residence in a Cuban district. Besides, although naturalised as a British citizen, and despite living most of my life in Europe, my 'complex' background as a black woman who had studied in a Cuban primary school in Angola in the 1980s brought me very close to the research participants. My somewhat similar background to that of the respondents – young black women, originating from developing countries – sometimes made it more difficult to distance myself from the respondents in order to allow myself to reflect upon their realities from an outsider's viewpoint.

The fact that my husband is Cuban and living outside of Cuba made him an outsider in the eyes of the respondents. His outsider status gave Cubans the confidence to be interviewed without fear of being reported to the authorities. At the same time, many also felt that they could relate to my husband as '*también se fue de Cuba*' (he also left Cuba), which for them suggested that he understood their situation, as most respondents themselves, who were still in Cuba aspired to migrate to Europe.

Soon my connections stretched beyond Cuba and included the UK. The fact that my husband is Cuban and living in the UK gave me the chance to meet many Cubans in England. Some of these contacts proved to be extremely valuable as they paved the way to further interviews, both in the UK and in Cuba. However, being a black researcher and an *extranjera* (foreigner) prompted opposing reactions by black and white Cubans in

Alamar. While it was relatively easy to build lasting relationships with Afro-Cubans, the few 'white' Cubans I was introduced to as a research student refused to participate in my research. Nonetheless, Afro-Cubans I spoke to not only talked openly about their personal lives with me, but were always willing to introduce me to their friends and family.

Another aspect that worked to my advantage was age. As I was in my late twenties, when I started this research, I was within the age range of most respondents, who were between the ages of 20 and 40. This factor was extremely favourable as respondents felt that I could relate to all the main issues that concerned them.

Despite the factors mentioned above, being a 'foreigner' was also advantageous. I was able to meet people in extraordinary circumstances, as Cubans are generally keen to meet and talk to foreigners. Nevertheless, relationships with white Cubans did not go beyond questions about life in England and small talk in the street. It never led to invitations to visit their houses and, as mentioned above, not a single white Cuban accepted an interview.

In spite of my semi-insider status, much of the complexity of my research only revealed itself in the process of sometimes naïve and prolonged ethnographic learning. Thus, for instance, in 2005 I became frustrated with a main informant, called Pedro, who only introduced me to female *jineteras* and at a very slow pace. I paid five Convertible Pesos (the equivalent to \$5) to a Cuban acquaintance, Alex, and asked the 25-year-old male, a University student and artist whose income was approximately \$7 per month, to accompany me to La Rampa. I was hoping that by 'hanging out' in this busy central street of Vedado, we would meet male *jineteros* willing to talk to us. The Cuban man obviously failed to turn up explaining later, without refunding the five Cuban *Pesos Convertibles* that he was terrified of being caught by the police. Not long after, Alex introduced me to Oneida, one of my key participants.

On another occasion, I stood outside a bar called 'P y O', an area known for male sex workers who in the evening offer their services to male tourists. I was hoping to meet Cubans that appeared to know the area well. A couple walked past whom I befriended and eventually invited for a drink. On the spur of the moment, I decided to interview them and found that their responses were filled with socialist slogans; as it later

transpired, the couple came from an eastern Cuban province. As a worker of a nearby bar that I visited regularly who saw me with the couple later told me, he was the woman's pimp rather than her boyfriend, as he claimed to be, and they probably thought that I worked for the government, hence their exaggeratedly positive depiction of life in Havana for young Cubans.

Pertierra (2007) raises many questions about the ability of the researcher to distance his/her personal life from that of the participants. In my case I was mostly concerned with how I would handle a topic that had caused me a great deal of humiliation and had reduced me to tears on numerous occasions. Would I still be neutral knowing that many women like me are being wrongly harassed by the police? Or would I resent women that give the police reasons to harass black people? I felt both sentiments when starting this research, and so had to devise ways of separating my own experiences from that of these women so as to avoid being biased.

1.12. Research Context – An Explanation of the Methods of Data Collection

Havana was the obvious location for carrying out this research. The capital is where Cuba's main international airport is situated and is a popular tourist destination. In fact, with its tourist areas weaving into residential areas, Havana presents itself as a suitable place in Cuba to carry out a study on *jineterismo*.

I chose the neighbourhood of Alamar (see map below) as the site for my fieldwork. Located on the outskirts of Havana, Alamar is purely a residential area without the hotels, tourist bars, banks and other services that abound in central Havana neighbourhoods such as Vedado, Old Havana and Central Havana. Alamar was chosen for various reasons: Firstly, because I wanted to meet most of my respondents away from the busy tourist areas where, due to police presence, some Cubans may act differently, as the couple discussed in the last section. By doing my interviews in Alamar, I hoped to gain access to more interviews. Secondly, because I hoped that by interviewing the respondents in a place where they would feel safe, I would obtain more valid data. Thirdly, because by interviewing them at home, I wished to build stronger relationships with them. Fourthly, I also chose Alamar because my main initial contact (Pedro) resided

in the area, which meant that he could introduce me to the people that I was hoping to interview. Finally, the choice of location was a practical one. Away from the epicentre of tourist life in the apartment where I was staying, I was able, when not conducting interviews, to observe and write field notes without being concerned about being stopped by the police or noticed by the locals.

Although I was convinced that Alamar was the most appropriate location to carry out this research, I was also aware that Alamar has certain characteristics, in terms of its location and its inhabitants, which suggests that if the research was carried out in other neighbourhoods the findings might have been slightly different. Alamar's inhabitants, according to a study by the Center for Anthropology (Cuba) were originally mainly black vanguard workers in lower paid jobs. The racial fabric of the neighbourhood also partly explains why Alamar has become the 'home' of the Hip Hop movement in Havana and these days attracts thousands of young black Cubans to its annual concerts. While this thesis acknowledges the particularities of this location, it also acknowledges the opportunities that carrying out research in this neighbourhood offer to analyse young black Cuban women's narratives of life in contemporary Cuba. In other words, this thesis is not claiming that the findings of this research should be generalised, nor am I implying that all young Cubans share the same concerns presented in the empirical chapters. Instead, it seeks to improve knowledge on *jineterismo* by including voices of women who have been excluded from discourses on *jineterismo*, because they do not roam the streets of central Havana neighbourhoods or because they stress their desire to find love.

Although my main point of contact with the respondents was in Alamar, and most of the interviews and observations were carried out there, my research was multi-sited. I often travelled with the interviewees to central Havana neighbourhoods, and a few respondents were also interviewed when they travelled to Europe. Therefore, while most of the ethnographic research was carried out in Alamar, I also spent a significant amount of time with respondents that resided in or were visiting the UK.

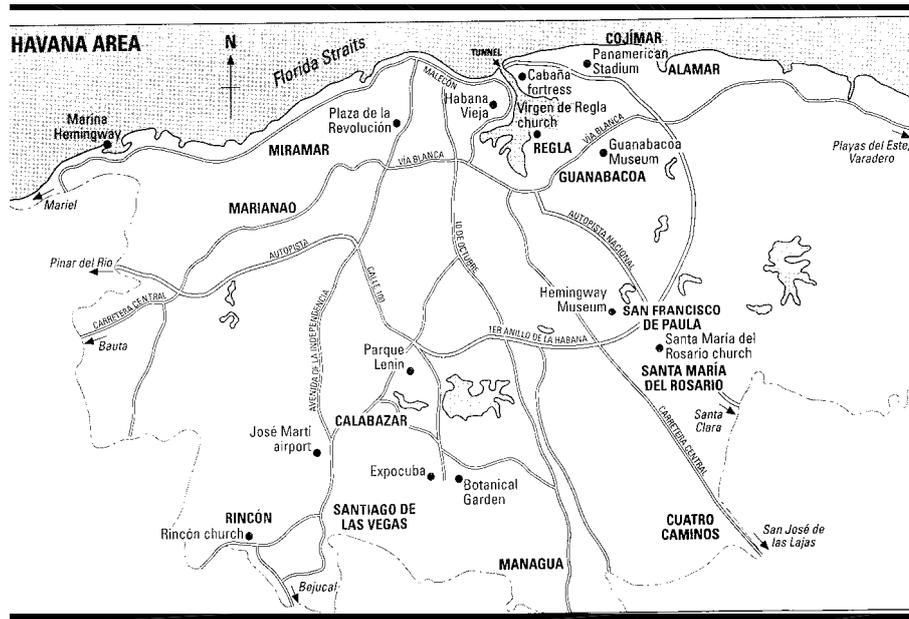


Image 2¹⁹ Map of Havana

1.13. Research Sample

The main sample of this research comprises of ten women interviewed in Cuba, and two complementary cases; that is, women interviewed in the UK (Julieta & Milania). As this is an ethnographic thesis, which focuses mainly on the cases of women living in Cuba, the two respondents interviewed in the UK are given a secondary role, as they supplement and help us to trace the continuities of *jineterismo*, but because these women rely mostly on their memories to recall their experiences, their cases fall mostly within the area of Oral History.

The participants in this research are all aged between twenty and thirty-five, an important age group, as it highlights that this thesis is mainly depicting the experiences of young Afro-Cuban women (stretching the concept ‘youth’ to include women who are 35 years old). Most of the women I met mostly through Pedro’s initiative.²⁰ However, the thesis also draws on interviews and conversations with family, friends and neighbours of respondents in the neighborhoods of Alamar and Vedado, of which the latter is the

¹⁹ Source: Calder and Hatchwell (1996: 196)

²⁰ Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the respondents. See list of respondents in Appendix I.

neighbourhood where two participants who are not labelled as *jinetteras* by their neighbourhood partly reside: Yesica and Tania.²¹

Among the twelve female contributors, Felicia, who will be introduced in Chapter 3, grew up in the same square as my husband in Alamar. Dayamí (Chapter 3), Oneida (Chapter 5) and Mercedes (Chapter 6) lived nearby (still within Alamar) and were known by some of the respondents that resided in the square where I had been living for two months each year since 1998 with my husband's family. Dayamí and Oneida both had foreign boyfriends, a German and an Italian respectively. Mercedes had been involved with two foreign men, and was looking for love on the internet. They did not seem to know each other, especially as Dayamí and Oneida always kept a very low profile in the neighborhood. Oneida was rarely seen out and about, and while Dayamí could occasionally be seen, she was not involved in the daily activities that women in the neighbourhood were involved in, such as queuing for goods and shopping.

There were respondents who visited Alamar frequently: Inesita and Alina. Inesita, introduced in Chapter 5, was married to a Cuban man who became involved with a foreign woman with the aim of emigrating (see Appendix III). Until recently her ex-partner was actively seeking a foreign husband for Inesita. Alina, introduced in Chapter 4, was until recently involved in a long-term relationship with an older Italian boyfriend.

Lola also lived in East Havana. Both Lola and Gisel had been involved romantically with two Italian men. After her failed relationship with a foreigner, Gisel sought a 'foreign' husband on the internet during her visits to the UK. Finally, two respondents live and are married to European men in the UK: Julieta, who is a housewife and mother in the UK, hinted in one of our conversations that she had been a *jinettera* in Havana. Milania, introduced for the first time in Chapter 3, is married to an Italian man and spent years in jail accused of being a *jinettera*. Her mother still resides in Alamar.

The main participants I interviewed and observed come from a diversity of households, but all grew up in a single-parent household headed by the mother; these were facts that only surfaced after being introduced to participants, therefore it was not a premeditated choice. By the end of the interview period, the majority lived (when in

²¹ Tania has her own apartment in East Havana but spends most days in Vedado looking after the elderly members of her family.

Cuba) with their mothers and siblings, and only two lived on their own (Inesita and Gisel). In terms of career and educational attainment, the participants are from a wide range of professions and have all completed College (Year 12 or equivalent). Others are either University students or graduates (Alina, Dayamí, and Oneida).

All of my main respondents are Afro-Cuban. Initially, this was completely unintentional because the only criterion that I adhered to, when I asked Pedro, and later Alex, to introduce me to individuals they knew, was that they were or had been involved in a relationship with a foreigner. I met a few white Cubans involved in relationships with tourists in Havana and Alamar, but they refused to be interviewed (see Chapter 3). If anything, the racial composition of my sample should be taken to represent my main contact's circle of friends and acquaintances and the difficulties of gaining access to whites as a black researcher. Furthermore, the racial composition could be taken as a representation of the Cuban population as a whole. Since the significant migrations of 'white' Cubans to Miami, the racial composition of the nation has changed significantly. Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs (2000: 2) describe the population as 'mainly black and brown', in comparison to the Cuban population in Miami whom they define as 'overwhelmingly white'. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning at this point that despite cities like Havana, Matanzas and Santiago de Cuba being visibly 'dark', the Cuban census of 2002 published in 2005, reveals that in Cuba 65.1% are white, 24.8% mulatto and mixed and 10% black. These figures are far from credible, however, as they rely on Cubans defining themselves. When my husband had to renew his ID in 1998, I witnessed how people defined themselves as '*mulato*', '*blanco*', '*negro*'. Workers of the ID office did not accept his auto-definition as '*negro*' and insisted that he put '*mulato*' in his ID form.

I started the research intending to interview male and female *jineteros/as*; however, my informants never introduced me to men involved in relationships with foreigners. Yet by visiting various households and in conversations, I got to know a significant number of Cuban men who were openly stating that they wanted to meet foreigners (Selas C, Roberto and Juan: Chapters 5 and 6). Men tended to be quite direct in their aims of meeting a foreigner and leaving the country, and some hinted that they expected to be paid to be interviewed by foreigners – something I refused to do on ethical grounds.

I found the women less focused on the idea of leaving Cuba or getting paid to be interviewed. They were also more willing to be interviewed. As a result I collected less data from men than women. Nevertheless, as I transcribed, translated and analysed the interviews, it was obvious that women's narratives stood out as being more complex, interesting, and with subtle but clear messages about why they wanted to meet foreigners. Therefore, I chose to focus on this group.

Apart from interacting with the main respondents, I also carried out formal and informal interviews with friends, family and neighbours of the respondents.²² Furthermore, from the balcony of the apartment where I stayed, I was able to observe the interactions between participants and other members of their community. The location of the apartment on the upper levels of the building allowed me to overhear countless conversations from older members of the neighbourhood and allowed me to observe how older members interacted with Cubans involved in relationships with *turistas*.

1.14. Interview Format

When I first met the respondents, I introduced myself as a researcher interested in 'transnational relationships' so as to avoid labelling respondents as *jineteras*, which might have prevented them from accepting an interview. The term initially created some confusion, but when I said to my main informants that I wanted to meet Cubans involved with *extranjeros*, I would immediately hear the word *jinetera* being mentioned, and therefore needed a term which did not prompt this reaction.

Most of the initial interviews were carried out in the participants' homes. Interviews were unstructured, based on themes and would normally last between one and two hours. Only on a few occasions did the first interview last longer. A Dictaphone was used to record the interviews. Consent was obtained on the first interview. Respondents were informed that interviews would be recorded; nevertheless, on every occasion, I still asked informants if I could record the interviews and use the data anonymously for my research. During the interviews I also wrote notes in a notepad about what was happening

²² Some of these extra respondents were contacted more frequently. The ones I saw for research purposes on more than three occasions are listed on Appendix II.

in the room at the time of the interview, as well as taking notes on non-verbal communication.

Respondents were told that the aim of my research was to focus on their narrations of their relationships with non-Cubans. In all cases, I explained that I was mostly focused on understanding Cubans' experiences of being in these relationships, but I was equally interested in gaining an insight into their daily lives in their neighbourhoods. Most participants were keen to share their experiences and did not object to being recorded. Dayamí was not as enthusiastic about the interviews, but accepted being recorded as long as the information was for research purposes only.

Interviews generally started with open questions about daily life in Havana or Alamar, for example: 1) How would you describe life in Alamar? 2) Tell me what it is like to live in Havana. 3) How would you describe your daily life/ routine?

Although the first interview tended to be more formal – namely, sitting around the table or in the living room – the second and third recorded interviews were more informal, with individuals carrying out their daily routines during the interview period. In total, most respondents were interviewed three times in the summer of 2005 and again (three times) in the summer of 2006. In 2007, I had informal conversations with key respondents; and in 2008 I had discussions with respondents who live in the UK.

In Cuba I carried out participant observation, spending time with various respondents. I visited most respondents on a daily basis, spent time with them at home and went out to Havana with them. Dayamí was the only respondent with whom I spent less time. She was rarely in the neighbourhood and never came to the apartment where I was staying. As visiting individuals in the community is a norm in Cuba, I saw most of my respondents on a daily basis; and when I was outside of Cuba, I maintained contact with some of the respondents either via email or I would telephone respondents who were in Europe at the same time.

I conducted three group interviews in all; and in each case because the interviewee was visited by friends or family who volunteered to participate. When not interviewing, I was taking field-notes that emerged from observations and informal chats.

I never asked the respondents directly about the label '*jinetera*' that their local communities assigned to them; but in conversations with neighbours, it was not unusual

to hear some neighbours gossiping about some of my participants. Also, perhaps because of my new status in the neighbourhood, older neighbours would inform me who the people they believed I should avoid being seen with were. They saw me as a ‘good, naïve foreigner’ and felt that by telling me this I would not be taken advantage of, or as one of the women said, damage my reputation.

I asked all respondents, at the end of the first round of interviews, how they defined themselves. Not one of the participants defined themselves as a *jinetera*. Despite avoiding the term *jineterismo* so as not to upset the respondents, it entered most of the conversations in one way or another. Sometimes it was only a brief comment; at other times I asked them to comment on the relationships between Cubans and foreigners in general.²³ Occasionally I asked them how they defined their own relationships. Because contact between ordinary Cubans and foreigners is still far from accepted, my questions could raise eyebrows and make some respondents uneasy. The awkward silences and facial expressions led me to conclude that they believed that I too was implying that they were *jineteras*. In response, most described their relationships and their first encounter with the foreigner in detail, some stating clearly that they are not *jineteras*. ‘*Para que quede bien claro*’ or ‘to make it clear’ was the type of phrases used by Alina, Felicia, Oneida and Julieta, as they described their relationships as different from what could be perceived as stemming from *jineterismo*.

Not a single participant said openly that they were, or had ever been, *jineteras* (see Chapter 4). Instead, most would stress that they met foreigners accidentally. Their answers highlight the central argument of the thesis, which is that many Cubans live forms of *jineterismo* while rejecting a *jinetera* identity, so as not to be perceived as challenging Cuba’s socialist norms and values and Cuban notions of patriotism.

Before writing this thesis, one of the main dilemmas that I faced was how to refer to the women I interviewed. I felt that many men and women had already been misunderstood and unfairly victimised by the police. I did not want to be yet another person judging and labelling them, so how would I address them? Would I focus on their racial identity, in which case I would only call them ‘Afro-Cuban’ – a term that most respondents do not use, yet is accepted in academic discourses as an umbrella term that

²³ This will be shown later in the empirical chapters (Chapters 3-6)

includes a continuum of ‘races’, from black to light brown? Would it be more sensible to use only the more ethically accepted, yet somewhat distant, researcher’s terms of ‘respondents’, ‘participants’, and ‘informants’? Or would I use the respondents’ pseudonyms to emphasise the ‘close’ relationship that I was able to develop with the Cubans? After careful consideration, I decided that to exclude the term ‘*jinetera*’ was to ignore the neighbourhood’s perceptions; after all, it was because of this term, used by them whenever I stated that I was researching transnational relationships, that I got to know the women I interviewed for this thesis. Furthermore, by avoiding the term I was, just as my participants were, passively perpetrating its negative meaning. Thus, I decided to use the terms ‘*jinetera*’, ‘Afro-Cuban’, ‘black’ and occasionally ‘mulata’ – which is how many of the women define themselves – and alternate them with the pseudonyms of the participants.

1.15. Thesis Outline

This thesis is an attempt to understand the various meanings and practices associated with *jinetismo*. The questions asked here help us to look at *jinetismo* not only as a local phenomenon, but also to place it within wider contexts in order to explore its broader meanings.

The thesis is divided into six chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 2 addresses the historical context in which *jinetismo* came to surface in the 1990s. The chapter looks at the social changes brought about by the Cuban Revolution as it attempted to build a new society free from racism and prostitution. Through an interpretation of the historical events that led to the eradication of prostitution through to the creation of the Cuban ‘new man’, we are able to decipher why the government has taken an officially stern, though also at times hypocritical, stance on *jinetismo*. Indeed, Che Guevara’s ‘new man’ (Chomsky et al, 2003) and the values associated with it are central to this thesis, for he advocated the need to ‘sacrifice’ for the nation in order to craft the ideal revolutionary. Therefore, Guevara and the other revolutionaries instilled new values in Cuban society, encouraging a culture whereby ‘*la lucha*’, or the struggle to get by, is acceptable for collective means, but never for personal ends.

Prostitution, tourism and migration are closely tied up with the concept of *jineterismo*. After analysing the government's attempt to end prostitution and tourism, I discuss Cuban migration as examining this area will provide some answers to how the Cuban government perceives those Cubans that leave the island; and secondly, it provides an insight into the numbers of Cubans that have continued to leave the island, which again tells us a great deal about daily life in socialist Cuba.

In Chapter 3, I look at how three Afro-Cuban women – Dayamí, Felicia and Milania – conceptualise and experience love, affection and conflict in their own social environment. The women are portrayed through their narratives of daily interactions in the neighbourhood with their families and residents of Alamar. Furthermore, I identify who they perceive to be their significant 'Others' and examine the frustrations and expectations they experience when they fall in love with Cuban men.

By placing the respondents in their daily environments, I have been able to observe the levels of responsibilities that the participants have for their immediate family, and their dissatisfaction with the main providers: Cuban men and the state. As I argue, their dissatisfaction with what they perceive as failed representations of masculinity, as well as their high level of responsibility for the family, are crucial factors ultimately linked to their decision to seek love or sexual relationships outside Cuba.

Chapter 4, which focuses on the meanings of *jineterismo*, is divided into two main sections. In the first part, I introduce definitions of *jineterismo* emerging from more recent ethnographic research. The theories introduced by Rundle, Facio, Cabezas, Fernandes and Elinson offer a solid foundation for my research. Their theories conflict with the Cuban official views of *jineterismo*, and generate similar views on *jineterismo* to the ones my participants were putting across in the interviews.

In this first part of the chapter I also analyse Elinson's argument that, through their actions and beliefs, *jineteras* 'erode social values'. Subsequently, after discussing Cuba's accepted norms of gender and black sexuality, I argue that one of the conflicts between the *jineteras* and the state may stem from the government's failure to address the stereotype that the *jinetera* is a black and 'decadent' woman. The second part of the chapter addresses the question: 'What are the meanings and practices that Afro-Cubans attribute to *jineterismo*?'

In this chapter, I will be examining the material from the field diaries, which are mainly drawn from observations, I also introduce Yesica – a ‘light-skinned woman’ who despite having various lovers is simply defined as a ‘fighter’ by the neighbourhood – and three dark-skinned women, who are perceived by their communities as *jineteras*: Dayamí, Felicia and Julieta. I discuss the practices carried out by the participants, which led to them being labeled *jineteras*, and explore how these individuals see and define themselves and how others see and define them. By doing so, I bring to the surface the tensions and conflicts of *jineterismo* as a social and economic practice.

Chapter 5 aims to answer the second research question: ‘How do these practices help us to understand daily life in contemporary Cuba?’ In this chapter, I develop the argument already formulated by Cubanists that *jineterismo* is basically an economic strategy. Here, I start by analysing the dilemmas of consumption in Cuba, and argue that the desperate need to obtain goods and to find employment that generates an income that, in turn, guarantees consumption, offers a rationale for *jineterismo*. Introducing three women (Inesita, Gisel and Oneida), I compare their accounts with my main male informant, Pedro, and find remarkable similarities in their tales of struggles in contemporary Cuba with my main informant’s narrations of struggles. In the second part of the chapter, I examine these discourses of consumption and argue that they are constructed as a form of resistance against the state, which is seen and ideologically perceived as the main provider.

In Chapter 6, I continue to show how *jineterismo* helps us to gain an insight into daily life in contemporary Cuba. By focusing first on ‘black’ consumption of the perceived ‘white’, foreign means of communication, I argue that for the informants *jineterismo* is associated with their desire to consume images and products from the ‘white’ West. Race, gender and nationalism, which weave into each of the main empirical chapters, are addressed directly in this chapter. In the final part of Chapter 6, I mainly address the fourth research question.

As I introduce four more women involved, or seeking love and/or sexual relationships with foreigners (Lola, Tania, Alina and Mercedes), I look at the link between *jineterismo*, tourism, migration and globalisation. Exploring more subjective facets of *jineterismo*, such as the ways Afro-Cubans imagine Europe and Europeans, I

narrate their own interpretations about why they aspire to develop relationships with Westerners.

Overall, in the empirical chapters, I seek to gain an insight into the meanings of *jineterismo* in order to understand questions of race, gender and nationalism in contemporary Cuba. Certainly, a phenomenon of this breadth that has not only elements of 'localised' but also 'transnational' dimensions can help us become familiar with how change generated by tourism, migration and other aspects of globalisation has impacted on and is lived out by ordinary black Cubans.

Chapter 2: Historical, Socio-Economic and Political Background of ‘*La Lucha*’

The historical background of this thesis on *jineterismo* must engage with an analysis of the immediate impact of the Revolution on Cuban society. I must stress that this discussion relies heavily on established secondary sources. The purpose of this contextual chapter, therefore, is to look at aspects of Cuban politics, economics and society that will enable a broad readership to understand the evolution of the nation, in which the twelve female participants discussed in the empirical chapters live.

The central point that this chapter will argue is that because the Cuban leadership implemented the revolutionary process, it suffered unprecedented socio-economic and political failures. Due to its newly implemented economic model, which some perceived as ‘erratic’ (Dominguez, 1993) and undeveloped political experience,²⁴ the government had little alternative but to manage with the few resources that it had. Subsequently, the Cuban government instigated a culture of dependency on the state, sending a message to the population that survival strategies were acceptable provided that the whole of society benefited from these strategies, but not if adopted for solely individualistic purposes. In other words, the leadership, attempting to model Cuban society on Marxist ideology, encouraged collective thinking and discouraged individualism (Fernandes, 2006; Kapcia, 2000). Indeed, as Fernandes (2006: 23) states, ‘revolutionary morals popularise such values and ideas as collectivism, work and egalitarianism’.

In addition, the Cuban government attempted to reduce Cubans’ contact with the outside capitalist world (Moses, 2000), while at the same time the state forged stronger links with left-leaning developing nations (Gleijeses, 2007). In the meantime, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, it attempted to eliminate the remnants of what they perceived as the ills of capitalist societies: poverty, prostitution and racism.

In providing an overview of Cuba’s economic and political aims, I seek to explain that the official discourse on *jineterismo* discussed in the introduction saw it as

²⁴ In his book, *Retrato de Familia con Fidel*, Carlos Franqui, the editor of *Revolución*, the newspaper of the revolutionaries, describes the early stages of the Revolution as based on sheer improvisation. He implies that Fidel’s lengthy speeches were improvised and that the rebel fighters lacked experience in politics. When asked to become the head of *Hacienda*, Franqui tells Fidel Castro: ‘*No sé nada de eso*’ (I know nothing about this). In response, Fidel Castro apparently replied: ‘*Aquí nadie sabe nada de nada*’ (Here, no-one knows nothing about nothing) (Franqui, 1981: 18).

symptomatic of Cuba's increasing contact with the highly criticised capitalist world; and just as the state's attitudes towards the outside world became ambivalent in the 1990s when tourism became a major source of income, so did its discourse on *jineterismo*.

I begin this chapter by discussing the Cuban government's attempt in the 1960s to tackle prostitution and to end the promotion of tourism. Considering that *jineterismo* is often used in Cuban official and literary discourses as a synonym for prostitution, and that prostitution is one of the side-effects of tourism, it is crucial to understand how the revolutionary leadership attempted to do away with these social 'problems'. I then proceed to discuss how the new society was shaped with the introduction of new values – including Che Guevara's idea of the 'new man' – and with the implementation of 'defective' economic policies (Dominguez, 1993; Franqui, 1981) with the goal of creating a more inclusive society, but which, in turn, were responsible for fostering great dissatisfaction within Cuba.

As my key informants are Afro-Cubans, and given that *jineteras* are perceived to be mainly black Cuban women, I then shift the focus to discuss the role that the government played in attempting to eliminate racism in post-1959 Cuba. Yet again, these attempts proved to be largely futile and caused major discontent in Cuba, mainly among 'white' affluent Cubans (De la Fuente, 2001).

Facing adversity from within, the government introduced social control strategies, which I then proceed to discuss. Finally, I concentrate on the effects of the economic crisis of the 1990s on Cuban society. I explain how it triggered yet another exodus of Cubans to the U.S.; and I proceed to discuss how the government's attempt to attract tourism to save socialism resulted in the re-emergence of 'problems', which they claimed to be associated with the capitalist world – such as racism and prostitution, the latter now referred to popularly as *jineterismo*.

2.1. Eliminating the Remnants of Capitalist Cuba

In Cuban official discourse, pre-1959 Cuba is portrayed as a place of racial and economic inequalities with very few prospects for the poor, and as being plagued by corruption, crime and prostitution. Cuban official discourse implies that before 1959, Cuba was afflicted by deep social problems such as crime, gambling, prostitution, racism, and extreme poverty. For example, school children learn from a very young age that Cuba's social problems originated from the North American culture of corruption and Batista's links with the U.S. (Martinez Sierra et al, 1983). This is a view shared by Saney (2004: 9) who confirms: 'Organised crime from the US – particularly the Mafia – came to have a tremendous influence on Cuban economics and politics'.²⁵

In official Cuban history, the island is perceived as having been saved by the 1959 Revolution led by Fidel Castro. In other words, Fidel Castro, unlike any of his predecessors, is depicted as the only leader that has been willing and able to create a better society for Cubans.

The Revolution, and especially Fidel Castro (as Fernández (2000: xiii) also points out), soon 'generated fervent feelings akin to religious devotion among many'. To many Cubans, the new Cuba represented the end of exploitation and dependence on superpowers. Indeed, many foresaw a new beginning, where Cuba would take control of its fate and eliminate puppet governments that bowed to the demands of the U.S.

It can be argued that an analysis of Cuban history reveals that Cuba is in fact 'the repeating island'.²⁶ It is, thus, not surprising to read that in the 1920s and in the 1950s, with the instability of the sugar market, the Cuban government at the time turned to tourism to boost its economy (Crahan, 1999: 564), just as Fidel's government did in the 1990s. The factors that lead Cuban governments to continuously turn to tourism are associated with their reliance on a single product – namely, sugar – and their financial dependence on one country in each of these periods: the US before 1959; and the Soviet Union (and Eastern European bloc) until the 1990s (Zimbalist, 1992: 408, 409, 411).

²⁵ Saney offers a good description of how Cuba lacked control over its economic system. He states that 'U.S corporations controlled 40 percent of sugar production and 75 percent of arable land; they also owned more than 90 percent of electric and telephone utilities, 50 percent of the railways, 90 percent of mines, 100 percent of oil refineries and 90 percent of cattle ranchers. They dominated the transportation, manufacturing and tourism sectors. Moreover, U.S. banks held more than a quarter of bank deposits.' (p: 9)

²⁶ Benitez Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and Postmodern Perspective* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996)

The root of these repetitive patterns (reliance on sugar and reverting to tourism when sugar production and prices are low) stems from Cuba's lack of profitable natural resources. As Fidel once pointed out, Cuba is not 'an oil producing country,' but rather 'the sea, the climate, the sun, the moon, the palm trees [...] are the natural wealth of our country' (Schwartz, 1997: 205).

The reliance on tourism as a form of 'economic salvation' (Schwartz, 1997: 204) is by no means characteristic of Cuba alone. In fact, as Pattullo's (1996: 5) study suggests, tourism was perceived by Caribbean leaders, in general, as the 'engine of growth'. The author implies that the region bears similar traits, which is why all Caribbean countries, nowadays, rely heavily on tourism or promote tourism as one of their main economic resources.

As in the case of the rest of the region, as Pattullo implies, tourism has enabled most Caribbean countries to survive in a highly competitive world; however, tourism alone has not provided these countries with great economic advantage. If anything, it has simply contributed to the shift from crop dependence (product dependence such as sugar, banana, and so on) to tourism dependence (Pattullo, 1996: 5).

2.2. The Impact of Tourism on Cuba before 1959

In an article entitled 'The Invasion of Tourists', Schwartz (2003) points out that Cuba's main tourists before 1959 were wealthy North Americans. Cárdenas (2000: 32) supports this view and adds that in 1952, 166,000 tourists arrived in Cuba, of which 90% were North Americans. That number was to increase in 1957 to 272,000 tourists, of which 85% were North Americans. Most of this tourism was associated with gambling and revolved around the cities of Havana (the capital) and Varadero beach resort (Cárdenas, 2000: 32). During that period, U.S. citizens perceived Cuba as a major tourist destination. Schwartz (2003: 244) states that Cuba was then envisioned as the 'Paris of the Western Caribbean', and was represented as a 'strange, exotic, tropical environment filled with African-inspired rhythms and sexually uninhibited *mulatas*'. The development of tourism was accompanied by sex tourism, and with some tens of thousands of prostitutes in the

country, Cuba soon became renowned as the ‘brothel of the Caribbean’²⁷ (Fernández Robaina, 2003: 257).

As Schwartz (1997) demonstrates, the encounters between tourists and locals were brief: in other words, they were mostly sexual relationships promoted by the tourist industry. Schwartz (1997: 86) states: ‘As Cuba increasingly marketed pleasure to fill its hotels and restaurants, advertising agencies and even tour guides slanted the appeal [of the *mulata*] accordingly.’ It must be pointed out that the image of the Cuban *mulata* who seduces ‘whites’ was also exploited by Cuban poets of the colonial period.²⁸ Interestingly, this is an image still used today by the Cuban tourist industry and promoted to attract tourism (Eckstein, 2003): an example of this is the image of the *mulata* Tropicana dancer, which clearly opposes the mostly ‘white’ images of Cuban women that appear in the Cuban travel magazines (see appendix II). In the latter, the women appear as family women or as ‘typical’ holiday-makers.

Although a discussion about the eroticising of the Cuban *mulata* will be developed in Chapter 3, in which I discuss *jineterismo* in contemporary Cuba, it is worth briefly pointing out at this stage that the myths of Afro-Cuban sexuality and sensuality are not novel themes in Cuban culture and beyond. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Cuban *mulata* had already grown into a global icon during the Batista years, attracting North American tourists because of her sensuality. As Smith and Padula (1996: 20-21) state:

Tropicana, the world’s greatest outdoor nightclub with its chorus girls in feathers and G-strings, was in full swing. Visitors disembarking from steamships in Havana were given “business cards” by young men advertising the availability of their sisters. Santiago’s [Cuba’s second most important province] bar girls eagerly awaited the arrival of American sailors on weekend leave from the naval base at Guantánamo Bay.

²⁷ Cuba has also been referred to as the ‘Thailand of the Caribbean’ (Pope, 2005).

²⁸ As in the case of Cirilo Villaverde, mentioned in the introduction.

The Tropicana cabaret was, and still is, one of the most typical tourist attractions. Cuban women wearing bikinis sway to music with extravagant chandelier-like headwear. These women also appear in postcards, items that are more likely to be purchased and used by tourists, such as the postcard below, which was available in a souvenir shop in Vedado.

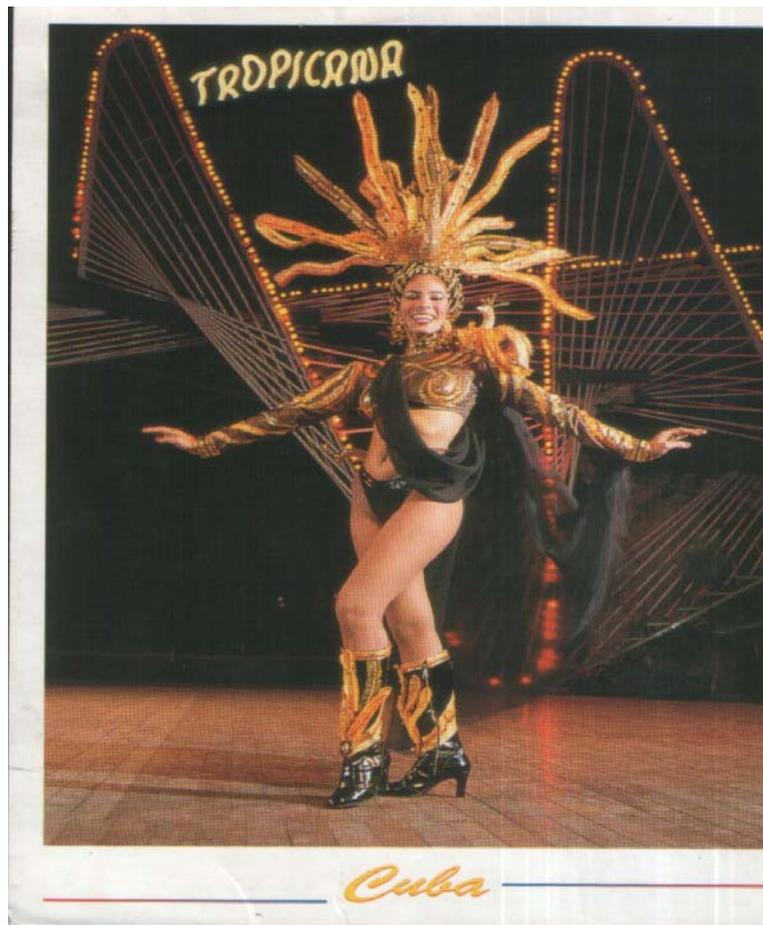


Image 3 Tropicana Dancer

Schwartz (1997), Fernández Robaina (2003), Lewis et al (1977), to mention but a few, all assert that prostitution in Cuba before the Revolution was a by-product of tourism. In that period, women (since the literature refers only to female prostitution) saw prostitution as a survival strategy. After 1959, however, Cuban society changed drastically and Cuba turned its back on its long term ally: the U.S. Fidel Castro envisaged a 'new' society – an egalitarian society where women would not sell their bodies to capitalism, but would rather lend their bodies to the revolutionary cause (Smith and

Padula, 1996). That is, ex-prostitutes would work in unison with other Cubans (men, women, children and all social groups) to defend the values of the Cuban Revolution.

2.3 A New Society without Tourism and Prostitution

The building of the new society involved the elimination of everything that resembled the old system. This was undertaken politically with the introduction of socialism as the national ideology; economically, with the shift to a centralised economy; and socially, through urban and agrarian reforms. In a strategic political move to ensure that the Revolution would remain unchallenged, the ‘rebel’²⁹ government eliminated all political parties that were previously part of the Cuban political arena, allowing only the PSP (Socialist Party of Cuba) to remain (Pérez Jr, 1999: 95).

In economic terms, the new government promoted equality in Cuban society; and in social terms, it made the end of prostitution one of its main concerns. Prostitutes were ‘forced’ into rehabilitation and sent to special institutions to learn a trade; drugs were made illegal, pimps arrested and brothels shut down (Lewis et al, 2003: 395). Moreover, despite the creation of the INIT (National Institute for the Tourist Industry) in 1959 to expand the national tourist industry, the government nationalised all hotels, along with recreational institutions (Cárdenas: 33). Cuba had decided that international tourism was no longer a priority³⁰, and, consequently, investment in the tourist sector halted.

Espino (1993: 50) states that ‘the major reason for the demise of international tourism can be attributed to the US embargo’ (imposed in 1961),³¹ which had a direct impact on the number of tourists entering the island, but she does not dismiss ‘internal ideological concerns’. In fact, as Espino goes on to explain, ‘[t]ourism was perceived as too closely associated with the capitalist evils of prostitution, drugs, gambling and organised crime’, and so to a degree it posed a threat to the new society that was designed by the revolutionary government. On a slightly different note, Hodge (2003: 629) offers

²⁹ The long bearded Revolutionaries introduced themselves to Cuban society as *los barbudos* (the bearded ones) and *los rebeldes* (the rebels) in the early days of the Cuban Revolution. Today Cuba still has a *Rebelde* newspaper, a TV and radio channel.

³⁰ Cárdenas (2000: 33) says that tourism data is scarce for the early days of the Revolution. Data only start emerging in statistical form in the 1980s.

³¹ Eisenhower severed diplomatic relations with Cuba, due to the Cuban government’s Marxist tendencies (Dominguez, 1993: 99).

an insightful explanation as to why tourism was actively discouraged in Cuba from 1959 onwards:

Havana before the Revolution was little more than a casino and brothel for wealthy U.S. capitalism in search of exotic pleasures. And the use of Cuban women was ideologically in keeping with U.S. economic colonialism. As Northern capitalists invaded the island en masse, backed by the power of the dollar and the U.S. navy, they individually penetrated the bodies of its women [...] Little wonder that the Revolution viewed prostitution as a blatant representation of foreign domination [...] As an affair of macho men, it was the duty of the Revolution to rescue the (feminized) island and its women from what was seen as the corruption of penetration from the North, and a product of capitalist exploitation.

Because tourism in the ‘new’ society (especially from capitalist societies) was perceived negatively, tourism investment decreased and the government concentrated mainly on domestic tourism (http://www.cubagov.cu/ingles/des_eco/turismo.htm). For the *rebeldes* tourism was associated with colonialism and, as Hodge mentions above, it was seen as yet another form of exploitation by the U.S., seen to be ‘consuming’ not just Cuban resources, but also the bodies of Cuban women. After many years focusing mostly on local tourism, the tourist sector no longer offered services of a good standard, because ‘the number and quality of hotel rooms was not competitive internationally’ (<http://www.cubagov.cu>).

2.4. The ‘New Man’ – A creation from ‘Above’

One of the greatest tests for the Revolution, especially after the embargo imposed by the U.S. in the early 1960s, was the creation of the concept of the *hombre nuevo* (new man). Ché Guevara envisaged the ‘new man’ as a citizen who made the transition from

capitalist to communist ideology: ‘a true communist society [...] requires the adoption of moral incentives by the “new man” and a radical diminution of the role played by money and markets’ (Guevara, 2003: 370). As he stated in 1965:

It is not a matter of how many kilograms of meat one has to eat, nor of how many times a year one goes to the beach, nor how many pretty things from abroad you might be able to buy with present-days wages. It is a matter of making the individual feel more complete, with much more internal richness and much more responsibility.

(Guevara, 2003: 373)

This arguably sexist concept, which I will be re-assessing in Chapter 5, encouraged the creation of tough women and rejected both homosexuals and feminine women, especially women who embraced consumerism. As an article in the Cuban newspaper *Revolución* stated: ‘the revolution is a matter of fists and not feathers, of courage and not trembling, of certainty and not intrigue, of creative valour and not of sweet surprises’ (Smith and Padula, 1996: 173).

In practice, Guevara’s concept promoted a culture of hardship, which contrasted with the idea of conspicuous consumption. Collectivism became part of Guevara’s rhetoric – true revolutionaries would adopt survival strategies and accept that resources would be used cautiously to ensure that all Cubans had the same. As we shall see in Chapters 5 and 6, this philosophy contradicts the practices of *jineterismo* where individuals are perceived by the state as acting for their own gain.

Another important factor about Guevara’s ‘new man’ was that he aimed to promote homogeneity in Cuba. Certainly this is one of the early signs of the construction of a new society based on completely ‘new’ values,³² and these included the expectation that the ‘new man’ would show unconditional loyalty and respect for the leadership.

In the 1960s, Guevara’s concept was also a direct attack on the many wealthy women, whose consumption patterns before the Revolution were higher than the rest of

³² Values that were new for Cuban society and based on the principles of socialism.

the population. Before the Revolution, the daily life of many affluent white Cuban women was dominated by glossy magazines like *Vanidades* and *Avance*, which according to Smith and Padula (1996: 20) ‘was a song for consumerism [with] almost a third of its pages [devoted to] advertisements, often for the products of North American subsidiaries in Cuba’. Because of its geographical proximity to Miami, and faster airlines which meant that Miami was only an hour away Havana, many wealthy Cuban women made frequent trips to Miami; others were educated in the U.S. (Smith and Padula, 1996: 20). The emerging revolutionaries were to fight against those consumerist values as well as the values carried to Cuba by the North American tourist apparatus.

Soon, the iconic image of the Cuban woman, wearing an olive green uniform and a rifle on her shoulder, replaced the image of the Cuban prostitute and that of the Cuban housewife. However, it is argued that the Revolution, which was represented by bearded *machos* and ‘brave’ *guerrilleros*, had limited space for feminine women. As Hodge (2003: 629) writes, ‘[t]he Revolution had fashioned itself a male affair, a matter of strong, tough, long bearded guerrillas expelling the island’s invaders’.

Undoubtedly, women had a wide participation in the fights against Batista; but as Smith and Padula (1996: 32) imply, their role stretched no further than taking care of the revolutionaries in the mountains. Such was the case of Celia Sanchez, Fidel’s personal assistant and rumored lover, who officially ‘took care’ of the Revolution and its women; and the case of Vilma Espín, Raúl Castro’s wife, who became the head of the Federation of Cuban Women in the 1960s. So, while the Revolution, on the one hand, was a process that supposedly benefited all, it was also arguably an exclusive one, for despite its attempts to emancipate women, it also assigned them a secondary role in the revolutionary process.

The successes of the Revolution – free education, health services, lower rents, and so on – were embraced by a large portion of the population (De la Fuente, 2001). However, what some scholars perceive as its failures – flawed economic policies (Dominguez, 1993), lack of freedom of expression (Franqui, 1985) and expected loyalty to the government and socialism (Moses, 2000)³³ – earned the Revolution many enemies

³³ The terms ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ are used here interchangeably, as in Cuba. Fidel Castro used to end his speeches with the slogan ‘*Socialismo o Muerte*’ (Socialism or Death), and Cuban students use the

both inside as well as outside Cuba (Dominguez, 1993: 105). Therefore, once socialism was declared in Cuba³⁴ the main challenge was to defend it against the U.S. (Cuba's previous main market and now its number one enemy) and those labeled as the *gusanos* – Cubans, whose ideals differed from those of the Revolution. The Cuban government, therefore, had the extremely difficult task of using scarce resources to satisfy the needs of the population; but one of its major tasks was also to protect the political system. This process of 'juggling' scarce economic resources to feed the population and challenging frequent political threats, both from within Cuba and outside the island, has provided the perfect 'breeding' ground for a new culture to emerge – the '*lucha*', or 'struggle' (to survive) culture, which requires a great degree of resourcefulness, or as Cubans call it '*inventos*' (inventing). As I will show in the next section, this culture of resourcefulness was instigated by the revolutionary leadership and enthusiastically adopted by a significant part of the Cuban population (see Chapter 5).

2.5. Managing Strategies in the New Society

The history of Cuba officially takes a separate path from the rest of the region from 1959 onwards. Cuba's revolutionary government set out to dismantle the old order. As they redistributed land through agrarian reform (Benjamin et al, 2003: 378); and with the urban reform, which saw the construction of houses leased with lifetime occupancy rights as well as the mass relocation of vanguard workers, many of whom were awarded home ownership rights (Saney, 2004: 15), the leadership gained immediate support amongst those from the lower ranks of society. Another major project the government introduced, which yet again benefited the most disadvantaged sectors of society, was the campaign to eliminate illiteracy in Cuba and to offer free education for all (Fagen, 2003: 386), as well as free health services for the entire population (Saney, 2004: 13). It was Fidel's major goal to ensure that the population had free access to main basic services; these services, in Benjamin et al's (2003: 346) words, included 'schooling, medical care, medicines [...]

slogan, '*Pioneros por el Comunismo- seremos como el Ché*' (Pioneers for Communism- we will be like Ché Guevara).

³⁴ Socialism was officially declared after the U.S. sponsored the Bay of Pigs attack, where Cuban exiles were defeated at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba in 1961. In an emotional speech, Fidel declared that the Revolution was Socialist.

water, burial services, sports facilities, public phones'. As the authors add, the government also dropped the price of electricity, gas, rent and transportation.

Despite enormous efforts, the government of Fidel Castro has not been able to develop a thriving economy. On the contrary, as pointed out by Dominguez (1993: 108), the Cuban economy has been underperforming since the early days of the Revolution. In the sixties, this deficit was caused, it was argued, by the Cuban leadership's 'flawed vision' of a centralised economy based on the socialist economic model (Dominguez, 1993: 109). Of great influence were the views of Ché Guevara, who in the early sixties was Minister of Industry and Head of the Cuban National Bank.³⁵ Under his initiative, material incentives (i.e. wages) would be replaced by moral incentives.³⁶

The new socialist society was viewed by many Cubans as the best that could have happened in a developing country. Since independence, and after a sequence of corrupt governments who ignored the voices of the population, most Cubans were enthusiastic about the spirit of the *rebeldes*, who filled them with promises of 'radical social change' (Fernández, 2000: xiii). Indeed, the Cuban leaders did not make empty promises, as Benjamin et al (2003: 344) emphasise, during the initial stages of the Revolution; and in order to combat undernourishment, one of the main problems of pre-revolutionary Cuba, the Cuban government raised the salary for the whole population. However, as the authors state, 'once people had more money to spend on food, it became clear that there was not enough food to go around'. This clearly demonstrates that, due to a lack of experience, the government implemented policies that ultimately adversely affected the whole nation.

Parallel to the efforts to combat undernourishment, the Cuban government also 'sought to generate fuller employment' (Benjamin et al, 2003: 345); but as the authors suggest, full employment, and the fact that most people had enough money to get by, meant that production would be affected and, undeniably, production decreased. The major problem during that period was that as the population was consuming extensively,

³⁵ Franqui states that Che and Raúl (Fidel's brother) were the ones with Marxist tendencies at the beginning of the Revolution and they influenced Fidel to become a communist.

³⁶ Cubans participating in voluntary activities in their communities or nationwide – for example those who participated in the massive literacy campaigns – were given moral incentives, such as the idea that they were doing something for their homeland, for the Revolution. Those that fought in the wars of Angola and those that stood by the revolutionary cause would be seen as real revolutionaries, a term which carried strong positive meanings.

foodstuffs ran out at a faster rate. At an even deeper level, the U.S. embargo imposed in 1961 impacted hugely on the island (Saney, 2004: 21).

Because of the embargo, Cuba's main market was no longer accessible and products from the U.S. began to disappear from Cuba's shelves (Benjamin et al, 2003: 348-49). As a result, Cuba had to rely on whatever little they could find, while at the same time ensuring that all Cubans had access to the similar amounts of basic resources. This was a difficult task because, as Dominguez (1993: 96) states, prior to 1959 the United States 'took about two-thirds of Cuban exports and supplied about three-quarters of its imports'. Hence, the embargo, which left Cuba with no other option but to *inventar* with whatever little resources they had, had a significant impact on Cuba.

Nutritionist Benjamin et al (2003: 349) provide a vivid description of the impact that the 1960s economic setback had on Cuban society. The authors explain that the embargo 'disrupted the island's agriculture, which had become dependant on the United States for farm machinery, fertilisers, pesticides, seeds [...]'. The authors go on to say that:

Cuba had become dependent on the import of large quantities of food – wheat, rice, beans, lard, poultry, dairy products and eggs, even onions and garlic. With over 70 percent of these imports coming from the United States, the abrupt embargo on U.S. trade with Cuba left the country in dire straits.

Increasing shortages led the government to implement policies to control consumption. The Cuban authorities nationalised all retail stores as well as most businesses; and a rationing system was implemented in 1961 where purchasing power was to be centralised, that is to say, monitored by the government (Benjamin et al, 2003: 351). As noted by Benjamin et al, community stores were also introduced where people would buy rationed products with a ration card (351-52). Although rationing was meant to be a 'temporary' measure, it has become a feature of Cuban daily life, hence the need to find ways to survive and the culture of dependency on the state.

In a matter of years, the culture of high consumption of Cubans – mainly the elites and middle classes – changed. Cubans of all social and racial backgrounds were asked to control their consumption habits, and the government stepped in to monitor consumption. As a result, a new society began to emerge different from any other in the region. It needs to be mentioned, however, that scholars like Zimbalist (1992) and certainly the respondents perceive the 1980s as a period of relative material affluence. Respondents, for example, recall the various types of ice-cream flavours sold at Coppelia, supermarkets filled with eastern bloc products and remember the diversity of dishes served at the then extremely affordable Cuban Pesos restaurants. Indeed, despite depicting the 1980s as a ‘blurred’ period economically, Erisman (1993: 222) acknowledges that due partly to economic growth (Cuba’s economy grew by 8%), the state was able to redistribute wealth and income, transforming Cuba in the most equal nation in Latin America. The end of the 1980s, on the other hand, was marked by uncertainty. Nevertheless, nothing had prepared Cuba for the crisis that was to follow. As Zimbalist stated (1992: 407) ‘Cuba in 1992 was in the worst crisis of the Revolution.’ The economic crisis of the early nineties was the most tragic that Cuba and Cubans had endured since 1959. Its impact on the Cuban population is discussed in detail in section 2.10.

As Dominguez (1993) notes, the inexperience of the Cuban revolutionary government was the main source of Cuba’s continuous economic crisis. While it faced great economic difficulties, in social terms one of its main challenges was to turn a neo-colonial racist society into a non-racist egalitarian nation.

2.6. Tackling Race and Racism³⁷

In a speech given at the presidential palace on 22nd March 1959, Fidel Castro, a ‘white’ Cuban,³⁸ condemned racism and urged Cubans to forge a ‘new *patria*’, or homeland (De la Fuente, 2001: 261). As De la Fuente points out, the revolutionary government tackled two forms of racism in Cuba: ‘One that barred blacks from access to cultural centres and the other, “the worst”, that denied them access to jobs’ (De la Fuente, 2001: 263). Thus, the Cuban leadership addressed institutional racism – that which

³⁷ I must stress that when discussing races here, I do not assume that there are ‘pure’ races in Cuba.

³⁸ Fidel Castro’s mother was a *mulata* and his father Spanish; but in Cuba phenotype is the most important criteria used to define someone as white.

prevented Afro-Cubans from becoming equal members of society; however, very little was done consistently and, in the long term, to change 'white' Cubans' perceptions and attitudes towards black Cubans. Marxist ideology foresees the end of class, racial inequalities and major social problems as nations make the transition from capitalism to communism. As he modeled the Revolution on Marxist ideology, Fidel was optimistic that a more egalitarian economic model would indeed solve a series of social problems, which is why a systematic government-planned campaign against racism was not considered necessary.

De la Fuente (2001b: 30) states that in the first year of the Revolution, Fidel Castro called for a national debate on race and racism in order to grasp 'its causes, manifestations and solutions.' In fact, Fidel Castro had mobilised 'journalists and intellectuals to educate the public on the fallacies of racial stereotypes' (De la Fuente 2001b: 30). For the first time ever, Cuba had a leader that defended the poor and those at the bottom of the racial/class hierarchy – the blacks. Not only did Fidel Castro present himself as the representative of the lower classes, he also emphasised that he would enlist all efforts to eradicate racism from the island.

Fidel's idea of creating an integrated Cuba was akin to Jose Martí's dream of creating a nation for all (De la Fuente, 2000). In the nineteenth century, Jose Martí, Cuba's national hero, said: 'Man is more than *white*, more than *mulatto*, more than *black*. *Cuban* is more than *white*, more than *mulatto*, more than *black*.' Martí's idea of the new patria for *all* was later reinforced by Fernando Ortíz's³⁹ notion that 'without the negro, Cuba would not be Cuba.' Fidel Castro clearly took these views forward. In a speech at the labour rally given on 23rd March 1959, he claimed that 'racism and Revolution' were incompatible concepts (De la Fuente, 2001: 266), and urged Cubans to be united under the banner of the Revolution:

³⁹ Ethnographer Fernando Ortiz was the first Cuban intellectual to write extensively about black Cubans and to popularise the term Afro-Cuban. His early writings were somewhat controversial and dehumanised blacks. The term was first used in 1847 by António Veitía (Mangual, 2004: 16). Most of my respondents prefer to be called black Cubans, and not many had heard of the term Afro-Cuban. Although this term is used widely by scholars outside of Cuba, Cuban writers tend to refer to *el negro cubano* (black Cubans) (Serviat, 1986; Robaina, 1990; Morales Domínguez, 2007).

We are going to put an end to racial discrimination in work centres by waging a campaign to end this shame, to end this hateful, repugnant system with a new slogan: Work opportunities for every Cuban, without discrimination by race or sex. Let there be an end to racial discrimination at work centres. In this way we will gradually build the new fatherland.

(Cited in De la Fuente, 2001: 266)

The Cuban leader's determination to talk publicly about racism caused discontent among white Cubans (De la Fuente, 2001); and, as a result, the Cuban leader eventually toned down his speeches, although it was clear that he continued to view racism as an anti-revolutionary act. In a later speech, Fidel addressed angry white Cubans and urged them to end the segregation in recreational places:

I did not say that we were going to open the exclusive clubs for blacks to go there to dance and entertain themselves. I did not say that. People dance with whomever they want to dance and...socialise with whomever they want.

(Fidel Castro, cited in De la Fuente, 2001: 265)

According to Saney (2004: 106): 'The Marxist position sees race and racism as a phenomenon totally subordinate to class and class oppression.' This explains why the Cuban government believed that by dismantling the class system racism would disappear. However, in retrospect, it could be argued that the leadership would have gained more by launching a persistent campaign to reach the minds of Cubans, and by eliminating negative stereotypes of blacks. As well as attempting to eliminate class inequalities, as they built the new Cuban society the authorities briefly engaged in an ideological battle against racism. Slogans and billboards appeared in the newspaper *Revolución* in an attempt to change the attitudes of white Cubans towards blacks (De la Fuente, 2001: 270-71).

It is believed that the series of measures taken by the Revolution did indeed reduce racial inequalities (Hoetink, 1997: 19): for instance, the agrarian reforms had a positive impact on the lives of black Cubans (Nodal, 1986). Furthermore, the fact that jobs were created for all Cubans, and that every Cuban had access to free education and health services, gave Afro-Cubans better life opportunities than they had previously.

By 1962, the Cuban authorities claimed to have eradicated racial discrimination. From that period, race became a taboo, and just as being racist was considered to be counterrevolutionary, mentioning race was no longer tolerated (De la Fuente, 2001). Today it is argued that Afro-Cubans are one of the groups that have benefited the most from Fidel's Revolution (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, 2000; Helg, 1995; McGarrity and Cárdenas, 1995); and this fact in itself has great implications for Afro-Cubans, as it affects their rights to protest when they feel that they are being discriminated against. For a long time in Cuba people were silent on the issue of race; and to acknowledge the fact that racism in Cuba exists was and still is seen as a direct challenge to the Revolution, which claimed for a long time to have eradicated it (Mangual, 2004; Moore, 2003). These factors partly explain why Afro-Cubans at times endure racial discrimination and do not challenge the status quo.

Between 1962 and 1986 there were three main views on racism in Cuba. Cuban government's discourse stated that the Revolution would solve the 'black problem'⁴⁰ and eliminate racism, but that it would do so by dismantling Cuba's unequal capitalist system. In other words, it would treat racism as a by-product of economic inequality. With this view, cultural forms of racism remained intact and belief in the inferiority of blacks persisted.

Possibly one of the greatest failures of the Revolution in its fight against racism was that it did not highlight the significant Afro-Cuban contribution to Cuba's independence in official Cuban history, which is why many white Cubans believed that they 'took the chains of black people' (De la Fuente, 2001: 324). Furthermore, some of the intellectuals that were recognised for their work on Afro-Cuban cultures – for example, Fernando Ortíz, whose work is discussed in Chapter 4 – actually played an

⁴⁰ *El problema negro* (the black problem) was the subject of studies on race in Cuba before the Special Period Crisis. Cf. *El problema negro y su solución definitiva* (by Serviat 1986) and *El Negro en Cuba antes del Siglo XX* (Fernández Robaina 1990)

important role in re-creating negative stereotypes of black Cubans. In education textbooks, which were used to pass on the message and the deeds of the Revolution to younger generations, featured very few Afro-Cuban heroes (Martínez Sierra et al, 1983). Thus, Cuban history is mainly 'white' with very few role-models for Afro-Cubans.

Carlos Moore (1984, 1988), a black Cuban exile, has a different view to that of the Cuban Revolution. He claims that the Revolution is formed of a small elite run by whites (Nodal, 1986: 261) and to benefit white Cubans. In his early work, Moore argued that the revolutionary elite reinforced discrimination by not allowing Afro-Cubans to hold positions of power. Moreover, he stated that 'the government moved conspiratorially to keep blacks out of high government' (Rout, 1976: 310). Moore (1988) went on to blame the Cuban government for sending black Cubans to die in the wars in Africa, implying that the government intended to 'whiten' the Cuban population as Cubans during the post-colonial period had intended. His views have changed significantly since then, and in 1992 Moore, who had one of the most controversial views on race in Cuba, acknowledged that under the current government, racism in Cuba has decreased (Pérez Sarduy, 2004, www.afrocubaweb.com).

Finally, a third approach, and one which this thesis supports, is that the Revolution has contributed to the decrease of racial discrimination by creating spaces for black Cubans in the new Cuba; however, the measures introduced were not enough to eradicate it completely (Sutherland, 1969; De la Fuente, 2000; Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, 2000; Saney, 2004; Brock and Cunningham, 1991). Many of the scholars who follow this rationale argue that the government did not handle the race issue effectively and that it should have tackled not just institutional but cultural forms of racism.

2.7. The Emergence of Tourist Apartheid in the 1990s and Economic Differences between Black and White Cubans

In the 1990s, Cuban society underwent one of its major changes since Fidel Castro rose to power in 1959. Global and local forces, such as the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the increased presence of tourists in the main Cuban cities, contributed to a change in the old social order. Cuban society had previously been closed to outside influences and migration was considered an anti-revolutionary and unpatriotic act, mainly

because it was associated with the thousands of Cubans that had left the island and settled in the United States in search of alternative political and economic options.

Since the 1990s, Cubans' contact with foreigners has increased. However, the nature of these encounters is subject to much debate because official, economic exchanges are accepted but unofficial communications are often stigmatised. In other words, while it is acceptable to see Cubans interacting with tourists for business and in official settings, all other types of relations tend to be met with social disapproval (Starmer-Smith, 2005). This can be responsible for creating divisions along racial lines in places like Havana, where the interactions of white Cubans with foreigners are generally not questioned, whereas Afro-Cubans tend to be the victims of police prosecution, being seen as hustlers and prostitutes.

An explanation given for this racial division, as Alejandro de la Fuente (2001) claims, is that Afro-Cubans have lower education levels and are seen as less likely to be employed by the tourist sector. But Morales Domínguez (2007), a Cuban writing from inside the island, argues that in terms of educational attainment blacks are not necessarily disadvantaged. In his view, the progress of black Cubans is handicapped partly by their past as slaves, servants and individuals amongst the lower ranks of society, which means that they would need more than just education to 'catch up' with white Cubans. Secondly, Morales Domínguez argues that blacks are still marginalised because Cuban society is still racist. He mentions, albeit briefly, that it is very difficult to see Afro-Cubans in good positions in the tourist sector.⁴¹ Indeed, as confirmed in previous research by De la Fuente (2001: 32), 'good presence' (appearance) is the central criterion used when considering employment applications in this sector. As affirmed by De la Fuente (32), such a criterion immediately excludes Afro-Cubans from these jobs because they are portrayed as being 'unattractive, dirty, prone to criminal activities, inefficient, and lack[ing] proper manners and education.'

Cubanists have acknowledged forms of racial discrimination in contemporary Cuba. The evidence shown by De la Fuente (2001) confirms that Afro-Cubans are

⁴¹ Morales Domínguez (2007) argues that the topic (race/ racism) must not be treated as a taboo and calls for more discussion on the topic. Interestingly, his account avoids discussing contemporary Cuba in any depth and returns consistently to pre-Revolutionary Cuba. Curiously he claims both that 'racism no longer exists in our national culture' (311) and that 'racism and discrimination still exists in Cuban society' (313).

economically at a disadvantage and are inadequately represented in national politics. Likewise, in the closing paragraph of her book, historian Aline Helg (1995: 248) questions the myth of racial equality in Cuba, stating that:

[t]his myth also allows the new ruling elite to ignore the issue of racism in socialist Cuba. But the fact that Afro-Cubans even today remain largely underrepresented in the upper spheres of power and overrepresented in the lower strata of society indicates that the Afro-Cuban struggle for equality has yet to be fully won.⁴²

If equality was supposed to be a reality during the first three decades of the Revolution, there was enough evidence during the 1990s to suggest that it was an outright deception. Cubans who work in dollar outlets⁴³ are mostly white. Black Cubans, if they do work in the sector, hold jobs that are perceived as inferior, namely cleaners and other positions that do not involve direct contact with tourists (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, 2000). Because of the lack of access to ‘good’ jobs in hotels, individuals like Osmani (a key interviewee in my previous research) see themselves as lucky when they actually get a job in one. Yet, as Osmani states in the extract that follows, Afro-Cubans are aware that they will have to fight against the odds to maintain that job.

Un hotel, ellos...se mira como una cosa muy fina en Cuba, ¿no? El servicio...una cosa muy de gente clásica. Por eso yo estudié Carpeta, ¿no? Me gustaba la Carpeta, ¿no? Y entonces fui el único carpetero hombre de Cuba ahí.

⁴² Aguirre and Bonilla Silva (2002) say that Afro-Cubans are overrepresented in the prison population and live in housing of lower quality than white Cubans (321)

⁴³ Jobs in the tourist sector are currently the most sought-after positions in Cuba, because of the ability to earn dollars (now Pesos Convertibles, even though many Cubans still call it dollars) and to obtain basic goods.

¡Hombre y pa' el colmo negro! O sea que tenía todas las de perder.⁴⁴

(Osmani (42) interviewed in South-East England 2004)

The overall consensus on race in contemporary Cuba is that there has been a re-emergence of racial discrimination (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, 2000; McGarrity and Cárdenas, 1995; Godfried, 2000; De la Fuente, 2001), and that this resurgence has been acknowledged by Fidel Castro. In 2003 at the May Day Rally Fidel mentioned racism; however, in his speech he stressed that racism is a problem inherited from the U.S.

From the earliest months of the Revolution, not a single one of the forms of racial discrimination copied from the south of the United States was left intact. In recent years, the Revolution has been particularly striving to eliminate any lingering traces of poverty and lack of education that afflicted the descendants of those who were enslaved for centuries [...] Soon, not even a shadow of the consequences of that terrible injustice will remain.

(<http://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/2003/05/01/htm>)

Morales Domínguez (2007) offers a different explanation for the persistence of racism in Cuba. He argues that new manifestations of racism emerged because although the government suppressed overt racist practices and eliminated segregation, it failed to understand the depth of the problem. Indeed, earlier, in 1986, Cuban scholar Pedro Serviat was confident that the Revolution was the solution to the black problem; likewise, Fernández Robaina (1990) believed that education would fix the 'black problem'. As he proposed the solution, Fernández Robaina urged the unity of Cubans in much the same way as the Cuban government has done for decades, arguing that racial divisions would

⁴⁴ A hotel is seen as something very posh in Cuba, do you know what I mean? The service...it's something for fine people. That's why I studied to become a receptionist; do you know what I mean? I liked being a receptionist; do you know what I mean? And then I was the only male receptionist in Cuba there. Male and to make matters worse *negro*, which means that I was against the odds.

only 'weaken' the Cuban nation. It is mainly because of this defensive attitude that Brock (1999) states that 'there is a lack of serious discourse and scholarship on race in Cuba by Cubans'. This statement is confirmed by Morales Domínguez who stresses that despite its 'humanitarian' attempts, the Revolution failed to adequately deal with racism in the 1960s, and thus, in his view, as Cuba opened up to tourism again, racism re-emerged.

2.8. The Presence of the *Mulato/a* in Cuba's Racial System

In 2001, Guanche (2001), an anthropologist and researcher from the Fundación Fernando Ortíz, stated:

[w]e should not identify, nor exaggerate the black problem in relation to the mulatto problem, and the white problem. This problem should not distract us from the central problem, which is the existence of our country as an independent nation as well as to get out of the crisis...'

(http://www.lajiribilla.cu/2001/n22_octubre/fuenteviva.html)

What is interesting in the quote above is the acknowledgement of *mulato/a* as a separate racial category. Unlike the two-tier racial system in the U.S., the Cuban racial system is divided into various categories, with the lowest status awarded to darker skinned Cubans. The *mulato* racial category is therefore conveniently adopted by lighter-skinned Cubans to differentiate themselves from those with darker skin.

While the main Cuban 'races' are officially *blanco/a* (white), *mulato/a* (mixed race) and *negro/a* (black), unofficially categories include *moro/a* (Cubans define *moros* as people with dark skin and 'good hair'), *jabao/a* (very light skin and, as they stress, 'bad hair') *mulata clara* (very light skinned) and many more. Indeed, the terms are often used as an opportunity to appear 'whiter' than individuals actually are. For instance, many self-defined *mulatos/as* are the children of 'black' with *mulato/a*, not necessarily black and white; this highlights the stigma of being labelled as 'black' or *negro/a*.

The term *mulata* in Cuba is used ambivalently. It is often used affectionately, but the underlying purpose is to differentiate lighter skin Cubans from the darker skinned.

Cubans take pride in defining themselves as *mulatos* and this is partly associated with the writings of Nicolás Guillen, Cuba's national poet, himself a *mulato*, who depicted the Cuban nation as a *mulato* nation. On the other hand, the term *mulata* is associated with sensuality, a point put forward by Vera Kutzinski (1993) in her book *Sugar and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism*: an exotic image, whose implications I discuss in Chapter 4. At the same time, racial prejudices lie at the heart of the pride of being called *mulato/a* as it implies having a higher status than black Cubans.

Kempadoo (1998), Fusco (1998) and Cabezas (2004) trace the origins of the *mulata* concept in the colonial period, where black women were raped and sexually exploited by white colonisers. The *mulata*, the 'love child' of a Spanish master and black slave, therefore became synonymous with illicit sex (Fusco, 1998: 155). Fusco mentions an old Caribbean saying: 'white women were for marrying, black women were for work and *mulatas* for sex.' In the same chapter, Fusco explains why the *mulata* and not any other 'group' has become a national icon. The author suggests that the Cuban government has used this image to attract tourism (155), but also stresses the fact that due to greater numbers of white Cubans migrating to the U.S. and higher population growth among brown and black Cubans, Cuba's youth are predominantly mixed race.

There has been much debate about the racial system in Cuba. Hoetink (1997) places the Cuban racial system within the Spanish Caribbean – which is the one based on appearance (phenotype) – and contrasts it with the North American system – which is based on ancestry (genotype).⁴⁵ The latter he sees as more credible. Hoetink (1997: 21) argues that Cuba's racial system is closer to Puerto Rico's, and that it is a 'racial continuum in which the extreme of the continuum [black and white] seems more visible and more numerous than the population situated in the middle'. Wade (1993: 29) problematises this system, arguing that it is less credible than the North American system because phenotype is 'alterable' and 'it gives rise to vaguer, more flexible' racial systems.

Nadine Fernández (1996: 101) agrees with Wade and Hoetink and adds that the Cuban system is 'fluid' and 'ambiguous'. She adds that it is because of this ambiguity that race is used in Cuba to enhance the status of some Cubans as more desirable, because

⁴⁵ For a full discussion of Race in Latin America see Peter Wade (1993; 2003)

they are 'closer' to the 'white' category, and others as less desirable because they are closer to Africa. Indeed, Osmani, a respondent in my MA dissertation, was visibly offended when I labelled him Afro-Cubano, stating that he had no connections with Africa, and stressing that he had Chinese and White in his genes too. Like most respondents, he preferred to be labelled either *mulato* or simply 'Cuban'. This demonstrates how for ordinary Cubans, race is still a very sensitive topic. In official discourses, however, the race topic risks threatening national unity and consequently undermining the revolutionary project, as the questions posed by Cuban writer Fernández Robaina confirm:

Are we to be a small people and on top of that divided? [...]
To what end if not to weaken the nation, to weaken Cuba?
Are we to be weak and also divided by color? [...] We have
to uproot the last colonial vestiges, conscious of making
that phrase of Martí a reality, he said it before, we have to
repeat it now, that a Cuban is more than a white, more than
a black, and we are Cuban.

(Fernández Robaina, cited in Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, 1993: 103)

Curiously, as in the case of race, the two other main topics that are still treated in Cuba as taboo are migration and prostitution. Ironically, all three (race, migration and prostitution) are linked with *jineterismo*, yet the government does not openly accuse *jineteras* of being counter-revolutionaries as these women contribute to the country's economy. Nevertheless, as I will show in Chapters 4 and 6, constraining forms of social control are implemented to prevent these women from meeting foreigners; and while publicly the government accuses these women of being immoral, economically, it is benefiting from weddings that take place between Cubans and foreigners.⁴⁶ In the section that follows, I discuss how the government has been protecting its system and 'controlling' Cubans that stray from the norms introduced by the Cuban leadership.

⁴⁶ A foreign national who marries a Cuban may pay up to £1000 (excluding the visas from the country of destination) to legalise the Cuban, so that s/he does not lose his rightful Cuban citizenship and the right to travel freely to Cuba.

2.9. Protecting the New System: Social Control Strategies in Revolutionary Cuba

Particularly relevant to this thesis is the role played by mass organisations in maintaining social control and acting as a preventative measure, singling out those Cubans not conforming to revolutionary norms and values – a category that would include *jineteras* because of their contact with foreigners (generally from capitalist countries). However, in the early years of the Revolution, mass organisations were more concerned with Cubans posing a political threat to the Revolution – the *contrarrevolucionarios* (counter-revolutionaries).

As counter-revolution both inside as well as outside Cuba increased,⁴⁷ the Cuban government created its own defence mechanism at the grassroots level. As Dominguez (1993: 105) asserts, thousands of Cubans joined the militia ‘to build support and to intimidate internal enemies’. This militia includes, among others, the FMC (Federation of Cuban Women), which played a major role in the rehabilitation of prostitutes and the ‘elimination’ of prostitution. The FMC, which was led by Vilma Espín was set up in August 1960. As mentioned in the introduction, Espín was highly critical of *jineterismo* and, as in the case of prostitution in the 1960s, the FMC was also heavily engaged in eradicating *jineterismo* in the 1990s.

One month after the FMC was set up, the government introduced the CDR, the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (Dominguez, 1993: 105, 127). The existence of these mass organisations partly answers the question of why, despite great dissatisfaction with the Cuban system, the government has been able to stay in power for five decades and prevent massive counter-revolutionary acts from taking place. Indeed, as Thomas (1971: 1457) argues, the CDRs, the PCC and the armed forces ‘control the country’.

Thomas’s description of the CDR gives us a useful insight into the way Cuba is controlled to prevent mass upheavals from taking place. He states:

The CDRs report on suspicious counter-revolutionaries, list possessions of those who have asked to leave Cuba, organise everything from fiestas to volunteers to work in

⁴⁷ Refers to dissidents and political exiles.

the country, and interfere in all private life for the public good [...] The anniversary of their foundation, on 28 September 1960, is one of the main revolutionary feast days, accompanied by dancing, poetry reading, beauty contests and a mass rally in the Plaza de la Revolución,⁴⁸ with a speech by Castro [...]

CDRs, as Dominguez points out (1993: 105), ‘were set up on every city block, in each large building [and] factor [ies]’; and although CDR membership is not compulsory, it is high due to the fact that, as Medin (1990: 157) states, membership has become as ‘natural’ and ‘necessary’ as being a revolutionary. In fact, as noted by Dominguez (1993: 127-28) membership has ‘become a prerequisite for a successful life in Cuba’ or simply ‘a bearable life’.⁴⁹

The position Cubanists tend to adopt regarding the role of the CDR will to an extent be associated with their political inclinations – that is, whether they are sympathetic to the Cuban government or not. For instance, Thomas describes the CDRs as ‘the core of the new Cuban society, creating a new culture of propaganda, participation, conformity and labour’ (1457). Moses (2000: 10) has a similar view and adds that the CDRs not only control who is ‘straying from the Revolution’, but also check on those who are in ‘contact with foreigners’. However, Saney (2004: 66) does not believe that the CDR performs a negative role in society; on the contrary, he says that they were ‘established to organize the population’ and later became the nucleus of social and community activities, organising ‘public security efforts, recycling drives, cultural and children’s events, vaccination and blood donation campaign’. From his standpoint, the CDR plays a valuable role in society as it allows all members of society not only to socialise but also to voice their problems. As he states, the CDR ‘ha[s] generated community cohesion and togetherness’ (66). Furthermore, according to his argument, the informal social control strategies linked with the CDR have ensured that social stability is maintained during times of economic crises.

⁴⁸ Revolutionary Square.

⁴⁹ In the empirical chapters (mainly Chapters 3, 5 and to a smaller extent 6), I will demonstrate the intricate relationship between Cuban *jineteros/as* and the CDRs.

Before the 1990s, Cubans not joining the CDR were automatically sending strong political messages to the state. These days, although less influential than they used to be prior to the 1990s, the CDRs are still important and most Cubans are involved in the activities they organise.

2.10. The Impact of the Economic Crisis and Transition to the Special Period

As early as 1986, the Cuban government began a process of rectification to consider changes in the way it operated both politically as well as economically, and to grant the people more political control (Hernández, 2003: 100; De la Fuente, 2001: 317). This was in response to an economic recession, which began in the same year and was to plague Cuba for many years to come (Pérez Jr, 1999: 146).

In a speech given in 1987, Fidel Castro said: '[o]ur error is not having done more and better over 30 years; in making mistakes, some of which stem from imitating the experiences of other socialist countries, many of which they are now saying are no use' (Stubbs, 1989: 9). The rectification process was interrupted with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of socialism in the ex-USSR (Hernández, 2003: 100).

The fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries, followed by the tightening of the US embargo in the early nineties, caused Cuba to enter the so-called Special Period in Time of Peace (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, 2000: 7). At that time, the embargo punished Cuba further for refusing to rejoin the 'capitalist community'. With the embargo, and without its former socialist allies, Cuba experienced shortages of food, medicine and virtually everything else (Cabezas, 1998).

As pointed out by Saney (2004: 24) the crisis impacted deeply on the daily lives of Cubans. From 1990 until 1994, Cuba endured possibly the most traumatic period in modern times. Its effects have marked Cubans to the point where many recall periods when Cuba was a 'laughing' nation (1980s) and present the early nineties as a period of desperation and absolute poverty. In 1992-93 an epidemic affected the vision of 50,000 people. Shortages of nutritious food left children, pregnant women and the population as a whole anaemic. Indeed, Kapcia (2000: 217) described the population at the time as 'visibly thinner' and 'despondent'. Furthermore, in that year, hospitals lacked medical equipment, medicine, vaccines, and so on. Lack of petrol meant that the population could

no longer rely on the transportation system as buses became irregular. Also, due to the shortage of petrol, Cubans had to endure long hours of blackouts. Other examples include the fact that schools ran out of paper, textbooks; and shops in general were bare. Furthermore, workplaces were shut due to a shortage of resources, and agricultural production was also affected due to the 'inability to obtain fertilizers, animal feed and spare parts for the machinery' (Saney, 2004: 23).

As noted by Hernández, after the dismissal of socialism in Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR: 'the sense of isolation, abandonment, instability [...] in all aspects of daily life had a devastating effect'. Prior to the 1990s, Cuba was a member of the Comecon, also known as CMEA (Council of Mutual Economic Assistance).⁵⁰ The collapse of socialism also meant the dissolution of the Comecon economic bloc, which was Cuba's economic backbone (Hernández, 2003: 100). The Comecon, and especially the Soviet Union, acted as Cuba's veins; it bought Cuba's sugar and provided the country with petroleum and most consumer goods (Hernández: 101).⁵¹ With its collapse, Cuba had to find ways to stay afloat.

Before 1989, Cubans were not allowed to use dollars; and as Stubbs (1989: 5) points out, 'dollar shops were a source of great irritation' due to the fact that Cubans living in the U.S. could buy products in those shops when visiting Cuba, yet those living permanently on the island could not.

In 1993, as Cuba could no longer count on their former socialist allies, and in response to the crisis, the government created a series of measures to maintain socialism and to alleviate the effects of the crisis. These 'market-oriented' measures were, according to De la Fuente (2001: 317), the 'legalisation of U.S. dollars [in 1993], different forms of self employment, foreign investment, and "free" agricultural markets'. Such measures, which Hodge (2001: 28) refers to as the transition to capitalism, enabled increased contact between the somewhat isolated and increasingly poor 'locals' and foreigners, but also increased inequalities in Cuban society (Eckstein, 2003: 614). As

⁵⁰ Other members included the Soviet Union, Eastern European countries and Mongolia (Saney: 21)

⁵¹ Besides, as Valle (1996: 107) points out, the CMEA provided Cuba with 'food, clothes, footwear, and other products of low quality, but affordable prices for the average salary of Cubans.' Thanks to the CMEA, Valle (1996: 107) argues, the majority of Cuban households had a television, a radio, a fridge, a fan, and other appliances.

Eckstein argues, Cubans with friends and relatives in the U.S. (mostly white Cubans) received remittances, so they were better off than other Cubans who could not rely on relatives abroad (Eckstein: 614; De la Fuente: 318-19).

To punish Cuba further and with the aim of dismantling the Socialist system, in 1993, the US Cuban Democracy Act tightened the embargo and supported Cuban dissidents (Sandau, 1993: 624); and in 1996, the Helms Burton Act prevented foreign businesses from investing in Cuba. Despite these measures by the U.S. government, Antoni Kapcia (2005) mentions improvements in the Cuban economy since 1994. These include economic growth, increase in production and the fact that less Cubans were dependent on the rationing system. The fact that many Cubans were receiving remittances from families abroad (Brundenius, 2002), and presumably the increase in *jineterismo*, are testament to this.

As Anderson (2003) asserts, by 1994, the economic reforms introduced in 1993 began to alleviate the crisis. Brundenius's (2002: 365) research, which assesses the Cuban economy from the nineties through to the year 2000, confirms these findings. Indeed, he states that the Cuban economy 'has been recovering at an average rate of four percent since 1994' (Brundenius, 2002: 365). Hence, by the end of the 1990s, the socio-economic environment looked more positive.

Brundenius makes reference to improvements in social indicators such as life expectancy, infant mortality and social expenditure. However, the gap between the 'rich' and the 'poor' has also increased.⁵² This led the author to predict that if the trend continues, 'income distribution in Cuba will resemble that of the rest of Latin America' (378). Brundenius's research highlights the fact that the improvements in the economy have not benefited all Cubans equally. Anderson agrees, adding that by the end of the 1990s, Cuba was 'inundated with material goods'; however, the author mentions that goods were mostly in dollars, and thus not accessible to all.

Scarcity in Cuba continued, and poverty affected the lives of a great portion of the population. For instance, in the countryside, scarcity led many Cubans to travel to the

⁵² Brundenius (2002: 378) argues that in the mid eighties, Cuba was an 'exceptionally equal society'. He says that the 'richer segment of the Cuban population (the upper quintile) received 33.8 per cent of income in 1986, the poor (the lower quintile) received 11.3 per cent. By 1999 the share of the 'rich' had increased to 58.1 per cent, while the share of the poor decreased to 40.3 per cent.'

capital. This created an internal migration crisis. As De la Fuente (2001: 328) states, approximately '50,000 people moved to Havana in 1996 alone [and by 1997], 92,000 people tried to legalize their status in the city'.

Because Varadero is mostly a tourist resort, and Cubans are not allowed to enter tourist areas (Moses, 2000: 55-56), Havana became the obvious choice. However, in response to the high movements of people towards the capital, the government 'banned all immigration to Havana in the spring of 1997, imposing fines on both the immigrants and their landlords, and requiring the immediate return of immigrants to their place of origin' (De la Fuente: 328).

During the Special Period, the food provided by government stores was very limited. Cubans were forced to turn to the black market and manage with very little. In this period, the government briefly turned a blind eye to Cubans adopting 'making do' practices for individual gain, as those that could individually look after themselves and get by with limited help from the government would leave resources for those with no other alternative but to rely on the state. We must remember that the government could only provide basic goods – such as beans, rice, sugar and cigarettes – of poor quality and in small quantities to the population through the rationing system (Fernández Holgado: 62).

According to Fernández Holgado (2002: 62), the Special Period represented for Cubans a period of total scarcity. As one of her informants says:

There was a lack of everything: oil, money, food [...] There was no electricity [...] Those empty shop shelves, filled with papers and magazines, without a pair of underwear, without a shirt, without soap to wash [...] we had a lack of everything: meat, chicken, eggs.

The crisis and the Special Period demoralised the population and increased popular discontent (Suchlicki, 2002: 205). As Chomsky (2003: 596) asserts, membership in the mass organisations, which were once seen as natural and important, was no longer relevant for many Cubans. In addition, discontent reached such high levels that, in

August 1994, major migration and a political crisis took place when large numbers of Cubans, mostly Afro-Cubans, took to the sea in makeshift rafts in the direction of the U.S. During that month, Havana witnessed the worst types of unrest since 1959.

Dissatisfaction led many Cubans to protest in the streets of Havana (Kapcia, 2005). Cubans smashed shop windows and special units had to be called in to bring the protests to an end (Suchlicki, 2002; Eckstein, 2004). What is interesting about the acts of defiance of 1994 is that a larger number of Afro-Cubans participated than in previous acts (West-Durán, 2003) due to the fact that Afro-Cubans were one of the social groups mostly affected by the economic crisis, which in turn was partly due to their exclusion from working in the tourist sector, the most profitable sector (De la Fuente, 2001).

Scholars tend to categorise the Cuban economic crisis of the 1990s as the worst Cubans have endured since the Revolution (Fernández Holgado, 2002: 23). In fact, the 1990s were the years in which most Cubans resorted mainly to survival strategies to make a living (Eckstein, 2003). Some writers, however, demonstrate that hardships are characteristic of life in revolutionary Cuba. For instance, Smith and Padula (1996: 149) mention the housing shortages of the 1970s, and state that as early as in the 1960s, '40 percent of [...] houses were overcrowded', and in some instances 'four generations were living in one small house'. In the quote that follows, Smith and Padula (150) explain the impact of the Cuban housing problem in the 1970s on Cubans:

In the 1970s bad housing conditions were repeatedly cited as the cause for divorce. Newlyweds could not find apartments and were obliged to live with their in-laws. Ingenious Cubans added *barbacoas*, or sleeping lofts, inside their apartments, sometimes with materials stolen from the state. Others built extra rooms on roofs, on terraces, in garages, in driveways, and in abandoned shops. Divorced couples, unable to find new housing, divided their apartments with sheets for privacy [...] Crowded housing stimulated the use of *posadas*, or love hotels, which rented rooms by the hour to couples who sought a bit of privacy.

The housing problem is simply one of many tribulations Cubans have faced. One of Fernández Holgado's (2002: 50) respondents remembers moments of hardships in the 1970s when there were no food, clothes, cigarettes or shoes for the population and people had to *inventar* and *resolver* ('make do') in order to survive. These problems triggered major, but containable social upheavals, such as the protests in Havana (Zimbalist, 1992: 407), culminating in the great migration crises that I will discuss in the following section.

2.11. Pressure or Desire to Leave?

Suárez (1999: 136) argues that although a great part of the Cuban population supported the Revolution in its early days, as soon as the government's 'communist tendencies surfaced' many (mainly white, middle-class) Cubans began to leave their country. The author divides the waves of Cuban migration into three separate periods:

Migration Waves	Period	Migrants' Profile	Problem Preceding Migration	Migration in Numbers (approximate)
<i>Golden Exiles</i>	1960-1964	Mostly whites; Upper-class, middle class, Professional sectors.	Many feared Castro's communist tendencies. Many lost their businesses/properties under the new egalitarian reforms. Others feared political and judicial clampdowns.	200,000
<i>Marielitos</i>	April-Sept. 1980	Criminals; Prostitutes; Other institutionalised people.	Many joined their families. Others allegedly forced into exile by the government.	125,000
<i>Balseros 1994 crisis</i>	August 1994	From all sectors of the population; a good proportion of Afro-Cubans were <i>balseros</i> . ⁵³	Special Period after the demise of Communism. Fear of persecution (political).	30,000 ⁵⁴

TABLE 2.1 Migration Waves⁵⁵

Table 2.1 offers a profile of the three major migration waves, starting with the Golden exiles in the 1960s consisting of almost 200,000 people (Dominguez, 1993: 100), who we could argue migrated mostly for political reasons – such as anti-communist feelings – although many fled for economic reasons too as the rich lost all of their wealth. The 1960s exiles were joined in the 1980s by the *Marielitos*, or ‘the undesirables’. These individuals left in boatlifts from the port of Mariel in 1980 (Fainaru and Sanchez, 2003: 642), creating one of the greatest migration tensions between Cuba and its long-time

⁵³The documentary *Balseros* by Carlos Bosch and Josep Maria Domenèch (2002), filmed in Cuba and the U.S., follows Cubans still planning to reach the United States by sea, and captures them on the day of their migration and arrival in the U.S. This is a powerful account, useful to understand the state of desperation many Cubans find themselves; such is the desire to leave Cuba that many risked their lives to get to the U.S. The last part of the documentary shows these Cubans many years later. I watched the documentary in Cuba in a room with 7 Cubans and it was interesting to see that many of them would use the terms *loco* (crazy) or *bruto* (thick) to describe the people in the documentary, because they were willing to risk their lives to then become ‘drop-outs’ in the U.S. At the end of the documentary, we see how many Cubans who had emigrated turn to crime, drugs or become drop-outs in the U.S. Some of the Cubans that showed me the documentary are also critical of the State; however, they had no sympathy for the *balseros* featured in the film, as in their view they were mostly victims of consumerism or *cabezas malas*, who ‘have nothing to offer to society’.

⁵⁴ Kapcia (2005) mentions 35,000.

⁵⁵ Based on Suarez (1999), Dominguez (1993) and Fainaru and Sanchez (2003).

adversary. As Bach (cited in Suárez, 1999: 139) suggests, Castro ‘was ridding the island of social undesirables’. These migrants, ranging from homosexuals to criminals (there were many desirables too), were later joined by the *balseros*.

There are various ways of looking at the third great migration wave. Some Cubanists argue that the *balseros* were demoralised with the system, hence the emphasis on political issues (Suchlicki, 2002: 205; Moses, 2000: 99). However, some scholars tend to see the *balseros* as individuals suffering from the effects of ‘post-communism’. In other words, they argue that economic desperation led Cubans to leave the country in rafts, risking their own lives in the shark infested waters of the Straits of Florida. However, a third line of analysis acknowledges Cuban-American propaganda, enticing Cubans to flee the island illegally.⁵⁶

In 1985, the exiled community in Miami headed by Jorge Más Canosa, leader of the Cuban-American National Foundation, succeeded in establishing Radio Martí (Fernández, 2000: 143-44). The radio station, financed by the U.S. government (Saney, 2004: 75) and ran by Cubans who avidly oppose the government of Fidel Castro, often lure Cubans from the island with dreams of finding the ‘land of freedom’ and economic salvation in the U.S. Since its establishment in 1985, the Cuban government has attempted to block the transmissions of Radio Martí in vain. Many Cubans secretly tune in to listen to what their fellow Cubans are saying about their government, and since the nineties, have also been watching the TV Channel Tele-Martí, which is equally based on propaganda against the Cuban government (Moses: 72, 117).

After the 1994 crisis, the U.S. government finally negotiated with the Cuban government a way to alleviate the migration crisis of the nineties. They agreed to issue 20,000 visas per year (known as visa lotteries) in order for Cubans to migrate legally to the U.S.⁵⁷ (Moses: 105). Migration, nevertheless, has not ceased to be perceived as a stigmatised act, partly because Cubans that wish to leave the island for political reasons are seen as ‘traitors’ (Franqui, 1981), but also as those that claim to leave for economic

⁵⁶ As Suárez (1999: 140) explains, ‘[i]f they made it safely to American waters [that is, if they did not drown, they died of dehydration or were eaten by sharks] Balseros were received as heroes by the Cuban exile community’.

⁵⁷ If we multiply the number of people that could have *potentially* left the island since this was introduced, we could have figures as high as 200,000 Cubans having left Cuba in this period. Considering that 200,000 Cubans left the island in the major exodus in the 1960s, one could say that this also is a very high figure indeed.

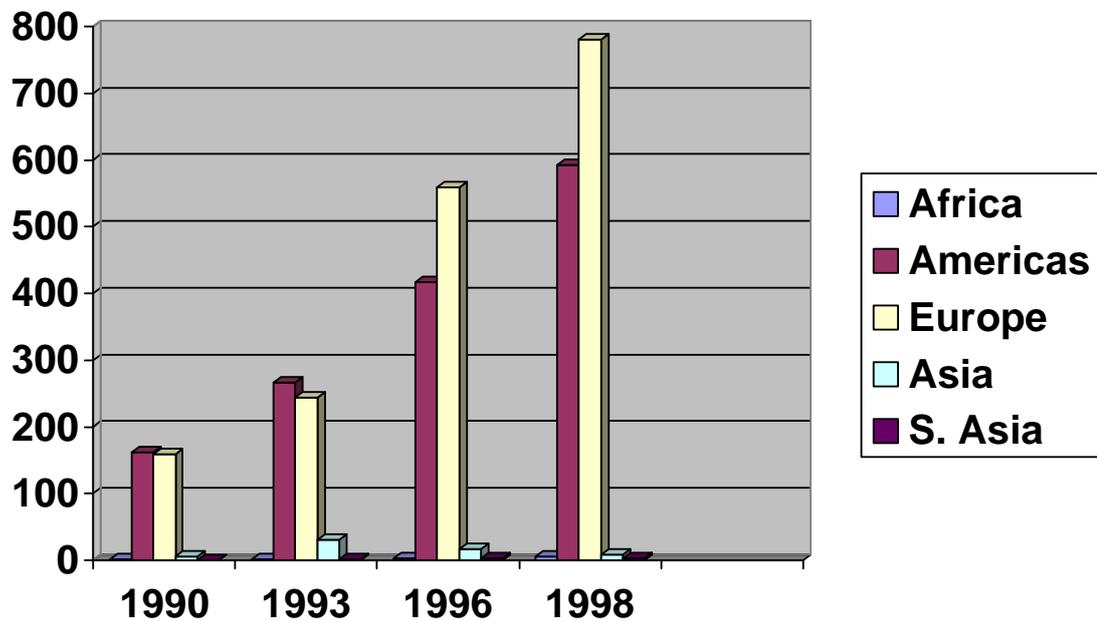
reasons will be perceived as individualistic. While a clear cut distinction between the two reasons for migration offered by Cubans is problematic, Cubans tend to emphasise one reason or another. Likewise, many *jineteras* who seek relationships in order to migrate from Cuba, as do many of the *balseros*, stress that they are ‘forced’ to leave Cuba for economic rather than political reasons (Strout cited in Cabezas, 1998: 84).

2.12. A New Tourist Cycle

It has been argued that tourism was promoted in Cuba prior to the crisis of the 1990s. In 1972, for example, 3,000 Soviet tourists visited Cuba (Schwartz, 1997: 205); and, as Cárdenas (2000: 34) demonstrates, the Cuban government began to explore tourism in the early 1980s as an economic strategy, resulting, in 1982, in the government taking its first steps towards ‘obtain[ing] financial resources and technology in order to develop the tourist industry’ (Cárdenas, 2000: 34). Two years earlier, tourism to Cuba started growing, and it was mainly tourists from capitalist countries who were visiting Cuba in the early 1980s, and providing the country with some hard currency. However, it was not until the 1990s that Cuba would witness a boom in the tourist industry: in 1999, for example, Cuba received 1,600,000 visitors (Cárdenas, 2000: 46).⁵⁸ In the absence of the North American tourist market, most tourists arriving in Cuba came initially from Latin America and Canada, and later from Europe. As the chart below shows, in the mid-nineties, European tourists overtook Latin Americans tourists. Hence the belief in the strong link between *jineterismo* and tourism from Europe.

⁵⁸ The use of the word visitor here is based on the United Nations definition (Espino, 1993: 51): ‘any person visiting a country other than that in which he has his usual place of residence, for any reason other than following an occupation remunerated from within the country visited.’ This definition is, however, not used here unproblematically; after all, does the National Statistics Office really separate ‘visiting exiles’ or Cuban residents abroad from diplomatic workers and ‘real’ tourists?

Table 2.2 Tourist Arrivals in Cuba (in thousands)⁵⁹



The origins of tourists arriving in Cuba changed considerably over time. In 1990, the three main sending countries were, according to Cardenas (50) ‘Canada, Germany and Mexico in that order’.

Table 2.2 shows the number of tourists arriving in Cuba throughout the nineties, demonstrating that tourism from Africa and Southern Asia has remained relatively low. In 1995, the Americas, the main sending region, were overtaken by Europe.

⁵⁹ Based on figures from Cuba’s National Office of Statistics (*Anuario Estadístico de Cuba*) 1996, 1997, 1998.

Table 2.3
Tourist Arrivals by Region (in thousands)⁶⁰

Arrivals by Region	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Africa	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	5	6
Americas	161	204	223	266	306	356	417	494	592
Europe	159	191	216	244	301	372	559	641	780
Asia⁶¹	5	3	10	31	6	10	17	10	9
Southern Asia	---	---	2	1	2	2	3	3	3

In 1996, the tourist composition of the main sending countries continued to change, with more Italians, Canadians and Spanish arriving on the island. Towards the end of the nineties, in 1998 to be specific, Germany joined the list of main sending countries. According to Cárdenas (50), during that period tourists mainly came from Canada, Italy, Germany and Spain, again in that order.

The World Tourism Organisation demonstrates that tourism in Cuba has increased consistently. The market leader in the Caribbean remains Puerto Rico, with 3,541,000 tourists arriving in 2004, followed by the Dominican Republic (3,450,000 in the same year). However, Cuba has emerged as the third main destination country in the region, overtaking the islands of Jamaica and Bahamas, which in the early nineties were the second, (Bahamas) and fourth (Jamaica) favourite tourist destinations. Table 2.3 illustrates Cuban tourist arrival trends from the year 2000 until 2004.

⁶⁰ Source: National Office of Statistics 1996, 1997, 1998.

⁶¹ Including Australia and New Zealand.

Table 2.4

Total Number of tourist arrivals at the beginning of the century (in thousands)

Year	2000	2002	2003	2004
Tourist Arrivals in Cuba	1,471	1,656	1,847	2,017

Source: World Tourism Organisation (WTO)

2.13. Contact with the Outside in the 70s, 80s and 90s

In the early sixties, nationals of Communist countries arrived in Cuba in great numbers. These were foreigners who travelled to Cuba to work and rarely mingled with the Cuban population. While Cuba received some tourists from socialist countries, nationals of capitalist countries remained Cuba's main market. From the early eighties, the numbers of tourists arriving in Cuba began to steadily increase. However, as Schwartz (1997: 206) and Moses (2000: 56) point out, visitors often did not return because of the poor quality of services that they received on the island.

Relations between Cubans and foreign nationals, which are mostly undocumented, flourished in the seventies and eighties both outside as well as inside Cuba. Smith and Pádula (147-48) state that between the year 1960 and late 1980, 'thousands of Cubans also travelled to countries of the former Soviet bloc to study and work'. The authors imply that these were mostly married professionals who travelled on contracts and returned to Cuba as soon as their mission was achieved.

Besides the relations with the ex-Soviet bloc, Cubans travelled in high numbers to many developing countries in internationalist missions to help to liberate those countries. Angola, for instance, received 400,000 troops and technicians (Smith and Padula: 148). Unfortunately, the experiences of the Cuban men and women who went to Angola are a notable absence from the history of Cuban-Angolan personal relationships.⁶²

Apart from the great movements of people from Cuba to other countries (the U.S., ex-Soviet Union and Eastern European countries), Cubans also travelled on 'international

⁶² Gleijeses et al (2007) wrote an insightful account of the Cuban military presence in Africa.

missions' to other developing countries: Angola, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Grenada, and so on.

These days, the Cuban government has forged strong ties with the government of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Articles about Chávez and Venezuelan affairs appear frequently in the Cuban official newspaper *Granma* (www.granma.cu). In fact, the exchange agreed by the Cuban government with the Venezuelan government (Venezuela provides Cuba with oil while Cuban doctors and teachers train, treat and teach the Venezuelan population) has alleviated the strain on the Cuban economy a great deal (www.granma.cu). As the two governments cement their relationships 'from above', new relationships are presumably being formed between Cuban and Venezuelan nationals at the grassroots level. Thus, while the government employs 'making do' practices at a larger scale, Cubans on a mission in Venezuela are adopting small scale 'making do' practices to obtain goods for their Cuban households.⁶³

Particularly useful for this thesis is the movement of Cubans to European countries in the 1990s. Unlike Cuban migration to the U.S., migration to Europe is fairly recent, which is why very little, if anything, has been written about it. However, the numbers are increasing, making these new migrants a highly noticeable group in many European countries (Gonzalez, 2003). Indeed, according to Gonzalez (2003, www.elmundo.es), the Spanish consulate in Cuba reported that since 1992, it has registered two thousand marriages per year between Cuban and Spanish nationals. Combined with figures from the British, German and Italian consulates amongst others, these figures could potentially double, thus confirming increased movements of Cubans 'into' the globalised world.

Cuban migration to Europe differs notably from migration to the U.S. For instance, as De la Fuente (2001), Kempadoo (2001), and Fusco (1998) suggest, these migrants are mostly Afro-Cubans. Secondly, unlike the most recent migration to the U.S. where family and friends' networks are important and feasible due to the high number of Cubans living there (Suárez, 1999: 140-42), Cubans that migrate to Europe tend to have a

⁶³ I have met many Cubans who have family members involved in missions in Venezuela. Although they do not earn a competitive salary, they still manage to gather enough hard currency to buy items that they lack in Cuba. One Cuban, who was in Venezuela for approximately three years managed to bring back a TV set, an audio player, and many more goods, which in Cuban dollar stores are more expensive.

small number of migration networks or no networks to facilitate the migration experience. Thirdly, as Cabezas (1998), Abiodun (2001) and Hodge (2001) agree, most of these migrants begin the migration process as *jineteros* in Cuba, and in many cases become husbands and wives.

2.14. Cultural and Social Constructions of Prostitution

Cuban writers (especially since 1959) have consistently held a double-standard view when it comes to prostitution. While in Havana and Varadero it is treated as a problem because of its associations with tourism, little is mentioned about domestic prostitution in pre-revolutionary or contemporary Cuba. Before the Revolution came to power, prostitutes travelled to the countryside to encounter 'cane cutters during the sugar harvest' (Smith and Padula, 1996: 21), but these examples are not highlighted as much as the cases of those women working in the main tourist cities, or in direct contact with American tourists. Indeed, as Pérez López (cited in Rundle, 2001: 2) points out, the term *jinete* in Cuba was used as early as in the 1960s 'to indicate a person who used his or her personal connections to obtain goods and services in short supply'.

Aside from the silence surrounding prostitution during the years of political and economic 'stability', there is also a perplexing silence on domestic prostitution in contemporary Cuba. Prostitutes who offer (or offered) their services to mainly Cuban males rarely feature, therefore, in Cuban official discourses of prostitution; yet these cases shed light on prostitution in Cuba and pose questions about the role of tourism in being responsible *de facto* for the emergence of prostitution.

Cuban officials estimate that before the Revolution there were approximately 100,000 prostitutes in a country of six million inhabitants (Valle, 1996: 104). It is vital to point out that these are based on a government census, and suggests that it might have included only prostitutes that were arrested in brothels and those who worked for the tourist industry.

If we follow the current Latin American interpretations of prostitution, we find that they tend to be shaped by 'a strong Latin Catholic tradition' (Fusco, 1998: 153) embedded in moralistic interpretations of what is and is not considered as 'good behaviour' in women. Furthermore, a large element of these perspectives emerges from

Latin American 'white' (or criollo)-dominant discourses of acceptable sexual behaviour. In Kempadoo and Doezema's volume *Global Sex Workers*, most authors contest these 'universal' interpretations of sex-work, an approach that serves to see women at the lower ranks of society – generally black and brown women – as the 'other', and to further marginalise them. Cabezas, for example, makes an insightful point when she says that 'race, class and geographic location make some women automatically suspect of being prostitutes' (86). In Latin American societies, Cabezas adds, the labels 'puta or prostituta' are applied to women that assert their sexuality. The point is that in these male-dominated societies, as Cabezas points out, women that contest male authority risk being labelled as *boconas* (mouthy), *atrevidas* (cheeky), *descaradas* (scoundrels) and even *putas* (whores) because they stray from the norm of how a 'good woman' should behave.

Opposing elitist discourses, Cabezas argues that Third World Women become prostitutes as an economic strategy. In addition, she sees global capitalism as triggering prostitution. In tune with feminist interpretations of prostitution, Cabezas argues that in societies such as Cuba's, which are male-dominated, the prostitute discourse is used as a tool to 'divide women, control them and ultimately benefit from their labor' (86).

Cuban culture is strongly influenced by Catholic and Western European models of sexuality (values followed by the 'white' elite); however, revolutionary thinking has shaped sexuality. Cuban-American artist Coco Fusco (1998: 156) notes that when she visited Cuba, she was 'impressed by the much more relaxed attitudes towards sexual assertiveness'. Fusco also states that women who had sex outside of marriage and had an 'active sex life' were not stigmatised as they would have been before the Revolution. In fact, under the revolutionary leadership *posadas*, or love-hotels, which are lodgings rented per hour, became extremely popular with couples queuing to have one hour of private intimacy (Smith and Padula, 1996). This eliminated the stigma linked with sex outside of marriage. As Lumsden (1996: 22) argues, sex outside of marriage is very common in Cuba, whether the people involved are in a formal relationship or not. However, this same action (sex outside of marriage) was one that led Asencio's (1999) respondents (young Latinos in the U.S.) to label young sexually active women as 'sluts'.

In her discussion about Latino constructions of 'machos' and 'sluts', Asencio demonstrates the ambivalence of these categories. Her study found that when a 'female's

sexual behaviour resembled that of a male, she was labeled by the social group as a 'slut', 'whore' or 'putita' (a little whore)' (112). What is clear from her research is that her respondents develop a strict criterion that leads them to define someone as *puta* or not (sexual permissiveness and assertiveness being two aspects). In Cuba, however, where sexual assertiveness is part of the norm (Lumsden, 1996), and where *posadas* have become part of Cuban culture (Smith and Padula, 1996), the label is more problematic.

2.15. Stages of Prostitution in Cuba

In 1961, as Hodge (2003: 630) notes, the revolutionaries claimed to have eliminated prostitution following a long process of re-training female ex-prostitutes 'as seamstresses' as well as 'clerks, bus drivers and waitresses' (Fusco, 1998: 153). Valle (1996: 104) acknowledges that the Revolution did indeed attempt to eliminate prostitution, but rightly argues that a total eradication did not take place, pointing out that there were different stages of domestic prostitution in Cuba before the 1990s. Valle defines this prostitution (domestic) as an exchange of 'sexual favours' in order to gain a better social and/or economic life. He implies that what makes these individuals different to the pre-1959 prostitutes is that they knew the morals of the Revolution, and their behaviour was thus more camouflaged. The author refers specifically to women in the artistic sector, 'mainly radio and television', who entered the sector by embarking on sexual encounters with 'powerful men'.

Valle (1996: 105) adds that in the eighties, new forms of prostitution surfaced. At that stage, as the writer points out, words like *puta*⁶⁴ were used derogatorily, indicating society's perception of women who used powerful men as a stepping stone for a better career. *Titimania*, a term that describes a form of exchange of sexual favours, emerged in the seventies, and later re-emerged in the eighties. Valle (1996: 106) says that 'these new prostitutes' exchanged sexual favours with members of the PCC (Cuban Political Party) and/or high ranking officials and Cuban entrepreneurs in order to gain a better social and

⁶⁴ Dictionary translation: 'whore'.

economic position. However, unlike the women in the artistic sector, these women, the so-called *tembómanas*⁶⁵ were not perceived so negatively by society.

Fusco (1998: 153) also says that in her visits to Cuba in the 1980s, she found many 'well dressed' Cuban women in cabarets and areas designated for foreigners. She adds that on many occasions, these women were placed in these strategic locations by the government. She recalls that two of the men with whom she was filming were offered a deal of two women and a gram of cocaine, after which they reached the conclusion that they were being spied on.

In terms of prostitution involving foreign nationals, and expanding on Fusco's point, Leiva (2004) explains that in the late eighties many Cuban women had sexual relations with students from developing countries who were studying in Cuban colleges and universities. The writer points out that at that stage, as dollars were still illegal, these women would exchange sex for 'clothes, shoes, electrical appliances, or to gain access to places designated to those foreigners' (Leiva, 2004: www.cubanet.org/CNews/y04/ago04/10a7.htm).

From the mid-nineties, articles about *jineterismo* proliferated in the online Florida-based newspaper *Cubanet* (www.cubanet.org).⁶⁶ At the same time, questions of public health emerged within Cuba as the number of cases of AIDS increased. The Cuban government immediately connected the increase in number of sufferers with sex tourism (Valle, 1996: 127). However, contradicting this argument, Smith and Pádula (1996: 66-67) state that sexually transmitted diseases increased in the 1970s and the 1980s because of the resurgence of prostitution (referring to domestic prostitution) and the contact the 400,000 Cuban soldiers had with Angolans during liberation wars. Back in that period, in 1988 to be precise, the Cuban government had controversially announced that Cubans suffering from AIDS were mostly 'members of high-risk groups [...] homosexuals, bisexuals, and those who engaged in sex with foreigners' (Smith and Padula p: 67).⁶⁷ As with prostitution, racism and other Cuban social 'problems', the government never misses the opportunity to 'point fingers' at the outside for catalysing Cuba's 'problems'.

⁶⁵ Derives from the term *temba*, Cuban slang, meaning older person. *Tembómanas* were young women who dated older men.

⁶⁶ See archives in Cubanet from 1997 onwards.

⁶⁷ Smith and Padula (p: 55) state that in 1992 there were 772 HIV positive cases in Cuba (554 men and 218 women). Valle mentions a total of 300 sufferers in the mid-nineties.

2.16. *Jineterismo*, Crime and Tourism

De la Fuente (2001: 327) states that '[c]uban tourist agencies [...] frequently advertise the island as a paradise of sexual indulgence and promiscuity'. Moses (2000: 48) takes a more direct approach by accusing the Cuban government of 'allowing [prostitution] to flourish again' and 'selling Cuba as a sexual paradise'.

Even though the government frowns upon the high levels of contact of *jineteros/as* with foreigners, *jineterismo* as such is not an official crime. However, because of their alleged 'antisocial behaviour' (Valle: 126), Cuban *jineteras* fall under a hazy category of the Cuban legislation known as the *Ley de Peligrosidad* or Law of Dangerousness (Saney, 2004: 131). Under this 'preventive' legislation, *jineteras* are given three warnings before they are taken away to work in the countryside (agriculture or other areas of production). One preventive measure, as explained by Fernández Holgado (2002: 255), is that prostitutes are 're-trained in order to be re-inserted in society'. However, if these women are caught *jineteando* again, they could be arrested and imprisoned for up to eight years (Fernández Holgado: 255).

As a socialist nation, the Cuban government includes in its penal code 'acts that are deemed to be harmful to the socialist state' (Saney, 2004: 131): for instance, 'selling of goods from a state enterprise for illegal personal gain' (*malversación*), 'illicitly receiving and/or diverting money or resources from a state enterprise' (*receptación*), 'the illegal slaughter and sale of livestock' (*sacrificio ilegal*), 'and illegal emigration' (*salida ilegal*) (Saney: 131). Although women partake in all of these activities, it is mainly Afro-Cuban males who are perceived as being more likely to become hustlers (see literature on *jineterismo* in the introduction). These male *jineteros*, who sell cigars and other products stolen from the workplace to tourists, can be accused of *malversación*.

In Moses's (2000: 20) view, *malversación*, in particular hustling, is perceived as a serious crime mainly because it involves contacts between Cubans and foreigners. The author claims that this threat stems from the government's fear of 'ideas from outside Cuba' (14) seeping into Cuba. This may appear as a slightly contradictory argument; after all, it was the Cuban government that reluctantly or not welcomed tourism, and was surely aware that tourists might expose Cubans to their own culture and ideologies. However, with the police preventing Cubans from entering tourist areas, could it not be

that the government believed that informal contact and interaction between Cubans and tourists would easily be controlled?

Forty-one years after the 1959 Revolution, and ten years after Cuba re-opened its borders to foreign countries, the problems which the government claimed to have eliminated re-emerged: prostitution and crime. Despite deciding not to criminalise prostitution, the government penalises pimps, with the sentence increasing from four to ten years, 'to seven to fifteen years if minors are involved' (Saney, 2004: 149).

Child prostitution – that is, prostitution involving individuals who are under 16 years of age – is indeed a major problem affecting Cuba (O'Connell Davidson, 1996). As Valle (1996), O'Connell Davidson (1996) and Fernández Holgado (2002) reiterate, the number of sex tourists travelling to Cuba in search of adventures with young boys and girls have increased. As Fernández Holgado (243) notes, 13 and 14 year-old girls are often seen in main tourist resorts ready to offer their services to tourists. This was also shown in Fusco's (1998) chapter *Hustling For Dollars*.

Fidel Castro appropriately stated in one of his speeches:

Our country is already being visited by nearly two million tourists [annually]. In general, these are respectable people, mostly Canadians and Europeans with exemplary behaviour. But there are always visitors, from various places, who travel for sex. Our people, particularly our children and teenagers must be protected, all the more so since the outbreak of diseases such as AIDS has led unscrupulous people seeking safe pleasure to believe that eleven, ten, eight-or-seven year old boys or girls pose a lower threat than an adult. And there is always someone willing to push such services [meaning pimps].

(Saney, 2004: 149)

According to Saney (2004: 147), the Cuban government acknowledged that crime in Cuba had increased. In a speech given in January 1999 to Cuba's Revolutionary Police,

President Castro urged the police to ‘get tough in the fight against crime’. In the same speech, he stressed that crime in Cuba had increased since the country ‘opened up to foreign business and tourism.’

Ironically, the Cuba of the 1990s, as academic and other texts note, shows to many a strong resemblance to the Cuba before 1959. Yet, more than fifty years separate these periods. Within these five decades, Cuba has moved from capitalism to socialism, and in the nineties, from socialism to a stage, which still remains to be credibly defined.

Cuba has one of the highest literacy rates in the world, Thus, the ‘outlaws’ that Carlos Puebla sings about in his ‘And then Fidel Arrived’ song (prostitutes, criminals, and pimps before 1959), are nowadays more likely to be highly educated individuals, living in one of the most egalitarian societies of this world. After half a century of experimenting with socialism, the Cuban government is forced once again to address ‘problems’ (prostitution, crime, and tourist exploitation), which it had claimed to have successfully eliminated. Paradoxically, these social problems are narrated in official discourse as having re-emerged as Cuba welcomed tourists from capitalist societies again. This explains why *jineterismo* has been received with such a negative connotation; after all, it is embedded in discourses of racism, inequality, (sex) tourism, prostitution and crime, all of which are seen by the Cuban leadership as factors that affect mainly capitalist societies.

In this chapter, I have discussed the historical context into which *jineterismo* emerged in the 1990s, a period which saw socio-political and economic instability. Cubans are systematically reminded of the social ‘progress’ made by the Revolution, and that without the Revolution, Cubans risk going back to a period of inequality, prostitution and injustices. While Afro-Cubans, the group that mostly benefited from the Revolution, are showing signs of dissatisfaction, the Cuban government finds in the ‘outside’ (that is, the U.S. and the blockade) the explanation for this dissatisfaction. The way the Cuban government deals with prostitution is certainly incoherent: half-naked, brown Cuban women appear on postcards in dollar shops, whilst the government blames tourism for the ‘sudden’ increase in prostitution.

If statistics show that *jineterismo* has increased, perhaps the results ought to be re-assessed to include a less ‘universal’ interpretation of prostitution, and certainly to

include a view of prostitution that has not been solely constructed by the 'white Revolutionary' elite; but instead, as Cabezas (2004) suggests, analyses of prostitution must not be detached from the individuals' perceptions and understandings of themselves.

Chapter 3: An Analysis of Afro-Cuban Women's Kin, Social and Romantic Relationships in Alamar

In the previous chapter, I introduced a historical account of the Cuban Revolution's resourcefulness in an economy of shortage. I also discussed the government's inability to provide for all, while at the same time attempting to maintain political control over all Cubans, and social misfits, including *jineteras*, whose label in Cuban official discourse implies socio-political deviance as well as deviance from Cuban norms and values. Furthermore, I described the broader events that led to the birth of *jineterismo*, discussing its association with tourism, migration and prostitution. Towards the end of the chapter, the discourse that blames tourism for the emergence of prostitution was problematised. However, this thesis acknowledges the connection between *jineterismo*, tourism and migration, without accepting that tourism is to be 'blamed' alone for the increase in prostitution, because, as shown in the previous chapter, prostitution re-emerged decades before *jineterismo*.

The current notions of *jineterismo*, as mentioned in the introduction, have been shaped mostly by official and elitist viewpoints, and overlook the voices of the so-called *jineteras*. In order to understand the social and economic coordinates of *jineterismo*, the individuals I worked with will now be placed in their everyday lives, their families, households and neighbourhood. Then I will slowly widen the scope to discuss how these Afro-Cuban women deal with the Cuban state as a symbol of masculinity and their conflicting relationship with Cuban men. It is paramount to understand the importance of kin and social relationships within the Cuban context, before embarking on an analysis of the types of relationships Cubans project onto the outside, a theme that will be discussed explicitly in Chapter 6. In this chapter I examine Cubans' discourses of love and conflict, the latter referring to gender struggles in contemporary Cuba. My principal aim is to establish what love means for the Cuban participants, and how love is performed and demonstrated in their local environment. This analysis will allow us to understand what Cubans expect from romantic relationships and the role the family plays in shaping the choices these Cubans make prior to embarking on romantic relationships with foreigners. By developing this rationale, we can enhance understanding about why some Cubans

project themselves onto the outside and their pre-existing expectations when they start their relationships with foreigners. In other words, we can gain an in-depth knowledge of the criteria these women adopt when selecting their romantic or sexual partners.

In order to achieve this aim, I start by grounding the individuals in Alamar. Rundle argued in her paper that *jinetteras* were granted 'heroic' status by their beloved ones. In the vignette that follows, I offer an insight into reactions to *jinetteras*' presence in the neighbourhood.

3.1. The *Jinetteras* of Building X

On a typical afternoon in Alamar, the neighbour from the floor below me, Maritza, would sit on the balcony of her flat, scanning the neighbourhood. The woman, who was in her late fifties, would iron on her balcony, wave at various neighbours and converse with passers-by. Other female neighbours and friends would come by and stay for short periods of time chatting animatedly and laughing loudly. From the conversations that she had with the various women, and which could be heard from my balcony, it became clear that Maritza knew about the lives of almost everyone in that block.

Maritza lived on her own and spent a great deal of time out on the balcony, hanging her clothes on the clothes-lines, waiting for neighbours to come by, gossiping and joking with her friends. Sometimes, when she realised that I was also sitting on my balcony, she would talk to me.

Maritza's 'balcony lifestyle' is not an exception. Most of the neighbours in the area left the doors leading to the balconies open all day, and some even left their front doors open until the early hours of the evening. Privacy was difficult to find in those buildings. In the house where I was staying, for example, the curtain-less windows and the wide balcony door would remain open for almost the whole day to allow air to flow into the apartment; and only before going to bed would the house owner lock everything up. This openness is characteristic of Cuba: neighbours come and go, privacy is perceived as synonymous with deviation, and noise, from music, people's conversations, and old cars, provide a permanent soundscape.

One afternoon, as I sat in the living room, I heard Maritza say:

'Look who's here!'

A seemingly brand new car was pulling over. Such a sight seemed to have brightened the day for the hundreds of people sitting on their balconies watching life unfold. Neighbours were noticeably curious about the appearance of a *turiscar*⁶⁸ in Alamar. A group of men, playing dominoes on the ground floor watched it; younger children playing in the dry fields stared, as did Maritza, who stopped working to look at it, with her laundry waiting to be hung out. Even the elderly who were sitting on their balconies, seemingly staring into space, did not take their eyes off the *turiscar*.

From the balcony where I was standing, I asked Maritza who they were.

‘*Las jineteras del edificio X!*’⁶⁹ (The *jineteras* from building X)’ Maritza raised her tone, as if expecting me to know who the *jineteras* of building X were.

A ‘brown’ woman, in her twenties, who was wearing a pair of lycra shorts, which sketched the shape of her body, emerged from inside the car. She was followed by a ‘white’ woman, who was wearing a similar outfit: a boob-tube, and lycra shorts. The young women walked like goddesses, in front of the scrutinising eyes of the neighbourhood. In a manner typical of many Cuban women they swaggered along the road, flaunting their femininity and unreservedly putting their beauty on display. Some neighbours waved and smiled at them, others seemed to be laughing and making fun of them. Young men flirted, just as they routinely did with many other women in the neighbourhood; and the little girls who were playing in the fields imitated their walk, just as they often imitated scenes from the soap operas.

Soon after that first sighting, I visited Dayamí, a green-eyed Afro-Cuban woman, who defined herself consciously as a *mulata*. She was with her friend, a white *jinetera* who later refused to be interviewed. Dayamí introduced herself as ‘Dayamí, the social worker’ who works in the community, providing support to the elderly and the sick. ‘*Somos la mano derecha de Fidel* (We are Fidel’s right hand),’ she said proudly, yet somewhat ironically.

As our conversation progressed, Dayamí criticised the police for harassing young women, especially in areas like Vedado and the tourist beaches of East Havana. When I asked her why she thought the police were harassing young women, she replied:

⁶⁸ A rented tourist car.

⁶⁹ The building number is not mentioned to maintain the respondents’ anonymity.

Aquí en Cuba por la misma situación del país las muchachitas se buscan novios extranjeros para que las saquen de aquí...para salir adelante, para ayudar a sus familias para...no sé, a lo mejor de verdad se enamoró de él y el policía piensa que tú eres *jinetera*.⁷⁰

3.2. Chapter Structure

This chapter focuses mainly on the cases of three Afro-Cuban women: Dayamí, Felicia and Milania, women that allowed me quite easily into their homes to observe their daily routines from within, as well as outside the moderately private space of their households. While Afro-Cuban men would contentedly sit with me at my place or out on the streets for lengthy discussions while drinking *Mojito* cocktails, the women had a set routine that was hardly ever interrupted by my frequent intermissions. It was not unusual for me to help women lay the tables, accompany them on their frequent daily shopping trips or to entertain their children while they mopped the floors. Most were pleased to have me around while they got on with their lives. Some would even send children from the neighbourhood to fetch me so that I could spend time with them. Most of these relationships, which started in the summer of 2005, evolved rapidly. Women would confide in me, ask me for advice on various occasions, and ask me to walk to the main commercial centres, where I would join queues and observe their daily interactions in the neighbourhood. This allowed me to gain a comprehensive insight into their relationships with their families, the neighbourhood and Cuban men, and to gain an insight into how they perceive their relationship with the Cuban state.

As the chapter progresses, I focus on gender struggles in a supposedly 'egalitarian' society, and the role that these struggles may play in altering the perceptions Cuban women have of Cuban men. In the final part of this chapter, I focus on offering Cuban women's interpretations of the 'Other' (Connell, 1995); and I illustrate the difficulties of performing 'masculinities' in Cuba based on the opinions of women in

⁷⁰ Here in Cuba due to the situation this country is in, the young girls are looking for [my emphasis] foreign boyfriends, so that they can have a better life, so that they can help their families, so that (long pause) I don't know! Perhaps, they truly fall in love with them, but the police think that they are *jineteras*.

Alamar. I take this approach in order to gain a wider view of these gendered struggles, which, as I argue later, help to explain the attraction Cubans seem to feel towards Europeans.

This ethnographic account of three Afro-Cuban women would be incomplete without placing the participants in the social environment where most of their relationships take place – *el barrio* or their ‘neighbourhood’. For the purposes of this thesis I will be using the term with reference to the area that covers the blocks, where most participants reside and where I was staying.

3.3. Alamar – ‘The Barrio’

Unlike central Havana’s *barrios*, which exhibit a blend of Spanish and American architecture (colonial buildings in Old Havana and big-American style avenues in Miramar), the first impression visitors may get of Alamar is that of buildings raised without a rigid plan. This neighbourhood of approximately 100,000 inhabitants, which stands 7 kilometres away from the tunnel that separates Havana from East Havana,⁷¹ narrates the story of Socialist Cuba.

Alamar was born with the Revolution⁷² and invokes revolutionary ideas, such as rationalisation (using resources and labour economically), equal opportunities and housing for all, and the triumph of the collective over the individual.

The majority of buildings in Alamar have a uniform appearance with a near identical architectural style (see images 4-6 below). With a few exceptions – notably ‘Doce Plantas’, the name of a twelve-floor building – most buildings have five or six floors and accommodate private residents. Occasionally, individuals do business from their own households: for example, one neighbour runs a food take-away service for the neighbourhood; there is also another that runs a hair salon from home. Despite the popularity of these services, they are mostly illegal as these individuals do not declare their business to the state.

⁷¹ Information from an interview with *Historiador de la Habana del Este* (Historian of East Havana). Alamar is one of the neighbourhoods of the district of *La Habana del Este* (East Havana)

⁷² See Chapter 2 (historical chapter).



Image 4 The Zonas⁷³

(Blue building is located in *Zona Y*; buildings in the background are *Zonas D* and *A*. Crossing the road towards where this photo was taken is *Zona E*⁷⁴)



Image 5 Zona B

⁷³ All photos in this section were taken in July 2007 by Dina de Sousa E Santos. Each of the pictures taken in the afternoon captures the alienation of Alamar from the central part of the city.

⁷⁴ Names of the zones have been changed. Normally zones are numbered.



Image 6 An Atypical Apartment – on the fifth floor, fully modernised with a private balcony, new windows and air-conditioning.

Homogeneity is also perceptible inside the apartments, which are uniform with two to three bedrooms, open kitchens, one bathroom⁷⁵ and two balconies. All flats are larger than average in size; however, because they are often inhabited by various family members, they appear smaller (see Image 7). On my last visit, water was still a luxury, running only for a few hours a day; therefore, buckets were used to wash hands, flush the toilets and shower.

In their kitchens many Alamareños kept pans filled with water for cooking and boiled water for drinking. Until very recently, alcohol was used to light the cookers, which were not complete units but rather portable hobs with space for two saucepans. To facilitate cooking and save energy, the government, in 2005, provided slow cookers known as *La Reina*; all households were entitled to have one and an advert ran repeatedly on Cuban television, showing Cubans how to use the *Reina* cooker.⁷⁶ Until my last visit,

⁷⁵ All the houses that I visited had just a shower with buckets for flushing the toilet.

⁷⁶ See Image 15.

in August 2007, there were only two telephones in the building where I was staying, and telephone conversations did not form a great part of Alamar's lifestyles. Due to their fairly basic existences, many of my respondents see *allá afuera*, or 'the outside' (meaning Western capitalist countries) as extremely attractive, as Chapter 6 demonstrates.

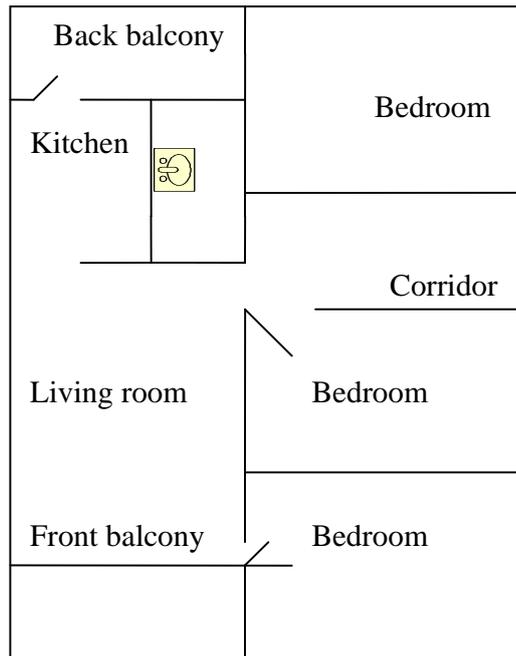


Image 7

Typical 3-Bedroom Apartment (Alamar)

Unlike some of the streets of central Havana, which are named by letters and numbers and follow some logical order allowing locals to find the streets fairly easily, Alamar is not organised by streets, but by irregularly numbered *zonas* or 'zones',⁷⁷ each of which is separated by a cluster of five or six-storey twin buildings.

The main roads of Alamar, compared to those of downtown Havana, are of a lower standard, yet some are fairly busy. Fewer cars can be seen in the inner streets as most of the main squares and inner streets are covered in red sand and dry, unkempt grass. Car drivers tend to use the main roads, which although in need of repair, offer

⁷⁷ A new system has recently been introduced in Alamar whereby streets are being given numbers – but the *zonas* still remain.

better driving conditions as Images 8 and 9 show. This means that the main roads of Alamar are much busier than the inner streets. Buses, taxis, bicycles and motorbikes are driven up and down the main roads, yet within the areas where buildings are crowded together – within the *zonas* – very few cars drive through. In fact, on two occasions the private taxi drivers who took me to Alamar refused to park immediately outside the building where I was staying, arguing that the road might damage their tyres. Some tourist taxis, however, venture into the inner streets of Alamar, such as the rented car described in the introduction to this chapter.

Symbols of ‘modernity’ are almost foreign to Alamar; modern cars and outsiders, which in central Havana come with the tourist package and are now part of that cityscape, are rarely seen in Alamar. The only attraction foreigners may find is the Hip Hop festival at the end of the summer but this does not attract the ‘typical’ tourist; and if it is given the go-ahead by the government, it takes place mainly in the evenings and over a few nights in August. In fact, it is just as rare to see a ‘typical’ tourist, or *yuma*⁷⁸ as Cubans call them, wandering in Alamar as it is to see an ordinary Cuban wandering into the National Hotel in Vedado.

Despite its quieter feel compared with central Havana, the streets of each *zona* of Alamar are often busy with locals going to the local stores or the *shopping*,⁷⁹ as Cubans call dollar stores. At certain times of the day, the inner squares are fairly busy, but the wide open-spaces that offer little protection from the hot summer weather make this neighbourhood less vibrant than the streets of downtown Havana.

⁷⁸ The term was previously used with reference to North American citizens. These days, the term applies mainly to white European tourists.

⁷⁹ Cubans call dollar stores *la shopping* – pronounced *chopeen*; the local stores, where goods are provided by the state are called *la bodega* or *el agro*. The last two terms will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.



Image 8
Alamar (The entrance to the neighbourhood)



Image 9
The main bus route road into Alamar from central Havana



Image 10 The Wide Roads of Alamar

Some Alamaresños spend time in the dollar bars and cafés on the main road (see Image 11) – a pastime that many can now afford – compared to my first visit to Alamar in 1998, where snack bars were not as populated. Since 1998, many more Cubans have left the island and a significant number of *balseiros* have continued to leave Cuba via Alamar. Cubans growing up in *zona E* in the 1990s responded that it was common for them to see families and friends accompanying their loved ones to the seafront, from where men and women would attempt the dangerous journey into Miami. Many men and women from Alamar who arrived safely now send remittances to their families and/or friends in Alamar, which partly explains the increase in consumption in the area.

Socialising and going out for a beer at the local bars is becoming as popular as going out for a coffee in many Western societies. Nonetheless, while the few bars of Alamar might at times be fairly busy, and occasionally a group of Cubans may sit drinking for long hours, very few can afford this luxury.

Whereas in central Havana the nightclubs and bars are open until late, in Alamar only some dollar bars – such as *El Rapidito*, a fast food bar/café and other dollar cafeterias – open late. However, by midnight even these venues are closed. The few options include some nightclubs that accept mostly Cuban Pesos, which are open until the early hours of the morning. Although most respondents have visited these venues, they stated their preference for dollar nightclubs.



Image 11 A Dollar Snack Bar

Generally, the locals spend evenings indoors with family members, or visit friends in the neighbourhood. Indeed, contrary to Havana which appears in travel guides as a vibrant Caribbean city, Alamar tends to be remarkably quiet at nine in the evening just before the evening soap opera, or '*la novela*' begins.

On visits between 1998 and 2005, I witnessed almost daily government-programmed blackouts (*apagones*⁸⁰). The *apagones* would take place at different times each day and would last for up to four hours. Blackouts had decreased since the early days of the Special Period when Cubans would endure up to 8 hours without electricity due to fuel shortages. Cubans living in tourist neighbourhoods within Havana, such as Vedado, are hardly affected by these power shortages; however, many Alamareros often have to watch the soap operas in their neighbours' houses as the *apagones* do not affect all *zonas* at the same time. During *apagones* even dollar bars close early and silence prevails.

3.4. The Family and the Household

Selas C, a Cuban man who defines himself as a Rastafarian, described Alamar as a place where Alamareros 'merely sleep'. As a participant observer I gained the opportunity to witness that Alamareros do not simply go back to their own houses after working in Havana; instead they sustain strong ties with their immediate families, friends and neighbours.

The family units of the respondents vary from nuclear to extended. Some family members may not share the same household but live in close proximity to each other. Individuals share two or three bedroom flats with members of their nuclear or extended family. Sometimes three generations of the same family live in the same household. All the Afro-Cuban women introduced in this chapter come from matrifocal families, whereby their mothers and grandmothers play the key role as providers and carers of children and older relatives.

Women can regularly be seen queuing outside and making frequent trips to the stores. They leave on a daily basis with used plastic bags in their hands and return with

⁸⁰ Blackouts were more frequent before 2005. However, many locals still showed their discontent because the blackouts would prevent them from watching the soap operas or damage their electrical goods, such as the fridge, televisions, radios, etc.

products such as sweet potatoes, cassava, *season* vegetables and other supplies. The mothers of the participants are middle-aged women, ranging from 40 to 65 years of age. Generally, women were in charge of buying and cooking food for their families.

Most of the main informants for this research grew up in a lone-parent household with the mother as the head of the family. When I visited them, their mothers were often doing household chores: cooking, cleaning, ironing, shopping or looking after the children of the family. It was not unusual for the mothers of these young women to join in the conversations or sit nearby.

The Afro-Cuban participants play a significant role in the household and tend to be their mother's main helper. For example, when I was interviewing 22 year-old Dayamí, she started helping her mother with lunch, while her 19-year-old brother was outdoors with his friends. Similarly, when I first met 33 year-old Felicia, she was cooking. Although Felicia's younger brother also lives in the house, these tasks are reserved for the female members of the household.

Before she went to Havana, Milania was in her late teens, her sister was barely in her teens, and thus, she too was her mother's main source of support. Such was the case of Julieta (Chapter 4) who, at the time of meeting John, was her grandmother's and mother's main helper and already had a young child.

Besides carrying out traditional domestic tasks, Dayamí and Felicia also have other responsibilities: Dayamí is a full time student, completing her Social Work degree; Felicia works as a receptionist in the local polyclinic and is the main care provider for her son. The fact that most of the mothers are housewives (except Dayamí's mother who is a street vendor, working for the state) also means that the female participants not only perform domestic and emotional labour, but also contribute to the financial stability of the household.

3.5. Dutiful Women

For all female respondents, the 'family' and responsibility for the family carry an important social value. Most stressed the responsibility they felt for improving the quality of life of their immediate family and discussed the prospect of meeting a foreigner in this respect. This idea was frequently supported by their mothers. For instance, Dayamí's

mother stated that she hoped her daughter's relationship with a German man would 'work out' because 'in that way she can help us'. And after almost a decade in the UK, Julieta is still the main source of income for her family in Cuba. She supports her brother, a full time construction worker, who is unable to support his children with his own salary in Cuba. With a new shopping system adopted in 2008, Julieta purchases goods in Cuban stores from the UK; these goods are then delivered to her mother's house in Havana.

Research on Jamaican families by Sobo (1993: 56) also reveals the importance of 'blood ties' and the role of kin in taking care of one another without the need for 'monetary rewards'; instead respondents were found to care for their families for 'moral satisfaction'. This is comparable to the Cuban context, where the 'mother' in particular stands at the centre of a universe of 'moral' ties.

While all my respondents mentioned the need to help their 'families', it became clear that family and its emotional and moral dimension was often epitomised by the 'mother'. Phrases such as: '*La madre es lo más grande de la vida*' (The mother is the greatest thing in life/ Felicia), '*Mi mamá es la persona que yo más quiero*' (My mum is the person I care about the most/ Milania), '*Lo más grande del mundo para mí es mi mamá*' (The greatest thing in the world is my mum/ Julieta) were common in conversations.

Querer or 'to love' was the term mostly used by these women to describe their feelings for their mothers. The term was often associated with the fact that the mother had 'sacrificed' for their families. As Noemia, a Cuban woman whom I interviewed in the UK in 2004 said: '*Mi mamá ha hecho lo posible y lo imposible para que nosotros no pasemos hambre ahora me toca a mí hacer algo por ella*' (My mother has done all that she could to ensure that we did not starve, now it is my turn to do something for her).

These women spoke of appreciation and gratitude for their mothers for putting food on the table during times of hardship, and of a sense of responsibility to reciprocate this labour of love. They believed it was paramount to 'sacrifice' and *luchar*, or 'fight' for their mothers, yet they implied that they would not 'sacrifice' for any other sibling, except their own children, in the same way.

'Sacrifice' is a term that has become part of Cuban ideological culture. In Chapter 2, I showed how Che Guevara expected to mould the new Cuban into individuals who

would sacrifice for their nation. Fidel Castro also mentioned an era of collective sacrifices when he announced that Cuba was going through the Special Period. 'Sacrifices' are embedded in the revolutionary rhetoric and are exemplified by acts such as rationing and acceptance of government's special powers in order to maintain the political system. Likewise, the phrase '*hay que luchar*' or 'one needs to fight' is a typical *Cubanismo* that implies the need to fight or struggle to keep yourself and your family alive. This highlights that Cubans, in general, appropriate the *lucha* discourse, originally used in reference to the struggle between Cubans and the U.S., to communicate their frustration with the Cuban state and what they consider its failure to provide enough goods for its citizens. Thus, 'sacrifice' and 'struggle' feature not only in political discourse but also in daily conversations. For example, mothers remind their daughters of *los sacrificios* they had to endure to feed the family; and these reminders were repeated by the participants to their own children. In the household, the mother becomes a *luchadora* (fighter) because of her ability to *inventar* or 'make do' under difficult conditions. She procures goods and food for the household and the children are taught to witness and respect her sacrifices.

The mother/daughter relationship in these cases is strengthened by the fact that most of these women feel that they can count on their mother for support in looking after their children. As Felicia states: '*mi mamá es mi brazo derecho sin ella yo soy practicamente nadie*' ('my mother is my right hand, without her I am nobody', I can't do anything).

In the absence of the fathers of their own children, most of those participants who are mothers themselves have to rely on their own mother to provide childcare so that they can further their careers. These mother/daughter partnerships are perceived by the Cuban female respondents as resting at the centre of the 'family'; thus, the nurture, care and help that the family is seen to provide is what holds the family together. As 42 year-old Mercedes who works in a dollar cyber-café in Havana explains: '*Si no fuera por mi mamá no sé que sería de mí. Yo tengo que contar con ella para todo, todo, todo. Ella es la verdadera madre de mi hija. La viste, la lleva a la escuela, la recoge, le da la comida...*' (If it was not for my mum, I would not know what I would have done. I have to count on her for everything. She is the real mother of my daughter. She dresses her, takes

her to school, picks her up, feeds her...). This highlights that the mother/daughter relationship is highly intricate. In the absence of fathers and husbands, these women feel that they are forced to alternate Cuban traditional gender roles; the daughter becomes the breadwinner, while also helping out in household tasks. In turn, the role assigned to their mothers is that of the 'traditional' housewife, performing domestic labour, including participating in bringing up the grandchildren.

While the mothers hope that their children will have a better future elsewhere, these women's sense of duty towards their families is so strong that each of them feels that it is important to provide, first and foremost, for their families in Cuba. A clear example of this is Milania, who has two jobs and rarely has time to socialise in the UK because she needs to send money to Cuba on a monthly basis.

In Facio's (1998) study of *jineterismo*, the author discusses the strains endured by Cuban women as they are the ones procuring goods to ensure the smooth running of their household. The Afro-Cuban informants confirm the theory of the 'dual burden' (Allan & Crow, 2001) of Cuban women, because they participate in the labour market and are in charge of childcare and domestic work.

Respondents both in the UK and in Cuba defined meanings of a 'good child' in the context of '*ayuda*', or 'help'. As one man emphasised: '[a good son is the one that] *ayude a los padres, que sea educado... a los padres que ayude, que sea buen estudiante. Que ayude en la casa en las cosas de la casa...pero cuando uno esté en la edad madura de aportar algo* (...helps his parents, someone that is well-mannered, that helps his parents, that studies well. That helps around the house but when one becomes more mature to contribute something). Contribution and help in this context imply financial as well as physical aid.

Because of housing shortages, family members may live with the parents well into adulthood. Commonly, married couples share a house with the in-laws and other family members. To be a 'good' son/daughter therefore involves helping the parents in different facets of their lives; however, by helping the mother they benefit all those that live within the same household. Such is the case of Milania, whose mother I met in the summer of 2005.

3.6. The ‘Good’ Daughter

46 year-old Regla (Milania’s mother) lives in a *zona* in Alamar. Her building stands between the main commercial road and the neglected seafront. Before I met Regla, one of my main informants, Pedro, had given me a full profile of Milania. He admitted that he had only seen her on a few occasions, but he knew her story well because Luisa, his wife, was a good friend of (and lived with) Regla.

Milania, now residing in the UK, is married to an Italian *turista*. When she first met him, she was in her early twenties and he was in his early fifties. In the late nineties, she was arrested and sentenced to several years in prison, accused of being a *jinetera*.

Originally from the eastern provinces of Cuba, Milania left her family home, which she shared with her mother and step-sister, and went to Havana to *jineteer*, as Pedro and his wife Luisa told me. In order to find her daughter, and after hearing rumours that she was a *jinetera* in Havana, Regla migrated to Havana. Once in Havana, she found out that Milania had been arrested. Milania spent five years in jail, and on her release, the Italian man, who stood by her side, married her and took her to England where he lived.

On my first visit to Regla’s house I was genuinely surprised. Her house was unlike any other houses I had visited in Alamar. Compared to local standards, it was very modern. Regla had decorated, painted and furnished the entire apartment. There were hand-made crafts from the local dollar markets that catered for tourists; embellishing the living room, a *new* VCD⁸¹ player, a *new* television and a *new* three-piece suite. On the walls there were various family portraits of Regla and her children (Milania and the youngest daughter). Regla went to the kitchen and came out with a freshly-prepared mango juice served with ice. I sat with the two women in the living room.

‘Very beautiful...’ I started saying.

‘All these are Regla’s things,’ Luisa clarified.

‘*Bueno...eso fue gracias a Milania que me ayuda mucho*’ (Well...this was thanks to Milania, who helps me a lot)

Regla smiled shyly although it was obvious that she was genuinely proud of what she had achieved. Shortly after, Regla took me on a tour of her house, where she even

⁸¹ DVD

showed me her flushing toilet and running water – all signs of status.⁸² Clearly this fact was also testament to Milania's commitment to better her mother's life. As we walked from one room to another, Regla constantly reminded me that she would not have been able to have this lifestyle if her daughter had not married a *turista* and left Cuba. I sat with the two women, who were both in their early forties and we started talking about life in general. Regla described her children as follows:

¡Tienes que conocerla! Ella es un poco brutica. Nunca le ha gustado estudiar pero tuvo suerte que se encontró con este señor [...] Pero ahora las niñas se fajan un poco. La de allá (England) piensa que a mí me gusta más esta (the 15 year-old living in Cuba) porque esta es casi blanca y la de aquí dice: 'A ti, te gusta más tu hija rica' pero a mí, me gustan las dos por igual. La blanquita es muy inteligente y estudiosa y la negrita ha salido bien en la vida, gracias a aquel señor...y me ayuda muchísimo.⁸³

(Interviewed in Alamar/ July 2005)

Curiously, when she describes her two daughters, Regla implicitly suggests that her family benefits a great deal more from the 'help' that she receives from Milania, who despite not being so intelligent and not having a career is doing better in life because she 'was lucky' to meet a foreigner. This highlights how education is perceived for some of these Cubans. Regla is proud of her 'studious' daughter, but sees education as a 'dead-end' social institution. Regla's statement also highlights Cuban cultural interpretations of race and educational achievement. She correlates intelligence with 'whiteness', and lack of it with 'blackness'. These views echo the views of other Afro-Cubans whom I

⁸² In Alamar, drinkable water fills the tank of each building. One neighbour is then in charge of using a pump to send water to various apartments. In the building where I was staying, running water was on for up to four hours every two days, but still toilet flushes did not work.

⁸³ You have to meet her. She is a bit simple. She never liked studying, but she was lucky that she met this gentleman [...] Now my children bicker a little. The one over there thinks that I like this one (the 15 year-old living in Cuba) because she is almost white, and the one here says: 'You like your rich daughter better', but I like them all the same. The *blanquita* (the white one) is very intelligent and studious; and *la negrita* (the black one) has succeeded in life, thanks to that gentleman, and she helps me a lot.

interviewed who also stereotype black people as *cabezas malas* or ‘unable to learn’ (Osmani), and see them as individuals who *no les gusta estudiar*, or who ‘do not like to study’ (white Cuban).

In 2006, I spent a substantial amount of time with Regla. She used to visit me almost daily in my apartment and we would go out for a drink to the dollar bars of Alamar. Despite being quite sociable Regla knew very few people in Alamar, the only exception being the warm relationship she had with the family that lived next door.

Throughout my time in Cuba, Milania continued to send money to her family. In 2006 there were three new albums of pictures showing Milania’s recent trip to Cuba. She had travelled to organise a party for her younger sister’s fifteenth birthday.⁸⁴ \$4000 were spent in what was the *zona*’s biggest fifteenth celebration. In fact, in comparison to the previous year when very few people knew Regla, in 2006 more people knew where she lived and, as she said, more people greeted her on the streets, even people she did not know. The party symbolised her new status: Milania was no longer a ‘*palestina*’,⁸⁵ as some neighbours referred to her the previous year. Even though she still was an ‘illegal resident’ as she had not been able to register permanently in Havana, economically she was doing well.

In supporting her daughter’s relationship with a ‘foreigner’, Regla took part in her daughter’s ‘success story’ and was admired for it by many neighbours, who made frequent comments about her ‘beautiful’ jewellery that her daughter *le trajo de Inglaterra* (brought her from England), and admired her new furniture. Regla was even contacted by neighbours who sought advice on how to decorate their kitchens and bathrooms. On one occasion, a neighbour, who claimed to be refurbishing her house, introduced herself to Regla in the street and asked her advice on where to find the best tiles on the black market.

This newly-found attention that Regla received highlights several important factors. It confirms the idiosyncracies and contradictions that *jineterismo* creates, for it is

⁸⁴ *Los quince*, as it is known Cubans, is an important celebration in Cuba. The fifteenth birthday (for females) is the most important as it symbolises a girl’s transition from childhood to adulthood. Almost all mothers with whom I have spoken dream of throwing a big party to celebrate their daughter’s fifteenth birthday.

⁸⁵ As mentioned in the introduction, this is a derogatory term designating an immigrant from the Eastern Cuban provinces.

rooted in both stigma and can generate envy; but curiously, while *jineteras* and their families have been stigmatised, they have also been considered as popular and useful to be in contact with. Milania and her mother have assumed a new status, for they have succeeded in improving their lives and in becoming 'rich'. In addition, while Milania has stayed in Europe, Regla has not exchanged her homeland for the capitalist West, but has remained in Cuba. As Maritza approvingly explains: 'she could have gone with her daughter, but she chose her homeland'. Nonetheless, the 'higher' status has been coupled with allegations of arrogance and of worries over envy. For instance, one of Maritza's friends once told me: 'I was going to send my daughter-in-law to ask her where she got her water tanks from, but who are we? I am a nobody...besides, I would not want her to think that neighbours are peering at her things and getting involved in *chismeteos* or gossiping'.

In July 2006, Regla and I watched the VCD of her youngest daughter's fifteenth party; we laughed about stories of Milania, whom she described as fun-loving and extrovert, and we spent a great deal of time together. Not once, though, did Regla mention Milania's arrest, and I was never able to summon the courage to ask her to discuss this issue with me. Yet, she would occasionally mention: '*Ella es medio loquita, ojalá que siga con el señor porque en definitiva él es un buen hombre y la quiere mucho.*' (She is a bit mad. I hope that she stays with the gentleman; after all, he is a good man and likes her a lot)

On my return to England that same year, Milania and I spoke frequently on the phone. She lived in London and had two day jobs, working long hours as a cleaner and as a waitress. During one of our long telephone conversations, Milania described her anxiety to me: '*¡No es fácil! Yo trabajo como una loca para que a mi familia no le falte nada y ellos allá piensan que tú tienes una vida fácil. Allá nos llaman de jineteros pero nosotros aquí estamos trabajando y mandando dinero para allá para mantener a los nuestros.*' (It is not easy! I work hard, so that my family can have everything and they think that you have an easy life. Over there they call us *jineteros* but we are here working and sending money to maintain our people)

Milania confessed: '*me sacrifico tanto, pero tanto, Dina y todavía tengo que estar con un hombre que no me gusta...pero ¡tengo que sacar a mi familia adelante!*' (I

sacrifice a lot, a lot. Dina and I have to be with a man that I don't like...but I have to improve my family's standard of living!) In that same conversation, Milania explained that she was unable to leave her husband because she felt 'grateful' for his help. Curiously, 'sacrifice' had placed her in a web of multiple, mutually interlocking moral obligations.

3.7. The Meanings of *Querer* (To Like/Love)

In Milania's context, meanings of 'love' include 'helping' the mother and the family. In fact, most of the Cubans participating in this research display their affection for their mothers by looking after them. By their accounts, some participants typically refer to their fathers as '*descarados*' (shameless) for abandoning the family, not providing for them economically, as well as not being faithful to the mothers who are left to run the household single-handedly. Love here is also associated with loyalty to the mother.

The Cuban Revolution's attempt to promote equality in society must certainly be acknowledged. However, the Revolution also had an impact on family structures. In Cuba, the divorce rate has increased since the Revolution as has the number of single-parent households. I stress that changes in family structures are linked with the revolutionary efforts to promote gender equality.

Reddock (1985: 68) argues in her paper that during slavery the 'nuclear family was discouraged by planters in the Caribbean', and both men and women were forced by their circumstances to develop multiple relationships. This statement provides us with some background knowledge about the meanings of relationships for Afro-Cubans in the past. However, it is unrealistic to argue that that period still shapes the way Afro-Cubans develop their relationships. In fact, if we were to agree that Afro-Cubans experience love differently to 'whites', as Don Ortiz once suggested (see Chapter 2), we would only be focusing on the African side of their ancestry. In today's Cuba, this is no longer the case as many respondents are also of European ancestry. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the changes introduced by the Revolution, more than any other factor, have had a great impact on these women's perceptions of relationships.

The participants' attitudes to marriage reflect the changing values and attitudes towards divorce. As these women are empowered, they develop higher expectations of

Cuban men – expectations which are not always met as men struggle to provide for the families. Hence, in most of the examples given, the main cause of divorce is the husband's failure to act as the breadwinner and his unfaithfulness. As participants often claimed, husbands used the financial and material resources that were meant to be for the household to lure their lovers. Like Milania, the majority of Afro-Cuban women I spoke to had mixed perceptions of Cuban men. On the one hand, men are expected to be the 'male of the household', the voice of authority and the one providing security to the family. Yet, most women would also state that Cuban men '*no sirven pa' nada*' or are 'useless'. Indeed, Felicia jokingly said that with the economic crisis Cuban men had, just like Cuban Pesos, 'devalued'. Perhaps an interesting comparison can be drawn between Afro-Cuban men during slavery and in contemporary Cuban society. As Reddock (1985: 68) states, during slavery the Afro-Cuban male head 'could not assert his authority as husband and father as "his wife" was the property of another'. Ironically, it seems as though these days, Cuban men in general, cannot act as the 'one in charge' because daily life in Cuba continues to be shaped by politics and the state; and ultimately, the state is the 'one in charge'.

When Milania fled her home in Eastern Cuba, her mother had already divorced twice and they were struggling to get by. Now she feels that her mother is making the same mistake by being in a relationship with a *negro machista* (black male chauvinist) whom both Milania and her sister dislike. The fact that Regla's partner has had a number of lovers in the neighbourhood is known to all, including Maritza, who on one occasion said to me: '*Regla no lo necesita para nada porque todo lo que ella tiene en su casa lo puso ella con el sudor de la hija. Ella que se busque a otro hombre que le ayude a resolver su situación porque aquel no sirve y no le resuelve nada.*' (Regla does not need him at all; everything that she has in her home was bought with her daughter's sweat. She better find a man that can help her solve her situation because that one is not worth it and he won't solve any of her problems). This statement suggests that for the community, and not just the women labeled as *jineteras*, marriage has a strong economic rationale and is not necessarily based on love in a romantic sense. When Maritza points out that Regla's current husband is not helping her *resolver los problemas*, she means that he does not

provide for his reconstituted family. This point was confirmed by Milania in a telephone conversation:

Dina, ese hombre tiene que resolverle los problemas de mi mamá porque él es su marido,⁸⁶ el hombre de la casa. Si yo pongo la ropa de mi hermana y todos los gastos de la casa, él tiene que por lo menos llevarle la comida a la casa. No es mucho pedirle que le garantice el arroz con frijoles porque todo lo demás lo pongo yo.⁸⁷

Milania offers emotional support to her mother, but has taken a very active role in helping her separate from her step-father. For Regla, however, to be in a relationship is important because she is illegal in Havana,⁸⁸ and if she marries her partner she will be entitled to stay. Also, she claims that there are practical tasks that her husband carries out, which she is unable to do, such as driving to the market and fixing things in the house. Regla also mentioned the safety of having a male in the house, which means that her home is less likely to be 'broken into'. When Regla talked about her relationship, she said that she did not understand why her children would want her to be 'growing old and alone'. She dismissed some of their concerns by saying that it was natural that they were jealous because for a long time the three of them lived together without a male in the household. In the summer of 2007, Regla had finally decided that she was better off on her own when her partner's lover became pregnant. Milania had sent money to Regla for her to buy land (illegally) in Havana. By the time I left, construction had began and Regla was hoping to move into her new house in 2008; Regla's partner, however, was left with a completely refurbished house. Regla had started a new relationship with an electrician, who was 'helping' her by building her new house.

⁸⁶ The term *marido* is used here despite the fact that Regla is not officially married to her current partner.

⁸⁷ Dina, that man has to solve my mother's problems because he is her husband – the man of the house. If I am in charge of my sister's clothes and all the house expenses, he has to at least bring food to the house. It is not asking a lot of him to ensure that there is rice and beans because everything else I provide.

⁸⁸ As an illegal resident, Regla is constantly worried about whether her daughter will be found out at school. Her daughter's education is her main concern, but there are other concerns, such as losing the house she is building and being sent to Oriente.

3.8. Felicia's Complex Female Identities

In July 2005, I knew the neighbourhood's version of Felicia's profile fairly well and had seen her on many occasions. It was known that Felicia had been arrested in the beaches of Havana del Este, accused of being a *jinetera*. All the neighbours seemed to know a story or two about her. The stories that I frequently heard described how her apartment was visited by many *turistas* and how her older brother acted as a pimp, sending his wife to downtown Havana and the beaches of East Havana to *jinetear*.

Felicia's older sister was married to an Italian man and her youngest brother, Juan, had a Croatian girlfriend. It was because of these relationships with *extranjeros* (foreigners) that Pedro referred to Felicia's household as a 'brothel'. Meeting a *turista* in Alamar is not a daily occurrence. What was puzzling for the neighbourhood was that almost every person in Felicia's family had met one.

34 year-old Felicia spent most time outdoors. She would stand at her porch chatting with neighbours and laughing loudly. From the building where I was staying, she could be seen across the square; and despite the vast distance between the buildings, her laughter could sometimes be heard from the balcony. Felicia is well known in the *zona*. She would talk happily at her mother's porch, while her five-year-old son played football with other children in the sandy square.

A few minutes after waiting outside the house, Felicia came out wearing a short top, exposing her stomach and dragging her sandals. She was wearing rollers and had no make-up on. When Pedro introduced me, Felicia smiled briefly: 'I know who she is. I have seen her before'. Sensing the uneasiness, Pedro mentioned that I was writing a thesis on contemporary Cuba and that I needed to interview young Cubans: 'Give her a quick interview, Felicia,' he said. As Felicia considered the proposal, her mother took over and urged her to accept, explaining that Felicia rarely went out of that area, and that she needed *un cambio de aire* (a change of air).

The mother continued pressing Felicia to talk to me; she offered to finish cooking and to feed her grandson. Felicia finally accepted and asked me to return half an hour later to give her time to get dressed and do her hair. On my return, I found Felicia, cigarette in hand, wearing tight denim trousers and a pair of sunglasses. She was heavily

made up and her hair changed into a curly, elaborated hairstyle. It was obvious that Felicia was not expecting to be interviewed at home, so I invited her for a drink at the nearby dollar bar.

Felicia used the occasion to stage a flamboyant outing. She greeted various people as we walked down the wide avenue. On two separate occasions, she excused herself and chatted with neighbours, laughing loudly and making jokes. She then joined me again, and we continued walking under the blazing sun.

Halfway down that wide avenue, there was a dollar bar with a good number of mostly male *Alamareños* sitting and drinking beer. *Reggaetón* tunes were playing loudly. Felicia greeted a few more friends: '*Salir aquí en La Habana para tomar una cerveza para mí es un lujo*' (To go out here in Havana for a beer for me is a treat), she explained. When I appreciated her actions and the attitudes of those around me, it was obvious that that feeling was shared by many around us. The men were dressed formally with their shirts or t-shirts on, and whenever they went to the bar to buy drinks, they would glance around. Men wanted to be seen buying, drinking and taking hard currency out of their wallets. Their attitude shed a light on why Felicia's mother was so excited about her going out and why Felicia dressed up as she did.

Clearly Felicia welcomed the occasion of being invited to the bar. With her permission, I started recording. Our interview started with a conversation about daily life. I asked Felicia to tell me about life in Alamar. As usual, the main topics that emerged from that discussion were the daily struggles to get by: blackouts, water shortages and other hardships; and every now and then she would quote information that she got from the *canales* (Miami channels) about a much better life on the other side.

Without being asked any questions about her private life, Felicia started telling me her life story, firmly embedding it in a rationale of hardship and struggle. She stressed how her work at the local polyclinic did not meet the financial needs of her household, and she presented herself as the one in charge of sustaining her family:

Yo soy una madre soltera y tengo que conseguir la mochila
pa' la escuela (for her son), los zapatos, la comida, el aceite
[...] Para mantenerme tengo que vender cosas que me dan:

ropa, comida [...] Lo gasto todo en comida y luego tengo que pagar el teléfono, comprar el pollo, pagar la electricidad y ya [implying that she is left with nothing].⁸⁹

Felicia emphasises being forced into managing a series of largely economic exchange relations in a system of chronic shortage: ‘I have to find’, ‘I have to sell’, ‘I have to pay, to buy’. Her statement defines a rationale for *jineterismo* as it narrates the struggles Felicia and all the other mothers face to sustain their families if they rely on their employment or help from the Cuban government.

The time I spent with Felicia confirmed the appeal that tourists have for her. When she waved and made jokes with neighbours, she wanted to be noticed and she was clearly excited about going to the dollar bar. Ultimately, our interview, too, became an instance of a successful exchange relation for both parties. I came out of the bar with an interview, but Felicia had had a ‘free’ meal, quite a few beers and sweets for her son and a beer for her mother. By the time she arrived home, her siblings had eaten well, not having to worry about her for once because she had eaten elsewhere and enjoyed herself.

Felicia had bartered some ‘treats’ for herself and her family in return for our conversation, perhaps revealing why her mother had had an interest in us going out together. While giving me the interview, Felicia had her immediate family, mother and son in mind. In this sense, we can say that they are both *luchando* on each other’s behalf.

In the section that follows, I show how the idea of working together is not limited to the family; instead the informants play an important role in the neighbourhood’s shared struggle in the economy of shortage.

3.9. Neighbourhood Links

In each of the concrete buildings of Alamar, neighbours form strong bonds and individuals help each other on a daily basis. In Alamar there is a strong community feel, neighbours go to each other’s houses to watch the soap opera if there is a blackout, they

⁸⁹ I am a single mother and I have to *conseguir* (find/ obtain) the backpack [for her son], the shoes, other food items, the oil [...] In order to get by, I have to sell things that are given to me: clothes, food [...] I spend it all on food and then I have to pay the telephone bill, well...buy the chicken, pay for the electricity and that’s it.

store food in their neighbour's fridges and, as very few households have a telephone, individuals make and receive phone calls in their neighbour's houses.

In the neighbourhood and in the streets, men and women call each other *compañeros* (comrades) – a Socialist term that has become part of everyday Cuban language. To be a good neighbour involves taking part in multiple exchange relations. Affection is demonstrated by helping neighbours out in times of need and showing mutual support: for instance, Julieta recalls that when she was in Cuba, her neighbour would take various food items to her house and vice-versa.

In Alamar, responsibilities are shown by taking part in voluntary activities – such as cleaning the building – and there are also more official expectations, for example attending meetings and parties organised by the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR).

While most Alamarinos greet and help each other, many of these relationships have significant racial boundaries: for example, most of my respondents' closer friends were Afro-Cuban. In the building where I was staying, white families were affable but kept themselves to themselves, their balconies were made more secluded with glass windows installed to maintain privacy (Image 6 is an example of an 'atypical', private Alamar household). Black families, such as Felicia's family, retained an 'open house' and generally spent more time outdoors or on their balconies.

Despite recent changes in Cuban society, relationships between neighbours continue to be important; but the more official roles in the neighbourhood are not as important as before – including participating in political activities, such as the ones organised by the CDR. Indeed, some participants have lost a significant amount of contact with the neighbourhood and concentrate on their personal needs – as is the case of Dayamí, who is the subject of endless gossip and curiosity. Dayamí's actions are perceived by some neighbours as 'selfish' and a worrying sign that values are changing. As Maritza claims: 'Cubans are becoming too individualistic and forgetting Revolutionary values like solidarity'. Nevertheless, *el barrio* is still an important aspect of daily life for most.

In Cuba, there is a saying: '*el mejor hermano es el vecino más cercano*' (the best brother is the nearest neighbour). Clearly, sharing hardships within *el barrio* and helping

each other in general are seen as positive traits. Whereas a person like Dayamí is seen as a ‘bad’ neighbour because she isolates herself from *el barrio*, neighbours do not gossip as much about the ‘white’ neighbours who keep to themselves. As an elderly neighbour once told me ‘they [white neighbours] are decent, hardworking people, but they simply don’t like to hang around in the neighbourhood’. I heard a similar comment from Maritza about the ‘white’ neighbour that lived one floor below the one I was staying. She stated: ‘these people surely will help their neighbours if people ask them to...but they live in their own world, it’s better like this, why get involved in *líos* (problems)?’

While the participants’ main responsibilities lie with their families, a great amount of effort is dedicated to demonstrating that they are ‘good neighbours’, and neighbours are often referred to as members of the extended family: ‘*Es como si fuera mi propia sangre*’ (almost as if they were my own blood). This phrase was sometimes used when people introduced me to their close friends in the neighbourhood.

The concept of the ‘good neighbour’ is connected with the idea that Cubans have a duty to support each other. As one of the neighbours stated: ‘*Los cubanos somos todos de la misma familia y por eso tenemos que ayudarnos unos a los otros*’ (Cubans are all of the same family, and that is why we must help each other). I witnessed the depth of this help on several occasions when people knocked on the door of their neighbours to ask for salt, tomatoes, or other ingredients whilst cooking. When the owners of the house that I was staying in were decorating their house, their neighbours used to help the workers carry materials to the apartment. Also, whenever we arrived in Cuba, there were always volunteers to help us carry the suitcases and my son’s pram, mainly because my husband had grown up in the neighbourhood.

Several examples of ‘comradeship’ are shown on a daily basis in Alamar. Whenever there is a water shortage, neighbours help each other carry buckets of water from the ground floor upwards. On one occasion after a blackout, a female neighbour rushed to her neighbour’s house to unplug their main electricity supply so that it would not ruin their equipment. Neighbours also routinely look out and protect children in the neighbourhood as if they were their own.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ I was often shocked (and concerned) when my three-year-old son was whisked off my hands by neighbours who used to come to our apartment, take him to meet other neighbours and, on one occasion,

Therefore, while many households are becoming more private and insular, neighbours are still an important part in Alamar's social fabric. In 2007, after a birthday party in the house in which I was staying, the owner took some cake over for neighbours unable to attend; and most of the resources for the party (such as, cassette player, tapes, plates and cooking pans) had come from different households in the neighbourhood. One respondent who spends a great deal of time interacting with neighbours is Felicia. Her case, introduced earlier, depicts the complexities of female identities in contemporary Cuba, for people who know her call her a 'good daughter, mother, worker, neighbour', but also a *jinetera*.

3.10. Neighbourhood's Expectations of the 'Model' Neighbour

When they started pursuing their relationships with tourists, the women introduced here were mostly involved in household activities and their own studies or jobs. They neglected activities organised by the CDR. Even Felicia, who spends more time in the neighbourhood than Dayamí's and Milania's family, is not as engaged in local political activities, except the CDR parties which she attends because, as she clarifies, she loves dancing.

Felicia is perceived by her neighbours as *muy buena gente*⁹¹ (a very good person). Maritza explains that this is because of the amount of time that she spends helping neighbours with either cooking oil or other items that they need. Factors like these are important but do not prevent some neighbours from whispering, with a disapproving look on their faces: '*Se dice que es jinetera*' (people say that she is a *jinetera*).

Even though neighbours do not say it to her face, they whisper that Felicia is a *jinetera*; yet she is seen as someone who thinks about the community, as opposed to Dayamí, who is perceived as more individualistic. If *jineterismo* is not fully accepted by the neighbourhood, even less acceptable is the intention of improving one's own life and that of the immediate family without showing any intention to 'help' the community.

when I found him later in one of the apartments, the female neighbours were already feeding him a plate of rice with beans. Another close friend of mine, a black British woman who had just given birth, was shocked and angry when her Cuban husband asked her to breastfeed the neighbour's baby because the neighbour was not producing milk. The Cuban man was just as angry when my friend refused – in his view my friend was 'being selfish'.

⁹¹ This concept was also used in the 80s lyrics of Cuban Salsa band, Los Van Van: '*El Buena Gente*'. In Van Van's lyrics *buena gente* is someone that would always share and hand out things to the neighbours.

Neighbours will often state in conversations: '*Yo no espero nada de esa gente*' (I don't expect anything from them), yet on the other hand they would say 'those people they don't care about anyone but themselves', which leads me to conclude that they do expect some form of 'help' from those that have more resources available.

Whilst Felicia is fully immersed in a close-knit community, Dayamí is known by the neighbourhood yet does not mingle with many people. Dayamí is simply seen as the *jineterita* (the little *jinetera*). This somewhat distant relationship could also be linked to the fact that Dayamí does not participate very often in the exchange of goods or daily gossip in the neighbourhood. Yet, as in the case of the other two women, she is completely devoted to her family.

While Dayamí's life revolves around her family, neighbours gossip about her dissociation from the community. As she spends a great deal of time indoors or away from Alamar, older neighbours interpret her absence as a rejection of her own community. As Luisa, who lives with Milania's mother, told me:

Los vecinos comentan...que (ella) no ayuda a nadie, casi no habla con nadie, saluda cuando le da la gana...sin embargo ella tiene más posibilidades que mucha gente porque...ella anda en tremendos carros...Si ella quisiera realmente ayudar a los vecinos...(shrugs), pero solo piensa en llevar su vida a'lante [...] se comenta que (ella) se ha olvidado de su gente y eso hay gente que no perdona.⁹²

Here is an interesting contradiction as some neighbours say that they do not expect anything from what they label as the *jineteras*, yet when these women do not help the neighbours, the neighbours 'have them crucified' because of their selfishness.

It is clear that the negative attitude that Dayamí's neighbours had developed towards her had pushed her further into a private space. Curiously, it was the women,

⁹²The neighbours they say...that (she) doesn't help anyone, she hardly speaks to anyone, she greets people when she feels like it...however, she has a better life than many people because...she is driven around in great cars...if she really wanted to help her neighbours... (shrugs), but she only wants to get on with her own life [...] People say that (she) has forgotten about her people and some people will not forgive her for this.

especially older women, who frowned upon her desire to lead a private life. The men I spoke to rarely had negative comments about Dayamí, but the women would cast angry looks and make loud and provocative comments whenever they saw her leaving her flat. Nevertheless, Dayamí stated that she brushes aside the hostility she faces from her older female neighbours. She explained to me that the main reason why she avoided contact with her neighbours is because '*La gente habla demasiado y se quiere meter en todo*' (People talk a lot and want to have an opinion on everything).

Faced with the various attempts of intrusion into her private life, Dayamí prefers to go out with her German boyfriend. When he is in Cuba, they travel to other cities, private resorts, and spend most of their time outside Alamar. However, in doing so, she is in some way encouraging the conflict within the neighbourhood. As an outsider, it appears that the *jinetera* label is partly applied in this case as 'punishment' for her perceived selfish behaviour, as I will discuss in Chapter 4. The neighbourhood's assumption is that Dayamí has turned her back on *su gente* or 'her people'. Neighbours see her as 'individualistic' and 'self-sufficient', actions that after all clash with revolutionary values, which is why she is often described as a 'bad neighbour.'

So far, I have analysed three women's relationships with the mother and the neighbourhood. In the section that follows, I look at the respondents' interactions and perceptions of Cuban men and the Cuban state. Considering that Cuba is, as Padula (1996) defines, the 'most aggressively masculine' of Latin American countries, the traditional labelling of females as *jinetas* and sex-workers (as shown in the introduction to this thesis) is justified in societal discourses because it sends the message that selling bodies and being exploited is associated with women rather than men. Despite the exclusive focus of this thesis on women, I challenge the idea that *jinetismo* should be associated with just women, and stress that men also encounter certain frustrations, which, as in the case of the women discussed here, could equally lead them to want or indeed need to seek relationships with foreigners. However, a full discussion of Cuban men's desires to be with European women falls outside the scope of this thesis.

3.11. Afro-Cuban Women's Experiences of Cuban Men

As I arrived at Regla's house one afternoon in the summer of 2006, her husband at that time was lying on the sofa with the remote control sitting on his stomach. Regla was in the kitchen preparing dinner. When he saw me, her husband retreated to his bedroom where he continued watching television. Regla's husband was a taxi driver, working for the state and earning Cuban Pesos. As Regla explained, 'sometimes, I don't know whether I should really ask him to contribute because the money he makes each month is nothing'. The point is that while her husband comes home with less than \$15 per month, Milania sends between \$50 and \$100 each month for their expenses, which, as she said, was a great source of embarrassment for her husband.

We spent the afternoon talking. At some point, Regla asked him to buy a few lemons from the local store and a bottle of rum from the dollar store; she got out her purse and gave him \$5. Avoiding eye contact and with his head down, he stretched his arm and received the money. When he came back, Regla and I sat at the dining table talking about relationships. After being constantly asked by Regla to accompany us, he finally obliged but did not participate much in the conversation. He was quiet and very polite, calling me '*Usted*' ('you' formal) at all times.

When we were about to go out to my place later that day, he insisted in a loud manner that Regla should not wear the shorts she had on, implying that they were too short. Whether Regla normally listens to his advice or not, I was not sure, but on this occasion, as awkward as the situation had turned out to be, she decided to defy him and did not get changed. The following day, she told me that they had had a major row and her next-door neighbours had to get involved to calm her husband down.

Many female respondents demonstrated that the relationships they had with Cuban men were rather complex, involving issues of 'control' and 'power' that could increasingly lead to violence. While Dayamí states that the family cannot 'count on' her younger brother, and Milania refers to her father in law as a 'bad husband' as he is unable to sustain his family, Felicia goes as far as saying that 'it is not worth the trouble being with a Cuban man'. Similarly, Julieta (Chapter 4) states that she has been 'bruised profusely' by Cuban men.

In the various dimensions that Cuban men are discussed, as 'fathers', 'brothers' and 'lovers', these women discuss the failures of these men in being '*hombres de verdad*' or 'real men' and this linked with their low incomes, which do not guarantee the family's livelihood. We saw earlier Milania questioning her step-father's role as the *hombre de la casa*, and in Dayamí's case her brother was delimited to the 'smallest' role in the family. In a country that is facing great economic hardship, and where males are perceived as not fulfilling their assigned roles as breadwinners, women often complain that there is nothing they can usefully expect of them. The brothers of Felicia and Dayamí and Milania's father in law lead somewhat idle lives and have an inconsequential role in their households. Thus, for a nation that is strongly *machista*, as Padula (1996) states, we can also argue that the participants of this thesis demonstrate that in Cuba there is also a 'crisis' of masculinity, which is why many women are forced to '*ponerse los pantalones, subirse las mangas de la blusa y salir a luchar*' (put their trousers on, roll their sleeves up and go out to fight (to sustain their livelihoods)', as Felicia states.

Matthew Gutmann (1997: 834) makes an insightful comment when he argues that masculinities 'have little meaning except in relation to women and female identities and practices'. He calls for an analysis of women's experiences of men in order to fully grasp cultural interpretations and continuous constructions of masculinities. Indeed, an analysis of women's experiences of male masculinities is useful to explore the impact of masculinities on women; and, in this case, the three participants suggest that the lack of *hombres de la casa* and males that the family can assign an important role to can have an impact on the choices that the females make in their lives.

Women's narratives persistently construe Cuban men as failing. Being unable to offer economic security is associated with both the failure to be a man and part of the family unit in which 'care', 'responsibility', and 'help' prevail as primary values. This explains why Felicia emphasises that the link with her father is merely biological. She then asks, 'what else has he given me?' Likewise, when she mentions her biological father, Milania says: '*de él...no sé nada, pero tampoco me hace falta porque yo tengo mi vida, mi familia, mi madre y si él no me ha dado nada nunca que voy a esperar ahora de él!*' (I know nothing about him, but I don't need him either because I have my life, my family, my mother and if he has not given me anything in the past, what am I going to

expect from him right now?). Once these women find some stability in their lives through the relationships they embark on, some of their fathers depend on them for survival.

In Cuba, as in most of Latin America, masculinities are enmeshed in discourses of *machismo*, '[a] masculine ideal stressing domination of women, competition between men, aggressive display, predatory sexuality and a double standard' (Connell, 1995: 31). Indeed, as research across Latin America confirms, men tend to be 'considered the authority within the family' (Parrado and Zenteno, 2002: 756). Most of these male traits conflict with the respondents' own realities; women like Felicia, Dayamí and Milania present themselves as relatively independent, or aspiring to be independent and believe that relationships with Cubans will unfailingly lead to abuse. As Milania states: 'if I was married to a Cuban, we would kill each other, because I do not allow any man to tell me what to do and he would not tolerate a woman that answers him back, so it would be the end.'

In the interviews, the women mention the strains that face the Cuban family and make reference to outbreaks of anger and rows between husbands and wives that are part of the norm in some building blocks. To many of my participants, these marital problems emerge because Cuban males attempt to dominate women. I witnessed one of the typical rows that occasionally erupt in the neighbourhood. A young Cuban male was caught cheating by his wife. In order to assert his manhood, he shouted down at his wife, warning her that she must respect him because he is a man. When the mother of the woman interfered, she repeatedly reminded her daughter to listen to her husband; yet, the woman challenged her husband, arguing that she had a career and a degree and did not need him. These attitudes partly explain why there has been a consistent increase in divorce rates and marital breakdown in revolutionary Cuba (Lumsden, 1996).

Parrado and Zenteno (2002) offer a useful explanation of Becker's theories of marriage. Becker's model, which concentrates on the division of labour, indicates that if men and women specialise in their strongest areas – namely, men in market work because they are the highest earners and women in domestic labour – then it would be 'beneficial to both partners' and ultimately for society. However, as societies develop and specialisation starts disappearing as women gain more skills through education and join the labour market, women become more independent and marriage becomes less

desirable. Parrado and Zenteno's research questions this theory. Using evidence from their research in Mexico, they argue that development has led to an increase in educational attainment among women and more women participating in the labour market. Yet, marriage is still highly desirable for Mexican women. Likewise, this research on Afro-Cuban women demonstrates that specialisation is not clear in Cuba as women perform various roles and have become more independent, again due to educational attainment and their participation in the labour market and informal economies; yet, most of these women still place a high value on marriage.

Felicia asked me on numerous occasions: '*Un cubano, pa' que?*' (Why would I want a Cuban?) On the one hand, she was telling me that she would not be involved romantically with a Cuban again; yet, I saw her with a young Cuban man many times in Alamar. I saw them sharing a beer at the dollar bar, then at the bus stop on another day when he had his arm around her and she even introduced him as her *esposo* (spouse/partner) to my husband. After a failed marriage to a Cuban, Felicia is extremely selective about who she wants to marry. Many Cuban women I spoke to stated that they would not become romantically involved with Cuban men, yet, acknowledged that having a Cuban partner made life easier. These women may in fact rely on Cuban men to carry water to their apartments, to protect their houses and to make them feel 'attractive'. This is linked with their perceptions of femininity as these women fear being seen as unattractive by their neighbours.

From discussions with Dayamí and Milania it is clear that these women also choose to be with or marry a foreigner because they believe that the benefits will be greater, as opposed to marrying a Cuban man, whom they describe as 'child-like' and 'irresponsible'.

While the women introduced in this chapter are perceived in the household and their communities as *luchadoras*, their relationships with Cuban men are a source of conflict as they feel that Cuban men should ideally, yet unrealistically, be '*hombres de verdad*'. In terms of their relationships with the Cuban state, there are further degrees of ambivalence as the next section will demonstrate.

3.12. *Jineteras* and the State

Before focusing on the experiences of the three women introduced in this chapter, I will widen the scope to understand how aspects of masculinity may affect Afro-Cuban women, and how the women respond to these. This includes a discussion of the Cuban state which is a gendered entity itself – a masculinised overarching provider. The Cuban state is, as mentioned in Chapter 2, omnipresent, and has for decades shaped the lives of many Cubans. In this section, I discuss the conflicting relationship between the ‘independent’ *jinetera* and the ‘struggling main provider’ in Cuba – the state.

The highest symbol of status in Cuba is represented by the toughness of the ‘white’ bearded revolutionaries of the late 1950s. The bravery and manly heroism that they provided to the Cuban nation awards them a higher status in Cuban society. In Cuba, as in most Socialist societies, there is a strong value attached to collective sacrifices, and it is these values associated with the revolutionaries, which have been passed down to Cuban society. We saw earlier how Dayamí’s neighbours saw her as a ‘bad neighbour’ because she was only ‘looking after’ her family and not ‘helping’ her community. This is a good example of how collective thinking has become established as one of the ideological underpinnings in revolutionary Cuba. With reference to survival practices at the household level, the Cuban government applauds and manages collective ‘making do’ practices that benefit all (see discussion in Chapter 2). However, economic management strategies for personal gains can be perilous and perceived as unethical; these are in essence the practices associated with *jineterismo* as further demonstrated in Chapter 5.

The rejection of *jineterismo* because of its perceived association with corrupted values is evident in the governmental discourses presented in previous chapters. In Milania, Dayamí and Felicia’s accounts, however, these women stress that they ‘sacrifice’ for their family and their communities. In Milania’s case, she states that despite not living in Cuba, she is ‘sacrificing’ for the Cuban nation, as she sends remittances for her family still living in Cuba. She argues that by sending money to her family, she feels that she is taking on the government’s responsibility of looking after the population; and in doing so, she, and many other Cubans that sacrifice for their families, are to an extent preventing the occurrence of further social upheavals.

When analysing her own personal experience, Milania places it within a discourse of discontent and contestation. She feels that the role that many emigrants play in the Cuban economy is crucial to creating a more stable nation. ‘In Cuba, they call us traitors,’ she said, ‘but thanks to us they are eating and thanks to us Fidel is still in power’. Making reference to the social upheavals of 1994, when angry Cubans took to the streets to protest against the government, Milania believes that if contemporary Cuba is able to remain socially stable, it is because of the many Cubans that ‘sacrificed’ to be abroad. Nevertheless, the relationship between the so called Cuban *jinetes* and the Cuban state is based on conflict because *jinetes*, like most Cubans, are compelled to accept the state as the father of all Cubans and the main provider (see Chapter 5 where this argument is developed), despite the fact that their relationships with foreigners provide them with access to greater financial resources than the majority of Cubans.

In this case, conflict emerges because the participants believe that in practice they are the ones providing for their family; yet their role as responsible mothers and devoted daughters is discredited by the state. For example, participants who have children of their own argue that school children are socialised to believe in revolutionary values and to love the motherland above all else. Felicia, for instance, says that she does not know what to say when her son comes home and says that he loves Fidel and the Revolution ‘more than anything in the world’. Felicia does not dare to interfere with these teachings; she only nods, because she is well aware that contradicting the children could lead to conflicts with the school.

Felicia and other female respondents talked about their powerless role as mothers. ‘*En Cuba los niños no son nuestros,*’ says Julieta (introduced in Chapter 4) ‘*son de la Revolución*’ (In Cuba, our children are not ours [...] they belong to the Revolution). She goes on to say: ‘*Nosotros los queremos pero la Revolución los educa. Los bañamos y la Revolución les da la comida. Si nos gusta la Revolución todo muy bien, pero si no, calladitas, hay que oírles decir todo lo que se les enseña en la escuela.*’ (We love them but the Revolution educates them. We bath them and the Revolution feeds them. If we like the Revolution all is well, but if not, we must keep our mouths shut and hear them say everything they are taught at school.) Likewise, Felicia explains: ‘*Quizás la Revolución le enseñe* [talking about her son] *que cuando crezca tenga que ayudar a*

Pueblos Hermanos,⁹³ *pero yo le quisiera enseñar que salga de aquí si tiene la oportunidad porque yo quiero lo mejor pa' él.*' (Perhaps the Revolution will teach my child to fight in Brother Nations, but I would like to teach him to get out of here as soon as he gets the opportunity, because I only want what is best for him). Here, the Revolution, which I see as the 'soul' of the state, is, therefore, a central figure in the lives of the children, yet this centrality contributes to the creation of further frustration with the Revolution.

The points presented in this section show that women like Felicia are living in a society dominated by 'masculine' values and leaders, who struggle in economic terms to provide for the population, in as much the same way as Felicia's husband, unable to sustain his family, still attempted to dominate them.

Cuban American Ileana Fuentes takes a radically critical view of the values promoted by the state. Fuentes (1994, quoted in Padula 199: 230) argues that the Revolution introduced the view that 'what is feminine is viewed as weak and worthless'. However, *machismo*, a practice that she claims is 'enmeshed with Cuban nationalism', is contrasted with femininity. Femininity in this case includes the following traits: sensitivity, sentimentalism, humanism, pacifism, and a willingness to negotiate (Fuentes, 1994). On the other hand, as Orlandini (1993: 156) points out, a real *macho* in Cuba is 'vigorous, hard, aggressive, autonomous, rational, practical, mature and polygamous'. The author goes on to say that many of these practices (*machismo*) are passed on from mothers to their sons. In fact, the community (in general) plays a major part in passing these values on to younger generations. For example, I found it interesting that one of the neighbours would only refer to my son as '*machi*' affectionately (little *macho*/ male). When neighbours saw or heard my son crying, some would remind him that '*los hombres no lloran*' (men don't cry). Also, neighbours and relatives (male and female) would frequently ask my toddler, how many girlfriends he has or was going to have, and the higher the number, the more amused they would be.

⁹³ *Pueblos Hermanos*, or Brother Nations, are countries with similar political ideologies or leftist leaders in Africa and Latin America. Cuba has previously provided military support to Brother Nations, such as Angola, and now sends many professionals to Venezuela. In 'Man and Socialism', Che Guevara says that 'Proletarian Internationalism is a duty, but it is also a revolutionary necessity.' It is this vision (of helping Brother Nations and 'educating' other people in the developing world about the benefits of communism) that led Cubans to countries like Angola, Nicaragua and Ethiopia.

Many writers confirm the view that in Cuba the state is the strongest expression of masculinity. For instance, Clavijo (1993) referring to one of Fidel's nicknames '*El Caballo*' (The Horse),⁹⁴ states that he is following the legacy of one of Cuba's previous dictators, Machado, who said that, 'the key to governing was a masculine organ' (quoted in Padula, 1996: 231). Hodge refers to the revolutionaries as a group of bearded 'machos', who attempt to prevent the female island and its women from being 'penetrated' by capitalism again (see full quote on page 48). Leiner (1993) supports these views, and questions the Revolution's need for 'macho control of Cuban citizens' (quoted in Padula: 232).

Milania states that the government is 'hypocritical' in penalising women who want to be with foreigners and criticising these women as being immoral; yet, it too benefits from the money that these women bring into the country. '*¡Quieren estar en todas! ¡Quieren controlarlo todo pero tienen a su pueblo muerto de hambre!*', she states angrily. (They want to be involved in everything! They want to control everything, but they have the people starving!) Similarly, Felicia criticises the fact that the state's policy is weak when it comes to marital breakdown, which is why her ex-husband does not contribute financially to her son's upbringing. She believes that there is not enough pressure from the state to ensure that men in these circumstances support their children.

3.13. The State's Policy on Household Matters

Through policy, the Cuban state has been closely involved in promoting family values and highlighting the need for 'responsibility', 'sacrifice' and 'moral duty' within the family. As Randall (2003: 367) argues, with the introduction in 1975 of the Family Code, which 'stipulates equality between men and women in their social relationships'⁹⁵, the revolutionary leadership attempted to promote gender equality, claiming that women needed to be liberated from 'domestic slavery' (Nazzari, 1983: 246). However, as the examples shown in this chapter confirm, women are still responsible for domestic labour

⁹⁴ When referring to Fidel in public spaces, and when wishing to be discreet, Cubans draw the shape of a beard. Some call him '*El Barba*' (The Beard)

⁹⁵ The FMC played a major role in ensuring that the clauses of the Family Code were followed. Between 1959 and 1985, the number of women entering the paid labour market doubled (Padula, 1996: 227). The State opened more daycare centres allowing women to collect their young children at 6 or 7pm. (Padula, 1996: 227).

and childcare, which is why Dayamí's brother spends most of his time at his friend's house, only coming back to carry out basic tasks. Likewise, while Felicia and Milania's mothers work long hours, the men that live in their households perform shorter and infrequent tasks.

Randall suggests that if gender equality has not been fully achieved, it is partly because the older generation retains its patriarchal values. She stresses, nevertheless, that a new generation has emerged, whose members see equality as a 'normal' and 'natural part of their lives' (403). Yet, at the level of routine everyday social interactions, Cubans socialise one another into performing very specific gendered identities, which is why many of the women I met believe, despite their double burdens, that men should not be 'allowed into the kitchen'.

Based on the majority of my informants, I argue that Cuban government policy has had a twofold and opposing effect on the Cuban families introduced here. Its emphasis on education and full employment has benefited these women and enabled them to gain a wide range of skills. On the other hand, it has partly reduced the significance of Cuban men. The higher educational level of the women (Dayami is a University student) coupled with their perception that there are 'better providers' elsewhere and 'real men' outside Cuba, gives them a wider relationship choice. As Parrado and Zenteno found in their study in Mexico, this research also indicates that in times of economic instability values of marriage have not disappeared; what has changed is the fact that women choose whether or not Cuban partners suit them and match their expectations.

3.14. 'Romantic' Cuban Love

In the summer of 2007, I unexpectedly saw Dayamí walking out of the bank of the Habana Libre Hotel in central Havana with a man I believed to be her German boyfriend. I knew that he used to visit Cuba once or twice a year and stay for a period of 15 days each time. When he was not in Cuba, she rarely left Alamar, preferring to stay at home instead.

As they headed towards the Habana Libre Hotel's stores, I noticed that she was dressed for the occasion, with high heels and a short, very smart dress. They were holding hands, embracing and laughing. From the distance, I watched the Dayamí that I did not have the chance to meet during our interviews. On the few occasions that I had met her previously, she was reserved and pensive, now I was seeing the other side of her; she was smiling and enjoying herself. As they disappeared into the distance, I compared the images of Dayamí in a tourist area with that of the sighting of Felicia and her boyfriend in Alamar. The images were extremely different. Felicia looked withdrawn and bored. She sat with her Cuban boyfriend, but they were not talking to each other, instead both seemed lost in thought. There were no romantic gestures when I saw Felicia and her Cuban lover, and the only exchange I saw from the distance was her reaching for the can of beer in his hand to drink it, lighting a cigarette and then passing it on to him. Perhaps even more interesting is the fact that they were sitting outside the same bar where I took Felicia, and unlike the day when we went out where she wanted to be noticed, on this sunny afternoon, neither of them was dressed up for a day out together, and did not seem to make any effort to enjoy each other's company.

Previously in this chapter, I have shown the gendered clashes in expectations. Felicia and Milania wanted the Cuban males in their lives to act as the providers, but the males were unable to take on that role successfully, yet expected the females to perform 'nurturing' roles. Another point mentioned was that some of these women (i.e. Milania) rejected the Cuban state's 'controlling' and 'paternalistic' values. However, somehow these women can be seen as 'working with' and not against the state. In other words, despite the fact that they appropriate the revolutionary *lucha* discourse to help their immediate families, their actions contribute to maintain social order in Cuba.

In terms of romance, there are also certain expectations that Cuban women have, which they feel that Cuban men are not willing or able to meet. When Cuban women describe the evolution of their romantic relationships with Cuban males, many embed these relationships within the Cuban economic context. Being a good economic provider is not only a desirable aspect, but a crucial one to most of the women I interviewed. In the excerpt that follows, Gisela, whom I will be introducing in later chapters, explains the difficulties Cuban women face in finding their ideal partner in Cuba:

:

Todo el mundo quiere estar con un hombre que le guste pero que la ayude. Y esas dos cosas no vienen en el mismo paquete. Todo el mundo no tiene la oportunidad de estar con un hombre que sea gerente de una firma, ¿me entiendes? o que tenga un buen desenvolvimiento. A lo mejor lo que me guste a mí, no me puede dar lo que... o me pueda ayudar como yo quiero.⁹⁶

(Gisel (26) Interviewed in England in 2006)

Gisel sees marriage as being based on help. This statement highlights the fact that these women are prepared to be with someone that ‘helps’ them, even if they do not ‘like’ them. What is clear from these accounts, however, is that this help would not come from an ordinary Cuban because an ordinary Cuban male struggles to get by. For these women, a desirable male would be a manager or, as Felicia states, an employee in the tourist sector, which in Cuban terms is more likely to be a ‘white’ man. Yet, as research demonstrates, and as discussed in Chapter 6, interracial relationships are not always accepted in Cuba (Fernández, 1996); some women, therefore, embark on ‘temporary’ relationships with black and brown Cuban men, relationships that in Felicia’s case do not trigger the same level of excitement as when she is with a foreigner.

Another important area of dissatisfaction with ‘ordinary’ Cuban men is associated with their perceived inability to demonstrate ‘romantic love’. Felicia and Dayamí mention the importance of actions, such as ‘a meal out’ (Dayamí) or a ‘gift’ (Felicia) in making the relationship more special. Yet, these are actions that, in their view, the Cuban men they had dated could not perform because they faced economic difficulties themselves.

Whereas European couples may exchange gifts – such as cards, flowers and chocolates – the Afro-Cuban women I spoke to in the UK said that, with the exception of

⁹⁶ Everyone wants to be with someone that they like, but who is able to help them, and these two things do not come in the same package. Not everyone has the opportunity of being with a man who is also the Manager of a Company, do you know what I mean? Or someone with good contacts. Perhaps the man I like may not be able to give me what...or may not be able to give me what I want.

flowers, males rarely give them cards or chocolates. As Felicia explains, on a typical date: *'te llevan a Coppelia o... muy pocas veces al cine...por general lo que más les importa en una relación es el sexo'*. (They take you to Coppelia (to eat ice-cream) or very rarely they take you to the cinema; but generally, in a relationship, they are mostly interested in sex). Curiously, in conversations with five Cuban males,⁹⁷ most stated that they did not buy women flowers because they could not afford to spend money on *'algo que no tiene mucho significado* (something that does not mean much), as an Afro-Cuban male in his thirties said.

Despite Cuban men not meeting the expectations of Cuban women economically and romantically, there is still the general perception that Cuban partners are the best lovers; but the women stress that Cuban males are only good lovers, not husbands. Milania's case confirms this statement. When Regla showed me pictures of her daughter's visit to Cuba, I noticed that there was a Cuban *mulato* in various pictures, embracing Milania or constantly in the background. Jokingly, I asked Regla if that was Milania's boyfriend, to which she replied light-heartedly: 'she really likes him, and he is really handsome, isn't he?' On reflection she said: 'but what can he offer her? He has nothing to offer her. No security, nothing...only fun!' These notions of Cubans as better lovers were shared by Pope's (2005) participants: as one of her female respondents' states: 'of course. I am Cuban and realise that they are the best [in bed]' (110).

In terms of love relationships, most Cuban women describe Cuban males as being more passionate, constantly emphasising that males are overwhelmingly jealous and possessive, and also less trustworthy because they are described as being (helplessly) *mujeriegos* (womanisers). Dissatisfaction with (Afro-) Cuban men's perceived unromantic ways and their inability to offer economic and emotional stability explains why the participants find Europeans to be a more attractive choice. Thus, the Cuban male in these women's accounts is described as an individual heavily dependent on the state; yet in much the same way as the Cuban state, they see Cuban men as being 'extremely controlling' (Felicia). However, ultimately, Cuban men are judged by their inability to sustain a family.

⁹⁷ Conversations took place at a social gathering in South-East England in 2008 at the house of a Cuban participant.

3.15. Concluding Chapter Remarks

In this chapter, I have examined Cuban women's multiple relationships in their local environments. An analysis of manifestations of love, conceptualisations of love and conflict, and expectations in relationships is crucial to set the context for the chapters that follow, where I discuss the meanings and analyses of *jineterismo* further. In general terms, expressions of love in the Cuban context imply helping the family, the neighbours and various significant others. As far as romantic love is concerned in contemporary Cuba, it carries an economic rationale; after all, for these Cubans 'to be in love' comes hand in hand with the idea of having a male partner that is able to perform his role as provider. Women, with their perceived roles as carers, are able to successfully manifest love on various scales. The men, however, have greater difficulties in demonstrating 'love' as Cuban women expect and struggle to perform the role of the 'good' father/husband – an issue that could explain the fact that very few participants grew up in nuclear families and the ones that have children are single mothers.

Within the Cuban context, there are conflicting relationships between Cuban women and representations of masculinity (Cuban men and the state). These women challenge forms of social control, including male control in the household and state control in society. They appropriate the revolutionary 'lucha' discourse in order to provide for their family, and, in doing so, perform roles which they see both Cuban males and the state fail.

Despite their role in providing for their family and being consumers in the local economy, there is much stigma associated with *jineterismo*. This will be explored in the next section, where I analyse the meanings and practices that Cubans attribute to *jineterismo*.

Chapter 4: *Jineterismo* – An Examination of its Meanings and Practices

Yesica is a single mother of three. She works part-time and when at home looks after elderly members of her family. She cleans, cooks, and acts as the main provider of care for her unmarried and widowed uncles who are in their late seventies and early eighties with failing health. When not looking after the elderly, Yesica cares for a close friend who spends a great deal of time in hospital after having been diagnosed with cancer at the age of 25. At home, Yesica washes the clothes of her teenage daughters and yells at the children telling them to help her tidy up the bedroom that she shares with them. As she explains, the insecurity of tomorrow combined with the hard work makes her prone to losing her temper easily. She says she ‘deeply cares’ for her daughters, but rarely has time to show any emotions towards them as she spends very little time with them.

Three men try to win Yesica’s love. They call her on a daily basis and visit her constantly. She says that she does not love any of them but that she cannot lose their friendship either, which is why she accepts their invitations to take her out. ‘*Uno me lleva adonde tengo que ir porque tiene carro. El otro trabaja en el aeropuerto y me ayuda a pasar las cosas cuando vengán familiares de afuera. El otro está bonito...*’ (One takes me everywhere I need to go because he has a car. The other works at the airport and helps my family members enter the items they bring when they come from abroad. The other is handsome...)

During the time that I spent in Cuba, the three men would barely miss each other. She spoke constantly on the phone with each of them and they came and visited for short periods of time. Yesica hopes that the third one will help her forget the love of her life – a white Cuban, Yuriel, who has endless *contactos* and who is able to *conseguir* (obtain) everything that she needs.

While her relationship with Yuriel, her boyfriend of many years, is in tatters after he cheated on her on three separate occasions, she still receives legs of pork, onions, yoghurts, fish, seafood and other provisions from him. The man, who is not allowed to come into the house, delivers (when he wants to get close to her) the products to her porch and disappears.

I often heard Cuban men comment on their ideal type of woman. Many seemed attracted to light-skinned Cubans – an ideal Yesica seems to embody. Her light skin and

flamboyant style make her a target for *piropos* and proposals; having to bring her children up on less than \$20 a month makes Yesica use these assets strategically.

On one particular occasion, I wanted to eat Cuban biscuits from Coppelia. Yesica entered the ice-cream place and started chatting and flirting with one of the administrators. I waited outside and a few minutes later Yesica ran outside with a bag full of biscuits. The man had sold her biscuits (illegally of course) on the condition that she would accept to have dinner with him. Having such multiple relationships ensures that Yesica's children can eat and drink milk on a daily basis. After a date, Yesica always comes home with a bag of meat or a carton of eggs, sometimes, a bottle of oil as well as flowers, perfumes and clothes.

Yesica's case is interesting because her strategies are bolder, and to a degree more desperate too, compared to the strategies adopted by many of my female key research participants. Yet, because her lovers are all Cuban, and because of her almost white skin, she is never called a *jinetera*; instead, those around her admire her claiming that she is simply a *luchadora* – a fighter who has been able to '*nadar contra la corriente*' (swim against the tide), as one of her female neighbours stated. Her case clearly problematises the prevalent stereotypes of the *jinetera*, and challenges the view that Cuban women are simply objects of male and tourists' desire.

While the struggles of all of the Cuban participants cited in this chapter overlap, the way they are treated by their neighbourhood is different. Yesica is labelled by her neighbourhood as an 'ordinary' *vecina* (neighbour). Dayamí, Milania and even Felicia, on the other hand, are the subject of endless gossip. While all of these women demonstrate great levels of female agency, they generate different reactions in the neighbourhood. When Yesica gets into a Cuban Lada or other Cuban cars, nobody takes notice as lifts and hitchhiking are commonplace and at times imperative in order to get from one area of Havana to another.⁹⁸ At most, one of the neighbours said light-heartedly that Yesica is *muy enamorada* (falls in love quickly), but when she goes out with her lovers, neighbours do not take much notice. However, as seen in the previous chapter,

⁹⁸ Cubans often told me that during the harder periods of the crisis, police officers would stop the cars of civil servants (work cars) in order to accommodate hitchhikers. Those Cubans that had been given a car by the government were obliged to offer transport to other Cubans. If they were driving a half-empty car, and did not stop to offer lifts in the areas where Cubans generally hitchhike, the police would order them to do so.

when Dayamí arrives in the block with a foreign man, she becomes the centre of attention.

Unlike Yesica, Dayamí is virtually ‘forced’ to isolate herself from the neighborhood because of the comments, jokes and the way that the neighbours stare at her when she arrives or leaves the neighbourhood. While both women are *luchando* (fighting) to maintain their families, one is labeled a *jinetera* because she is in a relationship with a foreigner and matches the stereotypical image of the Afro-Cuban *jinetera*. The other is simply a *luchadora* – a fighter. While the former is seen as someone who turned her back on the ‘nation’ during times of crisis, seeking to be ‘rescued’ by a foreigner, the latter is seen as a *luchadora*, because she embodies certain idealised Cuban values: a Cuban woman ‘maintained’ by a Cuban male (albeit, in her case, more than one), consuming Cuban goods and making no visible attempt to contact tourists or leave the island.

4.1. Chapter Background

In this chapter, I look at the discourses of Afro-Cuban women and examine the tensions and contradictions that Cubans seeking relationships with foreigners face. I also discuss the popular views attached to *jineteras*. Focusing on three main cases – Dayamí and Felicia, both introduced in the previous chapter, and Julieta, whom I met in the UK – I argue that while the labels are directly linked to the respondents’ involvement with foreigners, the stigma that is attached to *jineterismo* is associated with the fact that these women are perceived as straying from the norms and values of Cuban society. It is this act that transforms *jineterismo* into a negative act in the eyes of some Cubans. It will be seen that *jineterismo* is embedded in debates of ‘patriotism’, and that these Afro-Cuban women’s romantic and sexual involvement with foreigners is interpreted as a betrayal of the nation and the values of the Revolution.

The vignette that introduces Dayamí (Chapter 3) and the one that starts this chapter, both offer a glimpse of the ambiguity of *jineterismo*. In Chapter 3, Maritza, the neighbour, introduces Dayamí as the *jinetera del edificio X*; yet Dayamí does not see herself as a *jinetera*, using ‘*enamorarse*’ (to fall in love) as the criterion to separate *jineterismo* from other romantic relationships (see extract page 92). However, in this

chapter, Yesica is seen as a *luchadora*, regardless of how she obtains the goods to support her family. Hence, the popular perceptions of *jineterismo* are challenged by the research participants.

Considering that *jineterismo* is a term that features in the discourse of Cubans from across the spectrum of society, it is not surprising to see that most Cubans have a general idea about who should or should not be labelled as *jineteros/as*. To an outsider, however, the specific criteria linked to this labelling process are far from clear. Nevertheless, there is some indication that gender-specific norms of sexuality, which are to a great extent shaped by religion and ‘race’, play an important role in the labelling of these women, as does ‘patriotism’. Ultimately, the straying from revolutionary values is the criterion adopted for defining the women as *jineteras*.

I start the chapter with novel definitions of *jineterismo* emerging from ethnographic research, and challenge the elitist discourses of the term, which depict *jineteras* as women of ‘low values’. In addition, I discuss *jineterismo* as a socially-constructed term created around the complex concepts of race, gender, class and nation, and involving tourists. This reveals the intricate and multi-dimensional meanings of what is generally labelled and stigmatised as sex-work. This theme is followed by an evaluation of the meanings and practices that the Afro-Cuban participants attribute to *jineterismo*. Here, I examine how their perceptions may at times overlap with official discourse, revealing contradictions and ambiguities in their own perceptions of *jineterismo*. In the section that follows, I analyse the labelling process and how the women labelled as *jineteras* react to the stigma that society ascribes to them; and I explore the reasons behind the gap of perceptions between official discourse – often echoed by older members of the neighbourhood – and that of the *jineteras*. Finally, I move the debate forward by problematising the ‘local’ meaning of *jineterismo*, and by arguing that the meanings of the concept are much broader than those presented in the current literature on *jineterismo* discussed in the introduction.

4.2. Definitions of *Jineterismo*

Official Cuban notions of *jineterismo* revolve around four main concepts: ‘the female body’, ‘blackness’, ‘prostitution’ and ‘tourism’. These offer either negative meanings of

the phenomenon or perceive it as a futile practice: that is, Afro-Cuban women selling their bodies for as little as a drink; or 'decadent' women, who come from families with 'low values', as the head of the FMC stated. Moreover, because sex for sale is at the heart of such definitions, the complex relationships that may emerge from the encounters between tourists and Cubans remain obscured.

In failing to tackle these myths and stereotypes, the government is in fact creating a major conflict between the state and black Cuban women. On the many occasions that I walked in the streets of central Havana, I saw how real this friction was, witnessing how Cuban policemen would *exclusively* stop young, black, Cuban women. On occasions, I heard angry young black women cursing the police after their ordeal was over, and blaming the government for discriminating against black women.

As mentioned in the introduction, I experienced this frustration with the Cuban state on a personal level. Having arrived in Cuba as a defender of the socialist regime, the humiliation and the daily conflict with Cuban authorities forced me to pose questions about equality under socialism. In 1998, I arrived in Cuba with the notion that all Cubans were treated with dignity and respect; however, it slowly became apparent that the state has a hypocritical stance on race and racism. While class and racial inequalities are officially dismissed, black Cuban women are regularly harassed by police on the streets of Havana.

This study builds upon recent studies of *jineterismo*, in which the definition of the *jinetero/a* offers a wider scope to include a variety of practices, and is not limited to prevailing myths about Afro-Cuban females selling sex for dollars or a drink. For example, in Rundle's (2001: 2) definition, *jineterismo* is part of *la lucha* or the struggle for survival:

While some scholars tend to see the issue of *jineterismo* as a clear-cut issue of prostitution, I argue that it encompasses a range of activities and that it is not at all obvious to define who is a *jinetero/a* or not.

(Rundle, 2001: 2)

According to Rundle, *la lucha* entails ‘small scale buying and selling, absenteeism, pilfering, and theft from work places’. In fact, I argue that part of the difficulty of defining *jineterismo* arises from the almost impossible task of separating it from the various daily struggles that Cubans face in general. As Pedro states: ‘*Aquí el que no jinetea, trata de luchar de otra manera*’ (Here, those who do not practice *jineterismo*, try to find other ways of fighting). *Jineterismo*, in this sense, is perceived as what De Certeau (1988) would refer to as ‘tactics’, which in his view are ‘the art of the weak’.⁹⁹

Like Rundle, Díaz (1996: 4) also acknowledges that ‘*jineterismo* is a range of behaviours, not only a direct exchange of sexual relations with tourists’. In yet another study, Facio (1998: 63) offers a gendered definition of *jineterismo*, saying: ‘I define *jineterismo* as a new form of women’s work, and therefore the daily struggles of women’s lives during the special period must be highlighted.’

Focusing on the meanings that these practices might have for the Cuban nation, Elinson (1999) defines *jineterismo* as a ‘form of economic survival that erodes social values but has not yet coalesced into a genuine threat to the Cuban system’. She (1999: 1) discusses how *jineteros/as* are able to undermine the values that Cuban leaders have promoted since 1959. Furthermore, she suggests that *jineteros/as* may encourage ‘materialistic and individualistic values’, and consequently have an undesirable impact on revolutionary values, leading many Cubans to believe that ‘social and economic status is increasingly correlated to hustling activity rather than dedication to revolutionary goals’. Elinson’s definition opens useful windows for this thesis; after all, a conflict of values and ideals is indeed one of the major causes of friction between the *jinetera* and the state.

4.3. The Sexual ‘Norms’ in Cuba

In order to understand the norms that Afro-Cuban *jineteras* are supposedly ‘deviating from’, and which eventually lead to them being labelled as *jineteras*, it is important to understand the dominant norms of sexuality in Cuba. As I will show in this section, the accepted norms of sexuality are informed by Western Catholicism, whereas those originating from African traditions tend to be seen as inferior. This, nevertheless, can be

⁹⁹ The term ‘weak’ here is used with care because the argument I am trying to create is in fact that *jineterismo* is a much stronger ‘tactic’ than acknowledged.

explained by the fact that Cuban official history starts with Spanish Christians imposing their values on African slaves, an allegedly inferior race. Since 1959, the Revolution has promoted new gender values in Cuban society by promoting the image of female revolutionaries, challenging previous notions of femininity. Under the Revolution, the image of women in military uniform was promoted alongside that of cabaret dancers (see Tropicana dancer Chapter 2). Thus, the Revolution's new values were placed alongside the old ones imposed by the colonisers and masters during the neo-colonial period.

With reference to *jineterismo*, the assumption that it is a feminine practice can be traced back to nineteenth-century Western thought: the prostitute was constructed as a lower-class *woman* (see Cabezas, 1998: 82); and the male acted as the client, whose needs were to be satisfied by the female (wife and/or prostitute). In Cuba, this notion is also evident in how the *jinetera* is perceived today.

Accepted sexual norms in Cuban society are mostly based on traditional Spanish mores, influenced by Catholic values. As Smith and Padula state (1996: 169), 'gender roles of Spanish society [were] deeply influenced by the Catholic Church [which] emphasised the need to contain female sexuality, while encouraging expression of male sexuality'. Indeed, Mulhare (in Smith and Padula, 1996: 170) makes reference to Cuban society as a 'sexually predatory society'. In pre-revolutionary Cuba, he argues, the more mistresses a male had, the higher status he gained (Smith and Padula, 1996: 171). Contradictorily, while white males with various mistresses were seen as masculine, black men with multiple partners were perceived as a menace and of low morals. This highlights the hypocrisies during the colonial period where sexuality was racialised with the aim of demonstrating the inferiority of black/African values and culture. In fact, issues of rape of black women by white men are omitted from these discourses, despite its high occurrence during slavery (Beaulieu, 2006). While slave masters were not as stigmatised for raping slave women, historians mention how Cuban *criollo* society actively protected 'white' women from being raped and prevented them from being romantically involved with black men.

Gender-specific roles were initially constructed in a society that modelled itself on Spain and distanced itself from particular African values and principles, such as polygamous relationships (Reddock, 1985). Curiously, these dichotomous notions – the

accepted 'white' monogamous relationships versus the unaccepted African norms of sexuality – prevail in Cuban society today, despite the fact that Cuba has one of the highest proportions of black citizens who descended from slaves in Latin America (Nodal, 1986: 251). Indeed, the tourist industry, which relies on white Western tourists, 'cashes in' and conveniently reproduces these racial images of sexuality.

The traditionally dominant notions of sexuality in Cuba are historically associated with the 'virgin/madonna vs the whore dichotomy', which originates in 'Christian religious mores', and 'constructed human sexuality as consisting of opposed male and female categories [in which] female sexuality [is conceptualised] as either passive or non-existent' (Cabezas, 1998: 82). Hence, just as in Western constructions of sexuality, men's 'sexual promiscuity' in Cuban traditional accounts 'is natural and even laudable'; whereas in women, promiscuity is perceived as 'shameful, "unfeminine" and disruptive of social order' (Bilton et al, 1981: 359).

Jineterismo unties competing sexual norms that have existed since the colonial period. Its association with 'race' brings to the surface the conflict between the two main religions in Cuba: Catholic and Santería,¹⁰⁰ each carrying their own specific values. Although the Revolution does not fully or openly support religion as such, there is an unwritten rule that gives Catholic values a higher status than Santería. While the Cuban government had clashed with the Catholic Church in the first decades of the Revolution, Sweig (2009) argues that there has been more tolerance towards religion in general in the 1990s. Yet, the author claims that of all the religions practised in the 1990s, the Catholic Church remains the one with more 'institutional weight' (Sweig, 2009:154), and Cuba remains traditionally a Catholic country. However, there is no doubt that Afro-Cuban religions have consistently grown in popularity, and the fact that Cubans of all races practice Santería has contributed to increase the status of Santería. However, even though Santería has since the 1990s become a major tourist attraction (Hagedorn, 2000; Ayorinde, 2004), it is still packaged as an exotic cultural tradition with different values to those of mainstream society. The values associated with each religion vary a great deal:

¹⁰⁰ This Afro-Cuban religion originates in Nigeria. The Deities of the Santeros/as, although adapted and given slightly different names in Cuba by the slaves, are essentially the same as the Gods of the Yoruba people in Nigeria. Slaves syncretised their Gods with the Christian gods to avoid persecution. So, when they were praying for Saint Barbara, they were secretly evoking Changó; and the same applied to the other goddesses and Gods.

Catholics believe in marriage and fidelity, rejecting values such as vanity and *ostentación*; whereas in Santería, sensuality and ambiguous sexualities are not frowned upon. For example, one of the main goddesses of Santería, Ochún, is ostentatious and flirtatious; and another, Changó, is sexually ambivalent.

Fernando Ortíz, a highly respected scholar in Cuba who studied Afro-Cuban culture in the 19th and early 20th century, implies that religion shapes sexuality. The fact that Afro-Cuban religions place less emphasis on marriage leads him to conclude that Afro-Cubans are more promiscuous. Hence, an important point that comes to the surface in an examination of *jineterismo* is the imagined, construed dichotomy of *white* versus *black* sexualities. The former are perceived as being closer to Christianity and accepted as the norm, whereas the latter are presented in a different light.

The fact that accepted Cuban norms and values are mostly inclined towards Western societies is mainly due to the fact that in Cuba, during the colonial period, African influences were denounced and mis-interpreted, including Afro-Cuban sexuality. Racial biases and stereotypical images of blacks created panic during the colonial period, and are responsible for positioning black and white sexualities differently and ranking them in terms of accepted and unaccepted sexual behaviour.

4.4. Stereotypical ‘Norms’ of Black Sexuality

The assertion that the *jinetera* tends to be seen as an Afro-Cuban woman can also be traced in early constructions of prostitution, and in Cuban constructions of the *mulata* as a symbol of sensuality (Cabezas, 1998; Kutzinski, 1993).

Discussing race and gender during the colonial period, Gilman (quoted in Pieterse, 1995: 172) offers a good example of how race and sexuality can become intertwined:

The ‘white man’s burden’ thus becomes his sexuality and its control, and it is this which is transferred into the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Other as sexualized female. The colonial mentality which sees ‘natives’ as

needing control is easily transferred to ‘woman’ but woman as exemplified by the caste of prostitute.

In order to contextualise Gilman’s point and to understand the focus in current discourses of *jineterismo* on black Cubans, it is useful to draw on localised traditional discourses of sexuality. As Smith and Padula observe (1996: 170), Afro-Cubans during the colonial period were perceived by society as ‘sexually supercharged’. White Cuban men believed it to be their duty to ‘protect their women from the perceived danger posed by Cuban men of colour, while they sexually exploited Afro-Cuban women whom they labelled ‘promiscuous’ (Smith and Padula, 1996: 170).

In his book, *Los Negros Esclavos*, widely available in dollar stores and street bookstores in Havana, Fernando Ortíz (1988: 29) argues that the arrival of the slaves in Cuba contributed to the *mala vida* (bad life) in the Cuba of that period. He claims that Cuba’s ‘backwardness’ was associated with blacks. In his description of black sexuality, individuals are depicted as impulsive and with animalistic behaviour:

In their love-affairs, blacks were extremely lewd: they would have polygamous marriages; they were not averse to prostitution; their families lacked cohesiveness [...] But blacks’ inferiority, which kept them down, living the bad life, was due to their lack of integral civilisation because their morality was so primitive as was their intellect and their volitions etc.¹⁰¹

Unlike Ortíz’s stereotypical mis-interpretation of Afro-Cuban sexuality, Reddock’s (1985) study demonstrates that Afro-Cuban sexuality during slavery was as much shaped by traditions as by life in the plantations. He shows that long-term relationships were not suitable for life in Cuban plantations because slaves could be

¹⁰¹ En sus amores eran los negros sumamente lascivos, sus matrimonios llegaban hasta la poligamia, la prostitución no merecía su repugnancia, sus familias carecían de cohesión [...] Pero la inferioridad del negro, la que le sujetaba al mal vivir era debida a la falta de civilización integral, pues tan primitiva era su moralidad, como su intelectualidad, como sus voliciones, etc (Spanish Original – Translation by Dina Santos).

bought and sold at any time. Furthermore, the environment was equally precarious for raising children and the slave owners perceived children as a 'burden' on the productivity of their mothers. As a result, men and women developed multiple relationships, in many cases without being bound by marriage. Thus, enslavement was certainly a contributing factor in shaping the history of sexuality and marriage among black Cubans.

4.5. The *Mulata* in Discourses of Prostitution

The history of race and sex in Cuba and the imprints of colonialism and violence continue to inform current discourses of prostitution. Nowhere is this more tangible than in the fact that the marketing of Cuba as a tourist destination relies so heavily on the marketing of the black female body to a presumed white Western audience. For instance, in an article on the online edition of the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo*, Gonzalez (2003) racialises the sexual encounters between Cuban women and tourists. As Gonzalez, a *male* journalist, states: '[Spanish tourists] would allow themselves to be trapped by the fantasies of the sensuality of the *mulatas* and black women, who in bed made them believe that they were the best lovers in the world'.¹⁰²

If we read Valle's (1996) work from a slightly different angle from that intended by the author, an important point emerges: tourists, acting on stereotypes and images about Cuban sensuality read in magazines and brochures in their own countries, actively seek to meet black and *mulata* women. Therefore, the tourists not only come to Cuba with an image reproduced by the tourist industry, but also reproduce such constructs for other tourists by passing on information about the black or *mulata* women they meet in Cuba. The persistent racialisation of prostitution and sex as black and female explains why white women are seldom called *jineteras* despite their far from invisible presence in tourist spaces. Therefore, white *jineteras*, such as Dayamí's best friend, are un-researched, and their actions do not form part of the discourse on *jineterismo*. Yet, as Rundle (2001: 2) points out in her paper: 'recent studies concluded that the majority of *jineteras* were white and *mestiza*, mixed race', a fact partly confirmed by Elinson's study of male *jineteros*, in which only two out of sixteen were black.

¹⁰² Fusco (1998: 161) mentions the case of women in Merida who took to the streets because they feared that the Cuban *mulatas*, dancers in nightclubs in Merida, were destroying the Mexican family. The women protested that Cuban *jineteras* were 'turning tricks after every show'.

In Strout's study (quoted in Cabezas: 82), it is argued that 'the majority of the *jineteras* are dark-skinned'. Contesting Strout's racialised analyses of *jineterismo*, Cabezas (1998: 83) argues that 'these studies [...] replicate a historical trajectory and ideological constructs of *Mulatas* as the sexually available, exotic, erotic Other'. Cabezas adds that 'this model of analysis [...] constructs working-class women, and specifically women of color, as pathological, vain, greedy, and lacking morality, social values, emotional maturity, and ultimately revolutionary consciousness'.

Strout constructs the *jinetera* as an individual who sells her body for as little as a free drink and a free ride. Cabezas (1998: 81) contests this view and urges a 'shift [in] the level of analysis from the pathological model to the numerous and complex forces that inform sex work'. I take on Cabezas' point and stretch it further to acknowledge that it is not only prostitution that is classified as *jineterismo*, but also a series of other activities such as the pursuit of love and friendships with foreigners.

According to Fernandes (2003: 591), in their song *Atrevido*, the Cuban rap group Orishas portrays *jineterismo* as 'a vacation for the woman who is taken to the beach, receives new clothes, and has a fancy room in the hotel Cohiba'. What is particularly useful about Fernandes's (2003: 605) work is her definition of *jineterismo* as 'a fairly undefined activity that can include romances between Cubans and tourists'. Her approach (2003: 591), echoing that of Elinson (1999: 5), views *jineteros* as a subgroup whose 'values contradict socialist ideology'. As Dayamí's case shows, these women's values may differ from those of the Revolution in that they refuse to endure collective hardships as 'true revolutionaries' would. Her actions, as well as the ones adopted by the other participants, lead me to conclude that *jineterismo* involves adopting a series of strategies that help to achieve either a certain amount of autonomy in Cuba, or provide a means of survival. Thus, I define *jineterismo* as a range of practices that Cubans adopt at certain times of their lives, which include the pursuit of sexual, economic, love and cultural relationships with foreigners. The latter refers to friendships and other contacts with foreigners on a professional and personal level.

4.6. Frustrations and Aspirations

In the accounts of her own daily life, 22 year-old Dayamí, who refers to herself as simply '*una muchachita que se empató con un extranjero*' (a young girl that bumped into a foreigner), focuses on explaining the daily frustration of young Cubans like herself. The following is an extract from an interview conducted in 2005:

Aquí en Cuba hay jóvenes que la mayoría vive frustrada porque...porque tienen aspiraciones que aquí en Cuba no pueden realizar. Por ejemplo yo, yo soy trabajadora Social y...y estuve estudiando en la Universidad pero...la Universidad es de carrera de Letras y a mí las Letras no me gustan, ¿entiendes? Pero antes de eso estudiaba...el tecnológico y para coger la Universidad cogí el Trabajo Social pero cuando fue...empecé ahí, me dijeron que había Letras na'más y bueno, por tal de estar en la Universidad cogí eso mismo ¿entiendes? Entonces sigo ahí el trabajo social y dejé la Universidad. Aquí en Cuba, hay muchas oportunidades de estudio, pero (long pause) ¿cómo decirte? Hay muchos jóvenes que...no...no aprovechan esas oportunidades porque la misma situación del país no deja de que sigan estudiando, se tienen que poner a trabajar pa' poder mantenerse o mantener a su familia y todo esto.¹⁰³

Interestingly, in the quote above, Dayamí refers not just to herself but to 'the Cuban youth' as being frustrated, implying that the youth has developed new aspirations

¹⁰³ Here in Cuba the majority of young people are frustrated because...because they have aspirations that here in Cuba they cannot accomplish. For example I, I am a Social Worker and...and I was studying at the University but...the University was in Humanities and I don't like Humanities, you know? I was studying...the *tecnológico* (Technological College) and in order to be able to get into University I chose Social Work, but when I started there...they told me that they only had Humanities and well, as I wanted to go to University I chose that course, do you know what I mean? [...] Here in Cuba, there are many opportunities to study, but (long pause) how can I tell you this? There are many youngsters that ...don't, don't take these opportunities because the situation in this country prevents them from continuing their studies. They have to work in order to maintain themselves and their families.

that differ from the older generations. This statement confirms an important point this thesis makes. Young Cuban women have different aspirations and expectations to the older generations, who are the ones that have benefitted greatly from the Revolution and, in many cases, support its values. The generational differences are also evident in these women's discourses of consumption (see Chapter 5 & 6); the younger generation is more critical of consumption in Cuba, and the older generation acknowledges that consumption has improved for all with the Revolution. She states that many young people have to stop studying to help their families. This quote captures one of the neighbourhood's main criticisms of Dayamí; yet, as she puts it, this is linked to the changing values of younger generations. Dayamí is ostracised because of her 'individualistic values'; however, the quote above indicates that she is part of a group that has developed 'individualistic values'. In other words, it is not just her, but also the Cuban youth, that will find ways to sustain families, rather than wait for the government to provide for them.

Throughout the first thirty minutes of the interview, Dayamí held her mobile phone in her hand, fiddling with it continuously – a trait that her neighbours used to define her as someone who likes to *ostentar* or 'show off', and to claim that Dayamí *no tiene pena* (she is not ashamed to show off).

Clearly, Dayamí's views about the frustrations of young Cubans answer part of the question about the meanings of *jineterismo*. What comes across as a major grievance for Dayamí is the lack of choice in her own destiny and career; and these acts, of questioning what the government has to offer and criticising its actions, lead some neighbours to see her as having *valores diferentes*, or different values, and as someone that is 'ungrateful'.

Dayamí explained that her current job requires her to work within the community, visiting elderly and disabled individuals and helping them to lead an independent life in their own households. While this is a position that she now enjoys, her salary as a social worker is very low as she only earns the equivalent of \$13 (340 Cuban Pesos).

Eventually the conversation led to discussing those who had left the country – something that Dayamí would like to do, but only after she completes her degree. In the meantime, she dreams of visiting other countries; and when she talked about traveling,

she broke into a long smile. When I asked her why she was so passionate about seeing other countries, she raised the tone of her voice and replied:

No sé, conocer las culturas de otros países, cómo es la vida de otros países ¿me entiendes? Eh...porque a mí me han dicho de que la vida allá tampoco es fácil. Que ahí, allá, todo hay que pagarse: la escuela, la medicina, eh...todo, no es como aquí. Pero...me gustaría conocer la cultura de allá, cómo es que viven las personas allá, cómo aquí, cómo es...comparar el trabajo que se pasa allá, con el de aquí. [...] Es la curiosidad...Curiosidad y tener libertad, ¡aquí no tengo libertad! (raises tone of voice) ¡Aquí tenemos libertad entre comillas! Entre comillas [...] Porque...por ejemplo yo voy a la playa y...quiero ir pa' la playa mas bonita de la Habana y es Tropicoco y Mégano y Mar Azul y hay muchos policías y no te dejan tranquila, ¿me entiendes? [...] Voy a la Habana a hacer compras y na' más que voy a bajar el Prado y ya me están pidiendo el carnet en cada esquina. [...] Es verdad que hay mucha delincuencia pero el delincuente se conoce. El delincuente se le ve por encima.¹⁰⁴

(Dayamí (22) Interviewed in Alamar/ August 2005)

When talking about her relationship with a German man, Dayamí always lit up. The conversation started to lose some of its awkward formalities, as if among the various

¹⁰⁴ I don't know...to see other cultures, to see what life is like in other countries, do you know what I mean? Uhm...because I was told that life over there is not easy; that over there you have to pay for everything: school, health, uhm...everything! It is not like here but I would like to know the culture over there, how they live there [...] to compare our hardships. It is curiosity...curiosity and to have some freedom. Here, I don't have freedom (raises tone of voice) Here, we have freedom in brackets [...] For example if I go to the beach and I want to go to the most beautiful beaches of Havana: Tropicoco, Mégano and Mar Azul, there are many policemen and they won't leave you alone [...] If I go shopping to (central) Havana, I only have to get off the bus and they start asking for my identity card on every street corner [...] It is true that there is a lot of delinquency but you know the delinquent when you see them.

frustrations and difficulties one of the few positive aspects of her life in Cuba was her relationship with her non-Cuban boyfriend. She explained that although her 35-year-old boyfriend was more than ten years older than her, age was not important because he 'looks quite young'. One point that she made repeatedly was that she loved him dearly and that she was hoping to marry him one day:

Yo quisiera que algún día, no sé, que él se decidiera a casarse conmigo. Me gusta. Me cae muy bien. Me siento muy bien con él. Y [él] es muy bueno. Muy bueno conmigo.¹⁰⁵

(Dayamí (22) Interviewed in Alamar/ August 2005)

A few points emerge from this statement: for instance, it highlights Dayamí's lack of agency in marital decisions. It could be argued that in this relationship, her boyfriend, who is only in Cuba for approximately 30 days per year, is the one that makes important decisions. Ultimately, it depends on her husband whether she will go to Europe, when they get married and what places they visit in Cuba. In fact, her case fits a pattern that can be found in all interviews. For example, many women involved with foreigners often discussed their concerns with their friends. When boyfriends or prospective boyfriends failed to call or had not called for a long time, these women waited anxiously for them to contact them. Dayamí, for instance, stared constantly at her phone; while Felicia checked her emails frequently hoping to find a message from potential boyfriends. There was also the case of women who waited in agony for letters from foreign men. For example, after a fling with Italian men, Gisel and Lola waited for the men to write so that they knew whether the relationship was still on or not.

Despite the frustrations of having to wait for these partners to contact them, these women find relationships with foreign men highly appealing (see Chapter 6). My sighting of Dayamí in Havana confirms this: in Havana, she appeared happy, unlike the Dayamí that I had met in Alamar. When she states that her German boyfriend is 'very good' to

¹⁰⁵ I wish that one day...I don't know...that he would decide to marry me. I like him. I like him a lot. I feel really good when I am with him and...he is very good, very good with me.

her, she makes reference to him ‘spoiling’ her with things, as well as being *muy cariñoso* or ‘very affectionate’.

Dayamí’s descriptions of the relationship with her German boyfriend do not show any signs on the surface that it may be perceived as unconventional; but there are certain statements that to non-Cubans may suggest that there are elements of convenience. For instance, when she says that the man is ‘very good’ with her, she goes on to describe that he helps her and her family economically. However, as seen in Chapter 3, love tends to be demonstrated in this way in the Cuban context. Therefore, the fact that her boyfriend helps her out confirms to Dayamí that he loves her and that he is simply performing his role as the male partner who maintains the female and her family.

As she peeled potatoes, helping her mother cook dinner, Dayamí explained that, *hasta cierto punto* (to a degree) she is the *cabeza* (head) of her family, because she helps her mother financially. A great part of the money that her boyfriend sends on a monthly basis is spent on food. Her case is not unique – all other respondents confirm that most money that they were able to obtain, either through employment abroad or provided by foreign partners, was spent with the Cuban family.

4.7. Contradictory Discourses

Dayamí uses the governmental discourse to define *jineteras*. She states that some girls get into the *mala vida* (bad life) and try to find foreign boyfriends to take them out of the country.¹⁰⁶ Likewise, when she protests against the attitude of the police, she argues that ‘they think that everyone is wicked’. Clearly, Dayamí sees *jineterismo* as being associated with *la mala vida*; she contrasts her own case with that of women popularly known as *jineteras*, stating: ‘I was lucky that I met someone that I liked’. However, as she talks about *jineteras*, Dayamí says: ‘*a lo mejor de verdad se enamoró de él y la policía piensa que tú eres jinetera*’ (maybe she truly fell in love with him [the foreigner] and the police thinks that you are a *jinetera*). With this statement, Dayamí appears to legitimise her own position: she associates *jineterismo* with the pursuit of economic and sexual relationships, and, in her view, those Cubans involved in love relationships (such as herself) should not be defined as *jineteros*. ‘*El amor no se puede confundir con*

¹⁰⁶ See quotation in the introduction to Chapter 2.

prostitución. La mía es una relación muy sana y muy genuina (Love cannot be mixed with prostitution. My relationship is a healthy one and very genuine too). This is how Dayamí separates herself from women defined by Cubans as *jineteras*. After the first interview, Dayamí's mother escorted me to the ground floor: *'Ojalá que todo dé bien con el Alemán. Ella estudia y trabaja mucho y así nos ayuda'* (Hopefully everything will work out with the German man. She studies and works a lot. If it works out [the relationship] she will be able to help us).

Dayamí's description of her relationship, and her attempts to separate herself from other *jineteras*, carries a series of contradictions. She rationalises what she does so as not to appear as a 'typical' *jinetera*. She says that some Cubans *look for* foreigners for economic assistance, clearly excluding her case from this category. Within this discourse, her case appears to her as being different because, as she says, *'yo tuve suerte en conocer a alguien que me gustó'* (I was lucky that I met someone that I liked).

Dayamí carefully selects the words used to separate herself from *jineteras*. When she refers to *jineteras*, she uses the term *'buscar'* (to look for), implying that these women look for opportunities and go out of their way to meet non-Cubans; and when she makes reference to her own relationship, she drops that terminology and instead uses *'conocer'* (to meet someone). The vocabulary used explains the way in which Dayamí differentiates herself from the women who walk the *Quinta Avenida* or the *Malecón*. In her view, their circumstances are different for those women are 'looking for foreigners', and get paid to be with them. On the other hand, Dayamí claims that she met her German partner, without 'looking for' him, and is, thereby, involved in a meaningful relationship.

Perhaps the greatest contradiction emerges when Dayamí describes her first encounter with the German man:

Yo tengo un novio...que es Alemán, que lo conocí a través
de un canadien [canadiense] que está con una alemana y
luego vinieron juntos y nosotros nos enamoramos.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ I have a boyfriend...who is German. I met him through a Canadian who is going out with a German woman and they came together [to Cuba] and we fell in love.

In a different interview though, she states:

Eh...tengo unos familiares que viven en Alemania, que está con una alemana y entonces vinieron de visita y lo trajeron a él y...estábamos en una fiesta y no sé qué y empezó a conversar conmigo, le caí bien [unintelligible] estuvimos saliendo hasta que un día nos empatamos, nos hicimos novios.¹⁰⁸

These accounts of how she got to know her German boyfriend suggest that there are aspects of the encounter that Dayamí does not describe in detail. These omissions could be associated with her fear of being stigmatised as a *jinetera*.

4.8. Evaluating the Contradictions

Dayamí is not the only Cuban to be inconsistent when providing details of the relationship with a non-Cuban. Julieta, a 32-year-old Afro-Cuban whom I first interviewed in the UK in 2004,¹⁰⁹ describes what made her want to embark on a relationship with a foreigner. Although now in the UK and married to John, she still has great difficulty in discussing the initial phase of her relationship with her British husband. Of all the Cubans I spoke to, she was the only one who spoke in more detail about their first encounter. Yet, as the excerpt below shows, she uses indirect expressions to avoid stating directly that she was a *jinetera*, even when most Cubans in the city where she lives in the UK claim that she was a *jinetera* in Havana:

Nunca busqué muchas oportunidades porque me conformé con las oportunidades que se me daban. Y como se me dieron poco me conformé con ellas. Lo único que cuando vi que las oportunidades que se me daban que no era lo que yo

¹⁰⁸ Uhhh...I have family living in Germany, one of whom is going out with a German woman, and they came to visit and brought him along with them and...we were in a party and, I dont know, and he started talking with me and he liked me [unintelligible] We would go out frequently and then one day we became lovers.

¹⁰⁹ Data collected for MA dissertation.

quería. Y yo...ya tenía a lo mejor cuando yo empecé a pensar en estas oportunidades y en estas cosas tenía a un niño en quien pensar, decidí hacer otras cosas, ¿me entiendes? *Decidí irme por otra vía* aunque le gustara a quien le gustara y le pesara a quien le pesara. Decidí, lo hice y me fui por otra vía y entonces pude conseguir lo que otras madres y otras mujeres querían conseguir también [...] Entonces decidí irme por otro lado. Decidí...Yo dije ‘Yo me quiero ir a otro lugar. Quiero que aparezca un hombre bueno que sea de otro lugar porque es que quiero irme’. Y apareció el hombre bueno de otro lugar y me fui (laughs). [...] Según mi abuela dice que fue un regalo de Dios (laughs) porque yo me lo merecía. Porque yo me merecía un hombre bueno porque no me merecía, ¿tú me entiendes? estar en la calle. Y parece que es verdad que Dios lo sabía que, como yo me había criado...las causas que me habían obligado a llegar a ese punto. Pero llegué por un momento y me fui en seguida quiere decir que yo no estaba hecha para estar en este lugar ¿me entiendes?¹¹⁰

(Julieta (32) Interviewed in the UK, July 2004)

Julieta sees herself as someone who has decided to take an alternative route to the one most Cubans follow. She states that when she was not satisfied with her life, she

¹¹⁰ I have never looked for many opportunities because I made use of [clears throat] of the opportunities that were given to me and although I had very few opportunities, I accepted them. The only thing that...when I saw that the opportunities that were given to me were not what I wanted and I...I had, maybe when I started thinking about these opportunities, I had a son to think about. I decided to do other things, you know? I decided to take a different path, whether people liked it or not [...]. I decided I did it [...] and then I was able to *conseguir* (to obtain) what other mothers wanted to *conseguir* also [...] So I decided to go the other way. I decided, I said to myself, ‘I want to go to another place [meaning emigrate]. I want a good man to appear from another place because I want to leave [Cuba]’ And the good man from another place appeared and I left (laughs). [...] According to what my grandmother says, it was a present from God (laughs) because I deserved it because I deserved to be with a good man, because I did not deserve, you know, to be in the streets. And it seems that it is true because God knew that the way I was brought up...the causes that had forced me to get to that point. But I arrived and left straight away; that means that I was not made for that place, do you know what I mean?

went ‘the other way’. Interestingly ‘to go the other way’ (within the boundaries of legality) could have many connotations in Socialist Cuba: it could mean to go against the norms and values of Cuban society, and/or to drift away from the revolutionary cause – she clearly meant both.

As in the case of Dayamí, the power of official notions of *jineterismo* is also evident in Julieta’s discourse. Here, *jineterismo* is the implicit discourse containing the allegations that she argues against. She implies that because she had been ‘brought up well’, she should not have been ‘*en la calle*’ (on the streets). In Cuban culture, *la calle* or ‘the street’ has a powerful meaning. As Pope (2005: 100) states, Cubans see home as ‘the traditional domain of women, and the street as a traditionally masculine place’. Indeed, traditionally ‘good’ women would spend most of their time in ‘private spaces’ and avoid seeking relationships in ‘public spaces’. While women ‘on the street’ are normally seen as ‘prostitutes’, men who spend most time on the street are seen as ‘machos’, and their presence on the street is linked with employment. Indeed, Cuban men who display sexuality in public spaces and ‘*salen a buscar el fula*’ (go out to find dollars) are seen as more masculine.

Despite the similarities, Dayamí and Julieta struggle with society’s dominant meanings of *jineterismo*; nevertheless, there are moderate differences in the way that each narrates the experiences that led them to be in a relationship with a tourist. For instance, while Dayamí claims that she was ‘lucky’ that she met a foreigner, Julieta makes it clear that her first encounter was pre-meditated. She had decided that she wanted to meet someone from abroad in order to leave Cuba for good.

In Julieta’s discourse, meeting a foreigner and ‘going the other way’ is presented in a very positive light. Contrary to popular discourses that stigmatise these relationships, Julieta considers herself blessed by God because she met a good (foreign) man – a statement confirming that meeting and marrying a foreigner is highly desirable. In her case, as she explicitly states, the positive aspect of being with a foreigner – and what ‘forced’ her to go out onto the streets – is that she is finally able to afford items for her son, her family and for herself that she would not have been able to obtain had she not met John. In fact, in the same year that she arrived in the UK, she was able to bring her

Cuban-born son, who was still in primary education, to live with her and her English husband.

When she describes how the encounter with the foreigner actually took place, she suggests that it did not occur conventionally. For her, although *jineterismo* is presented as an act that produces positive outcomes, the act of walking the streets of Havana and looking for a foreigner carries a negative meaning, which may have led her to offer two versions of the same moment:

Version 1: A John lo conocí un día, creo que fue un día o dos después de mi cumpleaños en octubre del noventa y siete. Porque él estaba hablando con una muchacha que yo conocía. Entonces yo había ido por casualidad este día. Había ido a la Habana Vieja y esta muchacha que yo conocía me dijo: ‘Mira él es de Inglaterra’ [...] ¹¹¹

Version 2: Yo iba para la casa de mis primas pero cuando voy pasando por este bar. Yo recuerdo que yo había visto a John y entonces el bar estaba lleno, pero tan lleno, pero que pasa, que si entras en un bar y no estás consumiendo ellos te sacan pero...No puedes estar allí si no estás consumiendo [...] Y lo vi a él; y digo, ‘¡ay, si él me compra una Coca Cola!’ Le digo: ‘¿Ay, tú eres el amigo de... Fernanda?’ Pero él casi que no me entendía. Entonces yo le digo: ‘¿Tú puedes comprarme una (laughs) Coca Cola pa’ que no me saquen?’ Entonces yo cogí la Coca-Cola y me senté en una mesa aparte. [...] Entonces John estaba todo feo, todo sucio (laughs) ¿sabes? Tampoco que era mi tipo porque yo siempre era muy elegante, muy....Los tenis de John eran sucios. Tenía mucho pelo, ¡qué se yo! [...] Ya yo tenía a un

¹¹¹ **Version 1:** I met John one day when, I think it was a day or two after my birthday, in October 97. He was talking to a woman I knew. And I had gone by chance that day. I had gone to Old Havana and this girl I knew said to me: ‘look, he is from England, this and that’ [...]

novio que era Danés, que era de Dinamarca que él tenía un negocio en Cuba [...] Él [Danish boyfriend] siempre me mandaba dinero...¹¹²

After explaining that some of her friends had also ‘flirted’ with John, she proudly said that ‘he chose to be with her’. These women feel that they are ‘lucky’ because they have been selected by foreigners; however, yet again, this highlights the important role foreigners play in setting the pace of these relationships. Through a friend of Julieta, who spoke English, John arranged to see Julieta the following day in Old Havana:

Entonces yo le dije que sí [...] pero aquello era en el Parque Central y tenía que ser...él quería que fuera por la mañana. Pero yo le dije que fuera por la noche porque... con aquel talaje, ¡ay si la gente me veía en el Parque Central (laughs) con él! ¿Tú sabes? Porque el Parque Central está en el mismo centro...con aquel hombre. Y él dijo que no, que por la noche no, que tenía que ser por la mañana [...] Entonces por la mañana cuando él vino yo le dije [...] Mira aquí mismo hay una barbería para llevarte pa’ que te cortes el pelo’. Y ya yo dije: ‘Bueno está bien.’ Entonces le digo: ‘Yo te puedo lavar la ropa’ (laughs) Porque él era bueno. Pero nada de...todavía nada de amor ni nada de eso.¹¹³

¹¹² **Version 2:** I was going to my cousin’s house but when I was passing by this bar, I remember that I had seen John and then the bar was full, very full, but you know what? If you go into a bar and you are not consuming, they do not let you stay there...You can’t stay if you are not consuming [...] And I saw him and said to him ‘ah...if only he bought me a Coke’ and I tell him: ‘Ah...are you friends with...Fernanda? But he could barely understand me. So I said to him: ‘could you buy me (embarrassed laughter) a Coke so that they let me stay here?’ So I took the Coke and sat on a separate table [...] And John looked really ugly, and he was all dirty (laughs), you see? He wasn’t my type either because I always dressed up elegantly, very...His trainers were all dirty, he had lots of hair, God knows! [...] I already had a boyfriend who was Danish, who was from Denmark, and he had a business in Cuba [...] and he [Danish boyfriend] always used to send me money...

¹¹³ So I agreed [...] but that was at the Parque Central and it had to be there...he wanted us to meet in the morning. But I told him that it was better in the evening because... with that image... oh dear, if people saw me at the Parque Central (laughs) with him! You know? Because the Parque Central is right there in the centre...with that man! And he said no, not in the evening, it had to be in the morning, so in the morning when he arrived, I said to him [...] ‘look, right here, there is a barber shop that I can take you to,

Julieta's narratives of her first encounter with John are further complicated when, in a later interview, she describes her first impressions of John. She told me in the first interview that physically John was not her ideal man, and that she was embarrassed to go out with him in public during the day. In the second interview, she offered a different description of John:

El tiempo que el estuvo en Cuba [seven days] yo estaba conciente de que John era para mí ¿me entiendes? Y que ese era el hombre con el que yo me iba a casar...y que iba a tener hijos y todas esas cosas. Porque yo lo sabía ¿me entiendes? Porque puedes estar con siete u ocho hombres a lo mejor pero...hay uno que siempre tú vas a decir [...] porque yo sabía de ver a John como de la forma que se vestía, de la forma de todo...de la forma hasta en que hablaba a lo mejor el inglés.¹¹⁴

As seen in previous extracts, Julieta states that she did not fall in love immediately with John; yet, in this separate interview, she asserts that she knew from the beginning that John was the man for her. These inconsistencies suggest that Julieta had already fallen in love with the idea of meeting a foreign man (the gift from God), and that she was prepared to accept him irrespective of whether she was physically attracted to him or not. However, for Julieta appearance is, paradoxically, very important, hence her attempt to mould John into her ideal man on their first date, by taking him to have his hair cut and offering to wash his clothes. The latter point gives us a glimpse of Cuban

to get your hair cut'. And that was it. I said to myself: 'well, it is all right now.' So I said to him: 'I can wash your clothes' (laughs) because he was good. But [at that point] there was nothing of...no love, nothing of that kind.

¹¹⁴ The time that he was in Cuba [seven days], I was already conscious that I...that John was for me, you know? And that that was the man that I was to marry and...and that I was going to have children with him and all that. Because I knew it, do you know what I mean? Because maybe you can go out with seven or eight men, but...there is always one that you'll say... because I knew, when I saw John, the way he dressed, the way... everything...even the way that he spoke English.

notions of courtship. In this case, the female swiftly moves into the rented apartment of the tourist and adopts the caring role, namely, washing the male's clothes and ensuring that he is well presented in public. This was later confirmed by Yesica, who said that: '*Si realmente tú quieres a alguien tienes que cuidarlos, cuidarle la apariencia, lavarle, plancharle, cocinarle...así le demuestro yo a alguien que realmente lo quiero*' (If you really like someone you must take care of them, look after their appearance, wash their clothes, iron their clothes, cook for them...this is how I demonstrate that I like someone).

The way Julieta met John re-defines traditional forms of courtship in Cuba. Cuban relationships often begin with certain courtship elements such as the *piropo* (catcall) (Smith and Padula, 1996: 172), an emblematic trait of life in Cuban streets mostly initiated by males. In relationships with foreigners, courtship conventions are re-shaped: Julieta approached John first and attempted to adapt the courtship conventions to John's culture, values and even linguistic ability, for the relationship evolved mostly in English. However, the limits of female agency are still evident in these cases.

In the excerpt below, we get an insight into the pace with which her relationship evolved. Julieta, choosing her terminology carefully, explains what happened during the six/seven days that she spent with John in Havana. Initially, Julieta said that she was looking for a man, because she wanted to leave Cuba. In a later interview, Julieta implies that it was John who was keen to bring her to the UK:

Lo que tuvimos juntos fueron como...si llegaron a seis, siete días fue mucho. Ya él se iba. No obstante a eso antes de irse ya yo tenía...ya él quería que yo fuera...Y él me había hecho...Yo tenía el pasaporte con una carta de invitación [...] Entonces fue la segunda vez cuando él regresó que comenzó todo el tramite y el ticket y todo eso para que yo me viniera a Inglaterra.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ We were together like...not more than six, seven days. He was about to leave [Cuba]. However, before he left I already had...he already wanted me to go...and he had given me...I had the passport with an invitation letter [...] So on the second time around, when he arrived in Cuba again, we started the [migratory] process and the ticket and all that so that I could come to the UK.

The quote above captures Julieta's idea of a 'love relationship'. As mentioned in the previous chapter, love in the Cuban context fuses economic help and affection. The fact that after being together for one week John was able to give Julieta a passport and an invitation letter, demonstrates that he had fallen in love with her, but also that he would be able to sustain a family. In terms of the pace of the relationship, it is not rare to hear stories in the neighbourhood of individuals meeting new partners and moving in with the in-laws within weeks of meeting them. Here the main difference was that Julieta was actually moving abroad, after being with someone for only a week.

What the cases introduced so far demonstrate is that unlike official discourse, which is embedded in discourses of sex tourism, the participants in this research emphasise that they seek long-lasting love relationships with foreigners. Because of the domination of official discourse, and as a result of their struggle with the image of *jineterismo* held by Cuban society, these Cubans tell stories in order to eliminate the possibility that they could be perceived as *jineteras*. More importantly, the women reject the associations of *jineterismo* with 'vanity', 'selfishness', 'decadence' and 'low values'.

Sitting in her living room in the South of England during one of our first interviews, Julieta, filled with emotion, explains that it was never her intention to deceive anyone. In one of the quotes mentioned earlier, she makes reference to the way she was 'brought up', arguing that because she had been a 'good (grand-) daughter', she deserved to meet a 'good man'. Every time I see Julieta in the UK, as well as many other Cuban women married to foreigners, I sense that these women feel the need to justify their relationships to the world. Almost every person that visits Julieta's house will hear stories of how in love she is with John '*pa' que no se equivoquen*' (to set the record straight). Similarly, a good friend of mine, an Afro-Cuban woman who is married to a European man, avoids meeting other Cuban women, fearing that the others may label her a *jinetera*. She goes to great lengths to separate her case from that of other Cuban women, and like Julieta explained to me how she met her husband on the very first day we met.

The point is that the women I interviewed highlight the 'good' aspects of their actions. They talk about wishing to 'find love' (Dayamí), a 'good man' (Julieta) or 'someone that allows them to help their family' (Milania). Their experiences clash with the stereotypical image of *jineterismo* that sees *jineteras* as 'bad girls'. Hence, they stress

'ordinary', conventional desires, which they believe they share with other members of society.

4.9. The Successes and Risks of Female Agency

Felicia explained that she had been married to a Cuban man and that her marriage had failed when her son was only two because her husband was repeatedly unfaithful to her. '*Los hombres cubanos son por veces malos con las mujeres*' (Cuban men are sometimes bad with women) she said, describing the physical and emotional abuse that she had endured while married to her Cuban husband. '*O estaba pegándome los tarros en la calle o llegaba a la casa borracho y me pegaba.*' (He was either out on the streets cheating on me or he would arrive home drunk and beat me up)

Felicia also explained that after her bitter experience of divorce, she decided that she did not want to be involved in 'serious' relationships with Cubans, even though she later introduced me to her Cuban lover: '*¡Para Cubana basto yo! Ahora lo que yo quiero es un hombre de afuera pa' que me cuide.*' (One Cuban (in a relationship) is enough. What I want now is a foreign man to look after me). For Felicia, as well as most female respondents, the foreign man is placed above the Cuban man who is unable to 'look after' women as 'real men' should. Like all other participants, she believes that if she marries a foreign man, she will be well looked after.¹¹⁶

Aside from the disenchantment of a failed marriage, Felicia has also become increasingly disappointed with her country. Towards the end of the first interview, she started describing an incident she experienced with the Cuban police:

Felicia: Hace aproximadamente ya tres meses, como tres. Mi hijo estaba pa' la escuela. Una amiga mía...éramos dos, dos amigas mías e íbamos para la playa. Que estábamos en [xxx] porque la amiga que cogió y se...se graduó de Hotelaria y Turismo y la otra que es profesora íban pa' allá

¹¹⁶ As seen in the previous chapter, in most cases these women look after themselves and their families. However, most believe that the male should be the head of the family and the breadwinner.

a compartir pa' la playa [pausa] Vaya, los policías nos cayeron arriba como si fuéramos unas *jineteras*.

Dina: ¿Y por qué?

Felicia: Porque no podíamos estar en lugares donde están los turistas. Te piden el carnet cada cinco minutos. Y ellos [turistas] nos preguntan que por qué nos hacen eso. Imagínate, eso es una cosa [xxx] porque ¿sabes dónde estuve todo el día? En la estación de la policía. Solo por estar en...en...Entonces ya...na'más que se le digo al que tenga que decírselo. Que yo fui y yo me quedé y todo. Que fui y me quedé allá en el Vedado y se lo digo al que tenga que decírselo [...]

Dina: ¿Pero te pegaron?

Felicia: No, no me pegaron pero te tratan como una puta, como una callejera.

Dina: ¿Dónde las cogieron?

Felicia: ¡En la playa!¹¹⁷

The above excerpt shows that Felicia's encounter with tourists, although she claims that she went to celebrate, was not fortuitous. The beaches of East Havana are clearly divided into areas; tourist beaches generally have a wide range of services available in *Pesos Convertibles* (previously dollars) only, such as surrounding

¹¹⁷ Dina: Approximately three months ago...around three. My son was at school and a friend of mine...there were two, two friends of mine and we were going to the beach. We were in [unintelligible/music too loud] because my friend got the...she graduated in *Hotelería y Turismo* and the other, who is a teacher...they were going to celebrate at the beach [pauses] Blimey, the police fell on us as if we were a bunch of *jineteras*.

Dina: Why?

Felicia: Because we were not meant to be in the same places as tourists. They ask for your ID every five minutes and they [the tourists] ask us why they are doing this to us. Imagine! That's a terrible situation! And do you know where I spent the whole day? At the police station just because I was in...in...so that was it! [...] and I went and I stayed and all that [at the police station]. And I went and I stayed there in Vedado and I will tell this [situation] to anyone I feel like telling it to and I will tell people.

Dina: But did they hit you?

Felicia: No, they did not hit me but treated me like a whore, like someone who spends time in the streets.

Dina: Where did they pick you up?

Felicia: At the beach!

restaurants, bars, general stores as well as services for hiring beach huts, beach bicycles, and so on. Although there are no official signs warning them to stay out of tourist areas, Cubans have been socialised to understand the unofficial rules, created to prevent them from meeting foreigners.

Felicia and her friends knew the risks, and clearly *broke* the rules because not only did they enter a tourist zone, but they actually befriended *turistas*. The breaking of this law gave the Cuban police strong motives to believe that she was a *jinetera*. Hence the warning that if she was caught again *jineteando*, she would face a jail term. On that occasion, Felicia and her friends were freed and advised to *abandonar esa vida* (abandon that life) – the life of a *jinetera*.

Felicia was visibly infuriated because she was treated like a *puta*. ‘*¿Por que me tratan así? ¿Solamente por hacer amistades extranjeras? ¿Es ese el delito?*’ (Why would they disrespect me like that? Just because I made friends with foreigners? Is that the offence?), she asked me, then admitting that she was now using the internet to meet foreigners.

On a visit to a cyber café with Felicia in the late hours of the evening, two women talked to her about the best websites to find ‘*hombres serios*’, or serious men. ‘Maybe someone over there cannot find the woman of their dreams...well, here, we cannot find the man of our dreams either...so we are looking for each other really!’, said a white Cuban woman with rollers in her hair. The woman, like Felicia, had paid \$5 to use the internet for the whole month. She was relying on websites like cubandolls.com, friendfinder.com and singlebrides.com, to find her ‘perfect’ match. Felicia, on the other hand, preferred the site ‘*Amor y Amigos*’.

On a separate occasion, when Felicia needed to check her emails, the same woman was also surfing the internet. A friend was sitting next to her and they were talking about the men that had replied to the advert. The other computer was being used by a black Cuban woman, who seemed to be learning how to use the sites. While the ‘white’ Cuban explained to the new user how to upload her pictures, Felicia sat next to the white Cuban. The three women read emails together, gave each other advice and laughed whenever they came across a ‘*hombre raro*’ (rare man). The woman with rollers then suggested that the woman who was new to online dating should get her picture taken

in a proper studio with full make up to make herself more attractive. Aside from comparing emails with the other women, Felicia ensured that the woman who was new to online dating knew the possible problems of using this strategy:

Oyeme, hay algo en este hombre que no me parece muy serio. Niña, tú tienes que ser bien clara con él. Dile que estás buscando algo serio y que no estás buscando amiguitos, ni nadie pa' que se acueste contigo ni na'a...dile las cosas claras porque allá afuera hay mucha gente rara...pa' que el no se vaya a equivocarse contigo y pensar que tú eres una cualquiera.¹¹⁸

(Felicia, extract from fieldnotes, July 2007)

During one of our first interviews, Felicia had already explained why she was using 'Amor y Amigos'. Using categories that appear in the discourses of most participants 'here' (Cuba) and 'there' (the outside), Felicia states: '*Aquí los hombres son un poco promiscuos...de que están contigo y están...Allá no, allá yo veo de que un matrimonio tenga importancia*' (Here men are a bit promiscuous...they are with you and they are with...Over there is not like that, over there I see that marriage is important). By meeting someone online, she hoped to develop a good friendship and to get to know the person before starting a romantic relationship. She stated that she preferred to use this vehicle as it was more secure. Going to Havana, she risked being arrested again and as she stated: '*Si me cogen presa me embarco. Voy de Guatemala a Guatepeor. No estoy ni aquí con mi hijo, ni allá viviendo una vida mejor*' (If I get arrested I lose out. I go from bad to worse as I am neither here [in her house] with my son nor over there [abroad] living a better life). What is interesting is that Felicia, like most participants, only sees the successes of meeting a foreign man and does not consider the possibility that her life, either as a married woman or as an emigrant, might not turn out to be as positive as she

¹¹⁸ There is something about this man that doesn't seem serious to me. You better be straight with him, tell him that you are looking for something serious, you are not looking for friends and you don't want to find someone to sleep or with...be straight with him, because there are strange people out there and you don't want him to think that you are a loose woman.

expects; but this, as discussed in Chapter 6, is linked with the idealistic images that Cubans have of the capitalist Western world.

4.10. *Jineterismo*, Race and Patriotism

Maritza and other neighbours label the Afro-Cuban female participants as *jineteras*, not only because they are going out with foreigners, but also because they are ‘looking for and befriending tourists’, which many believe to be in discordance with the accepted values and norms of Cuban society. For many years, Cuba had been closed to the outside world, and Cubans were discouraged from making contact with individuals from capitalist societies (see Chapter 1). In conversations with Maritza and Pedro about the three women, they constantly refer to what they had heard from others: for instance, Dayamí was discussed for being dropped off by *turistaxis*; Felicia for being arrested at the beaches of East Havana; and Milania because of the jail term she served in Havana. In each of these cases, women are being singled out because they infringe Cuban law (contact with foreigners) and norms (romantic and sexual relationships with outsiders), norms which Yesica is not perceived as breaking because she is involved with Cuban men. Therefore, sex for sale, or love-trading, is not the immediate issue; the central point is that these women are transgressing boundaries by developing relationships and contacts outside Cuba, thus relocating these debates from the sphere of relationships and *jineterismo* to that of patriotism.

One of the participants, Gisel, questions the stigma associated with *jineterismo*. She distinguishes her actions from that of a prostitute, bringing in the Cuban notion of ‘*ayuda*’:

Si yo me acuesto con un hombre por interés (reference to economic situation), yo me estoy prostituyendo [...] No es lo mismo que yo [...] consigo un novio que me pueda casar y me puede llevar y pueda estar bien y bueno, ¡pero es uno! Y bueno voy a trabajar en base de eso. No, ¿no me gusta?

Pero bueno me puede ayudar y me puede proporcionar las cosas que quiera.¹¹⁹

Aside from the need to examine why labels are applied mainly to certain individuals, it is equally important to understand how members of society perceive *jineteras*. My main contact, Pedro, argues that *jineteras* are not stigmatised, partly because they have the unconditional support of their mothers. Indeed, in her research on Latin American sex workers in Spain, Laura Oso Casas (forthcoming, 2009) concludes that the family appears as the ‘women’s pimp’. Likewise, Pedro says that the mothers play a central role in leading these women into the arms of foreign men, highlighting that for these women, their daughters’ well being is more important than patriotism and loyalty to the state.

Hoy en día, ya eso ni se critica. Ya hoy en día las madres quieren que las chiquitas se busquen un italiano y que la lleve a Roma y que esto y que lo otro para que su hija tenga un futuro [...] Lo que está pensando es de cierta forma es en un mejor futuro para sus hijas.¹²⁰

Pedro asserts that *jineterismo* is no longer criticised. Yet, in our conversations, he often refers to the *jineteras* as ‘*unas pobrecitas que quieren salir adelante*’ (poor old things that just want to get on with their lives). In terms of attitudes towards *jineterismo* as seen in the case studies, each of the women whom Pedro defines as *jineteras* indirectly criticise those that are branded as *jineteros/as*. For instance, Dayamí uses the phrase ‘*la mala vida*’ (the bad life) to describe *jineteras*; Felicia takes issue with the Cuban police for treating her like a ‘*puta*’ (whore) or a ‘*callejera*’ (a woman who walks the streets);

¹¹⁹If I sleep with a man because I am interested in what he has to offer (reference to economic situation), I am prostituting myself [...] It is not the same if I [...] manage to get a boyfriend that I could get married to, and that could take me [abroad], and I could be better off, and well, it is one [person]! And, well, I will work towards that. What if I don’t like him? Well, he can help me, and can provide me with the things that I need.

¹²⁰ These days [*jineterismo*] is not even criticised. These days the mothers want their daughters to find an Italian man to take them to Rome and all that...so that their daughters have a future [...] They think that their daughters can have a better future that way.

and Milania uses the expression '*malos*' (bad people) to describe *jineteros*: 'they call us *jineteros* but we cannot be that bad if we keep going back to Cuba and we maintain our families happy, unlike those who go to the States, who abandon Cuba'. Milania brings in discourses of nationalism to explain that she has not betrayed the Cuban nation. Attempting to justify her own actions, she explains that she cannot understand why her actions are stigmatised when she continues to be loyal to her family and the Cuban nation.

Although the cases introduced here offer evidence that, as Pedro states, *jineteros* are 'praised' by family members; outside the family, at the level of society, there is still a great amount of stigma associated with the term, because to many, like Maritza, *jineteros* are a reminder of decaying values in contemporary Cuban society. There are also issues of treason, that is, the idea of sleeping with the (previous) enemy; and other reasons for the stigmatisation of these individuals may carry subtle racist tones.

Maritza and older members of the block¹²¹ argue that society is straying from values such as comradeship and collectivism. These forefront revolutionaries see the new generation as failing to appreciate the Revolution. As for the participants, they too see society as becoming more individualistic. As Gisel told me: '*No es lo mismo. La gente ahora ya no se ayuda como antes cuando Cuba reía*' (It's not the same, people here don't help each other as much as they used to when Cuba laughed).¹²² Nevertheless, they see themselves as women sharing Cuban norms and values, such as commitment to the family and the belief in clear gender roles within the family; and argue that skin colour is what leads society to label individuals as *jineteras* or not. For example, Julieta mentions the fear that she faced whenever she had to go to Havana, arguing that if she was stopped, she would automatically be accused by the police of being a prostitute. She said that, 'one is black in a tourist area...the police will always spot a black person three times faster than they would catch a murderer, because *el negro siempre está en algo malo* (blacks are always [perceived] as being up to something wrong)'. She bitterly explains how she was once told by a policeman to 'clear off' after sitting on a park bench to rest in Old Havana.

¹²¹ Maritza is one of the many original residents of the building who joined the Construction Brigades in the 80s and voluntarily helped to build the buildings. In the construction, men worked in more physical jobs, whereas women helped mainly with tasks such as cleaning the site.

¹²² '*Cuando Cuba reía*' is an expression that describes pre-1989 Cuba. The years, when many perceived Cuba to be a 'stable', 'happy' nation.

In her view, a white Cuban would not have been spoken to in such way. Dayamí also mentions racism as being the main reason why Afro-Cuban women are targeted by society and the police.

With reference to the changes introduced by the Cuban Revolution in the early 1960s, I argue that the labelling brings back (racialist) notions of ingratitude. Afro-Cuban women are not simply seen as promiscuous and immoral, but also ungrateful to the Revolution because they were once perceived as the social group at the bottom of the hierarchy prior to 1959 on the grounds of race, gender, class and educational achievement, but now have high educational achievement. As Maritza once said: ‘they say that life is hard, but they have not seen any hardships, they need to sit with their grandmothers to find out how hard life really used to be for poor black women [...] If it weren’t for Fidel...’.¹²³

The association of the word *malos* with the term *jineterismo* is what prompts most of the female participants to dissociate themselves from the latter. The point is that in societal discourses of *jineterismo*, *jineteras* tend to be perceived negatively because in some older members of society, like Maritza, it brings back memories of how hard the Revolution fought to eliminate prostitution. Yet, these attitudes are ambivalent because most of the older members of the community who would criticise prostitution and *jineterismo* were amicable and friendly with some of the women labelled as *jineteras*. Regla embodies these contradictions saying that young women were not used to sacrifices, and that she could not understand how women had sex with strangers; yet she fully endorsed her daughter’s marriage to an Italian man, implying that her daughter got ‘married’ and is still married to the same man. Her stress on the word ‘marriage’ highlights the high value that she attaches on it, even if it is not based on love.¹²⁴

¹²³ I often felt that the neighbourhood was far too critical of Dayamí. They would accuse her of being *materialista*, *individualista* and *especuladora*; but to me, Dayamí seemed like a young woman who just wanted to spend time with other women in their early twenties and enjoy spending time with her boyfriend, her family and close friends. What was missing from the long descriptions that neighbours gave me of Dayamí was the acknowledgement that she was in her early twenties and much younger than the rest of the participants.

¹²⁴ Respondents placed varying degrees of emphasis on love in marriage. Most hoped to marry someone that they loved or that they hoped to fall in love with. One of my respondents, Lola, however said: ‘Dina, do you think that our grandparents stayed married because they were in love with their partners? They respected each other and liked the person they were with, but many stayed together because they could not

Most of the respondents struggle with the popular assumptions of *jineterismo*, and their discourses express the tensions, conflicts and anxieties they feel about their actions. For most of these women, meeting a foreigner is highly appealing as it offers prospects of a better present and future. While the official meanings of *jineterismo* see this act as nonsensical, most of these individuals claim that their actions are not out of the ordinary, for some it simply means the search for ‘love’. Many respondents stress that a partner should demonstrate their love by ‘helping’ them; thus, these relationships are seen as necessary to have a decent existence. This is why Julieta sees meeting John as a gift from God, and Dayamí says that she was ‘lucky’ to meet her German boyfriend. Likewise, Felicia, knowing of the risks of being arrested, decides to continue pursuing her dream of meeting a foreign man because for her, as well as for most of the men and women I interviewed, meeting and marrying foreigners are perceived as positive, life-changing experiences.

4.11. Problematizing *Jineterismo*

By means of these main examples, I have sought to show how the participants talk about the diversity of practices of *jineterismo* they live; for *jineterismo* involves various acts such as looking for foreigners, befriending tourists, developing love/ sexual relationships with them, and is caused by differing personal reasons. While Pedro and most of the people I spoke to would define these women as *jineteras*, all respondents visibly distance themselves from the term, seeing themselves instead as the breadwinners, the daughters, and the mother’s right hand.

The view of *jineterismo* as a stigmatised practice is shared by the participants; yet, they also struggle with this notion, hence the attempt to differentiate their own actions to avoid the label. By introducing their own interpretations of what they do, they see their actions as a constructive route to changing their circumstances. In the neighbourhood, however, these women are labelled *jineteras* because most of them consciously decide to ‘look for’ foreign men, and they use a variety of tactics and vehicles to pursue these relationships.

survive [economically] on their own. So, what’s the fuss with marrying someone that you have not yet fallen in love with, as long as you respect him, you help each other and are faithful, that’s all that matters.’

If we look at the history of each of these women prior to meeting (or wanting to meet) these foreign men,¹²⁵ we find some strong points in common among them: each of them came from a lone-parent household headed by the mother who was either a housewife, unemployed, or on low income; and each of these women had an important role in the household, as they were also the main breadwinners. Nevertheless, there are also individual motives that lead these women to want to date foreign men. In Felicia's case, her bitter divorce and her arrest prompted disenchantment with the state, not only for not offering her adequate protection while she was the victim of domestic violence, but also for treating her 'like a prostitute' when she was arrested by the police. Milania's reasons were primarily associated with wanting to get her family out of the poverty in which they had found themselves in her province; that was also the case of Julieta, who mentioned in the interview that '*mi familia no es nadie*' (My family members are nobodies), implying that she had to do something for them. Dayami's case was narrated as perhaps the most ordinary of the three, because she claims to have met her German boyfriend by chance, they were both attracted to each other and the relationship blossomed from there.

Like Brennan's (2004: 3) participants who 'distinguish between relationships for love (*por amor*) or for green cards (*por residencia*)', the Afro-Cuban participants also differentiate their case from that of 'prostitutes', arguing that they fell in love with their partners and that they do not walk '*en la calle*' in search of foreigners. Even Julieta, who was '*en la calle*', and who at the time had an on-off relationship with another European man, justifies that it was on that occasion only, stressing that she is 'a good girl' who was 'brought up well', and that she wanted to 'find a good man'.

Based on her research on sex workers in the Dominican Republic, Brennan argues that these women often 'perform love' in order to achieve their goals of migrating. Cabezas (2004) who also carried out research on sex workers in Cuba and the Dominican Republic points out that these women are able to blur the lines between 'love and money, romance and work', posing great challenges to research on love and relationships.

¹²⁵ This forms the focus of Chapter 2.

4.12. *Jineterismo* – A ‘Transnational’ Practice

In this chapter, I have looked at the tensions and struggles that Cubans face as they become involved with foreigners, offering a reading of the complexities of life in contemporary Cuba. *Jineterismo* is shown here as being associated with a lack of patriotism and the diversion from Cuban norms and values.

Cubans are increasingly seeking relationships with foreigners and simultaneously demonstrating that they do in fact share many Cuban values, such as their need to sacrifice for others, in this case their families. New ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1993) continue to be formed as Cubans join love websites such as kiss.com, friendfinder.com, cubamania.com, singlebrides.com, cubandolls.com or ‘*Amor y Amigos*’, Felicia’s favourite dating site. This highlights the fact that Cubans are re-defining or wanting to escape their own notions of courtships, but are also taking an active role in shaping their own relationship choices.

In this chapter, I introduced women pursuing relationships from within, while at the same time projecting themselves beyond the boundaries of the Cuban state. Constable (2003: 15) calls these ‘communities of sentiments, united by their desire for the other’, confirmed by a statement made by the woman at the cyber café. That is, while Cuban women seek a man that can be a ‘good’ husband, foreigners may find in Cuban women their ‘idealised’ wives.

The micro-approach adopted in this thesis has enabled me to understand better the meanings that Afro-Cubans give to *jineterismo*, and the importance that these practices have for them. As Guarnizo and Smith (2003: 3) imply in ‘Transnationalism from Below’, ‘below’ is a space of resistance where individuals create tactics and manipulate the strategies of those in power in order to improve their livelihoods.

Hollander and Einwöhner (2004: 549) wrote an insightful article calling for clearer use of the term ‘resistance’, which in their view is embedded in debates of ‘power and control, inequality and difference and social context and interaction.’ One of the points they make, which is directly relevant to this thesis, is that individuals may resist the social structure while at the same time supporting it. Indeed, the respondents of this thesis are clearly contesting the authority of the state and its ‘social values’, as Elinson (1999) points out. Yet at the same time, by attempting to distance themselves from the

label, which in their eyes is linked to ‘real’ sex work, they are allowing *jineterismo* to remain a marginalised concept, and in turn allowing the state to dominate the discourse on *jineterismo* and to exert a certain amount of control over *jineteras*.

It must be stressed that the participants are challenging not only society, but most importantly the government that frowns upon relationships with foreigners and controls the means of communications, namely by making the internet illegal.¹²⁶ They are doing so by embarking on ‘transnational’ (and often interracial) relationships, thus also challenging the Cuban racial system, in which interracial relationships are still not widely accepted (Fernández, 1996: 4; Aguirre and Bonilla Silva, 2002). In using the term ‘transnational’, I stress that these relationships imply strong and long-lasting ties with more than one nation – Cuba and the European nations where the partners originate. For example, Julieta, who resides in the UK, sends remittances and buys food for her family from England. For her Cuban family, she is the main breadwinner; but in England, Julieta also plays a central role in her nuclear family as the mother, the main care-provider and the housewife. I heard about similar cases when conversing with Cubans in the UK. Interestingly, it is mostly the women stigmatised in Cuba as sex-workers who remained with their ‘foreign husbands’. All of the Cuban men I met or heard of through friends had separated from their ‘foreign wives’ within two years of being in the UK, causing a great deal of heartache, and shattering these women’s lives.

The official discourse on *jineterismo* implies that *jineteras* are women with low or no values. Besides having a strong negative meaning, this discourse also has a strong ‘local’ meaning. *Jineterismo* is defined as a practice adopted by a specific group of Cubans; yet without tourism, the term loses its meanings. The point is that the *jinetera* construct is constantly reproduced by the travel industry. Images of Cuban *mulatas* appear constantly in Cuban tourist adverts, were previously shown in Playboy magazine in the U.S.,¹²⁷ and currently feature on holiday brochures in Europe. Many tourists buy into and also reproduce the image of the local in their countries of origin (Hodge, 2001; Valle, 1996): for example, many of the European husbands whom I met in the UK said

¹²⁶ Since Fidel handed power over to his brother Raúl Castro, Raúl has reviewed some of Cuba’s old policies. In March 2008, he lifted the ban on computers and DVDs, but it remains to be seen whether this means that Cubans can openly use the internet.

¹²⁷ Eckstein (2003) points out that the Cuban government played a role in marketing Cuban women, after the government allowed Playboy to photograph Cuban women in the early 1990s.

that apart from being fascinated by Cuban History, they were introduced to Cuba by male friends who had been there before and had Cuban girlfriends. Based on these examples, *jineterismo* cannot be seen as a local phenomenon, but rather as a transnational practice. I have so far demonstrated the intricate relationship between women labelled as *jineteras* and the Cuban state. In Chapter 3, I showed that the conflict between the women and the state was linked to their rejection of the state as a symbol of masculinity that dominates society, but is criticised because of its inability to provide for its members. In this chapter, I have shown yet another form of conflict by discussing the state's role in contributing to the labelling of these women as 'immoral' and 'decadent'. Conflict emerges, firstly, because the state is perceived as taking no action against the police for harassing mainly young, black, Cuban women; and, secondly, because in doing so, it reproduces prejudices against them in society. In the next chapter I continue to demonstrate that *jineterismo* involves a range of practices, including the pursuit of sexual, economic, love and cultural relationships with foreigners. Moreover, I demonstrate how *jineterismo* enables Cubans to develop a discourse of resistance against Cuba's main provider, the state.

Chapter 5: *La Lucha Diaria para Sobrevivir* (The Daily Struggle to Survive)

This curious mixture of ‘Socialist’ fundamentalism and ‘neoliberalism’ has created corruption, widespread theft, marginality, the black market, mass exodus and *jineteo* [prostitution] as a survival strategy.¹²⁸

Gerardo Mosquera (Pattullo, 1996: 85)

26th July 2005 in Alamar

It was almost nine in the evening on the 25th of July 2005. I was walking in the streets of Alamar with 34 year-old Pedro¹²⁹ to attend the July celebrations. Every year the neighbourhood is in a festive mood; the national anthem is played, speeches delivered, and people dance until the early hours of the 26th of July – the day that commemorates the first clash between Fidel’s rebels and dictator Batista’s soldiers in 1953. Although the actual attempt failed, forcing the few rebels that survived either into exile or into hiding, the *26 de Julio* is a national holiday as it symbolises the courage of the revolutionaries.¹³⁰

Built in the seventies to cope with housing problems, Alamar, one of the more heavily populated ‘housing estates’ (Kapcia, 2005: 199) in Havana, had all the reasons to celebrate; after all, this neighbourhood was a real product of the Revolution. It was 9pm, however, and apart from the Cuban flags hanging from a few windows in the block and some people standing between the buildings, nothing else was happening.

After touring around the sandy square, we sat outside Pedro’s building with the former head of the CDR and three neighbours. In the middle of the square, a young man was fanning a coal fire where he was cooking a meal for the residents of Pedro’s building.

Five twin buildings, each of six floors, flanked the square. Every building had a double entrance, and each entrance had its own staircase that led to eighteen apartments. As I glanced around, I could not help but wonder where the members of the 36 families

¹²⁸ Cuban Art Critic quoted in Pattullo (1996).

¹²⁹ My first intermediary, a self-proclaimed *jinetero*, had travelled to the United States not long before I arrived. My ‘new’ research intermediary, Pedro, grew up in Alamar and had many contacts in the neighbourhood. He acted as interpreter for tourists and *jineteras*.

¹³⁰ The 25th, 26th and 27th are bank holidays in Cuba.

living in each of the double buildings were. This *26 de Julio* had an uneventful feel compared to the one I had witnessed three years ago.

A few hours earlier, the square had been filled with people, and not one of the apartments we visited was empty. Yet, outside the square was uncharacteristically quiet. Sporadically, the residents of Pedro's building would go outside with a plate and a cup to collect their *caldosas*¹³¹ and drinks, but nobody was in a festive mood. By eleven, a few houses were still lit and ghetto blasters were playing loud Salsa tunes, but still there was no sign of the multitude I was expecting.

At midnight, the music at Pedro's building had stopped, and silence prevailed in what was normally a relatively vibrant *zona*. It soon became clear that there would not be any speeches, and that the national anthem was not going to be played. When I asked Pedro why no one was celebrating, he replied: 'who's going to celebrate with an empty stomach?'

5.1. Chapter Outline

In the last chapter I proposed perceiving *jineterismo* as a range of actions. While black women who establish relationships with foreigners clearly struggle against the *jinetera* stigma they are exposed to, they also believe that being in a relationship with a foreigner is extremely advantageous and can attract multiple benefits.

In this chapter, I focus on the tactics the women use in the periods when they do not have a foreign partner, or during times of 'waiting' for the foreign partners to arrive in Cuba. I mentioned in the last chapter that these women spend a significant amount of time seeking relationships and waiting for their partners to make contact with them. Some of these foreign partners come to Cuba once or twice a year, others only 'flirt' online. There are cases of men who promise to travel to Cuba to meet them, but never actually arrive, leaving these women waiting anxiously. When the excitement of traveling to tourist spaces with foreign partners ends (once the tourist has departed), most of these women live other forms of *jineterismo*, enabling them to sustain their families. Thus, this chapter shows that *jineterismo* can be an 'empowering' economic strategy.

¹³¹ *Caldosa* is a stew made of root vegetables (such as potatoes, sweet potatoes, manioc) and various meats. Prior to the 26th July, neighbours (some who were directly involved with the CDR) carried out a door-to-door collection of Cuban Pesos to buy the ingredients for the *caldosa* and/or other items.

The women introduced in this chapter are Oneida, Gisel and Inesita, but I also analyse interviews carried out in Alamar with Pedro to demonstrate that the main consumption concerns affecting the women also affect other groups in Cuban society. More explicitly, I look at daily consumption in Cuba in order to understand why *jineterismo* help us to understand the impact of socio-economic problems on the lives of Cubans. The interviews demonstrate people's everyday concerns in the foreigner's absence, and the way in which they are lived. They also help us to understand further reasons why these women seek to embark on relationships with Europeans, and the drastic ways in which their lives change when the tourist is not present.

Pedro's statement represents the core theme of this chapter. When he says 'who is going to celebrate with an empty stomach?' one also needs to take into consideration the circumstances that led him to make such a declaration. His assertion was even more perplexing, as at that time he had a big plate of *caldosa* in his hand.

This chapter is composed of three separate parts. In the first part, I contextualise the realities of consumption in post-Special Period Havana. An analysis of consumption demonstrates that Cubans who are not in relationships with foreigners face great difficulties in obtaining basic goods. In the second part, I evaluate the various tactics used by the participants (in national and transnational spaces¹³² within Havana) in order to consume. These tactics, some of which are perceived by the government as illegal, help to further problematise *jineterismo* as they are (or were once) employed by most of my respondents, including those that would not be considered *jineteras*. Finally, in part three, consumption is discussed as a subjective and symbolic category. I discuss the concept of 'nothingness', commonly used by the respondents; and once we get to this stage, Pedro's statement becomes an emblematic point, illustrating that *jineteras* can contest the state through metaphors of food.

¹³² I call the neighbourhoods of Vedado, Old Habana and Miramar transnational spaces because they are residential areas as well as major areas of commerce. These physical spaces are protected by the Cuban police, and Cubans that travel to these areas from other neighbourhoods are more likely to be stopped by the police.

Part 1 – The Realities of Consumption in Post-Special Period Havana

5.2. Narratives of Daily Struggles

On the 26th of July, as Cuban television covered the festivities celebrating 53 years since Fidel and the rebels attacked the *Moncada* barracks, I interviewed Pedro for the second time. During the interview the phrases: ‘we are struggling’; ‘there is nothing here’; ‘we are hungry’ were repeated like a mantra. Pedro’s discourse contradicted the revolutionary view that ‘millions of people in the world die of malnutrition but none of them is Cuban’,¹³³ but supported the arguments of the Afro-Cuban participants, who describe Cuba as producing serious hardships.

In ‘Back from the Future: Cuba under Castro’, Eckstein (2003) evaluates the impact of the Special Period on Cuba’s economy and society. Her research shows the official stance on the difficulties brought by the Special Period on Cubans. The Cuban leadership explained to the population that a series of measures were necessary to save the Revolution. Dollarisation, foreign investment, tourism were some of the measures (Eckstein, 2004).¹³⁴ Cubans were urged to ‘sacrifice’ in order to save socialism. However, the clear message that was sent by the Cuban officials was ‘capital yes, capitalism no’ (Eckstein, 2003: 612).

I wanted to understand the extent to which the capital that had entered Cuba throughout the nineties was perceived by the participants to have changed the quality of their lives. Pedro and all my participants explain the daily struggles that Cubans depending on the government face to survive, and most conclude that it is these struggles that lead many to decide to engage in activities that Cuban society labels *jineterismo*. These views demonstrate that fifteen years after the Special Period was first announced, and twelve years after Eckstein published her research, the impact of the crisis on the daily lives of Cubans remains. The next section explores consumption in Cuban spaces in order to illustrate the difficulties that Cubans face in general.

¹³³ A slogan appeared on a billboard near the tunnel that separates Habana del Este (Alamar’s district) and Downtown Havana.

¹³⁴ Eckstein (2004: 320) sees dollarisation as a way of inducing family members to send remittances to Cuba. She calls it a ‘remittance-inducing initiative’.

5.3. Food Consumption: *La Libreta y la Bodega*

Consumption in Cuba is controlled by the government. Every Cuban has a *libreta* (ration book), which they use to buy consumable goods at the *bodega* (government shop) (See Figure 5.1). Household X's consumption in the first three months of 2005 provides a realistic image of the difficulties associated with consumption:

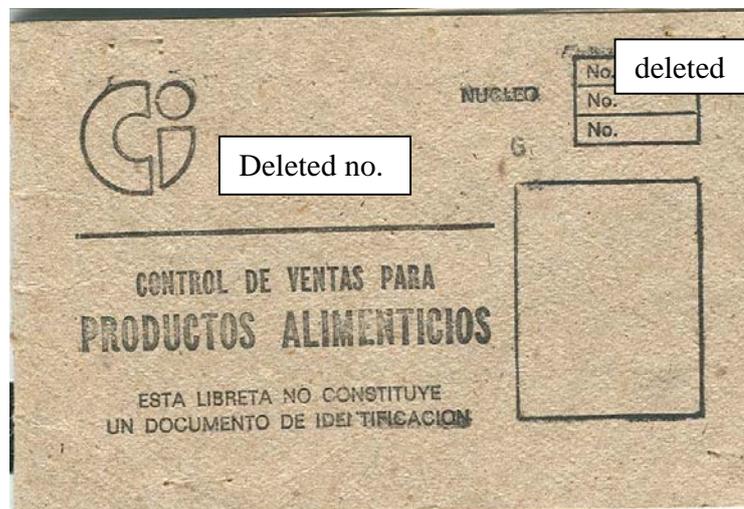


Figure 5.1

The Ration Card (*libreta*)

Figures 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 illustrate what this household consumed between January and March 2005. In January, the household received the following: rice, beans (*chícharos*), cooking oil, white sugar, coffee, salt, and in addition detergent, cigarettes and toothpaste. In February, most of the same products arrived at the *bodega* with one addition, lard. Salt, detergent and toothpaste were not provided that month. Finally, in March, the state provided rice, beans, oil, lard, sugar, coffee, cigarettes, toothpaste, soap for washing clothes, matches and toothpaste.

		ENTREGAS MES DE ENERO				7	
(Rice)	Arroz	4/4	12/4		Café	3/12	3/26
(Beans)	Granos	CH	3/18		Cig. Fuerte	3/11	3/18
					Cig. Suave		
(Oil)	Aceite	1.5	1/20		Tabaco		
(Lard)	Manteca				Fósforos		
(Sugar)	Azúcar	3	9/18		Pasta Dental	1/20	
	Compota		(Tinned juice)		Gul	3/14	
	Cons. Tomate		(Tomato puree)		2		
	Jabón Baño		(Soap/ bath)		3		
	Jabón Lavar		(Soap/ washing up)		4		
	Detergente	1/20	(Detergent)		5		

Figure 5.2 (Rationed Consumption for January)¹³⁵

		ENTREGAS MES DE FEBRERO				8	
	Arroz	6/4	6/8	6/12	Café	3/4	3/5
	Granos				Cig. Fuerte	3/12	3/18
					Cig. Suave	1/12	
	Aceite	1.5	1/3		Tabaco		
	Manteca	6	6/14		Fósforos		
	Azúcar	3	9/9		Pasta Dental		
	Compota				1		
	Cons. Tomate				2		
	Jabón Baño	3/12			3		
	Jabón Lavar				4		
	Detergente				5		

Figure 5.3 (Rationed Consumption for February)

¹³⁵ Translations added in brackets.

10 ENTREGAS MES DE MARZO

Arroz	18/25			Café	3/2	3/8	
Granos	FC 3/4			Cig. Fuerte	3/10	3/10	
	ca 3/21			Cig. Suave	7/10	3/10	
Aceite	10/13			Tabaco			
Manteca	0			Fósforos	2/10		
Azúcar	B 9/29			Pasta Dental	1/10		
Compota				1	08/20		
Cons. Tomate				2			
Jabón Baño				3			
Jabón Lavar	3/19			4			
Defergente				5			

Figure 5.4 (Rationed Consumption for March)

As the figures above show, products ‘*llegan*’ (arrive)¹³⁶ at the *bodega* on different days. This means that consumers have to make frequent trips to the store, which entails a great deal of time spent obtaining these items. This is yet another fact observed in Eckstein’s 1993 fieldwork, which reveals that, over ten years ago, ‘people came to spend hours in queues for meager pickings. And they were forced to make numerous trips to stores just to attain their paltry official allotments, because on any one day not all items were available’ (2003: 609).

Aside from having to go to the *bodega* regularly, the participants explained that the quantities provided are not sufficient because they are consumed before the first half of the month. Once they run out of products, they cannot get extra amounts from the *bodega*, so they have to rely on the *agro*.

5.4. *El Agro*

As figures 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 show, consumption is limited and sometimes some basic products do not ‘arrive’ at the *bodega* at all. Such is the case of *compota* (juices) and tomato puree, which did not arrive during the months of January, February and March (see figures). Soap, washing-up soap and detergent only arrived once in the three months.

¹³⁶ Term popularly used by Cubans: whenever the government distributes goods to the population, Cubans inform their neighbours that products have ‘arrived’.

This proves that relying on the ration card can make life rather difficult. In fact, it shows that Cubans cannot survive if they have to wait for the limited rations provided at the *bodega*. Thus, they need to search for other alternatives such as *el agro* (see Images 12 and 13).



Image 12 *El Agro Matancero* in Alamar¹³⁷



Image 13 *El Agro Mercado* in Vedado

¹³⁷ Images from this chapter were taken on the 10th of August 2007 by Dina de Sousa E Santos.

Unlike the *bodegas*, the *agros* do not have fixed quotas for consumption so the quantity is decided by the consumer. Nevertheless, there is a great concern for the price of products sold at the *agro*, as most of the participants who are in charge of the household (Chapter 3) consider the prices to be very high. If obtaining food in general is an area of concern for the participants, the greatest worry for most is how to obtain meat, because it arrives irregularly with the *libreta* and in smaller quantities; yet as Pedro says, ‘a meal without meat is not a meal’.

The *agro* is the main alternative for buying meat. Despite its expensive prices, it offers more variety than the *bodega*. However, *the agro* also has its limitations, as 25 year-old Gisel’s statement shows:

A la única carne que nosotros tenemos acceso es a la carne de pUerco [raised tone of voice] [...] La carne de cerdo que te cuesta treinta y cinco, treinta y cuatro, hasta cuarenta pesos la libra. El bistec está a cuarenta pesos la libra. Una libra de carne, ¿cuánto es? Cuatro bistecitos [...] Una cabeza de ajo cuesta dos pesos, tres pesos.

Por fuera el estado te vende picadillo de pollo pero te vende la libra en dieciocho pesos. ¡Una libra! El pollo sí te lo vende por fuera en moneda nacional pero son veintitrés pesos la libra. ¡Quiere decir que una posta de pollo te cuesta veintitrés pesos!¹³⁸

(Gisel (25) Interviewed in Havana City, August 2005)

What we see from Gisel’s statement is that the government is perceived as maintaining a double system. It sells products at the *bodega*, but it also provides goods *por fuera*,¹³⁹ outside the *bodega*. In fact, this term *por fuera* is used to imply that the

¹³⁸ The only meat we have access to here [in her local *agro*] is pORk meat [...] Pork meat, which costs you 35, 34, even 40 Cuban Pesos per pound. A pound of steak costs 40 Cuban Pesos. What is a pound of meat? It is four small steaks. Outside the *bodega* (*por fuera*), the government sells chicken mince, but it sells at 18 Cuban Pesos per pound. One pound! They do sell chicken *por fuera* in national currency but it costs 23 Cuban Pesos per pound. A quarter of chicken costs 23 Cuban Pesos!

¹³⁹ *Por fuera* [somewhere else/ literal translation: outside] May also mean: on the black market, illegally.

government resorts to a series of economic strategies to ensure that it is the main provider. As they sell *por fuera*, the government is certainly competing with small farmers and illicit traders; but this strategy works because, as respondents explain, they buy products from the *bodega*, and when they run out of foodstuffs they resort to the *agros* and services *por fuera* (not sold by the *bodega*). Either way, capital is flowing straight back to the government. Thus, it is profitable for the government to sell some products at the *bodega* and others *por fuera*. Nonetheless, the current system is the source of much concern for most respondents. These Cubans feel that they are not given much choice in terms of products and prices and this leads to a great deal of anxieties and anger.

5.5. Consumption Anxieties

Unlike Rosendahl's (1997: 29) optimistic view that in Cuba 'the rationing system [...] guarantees every citizen basic goods in equal amounts and at very low cost', the narratives of the Afro-Cuban research participants demonstrate anxiety about food. Indeed, irregular, insufficient and expensive food supplies are the main source of these anxieties. As Pedro emphasises:

Ya cuando se te acabaron esas que te corresponden, las otras que tú compres son a sobreprecio, ya no es al mismo precio ya. ¿Tú me entiendes? Y ya es ahí donde te coge el conteo...Es ahí. Es ahí. Si se te acabó el frijol ya...se acabó el del mes ahora hasta el mes que viene. A esperar hasta el mes que viene, que ese es la, que ese es el lío. Entonces, cuando viene el pollo ahí al, al mercado, viene, viene el pollo baratico, lo que cuesta es setenta kilos, setenta centavos la libra. Cosas así, cuando ves la libra, setenta centavos la libra. Ya baratico, pero vino una vez y ya no vino más. Ya en este mes no comiste más pollo, ya ¡Es la jodienda! Vino el picadillo. El picadillo viene ah...esto y que lo otro, eh treinta y cinco centavos eh la

libra por persona, pero ya vino esa vez y ya. Es decir que tú que vino, comiste pollo [pausa]...ya no vas a comer más pollo ya. Ahora, comiste pollo el día que, hoy que vino y mañana ¿qué comes?¹⁴⁰

In Chapter 3, I discussed Cuban women's perceptions that Cuban men are unable to sustain their families, a point that Pedro confirms here. His anxieties as a father stem from the fact that on relying on the *libreta* alone his family is always uncertain about the future. Pedro says that he rarely eats fish. He does not make that statement with as much passion as when he mentions his lack of consumption of red meat. Perhaps Fiddes (1991), Murcott (1995) and Charles's (1995) analogy of meat and cultures is valuable for understanding the way in which meat is regarded by Cubans. Murcott and Charles's discussions about what constitutes a proper meal reinforce the need for cultural values to be introduced into such an analysis. In this case, the Cuban meaning of a good meal can be demonstrated by Pedro's argument that a meal has to have meat.

As Eckstein observes (2003), pork is Cuba's favourite meat. However, because meat in the *agro* is one of the most expensive products, many Cubans have started breeding pigs since its legalisation in 1991 (Eckstein, 2003: 618). Although the informants' narratives suggest that pork is currently one of the most accessible meats, consumption is still expensive. Hence, those Cubans that do not breed pigs have to rely on the *agro* in order to eat pork.

¹⁴⁰ When you run out of [the rations] that are allocated to you, the others that you buy are above the average price. It is not the same price anymore, do you know what I mean? That's when the clock starts ticking. It is then. It is then. If your beans run out, that's it...you've run out of your monthly allowance, you have to wait until the following month [...] and that's the problem. So, when chicken arrives there, at the market [actually means the *bodega*], it is very cheap. It only costs 70 cents (Cuban Pesos) per pound [...] It's very cheap, but it comes once and does not come ANYmore. That's it; you don't get to eat anymore chicken for the rest of that month. That's the problem! [...] The mince 35 cents ummmm per pound, per person, but it comes on that occasion and that's it! [...]. Now, you've eaten chicken today because it arrived and what about tomorrow, what are you going to eat?

5.6. The Invisible Hand that Feeds Us – The *Jinetera* and the State

Two main points emerge from these discourses of consumption. Firstly, these anxieties lead some of these Cubans to seek relationships with foreigners; and secondly, they highlight the friction between the *jinetera* and the state because, as mentioned earlier, these Afro-Cuban women perceive the state as unable to provide efficiently for all Cubans, and as stigmatising women who seek alternative ways of sustaining their families. As Milania mentions in Chapter 3, the *jinetera*/state relationship should not have been based on conflict; after all, the *jinetera* is also a key consumer enabling the circulation of money within Cuba. Yet, as I argue here, conflict surfaces because the state dominates every aspect of the economy – from dollar spheres to Cuban Pesos spaces – and takes away the choices that these individuals believe they are entitled to.

After years of providing basic services to the Cuban population – such as free education and health services as well as affordable food at the *bodegas* – the government is still not perceived by the respondents as being able to offer goods and services of acceptable quality. Instead, the state is portrayed as a distant entity that ‘sends’ irregular goods to the population, rather than a service provider that satisfies people’s real needs and wants.

When mentioning food provided by the government, participants do not put themselves in the position of consumers by using the terms ‘buy’ or ‘purchase’; instead, these terms are replaced with ‘*venir*’ (to come), ‘*llegar*’ (to arrive) and ‘*dar*’ (to give). While this terminology might have been part of the Cuban jargon for many years, it is the context used by the participants that confirms the way in which they perceive the government. It is a distant provider, incapable of providing food for all.

No tienes vida. Entonces, ¿qué hay que hacer? Hay que prostituirse, hay que buscarte un *yuma*, el que no tiene el familiar que lo pueda ayudar y así y todo no te alcanza porque cuando tú te pones a comprar el aceite que un pomo de aceite son \$2.15, porque lo que te dan el gobierno son media libra... [...] Comemos pollo... por el estado tenemos estipulado comer pollo una vez al mes- una libra. Nos dan

una libra por persona. Un picadillo condimentado con una serie de cosas, que no sabemos que cosa es, pero que nos lo comemos porque nos lo tenemos que comer eh...un cuarto de onza que viene siendo como media libra. Es decir que nosotros comemos, a ver, ¿cómo es? El mes tiene cuatro semanas...el que vive por lo del gobierno tiene que dividir, me imagino, la costa de pollo en cuatro pedazos, pa' comerte un cuarto de pollo, dos días a la semana. Aquí hay que inventar mucho.¹⁴¹

(Gisel (25) Interviewed in Havana City, August 2005)

For all participants, food consumption appears right at the centre of their daily concerns. Here, Pedro explains how he perceives daily consumption in Alamar:

Uno se esta ahogando y...uno tiene que...El más, el más íntegro que hay lo hace [*jinetear*], el mejor lo hace, ¿porqué? ¡Por sobrevivir! [pausa larga]. Aquí uno lo que no se puede vivir es...de que el día cinco tú cobras. Entonces tu cogiste eso... No se puede vivir así. El que vive así aquí, está muerto.¹⁴²

(Pedro (34) Interviewed in Alamar, August 2005)

¹⁴¹ We don't have a life. So, do you know what one has to do? One has to prostitute oneself, find a *yuma*, those that do not have a family member (abroad) to help them, and even so, it is not enough because when you buy a bottle of oil, which costs \$2.15 (dollars) because the government only gives you half a litre... [...] We eat chicken. The government stipulates that we eat chicken once a month – a pound. They give us a pound of chicken per person. [Also] minced meat seasoned with all sorts of things, which we don't even know what they are, but we have to eat it because... we have to eat it! Uhhmm...[they give us] a quarter of an ounce, which is around half a pound [of chicken]. This is to say that we eat...let's see, how much? There are four weeks in a month...If you live with what the government provides, you have to divide, I imagine, the chicken portion, into four pieces in order to eat one quarter of chicken twice a week [...]

¹⁴² One is drowning...and one has to...the most, the most honest person does it [*jinetear*]. Why? In order to survive! [...] Here, one cannot live [waiting] for the day when you get paid [...] You cannot live like that. Whoever lives like that is dead.

The accounts above depict a bleak picture that implies that Cubans are struggling to get by, or even to survive. They perceive a deteriorated economic landscape. The Cubans I spoke to offer a complex analysis of their economic circumstances. They explain their circumstances eloquently and shrewdly and make constant comparisons between their country's socio-economic and political situation, and the impact on their lives. It is clear that these women's high educational and cultural background is linked to their higher expectations, leading them to question the goods that the government offers them. In the next section, I address employment issues and the sacrifices that educated Cubans feel they have to make in order to survive. It is these frustrations and the others mentioned in previous chapters that lead them to start dreaming of better opportunities elsewhere.

5.7. Rejection of Revolutionary Values

As mentioned in Chapter 2, in a speech delivered in March 1965, Che Guevara envisioned the creation of the 'new man' ('The Man of the 21st Century'), who sacrifices in the name of the nation. In his address to the Cuban nation, Guevara explained that periods of hardship would come, and that the future was uncertain. Guevara's 'new man' would not be weakened by the desire to consume, stressing that only after enduring a period of sacrifice, would individuals become true revolutionaries:

There is a risk of falling from weakness. If a man thinks that in order to dedicate his entire life to the Revolution, he or she cannot distract his/her mind because of the preoccupation that his son may not have a certain product; whether the child's shoes are broken or his family lacks a necessary product, under this reasoning we are fostering the germs of future corruption.

(1965: <http://www.filosofia.cu/che/che8e.htm>, my translation)

Guevara's ideology was reinforced by the Cuban leadership during the Special Period, when the state made a series of appeals to Cubans to stay strong and withstand

the effects of the crisis. However, as shown in the previous chapter, the *Alamareñas* I interviewed do not share these particular revolutionary values. Indeed, most participants indicate that they are not prepared to endure the hardships brought by what they perceive to be an ongoing economic crisis, despite the fact that Fidel Castro made a speech in 2000 declaring the end of the Special Period (Hagedorn, 2002). In our conversations, the respondents show open dissatisfaction with the current food system, and express their anxieties through discontent with food and work; after all, for most of them working for the government does not guarantee a better consumption deal nor does it offer better prospects for the future. Many participants believe that the hardships they suffer reduce them to a sub-human category.

25 year-old Gisel expressively voiced her consumption anxieties. The failures of her *transnational* relationships with foreigners mean that Gisel, who lives with her Cuban boyfriend in Cuba, needs to rely on rations provided by the government. I continued interviewing Gisel when she visited England and we discussed daily life in Cuba in 2008. Since 2005, I have hardly noticed changes in the way that she perceives daily life in Cuba. In fact, since visiting the UK, her perception of life in Cuba has become more pessimistic. This is also linked to the fact that after almost four years, she has still not found a foreign partner who would make emigration a possible option. In our first interview, which took place in front of her Cuban boyfriend, Gisel openly discussed her disappointment with her first foreign partner who seldom contacted her. In the same interview, Gisel was quite explicit about her frustrations and anxieties in Cuba:

La comida de nosotros es pescado prieto que tiene un olor fuertísimo que Alex lo odia pero yo tengo que comérmelo porque yo soy cubana, puré [...], huevo, el codo cuando viene [...]¹⁴³

(Gisel (25) Interviewed in Havana City, August 2005)

¹⁴³ Our food is fish, a dark fish, which has a very strong smell, which Alex (British brother in law) hates, but I have to eat it because I am Cuban [it also includes] puree [...] eggs, macaroni, when it *comes*.

A number of different readings can be drawn from this statement. Firstly, this rejection of Cuban food is influenced by Gisel's brother in law's perceptions of food in Cuba. This statement confirms Stephen Mennell's (1985: 87) argument that 'repulsion is socially constructed, not naturally acquired'. Indeed, all interviewees show revulsion towards some of the food sold in the Cuban Pesos stores, for example the *picadillo de soya*.¹⁴⁴ Secondly, Gisel's manner of speech, as well as that of the other respondents, displays signs of resignation as well as resistance: resignation due to a feeling of powerlessness when deciding what to consume; however, resistance in the sense that, unlike their ancestors, who are grateful to the Cuban government for giving them a plate of food, these individuals are highly critical of what is made available to them.

5.8. Getting-by Tactics: 'The Seeds of Your Work'

Inesita, a 35-year-old economist, does not believe that employment guarantees a secure life. 'We are not advancing economically at all,' she says. 'At work, you see that you work, work, work and work, and nothing!' Inesita, like most of the participants, has never stopped working, but recognises that work does not secure her a better standard of living.

In 2004, Inesita's husband Felix, met and married a woman in Barbados as a means of leaving the country to make more money to provide for Inesita and the family that they were planning to start. For years, Felix tried to convince Inesita to divorce him, so that he could marry the woman in Barbados. Having agreed on a marriage of convenience with the other woman, he promised Inesita that it was a short-term situation and that in the future, he would be able to invite her to Barbados (from where his ancestors came) and eventually, they would migrate to the UK. Tearfully, Inesita explains that she was always reluctant to accept his offer, but as soon as he had decided that he would take the risk and do it anyway, she felt compelled to accept and so they got divorced.

Inesita's situation improved slightly during the first months that Felix sent her remittances from Barbados. She was able to consume decently and to repair a leak on her roof. However, there was a twist in the saga and Felix fell in love with the woman from Barbados. In the summer of 2006, almost two years later, Felix admitted that he was

¹⁴⁴ Cuban staple of ground soya and beef.

being 'unfaithful'. Without discussing his plans with Inesita, he contacted me by email in 2004, asking if I could invite Inesita to come to the UK (see appendix III). He was willing to cover all her costs. In the long term, he hoped that Inesita would be able to marry a British man and stay in the UK.

Since the end of her relationship with Felix, Inesita's circumstances have changed again and, despite the fact that Felix still occasionally sends her remittances, most of the time she struggles to get by. Her case confirms that many Cubans in their relationships with foreigners seek, directly or indirectly, the opportunity to change their lives. Inesita's husband's relationship with the woman from Barbados had both benefits and detrimental implications for Inesita. Nevertheless, in her view, she lost a great deal more emotionally than she gained economically, and these days, perceives her life as being 'static', because of her inability to consume.

Like most respondents, Inesita says that in Cuba there are no signs of *avanzo* (progress), so she is now hoping to find a 'serious foreign man' with whom she can settle down. After hearing a conversation detailing that a friend of mine in England had recently separated from his long-term girlfriend, Inesita, who is quite shy and extremely private, asked me quietly and politely to give our friend her picture, '*a ver si yo le caigo bien*' (to see if he likes me). For almost one year, she would ask me in her emails if I had had the opportunity to show him her picture. Despite not knowing what he looked like, and even though I would not respond to her comments, she would always write a note in her emails, '*saluda a tu amigo por mi*' (say hello to your friend). In 2008, when another friend of mine, a man in his 40s, visited Cuba for a week, I asked Inesita to show him around the city. Unfortunately the favour was mis-interpreted and one week later, an email arrived from Inesita asking me to ask my friend if he liked her.

With these somewhat desperate tactics, women like Gisel and Inesita, who have not managed to develop secure relationships with foreigners, risk putting their lives in the hands of complete strangers. For them finding a foreign man offers the prospect of a better life and is linked with their idea of *avanzo*. Interestingly the concept of *avanzo*, as mentioned by the participants, is also linked with consumption. To these Cubans, consumption means to advance, yet unrestricted consumption clashes with revolutionary

ideology- an ideology that reflects not only the views of the Cuban revolutionary leaders, but also many Cubans that support the Cuban Revolution.

As Che discussed in his 'Man and Socialism' speech, to progress means perfecting the revolutionary being. In this discourse, progress is ideological and implies the growth of all; therefore, the revolutionary idea of progress is separated from the material and economic progress that benefits the individual or their family. However, as the statements above suggest, part of the participants' dissatisfaction lies in their lack of individual progress. Their discontent is translated in terms of their income, which is low and does not meet their consumption needs. In order to get a fuller picture of how work falls short of the participants' expectations, I now briefly compare salary and consumption, before moving on to Part 2, where I discuss in detail further tactics used by Cubans in national and transnational spaces to obtain basic goods.

5.9. The Impact of the Economic Crisis on Afro-Cuban Women

Amongst the Afro-Cuban participants salaries are perceived as extremely low. In this section, I look at the income of three women: Inesita, Felicia and, Gisel and analyse how their salary is spent. The first is Inesita:

Yo trabajé en un banco. Yo ganaba en el banco 198 pesos, que eso es equivalente...en dólares son siete dólares [...] El salario era muy bajito y la responsabilidad muy grande [...] Lo que tú ganas para verdaderamente alimentarte es en divisas. Y yo no gano en divisas. Yo gano 315 pesos en el mes. ¿Que son 315 pesos? Que yo compre 5 libras de pollo, que es a veintitrés pesos ¿con qué me quedo? El arroz son 5 libras al mes que te dan por la cuota. La cuota normal de un cubano son: cinco libras de arroz, tres de azúcar blanca, tres de azúcar prieta, una y media de aceite, una de frijoles y ya. No te puedes ni alimentar un mes. Tienes que comprar

extra. El extra, comprar el hígado en la plaza [...],
viandas...viandas es a precio libre...¹⁴⁵

Felicia agrees with the statement above and states:

Yo trabajo y lo que cobro es bobería [...] 148 pesos que
vienen siendo en divisa \$10 dólares al mes. Yo que soy una
madre soltera. Entonces la mochila, los zapatos, otras cosas
la comida, el aceite. Todo eso que prácticamente no
alcanza¹⁴⁶.

(Felicia (34) Interviewed in Alamar, August 2005)

As far as work is concerned, Gisel clarifies:

El cubano no es que no le guste trabajar es que es muy duro
trabajar toda una vida para no tener en un final nada. Mira,
mira, aquí no hay nada. No hay muebles. Ese televisor lo
tengo por mi hermana, el refrigerador lo tengo por mi
hermana, lo poquito que tengo lo tengo por mi hermana
porque si no...¹⁴⁷

(Gisel (25) Interviewed in Havana City, August 2005)

¹⁴⁵ I used to work in a bank. [Before] my salary was 198 Cuban Pesos, which is equivalent to...in dollars it is \$7 [...] But dollars are what you really need in order to feed yourself properly. I don't earn in dollars. [Right now] I earn 315 Cuban Pesos. If I buy five pounds of chicken, which is twenty-three Cuban Pesos, what am I left with? I normally eat five pounds of rice per month, which is allocated by the government. We normally get: five pounds of rice, three of black sugar, three of white sugar, one and a half of oil, beans and that's it. You cannot feed yourself for the entire month with this. You have to buy extra. The extra is to buy liver at the market [...] root vegetables.

¹⁴⁶ I work and what I earn is nothing [...] 148 Cuban pesos, which is \$10 per month and I am a single mother. I have to buy my son's school bag, shoes, other things food, oil. All this, and it is not enough.

¹⁴⁷ It is not like Cubans do not like to work. The problem is that it is very hard to see that you work all your life and in the end nothing. Look, nothing [points around her house]. There is nothing here. No furniture. This television, I have it thanks to my sister; the refrigerator, I have it because my sister gave it to me. Whatever little I have, I have it because of my sister, otherwise...

It became apparent in fieldwork that the crisis had a particularly strong impact on women who constantly expressed emotional and economic strain. Whereas the men I knew had time to participate in leisure activities, these women were constantly working – even socialising for them was done through work: for example, Felicia chatting at her gate, while mopping and sweeping the floor; Gisel and Lola chatting while going on shopping trips to the *bodega*. Rarely did women stand outside for long hours chatting with neighbours. Men, on the other hand, would play dominoes and socialised more with other males outdoors.

The crisis also had an impact on women's relationships. Inesita's eyes welled up in tears whenever she talked about her marriage. Felicia claimed that the economic strains along with other marital problems triggered her divorce. Gisel stated that she would not consider marrying in Cuba, or having a child, because she felt that she was already struggling too much on her own.

The studies carried out by Fernández Holgado (2002) and Facio (1998) demonstrate the strong impact of the economic crisis on Cuban women. Years after their research, the accounts presented in this study confirm that the hardships faced by Cuban women have not eased. Women carry the heavy burden of working outside the house, bringing up their children and looking after their families with whatever little they have.

The Afro-Cuban participants of this research are far from the '21st century New (Wo)Man' Che Guevara envisioned. In fact, they openly state that they are not prepared to make further 'sacrifices for the Revolution' (Felicia). Compared to their parents who lived through various economic crises in their lifetimes, these individuals born after the Revolution have higher expectations, and seek the solution to their daily economic problems in tourism. Pedro's interview shows that the difference in thought between the state and many Cubans is evident.

Even in a society where the 'new man' was supposed to follow the rule – 'With the Revolution all, without the Revolution, nothing' – Pedro confirms that these ideals can be contested through the use of food, arguably one of the best ways to show that the Revolution is not being digested:

Estos señores [en el poder] ellos [dicen] ‘tienen que *luchar* y esto...y resistir y esto y lo otro’ pero ellos están resistiendo con un plato de comida en el estomago. [...] Él [Fidel] no puede pedirle más a este pueblo. ¿Qué más él les va a pedir? Ya tantos años resistiendo esto y que lo otro.¹⁴⁸

The extract above highlights two points that cannot be overlooked: firstly, that food consumption can be a divisive political issue as Cubans, such as Pedro, perceive inequalities in consumption within Cuba. Secondly, it is clear not only from this interview, but also from the discourses of all Afro-Cuban participants of this research, that the *lucha* they are fighting is different from the *lucha* the Cuban leaders are fighting. What the participants suggest is that while the Cuban government is fighting against the *imperialismo yanqui* (the Yankee Imperialism), ordinary Cubans claim they are fighting to stay alive.

The fact that Cubans are eager to talk about their daily struggles of survival can be viewed as a way of contesting the revolutionary ideology, which suggests that the nature of a true revolutionary is to endure hardships and to do so with bravery, just as the heroes of the Cuban Revolution are said to have done in the past. The participants distance themselves from this discourse and create a discourse of hardship and struggle of their own. The malleability of spaces within Havana allows them to perform various roles in different spaces as most respondents work for the Cuban state, but also carry out a range of activities (legal and illegal) *por fuera*. They traverse national and transnational spaces within Havana in order to ensure that their needs are satisfied. Ultimately, they hope to find within these transnational spaces better long-term opportunities and more room to devise strategies for making a living.

¹⁴⁸ Those gentlemen [in power] they (say): ‘you have to *luchar* and this...and resist and this and that’. But they are resisting with a plate of food in their stomachs [...] He [Fidel] cannot ask these people anything else. What else can he ask them? So many years resisting this and that...

Part 2 – Procuring Consumer Goods in Alamar and Tourist Areas in Havana City

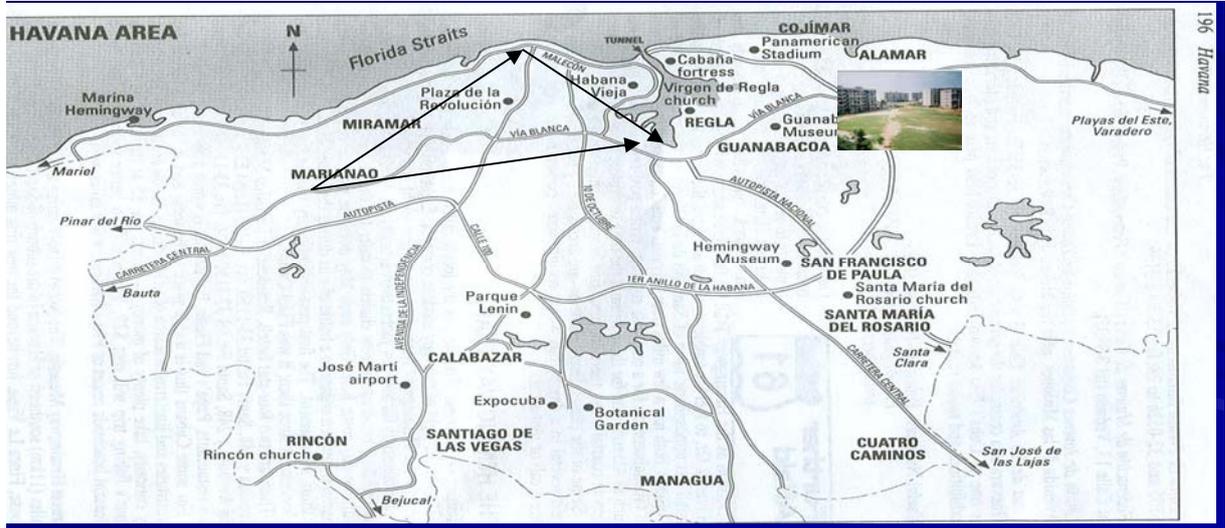


Image 14 Map of Havana (Source Calder and Hatchwell 1996)¹⁴⁹

5.10. *Inventando* or ‘Making Do’ Inside and Outside Alamar

Jineterismo only becomes apparent when Cubans are in contact with foreigners. I argue that in order to understand *jineterismo*, it is crucial to take into account not only activities taking place inside central Havana, but also the *inventos* used by Cubans outside these spaces. In this section, I discuss the experiences of some of my respondents who are defined or were at some point defined as *jineteras/os*.

Scarcities have led to the creation of an underground market in Cuba that most Cubans will resort to. Goods are procured and exchanged and transactions take place independently of the state. Although these activities are deemed illegal, the participants insist that all Cubans ‘need to *inventar*’ in order to survive. These *inventos* range from stealing from the government to selling products in the *mercado negro* (black market).

Cubans with family abroad, mainly white Cubans (Aguirre and Bonilla Silva, 2001), have the means to embellish their houses and to lead a lifestyle different to the

¹⁴⁹ Adaptations made to the map by the author of this thesis: photo of Alamar added and arrows to highlight the tourist areas within Havana City.

majority of the population. But those without family abroad, and who cannot justify how they obtained the money to consume certain goods, can be arrested if caught *inventando*. Such is the case of the husband of the head of the CDR in Pedro's building. After decorating and improving his house and acquiring electrical goods not normally affordable to most Cubans, he was investigated. In 2004 it was discovered that he had stolen trucks of meat. He was not spared a prison term, even though he was a respected member of the Cuban Communist Party. In 2008 he still had not been released, although he is now allowed home visits.

Pedro was also arrested in his previous job as an ice cream seller because he was charging a higher price than that stipulated by the state, but matters were settled once his parents paid an enormous fine that left them without savings.

As the security guard of a construction site in 2005, Pedro was one of the most sought after men in the neighbourhood. Housewives like Regla, young and older couples, professionals and retired individuals came over to buy tiles, sand and other materials from him. Once, while I was walking towards the bar with Pedro, he was stopped by a white Cuban man. The man told Pedro in a low tone of voice that he was doing some work in his own house. He had been to government stores and they did not have certain materials and the ones that they did have were of poor quality. The man asked Pedro if he would sell him some materials. Pedro, who had won the visa lottery to the United States, rapidly offered to help the neighbour because he needed to save money to leave the country with his family. With just their salaries it would have been difficult to pay for their air fares, but with the *inventos* he managed to save money to buy two tickets.

I did not notice a gendered difference when it comes to pilfering. Unlike the literature that says that pilfering is practiced mainly by male *jineteros* (see Introduction), here I found that males and females pilfered equally from the state as a desperate measure. For instance, while Pedro sold materials from a construction site, he admitted that his wife, who worked at a factory, also pilfered resources to sell in the neighbourhood.

In her attempts to get by, Felicia sells clothes or whatever products she can get hold of. Before stalls were made illegal, she sold cappuccino, Cuban coffee, cooked food and offered numerous services in the neighbourhood. Indeed, all the participants in this

thesis confirmed that they *inventan* in one way or another in order to make ends meet, even if some preferred not to reveal exactly what they did. This demonstrates that these individuals are not passive recipients of government provisions but actively involved in a 'shadow economy' in which they barter goods for food and food for food in their neighbourhoods.

Berdahl (1999: 112) points out that although scholars advise against 'importing certain concepts of Western social theory in the analysis of socialist societies', she finds Bourdieu's theories 'useful to conceptualise social differentiation under socialism'. Developing Berdahl's point, Bourdieu's (1983) theories of social capital are indeed relevant in the context of socialist societies. He argues that in countries where economic capital and class differences are not evident, and where cultural capital (such as knowledge and qualifications) are not sufficient to create distinctions, social capital including kinship and networks of friends and connections emerges as the main form of capital (249). Stretching Bourdieu's concept, Berdahl indicates that for certain types of 'exchange' of labour or products, the relationships with family, friends and neighbours, and the connections with friends of friends or with workers of bureaucratic institutions, are essential in the everyday lives of individuals from socialist societies, where the state is responsible to provide goods for the population. However, it may be unable to provide all the goods that the population requires. Considering that the government often cannot provide sufficient goods and services to satisfy the needs of the population, the informal economy adopts an important role in ensuring that goods are available.

In her research in former East Germany, Berdahl found that for her informants, 'money helped to maintain the connections, but the connections are [seen as] most important' (120). In Cuba social capital appears to be just as important as cultural or economic capital. As participants made clear, having hard currency is not sufficient to have access to basic goods. I encountered numerous examples of this myself: on my first research trip to Alamar my son would only have drinking yoghurt, but at some point yoghurts disappeared from the dollar shops in Alamar and Havana. We had the *Pesos Convertibles*, but in the end the only way we managed to get hold of the product was by benefiting from Pedro's *contactos*. First, a friend of Pedro's drove us to one of the biggest dollar supermarkets in Havana; Pedro then contacted another friend of his to

supply us with cheaper petrol than the one sold at the dollar petrol stations. In the end, the supermarket did not have yoghurt. Later, Pedro mentioned our odyssey to Havana in search of drinking yoghurt in conversations with neighbours, one of whom, a 'white' woman whose son lives in Miami, came to us with yoghurt someone had bought for her from a store in Vedado. As this example shows, a person with a large network of kinship, friendship and neighbourhood connections has access to more goods and services. In fact, the amount of contacts is a marker of distinction. Pedro, unlike Dayamí (mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4) occupies a high status in the neighborhood, not only because he has a wide range of contacts, but also because he is a major operator in the barter trade of the neighbourhood.

As Bourdieu (1983: 253) highlights, accumulating social capital requires 'an apparently gratuitous expenditure of time, attention, care, concern'. In 'economies of shortage' (Berdahl, 1999), it is the best way to avoid long queues in hospitals, circumvent government institutions and to have a bathroom fixed. For many participants, meeting foreigners is seen as an important way of accumulating social capital. For example, in my visit in 1998 a Cuban male managed to get a friend of mine, Aaron, to invite him to the UK after knowing him for just one week. The male took us to historical and cultural places, bought us snacks on the street in Cuban Pesos and got his mother-in-law to cook us a big meal on that first week. He acted as our tour guide without us requesting him to. Eventually he persuaded my British friend to invite him to the UK, and hastily took us to the office of the *Consultoria Juridica Internacional* in Vedado, where Aaron signed a letter of invitation and the Cuban paid approximately \$100. Unfortunately, when Aaron realised that the Cuban man would actually have to stay in his house for six months, he never made contact with him again. The Cuban man, however, had developed a wide network of foreign contacts by the end of my stay and eventually migrated to the U.S. Similarly, in the process of this research, Mercedes, a single mother working in a cyber-café in Havana, sent me pictures of her so that I could show them to friends in the UK; the same happened with Inesita, whose case I discussed earlier. Other women claimed that they had a room they could rent to foreigners and offered to '*recibir*', or 'receive' tourists in their houses for a 'small fee' and asked us to mention it to friends in the UK.

5.11. Consumption across Economic Spaces

All participants frequently resort to *inventos* of some kind. For them, and for many Cubans, remaining outside tourist/dollar areas is difficult, if not impossible, because certain products such as cooking oil are sold only there.¹⁵⁰ The concepts of ‘nothingness’ and ‘everything-ness’, which are central to the next part of this chapter, become evident in the discussion of consumption across economic spaces. This chapter demonstrates that through consumption individuals voice their discontents and critique the Cuban government.

Oneida, a thirty-five-year-old *mulata*, is a trained nurse, but the frustrations of ‘*no poder brindar un tratamiento adecuado*’, or ‘not being able to treat patients appropriately’, due to lack of resources made her want to give up the career that she ‘loved’, as she put it, to become a freelance singer and performer. Oneida was in a love triangle a year before this research began. Her Cuban lover and fellow artist died of a heart attack in his late twenties. She now devotes a great amount of time in preparing activities that pay homage to him. Oneida is still in what she describes as a meaningful relationship with an older Italian man who supports her and her son. Neighbours, perhaps sympathising with a woman who still seemed to be suffering the loss of her Cuban ‘friend’, do not pry as much into her life. However, Oneida is also a ‘good neighbour’ (see Chapter 2). She attends local ceremonies, visits and helps friends, advertises her concerts and occasionally invites neighbours to attend.

Alex, the young Afro-Cuban man whom I paid to ‘hang out’ in central Havana to meet sex workers (see Introduction), took me to Oneida’s apartment, which she shares with other Cubans, in the summer of 2006. She had come to the apartment I was staying at a week earlier to show me a demo of her tape. Alex had told her that I was an *extranjera* interested in Afro-Cuban music, and asked me to start the interview by focusing on music. Obviously he had told me earlier that she was also going out with an *extranjero*.

¹⁵⁰ The use of the term ‘tourist areas’, as mentioned by respondents, is not used unproblematically because tourist areas such as Vedado are also residential areas. In this thesis, I use the term tourist areas, dollar areas or transnational (spaces in) Havana to describe areas where Cubans are more likely to encounter tourists.

When we arrived at her apartment, Oneida a very tall and slim woman sat with a cassette player on her lap. She brought her portfolio for us to see, displaying impressive pictures of her and her Cuban partner in performance outfits. She also wanted us to hear the latest track she had recorded – a song for the *'fallecido'* (the *deceased*), as she called her Cuban friend. She sang along with the cassette player with tears in her eyes. That uncomfortable moment of knowing that she was singing about her Cuban lover, combined with Alex whispering what I already knew, created an impossible environment for our interview. The interview had to be re-scheduled and re-located to Alex's house. In retrospect, this explains why I got to know so little about Oneida. Even though I saw her out frequently, her Italian boyfriend was rarely mentioned. There were no stories of romance and no excitement when she mentioned him. Yet, she confirmed that her foreign partner occasionally sent remittances and that he only visited Cuba once a year.

Oneida confirmed the frustrations that all other respondents expressed in their interviews. With a quiet tone of voice, the single mother explained the difficulties of daily life:

Con moneda nacional aquí te mueres de hambre. Si yo tengo que comprar un *blúmer* tiene que ser en divisa [...] Un pomo te vale treinta pesos. El aceite si no lo consumes de la tienda comes sin aceite porque en moneda nacional no te lo venden.¹⁵¹

Pedro agrees with this statement and adds that while Cuban *bodegas* are empty, dollar supermarkets are always full of food: '*Aquí no hay nada. ¡No hay nada pa' el cubano! Pa' el de aquí, no hay nada. Para el extranjero todo lo que tú quieras pero pa' el cubano no hay nada*' (Here, there is nothing. Nothing for Cubans! For those who live here, there is nothing...For foreigners, all that you want, but for Cubans, nothing).¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ With the national currency one cannot live. If I have to buy a pair of knickers it needs to be in dollars [...] Oil, if you don't buy it in dollar shops, you eat without oil because they will not sell it to you in Cuban Pesos.

¹⁵² Although these Cubans perceive dollar stores as having everything, I found it really difficult to rely on dollar stores to eat proper meals, so I have always relied on the *agro* to buy fruits and vegetables. Dollar stores rarely sell fresh fruit.

Dayamí, who earns 320 Cuban Pesos as a Social Worker (\$13), also believes that it is impossible to live with Cuban Pesos and the *libreta*:

Aquí todo te lo venden en divisa. Todo. Lo que te dan en...en moneda nacional es una cosa que, que no te alcanza para nada. No te...es una cosa que no te dura para nada. Lo gastas en el mismo día, ¿entiendes? Aquí te dan una libreta de abastecimiento que vienen cosas mensuales al mercado, pero hay veces en el mercado no entran comidas y entonces, las cosas básicas no entran. Se demoran hasta dos semanas. Entonces si tú no las compra por fuera por los agros, las tiendas, no tienes que comer.¹⁵³

As these Cubans procure food and/or money to satisfy their basic needs, they feel that the main option available is to leave what are perceived as Cuban-only spaces and enter tourist/dollar spaces. An important point that emerges from the interviews and observations is that the crossing of 'spaces' determines the identity that society attributes to these individuals. In other words, once the individual is in areas such as Vedado, and especially if he or she is in contact with foreigners, they instantly shed their *luchadora* identity and become *jineteras*.

All of the individuals interviewed use tactics inside and outside *areas de turismo* and, in doing so, perform changing expressions of identity. This is partly because each setting requires different demeanours. The changes in behaviour in these encounters are what differentiate *inventos* from *jineterismo*: the former being tactics used in 'national spaces' (Alamar), mostly in *Cuban Pesos* or in the form of exchanging favours and barter trade, involving Cuban clients and friends, and in which 'businesses' are carried out within a Cuban business culture. Therefore, details such as the presentation of goods in

¹⁵³ They sell everything in dollars here. Everything! If they give you something in Cuban pesos, it is not something that is going to last. It does not...It does not last. You use it on the same day; do you know what I mean? [...] Here they give you a *libreta* and things come monthly to the market but there are times that certain food does not arrive on the market and then...basic things don't arrive. They may take up to two weeks [to arrive] so, if you don't have money to buy goods *por fuera* [somewhere else] at the *agros*, the shops...you go without food [...] But you cannot live on your salary. In Cuba with your salary you cannot live.

Cuba Pesos areas are not essential. Felicia explains that when she sold coffee, she would go to the commercial area of Alamar with plain cups and wearing rollers. In order to make coffee she relied on provisions pilfered by a friend from the local *bodega*. However, whenever she travelled to Havana or to dollar bars with foreigners – for example, when I first invited her for a drink in Alamar (Chapter 3) – she presented herself differently. Despite the fact that each of the activities border on the margins of legality, the risks are greater in Havana where women can be arrested and accused of being sex workers (see Figure 5.5).

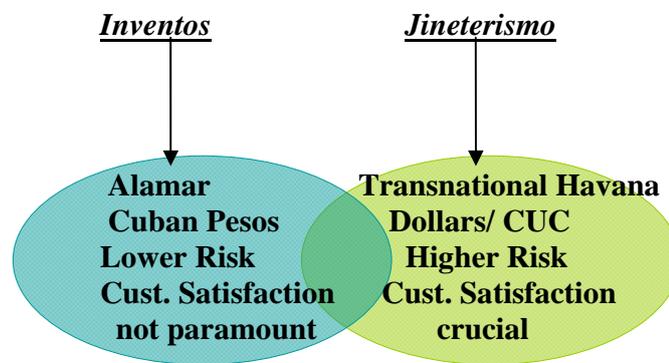


Figure 5.5 Tactics across Spaces

The narrations so far have led us to conclude that basic food consumption is one of the main factors prompting Cubans to move between different spaces in Havana, seeking to meet tourists. By doing so, they demonstrate that *jineterismo* should not just be seen as the exploitation of Cubans by Westerners, or vice-versa. While most of the literature presented in the introduction tends to focus on the exploitation of Cuban women by foreign men, unequal power relations and the stigmatisation of Cuban women, we tend to conveniently forget that both partners may benefit equally from these relationships. For example, Julieta, who clearly wanted to emigrate, achieved her goal by meeting John, who was looking for someone to settle down with.

Part 3 – Consumption as a Symbolic Action

5.12. Interpreting Nothingness

Conceptualising consumption as ‘symbolic action’ (Gell, 1986: 110) is particularly useful and helps us to understand the participants’ discourses of consumption. In Gell’s study of the Muria Fisherman in Sri Lanka, he found that the wealthier members of the community purchased and displayed their television sets, despite a lack of electricity. He argued that in this context consumption was symbolic because, while the product was not consumed as such, it was used as a ‘wealth signifier’ to mark status. Drawing on his idea, I discuss symbolic consumption in Havana, unearthing the meanings respondents give to food. Bringing back Savarin’s concept of ‘We are what we eat’, I examine what a good meal consists for the participants. The starting point for fusing the results found so far and introducing this angle of consumption is to offer an interpretation of ‘nothingness’.

The results presented in the previous two sections depict a dismal picture of contemporary Cuba, demonstrating how the economy of scarcity impacts on ordinary Cuban household economies and inevitably leads them to adopt ‘anarchic’ strategies to get by. This landscape is further complicated by the imaginary boundaries created around what these Cubans unofficially call *areas de turismo* and *areas del pueblo* within Havana. These geographic divisions are just as perplexing as the confusing and omnipresent double currency system. Each division, geographic and economic, leads these Cubans to feel socially excluded, to the point where some go as far as comparing contemporary Cuba with South Africa under Apartheid (Gisel).

In the second part of this chapter I explored whether the desire to consume was what ‘forced’ Cubans into Havana, a place controlled by the police and occupied by tourists. When the participants concluded that in Cuba there was ‘nothing’ for Cubans, they also justified the need to traverse these spaces. Most participants suggested that desperation was the reason why Cubans took their *inventos* across Havana and transformed them into the art of *jineterismo*. For instance, Julieta, the only woman to

indirectly accept the label *jinetera* (in the UK), indicated in Chapter 4 that only when she crossed these spaces did her life change for the better.¹⁵⁴

This section, as mentioned before, brings out a new analysis of consumption. I start with a quote from the last interview with Pedro in Havana. I asked him to tell me about his financial situation – income, expenditure, *libreta*, and the extras. He started by explaining that the salary set by the state is calculated according to products sold at the *bodega*:

Contra la bodega tú dices, coño, ¡da y sobra! Fíjate que si te da y te sobra que tú con veinte pesos, que ¡veinte pesos! Yo creo que una persona [pausa larga], una persona con diez pesos, o con quince pesos compra todos sus mandados del mes y te sobra dinero y te sobra dinero y te sobra dinero. Entonces tú miras a ver, tú sacas las estadísticas te da para vivir.¹⁵⁵

This interesting contradiction was repeated by various Alamareños in separate interviews. These narrations, in fact, demonstrate that *nada* (nothingness) is quite a complex and symbolic term. It allows important insights into the respondents' perceptions of consumption in Cuba and the implications this has for their relationship with the state. The following extract, from an interview with an Afro-Cuban man, is illuminating in this respect.

Mi salario no puede garantizar nada. El nada es, que con mi salario no puedes salir porque supongo que yo tengo dos cuarenta y cinco. Dos cuarenta y cinco que son...no son ni

¹⁵⁴ The men I spoke to during the course of this research accepted the label *jinetero*, but only because it implied that they were 'good businessmen' or 'good lovers', as a man in his thirties, Selas C, stated. Only one woman admitted that she had been in the streets (Julieta); however she did not directly define herself as a *jinetera*.

¹⁵⁵ Against the *bodega*, you say damn [my salary] is more than enough! More than enough! With twenty Cuban Pesos... With twenty Cuban Pesos, I think that one [long pause]. With ten Cuban Pesos, or fifteen...one can buy all the monthly goods and you still have money left, you still have money left, and you still have money left. So you do your calculations, and it is enough to live.

diez dólares. Diez dólares son doscientos y sesenta pesos.
Todo lo que hay aquí en Cuba es en dólares. En moneda
nacional no hay nada. Nada. Nada. No hay nada.¹⁵⁶

(Juan (25) Interviewed in Alamar, August 2005)

Interestingly, most consumer goods obtained by individuals I spoke to are from Cuban stores – such as *la bodega*, *el agro*, *el mercado negro* – and the main product that all participants buy at dollar stores (*la shopping*) is cooking oil. So the categorisation of ‘nothing’ for Cubans and ‘everything’ for foreigners is factually inconsistent. Symbolically, however, it carries a lot of meaning as it demonstrates how these individuals imagine consumption in the transnational areas within Havana, and echoes their desire to control their own consumption. A good example of this is Gisel’s ambivalent attitude to food: while she longed to be able to ‘cook spaghettis more often’, in one interview she claimed that a proper meal has to have meat, root vegetables and *congrís* (rice with beans) – ingredients attainable in Cuban spaces and in Cuban Pesos. Similarly, Pedro laughed when I invited him to eat spaghetti, claiming that ‘*el spaghettis no es comida, chica. Eso es una meriendita*’ (spaghetti is not proper food, girl. It’s only a little snack). Ironically, the components of what they consider a ‘proper meal’ are what could be considered Cuba’s national dishes, which are cooked in most Cuban households anyway.¹⁵⁷

Griffiths and Wallace (1998) suggest that eating a national dish implies the expression of a national identity. This idea can be problematised further as sometimes other factors may be taken into consideration, such as whether individuals consume national dishes because they are more available or out of choice. However, based on respondent opinion, we can argue that by perceiving the national dish as ‘a proper dish’, Gisel, Pedro and the others are partly accepting Cuban culture and *la tierra* (the homeland), but not necessarily the state and its values. In other words, food represents the

¹⁵⁶ My salary guarantees nothing. Nothing! With my salary I cannot go out because I only make 245 Cuban Pesos. 245 Cuban Pesos are not even \$10. \$10 are 275 Cuban Pesos. Everything here is in dollars. In national currency there is nothing. Nothing! Nothing! There is nothing.

¹⁵⁷ In most households I visited, the food that was cooked was generally rice, beans, avocado salad and meat; the latter was generally cut into various pieces to ensure that all could eat. I noticed that meat (chicken, pork or red meat) would often be served in smaller quantities, but rice and beans are served in generous portions. Alternatively, I saw Cubans eating white rice, a fried egg and fried plantains.

homeland – its culture and traditions – but not the state and the values that it introduces. Thus, these individuals on the one hand accept *la tierra cubana*, but contest the state through food. The distinction that I am emphasising here is one which is often blurred within Cuban boundaries – that of the state and its values and the nation and its norms – but is made by the Afro-Cuban respondents. Hence, most participants declare their love for their homeland (*la tierra*) and Cuban culture (*la cubanía*), yet, show that they do not always relate to the state and its revolutionary values.

5.13. The Symbolic Meaning of Food

Food, oil and meat are mentioned in the narratives as causes of anxiety¹⁵⁸ and important factors in the discourse of *nothingness*. I now examine further interviews to analyse the meanings of ‘hunger’, one of the most repeated terms during the interviews.

Alimentación como tal hay. Hay. La tienes que comprar a un precio bastante alto [...] Aquí nadie deja de comer. El que deja de comer es porque...emplea el dinero que pueda gastar en comida, lo emplea o en bebida o en cigarro. En eso sí, a muchas personas se les va el dinero.¹⁵⁹

(Inesita (35) Interviewed in Alamar, August 2005)

In spite of scarcities and irregularities in the provision of food, all respondents reiterated that no one in Cuba today dies of starvation. Nevertheless, the term food is clearly associated with anxiety. These anxieties are expressed in terms of the preoccupation with the next meal and, at a deeper level, in forms of discontent with the way in which food is provided.

¹⁵⁸ The anxiety experienced in Post-Special period Cuba is comparable to the one described by Corrigan that characterised life in medieval Europe. Corrigan says that life in medieval Europe was insecure and so was food availability. Historian Mandrou (1961: 26) also refers to the ‘fear of going hungry’ that characterised that period. In Cuba, this fear was aggravated by the Special Period crisis. Many Cubans I met have *stories* of hunger during the Special Period: i.e. Cubans eating rats, pigeons and cats disappearing from the island and Cubans resorting to eating animals that are not culturally constructed as edible in Cuba.

¹⁵⁹ Food as such there is. There is. You have to buy it at high prices but...here, nobody goes a day without food. If you don’t eat that’s because...the money he or she was supposed to spend on food is spent on drinks and cigarettes.

For the participants, ‘proper food’ is that which is being consumed in the areas of Vedado, Old Havana, inside hotels, and what is sold in dollar stores and restaurants. Thus, ‘proper food’ is off limits to the majority, because none of the respondents shops regularly at dollar shops, except to buy cooking oil. For them, however, the *bodega* represents nothingness and inappropriate food, whereas the dollar store is perceived as a better option both realistically and symbolically.

Gisel’s extract confirms this argument. She says:

Aquí el que más o menos está, más o menos, no bien, es el que tiene un familiar afuera que tenga la oportunidad de mandar un dinero de afuera porque aquí todo, todo, todo hay que comprar en chavitos¹⁶⁰ o en divisas.¹⁶¹

But what is this *todo* (everything)? As her story progresses, *todo*, a concept disguised as food, actually denotes many items that are not edible, such as clothes, soap and other items sold in dollar stores. In her view, as in the view of most of the respondents, the few goods provided by the government are completely dismissed, not even mentioned as worthy of consumption.

The views expressed in this chapter should not be dismissed as being simply contradictory. It is useful to analyse them in conjunction in order to get a wider picture of perceptions of consumption in contemporary Havana. Ransome (2005) offers a very useful discussion of consumption, arguing that society’s acts of consumption have progressed from simple to complex. He suggests that in post-modern times consumption tends to be more complex as opposed to the pre-modern periods, where consumption acts were simple. Adapting Ransome’s theory to the Cuban context, I argue that in places like Havana consumption is both simple and complex.

¹⁶⁰ *Chavitos* – A term used informally to refer to Cuban Convertible Pesos (CUC), the new Cuban currency introduced in 2003. The idea of the *chavitos* is to replace the dollar, but it has the same value and is used only in dollar stores; whereas in Cuban spaces, the currency used is still Cuban Pesos. Pedro told me that the informal name of the currency ‘*chavitos*’ is used with ironic reference to Fidel Castro’s new alliance with Hugo Chavez (President of Venezuela).

¹⁶¹ Here, those that live more or less well are those that have family abroad, who are able to send them some money, because here you have to buy *everything, everything, everything* in *chavitos* or in dollars.

With regards to simple consumption, Ransome says that these acts are crucial for 'maintaining our basic survival' (66). Thus, we can say that the narratives mentioned in the first section of this chapter reflect the need to consume at the most basic level. Acts of simple consumption, as described by Ransome, are '[s]trictly necessary in the sense that we cannot avoid them; we have no choice but to consume food, drink...' These would fall under the category of physiological needs according to Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs (See Figure 4.6 below). However, whereas simple consumption satisfies only basic needs, complex consumption is more 'abstract'. As Ransome states, these acts are '[d]eemed to provide satisfaction of something more than basic needs' (67). Therefore, 'complex consumption,' Ransome points out, 'is complex because the business of making and manipulating and consuming meanings, ideas and interpretations is more involved, more "of the mind" or "in the head" than gathering and eating fallen apples' (67).

Cuban consumption of perishable goods is not limited to a single interpretation. While Marxists may argue that Cubans who do not 'consume' the Revolution end up being ensnared by the products of capitalism, I argue that these Cuban consumers struggle to conceal their individualised identities in a nation that struggles to (re)produce the Cuban 'Man'.

In Marx's view, product creators lure consumers and create 'false needs' in order to continue the production process (quoted in Friedman, 1994: 2). According to this perspective, consumers are viewed as victims of 'trickery [and] psychological manipulation by market researchers and advertisers' (2). This view is supported by Hoggart (1957) who assigns a negative role to consumption, arguing that it allows the elites to increase their ideological control and to dominate the lower classes.

Postmodernist Jean Baudrillard (1988) offers a different view on consumption, arguing that we consume signs and meanings and not just products. Likewise, de Certeau (1984) makes reference to consumers who create meanings for the products they consume. These writers suggest that individuals consume goods creatively to produce meanings associated with the realisation of their identity/ies. These ideas can be linked to my analyses of Cuban consumption of food.

In a critique of consumption in postmodern periods (especially modern Western societies), Baudrillard (1998) indicates that ‘the real needs have been replaced by abstract ones’ (in Ransome, 1998: 71); but in a transnational space, such as Havana City where the ‘third world’ clashes with the ‘first’, and where the simple crossing of a physical space such as Havana’s Tunnel (the tunnel that separates East Havana districts from the ‘central’ Havana neighbourhoods) leads to a world of ‘conspicuous’ consumption, participants’ needs and desires transform and their consumption needs become complex.

Bourdieu’s work analyses the way in which goods are used to make ideological statements about the self and one’s class and culture. In other words, goods reflect taste, and taste reflects identities and creates distinctions. Bourdieu’s argument is corroborated by Miller (1995: 26) who says that ‘consumption is not simply the final resting place of goods and actions’. Miller argues that consumers use goods not just to satisfy basic needs but to articulate identities. In other words, in their complex consumption desires, these men and women are using tastes, as Trifonas and Balomeno (2003) state, to ‘highlight personal opinions’. They stress that these opinions are of an aesthetic rather than of a political nature; yet, in Cuban society, being different tends to signify making a political statement. Furthermore, for the older generation, seeking distinction or individual expression and style is often seen as a sign of selfishness, which is why older neighbours reject Dayamí. In this clash of values, in which the *jinetera* finds herself against the avant-gard revolutionaries, the former loses out for she is perceived to be emulating the lifestyles of capitalist societies, and ultimately is isolated from the community.

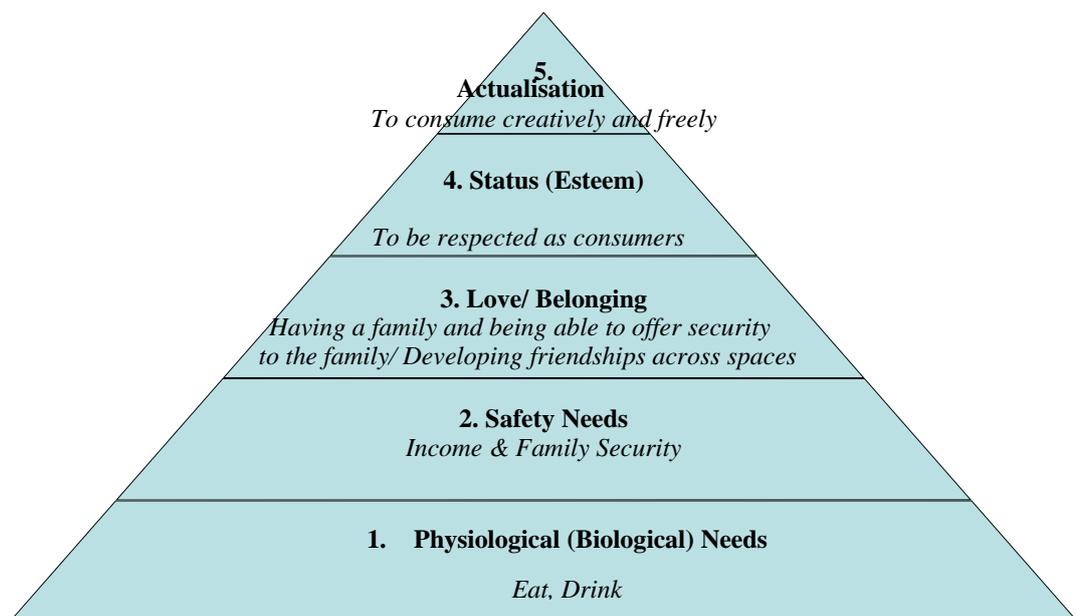


Figure 5.6 Cubans' Hierarchy of Consumption Needs¹⁶²

Figure 5.6, adapted from Maslow, explains the full scope of the consumption actions of Cubans. The hierarchical model is not to be interpreted as a fixed set of priorities for these Cubans, as the needs of the participants vary from person to person; and while some of them may show more concern with the quantity of food provided, others are more concerned with the quality. The categories included in Figure 5.6 highlight the main concerns and the frequency with which they were mentioned in the interviews. The first category (food) was mentioned invariably in all interviews, while categories 4 and 5, although not less important, were discussed less frequently than the first three concerns.

During the interviews, the participants displayed signs of anxiety because their most basic needs such as the need for food and meat were not being met. This was due to the scarcities and lack of variety at the *bodega*. Another source of anxiety was income, linked to employment. Job satisfaction was low generally because of poor remuneration, which meant that these individuals could not obtain the basic goods and offer security to their families. At other times, narrations of consumption were more complex and symbolic. For example, the lack of money and the excessive amount of time devoted to making money to obtain the goods affected family relationships and prevented many from starting families and relationships in Cuba (see Chapter 4).

Basic consumption here is not described in terms of food (or the lack of it); instead as Ransome (70) states, there are 'meanings and interpretations above the other facets [of consumption]'. In other words, it is not what is ingested that is used to express a specific fact; instead, food and consumption are given other 'meanings', which can be interpreted in terms of the participants' inability to fulfil their dreams of starting their families (as mentioned by Gisel earlier in this chapter), sustaining them and offering them a secure future.

The need to be respected as consumers (4) and to consume creatively and freely can be exemplified by Gisel's questioning of what they have been 'given' to consume.

¹⁶² Adapted from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943). Adaptations based on participants' opinions in italics.

She questions the contents of the mince that ‘arrives’ at the bodega, and says that she dislikes the fish that is ‘allocated’ to them, but she has to eat it because, as she says, as a Cuban she has no other option but to eat it.

Gisel’s phrase suggests that she does not feel respected as a consumer. Agreeing with her statement, Pedro says: ‘all that is rubbish is given to us. The good things are taken to dollar shops for the *yumas*¹⁶³ (foreigners)’. This critical correlation, far from being a sign of naivety, implies a great deal of consumer sophistication. This is partly obtained through being involved in relationships with foreigners, where Cubans have the opportunity to enter hotels and areas that are not openly accessible to Cubans; and also because most respondents are constantly connected to means of communication, such as the internet and the Cuban *antena* (illegal satellite channels) where they hear protests about the ‘tourist apartheid’ in Cuba. Here, another important point that shapes their discourses of consumption is the development of taste. Yet again, this is another aspect associated with transnational flows and the benefits of being involved in relationships with foreigners. The participants want to ‘enjoy’ food rather than just eat to satisfy their needs.

Finally, I interpret the top division of the diagram, which I call ‘The need to consume freely and creatively’ as a direct challenge to the status quo. Questions like, ‘Why can’t we eat proper meat?’, ‘Why can’t we aspire to more than what is given to us?’ ‘Why can you eat those cream crackers and I cannot?’, are direct questions to the state, the main provider.

Fine (2002: 59) states that ‘[t]here is more than a plum and a proof to be found in the eating of a pudding, for identity and meaning themselves appear to reside there’. In the examples above, the respondents’ aspirations to consume ‘proper meat’ and ‘nice crackers’ have a deeper and symbolic meaning for they highlight their dissatisfaction with the rationing system and frustration with the ongoing economic crisis.

In his analysis of meat consumption in nineteenth century Chile, Orlove (1994) states that there is a ‘[...] difficulty of claiming either that meat materially satisfies some

¹⁶³ Pedro told me that the term was used previously in sentences such as ‘*Fulano se fue pa’ el yuma!* (So and so is gone to the States). Nowadays the term *yuma* is applied to all tourists. Alejandro, on the other hand tends to use the term *pepe/a*. Perhaps because I was a foreign interviewer the terms *yuma*, *pepe/a* were rarely used in conversations/interviews; instead most participants used the term *extranjero/a*.

human want, need or desire or that meat semiotically serves as a sign to represent some other quality such as status or selfhood'. In this study, the symbolic meanings of meat (or for instance cream crackers) are perceptible in the respondents' narrations.¹⁶⁴ Both products are perceived as being available only to foreigners in transnational spaces, even if the *bodega* occasionally offers crackers, and the *agros* sells meat at lower prices than dollar stores. Clearly, then, the meaning of meat changes across these spaces. By asking in everyday conversations among themselves and to me why tourists can consume goods that Cubans cannot, the informants are also contesting the imaginary yet also very real boundaries that are sketched around the *areas de turismo* and the *areas del pueblo*. In other words, they implicitly contest the power of the state in creating these differences.

Wallace (1998: 1-2) draws a remarkable parallel between food and anxiety – a comparison that should be added to this analysis. She describes the end of the twentieth century as a period 'characterized by a popular feeling of helplessness'. This 'modern feeling of helplessness', she claims, is associated with the individual's lack of control over the forces affecting him or her: global capitalism and multi-nationals, environmental destruction, the impact of the government and its policies, and many other factors. Discussing modern Western societies, where consumption is plentiful, Wallace suggests that the modern individual resorts to food to deal with such anxieties. But in these cases, where it is scarce, food can be a great source of anxiety. This is explained by the fact that participants on the one hand claim what is their own by right; but on the other hand, there is a degree of powerlessness, which can be understood in terms of the inability to plan the next meal and incapacity to budget as products come irregularly to the *bodega*.

5.14. The Afro-Cubans of the 21st Century

This chapter has dealt with the question of why practices of *jineterismo* help us to understand daily life in contemporary Cuba, and has yielded the following conclusions. First of all, the narratives have shown that the daily struggle of the Cuban *jinetera* is not just about the struggle to survive. It is a combination of struggles, which can be listed as

¹⁶⁴ For further studies on meat consumption see Charles and Kerr (1987: 122); Sahlins (1976:176). They examine the status of meat and its link to gender: for example, meat (steaks, joints, chops) is preferred by men; medium-status foods (mince beef, stews, casseroles, liver and bacon) by women and sausages and burgers by children. They argue that males in the lower classes tend to eat 'less masculine' meats. In Cuba, many males perceive the 'proper' meal to have a 'proper' piece of meat adequate for their masculine needs.

follows: 1) the struggle to find the basics; 2) the need to have a job that pays reasonably well, or where *inventos* can be carried out at a low risk; 3) to provide for the family as well as being able to develop relationships across areas of Havana; 4) to be respected as consumers; 5) to consume freely.

Consumption here is both simple and complex. Simple because, in actual fact, Cubans still spend a great deal of time procuring basic goods and services and struggle with the problem of scarce consumption. Yet, this consumption is also complex because the narratives drift in and out of abstraction, displaying a constant desire to cross spaces within Havana and travel out of Cuba in order to obtain basic goods that in fact are available inside Alamar and in Cuban Pesos spaces. The following excerpt confirms this conclusion:

A mí me gusta mi país, pero yo quisiera salir adelante, ayudar a mi familia, sacarla del mundo donde está de que uno tiene que estar inventando para cocinar. [...] Hay veces que lo que yo hago con el papá del niño que manda dinero, que él coge y me da...lo que él puede diez dólares, cinco, quince. Yo voy para la tienda y yo...primero porque tengo un niño lo primero que garantizo es la comida. Porque yo si no puedo dejar que mi hijo se me muera de hambre. Compró un poco de comida y eso, y ahí tengo un alivio. No tengo un peso en la cartera pero bueno tengo un plato de comida.

Dina: Y a largo plazo, ¿cómo piensas resolver tu vida a largo plazo?

Felicia: Yo quisiera irme de aquí. Te lo juro, a mí me gusta pero yo no quisiera estar aquí [...] ¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Felicia: I like my country, but I want to progress. I want to help my family and get them out of this world where one has to *inventar* to cook. [...] Sometimes what I do when my son's father gives me some money [...] ten, twenty, fifteen dollars. I go to the shop and I...first, because I have to guarantee my son's food... I can't let my son starve to death...I buy food and that, and that gives me some relief. I don't have a single dollar in my purse, but I have a plate of food.

Dina: And in the long term, how do you think you will resolve your life in the long term?

Far from Che Guevara's imagination of Cuban men and women of the 21st Century, these men and women show that they are not prepared to make sacrifices for the state. 'They got us in this mess,' said Pedro fervently, 'why should we pay for this!' 'It is easy to preach when you don't have to worry about food', said Gisel, criticising the state. 'They need to spend a day living like us,' Felicia said in one of her interviews.

As the statements above show, through discourses of consumption participants also display their distance from the state and its supporters. If the 'new men (and women)' are supposed to live 'with the Revolution' and support its leaders, the respondents indicate that 'they' (the leaders and its supporters) and 'them' are completely separate beings, at least in terms of ideology.

By wanting to consume in tourist areas, they are using food to contest the idealised image of the 21st century 'new man', supposedly moulded by the state. Through their various practices as they enter 'foreign' spaces within Havana and develop relationships, they are able to absorb other ways of life, and encounter different tastes, cultures and consumption practices. I still cannot forget Inesita's quiet, but clear astonishment when I invited her to spend a day at one of the swimming pools of the Habana Libre Hotel. 'Wow', she said, 'so this is the other side of Cuba...that I wish we would be allowed to experience'. A similar reaction came from Gisel when she visited the UK. 'This is what freedom is about! The UK has really changed me,' she told me in an interview. 'People here have choice, too much choice even,' she concluded.

By seeking to adopt other lifestyles, these Cubans create distinctions within Cuban society and are able to lead a different lifestyle to other Cubans, and make political statements by proving that to think differently and to live in a socialist society is possible, whilst others find solutions to their daily hardships. These individuals demonstrate that they are being progressively moulded by their transforming taste rather than by the values of the Cuban state.

Felicia: I would like to leave the country. I swear, I like it (Cuba) but I would not like to remain here.

Chapter 6 *La Lucha Diaria para ‘Consumir’ el Mundo de Afuera* (The Daily Struggle to ‘Consume’ the Outside World)

*Cuando me veo y toco
yo, Juan sin nada no más
ayer
y hoy Juan con todo,
y hoy con todo
vuelvo los ojos, miro,
me veo y toco
y me pregunto ¿cómo ha
podido ser?*

*Tengo, vamos a ver,
tengo el gusto de andar por
mi país
dueño de cuanto hay en él
mirando bien de cerca lo
que antes
no tuve ni podía tener.*

*Tengo, vamos a ver,
que siendo un negro
nadie me puede detener
a la puerta de un dancing o
de un bar
o bien en la carpeta de un
hotel
gritarme que no hay pieza,
una mínima pieza y no una
pieza colosal,
una pequeña pieza donde yo
pueda descansar [...]*

*Tengo, vamos a ver,
que ya aprendí a leer,
a contar,
tengo que ya aprendí a
escribir
y a pensar
y a reír
Tengo que ya tengo
donde trabajar
y ganar
lo que me tengo que comer.*

*Tengo, vamos a ver,
tengo lo que tenía que tener.*

When I see and touch myself
I, Juan with nothing, no longer, (that was)
yesterday
and today, Juan who has *everything*¹⁶⁶
and today with *everything*
I turn my eyes and I watch
I see and touch myself
and I ask myself, how has it been possible?

I have, let's see,
I have the pleasure of walking around my
country,
owning everything that my country has,
watching very closely what before
I was unable to have.

I have, let's see,
that being a black person,
no-one can stop me
at the entrance of a club or of a bar
or even at the reception of a hotel
to shout that there are no rooms,
a basic room, not a massive room,
a small room where I can rest [...]

I have, let's see
that I have learnt to read
to count,
I have (that) I have already learnt to write
and to think
and to laugh
I have (that I have) a place to work
and to earn
what I have to eat

I have, let's see
I have what I had to have.

¹⁶⁶ My translation and emphasis

6.1. Introduction

The poem above, written in 1964 by the Afro-Cuban Nicolás Guillén (Cuba's national poet) celebrates the advances that Afro-Cubans have supposedly made since Fidel came to power. The black Cuban male in Guillén's poem celebrates becoming a rightful Cuban citizen with privileges that were previously enjoyed exclusively by wealthy 'whites'. Celebration, here, is linked with access to 'everything' that the black Cuban character believes he is entitled to.

Ironically, *Hermanos de Causa*, an Afro-Cuban Hip Hop group, re-wrote Guillén's *Tengo* in a way that gets closer to some of my Afro-Cuban participants' narrations of their experiences in contemporary Cuba. The rappers changed Guillén's poem as follows (Fernandes, 2003: 586):

<i>Tengo una raza oscura y discriminada</i>	I have a dark and discriminated race
<i>Tengo una jornada que me exige, no da nada</i>	I have a working day that demands but gives nothing
<i>Tengo tantas cosas que no puedo ni tocarlas</i>	I have so many things that I cannot even touch
<i>Tengo instalaciones que no puedo ni pisarlas</i>	I have so many resources that I cannot even step on
<i>Tengo libertad entre paréntesis de hierro</i>	I have liberty between parentheses of iron
<i>Tengo tantos provechos sin derechos</i>	I have so many benefits without rights
<i>q'a mi me encierro</i>	that I imprison myself
<i>Tengo tantas cosas sin tener lo que he tenido</i>	I have so many things without having what I had

The Afro-Cubans I interviewed, especially the darker skinned women – Julieta, Alina, Lola, Mercedes and Gisel – face racial discrimination in today's Cuba.¹⁶⁷ In fact,

¹⁶⁷ Perhaps is it not a coincidence that despite the fact that Alamar is inhabited by Cubans of various ethnic backgrounds, the Hip Hop festivals are overwhelmingly attended by Afro-Cubans (black and brown). The

many of the black Cubans I knew had experienced police harassment in ways that they felt were racially motivated. Likewise, the women listed above perceive race as the greatest factor affecting their experiences of life in Cuba. For this reason, this chapter, which looks at 'black' consumption of images of the 'white' Western World and of the European image, discusses what attracts these women to the (tourist) 'Other'.

As seen in Chapter 5, when discussing life in Cuba, whether it relates to Cuban partners, consuming Cuban products, living under a Cuban form of socialism or living in Cuban neighbourhoods, the respondents' accounts are negative in that they circle around the concept of 'nothingness'. Insightful contradictions emerge from these views: for instance, Julieta claims that she does not regret having left Cuba because '*en Cuba no había nada pa' mí*' (in Cuba there was 'nothing' for me); yet she also says that her mother is her 'everything' (Chapter 3), which could imply that she has 'everything' she needs in Cuba. However, these accounts demonstrate that for her, as for most participants, the family, and in some cases friends, are the only positive facets of daily life in Cuba.

Far from Guillén's celebration of 'everythingness', these Afro-Cubans believe that they are 'excluded' from the national project, which is partly why they adopt defiant consumption practices to express their discontent. Consumption, as articulated by the respondents, represents what García Canclini (1995) defines as the right to exercise citizenship; and since consumption in 'transnational' Havana stores is restricted, these Cubans perceive that their full rights as citizens are not recognised. This point is developed later in the chapter.

For the Cuban participants, there is a sense that they still face many battles to achieve what they are supposed to have. These women, who grew up with the Revolution, now claim to have higher and different aspirations and expectations from their parents.

As seen in the last chapter, narratives on the *lucha diaria* revolve around the difficulties to consume. The daily frustrations of *inventar* and *la lucha* in an economy of scarcity become part of a larger story of frustrating inaccessibility to the consumer world

racial composition of the festival has not changed since I started attending in the summer of 1999; the few whites that attend the festivals tend to be tourists or researchers.

of the 'outside'. Consumption, therefore, is a complex matter involving both real daily struggles to satisfy basic needs, imaginations, desires and projections. In the process of analysing the interviews, I became aware that the simple act of consuming a product became much more multifaceted and subjective. Such subjectivity is partly associated with the dissatisfaction with the government's control of the consumption system, but also with the ongoing fascination that Cubans have for the West.

With the development of tourism in Cuba, consumption became associated with different spaces in Havana and bifurcated along the lines of Cuban Pesos areas and dollar areas within Havana. The Cuban participants contest the fact that the Cuban state imposes a homogenised, unexciting pattern of consumption in Cuban Pesos areas, which does not evolve according to the shifting needs and tastes of the population. On the other hand, they perceive consumption in dollar spaces, to which tourists or 'white' Cubans have more access, as varied and exciting.

As Cuba opened up to tourism in the 1990s, it also allowed global cultures and lifestyles to penetrate its borders, inaugurating the Post-Special Period era. In contrast, the rationing system is perceived as static by the respondents, and their tastes, which are moulded by the increased contact with tourists, are perceived as being ignored while tourists and 'white' Cubans who receive remittances consume without restraint. In sum, I concluded in the previous chapter that the daily struggle of the respondents was not only the struggle to make ends meet, but also the struggle to consume and move freely without being restricted by the control of state boundaries.

As argued in the previous chapter, respondents display a great degree of consumer sophistication. Although most of them were born and raised in a culture that discarded consumerism, most demonstrate that they have developed a consumer identity that questions products sold at government stores whilst valuing those sold at dollar stores (see Gisel's extracts in Chapter 5). Whether these perceptions regarding the quality of products are based on facts or not, they deserve closer analysis as they reveal a great deal about contestation at the grassroots level.

Whereas in the previous chapter, I focused on consumption frustrations and aspirations within the Cuban territory, in this chapter I examine projections beyond the boundaries of the Cuban state. Therefore, here I take consumption to another level as I

examine how Afro-Cubans undermine Cuba's nationalist designs by desiring the outside world.¹⁶⁸ They seek to develop romantic and sexual relationships with Europeans while simultaneously hoping that these relationships will help eliminate their perceived status as 'second class citizens' in Cuba.

Here I discuss two cases of consumption that demonstrate how Cubans develop connections with the Western world with the aim of achieving racial and economic *avanzo* (progress). This chapter introduces another four Afro-Cuban women – Lola, Tania, Alina and Mercedes – and is divided into two parts: in the first part, I look at the ways in which Afro-Cubans consume images of the 'white' West¹⁶⁹ through the *antena*, a vehicle through which Cubans learn about Western lifestyles; and in the second part, I focus on Cuban imaginations of Europe and Europeans. In this way, I demonstrate the multi-directional aspect of 'consumption', which is not limited to 'tourists gazing' (Urry, 1990) or consuming non-Western bodies (Hodge, 2001); instead, Cubans simultaneously 'gaze' at the tourist 'Other', the double effect of which is that it enables them to construct critical readings of Cuba and, at the same time, more desirable images of Europe. Furthermore, I argue that the discrimination faced by these individuals plays a central role in constructing their positive perceptions of the Western world, prompting many to take an active role in changing their status for the 'better'.

6.2. Alamareñas Connections with the Outside World

Alamar is a 'space' in which individuals *inventan* to get by away from the scrutinising eyes of the state, including the active CDR members. From this neighbourhood on the outskirts of Havana, the Afro-Cuban participants connect to the capitalist and global consumerism world via what they call the *antena*.

In 2005, I became intrigued with the multiple connections Alamareños had established with the outside world. Walking through the partly sandy streets of Alamar, the wire connections running from various buildings were an impossible sight to miss. In one particular square, cables intertwined in the air leading to various apartments. Inside

¹⁶⁸ The term 'outside world' is used here to encapsulate the Cuban phrase *allá afuera*. The concept is frequently used with reference only to Western countries (U.S. and European countries; often excluding ex-socialist European countries) and the traditional notions of the 'West'

¹⁶⁹ While many of the programmes watched by these Cubans are on Latino channels, the main presenters and actors tend to be 'white' Latinos.

the apartments, *Alamareños* watched programmes created across the Straits of Florida – straight from the land of Cuba’s ‘enemies’.

Most of the channels of the *antena* are North American Latino channels in Spanish. Ravensberg (2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>) explains that the *antena* starts with ‘one person [who] buys the satellite and then sells the signals’. The main provider subsequently sends cables from his/her own house to other apartments. In some cases, cables are disguised as telephone cables and hidden in various creative ways, so that individuals are not discovered by the Cuban authorities.



Image 15 Fidel y las Antenas

(Source: <http://www.cubademocraciayvida.org>)¹⁷⁰

As explained by Ravensberg, in Cuba *antena* programmes are controlled by the person who owns the satellite. Therefore, all the other viewers will watch the channels as programmed by the house from where the cables emanate. I observed that this created a community of secrecy, whereby bonds were intensified among those who participated in and knew about this communal secret. Indeed, part of the respect that Felicia and Pedro have earned in the square is due to the fact that they allow those that do not have television or the *antena* at home to be entertained in their houses.

¹⁷⁰ Page for Cuban emigrants and exiles in Sweden. It shows an edited image of Fidel with an electric cooking pan (*La Reina* – translated as ‘The Queen’) which the Cuban leader had promised to give to all households on the island and satellites connected to the *Reina*.

The Cuban government has been fighting a long battle with those who purchase these satellites, and those who make a profitable but illegal business of it.¹⁷¹ On the Cuban-American website *Cubanet.org*, independent journalists write about Cubans caught watching North American channels (Febles, 2006; Garves, 2005). Cubans caught with the *antena* may be issued with penalties of up to 1500 Cuban Pesos (Garves, 2005: www.cubanet.org).¹⁷²

It soon became evident from the interviews that the *antena* bridges the gap between the dreams and realities of the *jineteras*, as it creates dreams of consuming freely, as demonstrated by the excerpt below. These are seen to materialise as relationships with tourists develop. Therefore, the *antena* fulfils a symbolic role, for it represents the Cubans' desire to flirt with the outside and break free from the hegemonic powers of the Cuban state.

6.3. 'Consuming' Western Lifestyles

In the summer of 2006, I was in a derelict apartment with 25 year-old Gisel. It was mid-afternoon and I was about to interview her and her 26-year-old friend, Lola. Both Afro-Cuban women were involved in on-off relationships with Italian men in their fifties.

The television was very loud and I could barely hear a word of what Gisel was saying. Lola's eyes were fixed on the screen. She would glance at me quickly and smile, but she seemed more interested in watching the soap. When the interview started, Gisel began to talk about her daily life. Lola was still absent, only adding a few words now and then. In the middle of the interview, Gisel, who was more focused on the interview, made frequent interruptions to make comments about the images that she was viewing on the screen. She admired the cleanliness of the houses, the stylish decorations, and the dress sense of the people in the soap. She wondered whether she would ever have a house as clean as the ones she was seeing, and dreamt about being able to furnish her own with modern furniture. At some point, she told me to look around her living room:

‘¡Aquí no hay nada!’ (There is nothing here!), she said with a slightly bitter tone.

¹⁷¹ According to Ravensberg, *antena* subscription may cost Cubans between \$6 and \$10.

¹⁷² Between approximately \$60 and \$70 (note that all respondents earn a monthly salary (in Cuban Pesos) between \$10 and \$20).

In her living room, there was an old Soviet fridge, three old wooden chairs and a brand new television that contrasted with the surrounding furniture.

The interview continued and Lola remained distant, only making comments about the characters of the soap: 'I like that dress', 'Oh, look at that hairstyle', 'Can you imagine me with a pair of shoes like that?' Every comment that she made was followed by a prolonged conversation between the two women about the products shown on TV.

As the interview progressed, another programme started. It was a Latino version of Judge Judy in a televised courthouse, dealing with family affairs, tenants versus landlords and clients versus service providers which are decided by the Judge on the programme. As an observer, I could not help but find the interruptions as rich in material as the interviews themselves. On the Dictaphone the women told me that they 'liked' watching *la antena* because they found the channels entertaining. Somehow, the verb *gustar* ('to like') used by the interviewees was soft compared to what I was seeing: they did not simply 'like' to watch the *antena*, but were in actual fact totally enraptured by the colourful images it projected, and fascinated by the lifestyles portrayed. Whereas at first I would do my best to focus on the interview, towards the end I found myself watching them as eagerly as they watched the *antena*, and participating in their commentary of the programmes.

The above episode demonstrates that the *antena* creates and/or reinforces positive images of the West in the minds of the respondents. By watching 'successful' Latinos on the screen, these Cubans' aspirations are expanded. As Lola said lightheartedly: 'if other Latin Americans can do well *allá afuera* (outside), why can't we?' This statement was followed by a series of comparisons, whereby other Latin Americans were stereotypically seen as 'less educated' and 'less hardworking' than Cubans. Their opinion is that if Latinos with such traits can do well abroad, then their chances are higher.

Cubans are most likely to compare themselves with Latinos and very rarely with African Americans, partly due to their own ambivalent rejection of Africanness. To them, Latinos in the U.S. imply ascendancy: culturally, racially and in terms of status; while African Americans are perceived as an oppressed group in a thriving nation. As Lola said: '*El negro americano está tan escacha'o (escachado) o más escacha'o que nosotros*' (Black Americans are just as 'squashed' or more 'squashed' than we are). These Cubans

argue that in the U.S. being 'Latino' opens more doors than being 'black', although these interpretations are linked with Cubans' own uneasiness with Africanness.

While Afro-Cuban religions thrive in Cuba and many Cubans acknowledge an African connection, 'brown' Cubans do not openly accept a black or African identity based on ancestry. For example, when I asked Inesita, who is phenotypically brown, if she knew anything about her ancestors, she only mentioned that her grandmother was white. Likewise, my husband's family only made references to their Chinese and Spanish ancestors, despite the fact that my husband's mother is a dark-skinned black woman.

Latinos are closer to Afro-Cuban's aspirations than African Americans, who are perceived as being a more disadvantaged group. Ultimately, the images of the *antena* of 'white' or 'very light-skinned Latinos' fuel their dream of living in a country where they are 'respected and rewarded as workers' (Inesita) and 'treated as proper consumers' (Gisel).

The consumption of the *antena* must also be analysed in conjunction with the relationship between Cubans and their government. Many critics of the Cuban Revolution argue that the government has remained in power because it controls the means of communication (Aguirre, 2002: 69). However, as the respondents of this thesis demonstrate, they too have some form of control over the means of communication. In either case this control is elusive; after all, the Cuban government does not really control the programmes Cubans watch. Likewise, Cubans are not free to watch what they want, as validated by the fines that the government issues.

In the section that follows I concentrate on discussing how the *antena* creates or strengthens dichotomous imageries that confirm already-established notions of Cuba as a 'monotonous' nation, against the respondents' more favourable image of the 'Western world'.

6.4. The *Antena* as a Practical Alternative to *La Nada Cotidiana*

In her novel *La Nada Cotidiana* (The Daily Nothingness), the Cuban writer Zoe Valdés (2004) depicts Cuba in the Special Period as a place characterised by boredom.¹⁷³ Unlike Guillén's Afro-Cuban character, who commemorates being able to go to clubs, bars and hotels, the young Afro-Cuban respondents of this research, and Hip Hop group Hermanos de Causa, insist on the lack of entertainment and lack of freedom of movement in Havana as main concerns affecting them. As Gisel angrily said: '*Mientras que al negro lo paran en cada esquina, ¡el blanco está acabando! Pero lo que pasa es que el negro no tiene familiares en Miami que le manden dinero pa' ir a una discoteca o pa' que se compre un VCD...*' (While blacks are stopped on every street corner, whites are doing as they please! The problem is that blacks do not have family in Miami to send them money to go to a nightclub or a DVD).

The perception that blacks have restricted access to certain areas in Havana is used as justification for resorting to the *antena* as the solution to the *nada* (nothingness) that they claim prevails. Indeed, as argued by 36 year-old Inesita, the 'best' nightclubs are in hotels in downtown Havana and, thus, are not affordable for ordinary black Cubans, who unlike whites do not have family abroad or work for the tourist sector.

For most Cubans I spoke to, the idealised forms of *recreación*, or 'entertainment' are mainly described as going to a nightclub, shopping in dollar shops and travelling abroad – activities that are hardly accessible to them. Being unable to gain access to highly desirable spaces in 'transnational' Havana and yet having them within their reach led to continual expressions of frustration. The popularity of the *antena* – and relationships with tourists, which form part of the same desire – lies in the access it opens to the 'outside' world and to alternative spaces of consumption and entertainment. What is clear from the interviews is that the discontent of the Afro-Cuban participants is exacerbated by the perceived lack of leisure activities.

¹⁷³ Boredom, especially among younger Cubans, is also mentioned by Smith and Padula (1996) in their book 'Sex and Revolution'. In the authors' view boredom is associated with the increase of sexual relationships between Cubans and tourists. The view of boredom in Post-Special Period Cuba is shared by Gutiérrez (2001: 171-72), who in one of the sections of his autobiographical novel makes the strangely stereotypical and racist statement: 'Every day I am more like the blacks who live in the building: they sit on the sidewalk with nothing to do, trying to make ends meet by selling a few rolls of bread, a bar of soap, a few tomatoes [...] letting the day slip by, and they just keep living. And time passes.'

For many Cubans, one way in which they can gain more access to leisure facilities is to be a member of the *Juventud*, also known as UJC,¹⁷⁴ one of the main official selective organisations. Young Cubans who are members of the *Juventud* are given opportunities to go camping, and many become members of this mass organization to get the benefits that membership offers. This statement is supported by Eckstein (1994: 118) who explains that in the early nineties the authorities, in their attempt to appeal to younger generations, ‘sought to entertain youth who had no place to go on weekends and vacations’.

Eckstein mentions the outdoor concerts organised by the UJC with the most popular Cuban bands of that period. While this shows that the leadership acknowledged the lack of entertainment for younger Cubans, it also demonstrates that the system is structured to offer alternatives and rewards for those Cubans who are active in national politics. The respondents imply that for those who are not affiliated with mass organisations, there are limited means of recreation.

Felicia refuses to go to nightclubs in Alamar, alleging that they are too violent and ‘rough’. Because Felicia does not have the economic means to go to a dollar nightclub, her only alternatives, as she states, are to go to the beach with her son,¹⁷⁵ stand outside her gate chatting or watch the programmes on the *antena*.

All respondents stressed that they do not understand why the most beautiful beaches of Havana, such as Tropicoco, were meant for only tourists to enjoy and heavily controlled by the police. Clearly this phenomenon is not exclusive to Cuba. Pattullo (1996: 81), for example, offers various examples of exclusion on Caribbean islands, including the case of the Prime Minister of Antigua who was ‘barred from Club Antigua’ because the security guard did not recognise him. What makes the experience of Cubans living on the island different to that of citizens of Caribbean countries is that the former witnessed a colossal social change, promoted by the 1959 Cuban Revolution that supposedly transformed Cuban society and claimed to eliminate all major social

¹⁷⁴ *Unión de Jóvenes Cubanos* (Cuban Youth Union). Membership is for those up to the age of 35.

¹⁷⁵ Felicia explains that by going to the beach, she ends up *pasando más trabajo* (going through a hard time), because it involves jumping on an overcrowded bus; as she cannot afford sun-cream, they come out aching; and although swimming makes her son very hungry, she will only take sandwiches and water to the beach. To avoid going through all that, she explains, she prefers to stay at home or take her son for a quick swim at the seafront of Alamar, which is not really suitable for swimmers, as I observed, because it is rocky and dangerous.

problems (Lumsden, 1996). However, most respondents challenge the idea that Cuba is a better society today. For example, Dayamí avoids *El Prado* and areas of Old Havana, as she fears being humiliated by the police (Chapter 3). Ironically, the *Prado* is mentioned by Pedro's father as a park that was divided before the Revolution. In those days, as Pedro's father explained to me, blacks were not allowed to share the same spaces as white Cubans. These days, segregation is not applied directly on racial grounds; instead, *jineterismo* is used as a justification for the harassment of black Cubans, and nationality has been adopted as the pretext to separate Cubans from foreigners, a separation that research participants felt was racially targeted..

6.5. Afro-Cubans' Fascination with the *Antena*

Consumption of the *antena* is just as intricate as the discourses of food consumption. Miller (1995: 32) aptly calls for improved and further usage of the term consumption. He argues that it must not be restricted to a fixed definition to avoid 'constraining uses of the term'. Several theoretical interpretations of consumption are appropriate to help our understanding of Cubans' attraction to the U.S. media: one of these is García Canclini's (1995: 57) argument, which conflicts with left perspectives that suggest viewers are 'television zombies' (Morley, 1995: 297) influenced by what they see on the screen.

García Canclini argues that consumption should not be dismissed as a 'useless' or 'irrational' act, but instead presents the argument that 'to consume is to be able to think' and to ask questions about our own identity. Similarly, Urry (1995: 165) makes reference to a new form of 'consumer citizenship'. He states that 'people are increasingly citizens by virtue of their ability to purchase goods and services'. Just like García Canclini, who links consumption with citizenship and identity, Friedman (cited in Miller: 32) points out that 'modern consumption is "really" about "identity"'.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) highlights the active nature of consumers, developing the correlation between consumption and articulations of identity. On a similar note to Bourdieu, Mackay (1997: 6) argues that individuals consume as an 'expression of their aspirations'. In other words, individuals decode messages from the media (unrestricted consumption) and adapt it to articulate their aspirations to consume freely (Chapter 5). A good example of this comes from Mercedes's interpretations of a series of adverts on

cleaning products that she watched on the *antena*: '*esto es otro mundo*' (that's another world). She was astonished by the variety of products advertised by the U.S. media and, like most respondents, made constant comparisons of what she was watching to her own reality: 'they can choose whether they buy this product or that one'. This 42-year-old Afro-Cuban woman, who has previously been romantically involved with an Argentinean and a Spanish man told me: '*Aquí la gente solo puede comprar lo que le da la gana cuando tiene un novio de afuera*' (here only people who have a foreign man from 'over there' can buy what they want).

Mercedes, who enjoyed visiting me to watch the soap operas broadcast on the *antena*, interrupted the programmes constantly to confirm with me whether what she was seeing truly represented life *allá afuera*. Her marriage broke down over a decade ago and she bitterly explains that she has to share her apartment with her husband, because she has nowhere to go and he refuses to leave. As she watched the soap one afternoon she stated: 'it is hard to get used to the idea that women over there can just rent a house on their own...I get really depressed thinking that I may end up sharing my house with that man all my life.'

Mercedes, who shares her bedroom with her mother and daughter, admired the independence of women *alla afuera*. For instance, she told me, 'you travelled to Cuba on your own and, besides, your husband doesn't tell you what time you need to get home. I am no longer with that man and he still gives me a hard time when I get home late.' She links her predicament with her country's situation, stating that if private renting and buying was not restricted and her income was higher, she would have more control over her life, 'like the women that live *alla afuera*'; but in her view, her race limits her income potential. This case, which was far from atypical, redirects us to Cuban questions of race, nationality and status; that is, the Afro-Cubans in this study see themselves as Cubans with no rights, as blacks, who are socially excluded and harassed by the police in areas that serve mainly tourists, and as individuals at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Thus, through the *antena*, these Cubans find a vehicle that allows them to 'flirt with' and 'escape to' the outside, temporarily eliminating the tediousness and frustrations that, in their view, are associated with their daily lives.

It is known, especially by the Cuban-American media and community, that Cubans have secretly been watching the *antena* for years (<http://www.cubanet.org>). From an ethnographic perspective, where the aim is to uncover meanings, the observations highlighted that the fascination with the *antena* is due to the fact that it performs more than one role. For many respondents, the *antena* functions as an alternative discourse to the government. For example, many rely on the *antena* to hear news of (what they perceive) to be really happening in Cuba.

The Breaking News programme on Channel 23 (Univision) was extremely popular, and I witnessed how the respondents sat quietly in their living rooms when there were listening to news about Cuba, especially if it was about Cubans protesting against the Cuban government inside Cuba, or about Cubans who were filmed trying to get to the U.S. The fact that in the U.S. such news is broadcast unrestrictedly, leads many respondents to see the U.S. media as more reliable because it covers topics that the Cuban media maintain a silence on.

The *antena* may also create a private space for protest: Pedro called this the ‘*antena* Revolution’, even if this protest is only visual (through visible wires in Alamar) and silent (as none of the respondents have voiced their discontent publicly). In a country where private and public boundaries are ambiguous, these Cubans ‘secretly’ watch their favourite programmes in their living rooms. For them the *antena* offers what, they believe, the Cuban system is not offering them: namely *entertainment* first of all, because as Gisel stated: ‘*la televisión cubana na’ más que quiere educar a la gente*’ (Cuban Television only seeks to educate people); and secondly *information* about what is happening in Cuba, because, as Inesita emphasised, ‘*aquí tú nunca te enteras de nada que realmente está pasando aquí adentro*’ (here you will never know what exactly is happening inside here). Furthermore, the *antena* plays a major role in creating ‘distinctions’ (Bourdieu, 1986) in Cuban society: ‘*Por ahí me entero de lo último que se está usando y oyendo allá*’ (Through this (*antena*) I find out about the clothes people wear and the music people hear over there), as Oneida said, wearing a pair of fashionable pink sunglasses and quietly claiming that ‘*yo no me visto como la gente de aquí. A mí me gusta vestirme bien*’ (I don’t dress up like people here do. I like to wear good clothes). The point is that the *antena* enables women like Oneida to create distinctions, and their

aspirations to be different often materialise when Cubans develop relationships with foreigners. As seen in Chapter 5, Oneida has a partner who frequently sends remittances, for without him, she would not be able to afford the fashion items she has.

So far in this chapter I have looked at the role played by the *antena* in attracting Cubans to the outside. In the next section, I focus on examining Cuban imaginations of Westerners, especially European tourists.



Image 16 Entering Havana¹⁷⁶

Image 17 Police Presence in Old Havana

¹⁷⁶ Image 16: the tunnel that separates East Havana from central Havana. Uniformed officers stand in the tunnel, which is the first sign that one is entering 'transnational' Havana – an area where policemen protect tourist areas and prevent encounters between Cubans and foreigners from taking place. See Images 16-19, all taken by the author of this thesis between 2001 and 2007.



Image 18
Protecting Miramar



Image 19
Protecting Havana

6.6. Race, Status and Labelling in ‘Transnational’ Havana

Tania, a 36 year-old who defines herself as a *mulata*, was married to a black Cuban man. In 2000, her husband abandoned her and her toddler, married a foreign woman and emigrated. I found the interview with Tania intriguing because, although she was not defined by those around her as a *jinetera*, most of the points that Tania made so eloquently were repeated like a mantra in various interviews I conducted with those defined as *jineteras*. Tania, who comes from a ‘wealthy’ family in downtown Havana, is discussed here because her circumstances help us to problematise the fuzziness of *jineterismo*, and the significance of class to how it is perceived.

When asked how to define ‘wealth’, Cubans mentioned the following factors: 1) area of residence and the extent to which it is affected by blackouts and lack of running water; 2) type of housing – although many of the mansions of the ‘middle-class’ district of Vedado were built in the late 1880s, they are still a symbol of higher status; 3) amount of important contacts with people that can help *resolver* daily problems; 4) having a car for personal use, as opposed to for business only; 5) being able to shop regularly in dollar stores. Other terms associated with wealth were inheritance, profession and family

abroad. Based on all the definitions given above, Tania ticks all the boxes and, according to Cuban standards, is thus classified as a 'middle class' Cuban.¹⁷⁷

Tania's family lives in Vedado, a 'modern' neighbourhood with high profile tourist hotels (see Introduction). Compared to most Cuban households, Tania's seems to have all the necessary items for the family. With the help of her ex-husband who sends remittances on a regular basis, and help from her family who migrated to the U.S in the 1960s, Tania's household can be considered affluent. The children have videos, VCDs, computers, and the household has an automobile, a microwave and spare rooms, which in the past, were successfully rented to tourists. Yet Tania, like the respondents in the first section, describes Cuba as a dull place.

In 2006, she was in a casual relationship with a Cuban man,¹⁷⁸ yet, she openly stated that she was only in the relationship to 'make time go by more bearably', and that she would be with him until she found the right one. That 'right one' for her was to be someone from 'Europe'.

Tania had a brief romantic relationship with a Spanish man, which dissolved when he returned to his country. Interestingly, she said in 2006 that if he returned to Cuba and asked her to go out with him she would seriously consider his offer. It is intriguing that Tania's dreams of finding the perfect European man are shared by many of my respondents. The distinguishing feature of these women is the spaces that they occupy in Cuban society. That is, while most of my participants live on the outskirts of Havana, meaning that they are less likely to meet European tourists by chance, Tania spends most of her time in the centre, even though her own apartment is in East Havana. This enables her to 'gaze' at tourists without crossing the imaginary borders of Havana and its outskirts.

The term *jinetera* is usually aimed at black, lower class women, while men and women from 'middle-upper-class' backgrounds who may live similar experiences with foreigners will often escape the label. I must stress that class is used cautiously in this

¹⁷⁷ It should be noted that education is perhaps not mentioned as a symbol of wealth or status because everyone is entitled to free education, and as stated by Pedro: 'education will not get you anywhere here, because you have completed secondary education, but so has everyone else!' Equally, Tania is perceived as 'middle class', not 'upper-class' because she is not associated with members of the governmental 'elite' who are perceived as being 'better off'.

¹⁷⁸ In 2007, Tania was in a meaningful relationship with a Cuban man who had just as many contacts as she did, and of whom she said: *está a mi nivel* (he is on my level). She was a happier person.

thesis because the Cuban Revolution inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology (Kapcia, 2000) claimed to have built a classless society by promoting equality among all Cubans (see Chapter 2). However, the Afro-Cuban respondents assert that class inequality in Cuba exists, and their accounts highlight that race and class are difficult to disentangle. For instance, when Gisel refers to *gente de clase alta* (people in the upper classes), she uses the term as a synonym for ‘white’.¹⁷⁹

Although in 2006 Tania was still waiting to marry a European man, and despite the fact that she had previously had a relationship with a foreigner, the term *jinetera* was not used by her neighbours to describe her. Yet, Tania’s discourse did not differ greatly from that of my participants residing outside Havana,¹⁸⁰ and who are perceived by those around them as *jineteras*. As a matter of fact, the main differences between my respondents and Tania are that, firstly, Tania is perceived as being of a different class; and secondly, she is perceived as being from a family of revolutionaries – her uncles are self proclaimed Communists and Fidelists. Curiously, one of Tania’s neighbours claimed that *jineteras* were ‘*muchachitas sin rumbo, que pasan mucha dificultad [...] Muchachas que no son tan estudiadas*’ (young women without goals, who are facing extreme hardships [...] Young uneducated women). As seen in previous chapters, this extremely biased definition clashes with the perceptions that women labelled as *jineteras* have of themselves, for they seem to have clear aims, and in fact most had a profession or were studying at University. Therefore, the views that *jineteras* are meaningless women direct the focus away from ‘light-skinned’ and ‘middle-class’ Cubans, and find in black women the convenient explanation for the causes and nature of *jineterismo*.

It is relevant to mention here that the participants racialise wealth, associating it with lighter and white skins; and, in many cases, lighter-skinned Cubans attempt to ‘improve’ their status by emphasising that they are not purely black and distancing themselves from *jineteras*. For example, in Cuba’s racial hierarchy where race is determined in terms of phenotype,¹⁸¹ Tania and her family tend to be classified as being

¹⁷⁹ My observations lead me to conclude that emigration has created a new ‘class’, without dismantling the old class hierarchy in racial terms. In other words, white and ‘light-skinned’ Cubans remain on top.

¹⁸⁰ *Havaneros* often refer to Alamar as *el campo* in a derogatory manner. That is, to live on the outskirts immediately implies a different class to those that live in areas such as Vedado, Nuevo Vedado and especially Miramar.

¹⁸¹ For a full discussion of race in Latin America see Peter Wade (1993; 2003).

of a different race. In the household, they define themselves as a family of *mulatos*, *mulatos claros* and *casi blancos* (almost white). The colour of the skin is given such importance that on one occasion there was an argument in the household because one of the children referred to one of Tania's cousin, a woman in her thirties, as *java'a*.¹⁸² The woman went to great lengths to clarify that she was a *mulata clara*, *casi blanca* (almost white), and 'no una cualquiera' (not just anybody), mentioning her 'pelo bueno' (good/soft hair) and her Spanish grandfather to prove that she should not be defined as *java'a*.¹⁸³ The more she distanced herself from her own stigmatised images of blackness, the more she used derogatory terms to define black Cubans. 'Are you saying that I am *sin clase* (of no class), *sin cultura* (culturally deprived) or *gente baja* (a low life)? I have enough going on for me in Cuba, why would I sell myself to a foreigner?', she asked. I found that ethnography was particularly useful to help me pick up the perceptions that Cuban society had of *jineteras*. Spending time with other Cubans, not just my key respondents, gave me an insight into the hostility that black Cubans and *jineteras* face.

On one occasion, while visiting Tania's cousin's friends in Old Havana, she introduced me as *no una negrita cualquiera* ('not just any black woman'). She then proceeded to use a series of patronising adjectives to supposedly raise my status (and perhaps hers too). As I was on a mission to understand Cuban society, all I could do was smile while she used phrases to describe me, such as: '*una negra buena, trabajadora, seria, estudiada*' (a good black woman, hard working, serious, with studies). The compliments contrasted clearly with her views of blacks and *jineteras*, whom she described as women of low culture with nothing going for them.

The stigma of blackness is so deep that Yesica, a *casi blanca mulata* (see Chapter 4) straightens her hair to eliminate traces of her curls and dyes it, claiming that she looks darker if she does not straighten her hair. Badillo (2001: 37), who carried out research on the importance of straightened hair among black Dominican women in the U.S., argues that 'straightening is about self denial'. Analysing her participants' actions, the author then explains that, for them, 'accepting oneself as black means recognising oneself as

¹⁸² Javao or Java'a: Defined by Cubans as someone who has a very light skin but very 'bad' hair.

¹⁸³ Black women in Cuba, and not exclusively, relax their hair with creams or a hot comb, so as to eliminate traces of curly hair. This ritual starts at a very early age and most women will relax their hair all their lives. After relaxing their hair, many *mulatas claras* will pass as white. In Yesica's case, she uses a cream to lighten her hair too, arguing that that makes her look lighter.

oppressed and exploited'. Hence, rejecting blackness, as in Yesica's and Tania's cousin's case, implies perceiving oneself as being of a higher status, even class.

These discourses of race offer a useful backdrop for the rest of this chapter, because how Cubans imagine Europeans is as much associated with race as it is with status and nationality.

6.7. Gazing and Constructing the Image of the Tourist

Tania's descriptions of Cuba as 'monotonous' and 'controlled' are constantly contrasted with her romanticised perceptions of life in Europe, which she imagines as 'exciting' and 'free'. These ideas stem from her interpretation of tourist behaviour(s). Thus, through contact with the few tourists that she has met, and indeed with the images of the West portrayed on the *antena*, Tania sketches an image of Europe, which resembles the one depicted by most of my respondents who have interacted more with foreigners.

It was obvious that the tourist that Tania often referred to in her interviews was the 'typical' white European man who can afford to indulge in the various leisure activities that, to an extent, are not available to Cubans. She explained how tourists can visit the best places in Cuba, and yet as a Cuban, who spends most of her time in downtown Havana, she is not able to enter hotels, visit swimming pools, certain bars and *dollar* nightclubs in the area, despite the fact that one of the main hotels is a few blocks from her family's house.

In her complex analysis of social exclusion, Tania argues that it is associated with her country's weak economic situation: because Cuba's economy is stagnant, she argues, there are many people in poverty; and by separating the underprivileged from the privileged (the tourists), the government ensures that those at the lower end of the strata 'do not disturb', as she says, the tourist. This in turn requires the separation of Cubans from non-Cubans. However, darker-skinned Cubans like Gisel, Lola, Mercedes, Alina and Julieta stress that this exclusion affects black more than brown or white Cubans.

To Tania, European tourists epitomise their country's economic situation; thus, their 'healthy appearances' and the amount of activities that they are able to do whilst in Cuba reflect the privilege that being from an economically affluent country entails. She uses the example of Cubans feeling out-of-place and awkward if they have to walk past a

tourist hotel: ‘yo si voy a pasar por un hotel prefiero cruzar la calle y si veo a un turista evito mirarlo’ (If I walk past a hotel, I cross over and if I see a tourist I avoid looking at him). The tension that she feels around tourist areas and in the presence of tourists was shared by most respondents who implied that Cubans feel ashamed to be near tourists.¹⁸⁴ For instance, 28 year-old Alina, who met her estranged Italian lover while she was at a bus-stop in central Havana, said that as she had never spoken to tourists before, so when he pulled over and offered to give her a lift, her natural reaction was to be embarrassed:

Al inicio me dio mucha pena porque todo el mundo me miraba como queriendo ver como yo reaccionaba. [...] Yo primero lo ignoré porque no quería que el se quedara con una mala impresión y además no quería que toda aquella gente fuera a equivocarse y pensara que yo era una *jinetera* pero acuérdate que yo estaba *obstinada, obstinada*, no tenía un kilo en el bolsillo, la guagua no acabava de pasar y ¡había tremendo calor! [...] Me acuerdo que la gente me empezó a decir que no fuera boba y que me fuera con él y al cabo de un rato acepté.¹⁸⁵

(Alina (28) UK, April 2007)

Alina’s assertion that she was ‘encouraged’ by those around her to go with the tourist is interesting as it provides a good example of how members of society may play an important role in these relationships. Somehow in the quote above, the stigma of being with a foreigner shifts onto collective guilt; in this case, everyone was responsible and ‘pushed’ her to go with the foreigner. She makes it clear that she was not looking for a

¹⁸⁴ Likewise, Lola explains that many Cubans avoid tourist areas for fear of intimidating tourists, even though, it seems, that it is Cubans who are understandably intimidated by tourist presence. She says, ‘*Que piensa el turista cuando un cubano todo flaco, desnutrido se le cruza alante, o que le va a robar o a pedir algo*’. (What does a tourist think when a puny, undernourished Cuban crosses his way, that he is about to rob him or ask him something.)

¹⁸⁵ I was really embarrassed at first, all those people staring at me, waiting to see my reaction [...] First, I ignored him because I did not want him to get the wrong impression, and besides I did not want all those people to think that I am a *jinetera*, but remember that I was stuck. I didn’t have any money on me, the bus had still not arrived and the heat was unbearable! [...] I remember that people started telling me not to be silly and to take the offer and eventually I accepted.

foreigner; instead, the foreigner was the one that addressed her, and other Cubans encouraged her. Just as interesting is what happened next. Alina tells me that she took responsibility for giving a lift to four more women. At the bus stop, there was a discussion about who was in a more vulnerable position, and after a long and loud assessment among the passengers, it was decided who should go, so they took two elderly women, a woman with a child and a woman who claimed to suffer from high blood pressure. As she explains, during the car journey the women made comments about how lucky Alina was and that the foreigner seemed like a ‘good man’, so they acted, as she says, ‘as the matchmakers’. With all the explanations provided, Alina attempts to distance herself from *jineterismo*, as Dayamí did in Chapter 3. In fact, these two women confirm the apprehension that still exists around tourists and tourist areas.

Alina’s example, as well as the cases of respondents still in Cuba, confirms that the embarrassment and fear of being labelled *jineteras* by other Cubans and especially by the Cuban police, is what leads the participants to alter their behaviour in downtown Havana. I had the opportunity to witness how Cubans change their behaviours when they travel to Havana on many occasions; when in Alamar, interviewees would chat openly with me, but in Havana, many would prefer to walk ahead or behind me. One Afro-Cuban male was so terrified that the police would stop and arrest him in Havana that he did not say a word when we went out for a drink in Havana; yet as we crossed the tunnel (see Image 16), heading back to East Havana, he talked incessantly and even made jokes about his behaviour.¹⁸⁶ Likewise, Felicia wanted to be noticed with a foreigner in Alamar, but in Havana she was very discreet. Interestingly, as Tania states, while the tourist’s presence makes some of these Cubans feel uneasy in central Havana, tourists unceremoniously arrive everywhere in various Cuban spaces, knowing that they have the right to be in that place. Therefore, the tourist is perceived as ‘feeling’ and ‘acting’ more at ‘home’ in most areas of Cuba than the actual local people. More significantly, the tourist is perceived as equipped with enough information and the means of communication in his/her own country, enabling him/her to enjoy Cuba with more ease than a Cuban. For instance, the tourist may sometimes visit places unheard of by locals. In fact, most of my respondents mentioned in the interviews that tourists knew large areas

¹⁸⁶ Images 14 to 16 show how the Cuban police protect transnational Havana.

of Cuba while most of them only knew Havana province. Once again they suggested that the advantage that tourists have over Cubans epitomises their nation's advances in wealth, knowledge and technology.

In the excerpt below Tania imagines Europe as an economically secure area, where she can expect to prosper and lead a better life. Considering that the Cuban-controlled national media broadcast mostly programs about Cuba, and that Fidel Castro's speeches have in the past focused on the evils of capitalism as an unfair political system that fuels inequalities, Tania's discourse illustrates a different side of Europe, countering the official Cuban portrayal of capitalist societies.

When asked why Cubans are increasingly choosing to embark on relationships with tourists, Tania explains:

Hay momentos que te puedes enamorar pero a lo mejor te puedes enamorar de lo nuevo, de la dulzura, de las circunstancias, del voy a estar mejor. Yo no soy la persona determinada a decírtelo. Porque ahora mismo hablándote con toda la franqueza del mundo. En estos momentos, no sé, y no quiere decir que yo este pasando la crisis de la crisis pero a lo mejor viene alguien que, que (pause). No es solo la cosa de que a lo mejor vas a ir a otro lugar y vas a estar bien...¹⁸⁷

It should be noted how she avoids being classed as a *jinetera* by saying that she is 'not the right person' to give me information about the topic. In the quote above, patterns, again, can be seen to emerge. The foreigner here is depicted as being 'sweet' and able to offer Cuban women new experiences, such as giving her a new life abroad. In the interviews it was obvious that those Cubans who were still looking for a relationship with

¹⁸⁷ You may end up falling in love, but you may fall in love with what is new, the sweetness [of the foreigner], the circumstances, with the idea that I will be better off. I am not the right person for telling you this, but right now, if I may be honest with you...I don't know and I am not going through the worst crisis but if someone comes that, that (pause)...It is not just the thought that maybe you will travel to another place and your life will turn out well...

a foreigner or had not yet formalised their relationships, glamorised foreigners and perceived them as exciting, mystical and awarded them a 'superior' status to Cuban men. For these women, the foreigner provided a mental escape (Tania, Gisel, Lola, Alina, Inesita). Some women still imagined the European in an idealistic way after marrying them. For example, Julieta tends to use phrases such as 'you know my husband is English, and Englishmen are real gentleman'. These stereotypes are transmitted to other Cubans, who will then confirm their imaginations of foreigners. However, not all women continue to fantasise about the foreigner: after being in Europe for half a decade, Milania's marriage to her older husband is breaking down because, as she states, she cannot connect with the 'coldness' and 'selfishness' of European men.

6.8. Looking at the Cuban Nation through the Eyes of the Tourist

Through the actions of the tourist who travels freely both within Cuba as well as across international borders, Tania evaluates the limitations of the Cuban political system. Her description of Cuba with its 'segregation' and travel restrictions suggests that Europe is more inclusive.

Indeed, some respondents are not aware that even if the Cuban system allows them to travel abroad, they still have to obtain a visa from the destination embassy. Instead, they continuously express their frustrations with Cuban migratory policies, which, in their view, unlike that of European countries, do not allow Cubans to have the freedom of travel. Tania implies that Europe, this group of nations that is compressed in her imagination into a single unit, allows its citizens to make choices and explore alternative ways to express their own identities. As she put it:

El cubano es sabio de salir, de conocer, de encontrar, de chocar con otras culturas, con otra gente y de ver a ver que pasa. [...] Mira, para mí es muy importante...Nosotros cuando alquilábamos que venían muchachos jovencitos, que alquilaban, venían dos amigas, los amigos [...] y venían a conocer y cuando le abrias el pasaporte [véías que] tienen dieciocho, veinte, veintidós anos. Eso es una forma de

madurar, de, de ser independiente, ¿Por qué no lo podemos hacer nosotros los cubanos? ¿Por qué no lo podemos hacer? [...] ¿y por qué yo tengo que llegar a conocer, esperar en mi casa sentada a que alguien venga y me cuente?¹⁸⁸

Curiously, Tania describes her life as motionless: while tourists travel, discover and then come to Cuba to narrate their experiences to Cubans, all Cubans can do is 'wait'. Just like the terms 'nothingness', 'monotony' and 'boredom' used extensively in the interviews, Tania describes her life as dull, suggesting that excitement comes with tourists and their stories of the outside.

When I mentioned the (illegal) internet as one way to learn about other cultures, she stated:

Pero no todo el mundo tiene internet, no todo el mundo tiene computadora en su casa. Tú puedes leer...Dina, mira, tú puedes leer la prensa, puedes salir y buscar otros libros de otras culturas, de otros países, pero igual no te llega de la misma forma, ¿entiendes? Hay cosas que son elementares, tú puedes estudiar un idioma, ¿entiendes? La posibilidad de buscar, de conocer, de encontrar, eso es normal. Porque el ser humano no nació para quedarse sentado así, '¡Bueno vengan años y ya!' ¿Entiendes? Yo misma vivo muy disgustada conmigo mismo porque yo siento que yo...con treinta y seis años hubiera podido hacer mucho más. Tengo tiempo para hacer mucho más pero bueno, pudiera haber hecho muchas más cosas y pudiera haber conocido mucho más. ¿Por qué todo tiene que ser entonces sobre la

¹⁸⁸ Cubans like to go out, to see and encounter other cultures, other people [...] Look, for me it is very important... We used to rent rooms in our house [to tourists] and young men and women used to come and rent our rooms. They used to come in groups of friends, males and females. They came to see Cuba and when you opened their passports you would see that they were eighteen, twenty, twenty-two years old. To me, that's a good way to mature, to become independent. Why can't we Cubans do the same? Why can't we? [...] Why do I have to wait in my house, seated, waiting for someone to come and tell me?

esencia...que tienes que conocer a alguien que a lo mejor le gusta tu cara? Y te dice, 'contra ven conmigo'. A lo mejor el objetivo que yo tenga de salir no sea el objetivo que la persona quiera que, que, que se...O sea, a lo mejor yo conozco un muchacho, o un hombre maduro que y me diga, 'Ay que bien, que se yo.' Y de pronto me diga a mi, 'no, yo te quiero a ti porque yo te quiero adentro de mi casa porque yo te quiero de figura decorativa porque yo...' Y es eso y muchas cosas que han pasado con muchas personas que han ido al extranjero [...] Felipe [a close friend of hers] cuando hizo un análisis dijo, 'esperate, déjame ver porque es volver a Cuba a lo mismo y aquí tengo la posibilidad de desarrollarme'¹⁸⁹

The view of Europe as a place where individuals can 'better themselves' and where societies are 'inclusive' and 'flexible' is directly projected onto the tourist, a figure who is frequently 'role distanced' (Urry 1994: 101). The tourist, according to Urry, may emulate lifestyles that may not coincide with the realities in their home countries. Nevertheless, Urry (2003) acknowledges the link between tourists and traveling cultures, affirming that 'not only do tourists travel but so do objects, cultures and images'. Therefore, this thesis also accepts the fact that tourists are not only a vehicle enabling

¹⁸⁹ But not everyone has the internet, and not everyone has a computer at home. You may read...Dina, look, you may read articles from the [Cuban] media, you may go out there in search of books about other cultures, about other countries, but the message will not arrive in the same way, do you know what I mean? There are things that are necessary...You may even learn the language [to be able to read foreign magazines] to be able to look for information, to gain knowledge, to find knowledge, it is [meaning should be] normal because humans were not born to remain seated like this, [changes tone of voice] 'Well, old age comes and that's it!' Do you know what I mean? In my case, I live with great dissatisfaction with myself because I feel that I...with thirty-six years of age, I could have done a lot more. I still have time to do a lot more, but, well, I could have already done a lot more and I could have known a lot more and I could have seen many more places. Why does it always have to be essentially based on the fact that you have to meet someone that maybe likes your looks, and says to you 'come with me?' Maybe the aim that I have to leave the country is not shared by that person, who maybe wants to, to, to...Maybe I meet a man, a mature man that says to me 'good' and all that and eventually tells me: 'I want you because I want you as part of the furniture of the house, to embellish the house.' [...] Many things have happened to many people that have gone abroad [...] Felipe [a close friend of hers] when he analysed his situation [after meeting his Italian wife] 'hang on, let me see, because if I go back to Cuba, I go back to the sameness and here I have the opportunity to better myself.' [...]

Cubans to reach their desired destinations, but are also, with their ability to travel, carriers of the Afro-Cuban participants' imagined visions of Europe.

6.9. 'Consumption in Reverse'¹⁹⁰

Urry (2003) addresses the interaction between locals and tourists by showing that these encounters are not restricted to 'traditional' discourses of sex tourism, where the foreigner 'consumes' and exploits the local. Pattullo (1996: 87), for example, makes reference to the anger of ordinary Caribbeans, who believe that their fellow 'men and women are being racially and economically exploited by tourists'. The writer adds that the availability of Caribbeans is made possible by received media images, laced with racism of 'the exotic, easy "native" woman with a hibiscus behind her ear or the beach boy whose sexual prowess has been defined by white culture'. In order to validate these claims, I would have to accept that Cubans 'consuming' the image of Europeans are equally and simply exploiting Europeans racially (to 'advance' racially), and economically (to be able to consume unrestricted). However, as I show in this chapter, 'consumption' of Europe is not always an issue of exploitation, but often mere fascination.

Kempadoo and Doezema (1998) challenge traditional discourses of sex tourism that attach a more important role to the foreigner. The authors argue that in their encounters with tourists, the 'local' is able to 'define and shape their struggles for social change and justice' (3). Thus, they dismiss views held by White (1990) and Troung (1989), who argue that 'the exploitation of sexual labor is intensified under systematic capitalism' (Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998: 8). Moreover, they reject the idea that sex workers are 'exclusively victims', arguing that to frame these women under the exploitation label denies them agency and ignores the fact that these women are 'actors in the global market', as well as 'individuals who 'are capable of making choices and decisions that lead to transformations of consciousness and changes in everyday life' (Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998: 9). Obviously, the exploitation and agency debates are complex with passionate views on both sides, and a full analysis of the literature strays

¹⁹⁰ 'Colonisation in Reverse' is the title of a poem by Louise Bennett. My reference to consumption reflects its role as the more appropriate concept in this context.

from the focus of this study. Nevertheless, Kempadoo and Doezema's approach falls within the theme presented here of the multidirectional flow, a perspective that is increasingly being accepted by scholars of consumption (Sheller, 2003; Classen and Howes, 1996). In fact, to acknowledge that flows of images, cultures and bodies are not one-way (Urry, 2003) is to accept the active role of the 'locals' in these interactions – a point that I demonstrate here, using the cases of Afro-Cubans who take an active role in seeking their idealised partner, which is why women like Inesita, Felicia and Gisel use their image to attract foreigners. Inesita sent a picture of herself to a friend of ours as a sign of her availability despite not knowing him. Likewise, Felicia, Gisel and Mercedes, during the process of this research, posted their pictures on the internet to find a foreign partner. Once in the UK, Gisel met a few partners, most of whom were highly interested in aspects of Cuban culture – Salsa, Cigars or Politics.

6.10. Blackness and Whiteness in Cuban Discourses

Classen and Howes (1996: 188) state that: '[i]f stereotypical representations of otherness abound in the West, stereotypical representations of the West are even more abundant, both inside and outside of the West.' Indeed, stereotypical images of the West, generally referred to as *allá afuera* (out there) abound in Cuba, and some of these stereotypes are reconstructed by the *antena*.

To understand what makes Cubans want to be in a relationship with a non-Cuban, it is useful to appreciate how these men and women perceive Europeans. Certainly, complex issues – such as racialised constructions of Europeans, during the colonial period as being 'superior' – cannot be neglected (Ortíz, 1988), but equally relevant is Frantz Fanon's discussion about internalisations of black inferiority. He (quoted in Ashcroft et al, 1995: 325) depicts here how a black person struggles with negative stereotypes of blackness:

As I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin,
I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I
am a Negro [...] I have unthinkingly conceded that the
black man is the color of evil.

This conflict with black identity inform *jineteras*' struggles with racism in Cuba, and partly explain their desire to be with the more 'accepting' and 'desirable' European. Interestingly, there is a popular Cuban phrase (strangely common even to date) to '*avanzar la raza*', or 'to advance the race'. Many of my respondents see relationships with white men and women as highly desirable because it offers them the opportunity to 'climb' the racial hierarchy. This highlights the ambivalence of race in Cuba and Latin American in general. In Cuba, racial status can be 'altered' through marriage, creating a new status for that person. Unlike the two-tier racial system in the U.S., the Latin system leaves spaces for ambiguities (see Chapter 2), which in turn reconfirm cultural prejudices against darker-skinned individuals.

In observing the participants' discourses, it becomes clear that a relationship with a European is placed by them, and to a degree by their communities, higher up on this socially constructed scale. As Lola says: 'for many Cubans being with a foreigner is ...the greatest thing ever!' Other issues, such as constructed personality traits must be acknowledged too. For instance, Tania refers to the *dulzura* (sweetness) of foreigners. This is a view also shared by Gisel who talks about her desire to find a 'white' man that she can settle down with and by Felicia who wants a foreigner 'to look after' her.

In the UK, Gisel, on the other hand, met a black British man on a dating website. She rapidly clarified that he seemed to be a good man, but that she was not attracted to him. In fact, Gisel promptly dismissed him as a potential husband, arguing that she only wanted to be friends with him: '*¡Para negra basto yo! ¿Qué voy a hacer yo con un negrito?*' (One black person in the relationship is enough! What am I going to do with a black man?). When I asked her what was different about black men, she burst out laughing:

Negro no he tenido muchos, no he tenido muchos. Porque no sé...no sé ni qué decirte...de los negros [...] El negro es más eh... ¿me entiendes? un poco mas escrupuloso ese que tiene sus complejos para la hora de comunicarse con una mujer. Tiene que haber, hacerse el fuerte...el más hombre que [...] a la hora de abrazarte es un poco mas tosquito y ya

en la cama tiene un poco mas de prejuicios. El hombre negro, comprobado, tiene más prejuicios que el hombre blanco porque es aquello del complejo...bueno, en el aspecto del sexo oral vaya, ¿me entiendes? Porque que se lo hagan a ellos no hay ningún problema...No sé si también por las religiones que hay, que eso a ellos los marca muchísimo [...] No sé si piensan que es un punto de debilidad. [...] El que lo hace [...] lo hace por quedar bien y no porque le guste hacer.¹⁹¹

(Gisel (26) Interviewed in the UK, June 2006)

Gisel's relationships with all her previous white Cuban partners were problematic, as the families of the men rejected her because she was black. This, combined with the stigma of blackness that exists in Cuban culture and which she grew up with, made her internalise negative images of blackness. However, she uses the stereotypical image of the sensual black woman in order to 'progress' in the social and racial hierarchy. As she states: '*Todos quieren avanzar y yo no soy una excepción*' (Everyone wants to progress and I am not an exception). For mainstream society, nevertheless, if relationships between 'black' and 'white Cubans are not accepted'¹⁹² (Fernández, 1996), *jinetas*' 'progression' through relationships with tourists are perceived as unnatural, and the perceived attraction of white tourists to black Cubans is seen as irrational.

Mangual's argument that Cubans during the colonial period were seen as the Cultural Other (2004, 16) is still prevalent in today's society. Godfried (2000: www.afrocubaweb.com) explains that this could be associated with a concept she calls

¹⁹¹ Black...I have not had many. I have not had many because I don't know...I don't know what to tell you...about blacks [...] The black man is more uhhh... do you know what I mean? A bit more scrupulous and he has more prejudices when it comes to communicating with a woman. He acts as a strong, macho man [...] when he hugs you, he is a bit abrupt and in bed he has more prejudices. A black man, and this has been proved, has more prejudices than white men because it is that prejudice...well, in terms of oral sex, to give you an example, do you know what I mean? If it is done to them, there is no problem...I don't know if that's [linked] with existing religions [...] I don't know if they see this as a weakness. Those that do it [...] do it because they want to please you not because they like you.

¹⁹² Nadine Fernández's research gives a very good insight into interracial relationships in Cuba. She states that interracial friendships are seen as normal and acceptable. However, 'white' Cubans strongly oppose interracial love relationships among Cubans; and a love relationship with a black Cuban can create clashes between 'white' Cubans and their families, and occasionally friends.

'cultural marginality'. In other words, as she states, in Cuba the 'supremacy of Iberian-Hispanic values and norms in education, culture, economics and politics' prevails. She argues that this 'eurocentrism' creates stereotypes against blacks which are used as barriers to prevent Afro-Cubans from being fully integrated into Cuban society, and serve to stigmatise them. This view is supported by Aguirre and Eduardo Bonilla (2002: 312) who state that whiteness in Cuba is still 'highly valued and seems to be one of the primary dimensions of status by which the overall evaluation of a person's social position is reached'.

The stigmatisation of black Cubans as 'backward', 'lazy' and 'less sophisticated' was presented in De la Fuente's (2001) study, and was evident in conversations I had with white Cubans. In 1998, when I arrived in Cuba as a tourist, I rented a *casa particular* owned by a white Cuban woman in her late 40s. Because I was a foreigner, the woman often spoke to me as if my tourist status deleted my black identity. This was a woman who openly stated that she wanted to meet and marry a foreigner and leave Cuba. While she saw a possible relationship with a foreigner as 'natural', she could not see why white tourists would, in her words, 'lower their status' to be with black Cubans, who had 'less to offer than white Cubans, who are more "advanced" culturally, intellectually and racially.' I heard similar comments by white Cubans during that trip. In conversations with a 'white' University student, I was asked why tourists would find Salsa clubs, loud music and sweating appealing when they have the National Theatre, the *Nueva Trova* (musical style) and many other interesting things to discover about Cuba. This student insisted on speaking to me in English and playing Sting tapes.

My research revealed that many Afro-Cubans have internalised the idea that they are the inferior/undesirable black/Cultural Other, and many seek to meet foreigners to 'alter' their racial and social status. From the viewpoint of the Cuban Communist government, though, this action raises serious questions about loyalty to the Cuban nation and commitment to the political cause.

6.11. 'Consuming' the 'European' Image

Many black female respondents believe that their options are limited. They imply that black women are less desirable than *mulatas*, light-skinned and white Cubans because

they are perceived as less feminine and less attractive. These racialisations of sexuality change according to gradations of skin colour. Many of the black Cuban women I interviewed clearly internalised the negative status, hence showing signs of lack of confidence. This lack of confidence is evident even in women who have been married to foreigners for a decade. For example, Julieta still states: 'I am very grateful to God for sending me a good man that likes me'. In other cases, respondents' confidence was boosted during times when they were involved with foreigners, but 'crashed' when the relationship ended (Alina and Mercedes).

After spending three years together, Luigi confessed to Alina, while she was in the UK that he was married in Italy. Having to break up with him led her to reflect upon her romantic life in Cuba:

Alina: En Cuba es muy difícil para la mujer negra. Yo soy ingeniera química y me considero una mujer inteligente pero los hombres decentes ¡no nos miran a nosotros! (laughs) Los que nos miran no están a nuestro nivel intelectual.

Dina: Pero eres joven y bonita...

Alina: Y negra...¡prieta! (laughs). Antes de yo estar con Luigi yo estuve sola por muchos años y ahora si me tengo que volver a Cuba...pero aquí, los pocos meses que estuve aquí me he dado cuenta que los ingleses tienen curiosidad y les gusta las negras. Yo conocí muchos en la internet (laughs) [...] Pero no me gustaron. Prefiero volver a Cuba y estar sola y en un trabajo que pagan malísimo que estar con alguien que no me guste.¹⁹³

¹⁹³Alina: In Cuba, it is hard for us black women. I am a Chemical Engineer and consider myself to be an intelligent woman, but nice men don't look at us black women! (laughs) The ones that look at us are not at our intellectual level.

Dina: But you are young and pretty...

Alina: And black...¡prieta! (very black) (laughs). Before Luigi I was single for many years, and if I go back to Cuba...but here, the few months that I was here, I realised that English men are intrigued and like black women. I met many men on the internet (laughs) [...] But I did not fancy them, I'd rather go back to Cuba and face a life as a single woman and with a badly paid job than being with someone I do not like.

(Alina (28) UK, April 2007)

Alina is clearly concerned that in Cuba she might end up *sola* (alone), but in fact part of her reason to be *sola* is that she has decided that she wants a *decente* man. Based on their descriptions, it is clear that a ‘decent’ man is one who looks after the woman well. However, because she has already been abroad, and with the ‘status’ that her degree has given her, she wants more than just a man that works, she wants someone that earns a good salary (in dollars), and who at the same time is at her level intellectually. The more she talked, the more I realised that she had already discarded black Cuban men.

What is remarkable about these stereotyped images of blackness is that they are reproduced in the Cuban media. In many Cuban films, race is mentioned to either enhance the image of ‘whites’ as more cultured, civilised and mannered or to tarnish the image of ‘blacks’ as ‘backward’ and untrustworthy. For example, in *Plaff* (1988), a film by one of Cuba’s most popular film directors Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, after an interracial couple splits up, the mother of the white woman says that that could only have happened because the man was black. In *Un Rey en La Habana*, a contemporary film that addresses the theme of this thesis, two characters bicker— a white woman and a black man about who knows more than the other. The white woman tells the black man: ‘*Tengo más cultura que tú [...] porque soy blanca*’ (I have more culture than you [...] because I am white).¹⁹⁴

These statements are taken light-heartedly by Cubans. At cinemas, Cubans of all races laugh hysterically when they hear racial jokes. With such attitudes, it is not surprising that black women like Gisel choose to accept and work with the stereotype, and that intellectual black men do not consider looking at black women. Unfortunately, while Cuban authorities concentrate on censoring film content that tarnishes the image of the Cuban Revolution, it turns a blind eye to racial prejudices reproduced in the media.

In their quest to be more accepted and with the idea that they can improve their lives, many decide to start relationships with Europeans who, in their view, are also better

¹⁹⁴ In *Fresa and Chocolate*, another film by Alea, a white homosexual reminds the man he fell in love with, a young Communist man, in an arrogant manner that the two of them were not descendants of Africans, clearly distancing them from the ‘inferior’ image of Africa. The protagonist then invites the Cuban Communist man to drink tea with him, making the comment that ‘blacks don’t drink tea’. Tea in this case is the marker of status that separates ‘white’ Cubans from ‘black Cubans’.

lovers than black men. Gisel's statement confirms this When describing what she likes about European men, Gisel says:

¿Del europeo? La forma de hablar...el cubano sí es más atento pero es mas chavacano al hablar [...] El europeo es una cosa mas de película, de novela...mi amor, [imitates their speech] 'mi vida, si yo tuviera, si te pudiera', que no sé que...es casi como un sueño.¹⁹⁵

(Gisel (26) Interviewed in the UK, June 2006)

The perception that Europeans are different and more 'desirable' is also shared by the Afro-Cuban males I interviewed. Unlike the women, who justified their attraction to the personality of European men and stressed that they were looking for romantic relationships, the men below tend to emphasise that the beauty and 'uninhibited' sexuality of European women is what makes these women attractive to Cuban men. Also, unlike Afro-Cuban women who tend to avoid discussing in direct terms the financial benefits that a relationship with a foreigner may bring, men like Selas C compare being with a foreign woman with winning the lottery. In the excerpt below, Rastafarian Selas C gives his own interpretation about the various factors that may draw Cubans to Europeans:

Interés más hermosura, o sea, más el código corporal que le pueda interesar. Entonces es como que vienen diciendo que hice el bingo. Gané. [...] Es descubrir lo nuevo [...] Es como una moda. Estas con una extranjera y eres otra gente.¹⁹⁶

(Selas C (33) Interviewed in Alamar, August 2005)

¹⁹⁵ The European? The way he talks...Cubans are more caring but more common when they talk [...] Europeans are like characters of films, soap operas [imitates their speech] 'my darling, my life...If only I could' and all that ...It's almost like a dream.

¹⁹⁶ It is self-interest mixed with attraction to their beauty; that is, interest in improving one's circumstances combined with the corporal codes that may be of interest to the Cuban. It is almost as if they say, Bingo! I won [...] It is about discovering what is new [...] but also it is a fashionable thing. You are with a foreigner and you become another person.

Interestingly, what the participants have in common with these narrations by Afro-Cuban men is that both social groups attribute these relationships exaggeratedly positive meanings: as Selas C states, being with a foreigner allows Cubans to ‘become another person’. This highlights the symbolic meaning of these relationships – foreigners are perceived as being able to enhance these Cubans’ current status.

Selas C associates the desire of being with European women with the images portrayed in Western films, in which beauty canons are constructed as white. In Hollywood films, which are one of the few American products to enter Cuba, women, especially the blondes with blue eyes, become symbols of purity and beauty. This explains Cubans’ attraction to Europeans in particular, who are traditionally perceived as ‘white’, as opposed to Canadians and Mexicans who also travel to Cuba in great numbers, but who were rarely mentioned by my interviewees.¹⁹⁷ In the interview with Selas C, which took place at eleven in the evening in the middle of a neglected park in Alamar, he whispered an explanation about what it is that he finds appealing about European women:¹⁹⁸

Yo la percibo [a la extranjera] con una mentalidad mucho mas abierta. Sin tabúes. El celo puede existir pero no lo demuestran. La cubana es muy celosa o los cubanos somos muy celosos. Los extranjeros, a veces no caen en celos como nosotros los cubanos, o sea, es una característica también muy propia de los cubanos.¹⁹⁹

Selas C offers an interesting analogy of Eve’s sin of eating an apple against the advice of God for being in a relationship with a tourist in Cuba:

¹⁹⁷ This is embedded in discourses of whiteness. For my interviewees, Europeans are seen as more desirable because they are imagined as being ‘whiter’ and more affluent.

¹⁹⁸ Because the interview took place so late in the evening, Selas C nervously whispered most of his answers; later, his greatest fear was that if caught by the police, they would search us, find my Dictaphone and he would be arrested for passing on information to a foreigner.

¹⁹⁹ I see her with a much more open mentality, without taboos. If they get jealous they do not show it. Cuban women are very jealous; actually, we Cubans are very jealous partners. Foreigners are not as jealous as we are; that’s a typical characteristic of us Cubans.

[El turista es] la fruta prohibida. Los cubanos sienten el deseo de probar la fruta prohibida. ‘Vamos a probar la fruta del Eden y vamos a ver que sorpresa nos trae. O trae serpiente o trae gusanitos o es sana, ¿no?’²⁰⁰

(Selas C (33) Interviewed in Alamar, August 2005)

To try the ‘forbidden fruit’ appears as an attractive prospect for some of these Cubans for it represents an open act of defiance against the grandfathers of the Revolution, the ones that have been in power for almost fifty years. His best friend, Roberto, in contrast, does not see why this attraction between black Cubans and white Europeans is a ‘taboo’. He dismisses Selas C’s stereotypical descriptions of the European woman, stating in the same interview: ‘*No hay que darle tanta vuelta. Es una condición humana. A mí, me pueden gustar las europeas, es un gusto personal*’ (There is no need to go around in circles. It is a human condition. I may like Europeans. It’s personal taste).

6.12. Cubans ‘Glimpsing’ the World of the Foreigner

Whereas Tania and the men above celebrate the spirit of freedom and spontaneity of the tourist as being mere reflections of their country of origin, other Cubans who are actively trying to embark on relationships with Europeans perceive these traits as a weakness. Such is the case of Felicia, who dreams of meeting an Italian man:²⁰¹

Los extranjeros que vienen aquí quieren estar contigo un día, una noche y ya. Y yo no quisiera eso y no

²⁰⁰ [The tourist is] the forbidden fruit. Cubans feel the need to try the forbidden fruit. ‘Let’s try the fruit of Eden and see what surprise it may bring us. It will either be a snake or maggots or it is healthy, right?’

²⁰¹ Felicia preferred Italian men, even though she defines them as ‘heartbreakers’, but she said that their romantic ways won her over. She describes English men as ‘real gentlemen but too scared to make the first move’; Germans ‘too serious, might not understand Cubans’ sense of humour’; and Spanish men ‘far too similar to Cuban men’. She adds that, based on some of her friends’ examples, ‘the families of Spanish [men] might not accept black in-laws that easily’.

necesariamente estar con alguien una semana, quince días.²⁰²

(Felicia (34) Interviewed in Alamar, July 2005)

Felicia, who like Alina and Gisel, is now using the internet to meet a European man and dreams about travelling to Italy. She recognises that the only way she can travel is if she meets an Italian man. She stresses that she likes older men as long as they are 'romantic and caring':

Me gustan los hombres mayores. No muy mayores, pero me gusta que sean responsables. Hay hombres de cincuenta y pico que se ven muy...El esposo de mi hermana tiene 54 años y es una gente fuerte.²⁰³

(Felicia (34) Interviewed in Alamar, July 2005)

Felicia's statement is not a naïve one. As she is now part of this transnational communications network (internet), Felicia is aware that older men tend to seek young women on these websites. She has also experienced this directly within the family as her older sister, who was thirty five in 2005, is married to an Italian man in his fifties. What Felicia is slowly becoming aware of is that not all men on these websites are looking for serious relationships; many simply want an adventure to live out their sexual and exotic fantasies.

A similar story is told by 26 year-old Lola, who was previously in a relationship with an Italian tourist in his fifties. She described how they met in Old Havana and went to the nightclub together and that within a few days the relationship was over. Lola was very disappointed when the man did not make their relationship official. She only heard from him a year later when he visited Cuba for the second time. She said that when he arrived he wanted *su bachata* (to have a party), that is, to have sex with her, but she did

²⁰² Foreigners that come to Cuba want to be with you for a day, an evening and that's it. That is not what I want. I do not necessarily want to be with someone for only a week or just fifteen days.

²⁰³ Not very old, but I like them to be responsible. There are men in their fifties that are very...My sister's husband, he is 54 and he is a strong man.

not accept. Sympathising with her friend, Gisel explains that the man knew what the situation was like in Cuba. She strongly believes that he should have been kind enough to help Lola, arguing that even though Lola never asked him for money, she expected him to help her in one way or another.

‘Si quieres que yo sea para ti solo, tienes que ayudarme’ (If you want me to be only yours, you must help me), Lola added.

On discovering that the man was suffering from diabetes, Lola asked him to take her to Italy: *‘yo lo pudiera ayudar’* (I could have helped him [meaning with the cooking and cleaning]). She has not heard from him since.

Some Cubans have had the opportunity to see the ‘foreigner’ in his home country: such is the case of Gisel, who has travelled to the UK on various occasions. She came to realise that an image does not always correspond to Cuban expectations. After a few failed relationships, she has come to the following conclusions:

Pero es que aquí los hombres, el problema es que trabajan demasiado. Porende no tienes tiempo para...prácticamente para la mujer. Se pasan la vida trabajando y cuando llegan a la casa están cansados, la comida, o se ponen a leer o, ya estoy cansado, no tienes tiempo para nada, ¿me entiendes?²⁰⁴

(Gisel (26) Interviewed in the UK, June 2006)

Gisel uses these experiences to compare British men with the typical Cuban man, whom in the UK she describes more positively as someone who *‘cuida más aquello de la relación, la cama’* (pays more importance to sexual relationships), but on the other hand, is *‘más chavacano al hablar [...] la expresión verbal es más tosca’* (More vulgar when talking [...]. His verbal expression is more abrupt).

²⁰⁴ The problem is that, here, men work too much. They hardly have time for women. They spend their time working and when they get home, they are tired. [They want] food or want to read or ‘I am tired’; there is no time for anything else, do you know what I mean?

6.13. The mutual Search for Authenticity

The female respondents compare themselves with a specific image of the European female. 'European men were left without "real women" because most of their women cannot even cook!' Milania said. These Cubans develop an image of European women as being independent, working women and just as adventurous as European males.

While most of the males I spoke to admired the 'modern' and 'adventurous' side of European women, the female participants criticised their departure from traditional female roles perceiving them as less feminine: 'They [male Europeans] come to get what they cannot find in their own countries – real women who are good cooks, excellent housewives and fantastic in bed,' as Lola stated.

For some of these women, the idea that European women are concentrating more on their careers mirrors the downside of modern Europe, almost as if in its struggle for equality and inclusion it has created a confusion of roles and identities; and this, in their view, is what brings European tourists to Cuba. It is this search for the period when roles between men and women were clear, the search for authenticity that makes them want to come to Cuba to see how Cubans, who have apparently not crossed the line of modernity, lead their lives.

6.14. Getting Close to the World of the *Turista*

So far, I have demonstrated the way in which black Cubans imagine Europe. Here, the dichotomy (positive versus negative) is clearly evident. Part of my efforts centres around emphasising the effect that the interactions with 'white' tourists have on Afro-Cuban *jineteras*. I argue that the local 'gaze' has a double effect, for it enables Cubans to imagine Europe, but also to be critical about life in Cuba: i.e. limited consumption, restriction of movement and racism. The following statement by Pedro demonstrates how Cuban interaction with foreigners helps to develop critical readings of their own nation:²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ For me it was interesting to hear that most of the Cubans who had developed some type of relationship with foreigners would say that they have seen pictures of those foreigners' houses in Europe. Most Cubans I met were curious about salaries in Europe and asked me questions about the things that a normal worker can afford to buy. At the same time, I had the opportunity to see many tourists in downtown Havana flaunting big wads of Pesos Convertibles while in the presence of their Cuban companions, and making careless statements about money being easy to make in their countries.

La gente quiere tener lo normal, lo que sencillamente tiene cualquier persona en el mundo. Las personas quieren, no sé, tener un celular. Tener, no sé, un televisor de siete pulgadas. ¡Eso le gusta a todo el mundo, Dina! [...] ¿Y de qué manera pueden tener esto, Dina? De esa manera porque trabajando no lo puedes tener. Esto...con una pensión tú no puedes tener nada de eso. Cómo único tú puedes tener eso es tratando tú de...de...pegarte al mundo ese, del extranjero.²⁰⁶

The view that it is vital to get close to the ‘world of the foreigner’ is shared by all respondents: Milania fled her home town to gain access to tourists in Havana; and most other women have at some point travelled to Havana or the beaches of East Havana to meet foreigners.

These Cubans are not actively opposed to the Cuban state; however, they criticise the government’s attempts to homogenise all Cubans and to expect all Cubans to take a political stance in ‘the war against the U.S.’ In their discourses, many demonstrate that the concepts of ‘socialism’ and ‘capitalism’ do not mean much to them. They do not wish to have a political voice, and at the same time they contest ‘the excess of control’ exercised against black Cubans. Through their relations with foreigners, they are able to find spaces of differentiation and of contestation.

6.15. Escaping Cuban Notions of Race and Status

In the cases shown so far, there is evidence that while many Cubans internalise negative stereotypes of blackness, they also find in relationships with tourists a way of ‘escaping’ and not being affected by what they define as racist practices in Cuba.

²⁰⁶ People here want to have what is normal to have, simply what any person in the world can have [peculiarly, the world here represents Western countries]. People here want to have a mobile phone, a big television. Everyone likes that, Dina! How can they get access to that? Only that way [through tourists] because if you work you will never afford it! The only way that you can get access to those things is by getting close to that world, [the world of] the foreigner.

When Cubans start relationships with foreigners, they also build a new image for themselves in Cuban society, and are more ‘tolerated’ in tourist areas of Havana. As Julieta states, ‘before when I used to go to the shops in Havana, this grumpy assistant would look at me as if I had no right of being there. Now, when I go back to Cuba with my Englishman on my side, the same woman is all over me.’ What these examples show is that respect is only earned once these Cubans are in relationships with foreigners and/or when they become emigrants. However, the actions described by the respondents make me question whether this is an issue of race, class or a mixture of both, because I am also given ‘the special treatment’ once shop assistants and employers of the tourist sector realise that I am not actually Cuban.

While I acknowledge the ethical implications of tourism and sex tourism,²⁰⁷ I cannot turn a blind eye to the elusive psychological benefits, such as feeling like a different person, as well as all the other benefits that interactions with tourists have for these Cubans. As a black tourist, I was immune to most of the restrictions of movement. I could enter or leave Cuba whenever and however I wanted. I could move freely within Havana and challenge police officers who persistently stopped me and insisted on seeing my ID card; my Cuban respondents could not. So, I had ways of escaping the frustration of being treated like a criminal and hearing stereotypical jokes, while my respondents had no other alternative but to laugh along in the cinemas and live with the overpowering stigma of blackness. Therefore, Selas C’s claim that *jineterismo* provides an escape route for Cubans is extremely valid:

El *jineterismo* es un movimiento porque toda persona que
vaya a buscar a un turismo con un fin...o como un escape,
ya yo lo...ya yo catalogo las cosas como un movimiento

²⁰⁷ For a discussion about the implications of tourism see Classen and Howes (1996); Urry (1995). Pattullo (1996: 84) also discusses Caribbean leaders’ fears of the threat of tourism to national identity, and mentions the perception that tourists impose their values on locals (i.e. nudity in beaches of conservative nations).

porque al final todo el mundo lo que está buscando es lo mismo...un escape, ¿no?²⁰⁸

(Selas C (33) Interviewed in Alamar, August 2005)

6.16. Desiring the Other

The foreigner imagined as a free adventurer, if not a rescuer from perceived daily pressures, is linked with the image that my respondents have of Europe, their desired destination. Europe, in this case, is constructed in an almost paradisiacal fashion as a place where economic prosperity can be achieved despite one's ethnic background; a democratic area that awards its citizens the right to travel and experiment with new identities, and a region where traditional roles have become blurred. Curiously, as Rojek and Urry (quoted in Bompadre, 1999) argue, the post-modern tourist is depicted as coming from areas where cultures have succumbed to globalisation, and where 'real' identities are not fixed due to an open consumption system, which allows individuals to pick and choose their own identities.

The tourist's experience in Cuba, a place where they are automatically awarded a high status and allowed to visit places that are inaccessible to Cubans, means that during the trip their status can be temporarily lifted. For instance, Odalys's husband, who in the UK defined himself as a working class man,²⁰⁹ occupied the higher place in the peculiar Cuban hierarchy – that of a tourist, but also that of the respectable white male provider.²¹⁰ In Cuba, the 'typical' Europeans simply become 'tourists', a term that carries a very positive meaning because of the economic power of the tourist.²¹¹ Thus, their original status disappears amidst the 'first class' treatment that they receive in Cuba. But the Cuban respondents seem to underestimate the important difference between 'work' and 'leisure', and the fact that realities and behaviours alter depending on the two separate circumstances.

²⁰⁸ *Jineterismo* is a movement because if a person goes in search of tourism for a purpose...I...I label those things as a movement, after all, everyone is searching for the same thing...an escape, no?

²⁰⁹ Using, here, profession and educational attainment to define class bearing in mind that class can be defined in many ways.

²¹⁰ Discussions about the inability of the Cuban male to act out their masculinity are presented in chapter 2.

²¹¹ Tourism was introduced to alleviate the effects of the Special Period and as a way of saving Socialism; therefore tourists (generally) carry a 'special' status in Cuba.

In this chapter I have looked at two areas of symbolic consumption, analysing how the Cuban informants consume images of the West, and demonstrating that although the *antena* channels are Miami-based, they still play a role in helping Cubans visualise and imagine life in the West. Cubans who watch the *antena* learn about the outside and see the *antena* as an alternative to the *obstinación* (boredom) that exists in Cuba. Likewise, the desire to watch the *antena* becomes part of a wider struggle to consume and move freely. It is part of this struggle that may attract Cubans to Westerners; however, because of the difficulties of migrating and retaining strong bonds with the Cuban family, most respondents prefer to meet Europeans who are geographically further away from Cuba, but whose nations have less hostile relationships with the Cuban government. Unlike the U.S., migrating to Europe will not strip Cubans of their nationality as long as they register with the Cuban embassy in their country of destination. This means that they can travel to Cuba more frequently (Cubans in the U.S. can only travel legally to Cuba once every three years) and legitimately send money to their families through bank transfers.

In the second part of the chapter, I examined what makes Cubans perceive Europeans as more desirable partners, concluding that Cubans imagine Europe as the place that will eradicate *all* their daily struggles. If life in Cuba offers no solution to daily struggles, and movement to certain spaces continues to be restricted, Europe is imagined as the place where all these barriers can be lifted and individuals can live decently.

Behind the idea of Europe being the perfect place, there is the perception that European men are more caring, more responsible and able to maintain their families financially; while in return, Cuban women are presented as excellent housewives and lovers, a combination that some believe is disappearing in Europe. One Cuban woman I met in the UK proudly stated that she was the best thing that had happened to her English husband: '*Las inglesas no son tan buenas esposas... así de cuidar la casa, los niños y el marido, ni son tan cariñosas como nosotras las cubanas* (English women are not as good wives in terms of looking after the household, the children and the husband, nor are they as caring as we Cuban women). Here, this woman presents blackness and Cubanity as positive, attractive and desirable.

In sum, the practices of consumption presented in this chapter, while demonstrating how Cubans consume aspects of the 'West', also show Afro-Cuban

jineteras forge relationships with the Cuban state. While the state institutes forms of social control, such as police fines for those that watch the *antena* and police presence in tourist areas, these Cubans are able to create small spaces of resistance and contestation by watching the *antena*, entering tourist areas in Havana and seeking relationships with foreigners. These Afro-Cubans not only ‘deviate’ from romantic relationship norms and nationalist conventions, but also, as this thesis demonstrates, construct discourses of Cuban society that diverge from the government’s discourse of a fair, equal and racism-free society. I agree with Elinson (1999) that their actions do not pose a threat to the Cuban state, despite the fact that in their discourses they demonstrate that racial and class friction exists in Cuban society.

In their sociological study of the importance of race among Cuban immigrants, Aguirre and Bonilla Silva (2002: 320) find that, contrary to previous suggestions, black Cubans tend to be more critical of the Cuban state. These findings challenge the common notion that there has been so little social upheaval in Cuba because Afro-Cubans do not revolt against the state. Their study also conflicts with the assumptions held by members of Cuban society that black Cubans, because they benefited mostly from the Revolution than white Cubans, will not develop a critical voice within Cuba. Indeed, the Afro-Cuban participants of this thesis are also critical of the state; however, the majority seeks to lead a neutral, non-political lifestyle. In this act alone, they are already deviating from the norm.

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Further Considerations



Image 20 Slogan on Cuban streets²¹²



Image 21 Slogan on dual-carriageway leading to Alamar (East Havana)
An association of Motherland or Death

²¹² Translation: 'Revolution is a deep conviction that no force in the world exists capable of crushing the strength of the Victory of Ideas'. Left corner slogan: 'Freedom to Cuban People'. Images 20-21 taken in August 2007.

‘The individual in our country knows that the glorious period in which he happens to live is one of sacrifice; he is familiar with sacrifice’

Che Guevara (in Chomsky et al: 374)

7.1. The Complexities of *Jineterismo*

This thesis has explored the meanings of Cuban *jineterismo*. I have placed women labelled as *jineteras* in their everyday lives and discussed the relation between *jineterismo* and economic struggles. This research has showed that young Afro-Cuban women labelled as *jineteras* struggle daily to sustain their families, suggesting that this is the main reason why they embark on relationships with foreigners (see Chapter 3).

Had this not been an in-depth study of daily life, the conclusion reached would have been that the root of *jineterismo* lies solely in these women’s economic difficulties and their struggles to *inventar* (find ways to survive). Yet, the hours of in-depth interviewing combined with the observations highlight that Cubans are adept in ‘performing poverty’ and are extremely resourceful in doing so. Participants would often tell incredible stories of hardship, claiming that they did not know how they would feed their children that day; yet, hours later, not only would I witness a stodgy plate of food being passed to all family members, but a plate would almost certainly be placed in my hand. Phrases like ‘*no es fácil*’ (is not easy), ‘*la cosa está mala*’ (things are really bad) and ‘*la cosa está en candela*’ (the situation is burning/extremely bad) were used as Cubans showed me around their houses and pointed at the few meagre foodstuffs they had in their kitchen. In fact, interviews would very often start with these opening lines. Remarkably, while the government claims that poverty in Cuba is caused by the capitalist world – notably the U.S. – the respondents ‘perform poverty’ to attract tourists from Western capitalist societies. Interestingly, while among Cubans, participants would complain about their economic circumstances, but not to the extent where they would need to show their neighbours how they live. Yet I noticed how quickly Cubans, not just the participants, would invite ‘foreigners’ into their world to witness how they struggle.

Beyond the lengthy stories of daily struggles, the interviews and observations revealed dilemmas that offered important insights into further factors impacting on Afro-Cuban women. For example, all participants play central roles in their households. They are in charge of domestic and emotional labour and are also the main earners. For those respondents who live in Cuba, the strains of sustaining the family and carrying out various roles in the household are exacerbated by the very high level of commitment that these women demonstrate to their families.

The devotion to their Cuban families and inability to offer them better security is a major source of frustration for those respondents who are still in Cuba. This explains why the participants believe that relationships with foreigners offer them the security that the Cuban government is unable to provide as it only guarantees consumption in *areas del pueblo*. Thus, household struggles partly explain why Cubans live forms of *jineterismo*, and lead them to want to embark on relationships with foreigners. However, this is one of the many contributing factors that Cubans are willing to discuss more openly, but not the only one. In their attempts to avoid being seen as ‘unpatriotic’ or ‘materialistic’, these Cubans justify their actions by stating that they have to support their families, and stress that they are therefore ‘good’ women.

One way in which the Afro-Cuban female respondents adapt to changes linked with the uncertainties brought by the economic environment is by adopting the role that, in their view, Cuban men and the state are unable to perform – the role of the provider. The only way this can be achieved effectively is through *inventos* in *areas de Pesos Cubanos*, or by crossing these areas and getting into ‘transnational’ Havana to find alternative solutions to their daily problems: this includes the desire to marry a foreign man, who they hope will ‘look after’ them – unlike Cubans who are perceived as failing as providers.

It was clear during the conversations that most participants believe in what are known as traditional family roles, where the husband performs the breadwinning role and the female carries out domestic labour. Despite the impact of the Revolution, many Cuban women – like Regla, for example – still seek approval from Cuban men to carry out leisure activities outside the household. Furthermore, many strongly believe in marriage, with the difference that marriage to a *extranjero* appears as a more desirable

choice as it enables women to act as the *mujer de la casa* (housewife); and the foreigner, because of his perceived economic stability, is able to be a good *hombre de la casa* (male of the house), which in their view is a man that is able to provide for his family. *Jineterismo*, I argue, is rooted in these discourses of resistance and adaptation to some of the changing gender roles that these women experience in their lives.

Lumsden (1996: 22) briefly discusses the fact that women are adapting rapidly to traditional male gender roles – a fact confirmed by the informants. Women are ready to become the breadwinners, and the central figures of their families. In Dayamí's household, she was bringing in more hard currency than her brother and her mother. However, as Lumsden (2006: 25) points out, men are not willing to adapt to 'traditionally female roles', and many would still not consider cooking and ironing, even in situations where women were sustaining the household. Most respondents feel the strains of combining these roles, and as Inesita said:

Things need to go back slightly to the situation we had previously. We need to be spoilt [by men], and we need to take care of the house, the husband and the children. It does not mean that women should not work outside the house...but, well, we need to focus a little more on the household.²¹³

When analysing their own circumstances, most respondents described *jineterismo* as an act with positive outcomes – a view that partly contradicts Cuban writer Elizalde's conclusion. In her article on *jineterismo*, she states that *jineterismo* is a 'punishment', and that *jineteras* are 'unhappy' women, 'slaves of their own aspirations' (2003: http://www.lajiribilla.cu/2003/n122_09/122_09.html accessed March 2003). Obviously, the issue of dependency on the Cuban family and the foreign partners cannot be neglected. Milania, for example, works two jobs in the UK and is only able to travel to

²¹³ La cosa tiene que cambiar un poquito a la situación de antes. A nosotras hay que consertirnos más, y nosotras tenemos que cuidar más la casa, al marido y a los niños. Y eso no quiere decir que las mujeres no deban de trabajar afuera de la casa...pero, bueno, tenemos que concentrarnos un poco más en el hogar.

Cuba once every few years while she contributes to her family's high standard of living. While she works as a cleaner in England and would be placed in the lower ranks of the class hierarchy in the UK, her Cuban family is described as *rica* (wealthy), thanks to her monthly remittances.

In her study on self-defined sex workers in Havana, Pope (2005: 113) questions their newly found independence, arguing that 'while women may feel empowered [...] they are also commodities in the global sex market'. With reference to my Afro-Cuban participants, and looking specifically at their personal experiences as they start relationships with foreigners, many feel that they have gained their independence from the state and Cuban men, whom they define as dominating and *machistas*. In other words, these women see many benefits in their actions. Indeed, as observed in the UK, apart from the nostalgia linked with being in a foreign country, many of these women state that they do not regret having married a foreigner and coming to the UK. In comparison, a significant number of Cuban men that I met in the UK or heard of, had employed self-interested strategies to get into the UK, affecting the lives of the foreign women they married. Some of these women struggled as single parents, and in some cases the violence and mental abuse that they suffered led to mental illness, such as depression and low self-esteem. Most of the black Cuban women I met in the UK and in Cuba tell a different story: theirs is the story of women who want to find love and/or stability with a *hombre serio* (serious man) who can also 'help them'. Hence, while black Cuban women are put in the spotlight when they befriend or marry foreigners, white 'middle-class' Cubans, and men in general, are unjustly and conveniently absent from studies on *jineterismo* or heterosexual sex-work in Cuba. Thus, black Cuban women, who according to Morales Dominguez (2007) belong to the lower ranks of Cuban society, continue to be victimised and labelled by the Cuban police and society in general.

If *jineterismo* has successfully been defined as prostitution performed by a homogeneous group of Afro-Cubans, or even if the literature and Cuban society have succeeded in depicting the *jinetero* as a male hustler and the *jinetera* as a prostitute, my aim has been to problematise these notions. Such ideas reduce women's identity to one of a sexual nature, encourage the treatment of black Cubans as a homogeneous group with peculiar characteristics and reproduce discrimination in society. To single out a section of

the population as more likely to deviate from the norm is in itself a form of discrimination, and a way of recreating stereotypes. Therefore labelling Afro-Cuban women as *jineteras* with the moralising meanings that are part of the official discourse is a discriminatory practice.

What makes *jineterismo* such a complex concept is that it obscures hegemonic practices of patriarchy, racism and patriotism. If the Afro-Cuban participants of this research are labeled as *jineteras*, it is partly because of their defiance of gendered and racialised spaces and norms. These are women who are perceived to work *en la calle* – a traditionally male space. In the neighbourhood, the point that neighbours implicitly made was that these black women were evading police control, infiltrating *areas de turismo* and befriending, falling in love or having sex with white *extranjeros*. All these actions are deviant only because they have been labelled as such by the Cuban state and society, as well as the global tourist industry. If the individuals involved in these relationships were Cubans from similar racial and social backgrounds the circumstances in which they met would certainly not be questioned. Likewise, if the individuals came from nations of similar socio-political and economic backgrounds, and if both partners were of similar ethnic backgrounds, then we might not be discussing the advent of *jineterismo* today. In fact, had this been the case of a British tourist who had become involved with a Spanish ‘local’ while on holiday in Spain, then this would probably be labelled in Western societies as a ‘holiday romance’ or simply a love relationship. Therefore, to simply dismiss *jineteras* as deviant somehow implies that a black woman cannot fall in love with a white man and vice versa.

7.2. Thesis Findings

In this thesis I have introduced the cases of young Afro-Cuban women who use a variety of tactics to meet foreigners: women, who seek love relationships online after failed relationships with foreigners and Cubans (Felicia, Gisel and Alina); women currently involved romantically in single relationships with foreigners (Dayamí and Oneida); women married to English men who have created their own Cuban-English families in the UK (Julieta); women who seek to marry foreigners (Tania and Lola), or who have multiple relationships with Cuban men (Yesica); a woman whose economic life improved

after the marriage of her husband with a foreign woman (Inesita); and a woman who spent years in jail, accused of being a *jinetera* and who is still in an ‘empty-shell marriage’ (Goode, 1961) with a foreigner (Milania). Each of these cases sheds light on *jineterismo* as a wide range of actions involving the pursuit of sexual, economic, love and cultural relationships with foreigners.

There are a series of issues affecting the lives of the participants which prompts them to take a dynamic role in altering their own lives. Some have the desire to achieve economic security for themselves and their family, whereas others show dissatisfaction with the fact that the government controls every aspect of life in Cuba, from the upbringing of their own children through to the consumption of goods and the media. Some find in *jineterismo* a way to get closer and learn about capitalist societies, and most have simultaneously fallen in love with the image of ‘Europe’ and the stereotyped ‘European’ – an attractive image to them in contrast to what they perceive as ‘backward’ in Cuba and as discrimination against Afro-Cubans. To marry a ‘European’ represents *avanzo* (progress) in almost every aspect of daily life: economically, for it promises unconstrained consumption and sustenance of the family; politically, as many believe that being with a foreigner and living in Europe provides more immunity from the eye of the state. For them, Europe and being with Europeans opens a space of difference, where they can be Cubans without having to be ‘revolutionaries’ or ‘socialists’.

7.3. The Cuban ‘New Beings’

I began this thesis by asking whether post-Soviet Cuba has shaped a ‘New (Wo)Man’ yearning for economic independence and contesting the values of the Revolution; and I have subsequently demonstrated the existence of new female identities, which have emerged as a response to local and global forces, such as the re-admission of Cuba onto the international tourist circuit. Certainly the emergence of these new identities has also been caused by changes from above – that is, Cuba’s transition to a grey area between socialism and capitalism.

The uncertainty of the Special Period and the social changes that occurred in Cuba in the 1990s could not have created the same individuals that Che Guevara envisioned in the 1960s when the Revolution triumphed. It must not be forgotten that

these Afro-Cuban women are no longer the uneducated people that 'memorise' slogans and feel they owe their lives to the Revolution. As they were already born with the Revolution, with free education and free health care, these individuals continue to aspire to more.

Many respondents acknowledge that there have been some positive changes in contemporary Cuba. For instance, in the early 1990s, Yesica's ex-husband was arrested outside a dollar store accused of possessing dollars. Yet, in 1993, all Cubans were allowed to have dollars. Tania remembers the fears she had of socialising with her family living in the U.S. whenever they travelled to Cuba, because they were known as *gusanos*. These days, when her family visits Cuba, the fear of being seen in their company no longer exists.

In this new Cuba, respondents expect a life less circumscribed by state politics, including the collective staging of the 'right' revolutionary consciousness in marches or voluntary work. Most participants seek the opportunity to commemorate other aspects of their private lives, as opposed to celebrating collective triumphs such as the achievements of the Cuban Revolution. Many acknowledge the positive aspects of socialism, while also seeing the positive side of other systems, but do not wish to lead an active political life.

The meaning of sacrifice has certainly changed for the respondents. Some of the Afro-Cuban respondents have seen their parents and family members sacrifice for the nation (for example, sent as volunteers to Angola), and not receive a great deal in return, apart from a few medals or a round of applause at CDR meetings. To them, these forms of sacrifice are 'old-fashioned' and 'unnecessary'. However, they value the sacrifice that their mothers make/made for their children.

As far as consumption is concerned, I have argued in Chapters 5 and 6 that the consumption needs of the Afro-Cuban participants are far from 'irrational', because through their consumption of foreign goods, media, and images of the European, they develop critical readings of their own nation. These Afro-Cuban women, therefore, have different values and attitudes to life than the 'new man' moulded by the Revolution in the 1960s, a period when Afro-Cubans (especially women) were still trying to find a space in society.

The depiction of the Afro-Cuban ‘new woman’ must include the image of the *jinetera* – the ‘rebels’²¹⁴ of the 21st century that refuse to be pushed into obscurity, but who, instead, are individually promoting small changes in society: firstly, by improving the economic lives of their families and communities; secondly, by slowly erasing the stigma associated with migrating to Western countries; and thirdly, to an extent de-sensationalising romantic relationships and contacts between ‘black’ Cubans and ‘white’ foreigners in their communities.

We must also acknowledge the impact that the *jineteras* have on the Cuban state and the ways in which they contribute to the continuous re-definitions of the Cuban nation. In reaction to the tactics of some of these individuals, Cuban leaders have re-developed their migration policies. For example, in the 2004 Conference on ‘Nation and Emigration’, the Cuban Minister of Foreign Relations Felipe Pérez Roque, announced Cuba’s changing attitude towards migration:

We understand that the right to be called Cuban goes beyond the place where one lives [and beyond] the desire to defend with ones life the independence of our country.
(www.granma.cu/espanol/2004/mayo/vier21/discurso-roque-e.html).

In this declaration, Roque stretched the image of nationality and citizenship to include the children of Cuban emigrants, who could be entitled to free University scholarship and summer courses (Spanish language, history and culture) in Cuba. All these efforts confirm that the relationship between the Cuban nation-state and the *jinetera*, sometimes turned emigrant, can be a productive relationship in that it helps to continuously re-define the Cuban nation to include emigrants. Undoubtedly, this is also a very profitable relationship as these Cubans’ remittances provide their families with a higher buying power, which in turn enables more hard currency to keep the economy active. Whatever the real causes are of this change of attitude towards emigrants to

²¹⁴ The term *rebeldes* tends to be used with reference to Fidel, Che and other rebels who fought against the Batista dictatorship.

capitalist societies, this is clearly an image of the nation that was unimaginable two decades ago.

7.4. The Globally-Conscious Afro-Cuban

To discuss *jineterismo* in local terms is to overlook the various connections, networks and flows of goods, capital, services, ideas, lifestyles and images that take place between the Western world and the previously 'isolated' Cubans.

Jineterismo is shown here as a transnational activity, and the term is introduced as a fluid concept, which although uniquely Cuban, flows beyond the Cuban nation. For these reasons, I see *jineterismo* enmeshed in the wider process of globalisation, for it implies constant physical and/or imaginary movement. Through their curiosity about the outside world and the desire to travel, these Cubans are pushing to be part of the globalised world. Furthermore, they are able to think beyond the nation as the *antena* provides them with images that allow them to fantasise about life outside Cuba. However, individuality and the desire to create distinctions are not easily achieved, and these individuals still struggle to exercise the right to be different.

In this thesis, I have acknowledged the evolution of the concept of *jineterismo*. The *jinetera* described in the literature on *jineterismo* of the 1990s will surely have a different vision from those that were labelled as such in the new century. It is, however, crucial to understand the changing meanings of the concept.

As I finish writing this thesis, Cuba is going through yet another period of change. After decades as president, Fidel Castro has stepped down to be succeeded by his brother, Raúl Castro, who was elected in January 2008 as the next Cuban president. In the space of three months, Raúl Castro has revised Cuban consumer policy, allowing Cubans to buy computers and DVDs. In March 2008, it was announced that Cubans could at last enter and stay at hotels that were previously designated for tourism. These changes have prompted various responses. For instance, in an article in the Miami-based online magazine *cubanet.org*, Tom Casey (quoted in Ikeda, 2008: www.cubanet.org) takes a rather pessimistic stance and argues that the changes are minor. In another article by Editorial de Libertad Digital (2008: www.cubanet.org), the author is concerned that the fact that Cubans will now be allowed to stay in dollar hotels will increase prostitution.

Gisel and Julieta argue that these changes do not eliminate their concerns about freedom of movement. Indeed, they compare this ‘openness’ with the measures introduced in 1993, where Cubans were allowed to enter hard currency stores but could not afford to buy the goods and were treated with indifference. The main concern for these women is that these changes may create further racial inequality with white Cubans being able to afford to shop in these places, and black Cubans being left on the margins and scrutinised if they try to consume individually here. One can only hope that these new ‘concessions’ will not be met with further forms of harassment of black Cubans by the Cuban police.

If *jineteras* today struggle to be part of a globalised world or to lead independent lives inside the Cuban state, as both Cuban and foreign societies evolve, the meanings and practices of *jineterismo* may also change. Therefore, continuous studies on *jineterismo* should continue to surface. Particularly useful would be studies that look at ‘transnational relationships’ from both sides. Undoubtedly, emotions and love cannot be theorised simplistically; nevertheless, more qualitative studies that explore these relationships and collect the discourses of both partners would help us to understand further the subjective factors that attract Cubans to *extranjeros* and vice versa.

It is equally important to historicise the presence of Cuban *jineteros and jineteras* in Europe. Historical studies would certainly enrich migration studies, providing a better insight into Cuban migration models to Europe. Likewise, ethnographic studies on the transnational Cuban-European family would be fruitful to understand the Cuban *jinetero/a*’s integration and struggles in Europe.

This study contributes to an understanding of the lives of women who do not conform to the rules of the nation and/or are desperate to find economic solutions outside of it. It shows the struggles of Afro-Cuban individuals who have almost detached themselves from the powers of the state, and attempt to live differently to other fellow Cubans, who still struggle on a daily basis to obtain the most basic goods, such as eggs and milk. The Afro-Cuban women in this thesis refuse to read the *Granma* newspaper with regular features on Fidel’s reflections;²¹⁵ they do not rely on the irregularities

²¹⁵ Fidel’s *reflexiones* are published almost on a daily basis in Cuban newspaper *Granma*. These *reflexiones* (sometimes three pages long in a newspaper of less than 25 pages) range from thoughts about the U.S., to

(goods) provided at the *bodega*, nor do most of them passively accept the restrictions that prevent Cubans from entering 'transnational' Havana. These women propagate, in a non-activist manner, new ideas and new ways of living that state that 'it is acceptable to be different'; and despite the fact that their label disappears outside of the Cuban context, they continue to perceive themselves as *luchadoras* (fighters) in Europe. Various cases exist of highly educated Cubans working as cleaners in private homes and airports, caring for the elderly in Care Homes in Britain, working various shifts in factories across Europe or struggling as artists and musicians in their new countries of residence. The black Cuban women that cross the Atlantic, and the ones that continue *luchando* in Cuba, embody a significant portion of Cuba's 'New Women'. It is therefore crucial to recognise that the experiences of these individuals and their critical minds help us to understand the intricacies of daily life in Cuba, as well as the everyday struggles of the 'Third World' fighter.

While Cuban official discourses and the media construct the stereotype of *jineterismo*, individual Cubans will continue to take advantage of other Cubans and foreigners. While the hustler, the prostitute, the *gusano*, the globally curious Cuban, the Cubans that live off *inventos* and the tricksters continue to be packaged under one stigmatised label, the pimp and those involved in child prostitution will have enough space to camouflage under the same label, whilst shattering the lives of women, men and children in Cuba and abroad. The *jinetera* must not be mixed with the criminal and the immoral who exploit men, women and children. While many *jineteras* may break the law and commit criminal activities, researchers must be cautious not to label all criminals as *jineteras*, and *jineterismo* must not be adopted as a synonym of negative deviance or crime.

The Cuban women I interviewed are only deviating from norms and values that were created in post-1959 Cuba: namely, contact with the outside, individualism and

the Five Heroes and teaching Cubans about the values of the Revolution. The latest *reflexiones* were inspired by the case of the failed asylum attempt of two Cuban boxers who travelled to Rio in 2007 (Olympic games of the Americas). Brazil deported these two men after they failed to present themselves at the games. They are now in Cuba, inspiring rumours that they have been arrested and that their careers are now finished. Fidel's publicly states that they are in a house (*de visita*), where they will be able to receive visits from family members. Cubans on the street say one thing, the government says another 'that nothing will happen to the two young men'. In the meantime, the *reflexiones* continue to be written.

uncontested loyalty to the political system. Their deviance is therefore ‘situational’ and certainly ‘culturally determined’ (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008: 322).

This study contributes to improve our knowledge of *jineterismo* as it offers a new angle to its analysis, emphasising young Afro-Cuban women’s struggles to find romantic love, as well as various other struggles that they face. While previous studies focused on explaining the sexual side of *jineterismo* and on black female bodies, I focus on women’s minds, their discourses, as well as their consumption desires and romantic needs. Furthermore, I offer alternative models of blackness, so that these women are not seen as sexual subjects, but rather shown in their roles as mothers, neighbours, consumers and global subjects.

Ethnography enabled me to see beyond the economic aspect of *jineterismo*. It flagged up issues that in the interviews and in conversations were mentioned with less emphasis than economic difficulties, yet they were quite crucial points that plausibly answered questions about *jineterismo*. For example, these young women have exceedingly negative perceptions of Cuban men and life in Cuba, while at the same time, they have equally exaggerated views of European men as reliable partners and idealised perceptions of Europe as the ideal place to live. These points offer reasonable answers about why these women persistently search for love across the boundaries of the Cuban state.

Appendix I

Sample Profile/ Key Respondents

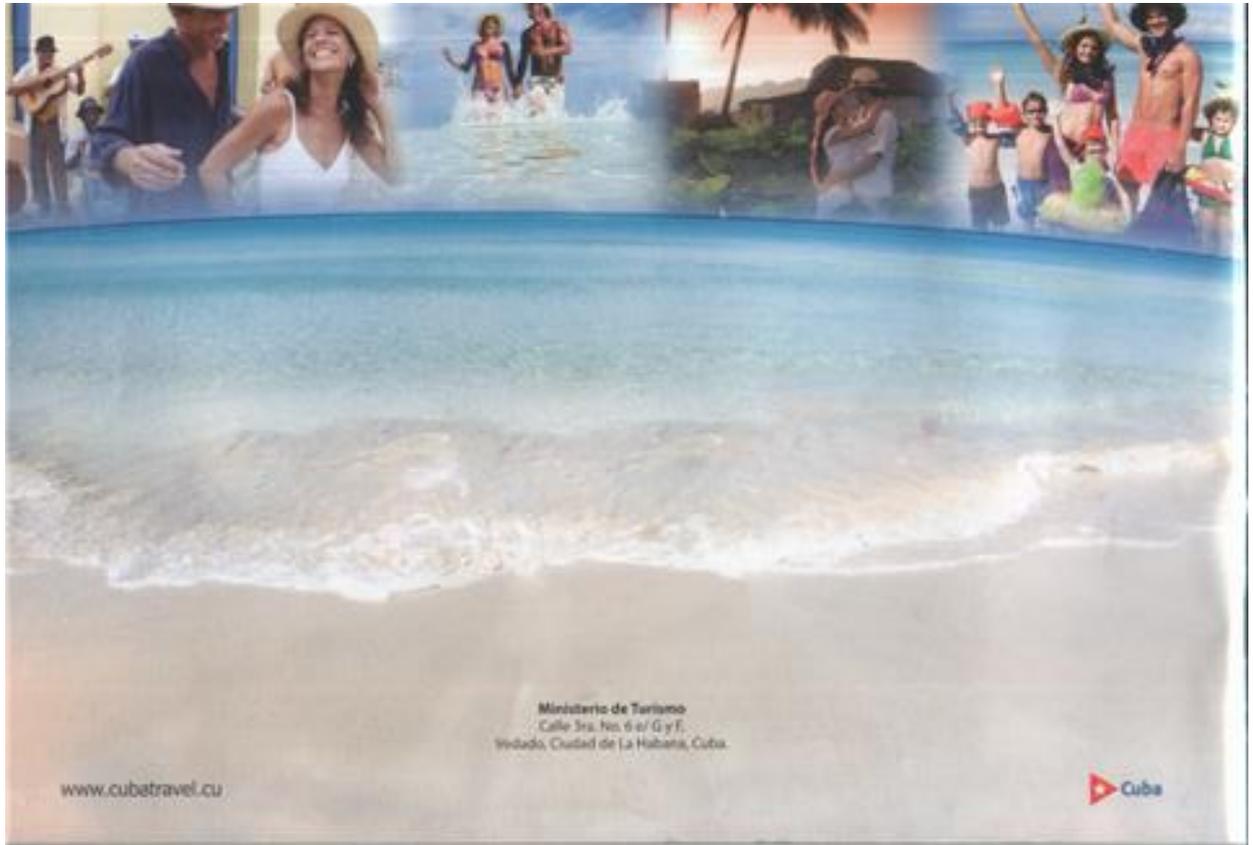
Pseudonym	Gender	Race (self-definition)	Area of residence	Relationship	Define themselves as <i>jineteras</i>
1. Dayamí	Female	<i>Mulata</i>	Havana	Love Relationship with German man	No
2. Felicia	Female	<i>Mulata</i>	Havana	Seeking a love/sexual relationship, preferably with Italian man	No
3. Milania	Female	<i>Negra</i>	Havana/ UK	Married to Italian man	As an ex- <i>jinetera</i>
4. Gisel	Female	<i>Negra</i>	Havana	Seeking love/sexual relationships online in Europe	No
5. Alina	Female	<i>Negra</i>	Havana	Previously in long-term love relationship with Italian man.	No
6. Inesita	Female	<i>Mulata</i>	Havana	Hopes to come to Europe (visit or marriage)	No
7. Lola	Female	<i>Negra</i>	Havana	Previously in a love/sexual relationship with an Italian man	No
8. Mercedes	Female	<i>Negra</i>	Havana	Previously in a love/sexual relationship with a Spanish man, and before an Argentinean man.	No
9. Oneida	Female	<i>Mulata</i>	Havana	Long-term relationship with Italian man	
10. Julieta	Female	<i>Negra</i>	UK	Married to British man with children	Admits that had been <i>en la calle</i> (the streets) in the past.
11. Tania	Female	<i>Mulata</i>	Havana	Previously in a brief relationship with a Spanish man; hoped to find someone she could marry from abroad	No
12. Yesica	Female	<i>Mulata clara</i>	Havana	Multiple 'relationships' with Cuban men	No

(Secondary set of interviews)

Pseudonym	Gender	Race (self-definition)	Area of residence	Reason(s) for being interviewed	Relationship type
1. Maritza	Female	<i>Mulata</i>	Havana	Neighbour	-----
2. Alejandro	Male	<i>Negro</i>	UK	Previously interviewed in 2004; continued conversations between 2005-08	Married and divorced a Black British woman; Long-term relationship with white British woman
3. Odalys	Female	<i>Mulata</i>	UK	Previously interviewed in 2004; continued conversations between 2005-08	Married to a British man. Children born in the UK.
4. Regla	Female	<i>Negra</i>	Havana	Milania's mother	-----
5. Osmani	Male	<i>Mulato</i>	UK	Previously interviewed in 2004; continued conversations between 2005-08	Married and divorced British woman (mother of his child); #has had various relationships with women in Cuba and the UK
6. Luisa	Female	<i>Negra</i>	US	Pedro's wife	-----
7. Pedro	Male	<i>Negro</i>	US	Main Informant	Acted as translators for jineteros/as and tourists in Cuba.
8. Selas C	Male	<i>Mulato</i>	Havana	Selas C was planning to marry a Spanish woman in order to migrate to Spain.	As an ex- <i>jinetero</i>
9. Roberto	Male	<i>Negro</i>	Havana	Roberto had dated a European and a Mexican woman and moved to Havana partly to meet foreigners	No

10. Juan	Male	<i>Mulato</i>	Havana	Long-term Relationship with Croatian woman.	No
11.Alex	Male	<i>Negro</i>	Havana	Introduced me to Oneida.	No

Appendix II Images of Tourism
(Cuban Tourist Office *Ministerio de Turismo*)



Appendix III

Inesita's husband's email to me (March 2004)

The email below, which was cut and pasted into this thesis without altering the grammatical style, has been altered only to add more punctuation and, in particular, to omit names, locations and personal details, which will affect Inesita's husband's confidentiality.

From: *Email deleted*

Sent: 08 March 2004 22:09:21

To: dina de sousa (*my email deleted*)

Hola Dina:

Espero que estes bien al igual que los dos charangueros (padre e hijo) ,disculpa si no te haya escrito por algun tiempo ,lo que pasa es que he estado muy ocupado con eso del viaje, estoy en *location deleted*, ademas de saludarlos te estoy escribiendo para ver si me puedes ayudar ,o nos puedes ayudar ,lo que pasa es que a Inesita la situacion alla la tiene un poco desesperada ,y yo quiero ayudarla a salir ,yo no puedo traerla aca porque estoy buscando la manera de poder tener un status primero para luego moverme a otro pais mejor ,eso no se que tiempo me tomara ,lo que te pido es ver si existe la posibilidad de que ella vaya a Inlaterra con uds ,yo pagaria todo lo referente a pasaje etc ,una vez alla ver como se le consigue un trabajoto para que pueda sobrevivir ,se que es mu atrevido de mi parte pedirte eso ,pero uds son los que la pueden ayudar y para ella a parte de mi eres su unica esperanza ,Por favor dime si es posible o no ,por supuesto no es para ahora mismo porque yo no tengo \$ para eso ahora ,pero si pueden ayudarla me pongo de lleno para eso ,si puedes mandame tu telefonop para llamarlos desde aqui.

bueno es todo por ahora ,un beso

Name

Translation

Hi Dina:

I hope you are well as well as the two *charangueros* (father and son), sorry for not having written for a while but I have been very busy with the trip. I am in *location deleted*,

besides greeting you I am writing to see if you can help me, or help us rather. The problem is that Inesita is a bit desperate with the situation over there [Cuba], and I want to help her get out, I cannot bring her here because I am trying to get a [more stable] status first so that I can then move to a better country. I don't know how long this is going to take me. What I am asking you is if there is the possibility that she [Inesita] could go to England with you. I would pay for her ticket, etc. Once there [England] if you could see how she could get a job so that she can get by. I know that I am being a bit bold asking you this but you are the people that can help her and in her view apart from me, you are her only hope. Please tell me if this is possible or not. Surely this won't be for now as I do not have \$ for this right now, but if you can help her, I will work on this. If you can send me your telephone number so that I can call you from here.

Well that's all for now, Kisses

Name

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