ACADEMIC ARTICLE

‘AN UNRIVALLED PARADISE’: THE PRODUCTION OF DIFFERENCE IN THE CUBAN MINISTRY OF TOURISM’S *AUTÉNTICA CUBA*

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Abstract

Utilising an interdisciplinary methodology that draws from cultural studies and critical tourism studies, this article examines the production of difference at the intersection of hedonism and revolution in the Cuban Ministry of Tourism’s international campaign, *Auténtica Cuba*. I analyse how the campaign’s feature film, *Auténtica Cuba*, carefully crafts a narrative of authenticity in its construction of the island as ‘an unrivalled paradise’. I pay close attention to how the production, commodification and marketing of Cuban difference for tourist consumption is contested and perpetuated, especially as difference is embodied by Afro-Cubans in the film. I conclude by considering whether the campaign provides what Stuart Hall terms, effective translation, in its aims to challenge the gendered, racialised and sexualised constructions of Cuba and Cubans as objects for tourist consumption. As tourism shapes and is shaped by neocolonial discourses of difference, this work is timely as – in light of the speculation about future transformations on the island – it considers the implications of the state’s renewed framing of the expansion of tourism development as central to the work of the revolution.

Keywords: Cuban difference, Afro-Cubans, tourism, paradise, revolution

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'I invite you to get to know an unrivalled paradise', boast the lyrics to one of the songs that accompany the feature promotional film for the Cuban Ministry of Tourism's marketing campaign, *Auténtica Cuba*, which has been successfully promoting international tourism to the island since 2010.[2] The campaign's construction of Cuba as an incomparable paradise perpetuates discourses that distinguish the island as a commodity in the global capitalist market of tourism. Notably differentiated as the 'Pearl of the Antilles', 'Holiday Isle of the Tropics' and 'Land of Romance', Cuba was effectively sold to foreign tourists, mainly from the United States (US), as *paradise* through graphic advertisements that drew on colonial imagery of the land and its people since the 1930s.[3] While international tourism to the island was halted with the triumph of the revolution in 1959 as 'the island no longer was pleasurable to visit' (Schwartz 1999: 203), Cuba did not completely lose its place as a commodity in the global capitalist market. Due to several historical and economic processes, it acquired new meanings as a 'socialist utopia', 'forbidden fruit' and 'a place stuck in time'.[4] Foreign leisure travel was reintroduced decades later as the state reinstated a formal tourism industry via the formation of the *Ministerio de Turismo* (MINTUR) in 1994 as a means for economic survival amidst what Fidel Castro termed, the Special Period in Times of Peace (Pérez 2011). The reintroduction of foreign tourism simultaneously brought great economic gains and adverse social consequences, such as a notable resurgence of sex work and the perpetuation of racialised social inequalities.[5] This highlights a key conundrum for the Cuban state: how to promote tourism for increased economic profit while regulating the

2 All translations are the author's own.

3 See, for example, the travel advertisements included in Levi and Heller (2002). Written accounts in travel guides also facilitated the commodification of the island during the first half of the twentieth century as in these, 'Cuba became a smiling, luxuriant tropical land where romance, beautiful women, soft music-filled nights, and the enchantments of Spanish culture awaited visitors' (Schwartz 1999: xxi). Pérez aptly notes that since the mid-1800s, 'Cuba entered the North American imagination as the "tropics" . . . a past in which to pursue undistracted pleasure . . . To be in Cuba was to be transported back to a simpler time' (2008: 22).

4 Most notably, the imposition of the US trade embargo and the loss of its principal trading partner after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. As Schwartz aptly notes, '[e]nforced isolation has enhanced the island's mystique' (1999: 212). Babb adds that since the 1990s, 'tourism has met surprising success in appealing to desires of both pre-revolutionary pleasures and enduring revolutionary culture and politics' (2011: 50).

5 For thorough discussions on the resurgence of tourism, sex work and racialised social inequalities in Cuba since the 1990s, see Allen (2011), Babb (2010), Cabezas (2009), Fernandez (1999), Roland (2013) and Stout (2014).

social and sexual practices that it engenders so as to decrease the exploitation of vulnerable populations in order to remain consistent with the principles of the revolution. As the island continues to rely on tourism for economic subsistence in the twenty-first century, it is no surprise that MINTUR adopted an advertisement campaign in 2010, *Auténtica Cuba*, that aims to simultaneously promote and regulate tourism in Cuba while representing the island as a *different* kind of paradise. The campaign was incredibly successful at selling Cuba to Canadian and European audiences and was renewed in 2015, the year in which US President Barack Obama began to advance diplomatic relations with Cuba. While the current US administration has halted that opening, the prospect of a massive influx of US tourists in the near future looms in the Cuban imaginary.

In this article, I explore how the renewal of *Auténtica Cuba* amidst the steady growth of international tourists and the possibility of a substantial arrival of US tourists to the island underlines the Cuban state's continued efforts to promote tourism on its own terms. As *Auténtica Cuba* aims to both encourage and limit tourist consumption in/of the island, I pay close attention to the tensions that emerge as Cuba is represented as both a hedonistic paradise and a revolutionary paradise in the campaign's homonymously titled promotional film. While the success of *Auténtica Cuba* relies on its ability to sell that audio-visual narrative as an authentic – that is, as a real, raw, or untouched – representation of Cuba, I contend that the campaign's representations are anything but reflective. I explore how meanings are constructed through the film and consider the discourses that (re)produce Cuba as a *different* kind of paradise that appeals to both hedonistic and revolutionary fantasies. I analyse the ways in which Cuban difference is contested and perpetuated through representations of Afro-Cubans that aim to challenge gendered, racialised and sexualised constructions of the island and its people as objects for tourist consumption. Given that, as Stuart Hall (2013a) argues, representation is dialogic, I conclude by considering the campaign's effectiveness at bridging the cultural divide between tourists and locals. I ask, is *Auténtica Cuba* successful at providing what Hall terms as effective 'translation' of Cuban difference (2013a: xxvi)? This analysis of *Auténtica Cuba* is timely given that in spite of the speculations about the forthcoming changes under the presidency of Miguel Díaz-Canel, the state continues to bolster Cuba's place in the capitalist market of global tourism with the aim of distinguishing it as a 'stunning world destination' (Perrottet 2018).[6]

6 Projects such as the continued restoration of *Habana Vieja*, for example, which recently included the inauguration of the 5-star Gran Hotel Manzana Kempinski, aim to set the island apart as a premiere destination. For an overview of the restoration projects headed by Havana's renowned historian, Eusebio Leal, see Perrottet (2018).

Representing Cuban Authenticity at the Intersection of Hedonism and Revolution

Auténtica Cuba is one of four principal tourism campaigns currently active, each deploying different strategies to appeal to diverse markets (Ferraris 2017).[7] It is composed of 'one six-minute film, three 30-second TV commercial spots as well as a separate print and web campaign' (Kauremszky 2010). I focus my analyses on the film as its carefully crafted narrative presents the full scope of the implications and tensions that emerge in the campaign's process of commodifying and marketing Cuban difference for foreign consumption. The central premise of *Auténtica Cuba*, starting with its title, is that its showcasing of Cuba as a *different* kind of paradise – as *more* than sun, sand and sea – is the *authentic* representation of the island.[8] Developed by Brandworks International, Inc., a Canadian marketing and advertising company, *Auténtica Cuba* was inspired by 'a phrase from a Lonely Planet Cuba Travel Survival Kit: "This is one of the last truly unspoiled countries"' (Kauremszky 2010). The campaign's claim that it showcases an 'unspoiled and untouched' (Raffaele 2010) Cuba taps into the quest for authenticity that, according to Dean MacCannell (2013), motivates all tourists. By claiming to unveil *hidden* aspects of the island, *Auténtica Cuba* constructs its representations as 'the real' and activates an 'anticipation . . . of intense pleasures' that, John Urry and Jonas Larsen contend, is central to the tourist experience (2012: 4). As the campaign simultaneously produces a set of meanings and creates a series of expectations about Cuba that reify the ordinary-extraordinary binary that sustains tourism (Urry and Larsen 2012), it enables the tourist to see a fantasy. While this reproduces and is produced by hegemonic discourses that distinguish the Caribbean as 'fantasy islands' (O'Connell Davidson and Sanchez Taylor 1999), the campaign seeks to set Cuba apart in the region by presenting 'intimate, (ostensibly) unposed scenes of everyday Cuban life . . . as a form of competitive difference' (Ogden 2018: 79). *Auténtica Cuba* constructs specific meanings of the island, drawing on discourses of Cuban exceptionalism centred on its specific socio-political history, that reproduce difference each time a claim

7 The other three campaigns are: *Ciudad Maravilla, Herencia Cultural y Diversidad Turística*, and *La Vives la Amas* (Ferraris 2017).

8 Brandworks' Michael Clancy asserted that with the campaign, he wanted tourists to see that in Cuba, 'Beyond the beach, there is so much there' (Raffaele 2010). It is important to note the placement of the adjective, *auténtica*, in the title of the campaign. In Spanish, when descriptive adjectives are placed before a noun, they add emphasis to the quality that is being ascribed to it. By placing *auténtica* before Cuba, the campaign is highlighting that authenticity is an *essential* quality of Cuba.

to authenticity is made. The campaign constitutes and is composed of signs through which the tourist gaze, Urry and Larsen (2012) argue, orders, classifies and shapes the world. This is key since the success of a tourism campaign rests upon its appeal to the tourist gaze and tourists' desires for a pleasurable, consequence-free getaway from the purported mundane monotony of their everyday lives in the Global North (Cabezas 2008; Urry and Larsen 2012).

As the tourist gaze mediates encounters between tourists and the places, people and things they will experience in 'paradise' before even embarking on their journey (Urry and Larsen 2012), tourism advertisements stand out as a means through which that socially constructed way of seeing is sustained. Tourism advertisements constitute 'discursive domains which set parameters around the presentation of particular social and cultural bodies' (Pritchard and Morgan 2007: 158). While Hall explains that, '[a]dvertising was one means by which the imperial project was given visual form in a popular medium' (2013b: 229), Nigel Morgan asserts that in the imagery of tourism promotion, 'the echoes of tourism's colonial antecedents are palpable – endorsing Lévi-Strauss's (2001) famous description of tourism as the child of imperialism' (Morgan 2004: 177). As tourism today continues to be shaped by 'the asymmetrical distribution of power and economic resources between former colonies and their colonizers' (Cabezas 2008: 23), tourism advertisements generally activate and reproduce neocolonial discourses that perpetuate the Othering of local cultures, peoples and places by reinforcing racialised, gendered and sexualised difference (Alexander 2005; Morgan and Pritchard 2018; Patil 2011). The tourist gaze thus stands out as 'a neocolonial tourist gaze' (Schoonover and Galt 2016). Keenly aware of the neocolonial character of tourist expansion in the Global South, MINTUR frames *Auténtica Cuba* as a different type of campaign, emphasising its 'singularity' – or exceptional character – , as well as that of the island, as a strategic marketing tactic aimed to set it apart from other Caribbean destinations (Odgen 2018: 82). Nonetheless, as I argue in the following sections, by conceptualising authenticity as its brand, *Auténtica Cuba* still (re)produces difference in problematic ways as it aims to convincingly sell the island and facilitate its circulation as a commodity for tourist consumption in the global capitalist market. According to Dunja Fehimović and Rebecca Odgen, a brand comprises, 'an identity deliberately (re) defined according to the principle of competition and strategically (re)oriented toward the market' (2018: 3–4). With *Auténtica Cuba*, MINTUR treads a fine line as it seeks to brand the island within what the Minister of Tourism describes as, 'the work of the Revolution . . . a touristic, cultural project' (Rubio A. 2018), without reproducing colonial patterns of racist degradation of Cuban difference. As tourism constitutes a neocolonial expansion (Cabezas 2008; Nash 1989; Puar 2002) that the Cuban state opposes, the production of difference in the

campaign is marked by a set of tensions that emerge as the island is represented at the intersection of hedonism and revolution in its feature film, *Auténtica Cuba*.

The film carefully weaves a series of images that produce a set of meanings – at times competing and conflicting – that, on one level, successfully appeal to the neocolonial tourist gaze by presenting expected images that differentiate and, thereby, *authenticate* Cuba as a hedonistic paradise. In this way, the film expands on the colonial discourse of tourism before the revolution when, as Rosalie Schwartz argues, 'The tourist industry sold pleasure – by definition, enjoyment, satisfaction, gratification, or delight' (1999: xxi). The neocolonial tourist gaze is sustained as the film showcases what appear to be untouched landscapes, a mixture of the countryside and beaches, so untouched that some of the images seem desolate, standing still in time. Yet, the time the camera spends over each location is too short for one to ponder why the locations appear as still, uninhabited spaces. Instead, the focus of the shots is on the careful construction of the idea that Cuba constitutes an untouched paradise that is ready for tourist exploration. What is most notable, however, is not the production of Cuba as yet another paradise-land in the Caribbean, but specifically as a *different* kind of paradise. That difference is constructed as the film builds on discourses that frame Cuba as a place 'stuck in the past', unspoiled, to both benefit from them, by focusing on portraying desolate but beautiful places, as well as to attempt to subvert them, by showcasing unexpected shots of healthy-looking, smiling Cubans engaged in daily activities – dancing, playing, working – with one another.[9] In this way, the film follows a traditional tourism advertisement script, showing happy, non-threatening locals to be consumed by the tourist gaze via their construction as Others, and simultaneously aims to break from that commodification of locals. The film carefully portrays Cubans carrying out various activities that are staged separately from its representations of international, White-presenting, tourists enjoying leisurely activities. This separation constructs Cuban difference as it challenges the tourist gaze by breaking from the expected representation of human exchange in tourism promotional advertisements to the Caribbean where locals are often portrayed catering to tourists, replicating colonial relations of servitude that perpetuate an unequal distribution of power

9 This intentionally quotidian representation of local Cubans rejects the notion that the film reproduces a 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell 2013) for the tourist gaze, thus bolstering the notion that Cuban authenticity is *different* as it is in fact 'real'. As Ogden argues, '[b]y foregrounding intimate settings and unposed portraits of "ordinary" Cubans . . . the campaign engages with a common perception of the population as the gatekeepers to what Cuba is *really like*' (2018: 85).

between tourists and locals. The film's production of conflicting meanings to construct Cuba as a hedonistic paradise while also limiting the definition of that hedonism for the tourist – mainly by rejecting the representation of Cubans as objects for tourist consumption – becomes further evident in the lyrics to the four songs that comprise the film's soundtrack.[10]

Tensions emerge within the first eighteen seconds of the film as a montage of purportedly reflective images are paired with a song whose opening lyrics produce Cubans as subjects with sociopolitical agency, something deeply at odds with the construct of a hedonistic paradise. While the tourist gaze is appeased visually with expected images of tourists on the beach, seemingly untouched landscapes, and several smiling, non-threatening Cubans, and musically with upbeat and fast paced timba rhythms, several harmonious Cuban voices sing, 'Cuba, come over and come, come to *my* Cuba . . . *I* invite you' (Ministerio 2010; emphasis mine). That the film begins with an upbeat chorus of Cuban voices expressing affirmative commands in the singular first-person form, noting that Cuba belongs to them, is significant as it produces and situates the agency of those voices as rooted in the collective imagined community of the revolution. This production of Cuban agency becomes a marker of difference – and, by extension, of authenticity – as it signals a significant departure from traditional tourism campaigns that strip locals of any agency they may have over themselves or their country and establishes the symbolic efforts of the state to subvert the workings of tourism given the asymmetries of power that predominantly distinguish locals from tourists in the Caribbean. While the campaign – and by extension the state – intends to sell the island as a tourist destination in a capitalist market, it does not aim to sell Cubans as objects for tourist consumption. Instead, it produces Cuban authenticity, from the start, as rooted in the recognition of Cubans as subjects with agency.

Furthermore, the lyrics to the second song are distinctive in their aim to establish a relationship of mutuality between the foreign tourist and the local Cuban. 'Come, visiting *friend*', sings a collective of Cuban voices in the style of rumba, 'through her streets so you can ascend, get to know this paradise that is *our* beautiful Cuba' (Ministerio 2010; emphasis mine). Through the assertive use of 'our' to refer to the island, these lyrics reframe it not as an object for sale for tourist consumption but rather as a place that *belongs* to the Cuban people. By interpellating the tourist as a 'friend', the collective Cuban voices reject the uneven power relations that distinguish tourists from locals in the Caribbean.

10 The four songs that serve as the film's soundtrack were composed for the campaign by local Cuban artists and are intended to stand out as a marker of authenticity and 'create a "sensory, experiential experience"' (Raffaele 2010).

This is significant given the commodification of social relationships that marks Cuban tourism (Babb 2010). The use of the term 'friend' signals an attempt to reframe the narrative of tourism, twenty years after its reintroduction to the island, as an *amicable* exchange between *equals*. It is this relationship of mutuality, the film contends, that marks a visit to Cuba as a potentially transformative experience for the tourist beyond the expected benefits of rest and restoration. The lyrics establish that as tourists 'get to know paradise', their stay in Cuba will not be an exclusively leisurely experience but will rather be a transformative social experience, the details of which are outlined in the lyrics to the third and fourth songs of the soundtrack. These songs therefore are more than Cuban sounds to authenticate the purported reflective nature of the images shown. Instead, they construct a narrative intended to serve as a manual for *how* to experience Cuba *authentically* by engaging in a *different* type of tourism in 'an unrivalled paradise'.

The film's production of difference is thus twofold; on the one hand constituting it as authenticity, and on the other deploying it to reframe tourists' privileged position and regulate their conduct. These attempts to regulate both the production of meanings of Cuba and the attitudes and conduct of tourists toward the island highlight the state's awareness of the importance of cultural representation to shape and structure national narratives locally and globally (Lossio Chávez 2018; Thompson 1997). Accordingly, through the implicit references to the revolution in the third song, the film builds on its initial production of tourists as friends. Laughter, light, sincerity, serenity and hope, contend the lyrics, are a few of the immaterial aspects of the experiences that await the tourist-friend in Cuba. Soothing guitar sounds accompany images of white sand and clear water beaches, as well as of tourists enjoying leisurely activities – windsurfing, scuba diving, sailing on a yacht, playing on the shore – in those pristine blue and green paradise settings. Nonetheless, the lyrics that accompany that sequence of images, reject the notion that Cuba is simply 'beach, colour and palm trees' and instead focus on what *truly* defines it as different (Ministerio 2010). The film continues to subtly reject the neocolonial tourist gaze as the lyrics contend that what makes Cuba a *real* paradise is that which comprises a 'people within': 'the best of Cuba'. These lyrics establish references to immaterial but tangible aspects of the island that the film claims distinguish it from other places and set it apart as more than a tourist destination. 'A child's laughter that travels in the wind, that's Cuba', a tranquil Cuban voice lulls accompanied by calming acoustic guitar strumming. Seconds later, the voice adds that Cuba is, 'An open hand and a sincere embrace, the serene refuge to any storm, the hope that has been growing, a tender soul upon which to rest'. These lyrics implicitly reference and perpetuate the discourse of the state that juxtaposes the

well-being of the Cuban people since the revolution with the oppression they experienced before 1959. The last song sustains that production of difference, asserting that what makes Cuba *truly* different is 'the face of its people who smile differently', which is framed as a product of the revolution. In this way, *Auténtica Cuba* builds upon and challenges the construction of the island as a hedonistic paradise by simultaneously producing Cuba as a revolutionary paradise. However, this construction of paradise at the crossroads of hedonism and revolution produces conflicting and competing meanings.

Auténtica Cuba attempts to reconcile those tensions through explicit references to the revolution in the film's last song. Yet these conflicts only become more apparent, and perhaps irreconcilable, as a Cuban voice welcomingly sings, 'I invite you to get to know an unrivalled paradise' (Ministerio 2010). The voice invites the tourist to engage in a transformative experience by learning about Cuba's history and traditions, anchored in the revolution, beyond the legends of pirates and corsairs. The lyrics continue alluding to the revolution through references to its purported immaterial products, such as Cuba's heart and its children's laughter. Yet, they also establish explicit references as the voice adds, 'I will also invite you to immerse yourself in the Moncada, the Sierra, Santa Clara, the Plaza with Martí'.[11] By signalling specific geographic and historical markers of the revolution, these lyrics aim to authenticate Cuba as a revolutionary paradise and underscore the specific encounters that will make a visit to the island transformative. The Moncada Barracks, the Sierra Maestra, the city of Santa Clara and Plaza de la Revolución with its monument to José Martí become symbols intended to remind the tourist that the traditional framework of tourism does not apply in Cuba because whereas the island may appear to be a hedonistic paradise, given its sun, sand and sea, it is *in fact* a revolutionary paradise. Although those markers of the revolution are intended to delineate the limits of the hedonistic paradise, they become commodified as their inclusion in a campaign aimed to sell Cuba in a capitalist

11 These four places are important points of reference within the Cuban revolutionary imaginary. The 1953 attack on the Moncada Military Barracks has historically served as a symbolic marker of the start of the 26 July Movement that culminated in the triumph of the revolution. The Sierra Maestra is the site where the revolutionaries expanded the 26 July Movement upon returning to Cuba in 1956. Santa Clara is the site where the last armed battle between the revolutionary army and Batista's troops took place in December 1958. The Plaza de la Revolución is a square located in Havana that serves as an important site for public political gatherings. There is a monument and museum that pays homage to the national hero, José Martí, on the northern side of the Plaza.

market transforms them into separate objects for tourist consumption. Consequently, these symbols produce the experience of the revolution itself as another tourist commodity.

As the last song reframes tourism as a peaceful homecoming, *Auténtica Cuba* further aims to resolve the conflicts between hedonism and revolution. A Cuban voice passionately declares, 'And when my doves welcome you in my sea, you'll realise the peace of my smile, and you'll understand why my culture is so lively, my great sports feats, my health, my education' (Ministerio 2010). Symbols of freedom abound as these lyrics build on state discourse by positing that a visit to the island will be transformative because it will provide the tourist with an understanding of Cuban difference that is rooted in *authentic* products of the revolution: peace, happiness, a rich culture, and accomplishments in health, education and sports. The lyrics expand on the metaphor of tourism as an enthusiastic and transformative homecoming as a Cuban voice adds, 'and you'll understand why in addition to Varadero, you're welcomed by an entire people with Fidel and with Ché'. While these lyrics fall in line with the official aims of tourism promotion to the island of constructing Cuba as more than a beach destination, they also problematically frame Fidel Castro and Ernesto 'Ché' Guevara as markers of difference and, by extension, of the authenticity of the film's representation of a revolutionary paradise. On the one hand, the lyrics reproduce the official discourse of the state in placing Castro and Guevara within the imagined community, *el pueblo*, of the revolution. The notion that both will welcome the tourist to the island signals the spirit and legacy of the revolution, activating the codes of signification of state discourse that construct its founding figures as still actively present in the revolutionary process.[12] While grouping the late Guevara and the then-alive Castro with the Cuban people situates them in the present as markers of authenticity, this deployment of historical figures supports Jonathan Culler's observation that 'authenticity has been lost and exists only in the past' (1990: 160). This underlines the film's representation of authenticity as constructed rather than reflective given the impossibility of a physical manifestation of Guevara and Castro to welcome tourists to the island.[13] Although these references are intended to construct the island as a revolutionary paradise, they instead produce Castro and Guevara as commodities for tourist consumption.[14]

12 This is evidenced, for example, in the murals of Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, as well as the statue of Martí, in Plaza de la Revolución.

13 Guevara was murdered in 1967 and Castro died in 2016. While Castro was alive during the first six years of the *Auténtica Cuba* campaign, he retired as prime minister in 2008 due to illness and it was highly unlikely that he would be found leisurely welcoming tourists to the island.

Consequently, this reveals the film's careful staging of signs and deployment of codes of signification to produce Cuba as a revolutionary paradise.

Afro-Cubans in Paradise: Reframing and (Re)producing Racialised Difference

The tensions that emerge when participating in the global capitalist market of tourism while attempting to subvert its structures and rewrite its rules are further highlighted through the deployment of images of Afro-Cubans in *Auténtica Cuba*. As the film challenges the neocolonial tourist gaze by portraying Cubans, most notably Afro-descendants, as subjects with agency, not objects for consumption, it marks a significant departure from tourism advertisements for other Caribbean nations that reproduce controlling images of locals as exotic and erotic Others, as well as from advertisements circulated by the Cuban Tourist Commission before 1959.[15] The latter perpetuated, in Hall's terms, a 'racialized regime of representation' (2013b: 237) that routinely represented Afro-Cubans as bodies linked to the land, barbarous yet non-threatening, and as bearers of culture: festive, entertaining, exotic Others. For example, many of the tourism advertisements designed by the prominent Cuban artist, Conrado Massaguer, often juxtapose White, affluent tourists and local Cubans of colour, dressed as mambo dancers or *guajiros* on and off stage.[16] During the 1930s–1950s, Massaguer's advertisements, as well as those of other Cuban artists, often delineated a clear spatial and social separation between tourists and locals. This separation is not surprising since, 'Tourism thrives on the delicate balance of difference between Us and Them' (Roland 2013: 402). In those advertisements, tourists were represented as subjects, leisurely gazing at the Other, the Cuban object for tourist consumption. The advertisements catered to the colonial gaze and perpetuated controlling images of Afro-Cubans as uncivilised, festive non-subjects. *Auténtica Cuba* marks a significant departure from pre-revolutionary tourism advertisements as its separation of locals and tourists rejects the objectification of Cubans for tourist consumption by challenging

14 The resurgence of tourism during the Special Period perpetuated the capitalist commodification of Guevara, whose image now answers to the capitalist laws of supply and demand. T-shirts and other souvenirs bearing his image, most notably reproductions of Alberto Korda's 'Guerrillero heroíco', can be found for purchase throughout the island.

15 I use the term, 'controlling images', drawing on Patricia Hill Collins's theorisations of these as negative, denigrating racialised and sexualised images of African American women whose hegemonic circulation works to sustain their oppression (1991).

16 See, for example, Massaguer's 1939 Vogue advertisement, 'Cuba' (Levi and Heller 2002: 28).

the reproduction of neocolonial controlling images of Afro-Cubans. Although the campaign does subvert the production of Cuban difference as a degrading difference, its separation of Cubans and tourists nonetheless still produces Cubans as Others, specifically as it constructs Afro-Cubans as bearers of *cubanía*, or *cubanidad*: the essence of an authentic Cuban culture.

Auténtica Cuba constructs Afro-Cubans as subjects who 'naturally' embody characteristics that generate national pride and, therefore, offer an 'untarnished' glimpse at life in a revolutionary paradise. This is not a new marketing strategy, as culture is most often commodified within the framework of tourism since 'Ethnicity and exotic culture sell' (Schwartz 1999: 78). In Cuba, Afro-Cuban culture first became commodified and marketed as the essence of *cubanía* during the first half of the twentieth century as, 'Tourism promoters exalted sensual and mystical qualities of Afro-Cubans for purposes of profit, and foreigners saw Cuba as an erotic, exotic island devoted to their pleasure and entertainment' (Schwartz 1999: 87). While *Auténtica Cuba* attempts to break those patterns of eroticisation and exoticisation, its representations of Afro-Cubans are still problematic as they produce difference by coding them as signifiers of an authentic Cuban culture. The film features Cuban music with notable influences or origins in Afro-Cuban culture, ranging from rumba to salsa to timba, as examples of manifestations of *cubanía*. As Afro-Cubans are showcased as the lively generators of those beats and sounds in scenes ranging from the famous jazz musician, Chucho Valdés, in studio (00:03:40–00:03:42), to Afro-Cuban musicians playing the conga and other *tambores* on the street (00:03:04–00:03:19), to Afro-Cuban couples leisurely dancing in a barbershop (00:04:01–00:04:04) and Afro-Cuban rumba performers at Callejón de Hamel in Havana (00:04:52–00:04:55), they are presented as authentic producers of culture and, thereby, as embodiments of *cubanía*.[17] While these scenes signal a national pride in *cubanía*, as Valdés himself contends that, 'nuestra música es nuestra identidad' (Fernández 2016: 120), the representation of Afro-Cubans as bearers of culture is nonetheless troublesome as it validates the stereotype that Afro-Cubans are *innately* musically talented. This notion is further expanded as Afro-Cubans are represented in relation to the island's national sport: baseball. The end of the film activates and sustains discourses of nationalism that position baseball as one of the premiere symbols of *cubanía*.[18] The culminating sequence of scenes presents Cubans cheering happily and enthusiastically at a baseball game as the famous outfielder, Frederich Cepeda

17 All references to specific passages in the film, *Auténtica Cuba* (Ministerio 2010), cited parenthetically utilise a hours:minutes:seconds format.

18 For an overview of the intersections of *cubanía* and baseball, see Carter (2008), Gmelch (2006) and Pérez (2008).

Cruz, catches the ball (00:06:01–00:06:15). As Afro-Cubans are carefully represented at the centre of that cheerful, collective narrative, they become signifiers of national cohesion and pride. Thus the film's production of *cubanía* simultaneously resists and perpetuates the production of Cuban difference through the bodies of Afro-Cubans. In spite of these positive, celebratory representations, the film nevertheless perpetuates the production of Afro-Cubans as difference by framing them as 'the desirable Other' (Aitchison 2001: 139).

While *Auténtica Cuba* mainly produces racialised difference through images of adults, its construction of *cubanía* through representations of Afro-Cuban children is also significant. The scenes representing a collective national pride at the baseball game at the film's conclusion are interwoven with scenes of young boys, mostly Afro-Cubans, using a wooden stick to play a game of baseball on the streets of their neighbourhood. In this way, the devotion to baseball and its resulting national pride and cohesion are represented as qualities that are inherent to Cubans from a young age. As Afro-Cuban boys are portrayed as peaceful, free and happy, these images support the state discourse that Cuban children are *different* and, in turn, validate the campaign's production of a revolutionary paradise.[19] The film carefully represents Afro-Cuban children safely and happily in school and in leisurely settings. Of particular significance is the focus on a group of Afro-Cuban girls dressed in their school uniforms, including the blue handkerchiefs that distinguish them as *pioneras*, running happily and carefree in front of the Moncada Barracks, now the *Ciudad escolar 26 de julio* in Santiago de Cuba (00:04:30–00:04:32).[20] While this representation of Afro-Cuban girls is intended to validate state discourse that Cuban children are not marginal subjects, the film still produces them as the Other for tourist consumption as their difference is one of the markers of Cuban authenticity. The focus on happiness embodied by the boys playing baseball on the street and the girls running in front of the school complements the representations of happy tourists and locals in the film. Happiness comes full circle as an authentic representation of the island, as adults' happiness is presented as being rooted in their childhood. As that further differentiates Cuba as revolutionary paradise, the film conveys to tourists that their visit to the island will also result in them experiencing joy. This is significant for, as Schwartz argues, 'tourism's fortunes depend on [the circulation of] positive images and expectations of relaxation and good times' (1999: 206). Hence, the film's efforts to reframe Afro-Cubans within a revolutionary paradise nonetheless still reproduce racialised difference.

19 For a discussion on 'the politics of childhood' within the revolution, see Casavantes Bradford (2014).

20 *Pioneras/os* is a term that denotes Cuban children as members of the *José Martí Pioneers Organisation*.

Contesting/Showcasing the Return of the Hypersexualised *Mulata*?

Auténtica Cuba highlights the state's continued efforts to reject the neocolonial controlling image of the erotic, exotic, hypersexualised Afro-Cuban woman as an object for tourist consumption. When the revolution triumphed, it rejected that as well as other colonial controlling images and sought to create a different narrative about Cuba and Cuban women by circulating new images associated with its socio-political processes. While a majority of those images are photographs taken most notably by Raúl Corrales, Alberto Korda and Osvaldo Salas and present a masculinist narrative featuring the *barbudos*, they also underscore the participation of women in, for example, the Revolutionary Army and the Literacy Campaign of 1961. Those photographs of Afro-Cuban women are no longer aimed to lure the tourist gaze with images of hypersexualised bodies. Instead they aim to create new meanings about Cuban women by representing them as subjects with socio-political agency within the revolutionary project. When the state opened the island to international tourism amidst the Special Period, it explicitly stated it would not signal a return to the old order of tourism (Castro 1994). Yet, tourism has had adverse effects on the social fabric of the nation and on the lives of Afro-Cuban women. As sex work resurged, the image of the *jinetera* became widespread and synonymous with the Afro-Cuban woman, specifically the hypersexualised *mulata*, constructed once again as readily available for sexual consumption (Cabezas 2009; Daigle 2015; Fernandez 1999).[21] While sex work remains steadily associated with tourism on the island, *Auténtica Cuba* highlights the state's efforts to remind the viewer that while international tourism is an economic necessity, sex work is not a condoned activity.[22] This is best exemplified in the careful placement of Afro-Cuban women in the film.

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21 *Mulatas* are mixed race women of African, Indigenous, and European descent. However, given that race in Cuba is defined in relation to a continuum of phenotypes and skin colour from blackness to whiteness (Fernandez 1999; Roland 2013), *mulatas* are commonly classified as Afro-Cuban women. For a history of the *mulata* in Cuba, see Blanco Borelli (2016) and Daigle (2015).

22 Schwartz notes that sex work on the island today 'has little in common with Cuba's prerevolutionary institutionalized sex shows and brothels', yet 'purchased sex is troublesome for a government that has spent decades inculcating the values of non-exploitation of fellow humans and gender parity' (1999: 211). For an overview of the racialised and sexualised dimensions of sex work in relation to tourism in Cuba since the Special Period, see Allen (2011), Cabezas (2009), Fernandez (1999) and Stout (2014).

The image of the hypersexualised *mulata* is mostly absent from the narrative about Cuba created by *Auténtica Cuba*. However, a series of scenes depicting Afro-Cuban women during the last minute of the film highlight the tensions inherent in trying to sell Cuba as paradise without hypersexualising Afro-Cuban women directly while still appeasing the tourist gaze that expects racialised, gendered and sexualised images. As the camera focuses on the back side of an Afro-Cuban woman's nearly nude body, highlighting her rear during a performance at the Cabaret Tropicana (00:05:27–00:05:29), it produces Cuban difference by activating colonial discourses that construct racialised and sexualised distinctions between the barbarous and the civilised. That scene is followed by the appearance of other Afro-Cuban women dressed in jewelled, skimpy and extravagant carnival costumes that highlight their curves (00:05:30–00:05:31). Although the film attempts to carefully resist the commodification of Cubans as objects for tourist consumption, those scenes featuring Afro-Cuban women construct them as symbols of sensuality for tourist consumption. They perpetuate gendered, racialised and sexualised constructions of Afro-Cuban women as erotic and exotic Others and, in turn, produce them as bodies for sexual consumption. It is important to note that these scenes represent performances at the Cabaret Tropicana. According to Ruben Jimenez, director of the Cuba Tourist Board, the campaign 'shows off Cuba's unique identity and highlights the country's strengths' (Raffaele 2010). As professional dancers, the Afro-Cuban women are markers of one of the revolution's strengths: its cultural productions. While showcasing their bodies on stage falls within the scope of the film's construction of Cuba as a revolutionary paradise, that cultural framework is likely only understood by an informed viewer who can distinguish the women's presence on stage as a performance. For tourists seeking to experience the island as a hedonistic paradise, that representation of Afro-Cuban women on stage, albeit brief, meets their expectations of sun, sand, sea *and* sex.

The – perhaps irreconcilable – conflicts that emerge in *Auténtica Cuba* are further accentuated as it intends to resist the fetishisation of Afro-Cuban women. This is highlighted as the cabaret scenes are carefully framed by scenes of Cuban women off stage. Immediately after the cabaret performers appear, the camera shifts to a scene featuring women playing in the National Symphony Orchestra (00:05:32–00:05:34). The scene constructs women as artists whose bodies are desexualised as the shot first focuses on the top half of the backs of mostly White and fair-skinned women playing instruments, and then frames them within the space of the Orchestra, highlighting the revolution's cultural projects. Equally important are two scenes that precede the cabaret scenes. One features a group of Cuban girls, many of Afro-Cuban descent, analysed in the previous section (00:04:30–00:04:32). The shot frames their gleeful movement

in front of a yellow and white building on which the message, '*26 CIUDAD ESCOLAR 26 DE JULIO*', is inscribed. That backdrop of the Moncada Barracks that Castro converted to a school in 1960 explicitly situates the girls and their education as symbols of the past, present and future of the revolution (Riquenes Cutiño 2010). Similarly, the scene that immediately precedes the cabaret scenes focuses on a young Afro-Cuban girl sitting leisurely on her mother's lap in a balcony, smiling happily as she looks directly at the camera (00:05:24–00:05:25). As these three scenes frame the images of the Afro-Cuban women in the cabaret, they constitute an attempt to produce Cuban women as socio-political agents and resist their objectification and sexual commodification. This endeavour is evident given that the scenes featuring the Afro-Cuban girls and cabaret scenes are accompanied by the song that references specific geographic and historical markers of the revolution. The lyrics, which are analysed above, constitute the only explicit references to the revolution in the film's four songs. It is no coincidence that these lyrics accompany the specific moments when the images of the hypersexualised *mulata* appear on screen, as if to attempt to contrast or control the circulation of that image by reminding the viewer of the context of the revolution where sex work and sex tourism are not condoned. Together, the five scenes underscore the conflicts present in the film as it rejects and (re)produces racialised, sexualised and gendered difference through its representations of Afro-Cuban women. They also exemplify the contradictions MINTUR attempts to reconcile as it aims to sell Cuba differently – by remaining consistent with the principles of the revolution – and successfully – by meeting the market demands to produce/consume bodies of colour as erotic and exotic desirable Others.

Producing Cuban Difference beyond Paradise

The competing meanings that *Auténtica Cuba* produces as it represents the island as 'an unrivalled paradise' are further complicated as two Afro-Cuban women in carnival attire appear again toward the end of the film. The camera focuses in on them during a performance as part of a montage of scenes that feature Afro-Cubans dancing and playing music in different entertainment settings, such as a plaza, a stadium, a bar and a nightclub (00:05:41–00:05:59). As the two Afro-Cuban women performers reappear in the film (00:05:55–00:05:57), they are situated out of the careful framing of scenes previously analysed. The two simply appear as smiling, flirtatious Afro-Cuban women dancing in festive, exotic clothing. They appear as erotic markers of Cuban difference for visual and sexual consumption. Their inclusion in the montage, perhaps inadvertently, reproduces the hypersexualised image of the *mulata* that, even if

briefly, appeases the neocolonial tourist gaze. This (re)production of the Afro-Cuban woman as an erotic, exotic Other escapes the efforts of the state to control the meanings produced by the campaign. The limitations of the efforts of the campaign, and by extension of MINTUR, to construct Cuba as different by rejecting the reproduction of controlling images of Afro-Cuban women, specifically, and the neocolonial Othering of Cubans, in general, while still problematically rooting authenticity as difference produced through the bodies of Afro-Cubans thus becomes evident.

It is paramount then to explore the degree to which *Auténtica Cuba* provides effective 'translation' in its production of meanings about Cuban difference. According to Hall, 'Meaning is a dialogue – always only partially understood, always an unequal exchange' (2013a: xx). Therefore, in order for the discourses the campaign seeks to activate to successfully construct Cuba as a hedonistic *and* revolutionary paradise, the film needs to facilitate an 'effective exchange – a process of *translation*' that will bridge the cultural divide between tourists and Cubans (2013a: xxvi). It is important to consider if the potential tourist who views the advertisement will, on the one hand, be proficient enough in Spanish to understand the song lyrics that aim to distinguish the island as a revolutionary paradise, and, on the other, be able to recognise that the Afro-Cuban women performers appear within the spatial bounds of the Cabaret Tropicana stage and not on the street. Will the viewer understand that the women's flirtatious demeanour is a *performance* and not a marker of their sexual availability for tourist consumption?[23] If the viewer does not understand Spanish enough to grasp the references to the revolution and cannot distinguish the Afro-Cuban women as performers, then the state's efforts to produce Cuba as more than a hedonistic paradise will go by unnoticed. The neocolonial tourist gaze will be perpetuated as what the viewer will take away from the film's representations of Afro-Cubans is that they are, in fact, desirable, sexually available Others and the expectation to visually consume the hypersexualised *mulata* will be met. Whom, then, is the film addressing? Could its message about what constitutes proper behaviour between tourists and locals in a revolutionary paradise be directed at local Cubans who can easily understand the film's meanings and political signifiers? Given the frustrations and complaints of Cubans upon the inequities

23 Though focusing on the commodification of Afro-Brazilian culture, Erica Williams (2013) argues that tourists from the Global North seeking an authentic Afro-cultural experience read cultural performers as sexually available objects. As the neocolonial gaze conflates culture and sex in Brazil as well as Cuba, 'black bodies and black culture are eroticized' in the sexual economies of tourism (Williams 2013: 38).

perpetuated by the tourism industry (Schwartz 1999: 209), it is not surprising that they might also be the target audience for the film's production of Cuba as a paradise at the intersection of hedonism and revolution.[24] After all, as an official product of MINTUR, *Auténtica Cuba* – and the meanings it produces – falls within the scope of the state's efforts to set guidelines for how local Cubans should conduct relations with foreign tourists that do not replicate those of sex tourism that have become the norm in tourist destinations in the Caribbean – including Cuba.

To conclude, it is important to return once more to the film's showcasing of Afro-Cuban women cabaret performers. While the film has been the central focus of analysis of this article, the *Auténtica Cuba* campaign is also composed of posters – print and web advertisements – constituted by single photographs that refer to the film.[25] These posters circulate on the web as well as in cities in Canada and Europe, where they also appear as wrap-around advertisements on cars, buses and trains. Two of those posters feature an image of one of the women included in the Afro-Cuban performers montage. While the montage contains a profile head shot of the woman (00:05:57), the photograph is a half body shot that captures her smiling, looking up into the distance; a few stage lights and the hats of two other performers are slightly discernible behind her. One of the advertisements is accompanied by the caption, 'Enjoy our star-studded nights', placed at the bottom of the advertisement so that the word 'nights' rests below the woman's breasts.[26] The other features the same photograph, zoomed in as a head shot, paired with the *Auténtica Cuba* campaign logo. As these posters circulate the image of the *mulata* outside the bounds of the film, their production of Cuban

24 Whereas the film is intended for international tourism promotion abroad, the campaign is also pervasive on the island. The film and print advertisements are showcased in public spaces like the airport, for example. This highlights the contradictions between the campaign's 'message of intimacy and the government's continued efforts to monitor and regulate host-guest contact in various ways' (Ogden 2018: 90).

25 The photographs for the print and web advertisements were taken by the Canadian photographer, Russell Monk, while the film was being shot. A selection of Monk's work for the *Auténtica Cuba* campaign can be found at www.russellmonk.com/autentica-cuba-1.

26 Below that message set in bold, capitalised font, appears the following text in smaller, sentence case font: 'Mixture of history and music, poetry and passion, adventure and amazing cultural richness. Discover it.' Hedonism and revolution compete through the juxtaposition of history, poetry, and culture on one end, and music, passion, and adventure on the other. Moreover, the text activates the colonial impulses as it invites the tourist to 'discover' the island.

difference indulges the neocolonial tourist gaze.[27] This is further problematised when considering the campaign director's assertion that, 'Each image [of the campaign] was thoughtfully created with the thought in mind: "could I [the tourist] put myself in the picture?"' (Raffaele 2010). How then is the captioned advertisement inviting tourists to put themselves in the picture? Its use of the words 'enjoy' and 'nights' signals an invitation for a nocturnal sexual consumption of the Afro-Cuban woman, producing her as the sexually available, desirable Other. A version of this image also circulates outside the bounds of the campaign on the cover of the *English/Cuban Spanish Phrasebook* by John Rigdon (2016). The photograph is a mirror image, slightly zoomed out to include part of a head shot of another Afro-Cuban woman performer who looks down. Used to authenticate and sell the book, the photograph perpetuates the production of Cuban difference as a commodity for foreign consumption in the capitalist market of tourism. As this use of the image escapes the reach of the campaign and, by extension, the state, it reifies the imaginary of Cuba as a hedonistic paradise and invalidates the fantasy of a revolutionary paradise.

Processes of 'translation' take place as the image of the Afro-Cuban woman is used to produce different meanings about Cuba. However, they are contrary to the state's efforts to position its citizens as social subjects not objects. Given the revolution's simultaneous continued reliance on tourism revenue and commitment to fostering racial and gender equity, can the state adopt an advertisement campaign whose marketing brand effectively sells the island to tourists *without* (re)producing gendered, sexualised and racialised difference? This certainly highlights a challenge as tourism constitutes 'a powerful cultural arena and process that both shapes and is shaped by gendered (re)presentations of places, people, nations and cultures' (Aitchison 2001: 134). The meanings produced by *Auténtica Cuba*, as well as concurrent and future campaigns, are especially relevant for the subjects upon whose bodies difference continues to be constructed as, according to Cuba's Minister of Tourism, the scope of the revolution now entails productively adjoining 'todo el pueblo' – the entirety of the Cuban nation – in the expansion of tourism development on the island (Rubio A. 2018).

27 It is important to underline that, as Sontag argues, 'The point of the image in a commercial poster is to be attractive, often sexually attractive, thereby covertly identifying material acquisitiveness with sexual appetite and subliminally reinforcing the first by appealing to the second' (1999: 203). The advertisements showcasing Afro-Cuban women thus normalise their sexual consumption since in capitalist societies posters not only sell products but also 'perpetuat[e] a social climate in which it is normative to buy' that which they advertise (Sontag 1999: 204).

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