

**Street Hustling, Wanderlust and Two Currencies: Contemporary Transitions  
Within Cuban Socialism**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis seeks to explore the contemporary transitions within Cuban socialism that have been occurring since the re-introduction of international tourism and the implementation of a dual currency system after the fall of the Soviet trading bloc in 1989. Socioeconomic gaps have formed in recent years, as some Cubans have more access to foreign currency than others. In particular, this thesis focuses on *jineterismo* (street hustling) as a means to analyze the transitions that have been occurring such as the growing socioeconomic inequality, racial inequality, the movement away from the ideology of a more moral conscious population, as well as the growing wanderlust within the Cuban youth. A primary finding of this thesis is that *jineterismo* may be an indicator of the changing generational perceptions in regards to the morality of Cuban-foreigner interactions as well as the desire to understand ways of life off of the island. As I suggest in the text, these perceptions are evolving as more and more visitors come to the island every year; causing the Cuban youth to become increasingly used to interacting with foreign visitors on a personal level.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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I would also like to thank the students who experienced Cuba for the first time with me during the Global Seminar in the summer of 2012. I will never forget the memories that all of us shared during those hot and humid six weeks abroad.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Three days into my trip to Cuba, I had gone to Havana Central with 3 other students from my study abroad group. We roamed the streets near the Capitolio (Havana's picturesque capitol building; see figure 1) all the while taking in the sights and enjoying the Caribbean climate. As lunchtime approached, we decided to eat in a small restaurant and were very pleased with the service we received. The man, named Alonso, who helped us to our table, took our order, and delivered our food, was even so kind as to offer a guided tour around the city; promising that he would provide us a glimpse of the 'real Cuba' before taking us to one of his favorite restaurants. He asked us what hotel we were staying at and explained that he would meet us there the following afternoon.



**Figure 1: Looking towards El Capitolio from Havana Central (photo by the author).**

The next day at 1 PM sharp, Alonso arrived and we all ventured to Havana Central to walk through the different streets that everyday Cubans call home. Alonso gave us little

anecdotes about life in Cuba all the while showing us places such as the local butcher, the train station, and the childhood home of Jose Martí<sup>1</sup>. He explained to us that he used to be a police officer but quit that job in order to work in the restaurant where we had met because he could make much more money. A little bit later in the afternoon he took us to his ‘favorite restaurant.’ As we walked in, we were each handed a leather-bound menu. I began to look over the prices, quickly realizing that we were in a restaurant geared towards tourists. Based on my prior readings (Berg 2004; Cabezas 1998; Facio 2000; Fusco 1998; Hodge 2001; Roland unpublished; Roland 2011; Simoni 2008), I got the sense that we were being hustled, and that Alonso was engaging in *jineterismo* (Roland In Progress 2012). I knew that one of the primary ways for a hustler to try to earn currency for consumer items was to take a group of foreigners to a restaurant in order to receive some sort of compensation. In this instance, all of us, including Alonso, enjoyed a very nice meal that was priced at about US\$115<sup>2</sup>.

I had travelled to Cuba in the summer of 2012 in order to take a ‘global seminar’<sup>3</sup> as well as perform research for my undergraduate honor’s thesis. I was interested in studying the effects that tourism has had on Cuban culture and society; specifically the interactions that *jineteros* and other Cubans have with foreigners. After this experience with Alonso, I became more and more interested in the effects that global circulations (such as foreign currency and foreign cultures) have on the Cuban society as well as Cuban socialism. Getting the chance to see *jineterismo* first-hand sparked a great interest in how *jineteros* operate within the changing socialist system.

My interests arose from research that Professor L. Kaifa Roland has performed regarding

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<sup>1</sup> A national hero who dedicated his life to Cuba's independence as well as racial equality for all Cubans (Moore 1997; Roland Lecture 2012)

<sup>2</sup> As I will describe later in the text, this price is close to 6 months’ worth of work for an everyday Cuban.

<sup>3</sup> A course offered by the University of Colorado in which a professor takes a group of students to a country of interest.



Cuban tourism in the post-Soviet period. Most interesting to me was her investigation of Cuban street hustling in its socialist context (Roland 2011). I began to develop ideas for this thesis as I read different authors interpretations of *jineterismo* (Berg 2004; Cabezas 1998; Facio 2000; Fusco 1998; Hodge 2001; Simoni 2008; Weinreb 2009) as well as Cuba's specific form of socialism (Colantonio 2006; Henken 2008; Roland 2011; Rosendahl 1997; Skidmore 2005; Weinreb 2009).

Cuba's socialist system seeks equality in terms of employment, health, and education for all of its citizens yet; I suggest that socialism in Cuba is in a transition period because individuals are leaving professional jobs for work in the service sector as well as work on the streets. Socialism is already determined to be an in between point of capitalism and communism.

In the socialist stage, then, it is understood that some vestiges of inequality and material motivations required under capitalism remain because communism has not yet been accomplished. This pragmatic capitalist loophole that socialism offers to communist doctrine is what has allowed the Cuban government to make such unorthodox moves as the wide-scale dollarization of the economy, acceptance of foreign investment, and opening to mass international tourism. (Roland 2011: 13)

The revolutionary government originally tried to attain full socialist equality yet socioeconomic gaps remained. As one author describes, inequality has to be built into the system, it cannot work if a doctor makes as much as a brick layer (Rosendahl 1997). Yet contrary to the socialist approach, individuals in the post-Soviet era have begun to make more in service sector and street level employment.

After experiencing *jineterismo* for myself and after seeing the vast difference between prices for Cubans and prices for foreigners, I began to ask myself how socialism in Cuba has changed since the re-opening of tourism in 1990 after the fall of the Soviet Union. How are people reacting to these transitions? How are they reacting to the tourism sector as a whole?

Within this paper I seek to examine the transitions within Cuban socialism, using

*jineterismo* as a lens for my research. I suggest that with the introduction of economic reforms, specifically the re-opening of the nation's borders to international tourism, Cuba is undergoing a transitional period that can be analyzed through interactions with *jineteros*, as well as both younger and older generations. I will begin by describing Cuba's economy, focusing primarily on the time period since the fall of the Soviet bloc in 1989. I will then describe the role Cuba's dual currency system has played in the transitions within socialism. Next I will examine tourism in Cuba since the re-introduction in 1990. After these background sections, I will explain the data that I collected during my research in the field concerning the dual currency system, *jineterismo*, and the wanderlust that Cuban youth display. The objective of each of these sections is to describe the changing dynamics of the Cuban socialist system as indicated by the practices of *jineteros* as well as the sentiments of Cubans both young and old.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **BACKGROUND RESEARCH/LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 The Cuban Economy**

From the formation of the Spanish colony to the present, Cuba has seen its share of different economic structures from slave-based and free market economies to Marxist-Leninist socialism. Currently, Cuba is experiencing a mixed economy that has a basis in socialism, yet uses free market mechanisms in order to fund socialist benefits. The most common areas of open market investment are in biotechnology, mining, and tourism. For the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to give a brief description of the Cuban economic structure during the time period from 1959 until 1989 in order to gain an understanding of why the country has more recently been opened to tourism, among other globalizing agents. Then I will provide an overview of the tumultuous economic re-structuring that occurred in the 1990's. Finally, I will give a description of the subsequent economic structure that so heavily relies upon tourism as a means for economic growth.

Just before the revolution occurred in 1959, the Cuban economy heavily relied upon the United States as its main source of exports and imports alike; reaching up to 67 percent of Cuba's exports and 70 percent of Cuba's imports (Bennett 2004: 7). When Fidel Castro took over in 1959, things began to change. As described by Thomas Skidmore (2005), "By the end of Fidel's second year in power, four basic trends had taken hold: (1) the nationalization of the economy, (2) a sharp swing to the Soviet bloc, (3) the establishment of an authoritarian regime, and (4) the launching of an egalitarian socioeconomic policy" (311). The nationalization that occurred began with oil refineries yet quickly involved the sugar industry; which became one of

the main components in the shift to the Soviet bloc. In 1960, one year before Cuba's full alliance with the U.S.S.R., "the Soviets signed a trade agreement with Cuba, granting \$100 million credit to buy equipment and promising to purchase 4 million tons of sugar in each of the coming four years" (Skidmore 2005:312). This trade agreement helped establish the revolutionary Cuban regime that has been in power for over half a century. This regime would insist on the promotion of socialist equality within the island's borders. In fact, this agreement helped to support the Cuban economy, even through fluctuating periods of sugar production, until the fall of the Soviet Union thrust the country into economic despair.

In the 20 years before the end of the Soviet Union, the Cuban economy saw its highest rates of per capita GDP for the revolutionary period (1959 – 1989). Economist Frank W. Thompson found that Cuba had an average growth rate of 2.2. However, just after the fall of the Berlin wall, from 1990 until 1993, the growth rate fell to negative 15.6 (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
Average Growth Rates of Cuban per Capita GDP (%)

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1950-2001: 0.4
1950-1958: 1.8
1959-2001: 0.4
1959-1970: -0.7
1971-1989: 2.2
1990-2001: -1.7
1990-1993: -15.6
1994-2001: 4.0

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*Source:* Annualized rates calculated by the author from Maddison (2003): (Thompson 2005)

Cuba's per capita GDP was the third worst in Latin America during this period. This decline in GDP can be attributed to disassociation from the Soviet bloc. As Thompson explains, "With the collapse of the Soviet system, Cuba went from being the per capita most highly externally subsidized national economy in the world to near autarchy" (2005). The self-reliance that Cuba

had to begin to use came after almost 30 years of dependence on the Soviet trading bloc.

The demise of the U.S.S.R. in 1989 only began to shed light on Cuba's economic vulnerability. Within just three years, "all Russian economic and military aid was gone. Oil shipments fell 86 percent from 1989 to 1992, while food imports dropped 42 percent in almost the same period... General economic activity fell by at least 29 percent between 1989 and 1993." (Skidmore 2005:323). This economic catastrophe (one of the worst in the Americas during the 1900s) was a result of an excessive concentration of economic activities within one market: *Comecon*, the Soviet trading bloc from 1949 until 1991 (Skidmore 2005).

Before the fall of the Soviet Union, and the economic catastrophe that ensued, life could be described as good for the majority of the Cuban population. One night, while playing dominoes, a friend explained life in this time period to me. My friend's godchild was playing with a toy car on the floor near to the domino table. As we began our third game of the night, the godchild, holding his toy car, came over to the mother of the house and explained that he had to go to the bathroom. He quietly placed the toy car on the sofa as he was led to the washroom. I began to set up my domino hand when I looked up and saw "Fidel"<sup>4</sup> (the man of the house) staring pensively at the car sitting on the sofa. Interested, I asked what he was thinking. He replied that he was thinking about the times in Cuba before the Soviet Union fell. Fidel described to me the seemingly easier lives that were led during this time period. He recounted that a toy car would have been something that a family could afford without having to spend a large portion of their paycheck. For example, he explained that the toy car he was looking at would probably cost about a quarter of his (converted) monthly salary of US \$16. This ease of consumerism was supplemented by revolutionary successes such as equal access to education or health care. With

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<sup>4</sup> I allowed my research subjects to choose their own names in order to protect their privacy. This man happened to choose the name Fidel.

the economic catastrophe that occurred as a result of the collapse of the Soviet trading bloc, this way of life was greatly threatened.

The economic re-structuring that was necessary to salvage Cuba's socialist goals began in early 1990 and was broken into three phases. In sum they comprised what Castro explained as a "Special Period in a Time of Peace." The Special Period was defined by war-like reactions to the economic crisis, such as deep levels of austerity, disappearances of basic goods, and frequent electricity blackouts. As Rubén Berrios describes, "The first phase (1990-93) was one of crisis management... The second phase (1993-94) was a process of fiscal and financial restructuring and further market-oriented reforms through legalizing private economic activities. Finally, the 1994-95 period was marked by a process of economic recovery" (Berrios 1997:120). Foreign trade during the first phase fell 75 percent, resulting in 20 percent of the labor force being pushed out of work in a country that aspires for full employment.

In 1990, the country was re-opened to international tourism. This caused many individuals to drop out of professional development programs, such as medical school or doctoral research, in order to pursue more lucrative jobs in the tourism sector (Henken 2008). As Amalia Cabezas (2004) explains, "The rapid move to a mixed-market system during the past ten years, coupled with the dollarization of the economy, has resulted in an inverted social pyramid that privileges workers in the tourist industries over professionals in all other sectors" (1990). An example of this that I encountered was a tour bus driver who drove us to our many destinations outside of Havana. He was originally trained as a mechanical engineer but decided to leave this type of work upon the birth of his son. Now, after 3 years as a tour bus driver, he makes enough money to have disposable income. He explained to me that it was nice to be able to provide luxuries for his son like those that Fidel described earlier. In 1993, economic reforms, including

the dollarization of the economy<sup>5</sup>, began to emerge that allowed more people to access luxuries.

Further, in addition to dollars being legalized for domestic use, another economic reform that occurred during this specific period was allowing self-employment again for the first time in nearly 35 years. Of course, there were restrictions such that only certain types of self-employment were allowed. For example, small bed and breakfasts (known as *casa particulares*) were allowed but had to be certified through taxes and governmental approval.

During this time period, and especially with the legalization of dollars, many Cubans began to flock to tourist destinations in order to try to make a living through the tourism market. Some of these individuals were sanctioned by the state while others were not<sup>6</sup>. Overall, the Special Period, from 1990 until 1996, used capitalistic economic growth methods in order to salvage the socialist goals that had been developed during the revolution from 1959 until 1989.

Regrettably, the Cuban economy experienced many disruptions in the early 2000s. These disruptions included lower sugar and nickel prices on the global market, disastrous hurricanes, and drought on the eastern half of the island. These hardships resulted in far worse living conditions illustrated by the low access to common goods, from a U.S./consumerist perspective. In fact, one of my best friends on the island became very excited when I explained to her that I had many five-liter water jugs that she could have when I was finished drinking them (she would fill these water jugs during the one hour every day that the water would run in her apartment building; once filled, she would use the water for cooking, flushing the toilet, and showering).

In 2011, about 83 percent of the labor force was employed by the state, with another 12 percent being self-employed. Another key economic sector are professionals whose services are

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<sup>5</sup> I will describe this, in depth, in the “Dual Currency System” section.

<sup>6</sup> For a more in depth discussion of the different individuals who make up the tourist sector, see “the Cuban Tourism Industry” section.

exported to Venezuela. This exportation began in 2000 when Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro signed the *Convenio Integral de Cooperacion*. According to Dan Erikson (2005), “[this agreement] has formed the backbone of the ‘oil for services’ arrangement that is economically crucial to Cuba. Under this agreement, Cuba would receive 53,000 barrels of oil a day... in exchange for providing technical support and advice in areas of education, health care, sports, and scientific research” (7). With this agreement, Venezuela has become Cuba’s largest trading partner. In 2000, Venezuela accounted for one-sixth of Cuba’s total imports. These numbers have grown in recent years, and since 2005 have accounted for the main source of hard currency entering the island. Javier Corrales (2005) explains, “Venezuela is sending approximately 90,000 barrels per day (bpd) of oil to Cuba... Because of payment terms favorable to Cuba, analysts estimate that Venezuela is providing Cuba approximately 20,000 to 26,000 bpd of *free* oil, for a total “‘gift’” of \$6 to \$8 billion over the next 15 years” (2). Further, “there are reports that Castro is re-exporting 40,000 to 50,000 bpd of the 90,000 bpd of Venezuelan imports, given that Cuba consumes just 120,000 bpd and produces 80,000 bpd domestically” (Corrales 2005: 2).

I found it interesting that the Venezuelan rapport has grown among the Cuban population. Whether because of familial ties, political backing, the economic support, or all three, Cubans outwardly display their Venezuelan sympathy. This support comes most commonly in the form of Venezuelan flags that are visible on many cars, businesses, or home windows.

This growth of Venezuelan rapport has not come without speculation by outside officials though. Many have cautioned that Cuba may be becoming too dependent on Venezuela. According to a *Wall Street Journal* article, “In 2010, Venezuela accounted for at least 40% of Cuba’s overall trade in goods, up from 27% the year before. That figure was more than the trade



levels of the next five countries... Venezuelan assistance and trade with Cuba accounted for up to 22% of Cuba's annual economic output in 2010" (Casey 2012). Although Cuba is on an economically better footing than it was as part of the Soviet bloc, many analysts have drawn a parallel between contemporary dependence on Venezuela and dependence on the Soviet Union from 1962 until 1989. "Three-quarters of Cuban trade was linked to the Soviet bloc, and the collapse of the Soviet bloc left Cuba's contracts with state companies from East Germany to Bulgaria invalidated almost overnight" (Casey 2009). A collapse by Venezuela, or an overthrow of Hugo Chavez's regime, could send Cuba into another economic spiral. Such a spiral would undoubtedly force Cuba to open its borders further to the free-market.

One way that the Cuban government has counteracted this dependence on Venezuela is through an increase in foreign investment within the country; most often coming in the form of joint ventures in hotel ownership. Since 1995, foreign ownership has been permitted (U.S. Department of State 2011), yet most of these joint ventures are 51 percent owned by the Cuban state and 49 percent owned by foreign companies such as Sol Melia from Spain. In 2010, a new law was passed that allowed lease extensions for foreign companies on tourist properties from 50 years to 99 years (U.S. Department of State 2011). Laws like this will likely allow for the continued circulation of foreign capital in the island.

### **2.1.1 The Blockade and the Cuban Economy**

It is necessary to give a brief description of the United States' sanctions that have been in effect since Fidel Castro took control in 1959. For the duration of this section I will refer to these sanctions as the U.S. blockade against Cuba. I use this term because nearly every Cuban that I spoke with would correct me when I used the word embargo; they explained to me that the

United States had imposed a blockade on Cuba. In their eyes, an embargo is something that involves two (or more) countries whereas a blockade is sanctions that are imposed by one country onto another. The objective of this section is to provide more details regarding the current economic situation in Cuba.

Since soon after the triumph of the revolution in 1959, the United States has imposed an economic blockade that has deterred its citizens from travelling to and spending money in Cuba (Spadoni 2010; USITC 2001). Also, this blockade has been implemented in order to try to limit the amount of foreign investment and trade (both imports and exports) that Cuba engages in (Lambie 2010; Purcell 2000; Saney 2004; USITC 2001). Throughout this 50 year period, Cuba's economy has suffered, most notably through the increase in cost regarding the importation of commercial goods.

In 1960, the U.S. economic blockade began with the suspension of the U.S. sugar quota as a reaction to Cuba's nationalization of its oil refineries. With an ensuing "economic war," Cuba accepted the Soviet Union's offer to purchase the remaining sugar quota and "announce[d] the nationalization of all U.S. properties and companies" (Henken 2008: 133). According to Thomas Henken (2008), "starting on [October 19, 1960], the Eisenhower administration began to prohibit all U.S. exports to the island except for non-subsidized food, medicine, and medical supplies... A little over a year later President John F. Kennedy made the embargo total, by prohibiting all exports and imports, with exceptions requiring a special license" (133). These sanctions imposed by the United States government were almost entirely meaningless until the collapse of Soviet Union, along with the Soviet trading bloc in 1989 because of Cuba's extreme reliance on these two entities (Bennett 2004; USITC 2001).

As I have depicted in the previous section, the collapse of the Soviet Union thrust Cuba

into economic despair. The continuation of the United States economic blockade in the 1990s was an attempt at “economic strangulation” (Saney 2004: 166). In 1992, the United States congress passed the Cuban Democracy Act.

The law prohibited subsidiaries of U.S. corporations from trading with Castro’s Cuba. It also prohibited foreign vessels that had entered Cuban ports for purposes of trade from loading or unloading freight in the United States for 180 days. In an effort to deprive the Cuban government of dollars, the act tightened restrictions on the kinds of U.S. citizens who could spend money in Cuba without permission from the U.S. Treasury. It also sought to discourage, and thereby reduce, the flow of dollars to Cuba by requiring individuals seeking to send money to relatives on the island to get licenses from the U.S. Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Controls. (Purcell 2000: 83)

This act effectively reduced Cuba’s importation numbers, resulting in further economic hardships faced by the Cuban population. According to George Lambie (2010), “The island’s capacity to import fell from \$8 billion [US] in 1989 to \$1.7 billion [US] in 1993. According to a more recent estimate [from 2005], between 1989 and 1993 there was a 35 per cent decline in Cuban GDP and a 78 per cent decrease in imports” (173).

Yet, the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 was not the end of the imposed economic sanctions. The United States government strengthened the economic blockade by passing the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (CLDSA), also known as the Helms-Burton Bill (named after the two men who created it – Jesse Helms and Dan Burton) in 1996.

The CLDSA establishes that the sanctions against Cuba will not be lifted if either Fidel or Raúl Castro are part of the Cuban government. Before there can be a normalization of relations between the two countries, there must be very specific political and economic changes in Cuba, namely the introduction [of] a political process deemed ‘democratic’ by Washington and the installation of a free-market capitalist economy... Under the CLDSA, the U.S. extends in law the sanctions against Cuba to include any international institution... that provides financial aid... The CLDSA establishes that any foreign company operating on the island whose business activity involves expropriated U.S. property will be liable to litigation in U.S. courts. Also, the U.S. government is empowered to refuse visas to members of those foreign companies. (Saney 2004: 170)

Since it was instituted in the 1996, legal action has yet to be taken on any specific company. The

closest that any one company has been to litigation was in 2004 when the Bush administration, under campaign pressure, sent a forty-five day notice to a Jamaican company explaining that visa restrictions would be employed if the company did not pull out of its two hotel contracts. The company obliged within the grace period (Spadoni 2010).

Although actual legal action has not been taken since the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 or the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996, increase in costs of imports to Cuba have been documented. According to the United States International Trade Commission (2001):

Some sources reported that the [Cuban Democracy Act] forced Cuba to import from greater distances. Higher transportation and freight costs, in turn, reportedly led to higher costs and lower levels of production in Cuba. According to one report, U.S. sanctions ‘create a \$virtual tax’ [*sic*] of 30 percent on all imports... because imports have to be purchased from more expensive and more distant markets.’ (p. 3-33)

The United States is, in effect, responsible for the increase in cost for imported items. In many ways, the sanctions imposed by the U.S. government have fostered social inequality in favor of those who have the income to purchase more expensive items and to the detriment of those who do not. Although not entirely created by the U.S. government, this social inequality, in combination with other things that I will detail further (the dual currency system, an increase in police force, etc.), has contributed to the transitions within socialism that Cuba is currently undergoing.

## **2.2 The Dual Currency System**

In 1993, the Cuban government re-legalized private ownership of foreign currencies, beginning the current dual currency system. According to Arne Kildegaard and Roberto Orro Fernandez, “In 1993, given the impossibility of controlling the illegal holding of assets, the

Cuban government took the wise step of decriminalizing it” (1999: 29). As had been the case since the Revolution began in 1959, until that point commodities sold on the world market were only available for purchase in Cuba with ‘foreigners’ currency’ on the black market.

With the depletion of central warehouse supplies, many Cubans used two alternatives as a means to get the goods that they needed given the hardships of the Special Period. The first alternative revolved around the black market. As L. Kaifa Roland describes, “Before the legalization of dollars in 1993, black marketers sold items like meat, eggs, and soap – items that were not available by other means – for exorbitant prices to those Cubans who had illegal access to dollars from their families overseas” (2011: 50-51). Since the legalization of hard currency, these “exorbitant prices” have been counteracted, and thus somewhat stabilized by the introduction of dollar stores, also known as TRDs (Tiendas de Recuperacion de Divisas).

Two scenes, from the film *Strawberry and Chocolate* (1994), stand out as being exemplary of the black market exchanges that occurred frequently before the legalization of dollars. In the first scene, Nancy is selling dye and detergent to another woman for an undisclosed amount of money. Nancy explains that she will have pantyhose and children’s shoes the next week just before the woman leaves (50’). In the second scene, Nancy hands Diego a large wad of dollars as she says that she has finally sold his watch (74’-75’). Since the movie is set in 1979, the fact that she has dollars alludes to the idea that she has sold his watch on the black market. Black market exchanges still occur in Cuba, yet the legalization of dollars and the introduction of TRDs have provided Cubans alternative avenues to obtain free market goods.

Dollar stores allow Cubans to buy consumer goods such as household items or trendy clothing that are not available for purchase with Cuban Pesos. In this manner, these stores are a link for Cubans to the outside world. According to Elisa Facio (2000), “Practically anything

worth buying - from jeans to shampoo - can be found only in stores once reserved for documented foreigners... but now open to anyone with dollars to spend” (64). On the other hand, the Cuban government gains access to foreign hard currency, that has been converted to CUC, through these dollar stores: “The Cuban government captures [CUC] and dollar remittances by allowing Cuban citizens to shop in state-run dollar stores, which sell clothing, food, and household items at high markups averaging more than 240 percent of face value by some estimates” (Weinreb 2009:23). Many Cubans though, especially those without ready access to CUC, still use the black market as a means for obtaining the goods they need.

The second alternative to access needed goods, is known as the *búsqueda*.<sup>7</sup> Roland explains “the *búsqueda* [is] the practice of searching for a way to use one’s regular peso-salaried job to earn dollars on the side by pilfering and re-selling goods” (2011: 51-52). In my own experiences in Cuba, I found that many who are involved in the *búsqueda* do not necessarily sell the goods they “obtain.” Rather, many trade these goods for other commodities that have been “pilfered” by other individuals. A Cuban friend of mine explained to me that he was thrilled about his new job because he would be receiving benefits along with a salary about equal to that of his former job. My friend’s new job position was working in a soap and liquid detergent factory where he was going to be able to “obtain”<sup>8</sup> the products produced at the factory and then sell them or trade them with neighbors and friends.

The current system uses both the Cuban Peso, or Moneda Nacional (MN), and the Cuban Convertible Peso, or CUC (see Figure 2). One CUC is worth 25 MN if changed in a government run *cadeca* (exchange house). Up until 2004, dollars could be used as legitimate foreign

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<sup>7</sup> Literally translated as “the search.”

<sup>8</sup> I place the word “obtain” in quotations because he left it unclear whether he would be legally or illegally receiving these items. A conversation with a mutual friend leads me to assume that this will be an illegal acquisition, through the *búsqueda*, of these products.

currency. Yet, “a decree [that] passed in November 2004 designated the CUC as the only currency accepted in the dollarized network of goods and services. At the same time, the Government established a 10% tax on the U.S. dollar” (Orro, 2008: 45). Currently, most Cubans who work for the state (with the exception of those employed in the tourism sector) are paid in MN. Moneda Nacional generally is only good for buying small items such as fruits and vegetables from a farmer’s market. On the other hand, CUC is useful in buying any item that one would find on the global market.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 2: CUC (on top) and MN (on bottom) (photo courtesy of cubalowcost.altervista.org)

### 2.3 The Cuban Tourism Industry

Since the re-opening of the Cuban tourism industry in 1990 it has become one of the

<sup>9</sup> I will describe the purchasing power of MN and CUC in the Data/Results section.

main contributors to the national economy and a main link to the rest of the world. Although I primarily want to focus on the characteristics and effects of this tremendous growth period, I do want to acknowledge and briefly describe the tourism industry that, according to Richard Sharpley and Martin Knight, has been defined by three main phases. They describe the first phase to have begun in 1949 and lasted until the revolution in 1959. The second phase lasted from 1959 until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. The last and current phase began with the fall of the Soviet Union and continues into the present day (Sharpley and Knight 2009).

The first phase from 1949 until 1959 was a unique time period for Cuban Tourism. According to Sharpley and Knight, “between 1949 and 1959, tourism became a major economic sector on the island, providing a vital source of both employment and hard currency” (2009:242). This sector continued to grow throughout this period and by the end was second only to sugar for foreign currency earnings. Also during this period, Cuba had become the focal point for international tourism in the Caribbean because of the allure that the casinos and nightlife of Havana provided. During this time, the island was a safe haven for organized crime’s gangsters from the United States. These gangsters helped to boost the Cuban economy, all the while developing the tourism infrastructure. Also, businessmen and people on vacation would go to Cuba in order to indulge in the luxuries comparable to those offered in U.S. cities such as Las Vegas.

Many different films have depicted these types of tourism. One such film is *Soy Cuba*, produced in 1964 by a Soviet Film company, which illustrates life, in many different facets, during the years leading up to the revolution in 1959. A particular scene from this film stands out when discussing the Cuban tourism industry during the 1950s. The scene begins with a Cuban man selling oranges on the street all the while trying to gain the attention of a beautiful mulatta



woman. The scene quickly switches to an eccentric nightclub filled with many different white, seemingly American men drinking, smoking cigars, dancing and spending time with different Cuban women. One of these Cuban women is the mulatta from the previous scene. After the camera pans around the room, it shows a white man leaving the nightclub with this mulatta woman. The two take a cab to the woman's house where, after the night is over, the white man pays the now naked woman and leaves.

This scene is emblematic of the sexual tourism that took place during this time period. The man selling oranges in the beginning of the scene provides an illustration of more moral forms of employment. Later, the nightclub describes the sort of tourism that was popular during the 1950s, especially for the international visitors that went to the island. This nightlife involved prostitution, which is exemplified by the mulatta woman, or *jinetera*, who leaves with the white man. This sort of tourism, along with the other more moral forms, helped to provide hard currency to the individuals of Cuba and ultimately the government. Eventually, this hard currency would help to provide the infrastructure that was necessary to accommodate large numbers of international visitors. The dawn of the second period though, nullified the financial successes of the previous tourism industry.

The second period from 1959 until 1989 saw a total reversal of the island's tourism industry. With Cuba's movement towards communism, international tourism was viewed as being contrary to the country's ideological goals. This mindset was heavily influenced by vices such as gambling and prostitution that the island had attracted in the previous decade. The government began to promote domestic tourism and focused their attention on the equality of all Cubans, both socially and economically. In autumn of 1959, the nationalization of major international hotels began. By 1962, with the establishment of the U.S. blockade, international

arrivals fell to a mere 3000 visitors (Sharpley and Knight 2009). Clearly tourism was no longer one of Cuba's major economic sectors. From 1962 until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, Cuba did not have to rely upon tourism as a means for economic stability because it relied upon the subsidized sale of sugar to the U.S.S.R. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 though, the Cuban economic system was hurled into economic despair.

Technically speaking, this economic despair began in the mid-1980s when an economic slowdown began due to a collapse in the world sugar price, and the Cuban government began to focus primarily on tourism for economic development. All the aid that Cuba had received for decades disappeared when the Soviet Union eventually fell. This forced the Cuban government to stop thinking and begin doing, in regards to the development of tourism. This began what Sharpley and Knight describe as the third phase.

From 1989 until the present, the tourism industry has been in a revitalization period. Since the beginning of this period, the number of foreign visitors to the island has grown steadily. As described by *USA Today*, "Despite a slight decline in 2006 and 2007, the number of foreign visitors to the island rose to 2.35 million in 2008, [generating more than \$2.7 billion in revenue]" (as quoted in Babb 2011:50). This increase is nearly 600%, in a little less than a 20-year period. The success of the re-introduced tourist industry is due to the rich history, intriguing culture, and beautiful environment that already existed on the island.

Not unique to the tourism in Cuba, yet probably the ultimate driving force for people to go and visit this island nation, are the many different activities that are available for consumption. Nearly any type of tourism imaginable is available to partake within the confines of the roughly 45,000 square mile country.

One of the most obvious options that Cuba has to offer is 'sun and sand' tourism. Sun and

sand tourism is the traditional island tourism activity in which the foreigner spends lots of time soaking in the sun at the beach. Canadians who travel to Cuba during the cold winter months especially enjoy this sort of tourism. As described by Sharpley and Knight (2009), “Canada has long been Cuba's principal market, accounting for over a quarter of all arrivals by 2005, although Europe as a whole provided over 45% of all arrivals in that year” (249). In this sense, these foreigners come to Cuba, from colder areas, in order to enjoy the warmer island climate.

What also draws people to Cuba, as opposed to the other Caribbean destinations, is the unique culture and abundant historical heritage. Florence Babb argues that: “[Cuba being] one of the last bastions of socialism [is] precisely what make[s] Cuba a desired travel destination” (Babb 2011:52). That is, international tourists want to travel to Cuba in order to experience what it is like in a socialist nation. In addition to this interesting cultural perspective, foreigners visit Cuba for its various historical sites, including seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

[Specifically] in Havana, the tourist industry revolves around the city's colonial heritage with its architecture being the centerpiece of the urban tourism strategy. The focal point is the Old City (*Habana Vieja*), which contains a treasure trove of colonial architecture and fortifications. In 1982, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) named the area a World Heritage Site. Under the direction of the Historian of the City, the northern core of *Habana Vieja* was transformed into a dreamscape – an authentic, historical place restored so that it met the needs, wants, and expectations of tourists. (Taylor Jr. and McGlynn 2009: 409)

Along with these UNESCO sites are interesting places to relax, such as the many bars that are devoted to the indulgences of the late Ernest Hemingway. In many ways though, the allure of Cuba does not stop with the beauty, culture, or history. The tourists are coming to Cuba because there is now an infrastructure that allows them to do so.



**Figure 3: Plaque explaining the refurbishing of a building in Havana Viejo (photo by author).**

In order to support the masses of foreigners who visit the island for various reasons, Cuba has had to revamp their tourism infrastructure, most notably within their hotels. In 1987 and 1988, two extremely prominent tourism development agencies were established: Cubanacan and Gaviota (Sharpley and Knight 2009). These two agencies have worked with foreign companies as joint ventures in the ownership of hotels as well as tour buses across the country. Within ten years, 25 joint ventures have heavily invested in the market. These joint ventures “[helped in] providing Cuba with money and expertise needed to grow the tourist industry” (Taylor Jr. and McGlynn 2009: 406). As described by Sharpley and Knight, “The first tourism joint venture in Cuba was established by Cubanacan with the Spanish hotel group Sol Melia, the outcome of which was the opening of the Sol Palmeras hotel in Varadero in 1990” (Sharpley and Knight 2009:250). Now, Sol Melia hotels are in every province across the island, especially in high tourist zones such as Matanzas and Havana. Hotel chains, such as Sol Melia, increased the number of hotel rooms that were needed to accommodate the increasing number of foreign

visitors. According to Henry Louis Taylor Jr. and Linda McGlynn, “between 1990 and 2000, the number of hotel rooms in Cuba, in pace with arrivals, doubled from 18,565 to 37,178. In Havana alone, the total number of rooms increased from 4682 rooms in 1988 to 12,002 rooms in 2002” (2009: 406). In order for these hotels to remain ‘state-owned,’ the Cuban government only allows 49% ownership by non-Cuban companies. The majority of these hotels are in the “sun-beach category, almost all being all-inclusive operations” (Sharpley and Knight 2009:249). In 2009, 13% of the hotels in Cuba were wholly under state management while 44% were under joint international management. Yet, in order to provide job security for the Cuban nationals, no foreigners are allowed to work within the hotels.

It is worth mentioning that the tourism industry labor force is divided into two categories: formal and informal. The formal sector of the tourism industry is made up of the employees who are employed and paid by the Cuban government. These individuals earn their income in Cuban Pesos based upon hourly or salary wages. The formal sector has a wide range of jobs from hotel workers to tour bus drivers to restaurant workers.

The informal sector of tourism in Cuba is made up of *jineteros* (literally translated as “jockey”). This word is used to describe the street hustlers that hustle money off of the visiting foreigners. When asked to describe themselves, some *jineteros* will say that they are *luchadores* (literally translated as “those who struggle”). The term *luchador* is used in order to describe individuals within Cuba who are involved with the daily struggle to make ends meet within a socialist sphere (Roland 2011). *Luchadores* do not have legal licenses for private business ownership, thus they must create ways to earn their money through more creative avenues. *Luchadores* earn their money through many different sectors of the Cuban economy, so for the purpose of this paper, I will apply the word “*jinetero*” for the *luchadores* in the tourist sector.

*Jineteros* earn money, generally CUC, by working as go-betweens for the tourists and the people who own *casa particulares* (bed and breakfasts), *paladares* (home restaurants), or are taxi drivers, among other things. Many researchers also apply the term *jinetera* (in the feminine) to prostitutes, yet as Mette Louise Berg describes, “*Jineteros* are people who offer sex, company, goods or services to foreigners in exchange for US dollars [or CUC], a meal, a night out or desired consumer goods” (Berg 2004:50). Thus, *jineteras* are not solely prostitutes; rather they are female *luchadores* who use tourists as a mean to survive as well as enjoy commodities that are generally only open to foreigners.



Figure 4: The bottom sign explains that "this restaurant does not give commission." This is an acknowledgement that this restaurant does not support *jineterismo* (photo by the author).

Much research has been done regarding differences in *jineterismo* based upon gender. Derrick Hodge and Amalia Cabezas stand out as two specific authors who have contributed to this discussion, primarily describing the gendered avenues of sex tourism in Cuba. Amalia Cabezas gives a detailed analysis, in *Discourses of Prostitution: The Case of Cuba* (1998), pertaining to theory surrounding female sex work on a global scale. Specifically in the Cuban case, Cabezas (1998) explains, “that today the majority of the *jineteras* are dark-skinned women who do not have relatives in the United States sending them dollars” (82). Without these remittances, it is harder for these women to have the ability to go out to nightclubs, upscale restaurants or to shop in TRDs (Cabezas 1998). Cabezas (1998) suggests that Cubans have “invented” this form of work as a means to make up for the economic hardships that have been brought with the re-opening of the country to tourism, and thus global capitalism (84-85).

In regards to male sex work, Derrick Hodge evaluates the difference between the word *jinetero* and the newly coined term *pinguero*.

There is indeed a group of young men in El Vedado<sup>10</sup> who call themselves ‘*jineteros*,’ but these are sellers of black-market cigars, tour guides, promoters of private restaurants and small-time con artists. They are a specifically nonsexual category and are adamant about that point, since if they were seen as sex-workers, they might be imagined to be passive partners, like their female counterparts. Those young men who are sex workers, then, had to radically distinguish themselves not only from the con-artist *jineteros* (despised by *Habaneros*<sup>11</sup> because they threaten tourism), and from the invaded bodies of the *jineteras*; they had to announce to the world that their work was precisely the opposite: masculine virility. So, to the slang term for ‘dick’ (‘pinga’) was added the suffix ‘*ero*,’ meaning a man whose activity, or profession, has to do with his pinga. (Hodge 2001: 22)

Here, Hodge highlights the stereotypes associated with *jineteros*. Yet, as I will explain later, *jineterismo* also transcends these types of cunning actions to include interactions with foreigners resulting in any sort of benefits. More importantly, as Hodge elaborates on the term *pinguero* he

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<sup>10</sup> A section of Havana.

<sup>11</sup> Havana locals.

contrasts the representation of the *jineteras*'s (female sex worker) body, as being emblematic of Cuba being invaded by foreign currency, as well as international tourists, with the idea that the *pinguero* has the capability to conquer foreign bodies all the while earning foreign currency. Derrick Hodge writes, "[*pingueros*] represent the strength of the powerful Cuban phallus conquering the bodies of foreigners... In fact, in a *pinguero*-tourist sex act, the Cuban has invaded the tourist, "screwed" him [or her], as it were" (2001: 23). In Hodge's opinion, *jineteros* and *pingueros* differ in the strategies they use to hustle foreigners, yet both engage in hustling schemes as a means to access foreign currency.

The access to dollars in Cuba has the great potential to ignite the entrepreneurial spirit within the informal sector of tourism. According to Amelia Weinreb in her book *Cuba in the Shadow of Change*, a *jintero*'s access to dollars allows him the ability to live like a tourist in his own country (2009). In Cuba, tourists have access to clubs, pools, luxurious taxis, etc. to which everyday Cubans do not have access (Weinreb 2009). In certain scenarios, "[*Jineteras* are] trading their bodies for consumer goods and recreational opportunities otherwise unavailable to them" (Facio 2000:64). These "recreational opportunities" pertain to nightlife such as entrance to a more upscale tourist club, or even entrance into a hotel's pool on a given afternoon. Also, *Jineterismo* allows Cubans, who are not employed formally by the tourism sector, the opportunity to indulge in consumer goods available on the island in dollar stores.

The *jineteros* involved in *la lucha* on the street use many different techniques in order to gain their income. According to V. Simoni (2008), many *jineteros* use an approach that involves trying to guess where the foreigner is from. The *jintero* uses this approach in order to stop the foreigner in a friendly manner. Although this approach is very common, Simoni explains that a whole repertoire of strategies and tactics has emerged. These strategies are generally based on



perception. That is to say, the *jineteros* will shift their tactics to what they perceive as desirable to the tourist. For example, if the foreigner is a male in their mid-20's, the *jinetero* may directly approach the foreigner in hopes of selling cigars or a woman's sexual services. Whatever the strategy is, the interaction with the foreigner has the potential of being more financially lucrative than any sort of formal employment.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **METHODS**

The research conducted for this investigation was performed in the summer of 2012 from early June until the mid-July. Though the majority of the research was conducted in Havana, I also had the chance to travel to other parts of the island. As a group, we travelled to 11 out of Cuba's 14 provinces. I had the opportunity to use participant observation and unstructured interviews in most of these provinces. Throughout the six weeks in Cuba, we stayed in hotels. This gave me the chance to get a first-hand experience of the tourism industry. I was also fortunate enough to meet and become close friends with a Cuban family while in the country. This gave me a great opportunity to contrast the hotel lifestyle with everyday Cuban life. While in Havana, I spent most of my time using participant observation in such places as *El Prado* (a shaded boulevard, in Old Havana, where lots of hustling takes place), the *Maleceón* (a seaside boardwalk that borders the city), and night clubs frequented by foreigners. These different sites allowed me to observe the different interactions that *Jineteros*, and non-hustling Cubans alike, have with foreigners visiting the island.

In addition to participant observation, I engaged in conversations and interacted with Cubans on a regular basis. These interactions included *jineteros*, as well as local Cubans employed by the state, such as hotel employees and Cubans employed by tour guide companies and tour bus companies. In all cases I let conversations develop naturally, often setting up times to meet them in areas where they felt comfortable. Many times, these areas were local coffee shops, parks, or their own homes. Most conversations began with basic 'banter' such as, "how are you, what did you do today, etc." Over time I could comfortably guide these conversations

discussions of the past, current, or future state of the economy, tourism industry, or *jineterismo* within Cuba.

I engaged in conversations and unstructured interviews with roughly 50 resident Cubans while I was in the country for six weeks. The individuals with whom I spoke with varied in age (from 19 to 70), by race, by type of employment as well as by geographic locale. This provided me with a variety of perspectives from different job sectors, generations, and ethnic categorizations. The qualitative methods (conversations, unstructured interviews, and participant observation) that I employed allowed me to gain a firsthand understanding of the different viewpoints that exist across race, and class in contemporary Cuba. I should acknowledge here that there is not a lot of gender diversity, especially in the data/results section, among Cubans represented in this paper. While as a college-aged white male foreigner, I was able to develop several personal relationships with male *jineteros*. I was simply not comfortable with the sexualized dynamics involved in developing relationships with female *jineteras*, especially as a first-time researcher.

I used opportunistic sampling for the duration of the research in Cuba because it presupposed common interactions that tourists have with the tourism sector. In many tourist sites, tourists are approached by locals and engaged in conversation. Whenever possible, I would seek out known tourist sites with hopes of engaging in conversations and potentially being involved in hustles by *jineteros*. I also used a ‘snowballing’ method as a means for discovering willing research candidates. This involved asking individuals if they knew friends or family that would be interested in speaking with me about my interests. One such example of this was meeting a self-proclaimed *jinetero* through another foreigner. I also had conversations about Cuba and tourism with foreigners whenever the opportunity presented itself. Since I was

traveling with 13 other students from the University of Colorado at Boulder, I was able to gauge other Americans' reactions to Cuban culture and *jineterismo* in general.

I kept a journal of my conversations, interactions, as well as observations regarding tourism and *jineterismo* for the six weeks I was in the country. Every day, I carried a small, pocket-sized notebook with me in which I would take notes regarding the interactions that I had with *jineterismo* as well as tourism as a whole. I would also take notes while observing other foreigners' interactions with *jineterismo* and tourism as a whole. I wrote in my journal nearly every night in order to summarize noteworthy events that had taken place that day.

While geographical locale names are real, I have used pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of each individual with whom I spoke. One pseudonym used that may be potentially confusing is "Fidel." Because I allowed my subjects to choose their own pseudonyms, this individual chose the name as a joke. The first conversation we had, and the time when he decided upon this pseudonym, turned into a particularly political conversation. He spoke to me about Fidel Castro's regime in ways that could be interpreted as non-sympathetic. When I asked him what he would like his pseudonym to be, he replied "Fidel." When he declared this, he smiled, laughed and told me it would be funny if anyone ever saw the outcome of our conversation.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA/RESULTS**

#### **4.1 Interaction with the Dual Currency System**

My first interaction with the dual currency system came on our third day in the country. A woman approached me in the street while on a guided tour of Old Havana and tried to sell me a three Cuban Peso note (known for the picture of Ernesto “Che” Guevara on the front) for one CUC. I had a feeling I was being ripped off even though I did not know the actual exchange rate for MN to CUC. I politely said “no,” but the encounter remained on my mind. I was informed about the two different types of currencies that existed on the island a day or two later. One of our tour guides explained that the Cuban Peso, also known as *Moneda Nacional* (MN), was the currency for locals and the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC) was the currency for foreigners visiting the island. I was told that MN was good to get a *maquina*<sup>12</sup> (see Figure 5) and that all my other purchases were probably going to be made in CUC. This was only the beginning of my daily interactions with the two different currencies.

I began to use MN on a regular basis after learning about the ease and inexpensiveness of traveling by *maquina*. I also found that having MN was beneficial in order to buy cheap street food. With this knowledge, I began to change out my CUC every week in order to cut my costs wherever possible. I found it quite easy to go to an exchange house, change my Euros<sup>13</sup> to CUC and then change 10 CUC into 250 MN. I realized why that woman had tried to get me to buy the

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<sup>12</sup> Maquinas are cars that have set routes throughout the city. Generally, maquinas are American made cars from the late 1940s and 1950s. The price for a maquina is 10 MN (US \$0.40) for anywhere inside the Havana city limits.

<sup>13</sup> I used Euros because of the 10% tax that has been placed on changing U.S. dollars into CUC.

bill with Che's face on it the first time I encountered it at a change house. Che Guevara is a symbol of the Socialist Revolution that began in 1959. Items with his face printed on them are common purchases for foreigners visiting the island. Also, many people from abroad do not have any interaction with the Cuban Peso and thus are unaware of the dual currency system currently in place. The sale of a 3 MN note for 1 CUC is not much money for the foreigner to spend. For this woman though, 1 CUC could be 1/20 of her monthly salary (or more).



**Figure 5: A Maquina driving near the airport (photo by Marisa Baylon Guillen).**

I eventually learned from many of my Cuban friends that the monthly income for a Cuban is very low by American standards. One of my friends explained to me that he made 390 MN (15.60 CUC) each month, as a hospital technician. His daily duties consisted of helping certified doctors in different wards, as well as moving technical equipment around the hospital

when certain doctors would need the equipment in other wings or wards. He did explain to me that his monthly pay was low, but even a qualified professional (such as a doctor or engineer) only makes up to the equivalent of 30 or 35 CUC each month. The state generally pays its employees in Cuban Pesos. Yet, employees in the tourist sector receive their income in both forms of currency.

The tourism sector is one of the best ways for a Cuban to have an opportunity to acquire hard currency, and thus an opportunity to make more money. Marc Perry, in *Jóvenes Rebeldes* (2005), explains that the dollar determines the opportunity for an individual to access privilege such as the opportunity to purchase consumer items only available with CUC. As I have discussed previously, many professionals are leaving professional lines of work in order to pursue employment in the tourist sector and thus have the opportunity to obtain CUC. According to Sheryl Marie Elliott and Lisa Delpy Neirotti (2008); “The Cubans who choose to be self-employed earn on average twenty times more than their previous state job” (386). Most self-employment is in the tourist sector and usually these forms of employment require a lot time and effort, yet this obviously comes with the incentive of more money. As described by Cynthia Benzing, “The self-employed work on average 66 h/week and earn varying amounts depending on the type of self-employment as well as the number of hours. Those working in food services reported the highest average earnings at approximately 8,000 pesos (US\$400)/month” (2005: 79). In order to regulate the income of the self-employed and to minimize competition between the state and private sector, the government has implemented taxes and tight regulations. Because of this though, “many choose to take their businesses underground despite the considerable risks” (Jackiewicz and Bolster 2003: 375). This sort of black-market entrepreneurship has created a gap between those willing to work illegally and those who are not,

as well as dissidence towards to the socialist structure of business practice.

Cubans choosing to leave professional practices has created a “brain drain” within the confines of the island. Although most literature describing “brain drain” pertains to professionals leaving the island, and thus taking their knowledge with them (Lehr 2008), this brain drain also has the capability of happening within the island when professionals who are at or near the top of their field are leaving their jobs in order to work in the more lucrative tourism sector. These higher salaries have created socioeconomic gaps between those in the tourist sector and those outside the tourist sector.

Socioeconomic gaps are also furthered by positions in the tourist sector that have potential for tips, where the employee earns a base payment in MN and will aspire to receive tips in CUC. Positions like this include bus drivers, tour guides, housekeepers, or waiters. For employees in the tourism sector who do not have high tourist contact, such as hotel security guards, their salaries are paid in both CUC and MN. One hotel security guard explained, “my salary is 2/3 MN and 1/3 CUC.” He then explained to me that he takes all of his MN directly to the exchange house and converts it to CUC. In his eyes, and the eyes of many other Cubans, CUC is the only worthwhile currency in Cuba. In his own words, “you can only buy simple things with MN; like vegetables or fruit from the market.” This statement squares with Elisa Facio’s (2000) explanation that just about anything worth buying (jeans, shampoo, cooking oil, etc.) is available for purchase with CUCs in state owned dollar stores. In the years since 2000, the items that Facio is describing have become available beyond the TRDs. Purchases with CUC are now available in just about any setting across the island. I noticed Cubans purchasing items like the U.S. brand, Coca-Cola. I was curious that Cubans had the option of purchasing the Cuban variety (*TuKola*; see Figure 6), yet many times would opt for the more expensive,



globally consumed Coca-Cola. Even though this global brand was more expensive, Cubans would still buy this almost identical in taste product. Their ability to buy items such as Coca-Cola displayed the fact that they had access to CUC, whereas I valued price over product.

The opportunity to buy global consumer items, such as Coca-Cola, is contradictory to the Cuban socialist goal of near economic equality. Items such as these are a form of “cultural capital” that allow the consumer to outwardly display their opportunity to obtain CUC. As described in the text *Subtle Signals of Inconspicuous Consumption*, purchasing items with the Nike swoosh emblem, or drinking Coca-Cola in public allow the consumer to openly “distinguish [themselves] from others in their community. This suggests that easily visible markers such as products adorned with large logos or brand names, should facilitate desired identification” (2010: 557). The identifications that are desired are in regards to consumerist notions that have entered the island with foreign visitors and many times these desired identifications pertain to U.S. Products. As Derrick Hodge (2001) explains, “Materialism, especially adoration of U.S. Brand-name products, has been one consequence of capitalism in Cuba” (26). Another consequence is the idea that inherent prosperity comes with capitalism. According to Hodge (2001), “Tommy Hilfiger clothing gives the illusion of the kind of prosperity which capitalism is imagined to bring” (26). Unfortunately though, as many Americans understand, capitalism does not provide prosperity to all, rather only to certain individuals who have had success in obtaining the 'American dream.' This desired identification with luxury items, as well as the prosperity that is supposedly tied to capitalism are indicators of the transitions occurring in Cuba’s socialist system, which ideologically should frown upon such notions.



**Figure 6: TuKola logo (photo by Martin Abegglen).**

On one hand, these luxury items create inequality that is defined by those who have more access to CUC and those who do not. On the other hand, inequality has arisen out of access to privately owned stores and eateries. According to Edward L. Jackiewicz and Todd Bolster, “compounding the state’s concern over this emergent sector is that most Cubans prefer to buy consumer items or eat in restaurants produced or operated by the self-employed, claiming that the prices and quality are often better than those offered by the state” (2003: 375). This competition creates disparity, as some people will inevitably have more access, through certain friends and family, to the privately owned stores that have more competitive prices and higher quality goods. The purchases made at either the state run or the privately owned stores, along with the opportunities to obtain CUC are emblematic of the socioeconomic gaps that have formed since the dual currency system took place in 1993.

My experiences with the dual currency system in Cuba allowed me to gain an

understanding of the purchasing power of CUC versus MN. Before leaving for Cuba, I had heard about the opportunity for Cubans to buy free market goods through dollar stores. Upon my arrival I was very interested in discovering these types of stores for myself because these stores provide Cubans a link to the global market. As I have described in my background research section, the free market goods that were available (anything from *Nutella* to T.V.s to Adidas clothing) were marked with the same, if not a higher price than found in the United States. These stores allowed for Cubans to purchase commercial goods that are common for most people in middle class America. What I found interesting though, is although these goods were available for purchase; their prices were not reflective of the common salary earned by everyday Cubans, suggesting they are not common items in Cuba, but are luxury items. During a conversation that I had about two weeks into my stay, I heard about this dilemma firsthand. I asked the individual (a man in his early 40's) to explain how the current economy affects everyday Cubans. His answer provided me a glimpse of the adversities that have arisen from this dual currency system.

The CUC is the strongest currency in Cuba and the Cubans want to use this currency. But, the majority of Cubans use MN because they are paid in this type of currency. This leads to problems in our lives; problems such as finding food to eat. Since we don't have a refrigerator and we don't have the correct money (CUC) or the ability to save the amount of money for a refrigerator, we have to buy food we can eat in that day.

For many foreigners, these difficulties may not seem insurmountable since there are stores where Cubans can go to purchase items such as refrigerators. Yet, when one looks closer into the reality of everyday life in Cuba, it becomes apparent that purchasing a basic item such as a refrigerator in CUC is nearly impossible with an average Cuban salary in MN.

After this conversation, I began to realize why certain Cubans hustle international visitors. Cubans who engage in hustling schemes have an opportunity to make what they would through a state job in one month in just a couple of hours. CUCs are not just used to buy free

market goods such as stereos or “name brand clothing.” With CUCs, Cubans have the opportunity to buy anything, whether a refrigerator, a ride in a *maquina* or a Coca-Cola. Even if the item for sale has a price in MN, a Cuban can purchase said item in CUC so long as the seller has change for the bill. Nonetheless, it can be difficult to use CUC if the price is in MN. With the value of the CUC marked at 25 to 1, the seller must have enough MN in order to provide the correct change to meet the difference in currency. Thus, I believe the opportunity to purchase in CUC is available but can be difficult, or impossible; depending on the amount of MN the seller is carrying<sup>14</sup>. The ability to obtain, and purchase with CUC allows for Cubans to have greater opportunities to purchase what they want.

The purchasing power that came with the introduction of the Cuban Convertible Peso is an aspect that is changing the dynamics of the socialist system in Cuba. The CUC has opened up a lifestyle that is readily available to foreigners, yet is only slowly becoming available to Cubans. The individuals who were born in the late 1980s and early 1990s have only had exposure to previous ways of life on the island through their parents or other people from older generations. The CUC is a currency that is used by the affluent visitors to the island as well as the Cubans who are able to gain access to it. In many ways, the CUC has certain privileges tied to it. For example, if a certain club has a cover charge that is set in CUC then only those with access to CUC have the privilege of entering and enjoying a night in the club. As I mentioned in the “Cuban Tourism Industry” section, access to CUC allows Cubans to live like tourists in their own country. The opportunities open to them include access to certain clubs, pools, luxurious taxis, etc. All of these opportunities, though, are dependent on obtaining CUC. The ability to gain access to the foreign currency is important for many in my generation of 20-something year

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<sup>14</sup> Of course, most Cubans who have CUC also carry a few MN.

olds. I encountered a university age student playing music for tips one night. He explained to me that during the day he attends classes and keeps up with his studies. At night though, he ventures down to the *Malecón*<sup>15</sup> where he plays guitar hoping to receive CUC from tourists or more affluent Cubans. When I asked him why he goes to the *Malecón* nearly every night when he could be with family or asleep, he responded, “making CUC allows me to buy nicer clothes and go out to nicer discos. Playing music allows me to have a nicer life.”

The introduction of the dual currency system has changed the socialist dynamics in Cuba in many different ways (Kildegaard 1999; LeoGrande 2008; Orro 2008; Ross 2002; Weinreb 2009). Primarily, this currency system has created large socioeconomic gaps in Cuban society. Those with access to CUC are more affluent than those who only get paid in MN. This is why many people have migrated from the countryside into cities like Havana or Santiago de Cuba. These two cities invite many international visitors each year due to their rich cultural or historical attractions. The more international visitors, the more CUC there is to be obtained. The creation of the dual currency system has allowed for many Cubans to pursue this foreign currency through *jineterismo*. And although it can be debated that *jineterismo* has been around for centuries<sup>16</sup>, even the dynamics of hustling are changing as the country continues to be subjected to international tourism and the current dual currency system.

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<sup>15</sup> A “boardwalk-esque” sea wall where many people go to enjoy the cool breeze from the ocean (see Figure 7).

<sup>16</sup> As one Cuban described to me, “*jineteros* have existed since the Spanish came to the island in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.” He explained to me that ever since foreign people have been coming to the island, the locals have been trying to earn some sort of income off of these people. The specific example he gave me was the indigenous prostitutes that would “service” the colonizers.



Figure 7: A man on the Malecón during the day (photo by Lindsay Wiebold).

#### ***4.2 Jineterismo and the Word Jinetero***

During my stay in Cuba, I was fortunate enough to encounter different types of Cubans living their everyday lives in different ways. Two of the most influential people that I got to know extremely well over the six weeks I was abroad were a man who chose the pseudonym “Fidel” and his wife who chose “Vilma.”<sup>17</sup> I had the opportunity to spend many late nights at their house eating and enjoying friendly conversation. The first time that I met them, I found it a bit forward that they asked for my shoes when I left the country. This was not a rare occurrence, as many Cubans will ask for items that are easier, and cheaper for foreigners to obtain in their own countries. In fact, I ended up giving many different items to Fidel and Vilma over the course

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<sup>17</sup> Fidel is a discredit to the former ruler of Cuba. Vilma is a discredit to Raul Castro’s late wife.

of my stay in Cuba. On one such occasion, I was out with Fidel, Vilma, and a friend of mine from the study abroad group named Isabel. As the night went along, Vilma approached and explained that she and Fidel were going to the beach in the morning. She pointed at my sandals and unashamedly asked if Fidel and I could trade so that he could have a nicer pair for their first trip outside of Havana in a few months. Without the slightest bit of hesitation I agreed. As I approached Fidel about the trade, I quickly realized that he had no part in the idea and in fact was surprised that Vilma had suggested it. I assured him that it was no problem for me, so long as his sandals fit my feet, which they did. Later in the evening, after many hours of dancing and drinking Havana Club rum, Isabel and I politely excused ourselves from the party and began to walk to our hotel. However, after a couple of blocks, Isabel noticed that I had given up my nicer sandals for Fidel's. Out of care for my well-being, she became upset and told me she thought Fidel and Vilma were taking advantage of me: "they are sucking you dry" she said. In my rum altered state of mind I could not explain to her that I was only lending the sandals to Fidel, though I would not have minded giving them to him.

The next day, Isabel and I had plans to attend a rumba<sup>18</sup> with Fidel and Vilma in Havana Central. However in light of the previous night, Isabel did not want to go. She explained that she did not like how Fidel and Vilma asked for, and expected me to part ways with my money and my things for their benefit. She described Fidel as a *jinetero*. Her conception of a *jinetero* was based upon the course readings for the study abroad class as well as my pre-conceived notions of *jineterismo* that I had explained to her (Berg 2004; Cabezas 1998; Facio 2000; Fusco 1998; Hodge 2001; Roland 2011; Simoni 2008; Weinreb 2009). In previous conversations, I had told Isabel that *jineteros* were people who tried to gain benefits from foreigners. These benefits of

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<sup>18</sup> A weekly party that consists of Afro-Caribbean percussive music accompanied by Afro-Caribbean dance styles.

course included money, but could also include consumer goods (such as the sandals I had parted ways with) or entrance into a club. In my descriptions of *jineterismo* I had explained that the *jineteros* were using the foreigner. After Isabel said she did not want to come, I told her that that was fine but I would not lie to Fidel and Vilma when asked where she was and why she was not coming. She accepted this and I left, alone, for Fidel and Vilma's house.

Upon my arrival to their house in Havana Central, Fidel immediately asked where Isabel was. I explained to him her feelings and without realizing the controversy it would create, explained that my friend thought he was a *jinetero*<sup>19</sup>. He erupted when he heard the word. He began to explain to me that the word *jinetero* is one of the worst things he could imagine being called. In his opinion, the word *jinetero* describes someone who is dishonest and has a poor moral code. He and his wife explained to me that *jineterismo* involves prostitution and selling drugs. Further, they told me that if Fidel was a *jinetero*, he would have no problem soliciting Vilma for prostitution. In order to diffuse the conversation, I shared with them a conversation I had had two nights previously with another Cuban friend of mine.

This friend, named Pablo, was only a year older than I am. He and I had met in my first week in Havana and had developed a very strong relationship from our first conversation. We had shared many conversations while hanging out on the *Malecón*. We had also frequented many different salsa clubs. I had paid for everything in just about every scenario that we had spent together. In our third conversation I explained to Pablo that I was not just studying tourism in Cuba, but also *jineterismo* as an aspect of tourism. After learning this, he agreed to converse with me regarding *jineterismo*. After a few different conversations about tourism as well as *jineteros*, he told me that he had something very important he wanted to tell me. The next day, when he

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<sup>19</sup> Later on in the trip, Isabel returned to Fidel's home and had a chance to explain to him her opinion. In this moment they made up and are currently still friends.



came to my hotel, he approached in a less than joyous mood. I had a feeling I understood what he was going to explain yet I let the conversation develop as he wished. We walked down the street, engaging in our usual banter (“how are you, what did you do today, etc.”) for about a mile, until we found a quiet park bench to sit upon. As we sat down, he told me that he wanted to be absolutely honest and that I should just listen for a while. He proceeded to explain to me his interpretation of *jineterismo*. He used mutual Cuban friends of ours as examples while he described the actions of a *jinetero*. He explained the “basic *jinetero*” as I understood it before entering Cuba: someone who sells cigars illegally to foreigners, is involved in selling sex to a foreigner, or takes a foreigner to a restaurant in order to receive compensation from said restaurant. As he continued, however, he began to describe interactions that he and I had engaged in, like reaping benefits from a foreigner. These benefits could range from accepting the cover fee into a club, a few sips from the foreigners rum, a couple of CUC to get a little food, or all of the above. I eventually said to Pablo, “Pablo what you are describing to me are things that you and I have done. Does this make you a *jinetero*?” He looked at the ground for a moment while breathing a long sigh. “Yes, *soy jinetero*” he replied. Translated as, “I am a *jinetero*,” this was the first time that I had heard of someone declaring themselves a *jinetero*. There had been other times where I had engaged in conversations with someone trying to sell me a box of cigars, or even a woman for the night. In each of these circumstances though, when asked if the person was a *jinetero*, the person would immediately say no and begin to describe some other type of *jineterismo*.

After I explained this story to Fidel, he stopped and reflected pensively for a moment. When he began to speak again, he used a tone closer to a father’s than a friend’s. He defended his outburst by explaining that for people of his generation, the word *jinetero* involves mal-

intention and is only used with regards to dishonest interactions. I interpreted his reaction, and those of Pablo's, as a difference in generations. For the older generation, the word is tied into an immoral lifestyle associated with a dishonest interaction with a foreigner. For the younger generation, the word involves that meaning as well. Yet, *jinetero* can also be tied to any interaction with a foreigner where money, or consumer goods are involved. As Pablo had explained to me, he was never trying to earn money from me. Rather, he was trying to enjoy himself as we, the foreigners, were enjoying ourselves. If, for example, the foreigner was going to a club that he couldn't afford, he would not turn down the opportunity if the foreigner offered to pay.

Pablo used a technique, in his *jineterismo*, which was consistent with most of his friends and most of the *jineteros* that I engaged with from our generation. Their approach used a method that allowed the foreigner to believe that a friendship was developing. In most circumstances, an honest friendship could develop; it depended though on how much investment the foreigner and the *jinetero* were interested in putting in. In many cases, the *jinetero* would gauge the interest of the foreigner, consistent with the technique I described in the "Cuban Tourism Industry" section, in which the *jineteros* will shift their tactics to what is necessary for each tourist. In my first interaction with Pablo, he discovered that I was into street art (graffiti). Upon learning this, he would consistently try to take me to a part of Havana that is known for a street art project. From the beginning, I was skeptical about accompanying Pablo because I assumed he was trying to earn some sort of money for hosting me. Yet, as our friendship developed, I realized that he was just trying to show me what I wanted to see. As I described above, Pablo's style of *jineterismo* was a form that I was only introduced to by him, during my stay in Cuba. It involved spending time with foreigners and accepting benefits that the foreigner offered out. What made his form

different from other types of *jineterismo* is that it required a significant investment of time for both the tourist and the *jinetero* to develop a worthwhile relationship. He did have friends who would outright ask for a couple of CUC to buy some food. But, generally all of his friends partook in the same sort of hustling as Pablo did. They would enjoy themselves with foreigners, not often turning down benefits that the foreigner had to offer.



Figure 8: Street art in 10 de Octubre, Havana (photo by Alex Schultz).

What became apparent, especially after the confrontation with Fidel, was that *jineterismo* was perceived by older generations to be a less honest sort of hustle. Obviously this was apparent by Fidel's reaction, but it was also apparent with the older *jineteros* that I interacted with on the street. On one such occasion, I was walking down *El Prado*<sup>20</sup> when an older gentleman called me

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<sup>20</sup> A boulevard that divides Havana Vieja from Havana Central (see Figure 9).

over to where he was sitting. As I approached, he explained that it was his birthday and asked me for a couple of CUC with which to celebrate. Realizing this was a scam, I politely said “no,” yet as I walked away, I realized that I could probably gain some useful information from him. I walked for about a block before I found a corner store. In the corner store, I bought a box of *planchao*<sup>21</sup>. I went back to this man and offered the *planchao* for the two of us to share. As I opened it, he admitted that he had been lying and when I asked him why he replied: “it is hard for me to make money for my family to enjoy. I noticed that you were a foreigner and thought that a couple of CUC would be no problem for you to spare.” Admittedly, two or three CUC was not much for me to spare, but the fact that he had lied about his reason made me realize that he was using any means at his disposal to make a few extra dollars. Of course, some Cuban youth would also use false stories as a means to earn CUC, yet the group that I engaged with the most used a more honest approach; if they wanted a couple of CUC to buy some food, they would say just that.

It seems to me that the increase of tourism since its re-opening in 1990, as well as the foreign currency that comes with the international visitors, has brought a shift in generational perceptions of interacting with and earning money from these foreign people. Pablo’s generation, which was born in the mid to late 1980’s, have really only seen and remembered life with tourism as a leading economic pillar. Thus, much of this generation has grown into adulthood accustomed to constant interaction with foreign people. This is especially true in the Havana area, since it is frequently the point of origin for Cuban tourism. This generation’s familiarity with foreigners has created a more understanding sentiment towards *jineterismo*, whereas Fidel believes that it is a dishonest means of earning an income. Pablo’s generation sees things a little

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<sup>21</sup> *Planchao* is a 200ml box of rum that can easily be mistaken for a juice box. Many Cubans (especially men) drink this, as it is very cheap (.90 CUC).

differently: as a friend, named Jamal, told me, “A *jinetero* can be a good person. They are hustling foreigners in order to resolve (a *resolver*) their problems.” Jamal explained to me that these were problems that were created by an economy that relies upon foreign currency. And as Pablo’s story illustrates, *jineterismo* is not solely used to resolve problems. Rather, *jineteros* may just be trying to enjoy life and interact with the foreign visitors.



**Figure 9: El Prado during the daytime (photo by the author).**

With increasing numbers of tourists visiting the island, the Cuban population is subjected to greater foreign circulations (foreign currency and foreign culture) every year. The foreign currency is an obvious reason why *jineteros* engage in hustling the foreigners. Yet, many *jineteros* also interact with foreigners merely to socialize with the visitor as well as to live like the tourist. As is evident with Pablo, *jineterismo* also allows the individual to engage in friendly interactions with foreigners that many times result in benefits. In Pablo’s case, he makes about 9



CUC per month as a student at the University of Havana, so *jineterismo* is not a means to make a living for him. Instead, Pablo is supplemented by the food that his mother, who he lives with, cooks for him. He also takes on odd jobs around his neighborhood such as helping the local car mechanic or local repairman in return for a small amount of money. *Jineterismo* is something that allows him to interact with people visiting the island, while also indulging in a consumerist way of life. These interactions though have not come without a price. The current government, under Raul Castro, has implemented security measures in order to deter the Cuban-foreigner interactions.

Aside from the installment of more police<sup>22</sup> in Havana in recent years, President Castro has also implemented changes that are beneficial for the Cuban population. In contrast to his brother's administration, since his official appointment as president in 2008, he has allowed for the Cuban public to purchase, or receive from abroad, free market goods. As we departed Miami for Havana this was extremely noticeable. Many of the people (largely Cuban Americans) who were embarking to Havana had carts full of televisions, video game systems, and other items that are cheaper to purchase outside of Cuba. As mentioned earlier, since even before Raul's administration, the Cuban population had the option of shopping at TRD's, which allow Cubans, who can afford it, to purchase free market goods with CUC; lending to a continued drive for many to find and earn CUC. Along with these consumer items that Cubans can receive from family coming into the country, or can buy in TRD's, Raul has also allowed the Cuban population to buy and use cell phones. In many ways though, these concessions constitute a step further away from the communist goal of equality. Those who have family abroad, or are able to earn a greater CUC income have greater ease consuming free market goods or using items such

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<sup>22</sup> "Cuba recently introduced tourist police in heavily trafficked areas to protect tourists from the hustlers" (Jackiewicz and Bolster 2003: 377).

as cell phones. My Cuban friends believed having things such as a good T.V. or a satellite dish improves their quality of life. Certainly, having money to buy a valuable item like a refrigerator allows that Cuban to buy food that he or she can then preserve for multiple days.

Cubans are more likely to be able to buy items such as refrigerators if they have family who live abroad. Since 1993, it has been legal for Cubans to possess dollars allowing families who live abroad to legally send money. Of course, certain restrictions have existed in the past regarding how much money families could receive, yet these restrictions were implemented by governments outside of Cuba. For example the United States had a cap set until Barack Obama removed all “remittance-sending restrictions” in April 2009 (Eckstein 2010: 1050). According to Susan Eckstein (2010), “In the post Soviet era [Washington] typically capped the amount Cuban Americans could remit at \$1,200 annually, and it typically limited remittance-sending to immediate kin” (1050). Now that these restrictions are gone, certain Cubans have the ability to receive as much money as their family is willing to send them, thus adding to existing socioeconomic gaps.

Raul has also opened up spaces, such as hotel rooms, previously closed to the Cuban population. Though Cubans are now allowed to purchase hotel rooms, authorities, such as security guards or police officers, still seem to curb Cubans from even entering the hotel lobbies, let alone interacting with foreigners. Two specific occurrences stand out in my mind that exemplify the Cuban authorities being less than hospitable to Cubans. The first example came on a night when I was planning on meeting with some Cuban friends in my hotel lobby before venturing down to the *Malecón*. On this night my two Cuban friends, both Afro-Cubans, came to my hotel and were not allowed to enter the covered patio area connected to the lobby. When I asked the hotel employee why they could not enter, he told me that they were *jineteros*, and thus

were not allowed to “hassle” any of the other hotel guests or myself. I could only guess that his basis for this assumption was that they were black and that one had dreadlocks.<sup>23</sup> The other example that comes to mind was on an afternoon when a friend had accompanied me to the hotel in order to receive a shirt I had promised him. We took a *maquina* from his house in Havana Central to my hotel located about 15 blocks away. Even though we took special precautions to avoid being seen together, authorities arrested him as he left the hotel lobby. When I asked him why he had been arrested he explained to me that the authorities thought that he was harassing foreigners.

I have interpreted these two interactions as being a result of the immense amount of police presence in downtown Havana. Although there have been some concessions that allow for Cubans to enter areas for CUC consumption, there is still a ban on Cuban-foreigner interactions. The Cuban population now has the opportunity to consume the same goods and services that foreigners have access to, but ideally they should consume separately and away from foreigners. The great number of police, nearly one officer on every street corner in Havana tourist areas, is an effort to minimize Cuban and non-Cubans interaction. The police, and government for that matter, explain that these measures have been installed in order to protect the foreigners. And while I cannot completely deny this notion, I prefer the explanation that my Cuban friends provided me. They believed Cubans were often taken into custody in order to disallow the foreigner from seeing the ‘real Cuba,’ comprised of the socioeconomic hardships that exist even in Cuba’s socialist revolutionary context. My friends explained to me that the Cuban government only wants the foreign visitors to see the successes of the revolution as opposed to the poverty and economic hardships that also exist for many Cubans.

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<sup>23</sup> These two descriptors (black and dreadlocks) are stereotypical of street hustlers in Cuba.



On the other hand, by arresting innocent Cubans who are interacting with foreigners, the Cuban government provides a sense of safety to the visiting tourists. One such instance occurred while Pablo was walking down the street talking with a friend of his. After conversing for a moment, he ran to catch up to our study abroad group. Two police officers witnessed him running up to us and thinking that Pablo was trying to hassle us, they stopped him and placed him in handcuffs. Without listening to anyone's side of the story, the police officers took Pablo to the police station. Isabel asked the officers why they had done this, and they explained that he could have been very dangerous. She told me that during this explanation, they described some other foreigners that had been found, drugged and without any of their belongings on the side of the road the night before. They explained that they took Pablo in order to keep us safe. Whether or not the story was true, it did provide a sense of security.

This example falls under a strategy that many call "tourism apartheid," that the Cuban government implemented in order to, among other things<sup>24</sup>, protect tourists from the crime inherently tied to tourism. "The most conspicuous dimension of this policy was the harassment of Cubans, especially young black men, publicly seen with tourists: police would ask for identification and sometimes, even arrest them" (Taylor Jr. and McGlynn 2009: 409). Pablo was in fact a young black man. Unfortunately though his arrest, and the arrest of others are contradictory to the revolutionary goal of racial equality. According to Rodrigo Espina Prieto and Pablo Rodríguez Ruiz, "The [revolution's] dominant discourse made racism a cardinal sin that was seen not only to debase the individual, but also to divide and weaken the Revolution" (2010: 163). This form of racial profiling, then, constitutes another transition in Cuba's socialist objectives.

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<sup>24</sup> See Taylor Jr. and McGlynn 2009 for a detailed description of "tourism apartheid."

Racial prejudices still continue to exist among authority figures as well as the everyday Cuban population. In *Cuban Color in Tourism and La Lucha*, L. Kaifa Roland discusses the “distinction in others’ perceptions of [racialized] women: while white women were often conceived to be “dating” foreign men, black women who associated with foreign men – because of their visibility and the sexualized stereotypes of them – were understood to be *jineteras*” (2011: 56). In this same manner the hotel security guard who would not let my friends into the veranda area was basing his assumption of them being *jineteros* on their physical appearance (dark skin with dreadlocks). It should be noted that these assumptions are tied to a lengthy Cuban history that involves “racist and sexist hegemony” helping to shape this island nation (Allen 2009: 55) and not even a half century revolution has been able to break these ongoing prejudices.

In the contemporary moment, racism and racial profiling still exist. I account this to the lack of discourse regarding race in the present day. As Jafari Allen explains, “Although there is a growing number of historical works on race in Cuba, [lack of race literature] remains true for contemporary studies. Notwithstanding this important work, there is a dearth of ethnographic and otherwise empirical social science literature on race in contemporary Cuba” (2009: 57). Cubans like Pablo will continue to be unnecessarily harassed by authority figures without sufficient discourse regarding the topic of racism and racial profiling. Without sufficient acknowledgement of these problems, Cuban society will continue to move away from original socialist goals of racial equality.

Indeed there was an overwhelming sense of security for foreigners in Havana. On nearly every street corner, uniformed police stood guard. On many of the buildings, cameras were in place in order to keep watch over the city, the local population and the visitors from abroad. In the tourist areas close to Havana Vieja and the Capitol building men in black, army-esque

uniforms, walked large German Shepherds while checking the identification and licenses of taxi drivers and street peddlers (see Figure 10). These same men patrolled the Central Park, on the lookout for street hustlers. What was interesting to me was the lack of obvious *jineterismo* in these areas. I had been told by my professor to go to these areas in order to find *jineteros*. When I arrived at the Central Park, an area I was assured would have lots of hustlers, I was surprised to have no one approach me. I attribute this to the three men in black uniforms with German Shepherds casually walking around and observing the park. When a Cuban did approach a foreign looking lady, one of these authorities immediately broke up the interaction.



**Figure 10: Specialized police before checking the IDs of the bicycle taxis (photo by Marisa Baylon Guillen).**

The police presence in other parts of the island is drastically less than is found in Havana. While on a weekend trip to Santiago de Cuba, on the southeastern end of the island, this became apparent. On a day tour around the city, a Cuban man approached me within steps of breaking

off from my study abroad group. I immediately assumed he was some sort of hustler because of the fancy gold watch, gold sunglasses, nice shirt, and new shoes he was wearing. My assumption was furthered when, while walking with him, he asked if I needed a place to stay or a restaurant to eat in. As I have noted in a previous section, many *jineteros* take their “clients” to restaurants (*paladares*) or bed and breakfasts (*casa particulares*) in return for compensation from the business. After I explained that I already had a hotel and was in fact not hungry, he offered a private tour around the city. I accepted the tour and after an hour of seeing ‘behind the scenes’ sites, he asked for a tip. I handed him 2 CUC, which was apparently enough for him. While on our tour, I noticed the lack of police presence in Santiago de Cuba. In fact, during the hour the hustler and I spent together, I did not see a single police officer. I did happen to see one policewoman the next day while out by myself, and I noticed that all Cubans were keeping to themselves and seemingly ignoring any foreigners. When I ventured one block away from this authority figure, I was approached over and over by Cubans asking for money or trying to sell me some sort of souvenir.

It seems apparent to me that the high police presence has dissuaded Cubans from openly interacting with and soliciting foreigners in Havana, whereas in Santiago de Cuba, *jineterismo* is much more obvious and foreigners are much more prone to Cubans trying to obtain CUC in any way possible. One tour guide spoke to this difference, “I don’t like Santiago because there are many people coming up aggressively asking for tips. In Havana, there are much more police taking care of tourism.” It seems to me that Havana has more police that are trying to allow foreign tourists to enjoy themselves without being hassled or hustled by Cubans. From my point of view, Havana has more police force than any other part of the country because it is the point of origin for most foreigners visiting the island and thus the first (or only) impression that many

visitors have of Cuba. This police force attempts to give foreigners a safe and secure image of Cuba, and I can attest, Havana seemed to be the safest city I have ever traveled to in Latin America.<sup>25</sup>

The high police presence in Havana has not stopped *jineterismo* from occurring. While *jineterismo* may not be as obvious as it had been during the 1990s and early 2000s, *jineteros* still do engage in a form of hustling. As noted from my interactions with Pablo, this form of *jineterismo* takes places in a less conspicuous form. Although not solely unique to their generation, the *jineteros* of my age group use a form of hustling, which employs friendship as a means for gaining CUC. I do not believe that the friendships established are false; rather they provide a means into the way of life that the foreigner is privileged to lead.

Whatever the form of hustling that is used, it is still contradictory to Ernesto Che Guevara's<sup>26</sup> idea of the "revolutionary new man". This idea is rooted in the ideology that work should be performed for moral incentive rather than material incentive (Ludlam 2012). Though it was never fully met, this idea became further compromised with the re-opening of the island to tourism in 1990.

The creation of a revolutionary society necessitated the development of a 'new person,' motivated by moral rather [than] material aspirations. International tourism, however, spawned a countervailing force to the goals of the revolution – to build a society based on social justice, collectivism, reciprocity, and the equitable distribution of wealth. Consumerism promotes individualism and material incentives and generates ideals of the 'good life' based on acquisition. (Taylor Jr. and McGlynn 2009: 410)

This re-introduction brought foreign currency as well as foreign consumer culture, which

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<sup>25</sup> Although the only Latin American cities I have traveled to are Cancún and Cabo San Lucas Mexico, San Jose and Puntarenas Costa Rica, and David Panama, I feel that Havana was the safest.

<sup>26</sup> "Che" played a major role in the overthrow of the Batista regime that ruled the country until 1959. He was a Marxist Leninist theorist who helped to shape the socialist nature of the Cuban revolution. Within his rise to 2<sup>nd</sup> in command, he developed the idea of the "revolutionary new man."

provided the Cuban population a glimpse of life with name brand clothing, higher wages, and easier social mobility. For many, inclusion in the tourism industry's wealth was unavailable legally, thus spawned *jineterismo* in the contemporary context. *Jineterismo* is used as a means to gain access to capitalistic privileges. And in many cases, *jineterismo* is the only option to enter into the tourism industry that provides more income than any other Cuban employment sector. In the article *Havana Hustle*, Damien Cave describes, one *jinetero*'s story of starting to hustle: "His mother was often bedridden with severe arthritis, his younger sister and her daughter were still in school, and [Carlos], as a black man without political connections or an appropriate degree, would never be able to get a tourism job that offered legal access to dollars. Becoming a *jinetero*, he argued, was the only option" (2003). Although Carlos used *jineterismo* as a means to provide for his sick mother (a moral incentive), he was still taking part in an occupation based in materialism. In many ways, *jineterismo* is exemplary of the current transitions within Cuban socialism in which global circulations, such as foreign currency and foreign culture play a large role.

#### **4.3 Wanderlust in Contemporary Cuba**

From my first interaction with Cuban youth, I learned that they had great interest in leaving the island and seeing the world. Unfortunately this is very difficult and according to Yoani Sanchez, "[the] capricious exit permit costs over \$200 [US], a year's salary for the average Cuban. But money is not enough. Nor is a valid passport. [Cubans] must also meet other, unwritten requirements, ideological and political conditions that make [them] eligible, or not, to board a plane" (2012). Various Cubans explained to me that there are only three possible ways for Cubans to even have a chance to leave the country legally: (1) obtain work in a foreign

country; (2) marry a foreigner and move to the foreigner's country of residence; and (3) receive a letter of invitation from a foreigner to visit<sup>2728</sup>. Based upon the difficulty of actually leaving the island legally, many young Cubans strive to interact with their foreign counterparts whenever possible. Nearly every Cuban that I interacted with, young and old, were extremely curious to learn how life was in my home country. What I found interesting is that Cubans from an older generation nearly always asked how I funded my trip to Cuba and the different trips that I have taken abroad, whereas those from my generation had little interest in the economics of it; rather they were more interested in my life, and the lives of my friends, in the United States. The latter group loved to talk about music and would almost always beat box or freestyle for me when they found out about my passion for hip-hop. In fact, one friend took me to his house in order to show me his hip-hop collection before letting me watch him and his rap group record some music. After one such night, he explained to me that he was trying to use his music as a means to leave the country. He hoped to produce beats for hip-hop artists beyond Cuba. When I asked him where he would like to go, he responded, "I don't know. I have a friend who is a D.J. in Chicago. I think that sounds cool."

My Cuban friends who were interested in hip-hop were also individuals who provided me much insight into *jineterismo*, because many times *raperos* (Cuban rappers), as well as *jineteros*, are from the *barrios marginados* (marginalized neighborhoods). Also, not unique to either *raperos* or *jineteros*, both groups are heavily influenced by "transnational flows of people,

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<sup>27</sup> This invitation must include an economic breakdown of how the foreigner will provide for the Cuban and ensure that the Cuban will not become a ward of the state. The Cuban government announced that it will be lifting all travel restrictions for Cubans to leave the country just before the finishing of this thesis. Although many are skeptical, this will be the first time in over 50 years that Cubans will be able to leave the country without having to go through a very strenuous process. For more details see Cave, 2012.

capital, and cultural influence” (Perry 2008: 646). In the case of the *rapero* these flows influence image aesthetics, such as performance techniques or clothing. As I have discussed throughout this paper, these flows are some of the driving forces for *jineteros* to enter into hustling as a lifestyle and occupation.

Further connecting *raperos* to *jineteros* are the content of *raperos*’ lyrics. As Roberto Zurbano describes, “their testimonies deal with the world of the *barrio*, the unjust and unequal world that tourism, foreign investment, and circulation of [foreign currency] has created” (2009: 152). These things are what drive the street hustlers to interact with foreigners in order to try and better themselves within the socioeconomic gaps that exist in contemporary Cuba. Further, “artists are from communities with limited economic possibilities; they are often disenfranchised from remittances... and consequently feel bitter, marginalized, or simply in danger of not making ends meet” (Zurbano 2009: 148). In this same sense, *jineteros* are often from marginalized communities and will use *jineterismo* as a means to earn a little more money and hopefully resolve their financial problems.

Other friends used other means of potentially leaving the country. Three of my friends, including Pablo, had foreign girlfriends – which is not to say that they only had these girlfriends because they were trying to use them to leave. In fact, I honestly feel that at least Pablo was in love with his girlfriend and would be more than content with her moving to Cuba in order to start a life together. Of course, this would still give Pablo access to a better life, since he would be married to a foreigner and thus have a connection to the global circulations many people seek. What was interesting though is that these three men, as well as other Cuban men I interacted with, had little interest in Cuban women. Jamal explained that he was more interested in foreign girls because they seemed to be less materialistic than Cuban women. Moreover, he explained



that many of the Cuban girls in our generation are more interested in foreign men. Jamal seemed to be suggesting that Cuban women are interested in the hard currency that the foreign men brought with them. Likewise, another friend asked me if I liked Cuban woman, to which I responded yes. But when I returned the question he replied, “Not really, they are all very shallow. If you don’t have money to take them out and buy them things, it won’t work out.” In that regard, I do not know if Cuban women are that much different from women elsewhere in the world, but my own assessment is that today’s generation of young Cuban men and women are interested in the tourists that visit the island largely because they would like to see other places. Yet, since they are generally unable to leave the island, they are compelled to learn about foreigners and foreign ways of life by getting to know those who visit Cuba.

My friends’ interests in foreigners and the potential interest in marrying these foreigners is a contemporary form of intermarriage resulting in racial or cultural mixing. Throughout Cuba’s extensive history, intermarriage has occurred in many different variations. Many times, individuals would attempt to strengthen the ‘value’ of their blood by marrying and generating offspring with a lighter skinned person. L. Kaifa Roland uses the term *blanquemento* (whitening), which applies to “cultural assimilation” as well as in reference to procreation in order to lighten skin tone (2011: 115).

In the contemporary moment, Cubans have engaged in marriage as well as association with foreign people in order to strengthen their socioeconomic positions. As Roland explains, “the economic hardships of the Special Period have again led women to seek a more secure future through exogenous (out-group) associations with high-status men – now, with foreign tourists” (2011: 25). My friends’ interests in foreign women leads me to believe that they are engaging in these same ‘association for benefits’ sort of relationships, which will help them to

secure better futures for themselves. Intermarriage is not solely for more social mobility, the contemporary form of intermarriage indicates that there are socioeconomic transitions within socialism that drive Cubans to seek out “exogenous associations” with foreign visitors.

Many older people voiced their desire for their children or grandchildren to have the opportunity to leave the country. Rarely did that person express the desire to leave for him/herself. Rather it was generally directed toward the generation that was born in the 1980s or later which grew up and really only remembers the country since the fall of the Soviet bloc and after the re-opening of tourism. One night when I was playing dominoes at Fidel and Vilma’s house in Havana Central, Vilma had gotten up to prepare some coffee for the three of us. In our break from the game, I turned to Fidel and asked him what his greatest desire was. He replied that he wanted an income that was fair for the work that he put in. More than that though, he said he wanted for his children to have the ability and opportunity to leave the country and know other places. I asked him if he wanted to leave as well. He replied that he really didn’t have any desire, even though he had spent over 40 years on the island. He explained to me, “This is home, here with my wife. I don’t need to see other places. I like being in Havana, but I would love for my children and their children to be able to come and go as they want. Not to have to leave the country and potentially never come back and see their home.”<sup>29</sup> This quote suggested to me that he and his wife enjoyed their lives but wanted, for future generations, the freedom that nearly every other young person in the world has; the legal freedom to leave their country of origin<sup>30</sup>.

One day, while out on the *Malecón*, I had another interesting interaction with an older man. I had been walking for about an hour when I ran into a *jinetero* I had met a few times.

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<sup>29</sup> This last sentence was in reference to Vilma’s son who left Cuba on a boat, in 2002, and cannot come back.

<sup>30</sup> Admittedly, many young people across the world do not have the ability to leave their country due to financial reasons.

Recognizing me, he invited me over to his group of friends. I was told to sit next to the oldest man in the group. I began speaking with this man and quickly realized he was a father figure for the youth in the group. The man asked me how I liked Cuba and I replied that I liked it very much. I returned his question to which he nodded his head and told me that he loved his country, especially Havana. I asked him if he wanted to leave the country ever. He smiled and explained that he would only want to leave to visit his family who had emigrated to the United States. Making sure that I understood, he explained that he only wanted to leave to visit them. If he could have it his way, he would have them come back and visit him in Havana. When I asked him if he was happy for the opportunities that they have outside of Cuba, he responded, “of course. They have the ability to make more money, and see other places outside of this little island. But I do not want them to forget where they came from.” For this older man, it was great that his family was able to leave and now live a potentially better life. But, he was also concerned that with this better life, his family may forget about life in Cuba. I interpreted his fear of his family forgetting about Cuba as an acknowledgment that even though his family may have the opportunity to come and go from their new country, they may have to work so hard that they may never have the free time to make the trip back. A little later in the conversation, I asked this man if he thought his family would come and visit. He smiled and said, “They have plane tickets for this December.” This last statement was a testament to the changes that U.S. President Barack Obama has made in relations with Cuba. According to Stephanie Hanson, “Obama signaled an intention to remove travel and remittance restrictions during his campaign, which he implemented on April 13, 2009” (2009). This implementation has lifted all travel restrictions for individuals wishing to visit family members in Cuba. With this change to the U.S. regulations on Cuba, there is less of a concern that Cubans will leave Cuba, never to come back again. Yet, as I

described above, the impossibility of leaving Cuba is the source of the problem. Thus, for this older individual that I spoke with on the *Malecón*, he is happy because his family has been able to reap the benefits outside of the island and can now come and go as they please. Yet, Fidel's sons and future grandchildren remain on the island without the option of coming and going.

Recently, Barack Obama has lifted certain travel bans that allow for Americans to fly with “people-to-people” licenses<sup>31</sup> (Higgins 2011). According to a *New York Times* article, “‘all a U.S. citizen has to do is sign up for an authorized program and they can go to Cuba.’ ... said Tom Popper, director of Insight Cuba, a travel company that [used “people-to-people licenses to take] more than 3,000 Americans to Cuba between 1999 and 2003, and was among the tour operators to apply for a license under the new rules [in 2011]” (Higgins 2011). This opportunity, along with the allowance of Cuban American families to return ‘home,’ has increased the foreign currencies as well as foreign cultures that enter the island yearly. These inevitably affect the Cuban socialist program, as they are further introductions of consumerism.

One of the most difficult things about travelling to Cuba for me was meeting the many people of my generation who have not had the opportunities with which I have been blessed. As the country becomes more and more open to the world abroad, the citizens become more and more interested in discovering what life is like in other places. What was interesting to me was interacting with *jineteros* of my generation. They would begin their schemes the same way as *jineteros* of older generations would. Yet, when they discovered that I was a student, it seemed like they became more concerned with getting to know me, and conversing, as opposed to earning money. For most young *jineteros* I met, they were content with sharing a little rum and more importantly sharing cultures. As one *jinetero* told me, “Es mejor a intercambiar la cultura

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<sup>31</sup> Originally these licenses were created under Bill Clinton in 1999. (Higgins 2011).

que ganar el dinero” (It is better to exchange culture than to earn money). It seems to me that the individuals who have only really known life since the re-opening of tourism realize that the borders will eventually open. For now, they are trying their best to get in touch with the “outside” world that they will eventually know and see.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The Cuban socialist system is currently undergoing a transitional period that is a result of the country being re-opened to tourism in 1990, after the fall of the Soviet Union. After the re-opening, the Cuban government implemented the present dual currency system. This dual currency system has encouraged consumerism, as global items are now available for purchase in private stores as well as TRDs. Also, this system has contributed to the movement of Cubans out of the professional industries, such as education and health care, and into the more lucrative tourist sector. The self-employment that occurs within the tourist sector has been a main contributor to the socioeconomic gaps that have formed in recent years. Specifically, *jineterismo* has allowed Cubans to make more in just a couple hours than they would in a full month.

*Jineterismo* as a whole is a useful lens to look through as a means for analyzing the contemporary transitions within Cuban socialism. It has allowed me to illustrate the racial inequality that exists in its contemporary form due to the increase in police as a result of the “tourism apartheid.” Also, it has allowed me to examine and analyze Cuba’s contemporary movement away from the idea of the “revolutionary new man” as consumerism continues to increase with the arrival of global circulations every day.

Perceptions of *jineterismo* are also changing over time. The younger generations are becoming increasingly used to foreign visitors, thus increasingly used to interacting with them as a means to meet their needs and desires. Also the idea of falling in love with or using a foreign person as a means to leave the country continues to be acceptable as the younger generations

become more accustomed to international ‘guests.’ This allows for transitions within the Cuban culture as it is continuing to be introduced to the world off of the island.

The contemporary transition that the Cuban socialist system is undergoing will continue to proceed as more people visit the country every year; allowing global circulations to enter. The United States will also play a large role in these transitions as more restrictions are lifted regarding remittances, travel, and trade. I personally hope to continue studying these transitions as they occur in the future. In those investigations, I hope to somehow work *raperos* more centrally into my discussions as I feel that they are capable of providing a glimpse of the realities and struggles that Cubans face on a day-to-day basis. It will be very interesting to see how these transitions continue to shape the lives of my Cuban friends.

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