

# The Eroticization of Labor in Cuba's All-Inclusive Resorts: Performing Race, Class and Gender in the New Tourist Economy

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*This paper examines the eroticization of labour in Cuba's new, all-inclusive beach resorts where workers are asked to enact scripts of affective labour, sexual enticement, and servility in the delivery of their occupational roles. Most studies of sexualized labour argue that workers' resistance is found in not complying with management's exigencies. Instead, in this paper I argue that workers' resistance can be found in the appropriation of their sexualized labour to establish relationships with hotel guests that provide more direct benefits and opportunities for travel and migration.*

Jorge is a privileged worker in Cuba's revived tourism economy. He is a waiter at a hotel resort in Varadero, and lives at home with his parents, grandparents and sister in the nearby town of Cárdenas.<sup>1</sup> In a country where a surgeon earns \$25 a month, Jorge can earn that, and more, in a day. As a *trabajador del sector mixto*, he works in one of Cuba's new mixed-sector enterprises, a joint venture resort hotel involving foreign capital and management. Jorge earns gratuities and part of his salary in US dollars. He travels 18km to Varadero in a tourism industry air-conditioned bus that picks up hotel workers and delivers them to the 'gilded ghettos' where foreign tourists, mainly Europeans and Canadians, come to vacation, sunbathe, relax, snorkel and play golf. Jorge is single, tall, slender, light-skinned, amiable and bright. He relied on contacts in the tourism industry to procure entrance into the local tourism training school where he received instruction in hospitality services. Other contacts helped Jorge gain employment in the restaurant of a Spanish joint-venture resort development.

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After the collapse of the socialist trading bloc, Cuba quickly turned to international tourism as a way to earn hard currency and to ease the economic crisis that threatened to crush the only socialist country in the Western Hemisphere. Through foreign joint ventures, tourism became the most dynamic sector of the economy. Between 1990 and 2000 the number of hotel rooms tripled from 12,900 to 50,000. In 1990, Cuba received 340,000 foreign tourists; by November 2005 it had already received 2 million visitors (Castro, 2003; DTC News Cuba, 2005). These phenomenal numbers were achieved in spite of travel sanctions to Cuba imposed by its most probable tourist source, the United States.

Changes implemented during the early 1990s restructured the Cuban economy away from state planning to a mixed market economy. The state-party apparatus implemented reforms that decriminalized the use of the dollar in 1994 and shortly thereafter legalized some forms of self-employment, privatization and remittances. The dollarization of the economy has increased economic inequality in Cuba. While Cuba has maintained an egalitarian salary structure for state workers, a two tier economy has developed that favours those with access to dollars through employment in joint ventures, tourism, or remittances from abroad.

Tourism workers such as Jorge can augment their earnings through gratuities and participation in illicit activities such as the sale of cigars, rum or sexual services to hotel guests. But during an interview Jorge claimed that what makes his job so desirable was not so much the access to dollars but the potential for romance and marriage. As he explained:

My friends at the Politécnico [tourism training school] were only interested in getting married to a tourist and getting out. That's the goal for every one of them, to find *una española* [a Spanish woman] and to leave the country.

I asked him how workers, such as waiters, forged relationships with foreigners dining at the restaurant:

ALC: Are there opportunities for getting to know them while you are working?

J: Yes, you find a way. If they smile at you, you smile back even more. If they ask you for something, you get it right away. You sweat to bring them what they want. And if they want a monkey or an elephant, you invent it. The thing is that you find a way to please them. And that has nothing to do with tips.

ALC: But how do you get the relationship to a more intimate level?

J: That's not the problem. The issue is being able to get time alone with them.

ALC: How do you do it?

J: You try to get them away from the hotel. Go to a *discoteca*, a disco. Or invite them to your house and have them meet your family. ¡*No es fácil!* It's not easy!

Workers strive to create and exploit conditions of intimacy, to forge bonds with guests through friendly conversations and gestures. While this is a practice suggested by management, the consequences cannot be predicted.

Most studies of **sex tourism** have examined encounters that take place between tourists and locals in bars, restaurants, nightclubs and on the streets and beaches of tourist resorts. However, few spaces provide more intimate contact than hotels where tourists and hotel workers are in constant contact twenty-four hours a day (Adler & Adler, 2004). **Given this, it is surprising that studies of sex tourism have ignored sexual encounters between hotel workers and guests, even though the hospitality sector is highly conditioned and structured to meet a tourist's needs—physical, emotional, and sexual—within the resort enclave.**

In this paper I **explore commercialized sexualities and the eroticization of labour in Cuba's all-inclusive resort hotels.** Drawing on interviews and participant observation conducted in Cuba between 1997 and 2003, **I examine the organization of labour in hotel resorts and the uses of emotional labour, race, gender, and sexuality to structure the work process.**<sup>2</sup> I argue that sexuality is an integral component of all-inclusive resorts and that the provision of sex to guests is part of the eroticization of the organization. While previous studies on the uses of emotional labour in a work setting argue that workers are harmed by the manipulation of private emotion for public use, this research challenges this dichotomy and suggests a more nuanced **reading of emotional labour and worker agency.**

Called upon to provide care work by transnational organizations, Cuban hospitality workers make use of affect and sexuality to cultivate friendships, romance and other exchanges. There are opportunities for cultivating various forms and gradations of relationships with hotel guests. These leave room to exploit sexuality in creative albeit limited ways. Resistance for these workers can be found, not in withdrawing from processes of sexualization, but in complying with the organization's exigencies and, in some cases, appropriating and benefiting from their sexualization. In the process, hotel workers erode hierarchical relations in occupations that often render them invisible and subservient. **While it may appear to management that workers are complying with corporate, customer service policies, their complicitous resistance circumvents (while reinforcing) these norms.** These strategies push resistance to a new level as hospitality workers take back the circulation of their sexuality to further their dreams.

## The Setting

Varadero has been intimately connected to metropolitan centres for over one hundred years. Located in western Cuba, two hours east of Havana, the 25km peninsula of Varadero has a resident population of approximately 18,000. After the Cuban Revolution, many of the opulent beach homes that belonged to North American and Cuban elites were nationalized by the government and redistributed to workers. Large mansions such as the Dupont and Josone estate were converted into

state-owned tourism-orientated enterprises. In the last 15 years, most of the peninsula has been built up with all-inclusive resort hotels, offering lodging to as many as 22,000 overnight visitor stays per day. Varadero went from 5,299 hotel rooms in 1990 to 13,490 in 2001 (*Cuba in Figures*, 2002). Currently, transnational tourism conglomerates such as Super Clubs, Sol Melia, Beaches, and Sandals dot Varadero's beaches.

During Cuba's height as a neocolonial destination for US travellers, Varadero served as a holiday resort for wealthy and bourgeois Cuban families and for US industrialists and mobsters. In the 1920s, most of the land in Varadero was purchased by Irénée du Pont de Nemours of the Dupont fortune. Dupont built a mansion in Varadero as did Chicago mafia boss Al Capone. Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista had a house in Varadero as does Fidel Castro. Currently, Varadero is Cuba's second most popular tourist destination, next to Havana, and the sixth most popular destination in the Caribbean. Visitors from Canada, Germany, France, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom account for 72 per cent of foreign vacationers visiting the resort (DTC News, 2005).<sup>3</sup> Proliferating in the 1990s, the vast majority of these all-inclusive Cancun-style beachfront resorts and high-rise hotels lie east of the city, removed from the town and its inhabitants.

Cubans and Varadero residents complain that Varadero is now too expensive for locals and affordable only for tourists. The businesses and new hotels cater exclusively to tourists, and everything costs dollars; the peso economy is virtually nonexistent. Varadero has become a fantasy island, an insulated space, complete with a mall, yacht harbour, and golf course. It is an enclave resort of luxury hotels, a package destination, where a tourist's expenses, including airplane travel, accommodation, meals, entertainment, recreation, tips and drinks, are paid for in the country of origin. There are few opportunities for locals to make money directly from tourists in the all-inclusive economy, as dollars and tourists seldom circulate outside the resorts.

### Emotional Labour

Mass tourism travellers, who come to Varadero for its sandy, white beaches and warm weather, seek a reprieve from monotonous, structured lives. They travel to identify more with bodily pleasures and with their own expressive and cultural needs (Graburn, 1983). Mass tourism offers travellers a destination away from home, but with all the conveniences of home—and more. Central to the selling of the Caribbean and other former colonial destinations is the notion that metropolitan travellers can escape from the daily grind of alienating work while having their needs met by smiling, courteous 'natives' who appear, and know when to disappear, to serve them. The care work involved in hospitality services is highly structured, from the marketing, organization of the labour process, to the delivery of the tourism product. In marketing a tourism destination, for example, so-called natives appear to exist only to fulfill the tourists' desires. Such reassuring images are especially pronounced in post- and neo-colonial settings, where it is important to evoke the colonial past

while reassuring travellers of the non-threatening, subservient, and welcoming population that awaits them.

In tourism, therefore, where the labour process aims to sell an experience, the quality of social interaction between workers and guests is paramount to the profitability of the enterprise (Urry, 1990; Filby, 1992). The 'experience' sold has an important component that fabricates social relations, where the objective is for the worker to please the guest, creating a comfortable environment and providing fun, friendliness and recreation (Filby, 1992, p. 37).

In hospitality services, management expects workers to personalize service and 'develop a social relationship based on warm, friendly, welcoming, courteous, open, and generous behavior' (Crick, 2002, p. 101; Burgess, 1982).<sup>4</sup> Increasingly, management encourages employees to befriend hotel guests and even maintain contact with them after they leave as a way to attract and retain customers (Crick, 2002). The aim is to turn hotel guests from visitors into friends. For example, in an interview with Maira, a light-skin chambermaid and a single mother in her mid-twenties working at a resort in Varadero, she revealed how workers are trained to deliver personalized service to guests. Maira was told by her immediate supervisor to leave written, personal notes in each guest's room. Later, she took it on herself to place a fresh flower on the pillow and to create towel art—in this case, designs of swans made with towels. She purchased the flowers from one of the grounds-keeping crew and nightly wrote notes to those staying in the rooms she was responsible for cleaning.

By establishing, maintaining, and enhancing personal relationships with guests, hotels aim to increase profits in what is a highly competitive industry with narrow profit margins (Ryan, 1991). Thus, the personalization of work blurs the boundaries between the private and public self of workers (Macdonald & Sirianni, 1996). In fact, Leidner (1999, p. 83) suggests that, in frontline interactive service work,

it is impossible to draw clear distinctions between the worker, the work process, and the product or outcome, because the quality of the interaction is frequently part of the service being delivered and thus, in many cases, the product generating company profits.

It becomes difficult to differentiate where the producer ends and the product begins (MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996). Workers are expected to go beyond merely providing service with a smile to the cultivation of intimacy and affectional bond. The use of emotional labour, the commercial manipulation of workers' emotions to produce and evoke feelings in customers, functions as a corporate strategy used to increase return visitors, one of the most sought-out segments of tourism market.

Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour, in her celebrated work on flight attendants, is pivotal in elucidating the commercialization of workers' feelings. Hochschild distinguishes between private and public emotions and shows how private feelings 'fall under the sway of large organizations, social engineering, and the profit motive' (1983, p. 19). She contends that emotional labour has negative consequences for workers due to the stress of performing inauthentic emotions. In

this essay, I break away from the Hochschild's notion of bifurcated emotional labour. Instead of distinguishing a binary in workers' use of emotional labour where a division between private, authentic emotions (read as good) versus public, performed, manufactured intimacy (read as bad), I suggest that hospitality workers utilize emotional labour to break down boundaries between themselves and customers, and ultimately appropriate the personalized dynamics of their work for their own ends. The commodification of interaction between workers and customers, set into motion by corporate policies, provides an environment that favours the cultivation of friendship, but also of sex-for-money-exchanges, romance and migration that ultimately benefit resort workers and improve their lives. Through corporate policies that manipulate affect, Cuban hospitality workers are able to set in motion and make possible romance, marriage, migration and sex with foreigners. Worker's relationships with customers open up spaces where subversion and compliance of corporate policies are intertwined.

### **The Structure of Labour**

For those fortunate enough to have a job in a tourist resort, the work can be physically rigorous and emotionally demanding. The hours are long, and the job requirements are incessant. As a consequence of seasonality, resorts create flexible labour arrangements, meaning that the workforce must adapt to the flow of visitors, shrinking during the slow season (fall and spring) and expanding during the high season (winter and summer). Moreover, service work in resorts lacks job mobility for Cubans. In the transnational resort, Cubans are consigned to staff and service positions. Upper-level management positions are restricted to foreign managers and those with extensive connections to the state/party apparatus. Nevertheless, the competition is not only fierce for tourism employment, it is limited to those who have the proper social characteristics (gender, race, age, good looks, and 'personality' serve as the matrix for labour organization), in addition to training, bribes, and networks.

### *Racial and Gender Stratification of Labour*

Tourism is an industry dependent on gendered and racialized sexual constructions in organizing the labour process. However, with the exception of Adler & Adler's (2004) study of Hawaiian hotel resorts, there are few studies of resorts and even fewer of the racial-ethnic stratification of the labour process in them. Their study of Hawaiian resorts supports the findings of other studies that suggest a convergence between occupation and racial-ethnic profile in hospitality services (Stepick & Grenier, 1994; Thompson, 2002). My research findings in Varadero resorts confirm the use of race, colour, sexuality and gender to stratify the labour process in Cuban resort hotels.<sup>5</sup>

For Cuba, scholars have identified the absence of Afro-Cubans in hotel and tourism related employment.<sup>6</sup> In a study of racial prejudice conducted in Cuba in 1994, a respondent commented,

Yes, it is true: there is a lot of prejudice in the tourist sector. I have worked there for about a year, and I know that there is a lot of racism. In my corporation, for instance, out of 500 workers, there are only five blacks. (de la Fuente, 2001, p. 77)

However, as I argue in this paper, the exclusion of Afro-Cubans from tourism jobs is not a monolithic form of discrimination. Afro-Cubans are excluded from front line service positions with direct customer contact, but they are widely represented in entertainment, back-kitchen, and security jobs. Afro-Cubans can also be found in the less prestigious hotels where they are also more likely to be employed in the lower echelons of services.

In an interview conducted with a Cuban hotel manager of a joint venture resort about the lack of Afro-Cubans employed in the luxury hotel where he worked in Varadero, he claimed that the European managers tend to favour light-skin Cubans and are reluctant to hire blacks. However, a European manager with whom I spoke said that Cubans made all the hiring decisions. Whatever the source, racism is widespread in Varadero. During an interview an Afro-Cuban woman living in Cárdenas lamented that she could not live in the house she inherited from her father because she did not want to expose her children to the racism so evident in the schools and neighbourhoods of Varadero. Only two of the Afro-Cuban women whom I interviewed in Cárdenas had worked in the hotels of Varadero, and one had been fired under questionable circumstances.

Despite its heterogeneous class composition—bus drivers, chambermaids, chefs, and surgeons share neighbourhoods—Varadero is racially homogeneous. Light-skin Cubans live in Varadero, while Afro-Cubans live in public housing in Santa Marta, a small town across the bridge from the entrance to Varadero.

Most hotel workers in Varadero are trained at the local tourism training centre, the José Smith Comas Institute of Hotel and Tourism Services. The school has strict regulations when it comes to physical appearance, with weight, age, and height requirements. Trainees must be young, attractive, and in good physical shape. Jorge explained that students are disqualified for missing or ugly teeth, being short, overweight, having short arms and fingers, and being ugly.

The training and distribution of work result in occupational segregation. While most of the front desk workers are lighter-skin Cubans, darker-skin workers are found in entertainment and in areas of maintenance, construction, security, or as back-kitchen help, away from direct contact with tourists. In general, Afro-Cubans in the tourism industry are relegated to entertainment in the cabaret shows and other performance venues. Some are entertainment workers, known as *animadores* (animators): scantily clad, dark-skin, young women and men who instruct the guests in salsa dancing, games, and other forms of recreation. Their work is mainly physical and sensual and often involves suggestive and sexualized contact with guests. Thus,

Afro-Cubans working in hotels are incorporated into the organizational structure as either low-level service workers, such as ground-keepers and back kitchen help, or in highly sexualized ones.<sup>7</sup>

The organization of work, therefore, relegates dark-skinned workers to racialized and sexualized occupational categories. As Macdonald & Sirianni (1996, p. 15) argue, occupations in service industries

are so stratified that worker characteristics such as race and gender determine not only who is considered desirable or even eligible to fill certain jobs, but also who will want to fill certain jobs and how the job itself is performed.

Work in the top-rated four and five star hotels employs younger and lighter skinned workers. Thus, race scripts occupations and segments workers in the labour process.

Feminist research on the service economy has also shown how gender and sexuality are embedded in the organizational structure of work, informing the conceptualization of jobs, job specifications, control over workers, and relations between women and men (Adkins, 1995; Hall, 1993; Filby, 1992; MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996). I asked Beatriz, a receptionist at a large resort, if women were ever employed to open doors or carry bags. After giving me a bewildered look she said firmly: 'The doorman is always a male, chambermaids always women. Things are like that here'. The labour process is gendered, and this is most likely a transnational phenomenon, with women perceived as possessing innate skills that render them more adept at subservient roles or jobs that are an extension of their reproductive role and that duplicate women's traditional domestic and care duties (Tyler & Abbott, 1998; MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996).

The majority of women are found in positions related to domestic maintenance, such as chambermaids, or in food service, reception, and retail sales. The structure of jobs is such that higher wages often go to male-defined positions. Furthermore, young and lighter skin-males are given preference for jobs with high visibility, public contact, and supervisory functions.

### *Sexuality as a Component of Tourism Labour*

The prominence of sexuality is also an important component in the organization of labour. Sexuality, as feminist studies of the hospitality sector reveal, is used to commodify women's bodies; a sexually attractive appearance is often part of the product sold.<sup>8</sup> A number of service jobs, for example, require women to exhibit and use their sexual appeal as part of their work (Allison, 1994; Hall, 1993). Job requirements are often predicated on images of women as 'objects of male desire and gratification', where physical attractiveness is the most important qualification. Adkins argues, 'Women are thus not only "economically productive" but also "sexually productive" workers' (Adkins, 1995, p. 147). Filby (1992), p. 23) writes that sexuality

represents a strong undercurrent in organizational power relationships. Such expectations, often codified in terms of ambiguous references to 'personality,' impact on both recruitment processes and authority and peer relations in the organization of work.

Thus, researchers have uncovered the ways in which sexuality is both an embedded and an open feature of women's work in hospitality services (Adkins, 1995; Crick, 2002). In travel and hospitality services, jobs requiring women to present themselves as sex objects are numerous, **including the chambermaid (an inherently gendered and sexualized position), the flight attendant, the flirty cocktail waitress in a revealing uniform, and the entertainment coordinator, whose requisite displays of enthusiasm, sexiness, and friendliness render her vulnerable to sexual harassment.** When sexiness is part of the job itself and flirting is encouraged, it becomes difficult to draw the lines between "selling the service" and "selling sexuality" (Gilbert, Guerrier, & Guy, 1998, p. 50).

The hospitality industry uses sexuality to structure production and organize labour. Workers are recruited to provide **sexualized care services, 'friendliness, subservience, and flirting.'** However, sexuality also offers an opportunity for resistance. Some scholars maintain that the emotional labour that workers perform intensifies their alienation by infringing on sacrosanct parts of the self (Hochschild, 1983; Leidner, 1999, p. 90) and that 'resistance to organizational demands seems the only self-respecting response open to workers' (Leidner, 1999, p. 90). Others contend that context plays an important role and that emotional labour can be both pleasurable and difficult for the worker, depending on a host of other factors (Williams, 2003, p. 513). My research suggests that resistance to workplace sexualization is not a pristine space of opposition. Rather, it is complicit with the articulations of power, while also challenging them. Through sex-for-money and affective exchanges, resort workers are able to forestall the alienating practices within the organizational structure by nourishing relationships with hotel guests. The fact remains that, once sexuality is unleashed, it can be unpredictable, generating contradictions and ambiguities for both workers and management (Filby, 1992).

### **Sexuality and Relations between Resort Workers and Guests**

If all work in resort organizations is sexualized to a degree, it should not come as a surprise that hospitality workers also provide sex to tourists. Studies conducted in the Dominican Republic of tourism's formal sector workers found a striking prevalence of sexual relations between hotel workers and tourists (CEPROSH, 1997). Reports from Jamaica also indicate that socializing with tourists can lead to **'future job offers or even marriage'** (Crick, 2001, p. 15). Romance between workers and guests in the Caribbean tourism industry have been scrutinized recently in the US media with the case of African-American writer Terry McMillan, who was swept off her feet by a young, attractive Jamaican man, Jonathan Plummer, whom she met while on vacation in Jamaica. Their affair and marriage were captured in the best-selling novel

(1996) and film (1998) *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, where Plummer is portrayed as a resort worker.<sup>9</sup> When Plummer eventually confessed to McMillan of having same-sex desires, she accused him of marrying her to leave Jamaica and obtain a green card.

The move into the sexual economy for hospitality workers follows the logic of providing care work and personalized service to guests and is thus in an organizationally hospitable terrain. Hospitality workers are educated to please their guests and to befriend customers. **With intimate access and proximity to hospitality workers, some tourists feel entitled to demand, entreat, and badger.** Maira remarked how sex is often asked for by male guests **in the same tone of voice they use to request extra towels and room service.** Suggesting that sense of entitlement was operational in this context, Maira commented: 'They think that we are there for whatever they want. It's not just towels, it's also the sex that they want'. As a chambermaid Maira was exposed to various men in different phases of suggestive disrobing:

I have to say, that part of my job is the worse because you never know when you walk into a room if some guy is going to be there naked holding his thing in his hand.

Exposed to high levels of sexual harassment, Maira did not complain for fear of losing her job.

While Maira sustained some sexual exchanges with tourists for money, she prefers befriend couples with children and establishing a relationship based on mutual affinity for kids. **Relationships that create long term obligations and commitment are, for many resort workers, more beneficial than commercialized sexuality.** She often asks for email addresses and sends them messages after they've left Varadero. She even got a Canadian tourist to send vitamins for her son. Upon leaving, many of the guests leave her not only gratuities but clothes, toiletries and other gift items.

Another reason why hotels create an environment that sustains sex-for-money exchanges has to do with the description and requirement of jobs. Some of the jobs in tourism, for example, combine aspects of both leisure and work. The boundaries between work and play are blurred, especially for *animadoras*, entertainment directors, whose job features elements of leisure at work. It is not always clear that the person at play is also at work (Guerrier & Adib, 2004). Workers in these positions must learn to navigate a thin line between encouraged behaviour such as 'safe flirting' and fraternizing with guest and more sexually explicit relations. In these later cases the worker risks being fired for crossing into unambiguous territory.

In the highly militarized resort enclaves, with round-the-clock security detail, the local population is effectively kept out and guests trapped in. **In Varadero, this is particularly acute, given that the majority of luxury, all-inclusive resorts lie far from public transportation and isolated from the local population.** Much has been made of the so-called 'tourist apartheid' in Cuba, where Cubans are not allowed to enter the **hotel resorts and beaches.** This needs to be contextualized within the practices and policies of the all-inclusive complexes. Whether in Cuba, Mexico, Jamaica, or the

Dominican Republic, all-inclusive resorts generally restrict the entry of non-registered guests. Plastic wrist bracelets control who wanders about freely and who is turned away at the front door; **race and class also mark who gets in and who is quickly turned away.** For tourists who come expecting to meet and consort with local denizens as part of their vacation experience, the all-inclusive scenario can be bleak, with the exception of resort workers. Maira explains how the expectations created in tourist-sending countries encourage this situation:

Look, the problem is that they come here—well, the Italians are specially the worst—they come here with the idea that Cuban women are hot, and they end up here in the middle of nowhere, and they get to the hotel, and they want a hot Cuban woman right away.

Certainly, other opportunities for sex include fellow vacationers staying at the enclave. But for many tourists, **sex with an ‘exotic other’ is more of an adventure, less compromising, and less demanding.** In addition, a sexual encounter with a local person ensures a level of anonymity. As the latest marketing slogan for Las Vegas, a popular sex tourism destination, claims, ‘What happens here, stays here’.

Finally, guests turn to resort workers because police harassment, repression, and incarceration of local citizens from the neighbouring areas make it difficult for tourists to find companionship outside the resort.<sup>10</sup> In some ways this resembles the common trend throughout the **global North where prostitution has moved indoors into business establishments and only marginal segments of the population—transgender people, drug addicts and women of colour—are relegated to the streets.** Thus, hotel resort workers are protected from social stigma and police scrutiny by their formal sector ‘indoor’ jobs.

Many resort workers are eager to procure extra earnings while on the job. Solarba, a 27-year old chambermaid working in a luxury resort in Varadero, related the story of a co-worker whose goal was to build a house for herself and her mother:

She slept with everything that moved that month. She would have fucked the shower curtain if it paid her in dollars. In a short time she was able to make \$2,000, and she built her house. She doesn’t do it anymore, because it was dangerous, but she got what she wanted.

Access to tourists provides resort workers with opportunities that would otherwise be unattainable. The sexual and affective economies operating in the resorts effectively complement the low wages of hospitality workers and make possible the expansion of consumer desires and needs.

As a waiter, Jorge met a Canadian woman ten years his senior who frequented Cuba on business. They became fast friends after her first stay at the resort. On her second trip, he invited her to visit his hometown of Cárdenas. Even though there are many visible signs of prosperity in Cárdenas, the city’s major form of transportation is the horse-drawn carriage. Jorge’s Canadian friend was charmed by the rustic

transportation and delighted to see the sights in Cárdenas, which she felt were more authentic and the 'real Cuba' than the resort where she stayed.

On one of my return trips to Cárdenas, Jorge and I were travelling one evening in a horse-drawn carriage to visit a mutual friend, another hotel worker in Varadero who also lived in Cárdenas. Jorge was still wearing his work uniform, but without the smoking jacket. In some ways we resembled the stereotypical couple in depictions of Caribbean sex tourism: the middle-aged traveller escorted by a young, Cuban man. I noticed that Jorge's conversations about his friendship with the Canadian tourist were more pronounced and incessant. He mentioned that she might hire him to work for her and that he might visit her in Canada. He asked what I thought of Canadian men and North American men in general. Before I could answer, he asked if I thought that North American men were cold and not as *cariñosos*, or affectionate, as Cuban men. I was perplexed by his line of questioning. Was Jorge positioning himself within the international division of romance as a Latin lover? Was he developing a romantic relationship with his Canadian friend? Did she invite him to visit Canada for work or pleasure? Was he in love with her? The ambiguity of the situation left me perplexed.

It became increasingly difficult for me to distinguish Jorge's work from his personal life. Jorge's dilemmas were magnified by the blurring between leisure and work in hospitality organizations. Relationships with tourists, myself included, are always ambiguous, intertwining, as they do, opportunity and gain with genuine affection and care.

## Conclusion

Transnational hospitality conglomerates operating in the Caribbean commodify bodies, emotions, and sexuality in ways that call on workers to be sexually available or at least appear so. The services performed by hospitality workers materialize notions of race, gender, and sexuality. But in settings that draw on sexuality as a commercial organizational resource, sexuality can be a double-edged sword. As Filby posits, 'As a product itself partly of discursive practices, sexuality also contains the potential for creativity and development' (Filby, 1992, p. 30). This potential for creativity, where sexuality is used for a worker's own gain, is also a form of resistance that, while temporary and partial, can bring rewards. This not to deny the differential power imbalances that exists between hospitality workers and leisure tourists, with constraint and mobility, socialism and capitalism, and the geo-politics of North and South playing itself out in these micro-level processes. Rather, this is to conclude, along with anthropologist Paula Ebron (2002, p. 188), that oppression does not erase agency.

## Notes

- [1] In 1999, Cárdenas gathered international fame as the home town of Elián González, the boy who left with his mother in an inner tube for the Florida Straits. Elián was held captive in the

- US by his Miami-based relatives before being released to his father and returned to Cuba in June 2000.
- [2] In addition to interviews and participant observation conducted in Havana and Varadero, from 2000 to 2003, I averaged three yearly trips to Cuba working as an assistant tour guide for educational conferences, business meetings and music festivals in Havana, Santiago, and Varadero. This experience allowed me to stay in tourist hotels and to participate in the tourism culture as a tourist-researcher.
  - [3] These countries represent the principal visitors in the rest of the island (*Cuba in Figures*, 2002).
  - [4] Leidner (1999) defines personalized service as when an employee smiles, makes eye contact, and uses a customer's name (Crick, 2001). Reck & Reck (1996) define it as taking care of the unique needs of the individual customers. Along these lines, Crick (2001, p. 3) explains that personalized service contains at least two common activities: 'emotional labor and customization'.
  - [5] The eroticization of race as a component and feature of colonial labour regimes, discussed in the work of Stoler (2002) and McClintock (1995), is operational in third world hospitality settings where the conflation of race, sexuality and the politics of exclusion facilitates the appropriation of labour and the regulation of sex. This 'racial embeddedness of sexuality' as Stoler (2002, p. 45) shows, was a core aspect of the colonial project and of imperial regimes.
  - [6] See for example de la Fuente, 2001; 2004; Holgado Fernández 2000; Pérez Sarduy & Stubbs (2000). The fundamental issue of racial inequality was initially addressed by the Cuban Revolution through classed-based, racially-blind policies (Hernández, 2000). The eradication of poverty, it was assumed, would eventually eliminate racism. Instead, racism continued to be widespread and unrecognized by the party/state apparatus. In 1986 the Communist Party Congress addressed the lack of Afro-Cubans in leadership structures of the party, prejudice and racial discrimination (Hernández, 2000; Pérez Sarduy & Stubbs, 2000).
  - [7] Afro-Cuban workers, primarily from the Eastern provinces, are over-represented in the manual labour and construction work of hotel resorts in Varadero. During a particularly scorching hot summer day I interviewed an Afro-Cuban worker who was brought from the province of Granma (approximately 10 hours east of Varadero) to work building new hotels in Varadero. He explained that workers from the Eastern provinces of Cuba, an area of the island with a large concentration of Afro-Caribbean people, were bused into the area to work for several months building hotels and were subsequently made to return to their provinces. Glad to have a job, he nevertheless complained about being away from home for so long and having a job that paid in pesos.
  - [8] See Adkins, 1995; Filby, 1992; Hall, 1993; Tyler & Abbott, 1998.
  - [9] Perhaps unbeknownst to McMillan, markets in Caribbean male sexuality have been a prominent feature of the islands for the past thirty years.
  - [10] As many as 6,000 people were arrested and sent back to their towns starting in 1996. Visitors enter Varadero by crossing a bridge, making it easy for police to conduct surveillance.

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