The Repeating Encounter: Tourism in the Cultural Discourse of the Hispanic Caribbean

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Abstract: This study analyzes the representation of tourism in the cultural discourse of the Hispanic Caribbean to examine how that discourse registers and responds to the impact that tourism has had there. I first consider examples of the contemporary tourism industry's commercial discourse produced in both Cuba and the Dominican Republic in order to examine the socio-historical logic that underwrites it, a logic both identified and contested in several short stories by Dominican writer Aurora Arias and Cuban author José Miguel Sánchez (aka Yoss). In their representations of the contact between local residents and foreign travelers within the context of tourism and sex tourism, Arias and Sánchez's texts highlight the dialectical interplay that configures the space of encounter as a space of mutual desire where historical hierarchies of class, race, and gender are both exploited and upset. I thus argue that, even as they frame how contemporary processes of globalization come to be embedded and negotiated at the micro-level of interpersonal relationships, the works analyzed in this study, whether complicit or contestatory, point to key ways in which colonial discourses and legacies continue to shape contemporary Caribbean experience.
Key Words: Caribbean Tourism, Aurora Arias**,** Sex Tourism, José Miguel Sánchez (Yoss)**,** Cuban Literature, Globalization**,** Dominican Literature, [Neo]Colonialism**,** Contact Zone, Cuban *Special Period***,** *Jinetero*, Discourse

Resumen: Este estudio analiza la representación del turismo en el discurso cultural del Caribe español para examinar cómo el imaginario emergente de la región registra y responde al impacto que el turismo ha tenido allí. Después de ofrecer una breve contextualización histórica del turismo contemporánea en Cuba y la República Dominicana, considero muestras del discurso comercial producidas localmente para examinar la lógica socio-histórica que sostiene la industria turística—una lógica identificada y resistida por varias obras artísticas, desde "El costo de la vida" de Juan Luis Guerra hasta *La breve y maravillosa vida de Oscar Wao* de Junot Díaz, pasando por la cuentística de la autora dominicana Aurora Arias y el escritor cubano José Miguel Sánchez (alias Yoss), cuyos textos problematizan y desmitifican las dinámicas que gobiernan el contacto entre residentes locales y viajeros dentro del contexto del turismo y el turismo sexual. Los cuentos de estos autores retratan la interacción dialéctica que configura el espacio de encuentro como un espacio de deseo mutuo en el que se explotan y desafían las jerarquías históricas de clase, raza y género. De esta manera, al mismo tiempo que encuadran cómo procesos contemporáneos de la globalización llegan a desenvolverse al micro-nivel de las relaciones interpersonales, las obras tratadas en este estudio, ya sean cómplices o contestatarias, señalan algunas maneras claves a través de las cuales el discurso y los legados coloniales siguen moldeando la experiencia caribeña actual.
Palabras claves: El turismo caribeño, Aurora Arias, el turismo sexual, José Miguel Sánchez (Yoss), la literatura cubana, la globalización, la literatura dominicana, el [neo]colonialismo, la zona de contacto, el *período especial* cubano, *Jinetero*, el discurso

In his now classic work *The Repeating Island*, Cuban writer and intellectual Antonio Benítez Rojo employs the metaphors of the spiral galaxy and the hurricane as sweeping master tropes to capture the turbulent nature and history of the modern Caribbean—a convergence point not only of ocean currents, but of people; a social space created and formed through the contact, clash, exchange, and mixture of cultures and social forces flowing and whirling around the geographic axis of the

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Caribbean according to the changing faces of empire and capitalism (1-22). This imagery seems particularly appropriate to conceptualize one of the principal phenomena through which global capital increasingly has come to articulate itself in the region—tourism, characterized by the elevated velocity and density of human flows that open up spaces of fleeting encounter and organize social experience and relations according to a logic rooted in the moment of the original transatlantic encounter.

The present study analyzes the representation of tourism in the cultural discourse of the Hispanic Caribbean to examine how that discourse registers and responds to the impact that the tourism industry has had there. After first offering a brief historical contextualization of contemporary tourism in both Cuba and the Dominican Republic, I take up examples of the industry's commercial discourse produced in these countries in order to examine the socio-historical logic that underwrites it—a logic identified and contested in several short stories by Dominican writer Aurora Arias and Cuban author José Miguel Sánchez (aka Yoss), which problematize and demystify the dynamics that govern the contact and interactions between local residents and foreign travelers within the context of tourism and sex tourism. These richly nuanced texts offer portraits of the dialectical interplay that configures the space of encounter as a space of mutual desire where historical hierarchies of class, race, and gender are both exploited and upset. Thus, even as they frame how contemporary processes of globalization come to be embedded and negotiated at the micro-level of interpersonal relationships, the works analyzed in this study, whether complicit or contestatory, point to key ways in which colonial discourses and legacies continue to shape contemporary Caribbean experience.[1]

The growth of contemporary tourism within the Caribbean has seen a marked increase since the late 1960s when both local governments and international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations promoted tourism as central to development strategies for the economic restructuring of the region's countries (Gregory 23). In the Dominican Republic, for example, the government of president Joaquín Balaguer (1966-1978) oversaw the transition of the Dominican economy from one rooted in the exportation of locally produced agricultural goods to one that was service-oriented, featuring transnational tourism as a central component (Gregory 7, 23). Although revolutionary Cuba largely reversed, for a time, the type of foreign-owned, transnational tourism that had developed on the island for the greater part of the twentieth century and that had come to be associated with carousing, gambling, and the sex trade (Cabezas 43-44), it turned to the tourism industry once again in the 1990s as a method of generating an influx of desperately needed foreign cash when faced with the severe material austerity and shortages of the *período especial*—the profound economic crisis produced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist-bloc Council for Mutual Economic Assistance upon whom Cuba had depended for trade, subsidies, and aid (Pérez 270, 293). In the cases of both Cuba and the Dominican Republic, as tourism has come to play a central economic role, increasing numbers of local residents, when unable to leave and escape challenging economic conditions, seek to plug themselves into tourist flows as these intersect the islands, looking to benefit from their participation in the formal and/or informal tourist economies, usually performing service-oriented labor (Gregory 7, 30; Cabezas 41-43).

[1] The emerging importance of the phenomenon as a theme within contemporary Caribbean cultural production is not only limited to literary texts, but is also seen in recent films from the region such as *Azúcar amarga* (1996), *Flores de otro mundo* (1999), *Princesas* (2005), *¿Quién diablos es Juliette?* (1997), *Sanky Panky* (2007), and *Vers le sud 'Heading South'* (2005). Due to spatial limitations, the consideration of these films is beyond the scope of the present study.

The structural shifts brought about by tourism in the Dominican Republic had, by the early 1990s, become more deeply enmeshed in the national economy, a reality evidenced in a series of commercials produced by the then locally-owned Dominican rum company Brugal—which also has a vested interest in local tourism—as it sought to position itself within the expanded transnational double movement of Dominicans and tourists to and from the islands. These commercials, which have come to be identified as "La americana de Ron Brugal"—named after their protagonist, a single, blond American woman—reflect the basic logic of consumerist capitalism and outline and promote a particular historically-based relational dynamic between the island and its exterior.

The first ad (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPEVxHmujKk) begins in the middle of a sunny downtown Manhattan of the 1990s against a backdrop comprised of the Twin Towers of The World Trade Center. As the scene opens, the sounds of live music played by street musicians captures the attention of a Dominican cab driver who has just dropped off some fares. As he listens, he is so absorbed that he does not notice the thirty-something blond woman who enters the taxi asking, "Sir, are you on duty?" Seemingly unaware of her presence, he continues to gaze upon the scene of the group playing a traditional Dominican music form, *merengue*, replete with typical musical instruments associated with it: a Dominican *marimba*, a saxophone, a *güira*, a *tambora*, and a *conga*. As the music continues, the dancing crowd surrounding the musicians also grows and includes a mix of twenty- and thirty-somethings of varied ethnicities, all smiling in this moment of impromptu celebration and cross-cultural interaction that takes place under the imposing gaze of the Twin Towers—icons of a then newly triumphant global capitalism. As the camera alternates between the cabdriver and the scene he beholds, it highlights his facial expressions, which convey fond memories and nostalgic longing; reflecting, perhaps, a conflict between a desire for home and the reality of being in the United States. It is only after an almost defiant or determined downward turn of the mouth, which appears to reflect a decision taken, an affirmation to self, that he is able to emerge from his reverie and finally respond to the repeated "Sir?" of the blond woman seated in his back seat, waiting expectantly. He responds: "Sí, perdón, mi músi…" abruptly correcting himself when he sees her: "My music..." He seductively raises his eyebrows in emphasis as he identifies: "*merengue*." The woman responds, eyes narrowed, and smiles knowingly with a sassy, slightly seductive air of her own: "Ah, merengue…Mucho buena!" indicating to the driver, if with grammatically-challenged and stereotypical *gringa* mispronunciation of his language, that she perhaps knows something of his culture and finds it exciting and pleasurable. As they laugh together, the taxi driver pulls away, proclaiming with a smile and a knowing air of friendly superiority "y eso, que tú no sabes nada, americana" ("You don't know anything, *Americana*").[2] As the music continues, the camera zooms out, panning over the impromptu party celebrants, and the official logo of Brugal Rum appears on the screen as a voiceover announces: "Brugal, contigo en todo lo nuestro" ("Brugal, with you in everything that is ours").

"Todo lo nuestro" is, of course, all the cultural capital that follows the flows of human movement and the circuits of consumption and production, the "authentic"—music, food, and laboring bodies, and, of course Brugal rum—commodified to cross the same borders as its primary consumers, Dominican citizens. Here, in transnational space, Brugal will serve as an iconic link to home even as it celebrates those transnational flows and seeks to place itself accordingly within rapidly expanding new circuits.

This commercial exemplifies what theorist Arjun Appadurai has identified as a "mediascape," which refers to both the distinct media for the production and

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

distribution of images as well as the actual images themselves (35). As he affirms: "mediascapes […] provide large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and 'ethnoscapes' to viewers throughout the world [. They are] narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, [that] offer […] a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places" (35). Thus, as broadcast throughout the Dominican Republic, the Brugal ad reflects back to the nation's citizens a growing fact of their everyday lives—transnational movement—while pointing to how some might and do position themselves under the auspices of transnational capital, participating, like the taxi driver and the rum which is pitched as subsuming all that is authentically Dominican, in spaces of economic commodification, labor, and material goods which may be consumed both *aquí* and *allá*.

Consumption will be the point of connection for intercultural relationships in the second commercial (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8Lviu3zXjc), which offers a glimpse of the blond *americana* in her adventures throughout the island, consuming "authentic" Dominican food and enjoying the company of several Dominican men with whom she dines, dances, and, of course, imbibes *Ron Brugal*. At the end of the ad, we find her once again in New York, recently arrived and in search of a taxi. When asked from where she is returning by the taxi driver, whose back is to her, she responds "Paradise," upon which he turns to see the "authentic" Dominican *tambora* drum upon which is painted a Dominican flag and, recognizing her, exclaims joyously, "Americana!" As they celebrate this happy reunion with much laughter and excitement, each of them holding one end of the *tambora*, new lyrics for the jingle are heard: "Somos uno juntos / somos el corazón de lo nuestro" ("We are one together / we are the heart of that which is ours"). In this way, the commercial joins together the *americana* and the Dominican male in a harmonious union of consumption and service at home and abroad.

Arguably, the story being told in these commercials serves a hegemonic didactic function originating with members of the country's economic elites. It not only describes the transnational and local experience of many Dominicans, but also seeks to interpellate local consumers at the same time it proposes a desirable and "natural" order of things within the global tourist economy, positing an ideal relationship between "Self" and "Other." Here, smiling, friendly, and helpful Dominicans cater to smiling, hungry, and consuming tourists. That it suggests the wedding of the (trans)local male to the foreign female may also be understood as not only an attempt at libidinal stimulation toward the sale of the product, but also an attempt to play to real desires and fantasies of many Dominicans for a way off the island, a primary motivation for many who place themselves within the transnational flows of tourism.

Furthermore, one of the more salient features of this commercial is the way it portrays how the Dominican "Self" and his or her cultural "Other" are constituted through their relationship with one another. As told from the local Dominican perspective, these commercials show multiple ways in which individuals and groups from different cultures of origin perceive, interact, identify, and "know" each other. Playing on the instability and indeterminate nature of identitarian categories, the commercials reveal the latter's complexity within the context of contact and encounter, simultaneously proposing both stasis and flux as integral to identity's construction. For example, there is a sense in which the commercials seek to promote an image of fixity to cultural identity so as to posit the product they wish to sell as one of many constitutive elements that will maintain the "authentic" Dominican Self when in the transnational space of the American Other. Cultural elements from "home" such as music, food, dance, and rum will be the anchors of authenticity there. But what of

all the others who are united together through consuming such products. Are they then also Dominican? Or do they maintain their difference? Consider the *americana*. Throughout the series of commercials she progressively becomes, as the lyrics of the jingle suggest, united and identified with Dominicans and they with her—both at home and abroad—while at the same time the viewer is constantly reminded of her fundamental difference, not only phenotypically, but also by her consistent mispronunciation of the extremely limited Spanish vocabulary she possesses. She is objectified and parodied; a stereotype, yet economically necessary, desired and catered to. Yet it is claimed that she is one of "us." On the other hand, who is the Dominican? He is the New York taxi driver, the local flirtatious bartender, the smiling dance and dining partners. Where is he? He is on the island. He is in New York, the territory of the *gringo/a* Other. Yet there, in New York, *he* is Other. In fact there are many others—Latinos, Asians, African Americans and other Dominicans—yet "we are all one together / we are the heart of that which is ours." We are bound together, same, yet distinct within transnational spaces, be these on the island or in a foreign land.

One constant beyond the rum that stabilizes both Dominican identity and that of the *americana*, regardless of the geographic context they occupy, lies in the fundamental nature of their relationship. Their hierarchical positioning relative to one another is presented as a given and integral to the paradisiacal imagery broadly utilized to market the Caribbean as an idyllic place for refreshment, consumption, and fun for privileged travelers in their adventures among friendly local populations, predisposed to service and gentleness. This imagery, part and parcel of the discourse of the mass tourism industry, is but a [re]articulation of imagery with a long history in the Caribbean, first finding its expression among the earliest portraits of the lands and people of the "New World," such as the following excerpt taken from the oft-cited *Carta de Cristóbal Colón a Luis de Santángel*:

> Y [las islas]son fertilísimas en demasiado grado, ésta en extremo[…] gente […] son tanto sin engaño y tan liberales de lo que tienen, que […] de cosa que tengan, pidiéndosela, jamás dicen que no, antes convidan la persona con ello, y muestran tanto amor que darían los corazones […] Y por ende se harán cristianos, que se inclinan al amor y servicio de Sus Altezas y de toda la nación castellana […]Esta [isla] es para desear, y vista, es para nunca dejar […] toda la Cristiandad debe tomar alegría y hacer grandes fiestas y dar gracias […] por los bienes temporales que no solamente a la España, mas a todos los cristianos tendrán aquí refrigerio y ganancia. [3]

Written in 1493 shortly after Columbus' first voyage, this passage offers the first European description of the island of Hispaniola and underscores its highly desirable fertility ripe for European development and exploitation. As goes the land, so too its people, whose generosity and lack of deceit are proposed as an indicator of their likely servility within the system soon to be imposed upon them. The document thus contains the seminal vision of the Caribbean which would inform the European imaginary, inscribing and positioning both land and people within and relative to what would become modern European empire. In this way, the *Carta* serves as a blueprint that set the discursive groundwork for a relational *praxis* still operative in that island

[3] *Carta a Luis de Santangel*. Modernized Spanish version taken from Chang-Rodríguez and Filer, 13-4 except for the passage that encompasses "La gente… castellana," which I rendered into modernized Spanish based on the original text as found in Colón, *Textos y documentos completos*, 141-2.

space some 500 years later as would-be adventurers, a.k.a. tourists, follow in the footsteps of the Admiral, protagonists in their own voyages of discovery and impelled by the very desire for *fiestas*, *refrigerio*, and *ganancia* recommended and prophesied by Columbus—a point not lost in the "Americana de Ron Brugal" commercials nor in the following advertisement for Cuban tourism found at travel2cuba.co.uk:

> Cuba has just about everything you could imagine. There are dramatic mountainous landscapes, wild and unspoilt valleys, sweeping vistas of sugar cane, tobacco plantations glowing emerald green against the vermillion earth of the fields, seven exquisite cities dating from the mid-fifteenth century, an amazing variety of flora and fauna, some of the world's most beautiful beaches and above all, Cuba's greatest asset: her people. We are (though we say it ourselves) welcoming, enthusiastic, polite and a lot of fun – and that's putting it mildly. Come and see for yourselves. Come and let us show you […] (http://www.travel2cuba.co.uk/)

The above echoes of the underwriting discourse of empire and colonialism amply illustrate Mimi Sheller's contention that the Caribbean represents, within the "West" a 'global icon'—a place within the West's imaginary and set of practices that "encapsulates modernity, enfolding within itself a deep history of relations of consumption, luxury and privilege for some"(37). Moreover, the Caribbean's present relationship to its exterior can be seen as a result of the way in which this foundational logic of modernity came to violently express itself there: the conquest, subjugation, and forced labor of its indigenous inhabitants; upon their decimation, the institution of slavery and the plantation system—a site where, as described by Martinican writer and intellectual Eduard Glissant, "the tendencies of [the Caribbean's] modernity begin to be detectable," forming one of the ineluctable "focal points for the development of present-day modes of Relation" between the islands and their exterior (65). Here, human capital was further organized along gendered, racialized, and sexualized lines that included the "right" of white, male slave owners to engage in sexual relations with their slaves and hire them out to other men as a source of income, thus institutionalizing prostitution in the Caribbean (Kempadoo 5-6)——a factor implicated in the exoticizing fantasies that fuel and accompany contemporary sex tourism there [Gregory 136-37; Kempadoo 99; Padilla 2].

The counter-discursive tradition that arose in reaction to such practices soon after the arrival of Columbus and the Europeans is still being written today and encompasses both the original moment of contact as well as the latter's legacies, thus serving to challenge and dismantle the idyllic image of the Caribbean first promulgated by the *Carta*. As Simone Gikandi observes, Columbus himself lurks as a kind of ghost-like figure that haunts Caribbean cultural consciousness among writers and intellectuals who exhibit an "extreme anxiety and ambivalence toward the beginnings of modernity" (1). This is evidenced in Dominican singer and songwriter Juan Luis Guerra's first-person classification of Hispaniola and Latin America in his song "El costo de la vida": "Somos un agujero / en medio del mar y el cielo / 500 años después / una raza encendida / negra, blanca y taína / pero, ¿quién descubrió a quién?" As the song continues, it places contemporary social experience within an historical continuum of inequities and contradictions which extends from the moment of conquest and settlement up until the present day, offering a litany of the contemporary social ills which beset the Caribbean and Latin America—recession, rising cost of food staples and energy coupled with the continuing devaluation of the peso against

the U.S. dollar, an increase in delinquency and violence, the lack of an effective medical system, and the tenuousness of democracy in an environment of political corruption. With references to Mitsubishi and Chevrolet and the importance of English and French as the hegemonic languages for international relations and legitimacy, Guerra underscores the current dynamics that permeate Caribbean space within a transnational, globalized context, while clearly positing that moment of first encounter as foundational.

In a similar fashion, Dominican-American writer Junot Diaz's Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* offers a stark portrait of Columbus' enduring and devastating legacy as it opens with the following description of the calamitous "*Fukú americanus*":

> a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles […] generally a curse or doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims […] it is believed that the arrival of the Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the fukú on the world, and we've all been in the shit ever since. Santo Domingo might be fukú's Kilometer Zero, its port of entry, but we are all of us its children, whether we know it or not. (1-2)

As these examples make clear, within Caribbean cultural production, 1492 often serves as a kind of phantasmagoric "deep past" that anchors contemporary experience within an historical continuum by which to understand present-day contradictions that operate on a hemispheric, if not global, scale.

Following this same discursive trajectory, both Cuban writer José Miguel Sánchez and Dominican author Aurora Arias have written texts that demystify contemporary encounters between travelers and local residents. As their stories explore the relational dialectic associated with tourism and its close affiliate, sex tourism, they point to phenomena that configure Caribbean social space into a present-day "contact zone" where, as Mary Louise Pratt has described it, "disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (4). In this way, tropical beaches, hotels and the simulacrum of cyberspace become the stage for the negotiation of mutual desire between tourists longing for personal encounters with the exotic "Other" and those local actors seeking to capitalize on such relationships.

Arias, whose works have garnered the greatest critical attention for their portraits of the contemporary urban spaces that constitute contemporary Santo Domingo (e.g. Demaessener, Ferly, and Rodríguez), has also repeatedly taken up the theme of the presence of the foreign traveler to the island and his/her impact there, from 1998's *Invi's Paradise* to her latest collection of short stories *Emoticons* (2007). These characters are often portrayed as enigmatic and transient beings that the narrative seeks to apprehend through an exploration of their interactions with members of Dominican society, whom also fall under the scrutiny of the narrative lens. I examine here one of the main vehicles used by the author to represent and explore the motivations and inner life-world of the wealthier male traveler from abroad—James Gatto, protagonist of the stories "Bachata" and "Novia del Atlántico" (*Emoticons*).

A restless, white male of uncertain origin who speaks Spanish, French, English, and Italian ("Novia" 112), James Gatto wanders the world and the Dominican Republic in search of "la vida verdadera" (121). Arias introduces him in the following passage taken from the beginning of the story "Bachata:

> Miraba todo desde afuera, como un gato que se detiene a auscultar encima de un tejado un escenario. [...] ¿Otro escenario más de los tantos que había conocido a lo largo de su vida de giramundo? No, de ningún modo. Un escenario muy singular, donde nacen hermosas flores entre los basureros. Donde ocurre una belleza nunca vista por sus ojos, como la de Yajaira, la muchacha que vivía junto al mar. Alta, prieta, encendida. Trabajaba de mesera en un disco-terraza. Una tarde cualquiera, James Gatto, sin proponérselo, cayó por ahí. (93)

In effect, this scene restages what Diana Taylor describes as the typical "Western" scenario of colonial encounter that "stars the same white male protagonist-subject and the same brown, found 'object'" (13). From the very outset, the narration places Gatto on the outside looking in, that is, the detached observer who gazes upon the local scenery, delimiting that space and converting the scene before him into an objectified stage for his own protagonism. In this he exemplifies what John Urry has termed "the tourist gaze", through which Gatto observes and circumscribes space, investing the objects and bodies found there with a desire born of the exoticizing discourses inscribed in his cultural "Other." Indeed, as Gatto surveys his environs, his eyes recognize the trash heaps which surround him but fix on the "beautiful flower" Yajaira, the dark, exotic "girl who lived by the sea." Her very beauty and allure will ultimately convert her into "one more mystery to be deciphered" and an object of pursuit (Arias, "Novia" 94).[4]

Throughout the stories Gatto is portrayed as a type of "drifter tourist"—to use sociologist Eric Cohen's terminology—a wandering, centerless, and nomadic individual "lacking clearly defined priorities and ultimate commitments" (189), who perpetually seeks the liminal and liminal experiences. As he travels through the Caribbean, he endows island spaces with his own sense of euphoria, seeing in them "a wide-open frontier" for his self-fashioned heroic protagonism as he "lives," "explores", "grows," and "loves (Arias, "Novia" 111). The islands through which he travels hold the possibility of personal illumination and the life he seeks, a place to find "renewed hopes and happiness"—an environment in which to lose himself and "bury" his past life (112). Throughout the stories, Gatto repeatedly converts island space into a transgressive margin where, in anthropologist Tom Selanniemi's words, his own "latent 'Other' may come forth and reveal characteristics that self-control and social control keep hidden in everyday life" (27).

Gatto, however, is not alone in his quest. He is also joined in Arias's texts by other males in search of the exotic, in particular by those whose express purpose of travel is to indulge their carnal desires by finding "un pedazo de carne caliente que hay que tratar de conseguir al menor precio posible" ("Novia" 120)—that is, sex tourists. This is clearly seen at *Barbanegra*—"*an erotic, exotic resort for single men and adventurous couples*" (126)—near Puerto Plata that serves as a primary setting of the story "Novia del Atlántico" and, in real life, has become a global convergence

[4] Gatto's impulses and actions are also similar to those ascribed to the figure identified by Mary Louise Pratt as the imperial "seeing man" of European colonial expansion: "the European male subject of European landscape discourse—he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess" (7).

point for men from abroad to repeat colonial sexual fantasies commodified through tourism. The fantasies of such men—"gringos en su mayoría […] viejos, menos viejos, blancos de Ohio, negros de New York, un noruego pálido todavía […], el alemán de 85 años de edad" (117), as well as the success of such places as *Barbanegra,* are fueled to a great extent by such web sites like the *World Sex Archives* through which flow the images for the male erotic tourist gaze to behold and where, for a fee, consumers may share experiences, photos and tips gleaned from their sexual adventures from around the world. In this way, the internet functions as a conduit through which the Dominican Republic is once again configured into what Anne McClintock terms a "porno-tropics"—a construct of European imperial expansion in which places such as Africa and the Americas: "were figured in European lore as libidinously eroticized [and became] a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears" (22).

The dynamic of the gaze is not a one-way street, however—just as local social actors are detected within the travelling male's field of vision and immediately inscribed with his exoticizing desire, they also immediately inscribe *him* with the desires that spring primarily from the economic conditions in which they live and that principally consist of extracting money and material benefit as well as finding a way off the island. This is seen multiple times in James Gatto's interaction with Dominican women such as in his encounter with Yajaira, who returns the tourist gaze with her own. As the narration describes it: "La muchacha se quedó parada observándolo mientras se alejaba. Ese hombre viene de algún país lejano, probablemente desde donde ella se muere por ir" (96).

The local gaze and the varied motivations behind it are seen once again in "Novia del Atlántico" when Gatto is waiting for an interview for the job of night manager at *Barbanegra*, unaware of the "adult" nature of the establishment. As he waits, he notices some of the women who, once they spot him, watch "sin quitarle ni un segundo la mirada de encima" (113). He thus quickly becomes an object of pursuit by Jennifer, one of the "cuero malo de Puerto Plata" who works at *Barbanegra*. She suddenly calls out to him:

> '¡Diablo, papi, tú sí tá bueno, buen perro!'—grita una de las tres mujeres, la más joven. Un solo grito a plena voz y sin miedo, consciente de su poder. [Ella tiene] cara de 'ven papi, buen perro, cómeme, que quiero ver cómo tú me pones, ven, que todo esto es tuyo, y es más, me lo voy a afeitar y me le voy a poner tu nombre para que veas que he estado esperándote la vida entera y ya no puedo vivir más sin ti.' (114)

Here the local sex worker engages her white, foreign, and male Other from a position of personal power that derives from her geographic, discursive, and corporal locus—that is, her exoticized Caribbeanness and eroticized body which she uses to her own advantage. In her sexualized performance, her body becomes the site for the negotiation of mutual desire even as she seeks to allure her interlocutor. Her look commands him to partake of an anthropophagic feast on her body and sex, above which she promises to inscribe his name, thus rehearsing and playing on the dynamics of exotic objectification, ownership, subjugation and dependency first set in motion some 500 years earlier, converting them into tools and conduits to connect with transnational capital and mobilities.

As these passages make clear, within a context of overarching inequality that obtains between the visitor and the visited, the exoticization of women such as

Jennifer not only sets some of the conditions of possibility for action on their part, but also becomes their cultural capital within the global sexual economy—a point reinforced in the following description of the "*Barbanegra Girls*" as they take the dance floor and initiate the embodied performance of *el agarre* […] "the great circus of seduction" (119) before the male onlookers: "caras de orgasmo, caderas, senos, caderas, cuerpos no tan perfectos porque saben lo que es mal pasar; dinero, decadencia, frustración sexual e impunidad de un lado; juventud, miseria, hambre del otro" (121). This space thus becomes the performative interstice between local poverty and outside wealth, both of which exact their toll on the women who, if they are successful in getting a client, know that "mañana tendrán con qué comer," or be able to bring back much needed cash to their homes**,** "donde han dejado a sus hijos con el marido, o en su apartamento vacío, después de haber esperado a un chulo por dos días," while still others will earn enough "para perderlo en el casino esa misma noche y amanecer bebiendo y oliendo y llorando a solas" (118).

These stories thus exemplify what Denise Brennan has pointed out regarding the sex trade in Sosúa, Dominican Republic. Just as male sex tourists may "view [Dominican sex workers] as commodities for pleasure and control," so too the women see them as "readily exploitable [and] potential dupes" and vehicles for their own material gain (168). These women use sex, romance and possibly marriage toward that end and as a "stepping stone" off the island (168), thus seeking escape and participation in the mobilities that local conditions prohibit. In other words, Dominican sex workers seek to *re*create them*selves* through their participation in the recreational sex of others. They are, as Brennan states, "marginalized women in a marginalized economy [who] can and do fashion creative strategies to control their economic lives" (168), thus making the space of sexualized encounter a potentially transformative one.

The socio-economic disparity that exists between sex tourists and sex workers puts into question, of course, the extent to which the latter can refashion themselves and their circumstances. However, as Arias's texts point out, relational power differentials as seen at the micro-scale of the contact zones of tourism are not fixed, but shift according to the relative knowledges and cultural capital the social actors involved possess and the success with which they are able to deploy them in their interactions with one another. Indeed, even though Gatto's wealth and mobility grant him a relatively greater ability to exercise his will within the purview of his gaze, often the local women he desires evidence a power greater than his. Jennifer, who, at eighteen years old, already "se la sabe todas" when it comes to men, eventually is able to seduce Gatto, who has resisted her advances by reminding himself that she is a mere "cuero" 'whore' (124). However, compared to her, he is but "un niño de teta," even though twice her age (124). Thus, Jennifer, suffering a swoon—perhaps a ruse or the product of all the cocaine and alcohol she has ingested during the evening—stirs pity within Gatto and convinces him to join her in the hotel's Jacuzzi. When he arrives there, he finds her lying apparently lifeless, eyes closed, within the hot tub. Pulled between, on the one hand, his sense of chivalry and, on the other, his libidinous impulses, Gatto quickly enters, attempting to resuscitate her, thinking, "Jennifer, novia del Atlántico, víctima del subdesarrollo, quiero ser tu héroe, yo, James Gatto, ciudadano del Primer Mundo, te salvaré" (126). Jennifer, sensing the intensity of his excitement as he touches her breasts and looks upon her long, dark eyelashes, suddenly opens her eyes to fix him with her gaze and, smiling, takes hold of his sex as if a "control remoto," gently pulling Gatto under the water in a hedonistic baptism with which to bury his former life and close "Novia del Atlántico" (126). In this way, apart from successfully manipulating the male sex drive, Jennifer seems to have correctly read Gatto's chivalrous sensibilities—a product, perhaps, of her having

witnessed what Chris Ryan terms the "white knight syndrome" among male sex tourists, who, upon witnessing the socio-economic disparity between themselves and their sex-worker lovers are moved by "the self-delusion […] that they, and they alone, are the answers to the predicament they imagine the […] girls to be in" (32).

In similar fashion, Yajaira, "explotada desde jovencita," has been forced to earn a living exercising many roles—waitress, masseuse, dancer, and female companion—to provide for her "pseudo-familia chupa-sangre" (Arias, "Bachata" 98). She also knows how to read men and is able to take advantage of Gatto, whose quest for *la vida verdadera* entails drifting according to the flow of circumstance and desire. At the end of "Bachata," he finds himself at Yajaira's mercy while being mugged at knife point. As seen in the passage cited earlier, Yajaira had already taken an interest in Gatto from the moment she saw him, seeing in him the representation of a place to which she was "dying to go". In comparison with Jennifer, however, Yajaira's seduction of Gatto is much more subtle, limited initially to a silent smile upon first crossing paths. And yet, the text indicates that, after their first encounter, Yajaira "lo dejó irse, sabiendo que no llegaría más allá del último basurero," suggesting a tactical move on her part in as much as she also knew that he would eventually have to turn back and pass by the restaurant-bar where she works—and where they will further interact (96). Thus, Yajaira uses her knowledge of the local terrain—a knowledge Gatto lacks—to work in her favor as further evidenced later in the evening. After entertaining his advances while working, she instructs the impulsive and insistent adventurer to meet her by a small house on the beach near a stream of dirty water. As he waits with anticipation in the dark of the moonless night, he suddenly senses the edge of a knife blade against his throat, and discovers he is being mugged by the same local men whom he had met earlier at the bar and whose quaint "sociabilidad dominicana" had impressed him (101). However, Gatto had fallen within the gaze of these men as they had immediately equated his "gringo" otherness with the money they now seek to steal. In the end, however, Yajaira comes to the rescue of this would be First World savior, who finally realizes that he is no hero at all but rather an "anti-hero" (102), whose wellbeing is in the hands of this "beautiful flower" from among the "trash heaps". After authoritatively calling off the attackers, who are in reality her brothers and obey her without question, Yajaira confronts Gatto, imposing a distance between them that had been breached in his earlier pursuit of her. Nevertheless, even as she drives him away she entices him: "Luego, coqueta, dio media vuelta y se fue caminando con su sensual meneo de nalgas por entre la penumbra," exhibiting her command over men and drawing further attention to the power she possesses (103). The narrative further reinforces this, quoting a bachata song that has been interwoven throughout the text and now wafts through the night air, offering its audience two options: "'Y si tú quieres me olvidas, si quieres volver también, yo esperaré hasta que entiendas, que sin mi amor tú no eres nada'" (106).

In this way, Arias offers no simple binary depiction of exploiter and exploited but rather the dynamics involved as local and foreign subjects engage each other and negotiate their desires, thus shaping Dominican social space and its varied meanings. Indeed, even as Gatto and sex tourists reduce Caribbean places to personal settings for the rehearsal of Western scenarios of heterosexual male protagonism within the periphery, the local subjects they encounter use those same places for personal material gain, configuring Gatto's "wide-open frontier" as a field of predatory action deeply intertwined with their daily survival and economic lives.

These dynamics are also seen in literary works from Cuba, especially in those which place their settings in Havana during the severe economic crisis of the *período especial*, during which, as mentioned above, the Cuban government opened the country to the international travel and tourism industry as a main economic survival

and development strategy.[5] This, together with the creation of a dual economy tied to the US dollar, led to increased growth of the informal economy and the black market and was accompanied by an explosion in sex tourism. José Miguel Sánchez's (aka Yoss) short story "La causa que refresca" (1998) addresses the realities of this desperate moment in Cuban history and is illustrative of the period, highlighting the continued operation of discourses and practices rooted in the original colonial scenario of encounter as these unfold between an ostensibly ideologically committed female "cultural" tourist and a local *jinetero*, or male hustler/sex worker. Written from the perspective of the *jinetero*, the text takes the form of a monologue narrated entirely in the second person singular and directed at the female tourist.[6] As Esther Whitfield points out, the story constitutes a type of strategic counter to the stereotypes of Cubans that the latter experienced in their contact with foreigners during the special period, in this case, employing a stereotyped construction of the female tourist (Whitfield 93-94). The text is thus marked by an at times cynical undertone as the sarcastic *jinetero/*narrator rehearses a representational inversion of hierarchies between the guilt-ridden, yet libidinous, privileged outsider and the local self in which he highlights his own agency and power, while seeking to demystify the desires and motives of his interlocutor.

The narrative begins with the *jinetero* designating himself as the tour guide who will lead the object of his desire—the female tourist—into the world that she has travelled to find: "Bienvenida. Sí, yo siempre estoy aquí, en la entrada del aeropuerto o del hotel, esperando por ti. Veo en tu sonrisa que tú también me has reconocido a la primera ojeada" (91). Thus, he positions himself in a place from which to see and be seen, to be held within the tourist gaze even as he gazes back, from there to gauge his Other and work his seduction, proffering himself as her fulfillment: "Yo soy lo que soñaste todos estos años, justamente lo que buscas" (92). Portrayed as a permanent fixture, he is recognized by his Other; recognized according to the "authenticity" he embodies and upon which he capitalizes strategically. Thus, he begins by detailing what his body signifies according to the historical dual discourse of the Caribbean as simultaneous paradise and perdition; the site of primitive pleasure and threat: "Tengo ojos mestizos y la piel mordida por el sol y el salitre, pelo indómito y músculos de trabajo […] En mis facciones está el peligro, el delicado riesgo del robo o la enfermedad venérea, pero también la dulzura de la caña, la sincera amistad, el buen salvaje de Rousseau" (92).[7] This litany of stereotypes enumerates the primary subject positions he occupies—the roles he plays as her object of desire and upon which their relationship is predicated. Of course, these will extend to their sexual liaison in which they rehearse the racialized exoticism by which Caribbean and European/Euro-American subjectivities have historically been joined: "Disfruta […] de mi cuero tostado sobre tu piel nívea […] ¿Tú eras de las que creía que eso de la virilidad afrocaribeña era otro mito?" (93). As he continues his description of their sexual liaison, he further portrays their experience as rooted in the consumption of the

[5] While most scholars agree that the most extreme of the special period was over by the mid-1990s (see, for example, Pérez 320; Cabezas 73), there is no clear consensus on when, or even if, the special period ended. Esther Whitfield suggests 2005 as a possible end point based on a speech by Castro in which he declared the special period as something the Cuban people were "leaving behind". Whitfield also points out that , "[b]y this time, many in Cuba agreed that the special period was over, but pointed to the end of the very worst years rather than hardship per se" (159 n 4). Exemplary literary works of the special period include those of Gutiérrez and Valdés. For examples of literature that take up *jineterismo* 'hustling' as their central theme, see Bustamante, Consuegra, and Valle.

[6] A dialogic technique also utilized by Antiguan author Jamaica Kincaid to frame her contestatory and demystifying portrayal of her own country in *A Small Place*.

[7] On this dualism within metropolitan discourses and practices, see Mimi Sheller, Consuming the Caribbean, p. 107-22.

exoticized brown body. Having passed through the "escuela latina" of lovemaking, her stereotypically refined and contained sexuality comes to express itself in a more boisterous and "savage" manner (93), evidenced by her seeking to subjugate herself to him and the primitiveness that he embodies for her: "Y podrás nombrarme ipso facto dictador con plenos poderes […] Y pedirme que contigo nunca tenga esa democracia, ni monarquía constitucional ni nada civilizado, sólo este puro salvajismo que tanto te complace. La bella y la bestia, la turista y el nativo. La primermundista y el subdesarrollado" (93). Thus, while through their sexual liaison this string of binaries—which specify the relational positioning of each actor—is both consummated and placed into suspension, in the end, it is her desire that dictates the terms of their temporary social pact, including the temporary inversion of hierarchical roles. Furthermore, through these binaries, the text represents the *jinetero* as the "authentically" Cuban, a category that comprehends the history of the island in relation with the "West" from the time of discovery and encompasses recent geopolitical categorizations into "First" and "Third" worlds.

Her desire—and his configuration—however, extend beyond the merely carnal, for her travels also have an ideological motivation, demonstrated in her political practice and the revolutionary symbolic capital she has acquired: participating in student demonstrations in 1968, knowing intimately the songs of the Cuban *Nueva Trova* artists Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés, decorating her room with posters of Fidel and Rigoberta Menchú, participating in relief efforts for orphaned children of Guatemala, and arguing back home over the true identity of Subcomandante Marcos (91-2). After enumerating these pieces of revolutionary pop culture and participatory evidence of her solidarity with the revolution, the author reassures her that, "No te preocupes, todos sabemos eso. Eres una de nosotros" (92), thus sarcastically affirming her self-identification with the revolutionary cause. In this way, the woman's desire corresponds to multi-tiered socio-historical cultural logics operative in Caribbean space: from her seeking the sun and sand of the tropics to her indulgence in colonial fantasies of the "primitive," hyper-sexualized Other, while, at the same time, fulfilling ideological commitments in support of the revolution and the Cuban people.

Moreover, the woman suffers from a sense of guilt because of the material advantage she enjoys over local residents, her primary culpability owing to the "pecado de ser del Primer Mundo" (94). In a move reminiscent of Jennifer in her relationship with James Gatto in "Novia del Atlántico," the *jinetero* in "La causa que refresca" uses the emotional states accompanying his companion's sense of privilege to extract material benefit and, thus, thankfully accepts her "First World" guilt offering—a pair of pants and tennis shoes. After asking if she will mail some letters for him, he assures her that she can write to him, playing on her guilt and sympathy once more within the context of special period scarcity as he unobtrusively reminds her that "conoces mi talla, no creo que vaya a engordar" (94). Furthermore, even as he mockingly assumes the role of a priest, he sarcastically points out the benefits that accrue to Cuban citizens as a result of her penitent acts: "de expiar tu culpa bendiciéndonos con moneda fuerte, con tus maletas que llegaron llenas y se van casi vacías, por tu caridad y tu satisfacción de estar haciendo algo por la justicia social" (94).

While the text may be, as Whitfield contends, a counter-stereotyping of the tourist, it nevertheless demonstrates the role of exoticizing metropolitan discourse in governing relations within the contact zone of tourism. The enunciating subject of the story's contestatory speech and his interlocutor are both brought into contact, bound, and constructed according to the operation of that discourse, which thus predicates the terms of their interaction and the positions they may occupy relative to one another. In this way, "La causa que refresca" corresponds to the definition of autoethnography as described by Mary Louise Pratt, who, explaining representational practices that

developed within the contact zone upon the encounter of indigenous and European social actors during the colonial period, maintains: "If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations" (8). In the same way, Yoss' text wrests control of discourse to construct an utterance that contests and dialogues, from a local perspective, not only with stereotypical metropolitan representations of the "Cuban," but also their discursive trace as articulated through the behavior and practices of those such as this tourist, whose interest is, on the one hand, ideological, and, on the other, deeply intertwined with the exoticizing discourses of desire that touch upon all aspects of her trip. In the final analysis, hers is a sojourn at the end of the twentieth century in search of "authentic" objects for consumption: from the hyper-sexual and racialized brown male body through which to refresh herself physically, to her ideological and moral refreshment as she participates in the specialness of the special period, among "un pueblo que, a pesar de todo, lucha y no se rinde" (93)—even as they quickly capitalize on their interactions with her.

In similar fashion, Arias demystifies contemporary tourist encounters as she sketches the experience of the privileged traveler James Gatto, whom the text describes as a *giramundo*, or globetrotter (93). The term, however, interpreted within the context of the global flows of money and bodies which trace their origin to the colonial relations established at the outset of modernity, could very well be taken in a more literal fashion as "one who spins the world" or "causes the world to spin." Indeed, it is precisely out of the relational dynamics set in motion by travelers like Gatto in their encounters with the local, that Arias weaves her portraits of present day tourism in the Dominican Republic, showing how that 'tropical paradise' is a site of negotiation and struggle where bodies are shaped and reshaped as they spin in a dialectic of mutual desire.

Thus, "Bachata," "Novia del Atlántico," and "La causa que refresca," not only carry out an important archival function *vis-à-vis* the contemporary social reality and everyday vital experience of Caribbean societies in relationship with the foreign "Others" that transiently pass through island space, they also demystify and contest those forms of cultural discourse such as the Brugal rum commercials and the advertisement from travel2cuba.com.uk that propose and capitalize on a seemingly naturalized order of things organized according to neo-colonial hierarchies. In the counter discourse they generate, Arias and Sánchez highlight how the foundational logic of the modern Caribbean—*fiestas*, *refrigerio* and *ganancias*—echoes today.

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