



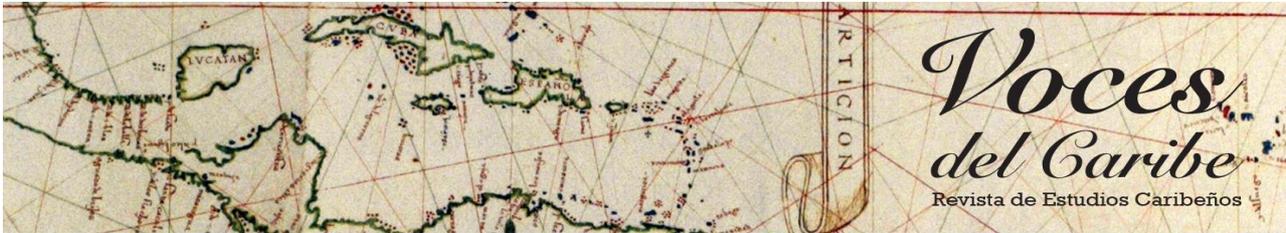
Black Markets, Foreign Clothing, Identity Construction in Contemporary Urban Cuba

Introduction

Cuba is a fascinating island on which to conduct anthropological studies, as its exceptional political and economic situation has an enormous impact on Cuban people's life. Due to the unique character of Cuba's socialist governmental structure and policies, as well as the economic embargo imposed by the United States on Cuba, in combination with the economic hardship Cubans faced (and still face) after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Many Cubans rely on remittances, gifts, and imported goods from abroad to fulfill their (basic) consumption needs. Nevertheless, a new generation of young Cubans seems to be paying more attention to obtaining consumer goods—such as fashionable clothes, shoes, and smartphones—from abroad. As black markets flourish on the island as a result of the tendencies stated above, it is worthwhile to study what kind of goods are wanted and available, how they are provided and obtained, by whom they are sold and bought, and with what objectives.

Geographically, Cuba belongs to the world, but it does not economically and politically participate fully in it. In relation to globalization, I noticed while I was there that Cubans, especially young Cubans, imagine their island as participating in





global economies and politics while concomitantly feeling fettered by the restrictions and limitations that the reality of their current socioeconomic organization presents. As Foucault (1967) described, “there is a certain kind of heterotopia which I would describe as that of crisis; it comprises privileged or sacred or forbidden places that are reserved for the individual who finds himself in a state of crisis with respect to the society or the environment in which he lives” (331). It is through this crisis (described by Fidel Castro as the ‘Special Period in Times of Peace’ in the 1990s in Cuba) that Cuban people became the infrastructure itself by which to compensate for the shortcomings of their society and spatial existence. The resilience of human beings for dealing with such struggle (known as *la lucha* in Cuba) is what Cubans call *resolver* (to resolve, ‘by any means possible’) and *inventar* (to invent, or ‘come up with something’)¹. Black markets form part of that struggle, thus clothing becomes a ‘weapon’ through which Cuban youth demonstrate their frustration with the values and norms of the Cuban Revolution and a desire to take part in a globalized era.

As I will explain in more detail further on, I approach the topic not only by drawing on Foucault, but also on the work of AbdouMaliq Simone (2004), and also build further on Simone’s notion of ‘People as Infrastructure’, which he defines as “economic collaboration among residents seemingly marginalized from and immiserated by urban life” (407). Although my Cuban informants who lived in the

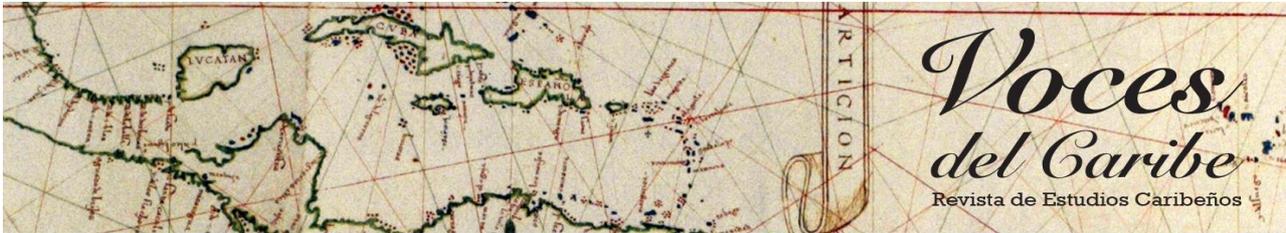




city of Santiago de Cuba, in the eastern part of the island, were not necessarily physically marginalized from urban life, I do consider them to be marginalized vis-à-vis the global world because they suffer hardship when trying to obtain luxury consumer goods (such as clothing) and to connect the Internet, for example, due to the economic blockade and socialist nature of Cuba's society. Within Cuba, citizens of Santiago de Cuba is also marginalized vis-à-vis Havana, which is known historically to offer more economic opportunities and has led to an (illegal) flow of migration from the Eastern provinces to the capital. In black markets, people operate within urban illegal economies in which people themselves create transnational trade dynamics and networks. Therefore, I consider Cuba to be a 'heterotopia', in the way that Foucault would define it: "a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable" (330).

I collected data for this article over a one-month period of ethnographic fieldwork in and around the neighborhood '*Reperto La Asunción*' in Santiago de Cuba in December 2016. The modest data I discuss here represents interviews I conducted with four Cubans in their early twenties, who reside in this city. Apart from talking informally with my informants about their clothing and fashion preferences, I also went (window) shopping with them at black markets and in state shops. This allowed me to approach my research project 'bottom up,' as it would have been





impossible as a foreign, Belgian anthropologist with no prior connections to this illegal trade environment to find out where the black markets were located or track who operated in them. The traffickers of consumer goods, known as *mulas* (mules) in Cuba, are highly invisible because they operate within the margins of the law as they tend to operate creatively to bypass the legal restrictions on imported goods to the island.² Notwithstanding, their role is particularly important because it is these people who provide consumer goods and greatly influence the market, as it is they who estimate and respond to local demand.

Apart from doing an extensive literature review, researching articles online and in newspapers, having conversations with young people living in and around the *casa particular* (private home) where I stayed in this Cuban city served as a useful starting point. Through qualitative and reflexive methods of anthropology—by ‘hanging out’ with Cubans— I engaged in participant observation (Bernard 2011). This allowed me to access to insider knowledge about black markets and fashion. I asked young Cubans what kind of clothes they owned and liked, and where they bought their clothes. In this way, I tried to figure out what kinds of imported, fashionable items they wanted to be able to find on the black market (e.g. brands such as Adidas), why in particular they liked white clothes (due to religious requirements for *iyawó* initiates in Santería), and how they added value to a construction of a young



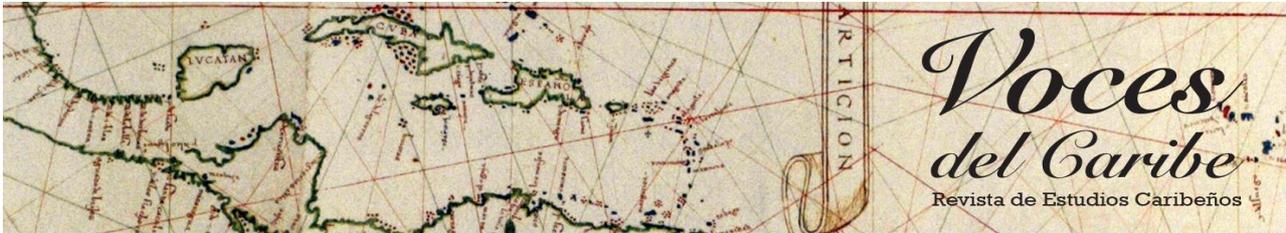


person's identity in contemporary Cuba. Depending on their openness, I then asked them to take me to the places where they bought the clothes (private houses or illegal street sellers) but also legal shops in the city. This allowed me to track *mulas* (traffickers) and/or first-hand sellers. In some cases, the *mula* operated both as the trafficker and the in-country seller.

In total, during this short visit I talked to four Cubans (two young men and two young women) in their early twenties, managed to visit three private homes where clothes are sold illegally (on the black market), and numerous, state- and private-run official clothing shops. One of my informants also sold clothes on the street. Notwithstanding, I visited these black markets as a potential client, since I would have been seen with suspicion had I revealed I was conducting research on the illegal clothing trade, and people would be unlikely to want to talk openly about their operations for fear of incarceration and police fines. I asked my informants what they regarded as fashionable items or not, where they got ideas about the latest fashions, and who were considered role models and examples in their respective, gendered, social groups.

From an ethical perspective, I often felt uncomfortable not always being able to reveal my identity as a researcher, but the project simply would have been impossible if I had because most (if not all) Cubans are keenly aware of the potential





incarceration they face if the government were to discover their black-market operations. So, I was only able to be as discrete as possible in order to protect the identity of my research informants, all of whom insisted on remaining anonymous due to the illegitimate nature of my research: thus, the names I use are pseudonyms. In the field, it was also challenging at times to only be able to take notes after having visited people and places, because I could not record or write on the spot.

The Cuban Economy, Black Markets, and Clothing Imports

Ever since the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the Cuban economy has been based on socialist principles, meaning that its economy is centrally planned and controlled by the state. Moreover, Cuba suffers from an economic and financial blockade imposed by the United States, as the latter was unhappy about having an anti-capitalistic neighbor in its geographical backyard. For decades, Cuba relied mostly on trading partnerships with the Soviet Union. However, when the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991, Cuba entered a period of severe economic hardship in the 1990s, *el Periodo Especial en Tiempos de Paz* (the Special Period in Times of Peace), an austerity program launched by Fidel Castro. Cuba went into a deep economic recession and with a strengthened U.S. embargo, caused a shortage of basic consumer





goods intensified as significant declines in imported goods were registered (Gualerzi 2009; Pérez-Lopez 1995).

While the Cuban government implemented new regulations and action plans (such as an economic restructuring, the creation of an international tourism infrastructure, encouragement of foreign currency remittances, and the allowance for Cubans to emigrate, as Blue (2005) summarized) to revive its economy, Cuban people—both individually and collectively, as well as publicly and secretly—looked for a way out of scarcity by creating their own, alternative, socio-economic networks to obtain basic goods such as food and clothes.³ Cuba's population did receive rationed goods provided by the state with its *libreta* (rationing book), but the amounts proved insufficient for an average household to survive (Pérez-Lopez, 1995), even more when the amounts came to be reduced over time.⁴ Moreover, the government has never provided a complete range of basic goods such as soap, medicines, shoes and clothes. However, these items did become increasingly available through *diplo tiendas* (dollar stores with higher prices for foreign diplomats) in the 1990s, but most Cubans did not have the money to buy them. In practice, many consumer goods remained inaccessible for Cubans who officially earned (and still earn) less than 500 Cuban pesos (CUP) a month, on average (the equivalent to 20 CUC or USD).⁵ With two currencies circulating on the island – the CUP for the locals and the CUC for tourists,





Gualerzi speaks of “the ‘dollarization’ of the Cuban economy” and “*a dual economy*” (294). Moreover, as Blue (2005) suggests, ever since this moment in history, Cubans who had relatives abroad began to receive increasing financial and material aid from their migrated family members, which helped them access such consumer goods.

The political and economic dynamics that emerged during the Special Period also resulted over time in the emergence of a second economy to fill the gap created by the official (‘first’) economy (see Figure 1), as described in detail by J. F. Pérez-Lopez in his 1995 book ‘*Cuba’s Second Economy. From Behind the Scenes to Center Stage*’. The author describes this phenomenon as “widely present unregulated economic activities in socialist economies outside the channels of the official (centrally planned or first) economy and direct state control” (10). He goes on to explain: “Cubans rely [on it] to ‘resolve’ their day-to-day economic needs” (77). Thus, it involved the production and distribution of all kinds of goods and services outside the centrally planned economy, activities that were *debajo de la mesa* (under the table), and mostly, but not exclusively, illegal (see Figure 1). In this study, I focus on a very particular and understudied aspect of the Cuban economy that responds highly efficiently – though illicitly – to current consumer demands for black market clothing on the island.⁶



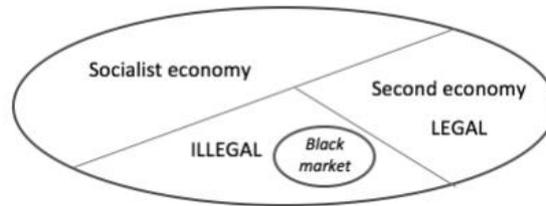


Figure 1: Socialist and Second Economies (Pérez-Lopez 1995, 26)

Officially, any black market activity is illegal and penalized by the government with sanctions ranging from expensive fines to years of imprisonment, according to the criminal code of December 1978 (Pérez-Lopez 1995). But, black marketers tend to hide their illegal activities from the government, which explains why there are hardly any statistics available on this segment of Cuba's economy and why it is difficult to conduct scientific studies. Nevertheless, the black market is commonplace – though invisible – in most urban areas in Cuba today. As many households depend on these black markets, which appear to function rather as a survival mechanism for citizens who struggle to get by than as counterrevolutionary activities, it seems that the government is tolerating most of these activities. This attitude became also clear in a revised penal code in 1987, which stipulates that now only “significant or persistent” economic crimes are punishable (Codigo Penal 1987).

Moreover, according to Munzenkrieder (2010), there is a lot of “underground capitalism” going on in Cuba, and the black market is thriving thanks to a loosening





of travel restrictions for American citizens (including Cuban-Americans) to travel to Cuba from the United States. The author writes: “[A] Reuters report claims that in 2008, “Cuban exiles in the United States sent to the island some \$636 million in 2008 ...About 60 percent of that trade goes through unofficial channels such as human mules” (11 August 2010, Miami New Times) (see also Figure 2). Hence, this black market trade is closely linked to the transnational traffic of goods and remittances, and has been largely facilitated by the Cuban diaspora. Manuel Orozco’s 2009 report on U.S. remittances to Cuba confirms this statement: “These networks of travelers known as ‘*mulas*’ in Cuban parlance have become more active particularly since the restrictions the U.S. government made on money transfers to the island” (Pérez-Lopez 6). The results of his questionnaire showed that Cubans increasingly receive remittances through networks of informal mules⁷ NBC News offered another argument: “Now that President Barack Obama has allowed Americans with relatives in Cuba to make unlimited visits, such underground courier services are expanding. The so-called ‘*mulas*’ have always helped the U.S. exile community support their families by delivering hard-to-get” (21 May 2009).



¿Qué método utiliza para enviar remesas?

Método	%
Agencias de remesas como Western Union	56
Viajeros, 'mulas'	43
Internet como Xoom	0
Bancos comerciales como Citibank, BOA	0

Figure 2: Results of a questionnaire taken among Cubans in the United States stating that 43% of the remittances are being send through mulas (*The Cuban Condition* 14)

Together with the liberalizing of the Cuban migration policy that now allows Cubans to migrate temporarily (Barberia 2002), it seems as though the state realizes that the second economy can serve as a solution to the shortcomings of its first economy. Moreover, as Pérez-Lopez notes:

“The government’s ambiguity toward the second economy is a reflection of the population’s feelings: on the one hand, the perceived need to rely on the second economy and black markets to supplement meager rations and, on the other hand, discontent at very high prices and opportunity for some to enrich themselves” (146).



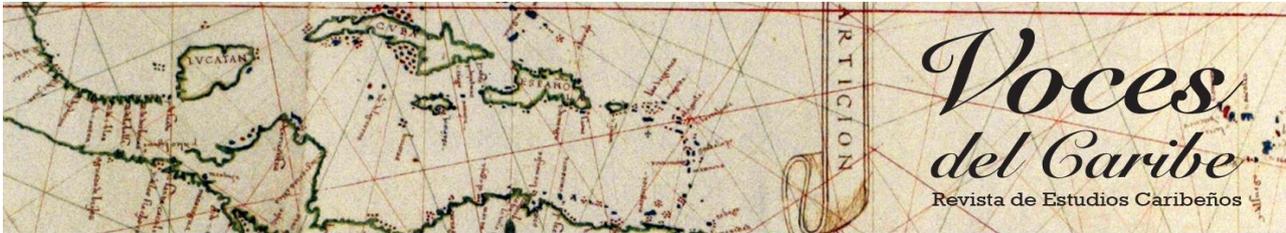


The *Mula* Phenomenon

I first heard about the *mulas* while I was talking to a tour guide in Guantanamo province in eastern Cuba during an excursion to *Boca de Yumuri*. When I sat down near the riverbank, Delfino said: “The legend goes that if you bathe in the Yumuri river, you will get married in Cuba and stay forever on this beautiful island”. Amused by his little romantic story, I teased Delfino with some more realistic comments: “So, but if I stay... How will I be able to make a living here? I heard that people don’t earn so much here...” Delfino explained that there was always a way for love to survive, and that I was in a privileged position to make a living there: “You could become a *mula* because you would keep a Belgian passport that allows you to travel and return as much as you want.” I did not understand what he was talking about: “What is a *mula*?” I asked him. He explained:

Many foreigners who live in Cuba work as mules or traffickers: they travel to other countries with empty suitcases and return to Cuba with suitcases full of clothes, shoes, and other stuff. They then sell these goods to other Cubans living on the island who are not able to access these goods because they cannot travel and because these things are usually not available in state-run





shops. You can live like a queen in Cuba doing that kind of job (Informal Conversation with Delfino, August 2016).

Intrigued by this phenomenon, I started to look up information about these *mula*, and although much has been written in newspapers and online websites on *mulas*⁸ very little academic literature can be found on this phenomenon. Only Orozco (2002, as cited in DeWind & Holdaway 2008) managed to define *mulas* properly:

Mulas are entrepreneurs ... who can and do travel with ease and frequency to the island. They carry both money and packages of goods to the sender's relatives in Cuba for relatively inexpensive fees. They are known through word of mouth, through the references of relatives, acquaintances, and friends ... *Mulas* go to Cuba predominantly as tourists, as they are informal entrepreneurs without a license to operate as a business. ... There is no single type of *mula* and their numbers may run into the thousands (306).

While many *mulas* are being paid for travelling to other countries to buy goods and return with them to Cuba, most *mulas* I encountered were independent entrepreneurs who had expanded informal networks in other countries, such as Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Russia, and the United States, and although Orozco (2002) describes *mulas* mainly as couriers of dollar remittances, I found that most of them imported clothing, shoes, watches, jewelry, and electronic devices such





as televisions, laptops, smartphones, and air conditioners. Usually, they traveled to a country outside Cuba for only a few days, to save as much as possible on accommodations and living costs abroad and make their business economically successful.

Interestingly, I also found that many tourists that do not necessarily identify as *mulas* could be categorized as such traffickers as well. For example, I met a Canadian tourist in Santiago de Cuba who traveled every three months to Cuba to meet his 30 years' younger Cuban girlfriend. He openly declared himself as “a different kind of sex tourist”, explaining that his actions were not as exploitative as those of other sex tourists: “Each time I come back to Cuba, I bring a suitcase full of clothes and shoes for her. Usually she does not keep that stuff, but I don't mind. She sells it to other people in Cuba. That way, she can earn some money too. So I don't really pay her for her companionship, but I do offer her opportunities to make a living”, he explained (Informal Conversation with Marc, August 2016). Thus, *mulas* may also be rather sporadic tourists who do not consciously but surely do situate themselves on the black market by their behavior. García (2013) confirms this by arguing that all kinds of people—from businessmen to salesmen to doctors to pilots—operate as *mulas* by importing articles (illegally).⁹ He estimates that an average value of 4 million dollars is imported annually in consumer goods. AP Television (2014) speaks of even nearly

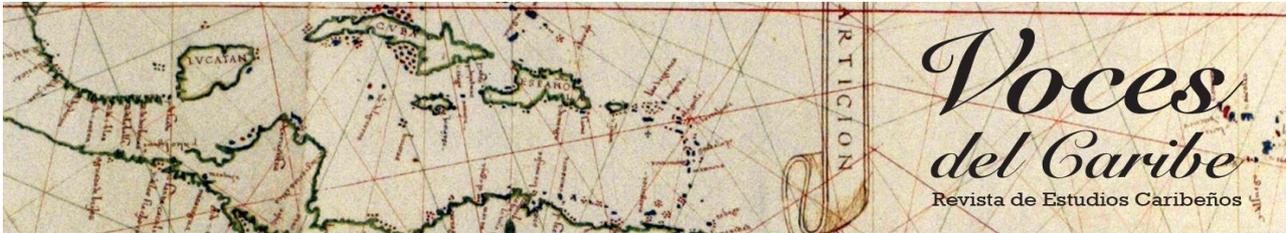




one billion dollars of goods per year since the easing of U.S. travel restrictions to Cuba.

According to Padura (2013), a journalist who wrote on the *mula* phenomenon for *Cartas desde Cuba*, Cuban residents who travel have the right to import goods for personal goods, but they need to pay taxes on each kilogram above the permitted weight of 30 kilograms for their luggage. Moreover, Cuban citizens are only allowed to import goods once a year, and need to pay high taxes on all goods that are not for personal use. This is a measure taken by the state to keep Cubans from starting to make a business out of traveling or, in other words, to prevent the *mula* phenomenon. In another attempt to crack down on the black market and the increased professionalization of the *mula* phenomenon, the Cuban government announced new regulations in September 2014: it increased limitations on the amount of consumer goods travelers can import to Cuba in their luggage, and on customs duty fees on permitted imported goods (AP Television 2014; Tennant-Scull 2014; Weissenstein 2014). Nevertheless, I still witnessed people carrying very large amounts of luggage to Cuba from Miami International Airport in October and December 2016, which makes it seem that goods are still being imported event today, despite these new regulations.¹⁰

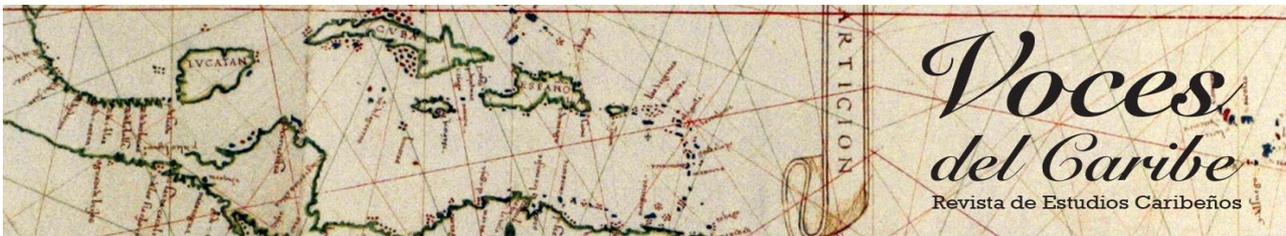




One of the most important reasons why the *mula* phenomenon remains so popular on the island and why it is so important for Cubans is that Cuba cannot import clothing directly from the U.S. because of the U.S. embargo. Another reason, as Munzenkrieder noted, is that: “[sending] money and goods through mules is often preferable than the legally available channels. Mules cost less, and money usually arrives faster. Goods sent through mules are usually priced lower than similar goods sold in state-run stores” (2010).¹¹ Moreover, other countries that trade with Cuba are often sanctioned by the U.S. Ships that dock in Cuba are, for example, not allowed to dock in the U.S afterwards. All of this resulted over time in an underdeveloped economy in Cuba, and a scarcity of consumer goods such as clothes. Thus, these individual transfers of goods are an important provision of clothing for the local population, and the *mulas* have also a certain power to decide and control what is imported or not. Notwithstanding, the *mulas* are not necessarily always perceived as heroic persons in Cuban or American society, especially when they are Cuban-American migrants.

Even through the lyrics of Cuban songs such as ‘*Johnny La Mula*’ by Hoyo Colorao (2016), it becomes clear that although Cuban citizens significantly rely upon their relatives living abroad (mostly in Miami, United States), some do indeed see these migrated Cubans as betrayers of the Cuban Revolution and socialist values





because of their capitalistic lifestyle in the U.S. and how money has changed their values. Moreover, some Cubans situate themselves in an ambiguous situation in which they look forward to *mulas* like Johnny coming over to bring material aid, but on the other hand are upset with the way in which the *mula* – as a person who embodies a capitalist lifestyle – has materialized his or her whole existence. This mixed feeling can be explained by socialist values (read: anti-consumerist, anti-capitalist, anti-materialist) on the one hand but necessity and economic hardship (lack of basic consumption needs) on the other hand.

Therefore, some Cubans find themselves in a difficult situation as they morally disagree with mule's behavior and lifestyle, while simultaneously having no other choice than to trade with mules to be able to obtain consumer goods. Nevertheless, this moral ambiguity was less apparent in the conversations I had with young Cubans. This frustration, in combination with certain disenchantment with the traditional socialist rhetoric, mainly at the economic level, seems to orientate Cuban youth increasingly in favor towards a Western lifestyle and luxury consumption.

“White” Clothes & Identity Creation: I consume, therefore I am...¹²

In this section I deal with the sociocultural importance and meanings given to clothes in contemporary Cuba, especially for Cuban youth, in the context of globalization and

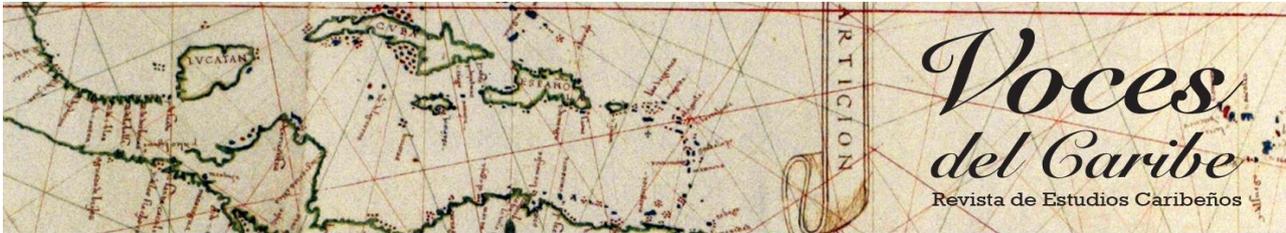




consumption. I build on Karen Transberg Hansen's research in her book "Salaula: The World of Secondhand Clothing and Namibia" (2000), and her notion that clothing markets are shaped "by cultural specificities of judgment, preference, and style" (2). Moreover, her argument that "clothing consumption has complex effects on how people organize their livelihoods, and the manner in which they conduct their everyday livelihoods, and the manner in which they conduct their everyday lives touches on the production and distribution relations that are available to them" (3) is very applicable in the Cuban case. In contemporary Cuba, it is remarkable how the ability to consume increasingly defines the status and identity of a person.

It is noteworthy that not just any sort of consumption is valued within this politics of class, status, and identity. Generally, clothes and other visible items of embodied identity are the preferred items of consumption. The reason why Cubans, especially young ones, prefer to spend their money in buying clothes and not kitchen utilities for their houses, for example, can be explained by Terence Turner's theory concerning (1993) the human body in terms of 'social skin': "the surface of the body, as the common frontier of society, the social self, and the psychobiological individual; becomes the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted, and bodily adornment (...) becomes the language through which it is expressed" (486). Thus, it is in relation to consumption and identity that clothing becomes a cultural





medium with which carefully negotiate between the desires of the Self and the society while shaping a personal identity. Social skin models both social boundaries between the individual and others and also categorizes people in social classes according to cultural conventions. As Transberg Hansen (2004) notes, clothing has a unique power to mediate between the Self and society through bodily expressions.

While in Cuba, I saw that the ability to wear such imported clothes that visibly represented foreign fashion via the displaying brands and quality characteristics gave a certain degree of status and class to poorer Cubans in their respective society (see Figure 3). Transberg Hansen also made this finding in her research in Africa “Wearing clothes rather than rags gives dignity to people with few means, and this is an important reason why clothing constitutes a major dimension of well-being” (3). Pérez-Lopez also noticed that this second economy “fits with the desire of Cuban citizens to improve their economic well-being and the lack of opportunities to do so within the very restrictive official economy” (13). Thus, the desire for clothing as a means for measuring one’s wellbeing is essential to both the phenomenon of black markets as to the creation of identity in Cuba.





Figure 3: Youngsters in Santiago de Cuba wearing imported clothes © Julie Rausenberger 2016

In socialist Cuba, the emergence of clothing consumption has resulted in a visible marker of social inequality in a societal structure that pays great attention to the values of equality.¹³ Nowadays, the illegal influx of consumer goods has created sociocultural tensions in Cuban society, as Amy Porter describes in her study on consumption and national identity: “This inability to consume is causing some Cubans to feel substandard and less-than-citizens in their own country” (134). One of the reasons for this is the fact that most Cubans earn wages in Cuban pesos (CUP), while most imported consumer goods can only be bought with Convertible pesos (CUC). Nevertheless, most Cubans do not have access to the CUC currency, so for those possessing CUC, as Gualerzi notes: “The resulting dilemma is that some people





are increasingly being discriminated against, or made unequal, by the access of others to the currency and salaries of the modernizing sector, and in turn to the consumer items that are coming to dominate these two separate standards of consumption and lifestyle (2009, 296).” Thus, the black clothing market is creating a new elite in Cuban society that represents a new division between ‘Us’ (the rich, the fashionably dressed) and ‘Them’ (the poor, the unfashionably dressed).¹⁴

Another important element in clothing consumption through black markets is that it allows Cubans to interact with the West on their own terms. As Transberg Hansen (2000) noted in her African study: “[Consumers’] preoccupation with creating particular appearances is inspired by fashion trends and popular dress cultures from across the world. They draw on these influences in ways that are informed by local norms about bodies and dress (184).” Similar dynamics are visible in Cuba, where the latest trends of Western-style clothing have become the focal point of being a modern and developed person who forms part of a globalized world in which consumption defines increasingly the identity of a person. Thus, the importance and meaning of imported clothes in Cuba is not only marked by local everyday consumer needs but also by desires to construct new social values and contest the existing ones. This also helps to explain why imported clothes are more popular and higher valued than locally produced clothes, and why, during my many conversations with Cuban youth,





several of them asked: “Where did you buy that (referring to my clothing)?” I have to conclude that because the foreignness of clothes defines their attractiveness, as Hansen has also suggested: “What the West is, above all, is an imagined place, associated with power, wealth, and an abundance of consumer goods that surpass most local products in quality and style” (253).

Gendered Consumption Patterns: Rappers vs. Princesses

To understand cultural patterns in clothing consumption in Cuba, it is important to discuss gender. While there, I noticed that young men and women have different ideas and preoccupations regarding clothing. In Cuban society, men are ideally perceived as *machos*. A blog post called ‘Cuba loves fashion’ on Cuban fashion on *The Definitely Different Project* blog (2016) describes: “every now and then, you will see them [Cuban men] going through a fashion magazine or trying to know what famous artists from the big screen wear. From that, there’s the “*invento*”: trying to reproduce, with the available resources, something similar to what they see in the fashion magazines” (The Definitely Different Project). In urban contexts, males also pay more attention to what they see on television and in music videos. Role models for my informant Lionel (21 years old) were local rappers and international artists: “Personally, I get my inspiration to dress fashionable from singers because they always wear nice clothes of





the latest trends. My favorite singers are Chris Brown, El Principe, Daddy Yankee, Yandel and Romeo Santos. Most of my friends and I try to dress like them” (informal conversation with Lionel, December 2016). Remarkably, girls usually referred only to foreign singers: “I like how Nicky Minaj, Rihanna, and Katy Perry dress, but I don’t really like how the Cuban female singers dress up”, claimed Yilka (23 years old) (informal conversation with Yilka, December 2016).

The inspiration that Cuban people get regarding fashion and modern consumption increasingly derives from music videos and other sources that can be accessed through the global Internet. Now that the government-regulated wireless networks are becoming more widespread throughout the island, those Cubans with money to pay for Wi-Fi access increasingly get their ideas online. Nevertheless, as Menendez (2016) notes, it is estimated that only 30 percent of all Cubans are able to access the Internet because of the high cost (2 CUC per hour in 2016). It is assumed by Fernandez (2005) that the government restricts Internet access to prevent the spreading of global mass culture.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the tourist influx also has a certain demonstrated effect on Cubans because they wear fashionable items while walking through Cuban cities. More than once, Cuban people on the street asked me where I bought my clothes, how much my iPhone 5 cost, and so on. Increasingly, Internet access is becoming easier and cheaper to access for Cubans with new rates and more



available Wi-Fi hotspots in Cuban cities at the time of my research in December 2016.¹⁶ As Lieber (2016) notes, the combination of increased Internet access and lessened travel restrictions for U.S. citizens and Cubans to travel in and outside Cuba, “Cubans are now exposed to life far beyond the only country they have ever known”¹⁷

Another technological aspect that explains the inspiration young Cuban men and women get from foreign influences is the relatively new phenomenon of *El Paquete* (the Package) in Cuban cities (Lieber 2016). As Menendez (2016) explains, it is:

[a] weekly compilation of US and other foreign television shows, series, movies and fashion magazines (that) are delivered to Cubans’ homes on a hard drive or USB disk for the equivalent of US \$2 to \$5. Although illegal, it has been largely tolerated by the government and, according to some estimates, *reaches around 70 percent of the population.*

This allows Cubans to get a better idea and more realistic image of how people abroad dress, and how they can shape their personal outfits according to these images.

Therefore, *El Paquete* is another thriving black market item and, according to Menendez, “an important indicator of changing tides in Cuba.”

The reason why singers are role models for young Cubans is because they represent an image of successful, civilized (in contrast to the less-than-citizens), rich,





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wealthy persons. Dressing like them and imitating their clothing style, Cuban youth feel as if they identify more with these persons. Looking like a rich, successful, and modern person is therefore almost as importantly valued as being one (in terms of money, jobs, and lifestyle). In the popular song *Super Mega Fashion*, the Cuban rapper El Principe declares himself as being in ‘Super Mega Fashion,’ explaining that being fashionable is not just about clothing items, but also about a bodily performance that represents a modern, urban, civilized, wealthy lifestyle with which it becomes easier to date a girl because Cuban girls pay a lot of attention to the fashionable appearance of men, both in the way they dress and if they are successful and have money. Moreover, being this fashionable and modern man also includes being sporty and muscled. Two young women I interviewed declared their preference for a young man who lifts *pesas* (weights) and has a body that is ‘in shape.’

For young women, there are other culturally existing ideals and normative ideas about how to dress, look, and be fashionable and successful. This is represented very clearly in the current, popular, Cuban form of the *quinceañera* rite of passage, which is described very detailed in the articles of anthropologists Härkönen (2011) and Pertierra (2015). It involves a 15th birthday celebration of a Cuban girl (*la fiesta de los quince años*) with an over-the-top celebration, including expensive photo shoots with different outfits, hairstyles and make-up, videos, and a party, all to mark





the transition of a girl into a woman.¹⁸ Within this ritual, “the display of wealth is important” (12), as Härkönen notes. Therefore, *quinceañeras* are often presented as princesses in their photo albums. It is a very expensive celebration according to Cuban standards, but an increasingly important part of Cuban cultural tradition for girls (Pertierra, 2015). While studying *quince* photo albums, Härkönen (2011) also remarked that *quinceañeras* often appear with imported objects of foreign origin, such as Heineken beer, or whiskey, which demonstrates that imported luxury consumer goods add value to the status of a person. Moreover, being able to afford such celebration is proof of certain economic abilities and, hence, clear markers of financial *poder* (power). Härkönen found that the *quinceañeras* are “are parties to show off; ‘the more I have the more I value’. There are families that lose [sell] the most important domestic equipment of their house to make a party for a day to their daughter for her *quince*” (14) supports my earlier argument that Cubans prefer to buy clothes over kitchen utilities, for example, as clothes represent their social skin.

Whereas Cuban female youth have this important ritual to emphasize their social status, class, gender, and lifestyle by emphasizing luxury and wealth by showing off with consumer goods such as clothes, Härkönen (2011) notes that boys do not have such a rite of passage to symbolize their successful embodied identity. I believe that because young men do not have a symbolic ritual to imagine such a high-





class lifestyle outside the socialist context, their everyday dress is more important to them than to their counterparts. Thus, I argue that consumption practices of clothing are gendered and that the meaning they give to young men is different than it is for a young woman in contemporary Cuba.

I approached my research from two different sides. On the one hand, I asked young Cubans to show me their closets while talking about the clothes they owned. On the other hand, I went shopping with my research informants both in official state-run and black market shops.

Dressing Up

There is no better way than to gain understanding of clothing than by looking at someone's closet. I asked four young Cubans to take me to their homes and show me what kind of clothes they have while explaining of each item the price, the brand (if it had any), the place where it was bought, where the sellers got the items from (if they knew that), from who they received the item in case it was a gift, and whether the item had a special meaning to the person (because of the color, brand, looks, etc.). Overall, my findings are that most items were bought on the black market. Even in case the items were gifts, they were likely to be obtained via informal networks on the





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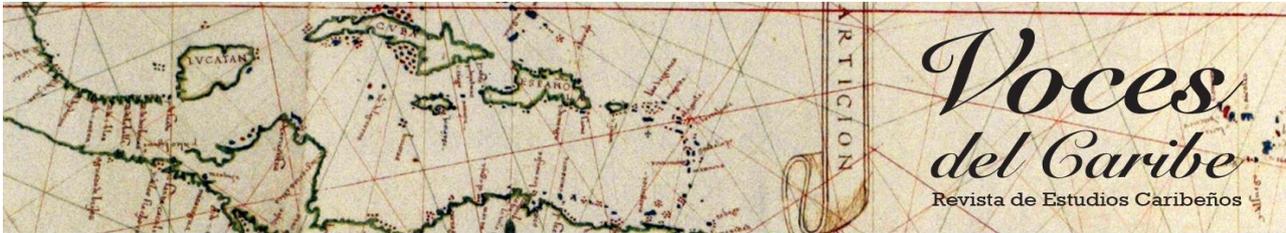
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island. Prices ranged from 5 to 50 CUC per item, depending on the type of clothing, with shoes being the most expensive items.

Concerning brands, it was surprising to find that my informants always read the labels (usually in English) attached to the clothing items out loud to me, assuming that they were all brand name items. It thus seemed that Cuban youth did not know to distinguish expensive brands (such as Adidas) from cheaper labels (such as ‘Elegance’ or ‘Funk’). This might be explained by the fact that many youngsters in my research area did not speak or understand English. Moreover, as most of them did not have much access to foreign influences through the Internet or television, they were not very familiar with brand names. When Lionel (21 years old) showed me a white T-shirt and read the label ‘ESPRIT’, I asked him whether he knew what kind of brand it was, but he did not:

This was a gift I received from my mother. She works in Hotel Las Americas in the city. I don’t know where she got it from. Sometimes she gets stuff from tourists that leave things behind, but there is also a colleague of her whose husband travels to Ecuador to bring back clothing to Cuba. He is a *mula*”
(Informal conversation with Lionel, December 2016)





I explained to Lionel that ESPRIT was a European, middle-class brand with a relatively high cost and quality, and that it was quite highly valued in my country (Belgium). Contradictorily, when Lionel showed me his favorite, brand-less clothing items without, with their cheaper labels, he did not differentiate the value of these items. Apparently, branded items are partially social constructions – or even illusions – for many Cuban youngsters as they assume that each item that has a label on it, is automatically branded.

I had a similar experience when I did an experiment with Elena (22 years old), a girl who lived near the *casa particular* (private house) where I stayed. I gave her two T-shirts of mine as a gift: one T-shirt had a value of approximately 12 Euros of the popular European brand H&M, the other T-shirt had a value of approximately 56 Euros of the more expensive high-quality brand RIVER WOODS. When I asked her which one she thought was more expensive or of a higher quality brand, she did not seem to have the slightest idea. Moreover, she decided that the item that she found the most pretty was probably the most expensive one, which was incorrect. These findings do not, however, mean that young people do not know any brands by name or logo. They do get influenced by (inter)national rappers and singers who serve as role models and dress by fashion brands such as GUCCI and ARMANI, and also by football players and athletes who often display sporting designer brands such as





ADIDAS, NIKE and PUMA. Menendez (2016) had similar findings, and argued that “if you stop someone on the street, there’s a high chance they wouldn’t be able to tell you who Chanel is,” but that some Cubans do manage to recognize brands.

When it comes to color preferences, white was by far the most popular color. Although my informants did not all give me very useful or meaningful explanations for this preference when I asked for it (such as “I like white because it is a light color”), the answers can be found in the environmental and cultural context. First, in the urban area where I conducted my research, people did not have constant access to running water, so washing clothes could be a challenge. Moreover, only those households that had the money to buy detergent could keep their clothes clean. On the one hand, those who had white clothes were regarded as civilized, decent, and clean persons because they could maintain the color clear. On the other hand, a very white color represented a new clothing item because everybody knew that it was impossible to keep the white as bright and light as if it were brand-new. For some, it was thus a way to show off in society. Ultimately, there is also a religious explanation for the high valorization of white clothes. In the dominant local Afro-Cuban religion, called Santería, a religious practitioner (called *Iyawó*) is supposed to dress in white for one year after the completion of his or her initiation process to improve his or her health and wealth, and to clean his or her body and soul from negative energy (see Figure 4).



In practice, white clothes become a status symbol because many people in Santiago de Cuba believe that – even if they do not have the money and ability to become an *Iyawoaje* – white clothes will be beneficial for their spirit as well as make them look like (a copy of) the richer and important figure of the *Iyawó*.



Figure 4: A Cuban *iyawó* (new Santeria initiate) ©Julie Rausenberger 2016

When it comes to materials and textures, jeans and gold were by far the most wanted. Whereas jeans were an obviously foreign, fashionable item that was almost always imported from outside of Cuba and therefore more desired, gold represented richness and wealth. Many Cubans – not just youngsters – wear as much gold as they can: jewelry such as necklaces, bracelets, watches, rings, earrings, piercings, but also



golden teeth. Such visual elements add value to a persons' 'social skin' (Turner, 1993) as they are a symbolic medium of wealth and are aimed at displaying an image of successful identity. Nevertheless, it should be noted that most of this gold is merely a cheaper replica, however, that does not seem to matter to most Cubans. This tendency is similar in clothing and shoes, whereas most Cubans don't differentiate between fake copies or original items of brands like Adidas and Converse (see Figure 5). An increasing generational difference regarding clothing in Cuba is that young Cubans do not longer desire secondhand clothes, whereas older Cubans who went through harder economic times do value all kinds of clothing, bought new or used or received as a gift. As Lieber (2015) has noted: "They (the younger generation) just want to wear things that make them feel differently."



Figure 5: One of my Cuban research informants dressed in jeans, Converse shoes and a white shirt, all popular – and often imported – items in Santiago de Cuba © Julie Rausenberger 2016





(Window) Shopping

To gain a deepened understanding of the local clothing provision in Cuba, I asked my informants to take me the places where they bought their clothes (usually private houses or illegal street vendors that operate on the black market). I also went (window) shopping in the main shopping streets of Santiago de Cuba to compare prices and quality of available items in state-run and private shops. In total, I visited three private houses where clothes are sold illegally (on the black market) in addition to approximately nine state- and private-run official clothing shops. As Orozco's 2009 questionnaire already revealed, most people buy their clothes on the black market (31%), in addition to CUP-shops (19%), CUC-shops (18%) and others (see Figure 6). My own research supports these survey results. For example, of the 15 clothing items that Yilka (23 years old) showed me, eleven were bought on the black market, two were gifts, and two were bought in state-run shops.



Table 15: Where does your family in Cuba buy personal household products (like clothes, shoes, etc.)? (%)

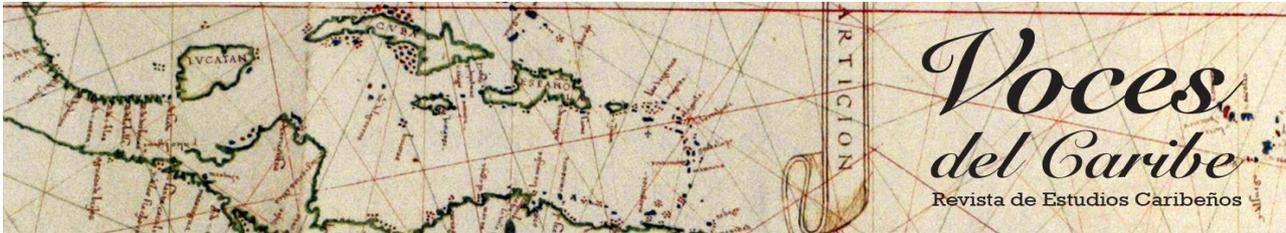
En la calle a través de la Bolsa Negra	31
Tiendas en Pesos Cubanos Por la Libre	19
Tiendas en Dolares	18
Mercados Agropecuarios	13
Shoppings	11
Diplotiendas	9

Source: Survey data, 2009.

Figure 6: Results of a questionnaire taken among Cubans stating that 31% of household products (including shoes and clothing) were bought on the black market (Orozco 10)

The main shopping street in the center of Santiago de Cuba is La Enramada (also known as Calle José A Saco, see Figure 7). In the shops of the international brands PUMA and ADIDAS, trousers cost approximately 30 CUC, a T-shirt 20 CUC, and a pair of sneakers 95 CUC. Another semi-private shop called ‘MUSTIQUE’ sells imported fabricated goods such as blouses for 40-50 CUC, joggings and shorts for 30 CUC, dresses for 50 CUC and sandals for 30 CUC (see Figure 8). In the more upscale area Vista Alegre, I visited the *diplotienda* ‘La Maison’ (see Figure 9). In this boutique, a T-shirt, a pullover, or a pair of jeans cost approximately 30 CUC. Sandals costs 40 CUC on average, a pair of shoes of the brand FILS 80 CUC, and a pair of NIKE’s 130 to 150 CUC. The prices are comparable to the price of similar items in Europe or the United States. However, the items are often out of fashion: items sold now in Cuba would be sold years ago elsewhere. Lieber (2016) made the same remark





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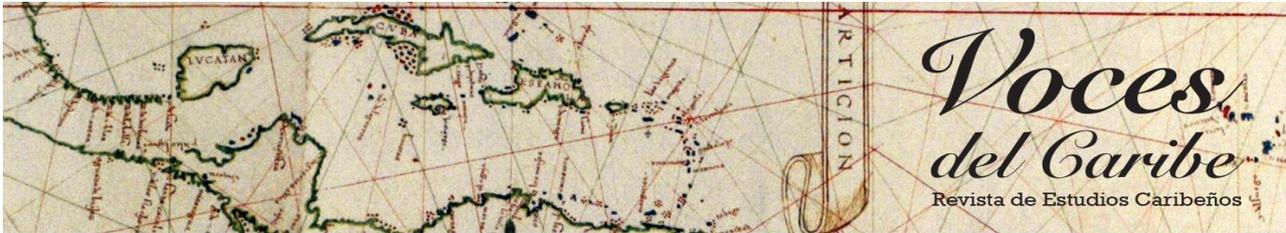
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in her article, and argued “*this is at odds with how Cubans value style*” (no page, this is a website post).



Figure 7: La Enramada Shopping Street in Santiago de Cuba © Julie Rausenberger 2016





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Figure 8: PUMA shop next to MUSTIQUE shop in Santiago de Cuba © Julie Rausenberger 2016



Figure 9: La Maison, 'Cuban Fashion House' in Santiago de Cuba © Julie Rausenberger 2016



There are also semi-private shops that belong to *cuentrapropistas* (independent, self-employed people who pay a monthly fee to the government) (see Figure 10 and 11).¹⁹ These individuals usually have a shop in the front room of a house and display items of Cuban production by hanging them on the wall. However, when Cubans enter and ask for specific items that are not displayed in the shop, the seller will go to a room in the back and return with other – usually illegally imported – items that are for sale *debajo de la mesa* (under the table) and, thus, out of sight or immune to government control. *Cuentapropistas* often make their money partially through the sale of official items and partially through the black market. In this type of shop, I was offered a dress to buy that cost 15 CUC, much cheaper than a dress in a *diplo tienda*, but the quality of the item was obviously inferior, as this cheaper dress was produced in Cuba and the dresses in the *diplo tienda* are produced abroad.



Figure 10: Cuban clothing items for sale in a *cuentapropista*'s shop © Julie Rausenberger 2016

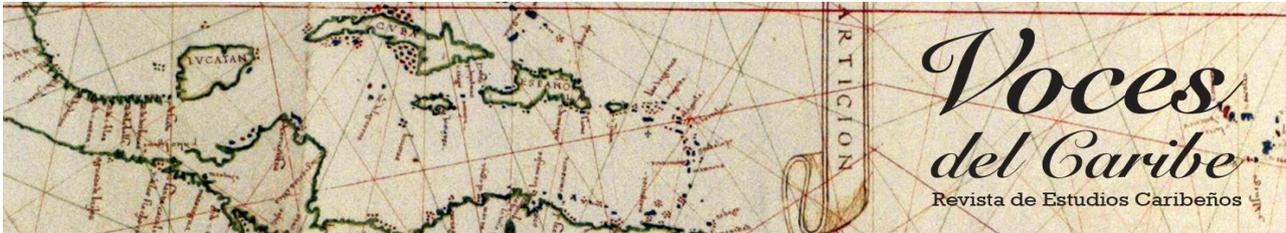




Figure 11: Cuban ‘Tienda religiosa’ (Religious shop) © Julie Rausenberger 2016

The quality of consumer goods was an important indicator of the price and foreign origin of consumer goods available in the Cuban clothing market. This explains the popularity of imported clothes – of higher quality clothes – on the black market as well. As Porter (2008) showed: “there are still some stores that operate in *moneda nacional* (CUP), but the Cubans I know laugh when they are mentioned because the stores are dingy and depressing, with goods of far inferior quality (when there even are any goods in them)” (139). Thus, the importance and meaning of imported clothes in Cuba is not marked only by local everyday consumer needs, or a preference for fashionable, foreign items because of any desire to construct new social





values and contest existing ones, but also by the fact that the quality of clothes of foreign origin and of international brands was visibly better. This explains their popularity and valorization in Cuban society. Hansen (2000) encountered similar tendencies in Zambia: “The fact that *salaula* is imported and not local enhances its attractiveness to local consumers” (29).

Ultimately, I spent some time in the black markets of Santiago de Cuba. I managed to access these markets because some of my informants were willing to take me there. I pretended to be my informants’ (girl)friend: we acted as if we were looking for specific items, but never bought anything. This allowed me to observe how these businesses functioned, how traders interacted with their customers, and what was sold for what price. For example, Lionel (21) took me to a house where a few Cubans showed us four bags with clothes and shoes. While they told us to sit down so that they could show us item by item of what they had on offer, other people rang the doorbell. They carefully looked through the window before opening the door, giving the impression that they would not allow a random person to enter. A level of trust was needed to access the store. We were shown pairs of CONVERSE ‘All Stars’ for 65 CUC, ADIDAS sneakers for 80 CUC, trousers for 45 CUC and T-shirts for 25 CUC. Yilka (23 years old) took me to a house across from her mother’s home where a woman worked as a manicurist. Apart from doing nails, the lady also sold clothes.





Her husband held a Spanish passport, which allowed him to travel with more ease. Foreign citizens who resided in Cuba were indeed often the ones who provided black-market goods. The lady told us that these clothes came from the Dominican Republic, and showed us some dresses for sale for 45 CUC each. Overall, I found that the prices in black markets were not higher than in the legal market, but the quality, variety, brands, and trendiness were. This also explains the popularity of clothing black markets in Cuba. The fact that Cuba has a cash-only economic system only reinforces the circulation of illegal trade outside of State control.

Conclusion

Throughout a research period of one month during December 2016, I focused on two aspects of Cuban youth contemporary lives in urban Cuba: first, the landscape of a transnational economy and illegal trade, by using fashion and clothing as a case study for grasping the role of *mulas* (“mules,” traders), and second, the meaning of these international consumer items in the creation of an identity. My aim here is to provide a broader understanding of an understudied part of the Cuban economy, the black market, by focusing on clothing importation as the consumption good of my inquiry.²⁰ Moreover, by collecting qualitative data from Cuban youth, I aim to shed light on





what consumer goods mean for these people, and how they help construct a modern Cuban identity.

I have tried to explain briefly the popularity of imported fashionable clothes and thriving black markets in contemporary Cuba using modest data I collected in Santiago de Cuba. I hope that it is clear that by studying local clothing practices one can understand not only Cuba's economic system, but also what it means to be young and fashionable in contemporary Cuba. Even so, it is my hope that my data, limited because of the limited time I spent conducting fieldwork with an equally limited number of informants, will encourage others to conduct further investigation on this somewhat neglected but vitally relevant topic.

With Cuba being at an interesting point of change in history, after Fidel Castro's death in December 2016, and the partial transition of power that just occurred when Raul Castro stepped down on April 19, 2018, the underpinnings of continued socialism will face further challenges over the next few years. Moreover, international capitalistic influences on Cuba keep growing as the island receives a growing number of tourists each year, and the United States slightly loosening travel restrictions for its citizens to travel to Cuba. Although nobody seems to believe that the embargo will be lifted over the next few decades – especially with Donald Trump as president of the United States –, Cuba is likely to continue its integration into an





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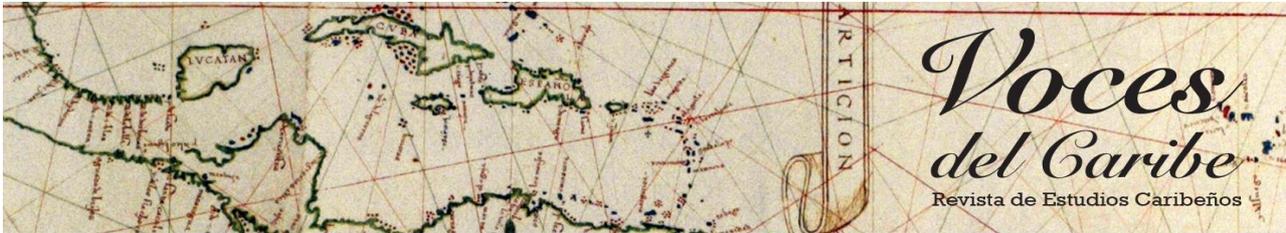
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increasingly globalized world. In addition, increasing access to the Internet, foreign television, and music, as well as the growing number of international flights (and thus growing number of *mulas* and tourists who can bring foreign consumer goods to the island) may very well continue to impact the unofficial clothing market in Cuba.

Nevertheless, even today, Cuba remains a unique island with an exceptional political and economic situation, a certain kind of ‘heterotopia’ – “a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable” (Foucault, 1967, 330) – which makes it difficult for people to obtain consumer goods such as clothes and shoes. The question of how identity construction through fashion will evolve in urban Cuba if the black market becomes secondary the moment international clothing importation is legalized, remains to be answered.

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Notes:

1. Pérez-Lopez (1995, 77) defines the Cuban verb ‘resolver’ as “the term used on the island to capture the broad set of entrepreneurial activities on which Cubans rely to make ends meet.”

2. Border customs do not allow to import goods for business motives, or, hence, in large quantities. Therefore, *mulas* can only travel with limited goods once at a time and need to be able to declare the goods they carry as personal belongings.

3. As Blue (2005, 28) notes: “Dollar remittances began to flow to Cuba on a large scale after the Cuban government authorized its citizens to use U.S. dollars for transactions within Cuba in July 1993.” Gualerzi (2009, 294) also wrote that such a transition was more a necessity than a choice: “Cuba was now forced to face the problem of integrating its economy into the international market, since doing otherwise would lead to economic collapse and the consequent weakening of its socialist institutions.”

4. Gualerzi (2009, 296) describes the Cuban libreta as “a rationing system that guarantees the availability of staple foods and other basic items of consumption and is still important for the poorest Cubans.” In the glossary of Pérez-Lopez’s (1995, 187) book, the *libreta de abastecimiento* is defined as: “Rationing book. Used to distribute commodities subject to quantitative limits to Cuban households since March 1962.





Commodities not subject to the *libreta* can be obtained *por la libre*.” Rationed basic goods and services in la *libreta* include electricity, gas, meat, chicken, milk, rice, grains, oil, sugar, salt, coffee, fish, eggs, yoghurt, and bread. However, today, these rationed basic goods and services are limited in variety and only available subject to health conditions or age. For example, children under 7 years old receive powder milk. Fish and meat are not available for everybody, but are occasionally replaced by chicken or minced soybeans. Moreover, the quality and amount of products is very low and insufficient to provide a healthy and complete nutritional diet. For example, a person is given only 7 pounds of rice per month. Rice is, however, sold for 5 *pesos por la libra*. The same goes for sugar and other products.

5. The *diplotienda* (or *diplomercado*) is also defined in Pérez-Lopez’s glossary (1995, 186) as: “Stores that serve the needs of foreign diplomats. They stock a variety of domestic and important goods and require the use of hard currency. Ordinary Cubans did not have access to these stores.” Nowadays, anyone with access to CUC (peso convertible, the Cuban legal equivalent currency to the U.S. dollar) can buy goods in these shops. Nevertheless, Cubans still rely on a uniform national wage of approximately 20 CUC (or 530 CUP). At the time of publishing this paper in 2018, 1 CUC equals 1 USD or 26,50 CUP.





6. It should be noted that although the black market, as defined by Pérez-Lopez (1995, 14) is “subset of the black market economy referring, strictly speaking, only to illegal trade in goods, currencies, services, and so forth”. However, in this paper I only focus on clothing.

7. Although the study of Manuel Orozco (2009) mainly focuses on money transfers, it can be estimated that similar tendencies are applicable for the transfers of consumer goods and other material aid, such as clothing and electronics, and electrical appliances, for example. The report shows that 95% of the Cuban respondents said to have a family members living outside of Cuba, and 90% stated to receive remittances from abroad. Most Cubans receive remittances from the United States (64%, mainly Miami: 50%) and Spain (13%).

8. References cited in this paper include: AP Television, 2014; Canadian Press, 2007; Garcia, 2013; Hernandez, 2016; Lieber, 2016; Menendez, 2016; Munzenkrieder, 2010; NBC News, 2009; Padura, 2013; Tennant-Scull, 2014; Weissenstein, 2014.

9. It should be noted that it is not forbidden by law to carry goods to Cuba, but operating as a courier – and thus making a business out of it – is. It is a violation of both the Cuban laws regarding private enterprise and the U.S. embargo (NBC News, 2009).





10. As Padura (2013) noted, the true victim of the commercial game to outlaw illegal clothing import is not the *mula*, but the ordinary Cuban customer who relies on these providers to obtain clothing and other consumer goods. This comment was also given on AP Television (2014): “The new law is no good because it limits the little benefit families receive”. While the demand for clothing keeps soaring, the offer keeps being severely restricted, Tennant-Scull (2014) remarks. The meaning and importance of clothing from the black market for Cuban people is therefore the topic of next section in this paper.

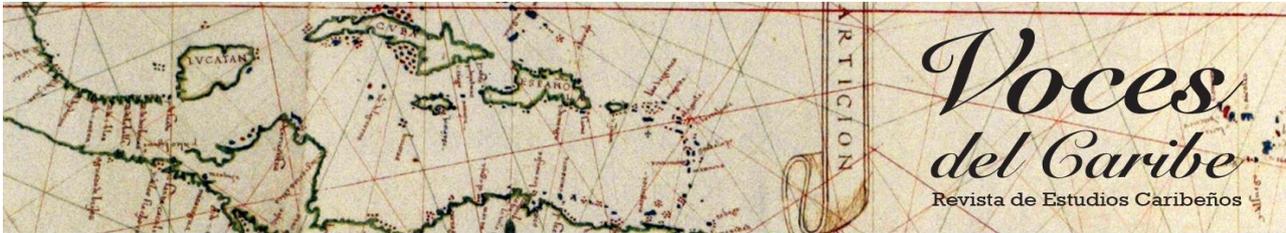
11. It would be interesting to keep an eye on changes in this tendency in the future now that FedEx, a large express packaging service company, has got permission by the U.S. government to start operating five flights a week from Miami to Varadero, starting the 15th of January 2017, according to Hernandez (2016).

12. My research showed that white clothes are particularly popular and valorized in Santiago de Cuba. In the section ‘Dressing Up’ I provide a detailed explanation.

13. Pérez-Lopez (1995, 12) goes even further by arguing that black markets have “a secret political connotation” because they “can be seen as evidence of resistance and defiance of the order established by the socialist state.”

14. Fernandez (2005, xvi) argued that social remittances fueled such social change and inequality in Cuba: “New identity categories have emerged as a result of the





economic and social conditions of the island and the place of Cuba in an international political economy and a global imaginary influenced by transnational encounters. ...

What has received less attention is that social and cultural messages – ideas, behavior, social capital – are being transmitted concurrently with financial remittances.

According to Levitt (2001, 11), social remittances “are the tools with which individuals create global culture at the local level.”

15. It should be noted that access to certain websites and applications such as Skype or Snapchat is also restricted because of the poor Internet infrastructure. The broadband width is insufficient to support these software packages. The government is currently working on infrastructural changes to improve this.

16. The government-run company ETECSA lowered its prices in December 2016 from 2 CUC per hour to 0.25 CUC per hour for nationals, and 1.50 CUC per hour for internationals.

17. At the time of publishing this paper in 2018, travel for U.S. citizens to Cuba has, however, been restricted again under the Trump administration.

18. Härkönen (2011) also describes how “In these photos the girl poses in ‘colonialist’ settings wearing a Rococo style dress, as well as a range of more modern outfits. In some photos she wears nothing at all besides a basket of flowers or other props to cover her breasts and genitals” (8) and “the fake ‘diamonds’ worn by the girl





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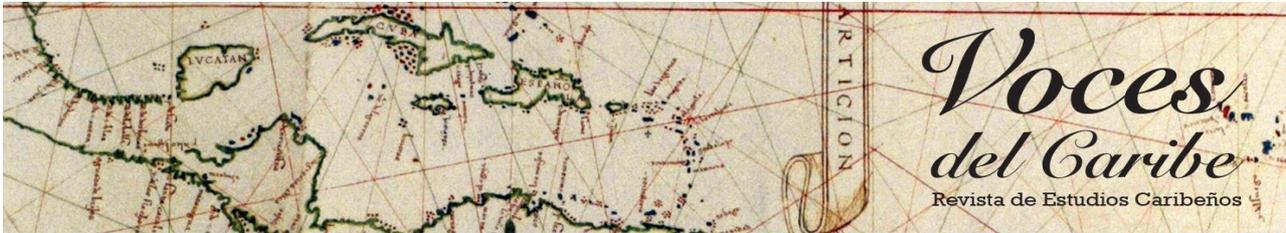
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contribute to signal her state of royalty” (10). Another important finding that she has is that “Photographers often portray *quinceañeras* in locations and performing activities that are economically unattainable to the majority of Cubans, like sipping a cocktail in the lounge of a fancy hotel... or lounging by a luxurious pool. In quince photos girls are often acting like foreign tourists or film stars, living the high life in contrast with the socialist state’s values of hard work and humility” (13).

19. Pérez-Lopez (1995, 93) described *trabajadores por cuenta propia* as “individuals who wished to perform some forms of personal services on their own account” who are “required to pay a monthly fee (*un patente*) that ranged from 5 to 80 pesos (CUP) per month.”

20. As Pérez-Lopez (1995, 77) notes: “Cuba’s second economy has been severely understudied in the academic literature. This is not surprising considering the difficulties and challenges posed by the study of the island’s first economy: availability, timeliness, and reliability of information; ability to do fieldwork; access to policymakers, and so forth.”

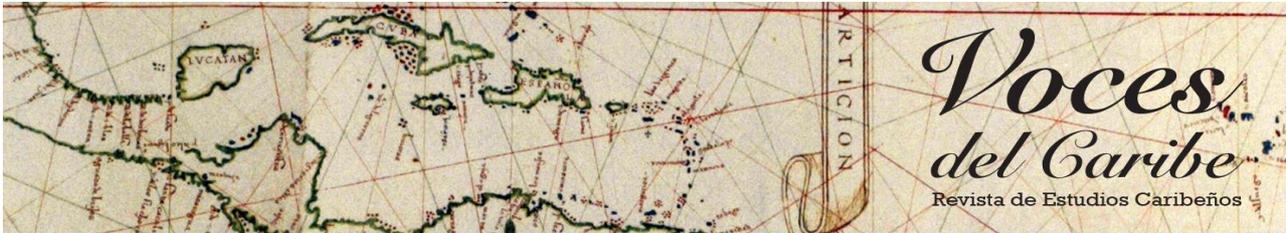




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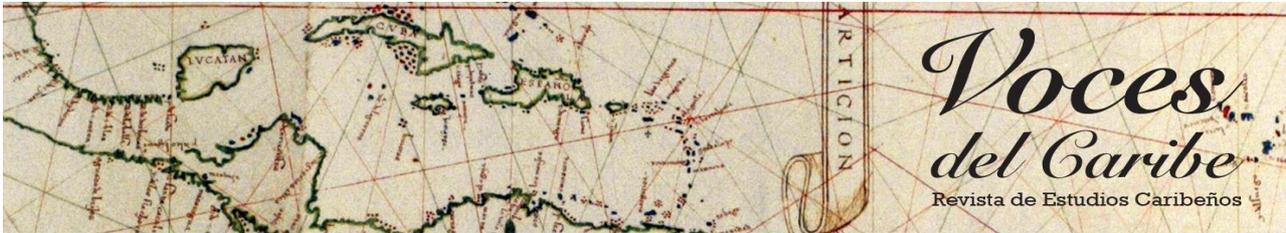
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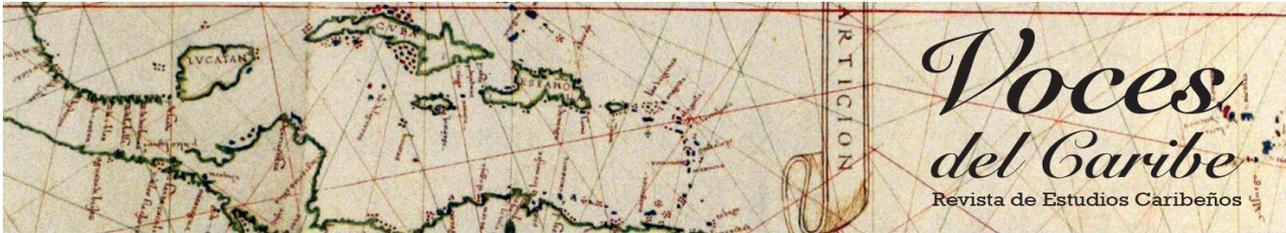
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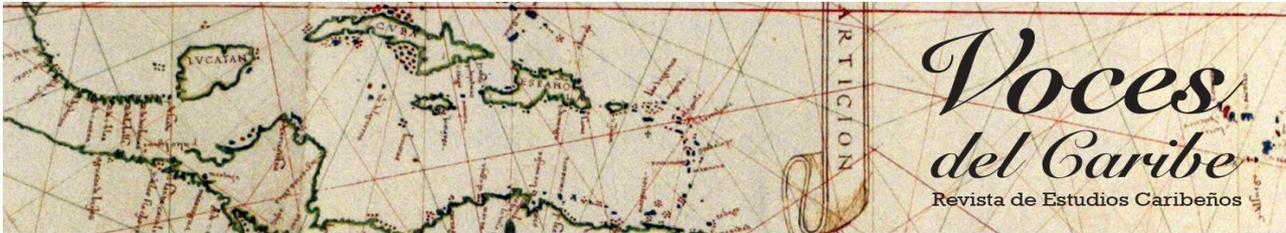
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