On a hot day in late July 2001, I tagged along as Yeshua escorted a group of five Canadian women to the beach from the Playa del Este hotel in which he worked. We arrived in Santa María by taxi and, after paying the beach attendant, began setting up our things on the beach chairs we had rented under a large shady tree. Within minutes, a policeman approached and asked Yeshua and me for our carnets identidades—our ID cards. I exercised my tourist persona and pretended not to understand Spanish; Yeshua, on the other hand, had no choice. He surrendered his ID while explaining to the policeman that he was not a hustler but a legally employed tourism worker who had brought the Canadians and me—a U.S. American—for a day at the beach. In the month that I had been conducting research in Cuba, I was already accustomed to being stopped when in the presence of white-skinned tourists; however, when the officer left, the women wanted to know what had just happened. As I had observed him respond on previous occasions, Yeshua shrugged his shoulders and explained that the police officer “must have been confused.”

What Yeshua left unsaid was whether the source of the officer’s “confus[ion]” was the well-worn assumption in post-emancipation societies that darker skin suggests some form of criminality, or whether something else was also at play in this touristic context given my own skin color was eventually overlooked in favor of my foreign status. In this article, I attend to such questions of racialized belonging. Who belongs where? Who should be in the company of whom? What are the criteria by which belonging is determined? And, are there categories of
intermediate belonging? I draw from my ethnographic research in the context of Cuban tourism to analyze how beliefs about place of origin, status, classed behavior, and appearance are defined by and help define the concept of “race.”

**RACIAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

While I do not aim to be comprehensive, there is an extensive, still-emerging literature on raciality in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) from which I provide the following sketch. It has been well documented that throughout the region, complex classifications of color are linked with expectations regarding education, social status, and value. Since Brazil has more African descendants than any other country in the Western hemisphere, a great deal of the scholarship on race in Latin America has been focused there. Despite Brazil’s long history of African slavery, early scholars celebrated the country as a nondiscriminatory “racial democracy.” Likewise, several Spanish American countries that had significant African-descended populations—Colombia, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba—also touted this racially democratic ideal as their own.

The racial democracy theory was subsequently challenged by studies that concluded that “race”—or more specifically, color—still significantly determined social standing even though Brazil might never have been a strictly color-segregated society like that of the United States (Degler 1971; Harris 1963; Skidmore 1974). While before the Civil Rights movement in the United States, some blacks might have achieved middle-class status—even without “passing” as white—they still indisputably “belonged” among blacks. By contrast, in Brazil individual blacks might rise to middle- (or even upper-) class status, but they were perceived by the broader society—both black and white—to be exceptional, and therefore “white” or otherwise “whitened” (e.g., mulaticized) (Degler 1971). The point that Brazilians were socialized to overlook in such cases of black social mobility was that in general blackness (and to a lesser extent mixed-ness) was associated with negative characteristics like poverty, stupidity, and unattractiveness, while whiteness signified wealth, intelligence, and beauty (Degler 1971).

The “mixed-race” (*mulato* or *pardo*) category in Latin America shared many characteristics with the intermediate racial category of “browns” or “coloreds” in the British Caribbean. Whereas in either case this “mixed-race” group may have had access to occupations closed to blacks or *negros*, in the Anglo-Caribbean there remained a fixed social line dividing this group from whites. Similarly, while upwardly mobile blacks might enter the lower rungs of the mixed population in
both the Latin and the Anglo-American countries, only in Latin America and the French Caribbean could mulatos aspire to penetrate the white social and professional sphere. In any case, as Harry Hoetink (1985:70) reiterates, “the whole racial power structure conspires to encourage the colored elite to emulate the white groups both culturally and in physical appearance (fostering a desire for ‘whitening’ or ‘improving the race’).” The LAC context highlights how blackness, whiteness, and mixed-ness are often fluid categories that are defined as much by such forms of cultural capital as education, wealth, and acceptable comportment as by skin color itself. Acknowledging the broad strokes with which I have described raciality in a diverse and complex region, I now provide greater detail and ethnographic examples from the Cuban case of my research.

**Cuba’s Color Complex**

In today’s Cuba, many foreign visitors are struck by how frequently Cubans invoke terms that refer to phenotypical distinctions in the course of ordinary conversation, especially given the oft-cited racially democratic conviction that “race doesn’t matter” (Roland 2004).

*Aquí, no hay nada de raza.* We’re all the same. I’ve got a little bit of everything in me. *Llevo negro esclavo, español, indio—llevó todo!* Just like my grandchildren—you see these here, but I’ve also got a nephew who is *prieto,* prieto, prieto! But how adorable he is! – Saida, age 80

Here, my 80-year-old neighbor explained that “race is a non-issue” in Cuba, citing her own racial composite of “black slave, Spanish, and Indian” as an example. Still, as she contrasted the lighter-complexioned *trigueño* offspring with whom she lived to her nephew who is “very, very dark!” one can glean the back hand of Cuban raciality in the exceptionality of his being both “dark” and “adorable.” Upon closer analysis of Cuban racial terminology, the same pattern evident elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean becomes clear—that, in general, blackness and black identifying features are denigrated in comparison to whiteness or features identified as “whitened.”

Figure 1 illustrates the broad range of racialized color terms used today in Cuba (and elsewhere in Latin America). The *blanco* or “white” category almost exclusively links racial designation to hair color, with the significant exceptions of “wheat colored” *trigueños,* who have straight black hair, and *lechosos,* who have a complexion described as “milky white.” The different gradations of *negro* and *mulato*—featuring dark and light color variants and also considering hair texture and facial features—address the extent of discernible African ancestry. From behind,
what may appear to be a *trigueña* with straight black hair and naturally tanned arms, may be revealed as a *mulata clara* when her full lips or nose are visible. *Jaba(d)os* constitute something of a “special category” of *mulato*, which may be among any of the lighter complexions—including *lechoso*—often with hazel, blue, or green eyes, but they are considered non-white because they have some prominent “black” associated feature, most notably *pasas* (“nappy” or what is called “bad” hair). There is also a “special category” of *negro* called *moro* which describes a dark complexioned person with what is considered a “good hair” texture—resembling a North African Moor.

Perhaps more telling about racial constructions in Cuba than the broad range of terms, are their progressive or “evolutionary” usages. Just as the arrows in Figure 1 that point upward from blackness toward whiteness symbolize the perceived “advancement” of the Cuban people through historic policies of *blanqueamiento* (whitening), within each non-white category, there is a “sub-race” of “*adelantados*”—literally, advancers, that is into the next category up—also called “*de salir.*” *De salir* translates as “leaving from,” so one could be “leaving” blackness or *mulato*-ness. For example, Yeshua—the chestnut-brown complexioned son of a
jabada and a negro—once explained to me that he considers himself negro, though
due to both his soft hair texture and his mild manners, people generally refer to
him alternately as a negro adelantado or a mulato oscuro.

Today, under a revolution that purports to have eliminated both racism and
classism, those same Eurocentric premises that assume “white is right” nevertheless
continue to define an individual’s cultural designation—or nivel cultural—in Cuba.
Similar to the broader LAC region described above, Nadine Fernández (1996)
explains that “[c]ulture, in this sense, implies a social hierarchy: one group with
high culture (más nivel, alta cultura) and the other group with low culture (menos nivel,
baja cultura).” Specifically, nivel de cultura alluded to an individual’s (or his/her
family or community’s) “level of formal education, public manners and etiquette,
and . . . degree of social refinement” (Fernández 1996:147). Because “[h]igh
culture’ is associated most often with whites, while ‘low culture’ connotes poverty
and blackness,” this socially relative understanding of culture is also racialized
(Fernández 1996:147). This long-standing conception of cultura illustrates how
Cuban raciality is constructed primarily as a way to delineate who belongs in spaces
of privilege and power and who does not.

While Cuban race is flexible, performed, and tied to class and other such
traits as much as to skin color, it is also organized around a categorical contrast
between white and black, with the former valued and the latter devalued. In
other words, while individuals can move up and down the racial hierarchy—
“whitening” themselves, for instance, by behaving in certain (white) ways, or
darkening themselves by behaving in other (black) ways—they nevertheless enact
these performances within a system that remains defined by long-standing meanings
associated with skin color. I turn now to Cuba’s contemporary tourist scene to
further explore some of the nuances of this system of racial categories.

Tourism and Belonging

Like race, tourism is constructed around often caricatured constructions of
difference and belonging. In Orientalism, Edward Said (1978) located in-group iden-
tity (i.e., Us/Self) in contrast to a differentiated out-group (i.e., Them/Others)
that is distinguished by where They live (i.e., across the river), how They act (i.e.,
praying to water gods), or how They look (i.e., long flowing hair). Importantly,
more distant Others might flatten the many perceived differences and recognize
these archenemies to be members of the same group. Because “race” was originally
aligned closely with the concept of nation (i.e., the German race, the Nordic race),
observable differences based in language and cultural practices played as much a
role as the associated physical differences in early notions of raciality. As the lines in the sand that divided groups of people into “races” extended beyond nation-states and incorporated entire continents, skin color and other physical features became more prominent in raciality, and ultimately assisted in defining the global division of labor. That is, inasmuch as raciality relies on phenotypical differences, those color distinctions have come to shorthand hierarchically valued cultural and class(ed) behaviors. In this regard, Paul Gilroy usefully points out that “[c]alculating the relationship between identity and difference, sameness and otherness is an intrinsically political operation” (2000:99). Those with greater access to resources have the political authority to determine the criteria for who belongs within the sphere of power.

Based on my research in Cuba, I found questions of belonging to be central to the practice of mass international tourism and correspondingly, those questions revealed the racialized nature of the tourism enterprise. This racialization extends beyond the complexions of individual workers and tourists, and incorporates the global imbalance of power that allows one group to tour while the other group serves them (see Alexander 1997 and Sheller 2003). Jafari Allen (2007) astutely refers to this kind of racialization in terms of “structural” blackness and whiteness.

Questions of belonging acknowledge the bilateral, if imbalanced, power dynamics involved in both raciality and tourism because belonging cuts both ways—the privileged group has its own comfort zone, where underclass members are welcome only in prescribed capacities. However, the privileged often have even less access to the everyday lives of the marginalized people who serve them. Much like segregated societies in which the working class of color moved in and out of the most intimate of white spaces for their employment while their employers were shielded from the entirety of their servants’ real-life joys and pains (see Pérez Sarduy 2010 and Stockett 2009), tourism relies on workers coming in and out of the tourist zone in very specific roles. Tourists, however, generally remain outsiders to the lives of tourism’s hosts beyond those tourist spaces, despite their buying power (Bruner 2005; MacCannell 1992). Even despite backpacker and other touristic quests to “really get to know the locals,” host communities are extremely astute at providing tourists the image that they (think they) want: what appears to be local reality—like the weekly rumba performances that I describe below—is often a tourist zone portrayed to look like an authentically local space (MacCannell 1976; Maoz 2005). In the rare cases when tourists do find themselves in non-tourist zones, they are often faced with unwelcoming looks or utterances; in the Cuban context of my research, an astute tourist might overhear comments on a local currency
bus about “esos pies sucios,” referring to those tourists with “dirty feet” who seek to rough it. The message hosts seek to impress upon tourists in these cases: stay on your side of the tourism fence!

At the same time, local realities often disappoint tourists in either their excessive hardship, or their similarity to tourists’ own lives at home. Tourism thrives on the delicate balance of difference between Us and Them, and—since they have more at stake—hosts are more cognizant of this balancing act than tourists. As a result, there may actually be more acceptable ways for local residents to belong in tourist spaces than for tourists to belong in host spaces (even if either group may unacceptably be in the Other’s space).

**APPROACHING “RACE”**

Following Mikhail Bakhtin’s understanding that words are loaded with inherited cultural and historical implications (1974), I am deliberate in the terms I use to describe racial-ness. If past folk notions of “race” now have been scientifically discredited by the Boasian constructionists (Benedict 1940; Boas 1938; Montagu 1942; see also Baker 1998 and Stocking 1994), I am interested in the Derridian trace of those beliefs—the “t/race” perhaps—that remains to this day (Derrida 1974). Because the trace of “race” remains powerful, many post-Boasian scholars understood that the race concept could not be discarded altogether (see, for example, Harrison 1995; Hartigan 2005; Visweswaran 1998). In this article, I speak to that slippage—that différance (Derrida 1968 [1982])—through my choice of terminology: rather than validate long-standing notions of scientifically grounded differences between peoples of varied phenotypes (i.e., “race”), I emphasize the ways those various phenotypes retain lived meanings in the real world (Harrison 1998; Omi and Winant 1986).

Throughout the article, I use the grammatically descriptive term “racial” to mean of, or having to do with loaded conceptions of difference based on physical appearance (which terms like “race” and “ethnicity” frequently code); likewise, I use “raciality” to describe how “race” operates in day-to-day practice. Last, I occasionally invoke the “t/race” trope when the residue of an essentialist, folk “race” concept is at play. I should be clear, however: this article is more focused on the mechanics of raciality than on fixing differentially colored bodies to specific “races.” I join the cadre of contemporary race theorists like John Hartigan (1999, 2005, 2010), Thomas C. Holt (2000), and John L. Jackson (2001, 2008) who emphasize how flexible racial categories are, even as those categories remain grounded in performed, culturally understood behaviors. The Cuban context regularly reiterates the need
to shift the scholarly focus from “race is how race looks,” to “race is as race does.” An interaction in Trinidad-de-Cuba in which a heavyset *trigueño* musician endearingly referred to me as a *mulata* bears this out; his bandmate told me I should say “thank you,” presumably for allowing my classed (and gendered) status and behaviors to whiten me despite my dark skin and coarsely textured hair.

Though it was not my intention, I inadvertently stumbled into noticing raciality in Cuba as I studied the implications of tourism for that country’s socialist ideology. Before I could even talk to the tourists, I was constantly barred access to tourist sites until I, a dark-complexioned African American, had proven my foreignness. Whether I acted like I did not understand Spanish (as in the opening narrative) or displayed the copy of my passport I had learned to keep with me at all times, I was being asked to demonstrate on which side of the tourism divide I belonged: the gatekeepers’ gaze classified me among their fellow marginalized Cubans, but my performances of foreignness often led them to shift the focus from my Cuban-looking skin to the Otherness of my behaviors. Like performance theorist E. Patrick Johnson, performativity not only factored in my theorization of race, tourism, and belonging, but the implicit issues of embodiment and authenticity also figured in my methodological approach: “[t]he multiple identities I performed . . . influenced my ethnographic experience as/of the Other. Therefore, I construe my ethnographic practice . . . as a performance” (Johnson 2003:10). My many observers (mostly Cuban, but occasionally tourist) interpreted and measured my success or failure at performing the multiple identities I was perceived to embody by categorizing me as a Cuban, a tourist, or as a student from a developing country benefitting from Cuba’s policy of socialist outreach (see also Allen 2009). Until I introduced myself, no one ever imagined I was an anthropologist.

Between 1999 and 2012, I conducted approximately 22 months of ethnographic research in various sites of Cuban tourism, including hundreds of structured and unstructured interviews among a diverse and random sampling of both Cubans and tourists. Moreover, through participant-observation as I resided among each group, I gained a much more textured understanding of each group’s motives and thought processes with regard to the Other. Last, though I fit neither group technically, as an anthropologist of color I had to analyze my own positionality at the intersection of both Cubans and foreign tourists. In this article, I strive to balance my own reflexivity with the voices of the tourists and Cubans from whom I gained an understanding of the shades of belonging.
RESCUING T/RACE FOR THE REVOLUTION

As a left-leaning African American, I entered the Cuban research site with an expectation that the socialist revolution had leveled class differences and made the multiplicity of skin color variations featured in Cuba nearly insignificant (see Allen 2009). Cuba’s socialist ideology has certainly impacted the complexion of Cuba’s class structure: if prior to the revolution’s triumph in 1959, U.S. political and business interests were paramount and catered to by Cuba’s white(r) elite classes, then revolutionary Cuba has eliminated those two sources of severely imbalanced political, social, and economic power. However, for the half century since that time, power has been concentrated exclusively in the hands of the Communist Party, whose members are largely men of European descent. To be sure, their class-leveling policies have significantly improved the life chances of Cubans of color in comparison to the prerevolutionary period, but they have not been able to legislate old racial prejudices away completely (Allen 2009, 2011; Fernández 2010; de la Fuente 2001). Despite the systemic restructuring of education, hiring, and (to a lesser degree) housing policies early in the revolution, a t/race of emancipation era beliefs about the meanings of skin color and belonging remain.

When the Soviet Union fell in 1989, the Cuban economy was devastated and would likely have collapsed entirely had state officials not opted to revive the tourism industry; it quickly overtook sugar as the primary engine of Cuba’s economy. Because the state insisted on maintaining a socialist economy for the general populace, even as it encouraged the growth of a restricted capitalist sector, one result of the proximity of the new global economy is the increasing inequality fostered between those who have access to foreign currency (CUC, or the Cuban Convertible peso) and those who do not (Allen 2009, 2011; Roland 2006). For example, a family that is able to make their home amenable to foreign tourists has the capacity to rent out rooms in their casa particular as a bed and breakfast residence for CUC$15–30/night, in contrast to the average (converted) worker salary of CUC$20/month. The housing scenario, in which white(r)-skinned families tend to live in nicer homes in tourist-friendly areas, t/races historic residential patterns; moreover, because the majority of those who have fled into exile since the rise of the revolution were white, their (largely) white family members who remained in Cuba are the greatest beneficiaries of foreign remittances that can assist them in upgrading their homes for rental by tourists. Based on such structural inequalities, Cubans of African descent are less likely to have legal access to the money tourists bring to the country. Instead, Cubans of color have been compelled to rely on “creative home economics” (Allen 2009) that I describe elsewhere as la lucha—the
struggle to survive (Roland 2011). Still, while these inequalities are colored, this form of racialization extends beyond skin (Allen 2007; Roland 2004).

**RACIALIZED TOURISM**

I met Grace, Marta, and Rodrigo—three tourists from Barcelona—during my first visit to Santiago-de-Cuba. We hired a driver in Céspedes Park in the center of town to take us to the shrine of Cuba’s patron saint, La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre (The Virgin of the Copper Mines Charity). The driver told me to sit in the front seat, but not to speak if the police approached since I looked Cuban enough. We were, indeed, stopped four times en route because of the obvious foreigners in the backseat of our illegal taxi, though with no repercussions. Each time, the driver explained that I was his cousin who lived abroad, and the Spaniards were my friends. Apparently, this cover story of my partial belonging satisfactorily provided the bridge that explained to authorities why white foreigners might be safe in a privately owned Cuban car.

The driver later deposited us at Siboney Beach where our multihued group attracted a great deal of attention from the largely Cuban beachgoers. Aside from a few vendors, Jorge and Lenyn were the only ones who dared to come and talk with us. A conversation ensued about what Grace called the “tourist ghettos” that are endemic to Cuban tourism, where tourists have access to the most desirable recreational spaces while Cubans are generally excluded. Like many young people who seek a more “authentic” travel experience involving high levels of integration with local residents, the Spaniards were offended by the enforced nature of tourist-only spaces. Indeed, Jorge and Lenyn showed Grace and me one such “tourist ghetto” later that night when we encountered the crowd of Cubans hoping to get into Casa de la Trova—a popular dance locale notorious for arbitrarily limiting the numbers of Cubans permitted inside at the national currency price.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the physical separation of Cubans from tourists fostered by Cubans’ long-standing bias toward whiteness, as well as the class chasm created by Cuba’s post-Soviet dual monetary system that gives convertible currency holders significantly more buying power than those who only have national currency. One of the greatest ironies in today’s tourism is that these inequalities are mobilized in the name of a revolution that purportedly sought to create an egalitarian society. In order to make sense of this apparent contradiction it is necessary to unpack the nature of the relationship between raciality, tourism, and belonging in today’s Cuba.
FIGURE 2. Cubans on the Outside.

FIGURE 3. Tourists on the Inside (photos by the author).
A key consideration is that the Cuba experienced by tourists is markedly different from the Cuba of Cubans. Mass international tourism (the form that predominates in Cuba and is preferred by the government) is a capitalist business that requires prompt smiling service and systemic efficiency. Cuba is a socialist country in which efficiency is rare due to the centralized system of economic organization, and in which one might hope for “promptness,” “smiles,” or “service” but seldom all three at once. Contrasted with their Cuban hosts who live constrained by the scarcities of the socialist system during the post-Soviet era, tourists in Cuba generally exist in a leisure world of excesses—too much food, too much drink, too much time—though, by Cuban standards, they are charged exorbitant prices for such capitalistic indulgences. My research found that (1) the Cuba of tourists is one of leisure and privilege and (2) interactions between tourists and Cubans revolve around questions of power and belonging. I contend that each of these attributes contains a t/race of Cuban understandings about the status and place of whites, blacks, and other non-whites.

The Yuma Race

In the word “yuma,” Cuban popular parlance has captured the racial meanings behind both the status measures (i.e., nivel cultural) and the visual cues involved in Cuban tourism. Referring to Yuma, Arizona, the term originated in the early 1990s and referred specifically to U.S. Americans (then, rarely seen in Cuba). By the time I conducted my research later in the decade, yuma had come to refer to a broader sector of non-Cuban “Others” whom my interviewees repeatedly told me were easily recognizable by their clothes (especially their shoes), their hairstyles or facial hair (for men), their skin colors (especially obvious attempts at tanning), and their entire forma de ser (their way of being). Because the majority of tourists visited from Canada and Europe—especially Spain, France, Germany, and Italy—yumas were presumed to be white.

As is the case in many tourist destinations around the world, “Their” (tourist) skin color has been associated with global wealth, while “Our” (local) complexion is associated with the dependence of global poverty. Therefore, non-white yumas who travel to Cuba from elsewhere in the Americas often have their foreignness scrutinized through a performative lens that closely considers such cultural markers as clothes, hair, skin color, and comportment (Johnson 2003). Only after those behavioral cues have been accurately interpreted are those black and brown tourists recognized and treated as yumas in a way that parallels the prospect of cultural whitening described earlier.
Also tellingly, the monied “race” of *yumas* was distinguished from foreigners from developing countries who were in Cuba to benefit from its international socialist outreach programs in medicine and education. Russian teens, for example, though often phenotypically rubios (blondes), were quickly dismissed as potential clients by the hustlers I interviewed with such comments as “they’re just Chernobyl victims here for medical treatment. . . .” Visibly outsiders, but also easily recognized as non-monied, this intermediate group might be “raced” *mulato*. For their part, Cuban nationals of all complexions were continually treated by tourism’s gatekeepers as criminally as well as culturally suspect, paralleling what I have described as Cuban understandings of *negros*.

Returning Cubans who live abroad complicate tourism’s racialized schema perhaps more than any other category of visitor. They are Cuban, but they no longer belong to the Cuban nation by virtue of their departure—and, I would add, by virtue of the foreign capital to which they now have access. I rarely encountered visiting exiles in tourist spaces, likely because the purpose of their visit was to reunite with family more than to “tour” per se (i.e., sightseeing, conspicuous consumption). Aside from the airport departure terminal—which involves a myriad of complicated emotions, but appears too transitory to involve the questions of belonging in which I am interested here—the only noteworthy occasions I have seen returning Cubans in tourist spaces were in nightclubs and swimming pools where they were generally allowed to “pass” among the *yuma* population. At a nightclub in Santiago, for example, a white-skinned visiting Cuban seemed to be authenticating his Cuban-ness for the benefit of the growing crowd of onlookers by displaying his skill at dancing the rumba. I will clarify shortly why his elite whiteness (read: outsiderness) is what made his proficiency at rumba (read: insiderness) so remarkable. Structurally, such Cubans are mulaticized (*de salir*, I would suggest) by their liminal position in both tourism and the Cuban nation.

**Of Bracelets and Belonging**

From the tourist’s point of view, I found it useful to conceive of the resort as a multi-ethnic/lingual/national village that generally remained segregated along in-group lines. As I observed the phenomenon, only children under 13 dared to traverse those boundaries. From the hotel’s point of view, however, the only national distinction that mattered was whether the guest was Cuban or not, a distinction embodied in the plastic hospital-style bracelets issued to all tourists staying in all-inclusive hotel resorts throughout the country—most notably the
beach areas of Havana’s Playas del Este, Varadero, Trinidad, Cayo Largo, and Cayo Coco. Such bracelets are used in hotels and nightclubs around the world, but their meaning is magnified in the socialist yet racialized context of today’s Cuba: they indicate who belongs in tourist spaces, who does not, and how much access they should have to “the good life.”

Upon checking in, each guest at an all-inclusive hotel is given one of these brightly colored bracelets and told that s/he should wear it at all times in order to use the hotel’s amenities. Most guests keep their bracelets on far beyond the confines of the resort, but I met several who resented having their tourist status labeled and refused to wear them at all, keeping them, instead, in pockets or purses. One Francophone Swiss woman was so bold as to discard hers altogether on the first day: “I put it in the garbage the moment I got in my room because I refuse to be tagged like a dog!” This woman recognized that the wristbands identified her as part of a privileged group, but she did not know the experience of “looking Cuban” and not having that signifier of belonging. Still, not all of these rebellious tourists were white; I met a 70-something brown-skinned Canadian woman of Egyptian descent who grinned as she flashed her wristband to me from her beach bag. After a few days in the hotel, one is generally known to security and staff and would rarely be barred from the hotel’s facilities, even without a bracelet. Nonetheless, I witnessed a few incidents in which security officers asked to see guests’ bracelets. If the bracelet were not produced, a key or valid room number would suffice. On very rare occasions, I observed security actively pursuing foreign white men who were using their color advantage in order to enjoy the hotel’s amenities, though they were not actually guests. Especially among repeat travelers, there is an increasing recognition of the power of white skin and foreign-ness (see Roland 2011).

Until the expansions offered since Raul Castro inherited the presidential reins from his brother Fidel in 2008, among the few Cuban nationals who could hope to partake in the luxuries of the new tourist industry were honeymooners and vanguard workers—the top-producing, hardest-working exemplars of the revolution’s New Man ideal. Because the convertible currency prices of the hotels are generally far beyond what any Cuban who works for the state can afford, their visits are highly subsidized, and—before Raul’s expansions at least—they were allowed to pay the same amount in national currency. To signify what their peso rate allowed them—the same all-inclusive meals as tourists, but limited alcoholic beverages—Cuban tourists would wear differently colored bracelets. In the course of my fieldwork, I never heard any Cubans complain about their differential tagging. Indeed, those
with whom I spoke were grateful for the opportunity to partake in resort tourism at all and acknowledged the arrangement as completely fair. In Cuba’s racial scheme, these admissible Cubans might be conceived as mulaticized through the partial nature of their belonging.

Cubans who are neither vanguard workers nor honeymooners are rarely permitted beyond the lobbies of hotels without paying a day-fare (or having it paid by a guest). The pass they receive for the CUC$5–$10 fare allows them to eat, drink, and swim, but visiting Cuban nationals are seldom allowed into guest rooms at all. The high price of entry precludes harassment by hustlers, and if the gatekeeper is at all suspicious, he can always refuse service. Indeed, the very presence of security guards at the door serves to intimidate and remind the majority of bracelet-free Cubans that they must remain outside hotels altogether.

**Power and Belonging**

I used to sit out on the Malecón with my friends and we’d look up at the nightclub in the Habana Libre [hotel] and watch the lights flash. We’d just imagine what a good time people must be having . . . – Yeshua, age 24

People from other countries can come here [to Cuba] but Cubans can neither enter their hotel nor visit the other countries. – Niyelis, age 19

If Cubans “race” tourists as *yumas* for whom the nation’s scarce material resources are reserved, where does that leave everyday Cubans? While they have been promised the fruits of tourism’s economic earnings in the form of continued socialist benefits, Cubans largely remain outsiders to the capitalist lifestyle in their midst. I recorded countless examples of such exclusions in the course of my research (see also Allen 2009). One particularly notable occasion involved 32-year-old Javier.

As a light-complexioned *mulato* with hazel eyes and dreadlocked hair, Javier explained: “My mother is *blanca*, my father was a *mulato oscuro*, so in this country they call me *jabá’o*. But I am Rasta, so I consider myself to be *negro*. *Yo soy negro.*” After a month providing me with a wealth of information about his native country during my first sojourn in fieldwork, I offered him some of my clothes and shoes to give to his teenage daughter. Knowing the edicts against Cubans in hotel rooms, I invited Javier to wait for me in the lobby while I went to retrieve the items. He opted instead to wait outside, across the street from the hotel. By the time I returned some 5 to 10 minutes later, Javier had been detained by the police. I rushed over and explained that Javier had been waiting for me—an American
staying in the hotel. The policeman disregarded me and continued calling Javier’s information into his walkie-talkie. Finding no hustling record of note, Javier was eventually given back his ID, with the admonition that he “stay away from tourists.” After the officer departed, I tried to calm Javier, who paced back and forth angrily shaking his head. In his frustration and humiliation, tears filled his eyes as he exclaimed: “this happens to me every day, and it’s just because of the way I look!” If white(r)-skinned Cubans in tourist spaces were mulaticized when they participated in the tourist industry, here Javier’s appearance signified an impoverished and criminalized person de baja cultura (of a low cultural level). In the Cuban context, Javier’s black(ened) self-identification served to clarify his place as an outsider for tourism’s gatekeepers.

**Interpreting Rumba’s Inversions**

Before concluding, I would like to discuss one touristic borderzone (Bruner 2005) that—on first glance—might seem to challenge my argument about how belonging is reckoned in Cuba’s tourist spaces. If I have described much of Cuban tourism to privilege white(ned) foreign tourists from developed countries over the dark(ened) resident Cubans, might rumba performances constitute a counter-example in which tourists are tolerated on the margins, while Cuban society’s most marginalized occupy the center of the action?

At nightclubs featuring salsa or international dance music genres, one encounters large numbers of yumas who have studied salsa in their home countries, and come to Cuba both to validate and authenticate their skills by working with local Cuban dance teams. Observing Cubans and tourists dancing with one another often emboldens less skilled yumas to “take a spin” on the dance floor as well. The MN$60 (CUC$3) price in highly regarded clubs like Café Cantate or Casa de la Música is prohibitive to most Cubans, such that a foreigner has usually invited—and paid entry for—those Cuban nationals who are present. In short, nightclubs are borderzones that involve a high degree of interaction between the paying tourists and the temporarily permissible Cubans who have been granted entry (see Hernandez-Reguant 2006).

By contrast, few tourists have learned to dance rumba before traveling to Cuba. Guanguancó, the male–female sexual flirtation performance, is the most popular variety of rumba (Daniel 1995). If salsa is danced in close face-to-face proximity in a forward and back movement, rumba involves a side-to-side movement danced at a slight distance from the partner (see Figure 4). The woman flirtatiously wiggles her hips and shoulders to the percussive rhythm, while always symbolically protecting
FIGURE 4. Rumba at Callejon de Hamel (photo by the author).

FIGURE 5. From the Margins to the Center? (photo by the author).
her sexuality by waving off the male’s (symbolic) “penetration” with her skirt. As the pursuer in this sexual mime, the man demonstrates his virility by pointing a handkerchief, a foot, or any other body part toward the woman’s lower body gyrations in time with the downbeat.

Because rumba is closely associated with the underclass residences known as solares, the practice is closely associated with the urban black and mulato lower class (Daniel 1995). The rumba at Callejón de Hamel in Havana’s Cayo Hueso neighborhood pays tribute to this centuries-old art form in free weekly performances. Every Sunday that weather permits, the colorful alleyway is set up with about 30 plastic chairs for a small fraction of the sprawling audience. During each of the six times I have attended, there were relatively few tourists present, generally seated in the very front row; when I was there, most of the haphazard rows were occupied by Cubans. The performance occurs in a chained-off square at one end of the canopied venue. While many of the Cuban spectators dance and socialize beyond the chains nearest the musicians, within the square are two perpendicular rows of permanent seats at a right-angle from one another. On one row sat a couple of young girls and middle-aged (30-something) women singing and responding to the (male) rumberos’ song; on the other row sat older women, in their late 40s and up. It was from this latter group of women that the sensuous dance tended to arise. Whenever one felt so moved, she would get up and wiggle her hips in rumba’s seductive wind, thus inviting any man bold enough to approach and skillfully attempt the vacunao penetration described above. Although many people danced freely in the audience, these women were the primary spectacle beyond the rumberos who commanded attention through their songs. If Cuban tourism normally constructs the young exoticized mulata as the ideal woman (Roland 2010; Cabezas 2009), the rumba celebrates the darker-complexioned, poorer, and older women who are generally marginalized in Cuba’s value-laden context as less desirable.

While tourists were certainly in the minority at the Callejón de Hamel, one might argue that a large proportion of dark-complexioned Cubans is necessary to achieve the appearance of authenticity that some tourists seek. Without a significant Cuban presence, how would the rumberos perform their “call-and-response” of popular songs in concert with the audience? Still, the singers were using microphones and shiny new drums, in contrast to the informality and simplicity of a spontaneous “box and stick” variety rumba that does not occur weekly at a set time and place (Daniel 1995). Miguel, a professional dancer whom I met there, explained that the rumba at Callejón “is for anyone who wants to see Cuban culture, so it’s for everyone. But when the tourists come, a different element of Cubans also comes,
Tourists may not have been the primary audience of the rumba performance, but no one disputed their right to be there. In fact, unlike Cubans, who are perceived to somehow detract from tourist-designated spaces, tourists have the potential to attract greater numbers to the cultural event (even if those they attract are themselves undesirable). In other words, the rumba at Callejón provides a foil to the “tourist ghettos” mentioned earlier; in this case, both Cubans and tourists differentially belong in the rumba space in a liminal moment where society’s most marginalized populations have occasion to take center stage.

**CONCLUSION**

One night, three Cuban men were walking down Havana’s popular Malecón boardwalk: Marco and Dario were dark-complexioned men of obvious African descent, while Tony had large blond curls and white-complexioned skin. As the three walked, they were greeted by a young (white) man they used to know from California. Without addressing Tony or the Californian at all, a policeman approached and asked for Marco and Dario’s ID cards. The Californian tried to explain that they were all his friends, prompting the officer to ask Tony if he was also Cuban. When Tony did not lie, his ID card was also collected, and all of the Cubans were taken to the police station. While both Marco and Dario had been arrested for tourist-related incidences before, this was Tony’s first such encounter with the police.

This article began with Yeshua declaring that the policeman who asked for his ID card was “confused.” At many points in this article, it has become clear that the police (and other tourism gatekeepers) readily interpret blackness as a sign of undesirable criminality. The confusion comes because while not all negros are criminals, negros are structurally defined by their general undesirability. The unprovoked arrest of Tony and his friends begs the question, what constitutes a negro? Who is racialized as inside the sphere of belonging, and who is racialized as an outsider? With Tony’s and my own experiences in mind, I ask, how stable are these categories? These are questions of belonging. I have illustrated that in Cuba’s LAC context, early notions of “race” emphasized origins, and behaviors linked to income and status as much as they attended to physical differences among groups. At its core, then, “race” is not about skin color; it is about the hierarchized valuation of difference. Racialization is about determining who should have access to certain privileges in contrast to who should be deemed marginal to privilege and power.

In the global enterprise of tourism, it would appear that the tourists are the empowered and privileged group. Yet, I have suggested that belonging is not
unilateral. Like “race,” mass international tourism is dependent upon perceived differences between groups of people. It relies on Us/tourists gazing upon the exotic ways of Them/locals, but it also requires Us/locals to serve and otherwise perform for Them/tourists (Aitchison 2001; Maoz 2005; Urry 1990). Indeed, much of tourism involves cross-cultural, intrapersonal encounters, such that tourists frequently find themselves at the mercy of tourism workers and other members of the host society. Tourists’ money may buy them access to spaces from which locals are restricted, but hosts can also structure spaces or turn their gaze back to tourists in ways that aim to clarify the limits of touristic belonging.

Such relationships between “race” and nation, and nation and tourism have been well researched. However, what has long been undertheorized is the relationship between “race” and tourism. Surely, scholars (and tourists themselves) have acknowledged the complexions of those who tour in contrast to those who work (see Bruner 2005 and Smith and Brent 2001), and some have emphasized the imbalanced global context that has fostered the re-creation of colonial-era tropes (Alexander 1997; Enloe 1990; Sheller 2003). I have proposed here that the key to understanding the racialized nature of tourism is to clarify the t/race assumptions about perceived blackness, whiteness, and mixed-ness. If raciality is not only about appearances, but also such questions of belonging as place of origin, status and classed behavior, then it becomes clear how studying tourism provides a means for better understanding how “race” operates in the real world.

Deconstructing what “race” means and how “race” acts in Cuba’s multihued revolutionary society supports an understanding of how raciality plays out in a highly lucrative form of popular culture that brings people of different complexions and global class status into close proximity—tourism. Do similar questions of belonging reveal themselves in other places, or with other global forms of popular culture like salsa, reggae, or hip-hop music? Sports phenomena like basketball, baseball, or soccer? How about spiritual practices like Santería or yoga? What role does the participants’ (assumed) place of origin, culturally based behaviors, status, or appearance play in either the successful production or consumption of these practices? If race scholarship has long failed to effectively communicate how a cultural construction like “race” can still hold meaning even when it has been scientifically disproved, then a key recommendation evolving from this study is that theorists must increasingly deconstruct how raciality operates in a myriad of popular practices like tourism in order to clarify for the non-academic public that “race” is not just about skin color—if it was ever about skin color at all.
ABSTRACT
Because Cuban “race” operates on a flexible black–white continuum, with performance and social markers like class and foreign-ness affecting racial assignment, the very category itself remains unstable. I examine this instability in Cuban touristic practice, focusing on the way in which questions of belonging and origin, as well as perceived differences between “us” and “them,” mark and assign racial identity in different ways. I became aware of such dynamics through my own subjectivity—as a black, female foreigner whose body was frequently interpreted as Cuban—and through my simultaneous status as a researcher, engaging in participant observation of Cuban touristic practice. [race, tourism, belonging, constructions of difference, Cuba]

NOTES
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1. All names of non-public officials used in this article are pseudonyms.
2. While the root word trigo means “wheat,” trigueño best translates to English as “olive-skinned.”
3. The beach constitutes another place where I occasionally observed Cubans who live abroad in tourist spaces, usually in the company of their resident families. On these occasions, they appeared to be categorized (and racialized) as Cuban based on both their appearance and their “insider” behaviors.
4. Ernesto “Ché” Guevara was the architect of Cuba’s project of creating a society of New Men and Women who exemplified the socialist ideals of humility, sacrifice, and service toward the greater good.
5. That is, if the hotel room normally cost CUC$50/night, a subsidized Cuban national would pay MN$50/night (CUC$2.27).
6. Since Raul Castro came to power in 2008, Cuban nationals have been allowed access to hotel rooms if they provide their identifying information, and pay (or have paid by someone else) the full convertible currency room rate.
7. The other two varieties of secular rumba are (1) yambú, a slower rumba danced by a couple, often side-by-side with interlinked arms, and (2) columbia, which features a faster rhythm and a single male dancer.
8. There are countless examples of rumba/guaguancó available on YouTube; one video that exemplifies the movements, as well as issues of complexion and tourist permissibility that I describe in this article is located at http://youtu.be/nGDNX05SrN8. Whereas there are also numerous examples of older participants, this version instead showcases children—suggesting that rumba will continue be practiced by future generations.
9. While ambiente literally translates to “atmosphere” or “environment,” it is used here in the racialized sense described in the above explanation of cultura, indicating lower or “darker” classed behavior.
10. Allison Melvin was an undergraduate student who traveled to Cuba with me through the University of Colorado’s global seminar study abroad program and included the content of this paragraph in her final paper; I include it here with her permission.
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