



Ingrid Kummels*

⇒ Love in the Time of Diaspora. Global Markets and Local Meanings in Prostitution, Marriage and Womanhood in Cuba

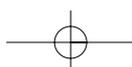
Abstract: Interrelations between the circulation of images concerning race and gender in the context of global hierarchies and new local forms and meanings of partnership and prostitution in Cuba have not been adequately understood until now. This is due to the image of a “sudden” revival of prostitution, after it had allegedly been eradicated in socialist Cuba. Exploring prostitution, marriage and womanhood in Havana from a historical perspective and examining *jineterismo* as part of the local ‘informal’ economy, this article demonstrates how these institutions were modified in a global context long before the 1990s. In the transcultural relations between foreigners and locals, models of womanhood, partnership and love were not merely ‘given’ by the social structure in the context of a globalized modernity. Instead they were to a large extent influenced by ideas concerning gender, race and morality, created and negotiated by agents as they interacted, Cuban women having resorted to these ideas and related institutions as arenas of empowerment.

Keywords: Anthropology; Prostitution; Marriage; Cuba; 20th century.

1. Introduction

Since the economic crisis of the 90s – the “Special Period in Time of Peace” – Cuba has become one of the prime destinations for sex tourism alongside Thailand, the Philippines and the Dominican Republic. This fact has caused consternation both on the socialist island itself and elsewhere. According to initial reports from the official Cuban press, Cuban society has been taken completely by surprise. Rosa Miriam Elizalde (1996: 6), a journalist for “Juventud Rebelde”, explains: “I belong to a generation that knew nothing about traditional prostitution, except through hearsay... my stupefaction gave way to a wish to find out what it was that made remunerated sex so special [...]” Cuban analysts like Sara Más Farías (2004: 107), however, have remained largely unconcerned, portraying the *jineteras* who cater to foreign tourists as working women with a relatively high

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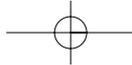


level of education who help their families financially. They are tolerated – even accepted – by large parts of society. The dividing line between them and working women in general is blurred. This fluidity is further reflected by the fact that women who grant tourists sexual services in exchange for dollars are referred to as *jineteras* (which literally translates as ‘jockeys’). The same term, *jinetero*, applies to hawkers and hustlers who specialize in peddling all sorts of goods to tourists in return for dollars, from cigars produced in government factories to illegal lodgings.

Scholars from foreign countries have likewise been stunned. *Jineterismo* differs from other local forms of prostitution in a puzzling way. Judith O’Connell Davidson (1996: 40) stresses the autonomy and individualism of the *jineteras*: “At present, the sale of sexual services does not take place within an established and organisational framework [...] there is no network of brothels, no organised system of bar prostitution.” Charles Trumbull (2001: 359), who visited the island in 1999, corroborated this: “Most of the prostitutes [...] go into business of their own accord, driven by economic need.” Three motives incite women to turn to prostitution: the economic necessity of earning a living under the difficult circumstances resulting from the economic crisis that followed the collapse of the Soviet bloc, their wish to finance or earn starting capital for studies or work in a chosen profession, and finally as a means of pursuing a better, tourist-like lifestyle. At the same time, the *jineteras* do not draw a firm line between business and emotion. As with “open-ended prostitution” in Thailand, “the relationship might commence as a neutral service (and) be extended into a more personalized liaison” ... even leading to marriage (Cohen 1982, cited in Trumbull 2001: 361; cf. Más Fariás 2004: 106).

The findings of Cuban and US scholars echo those of current research on prostitution and sex tourism in various parts of the world. In Cuba, as in Thailand and the Philippines, a weak internal economy with a low level of earnings and limited job opportunities co-exists with a booming tourist industry that attracts a high number of relatively affluent consumers. Men from the ‘First World’ create a demand for the sexual services of women from the ‘Third World’. At the same time, contemporary sex workers should not be seen as being driven exclusively by poverty and macroeconomic forces. Modern approaches to understanding the current sex trade are based not only on an analysis of structural forces, but also on an analysis of the practices of women and men as sexual agents. They focus on their subjective views and their everyday lives as a crucial component in the dynamics of the social reality of prostitution. Current investigations therefore no longer depict prostitution in terms of social deviance, but instead describe it without moralizing as an economic activity and as one of several entrepreneurial options in the framework of the ‘informal’ economy (see, for example, Kenia White 1990 and Nigeria Platte 2004). Other recent studies focus on the conditioning of prostitution by constructs of gender, race, ethnicity and nationality (Kempadoo 1996). They argue that neocolonial, racist attitudes, which construct the ‘Other’ as sexually exotic, continue to shape demand and fuel current globalized sex commerce (O’Connell Davidson 2001: 11245; Connell 2000: 84).

It is conspicuous that, currently, the majority of female prostitutes in Cuba are black or mulatto. Sex tourists from Italy, Spain, Germany and Canada imagine their sexuality “to be ‘untamed’ and ‘primitive’ and therefore more uninhibited, exciting and abandoned than white sexuality” (O’Connell Davidson 1996: 46). Kempadoo points to a connection between internal and transnational migration flows – whether on the part of migrant

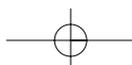


female labor or of clients – and the racialization of sex workers. The fact that “large proportions of women in the sex trade (are) culturally, nationally or ethnically different from their clients” indicates that “there is no straightforward correlation between economic conditions and prostitution” (Kempadoo 1996: 75).

In this article, I will explore the interrelations between the circulation of images concerning race and gender in the context of global hierarchies and new local forms and meanings of partnership and prostitution in Cuba from a historical perspective. One of my hypotheses is that these interrelationships have not been adequately understood until now due to the image of a “sudden” revival of prostitution, after it had allegedly been eradicated in socialist Cuba. Several factors raise doubts about this image. Analysts readily point out that, prior to the Revolution, Cuba’s political and economic dependence on the United States shaped the extent and the modalities of the sex business (Trumbull 2001; Más Farías 2004). However, they do not take into account the transnational links which Cuba established within a Cold War context as a member of the Soviet bloc. These transnational relations, inserted in the global ideology of Socialism, nevertheless likewise implied a global hierarchy. Moreover, in 1979 Cuba gradually opened its gates to the exile community in the United States. As a result, dollars made their appearance in the country and became an unofficial second currency. In addition, Cuba established south-south relationships with non-aligned and developing countries as part of its internationalist commitment. In this context, foreign students from Latin America were offered scholarships, as well as 30,000 Africans. As foreigners they were automatically granted privileged access to dollars and dollar shops, which were officially off-limits for Cuban citizens. These factors played an equally important part in shaping Cuba’s ‘informal’ economy during the 80s – prostitution being part of it.

A second aspect requiring critical review concerns the parallels and differences between *jineterismo* and other forms of heterosexual partnership in Cuba. According to popular opinion in Cuba, *jineteras* oscillate between casual flirtation and professional prostitution, and alternate easily between emotion and business. European social scientists have for some time been looking at how market constraints have influenced private and intimate relations in Europe (Honneth 2003: VII). With the establishment of sex tourism in Cuba and other countries, we are confronted with an apparently contradictory phenomenon: affection, which in many societies is considered to be reserved for romantic relationships, seems to be progressively crossing over into the sphere of venal love. This fluidity is reflected in the places where *jineterismo* is practiced. Since prostitution is not regulated by Cuban law, Cuban sex workers, unlike those in other countries, do not offer their services in specially designated bars and brothels. Instead they ply their trade openly in places frequented by tourists. To what extent do agents in Cuba conceptualize *jineterismo* and affective relationships, such as common-law relationships, as distinct? This question arises in view of the fact that in Cuba, as in other Caribbean societies, “the history of sexual relations is far less confined to monogamous marriages and ideologies of ‘romantic love’” than it is in Europe, for example. People tend to be more honest about the financial nature of their sexual relationships (Kempadoo 1996: 72, 80; cf. Benoit 1999: 31).

For this reason, I will explore the main form of prostitution in Havana – that between female sex workers and foreign male clients – jointly with other forms of heterosexual partnership. Moreover, I will examine *jineterismo* as part of the local ‘informal’ econo-



my and entertainment industry. I argue that, in the transcultural relations between sex tourists and locals, models of womanhood, partnership and love are not merely ‘given’ by the social structure in the context of a globalized modernity. Instead they are to a large extent actively produced via agency or are renegotiated (Schlehe 2002: 206; Kempadoo 1996: 69). In the same way that sex tourists bring with them neocolonial, racist fantasies, sex workers may categorize their clients according to local racial ideologies. How do agents construct sexual services and affective relationships in this transcultural context, especially in relation to their respective conceptions of love and economic obligations? What possibilities do subaltern woman have, in the face of the embeddedness of the sex industry in global cultural, social and economic structures, to reinterpret gender and racial inscriptions in a subversive way?

I will address these questions by focusing on prostitution, marriage and womanhood in three historical periods and by consulting heterogeneous sources. Starting in 1982, I visited Cuba regularly and therefore casually observed different forms of *jineterismo* during two of the three historical periods in question.¹ In January 2003 I conducted research and interviewed a *jinetera*, María Elena, in detail. She had been acquainted for many years with a friend of mine, who knew her life history and her opinions well, contributing to the quality of the interview. A good source for an emic view of pre-revolutionary prostitution has existed since Fernández Robaina (1998) recorded the life histories of the sex workers Violeta and Consuelo la Charmé in the form of a *testimonio*. Referring to the “golden” 80s in socialist Cuba, the Togolese author Sami Tchak (1999) interviewed African students living in Havana who had worked as black market tradesmen and had been clients of sexual services. I will focus on the entertainment industry in Havana starting from the 1930s, not only because that was for a long time the main center of prostitution, but also because it is there that images of womanhood and romantic love were created and communicated through music and dance performances. Such images convey messages in a similarly poignant form to that of commercials, stripped of irrelevant meanings. They mirror the concerns, fears and dreams of society (cf. Illouz 2003: 20).

2. Prostitution, Marriage and Womanhood before the Revolution

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the neocolonial Cuban republic was dependent on the USA. Prostitution, marriage and womanhood were embedded in a highly stratified and socially unequal society. They were intertwined with a racial order derived from the colonial working relationships in sugar production. Spanish plantation owners – especially after the spectacular slave rebellion in Haiti – had exploited a large workforce of African slaves. Even after the colonial period, social position was ascribed at birth along the poles of “white” and “black”, with people being classified according to

¹ The latter sections of this article are largely based on intense periods of residence and participant observation in a matrifocal household of the tobacco workers’ district of Havana during the 1980s, 1990s and in 2003. In January 2003 I specifically interviewed several prostitutes as well as women working in other professions on the subject of *jineterismo*.



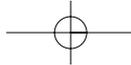
physical characteristics based on skin color and physiognomy. Besides “whites” and “blacks”, the other main category consisted of “mulattos”. Originally these were defined as the offspring of one black and one white parent, but locals progressively conceived this category as including persons of a racially mixed origin, whose phenotype coincided with the popular image of a mulatto.

Economic success permitted mobility to a higher status. Hypergamy, ascent of women of a subordinate social category via marriage or concubinage, was an option for colored women in particular – but not for men. By mating a man of a lighter skin color, they could achieve a higher social position for their children and for themselves, a procedure the women in question referred to as *blanquearse* (literally: to whiten oneself) or *adelantar la raza* (literally: to advance the race; Rubiera Castillo 2000: 11). Lower-class women and their children therefore often constituted the informal second families of men who were legally married to white spouses. It is from this period that the saying stems: “White women are for marriage, black women for work and mulatas to make love” (“*Las mujeres blancas son para casarse, las negras para trabajar y las mulatas para hacer el amor*”; cited in Fusco 1997: 57). As in Europe, the Cuban upper-class defined the institutions of marriage, concubinage and labor in terms of gender and social class as well as in terms of the antipoles of business and emotion.

According to Martínez-Alier (1974), these forms of marriage and concubinage contributed towards the establishment of the matrifocal family pattern which is still upheld in socialist Cuba. Women, sometimes women of several generations, are the central figures in these families. They are the pillar of the household economy and feel responsible for the education of the children. Women may learn a craft like sewing, embroidery or shoemaking. An important part of the family income derives from the sale of the products made at home, especially self-prepared snacks and sweets. The “husbands” – whether a lover, common-law mate or legal husband – are often remote figures in family life and the household economy. Since the unions are often unstable, women as a rule live monogamously with several men during their lifetime, often remaining without a male companion for longer periods of time.

Female participation in the labor force and other areas of public life increased at the beginning of the 1930s as a result of progressive laws inspired by the United States, women’s access to institutional education and their determination to secure women’s rights (Lang 2004: 12). Up to then a dichotomy had prevailed, according to which women ideally were in charge of the domestic realm, while the men’s sphere was the street and public life. The majority of women and girls did not have any professional qualifications and worked as maids, washerwomen or ironers. The proportion of women in gainful employment outside the home grew slowly, with lower and middle-class women working as employees in the retail trade and as elementary school teachers. Those who studied at the University of Havana became doctors, lawyers or pharmacists (Henning 1996: 105ff). As they began to socialize with non-related men at educational facilities and at work, a change took place in the relations between the sexes. Instead of a man courting a girl at her family home, young people began dating on their own, even though lovers as a rule met in the company of friends and/or siblings (Castro/Kumels/Schäfer 2002). As in the United States and in Europe, marriage began to be perceived less and less as a contract between kin groups and more as an autonomous decision between lovers.





One market sector in which the number of economically active women rapidly increased was the entertainment industry. As an outcome of Prohibition in the United States (1920-1933), up to 120,000 Americans traveled to Havana every year. By the 1920s there were about 7,000 bars in Havana and the number of prostitutes soared (Pérez 1999: 169, 193). Women were formally employed as waitresses, musicians, singers and dancers. Clubs and cabarets functioned socially as arenas of representation of a racialized class identity. "Cabarets in general were classified as *de primera*, *segunda*, or *tercera*, based on the number and quality of the acts they presented and their prices" (Moore 1997: 38). As a rule, first-class cabarets refused entrance to black and mulatto clients through the 1950s, and frequently to performers of these races as well. A classic example of this policy of segregation was the Havana Yacht Club's refusal to grant Cuba's president Fulgencio Batista membership during the 1930s because he was considered a mulatto.

Discrimination on the basis of race was also notable in the context of prostitution. To a certain degree, the neocolonial Cuban republic developed the sex business into a state institution. Officially, prostitution was not considered to be a crime, and was only prosecuted outside the established zones of tolerance (Más Fariás 2004: 104). Violeta, the prostitute interviewed by Fernández Robaina (1998: 23-26), distinguishes between the sex workers of this period according to their access to housing and the class affiliation of their clients. Sex workers were generally referred to as *putas*, *mujeres de mala vida* or *mujeres públicas*. In public opinion *fleteras*, street prostitutes, were at the bottom of the social scale, particularly those who worked near the Vía Blanca train station. They offered quick sex to whoever approached them on the street. Other sex workers would seek men in bars. Both types of street workers saw it as an advantage that they did not have to share their earnings with a third party. Prostitutes who worked in the popular "dance academies" as "instructors" – offering their partners more than just company on the dance floor – were obliged to pay a fee to the owner of the establishment. In these disguised brothels, only white and mulatto women were hired (Moore 1997: 99). Prostitution in brothels called *casas* was considered the most distinguished category. Sex workers rented rooms from female entrepreneurs referred to as *dueñas*, who deducted up to 50 % of their earnings. At the top of the hierarchy were the *casas* managed by Frenchmen, where white French prostitutes offered their services (see also Carpentier 2000: 162-165). Violeta relates that, where possible, Cuban sex workers chose clients of a light skin color (Fernández Robaina 1998: 82).

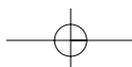
Local racism was congruent with the variants of North American racism that tourists from the States brought with them. The historian Louis Pérez (1999: 193) demonstrates how, as far back as the 1920s, American consumers shaped Cuba according to their ideals and perceived necessities. Cuba became a synonym for sexual license. This "tropical paradise" had a familiar and cozy character thanks to the availability of US goods, cuisine, language and amusements on the island (Pérez 1999: 167, 169). In one Havana brothel frequented by American tourists, the girls "were white and several blonde, though their eyes were unmistakably Latin. It was a place where American high-school and college boys [...] came to relieve their sexual tensions in surroundings that were not forbiddingly foreign" (MacCaulay cited by Pérez 1999: 194). As far as racial ideologies were concerned, it was a two-way process. French prostitutes thwarted the racial division by not distinguishing between clients of different skin colors, which allowed them to earn



more. According to Violeta, she and other Cuban sex workers did the same when they became aware of the economic advantages (Fernández Robaina 1998: 82-83).

The representation of the mulata on the stages of amusement centers is a further example of mutual influencing. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the mulata had gained currency as an icon of Cuba and “a symbolic container for all the tricky questions about how race, gender, and sexuality inflect the power relations that obtain in... postcolonial Cuba” (Kutzinski 1993: 7). Local performances had an impact on tourists’ tastes. The explicitly sexual Neo-African rumba dance, performed by professional dance couples in night clubs, became an indispensable part of any tourist program. The image of the sensuous, hip-swinging, olive-colored mulata entered the arenas of pleasure in the United States. In Cuban literature, theater and salon music, exclusively male intellectuals molded the image of the mulata as a prototypical Cuban woman (Phaf 1989; Kutzinski 1993). They highlighted her beauty and desirability, but at the same time stylized her as the exponent of a “lower” race that could only become the sexual object of a white man and never his spouse. Less well known is the fact that women, too, played a double game with this male model of womanhood, at household level, for example. Since husbands were deemed to be unreliable, women in their everyday lives cultivated flirtation and sexual attraction – not only vis-à-vis their partners but simultaneously vis-à-vis other men. Mothers therefore instructed their daughters from an early age in coquetry, which is prototypically considered to be a quality of the patron of Cuba, the *Virgen de la Caridad*, Our Mother of Charity. She is identified with the African river and love goddess Ochún and as a mulata. At household parties, women personified Ochún on the basis of the religious belief that each person is connected by his character to a certain saint. They impersonated her with a sensuous dance, running their hands down their bodies with fluid movements and jangling golden bracelets on their arms (Castro/Kummels/Schäfer 2002: 56). The dance conveyed beauty, cool deliberation and the adamant determination of the mulata to achieve social ascent as a source of female power. The mulata is therefore a good example of the intertwining and complexity of symbolic inscriptions and reinterpretations by different social groups.

The activities of female artists also bear testimony to the way in which Cuban subalterns not only adapted to market demands, but also used them as an arena of empowerment. In the context of the entertainment industry, women participating in new professional fields actively shaped symbols which were considered to be a male domain. They influenced son music, which conquered Havana in the 1920s (Kummels 2005). This new genre mirrored changes in moral values concerning love: The old trova ballads sang the praises of an idealized, romantic love, removed from daily life, in the style of Spanish noblemen. Son, on the other hand, praised in earthy lyrics the pleasures of the lower classes: drinking alcohol, having parties, talking in an erotically suggestive way and having spontaneous affairs. Female artists first contested male privileges by means of their attire, gestures and the intonation of song lyrics. Singer Rita Montaner was one of the first to break with the tradition of women singing virtually motionless. Graciela Pérez reinterpreted existing son love songs from a male perspective to a female one, conquering the male domain of flirting in public. Another barrier was broken down when Anacaona, Cuba’s first all-girl son septet, became the first females to play African percussion in public. Only a few years earlier, police would routinely interfere whenever percussion instruments such as bongos were played in Havana. Moreover, members of





the black lower classes regarded drums as sacred and as the domain of men in accordance with their privileged positions in Neo-African religious cults. Women therefore made a crucial contribution towards secularizing symbols of the lower classes that had formerly stood for primitive nature, and integrating them into the mainstream. The female artists were very conscious of the political dimension of their acts: All-women bands gave themselves programmatic names emphasizing at the same time the importance of racial mixture for Cuban national identity as well as demands for more female power.

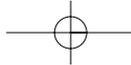
3. Prostitution, Marriage and Womanhood during the “golden” 80s

The Castro government undertook a series of measures, based on its Marxist-inspired ideology, that aimed at eliminating social and economic inequality. One goal was to achieve total equality between men and women in these spheres. In spite of the progress that had been made in the first half of the twentieth century, in 1953 only 13 % of women had access to formal, paid employment, and even then their wages were lower than men's (Lang 2004: 13). Women in general still suffered from discrimination at work and in society. The government at first assumed that equality could be achieved simply by integrating women into formal, paid labor, and that gender-specific and ethnic discrimination would automatically disappear in the process.

Accordingly, the role of the traditional housewife was discouraged. The socialist government also took specific action to modify the matrifocal family structure, which became discredited because of its self-sufficient household economy. Socialist family policy created day care centers, washing facilities and canteens for workers to relieve women of their traditional obligations. However, it was mainly women who were employed in these sectors (Henning 1996: 219). The State was therefore trying to take over many of the traditional functions of the family, including the task of raising children. Children and juveniles were educated in boarding-schools and enrolled in institutions such as the young pioneers and the Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (Union of the Communist Youth), whose members ideally also became members of the Party. Grown-ups were urged to participate in block committees, voluntary labor, militias and public demonstrations. These factors contributed to the dispersal of family members and to family instability (Smith/Padula 1996: 163f).

Family policy was contradictory, however. On the one hand, the government promoted collectivism; on the other hand, it also valued the nuclear family modeled on bourgeois Europe. As a weapon against frequently changing spouses, the socialist government tried to encourage Cubans to marry legally by providing exuberant wedding ceremonies in state-operated “marriage palaces”. Marriage became a much-valued source of scarce goods such as porcelain and furniture and offered the rare opportunity to lodge in a first-class hotel during one's honeymoon. Nevertheless, this did not slow down the rate of divorces and partner changes. The new mobility that was forced on almost everybody inevitably led to separations (Smith/Padula 1996: 155; Rosendahl 1997: 57).

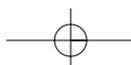
In addition to actively discouraging prostitution, the government also eliminated a large part of the pre-revolution entertainment industry, as these activities were seen to a



certain extent as going hand in hand. In accordance with socialist morality, the entertainment industry in Havana was condemned as the incarnation of capitalist excess. Many cabarets and especially casinos were forced to shut down. In the course of the centralization and regulation of musical activities the government withdrew its support from apolitical popular music and “chose for many years to lend its strongest support only to classical music, or pop music with overtly political lyrical content” (Moore 2002: 57). Prostitutes were regarded as victims of capitalist conditions, who had not had any other possibility of earning a living. The government closed all the brothels and sought to assimilate ex-prostitutes into society by teaching them reading and writing, sewing and other crafts. According to official announcements, this process of re-education was completed in 1965 and consequently prostitution and the hustler networks were considered to have been virtually abolished from the island (Más Farías 2004: 104).

Nevertheless, several factors led to a resurgence of prostitution, though in the new form of *jineterismo*. The 1980s were a period of relative prosperity thanks to a Soviet-type planned economy, subsidies from the Soviet Union and economic measures of liberalization with regard to free peasant markets (Hoffmann 2000: 98). This fostered new social divisions, however, to which the government indirectly admitted. It repeatedly referred to people acting in conformance with the revolutionary agenda and denounced those who adhered to ‘traditional attitudes’. I experienced the new divisions in the tobacco workers’ district of Havana during the 1980s. In this district, people either explicitly declared themselves to be socialists or indirectly manifested a certain distance – I will refer to the latter group as non-socialists. Women of the first group joined the women’s organization Federación de Mujeres Comunistas (FMC) as a matter of course and took up paid employment. One advantage of such membership and formal employment was the possibility of obtaining privileges such as access to higher education and housing as well as such desirable goods as television sets and cars. On the other side were the women who persisted in being housewives and did not engage in formal wage labor. They often lived in extended matrifocal families with women of several generations. Home produce and crafts remained the pillars of these household economies, although they were actually illegal following the nationalization of all private businesses in 1966. The ideological divide between socialists and non-socialists was accompanied by a clandestine division of labor that was also of advantage to the socialists: those who were not socialists depended on the cooperation of Party militants for access to goods, which led to a thriving black market. Furthermore, the non-socialists needed the protection of militants for their illegal businesses. Only with their help could they obtain and produce goods which the central administration could not supply to the public, at least not in sufficient quantities. This cooperation between socialists and non-socialists worked, largely thanks to family solidarity and the knowledge that without the tradespeople, the planned economy would collapse (Kummels 1996: 150). These diverse orientations did not result from individuals’ choices alone. Many of those who had been underprivileged prior to the Revolution remained so, because of more subtle forms of racial discrimination (Rubiera Castillo 2004). All in all, a growing contradiction arose between the official State image of full employment and a rapidly expanding ‘informal’ economy.

These social differences gave rise in the 1980s to a phenomenon known as *titimanía*. This described the tendency of young girls (referred to as *tittis*) to seek the company of old, affluent men, for example doctors and other professionals with relatively high earn-



ings. The men would often divorce to marry them. A further social division resulted from the détente that took place during the presidency of Jimmy Carter (1976-1980). This permitted dialogue between the two countries and a certain amount of reconciliation between socialist Cuba and Cuban exiles, who had until then been ostracized as *gusanos*, “worms”. The isolation that had even forbidden telephone calls between Cubans on the island and in the United States gave way to restricted, though regular visits of émigrés to the island. The government also took the first steps towards developing tourism, which was later to become the mainstay of Cuba’s re-integration into the world market. As part of internationalist policy, foreign students from Latin America and Africa were invited into the country by the government.

When Cuban exiles and foreigners started bringing in dollars in 1980, a further division took place in Cuban society. On the one hand there was the world of the ‘normal’ Cubans, and on the other hand there was the world of dollars, created specifically for foreigners, which was off-limits to the overwhelming majority. The latter was the realm of air-conditioned, first-class hotels with restaurants, bars, live music and small shopping areas. For many Cubans, these enclaves of affluence and leisure represented their image of what life ‘abroad’ must be like. This social and spatial separation affected people in many ways. Cubans were not officially allowed to possess dollars. They could spend the money relatives had given them only in the company of a foreigner. Sometimes – when the ban on entering these stores was reinforced – they even had to entrust a foreigner to do the shopping for them. The reason for this ‘tourist apartheid’ was that the government was seeking to uphold socialist norms and values, while at the same time obtaining hard currency.

Jineterismo prospered, because young Cubans longed for foreign articles and wanted to experience this forbidden realm. Any kind of commodity associated with it was coveted. Cuban author Karla Suárez (1999) impressively describes the fascination felt by the protagonist of her short story on stepping into a hotel in the middle of Havana. Even to be seen by other Cubans in the company of a tourist meant participating in his lifestyle and gave a certain social standing. Cubans who established contact with a tourist sometimes made sure that he was pampered around the clock by their relatives and friends. The *jineteros* therefore at the same time made the tourists feel special. Even relatively poor tourists were made to feel like rich nabobs. Foreigners became an important social category comparable to the pre-revolutionary upper-class whites. Cubans often considered the term *extranjero* to refer exclusively to a white person from a capitalist country. At the same time, *extranjeros* were viewed stereotypically and with racist connotations such as naive, physically unattractive, and above all not talented at dancing. Consequently, they were considered by women to be sexually fairly unattractive. The government was aware of the new form of prostitution, *jineterismo*, at the end of the 1980s, even if it did not admit it.²

Further social groups became very attractive to Cubans in this period. Diplomats and technical personnel from Soviet bloc countries – sometimes mockingly addressed as

² Although I am German, I have an almost Cuban complexion. Together with my German companion, whose skin color corresponded more to the stereotype of a German, we were constantly stopped and interrogated at the entrances to hotels and restaurants on the assumption that I was a *jinetera*.



“tovarich” – and even foreign students served as economic instruments. The dollar shops, nowadays popularly referred to as *shoppins*, were then called *diplotiendas*, since they were meant for diplomats and similar groups of foreigners. The goods which were available there – and were not available, or only with difficulty, at Cuban *bodegas* and stores – included articles of daily consumption such as detergent and deodorants and articles considered to be typically Cuban. To the annoyance of many, foreigners paradoxically had easier access to vintage rum, fish and lobster. Finally, the *diplotiendas* offered ready-made clothing of a higher quality and greater variety than the assortment available even in Havana’s best department stores.

Some women specialized in acquiring coveted goods by forming relationships with foreign students, some of whom, for their part, took advantage of their privileged access to hard currency and dollar shops. Some students achieved a certain affluence by selling dollar goods – the African students interviewed by Tchak (1999: 56), for example, who were able to treat themselves to as many female sexual partners as they desired. They were especially keen on those of another race and class, turning the social hierarchy they had experienced at home upside-down (Tchak 1999: 50). This form of *jineterismo* was by no means as widespread and as professionalized as prostitution prior to the Revolution or current *jineterismo* since the economic crisis of the 1990s. But it is still astonishing that it has been largely unrecognized outside Cuba. This early *jineterismo* was “invisible” partly because it was not officially admitted to by the government, since it was not supposed to exist in socialism. As Tchak explains, however, the invisibility was also due to the fact that one of the main client groups was the foreign students. For *jineteras* they were even more attractive than tourists as a means of obtaining goods and the possibility of participating in a ‘better’ way of life. They were easy to contact in the student hostels. The women could also take them along to *posadas*, hostels for Cuban couples, or amusement centers that were reserved for Cubans. The company of a white foreigner would have aroused attention. It also relieved them of the problem of communicating in another language. These relations, however, were also tainted by racism. Cuban women often disdained the Africans. The African students, for their part, preferred *jineteras* of a light skin color.

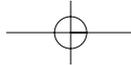
As a foreigner I inevitably came into contact with *jineteros*, both in the sense of hawkers and in the sense of people selling their sexual services, and therefore became aware of the emerging social divisions at an early juncture. As early as 1982, I made the acquaintance of a *jinetera*, a young student of economics. She immediately attracted my attention because she enhanced her light skin color by dressing up carefully in expensive attire to look like a foreigner. I later found out that this was what her clients, technical personnel from the Soviet bloc countries and dark-skinned African students, wanted. For her services she was paid principally with brand-new dresses and shoes of her choice bought at the *diplotiendas*. Interestingly, I got to know her through a group of peers, who at first sight seemed quite a mixed bunch. One of them was an Italian backpacker whom I had met on the plane to Cuba, another a young black woman who was the daughter of a state employee who was a convinced socialist. In a matter-of-fact way, this young black woman explained to me that she had made the Italian fall madly in love with her (*volverlo bobo* or *volverlo loco*) and that during his stay they were going to get married in Havana. Another member of the group was the son of a “hero of the Revolution”. The families of officially recognized “heroes”, revolutionaries who died in battle before or during the change of regime in 1959, receive special benefits. His mother was an ambas-

sador abroad. This young man therefore possessed a passport and was able to visit foreign countries. He was fervently opposed to the socialist government because of its persecution of homosexuals, a matter close to his heart, being himself homosexual. The *jinetera*, as I was told the following year, was denounced by a member of the block committee and condemned to three years in a labor camp for women, and consequently required to work in agriculture. The young black woman and the Italian married and moved to Germany, but after two years she sought a divorce and stayed in Europe.

This group of friends with privileged access to hard currency spent their leisure time in a way other Cubans could only dream of. They frequently visited cabarets, including Tropicana, places which were not off-limits to 'normal' Cubans, but were so expensive that very few of them could afford to go there. Why did Cubans feel deprived at not being able to afford cabaret visits? The cultural life of Havana under socialism was varied and of a high quality. As Manuel (1995: 17) has documented, on any weekend the leisure options were quite diverse, ranging from rumba performances by national folklore groups to salsa-style dance clubs. Nevertheless, the Cubans I met – socialists and non-socialists alike – paradoxically rated cabarets highest. A high proportion of party members and workers visited them. Access to cabarets was a means of rewarding workers for the relatively high output and quality standards they had maintained (see Moore 2002: 56). Technical personnel from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were also regular guests there. In the cabarets, a series of seemingly anachronistic but "joyously kitsch" music and dance numbers were performed, often portraying women in the style of the sugar plantation era, albeit in a new interpretation. Nevertheless, they still conveyed an image of the mulata that stemmed from those days, the mulata as the sexual object of plantation owners. The majority of young Cubans had to content themselves with more 'humble' forms of leisure such as parties at home, where they played games like dominoes and danced the "casino". One of the highlights of such get-togethers were alcoholic beverages, including plain rum and bootleg *aliñado* made from beetroot and resembling red wine in color and even in taste. To a certain extent, therefore, the entertainment culture mirrored the new social divisions and double standards: on the one hand there was the "decadent" club atmosphere reminiscent of independent Cuba's capitalist phase and still valued by the majority, and on the other hand there were the more "innocent" forms of popular culture promoted by the State.

4. Prostitution, Marriage and Womanhood since the *Período Especial*

After the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989, Cuba was forced to make drastic ideological and economic changes as a consequence of losing its main trading partners and Soviet subsidies. It was furthermore affected by the ongoing US embargo. Foreign investment in the tourist industry was curbed as a means of securing desperately needed foreign exchange. Castro also managed to wrest back control of the economy by declaring the US dollar legal tender in 1993, transforming it into the only effective currency in the country. Self-employment (*cuentapropismo*) was liberalized, allowing nationals to provide services such as transportation, room rental and food to foreign tourists. Gradually, the tourism sector has turned into the locomotive of the Cuban economy, with more than 2 million tourists visiting Cuba in 2004.



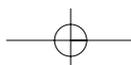
Part of the current local social conditions that influence the relationship between men and women is a two-class society, separating those who have access to hard-currency jobs from those who work in State enterprises, which only pay wages in pesos. In the latter case, wages range from the equivalent of 5 to 25 dollars per month, whereby at least 20 dollars per month are required to cover basic living expenses. Hard currency can mainly be earned in the tourism sector with its joint ventures between European firms and State enterprises, often controlled by party organizations such as the military. As to these dollar jobs, women's share amounts to only 35 %, which means they are underrepresented (Lang 2004: 24). A further crucial source of hard currency is the Cuban exile community in the United States. They provide relatives on the island with more than a billion dollars a year, making this Cuba's largest single source of hard currency, even exceeding the total income generated by the tourism industry in terms of net profit.

Those who are unable to obtain a job in the tourist sector or in the highly regulated self-employment sector are forced to seek other, mainly illegal means of earning dollars. Therefore both women and men resort to illegal odd jobs, with foreign tourists as their main customers, to supplement their incomes. They rent out rooms, drive taxis or provide restaurants with prepared dishes. *Jineterismo* is an important part of the expanding 'informal' economy. People who do not have material resources they can tap, and who are young, tend to become *jineteros*, peddling all sorts of goods. House-owners, craftsmen, artists and tradespeople in general rely on them and pay them a commission in exchange for the customers they attract.

Since the 1990s, the social divisions have also been intensified by migration. As a result of recurring migratory waves during the past two and a half decades, approximately 20 percent of the Cuban population live outside the island. The majority of the 1.5 million Cubans residing in the USA are concentrated in southern Florida, but there are also large numbers of Cubans in Canada and in Spain. The rush of Cubans into the United States, and especially Miami, continues following the agreement between Cuba and the United States to allow 20,000 Cubans to emigrate legally every year on the basis of a lottery.

The vital pursuit of hard currency, orientation towards foreigners and migration have all had an effect on mating patterns and even affect existing marriages. An arrangement that is now widespread is the "overseas" couple. A husband may choose to reside abroad for several years for the sole purpose of earning money for the family. Since the Cuban government does not readily permit its nationals to travel abroad, this is only an option for a small group of people – in particular the offspring of Spaniards, who can obtain a Spanish passport with relative ease, scientists, who can count on receiving official invitations from universities and institutes in foreign countries, and finally retired persons, who are more likely to be granted permission to travel by the government. One of the spouses, most frequently the wife – who feels responsible for bringing up the children according to the norms of Cuban society – remains with the children in Cuba and receives monthly remittances (Kummels 2004: 33).

Single women and men – including people who do not practice *jineterismo* – increasingly consider marrying a foreigner as a means to economic and social ascent. Girls and women visit internet cafés in search of a good match. They cultivate virtual friendships with tourist acquaintances, foreign colleagues or Cubans who have emigrated. The few statistical data available indicate that marriages to foreigners have increased since the



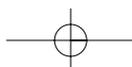


Período Especial, especially marriages to Italians and Spaniards, who account for the largest proportion of male tourists (Más Fariás 2004: 107).

Cubans in general are critical of these changes. Men often voice complaints about the way even schoolgirls are no longer interested in Cuban partners. Nevertheless, more people – women and men alike – now pursue a marriage arrangement that will guarantee them either economic advantages or even wealth – preferably with a foreigner from the ‘First World’. Cubans and foreigners with different points of view all seem to consider that the dividing line between ‘normal’ couple relationships and *jineterismo* is becoming blurred, with Cubans referring to their increasingly economic character and sex tourists alleging that Cubans have a ‘natural’ sexual permissiveness. Both ideas may even interlock, since sex tourists’ conception of “Cuban culture (as) sexually permissive, (is) an idea that is promulgated by some Cubans as well” (O’Connell Davidson 1996: 46). This deliberate misunderstanding takes advantage of different ideals of partnership and love in the USA, Europe and Cuba. Cuban ideals concerning love relationships presuppose an ever-present eroticism, something which is, however, not to be confused with promiscuity. Love in the opinion of the agents is synonymous with the upholding of a sexually laden atmosphere. Part of the erotic play of couples is to flirt with one’s mate as well as with others, simultaneously displaying jealousy as a means of claiming possession of one’s partner. (Affairs, by contrast, are engaged in with extreme discretion.) Many women, for example, consider it to be a proof of love when men embrace them possessively and reprimand them for wearing ‘too’ sexy attire in public. A man considers it to be an expression of affection when his wife pampers him like a child, waiting on him hand and foot. In non-venal love relationships, women will also employ utilitarian jargon, using expressions like *amarrarlo* (literally: “tying up” a man, meaning magical practices as well as good sex as a means of securing love) and *volverlo loco* (literally: making him crazy, dependent on one’s love). These expressions reflect the pride in dominating a man by means of erotic attraction (Kummels 2004: 34, 37).

These values are constantly renegotiated. New models of womanhood are now portrayed in the arena of public entertainment, even if the figure of the sensuous mulata continues to be highly topical in cabarets. In accordance with the demand of sex tourists for dark-skinned prostitutes, the latter pick up and rework this colonial image based on the “classic” racial binary of “white ladies/black prostitutes”. A common sight on Old Havana’s Plaza de Armas is that of a tall, extremely slim dark-skinned *jinetera*, dressed up in skin-tight white lace, her head adorned with a Florentine hat and aristocratically raised. The Italian at her side, who is one head shorter, feels like a fin-de-siècle sugar baron next to her. Interestingly, *jineterismo* based on this new version of racism does not reproduce that of current or pre-revolutionary Cuban society, but instead has a neo-colonial character reminiscent of the plantation era.

An alternative image of womanhood directed mainly at Cuban audiences is conveyed by the national folkloric ballet, the “Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba”, which is located in the once elegant residential area of Vedado. Their show is much in demand among young Cubans, partly because the entrance fee is “only” five dollars and the show resembles a higher-class cabaret. In addition, the audience unites a majority of locals with a minority of tourists, members of both groups enjoying the opportunity to mingle. The folkloric ballet offers an eclectic program, including the usual stylized dances derived from the Afro-Cuban cults of possession as well as the national dance,



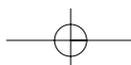


the rumba. A novel element is the *pasarela* or catwalk, which – judging by the reaction of the local audience – is the climax of the show. In the style of a fashion show à la Chanel or Versace, couples consisting of a man and a woman slowly advance toward the audience. The mulata or black mannequins, as skinny as international supermodels, move in a perfect cat-like manner, bearing an expression of detached boredom on their faces. They wear plain, tight-fitting clothing with decadently ripped hems. The cool performance, mimicking wealthy, good-looking couples from the ‘West’ thrills the Cuban onlookers. This new model of womanhood constitutes a blatant contrast to the smiling, vibrant, opulent and flirtatious mulata.

But let us now examine the organization of contemporary prostitution. O’Connell Davidson (1996: 41) accurately distinguished two main groups of *jineteras*: On the one hand there are those who are legitimate inhabitants of a tourist center, which allows them to exercise greater control over sex work. Then there are the migrants from inland villages and towns, who are at a disadvantage, since they live far away from profitable sex commerce and are prevented by internal migration laws from legally residing and obtaining a job in these centers or cities. There they are to a larger extent victims of exploitation by third parties. When discovered by the police, migrants are returned to their place of residence. Accordingly, they depend to a degree on bribery to overcome their illegal status.

I interviewed one such sex worker and migrant from the interior, the 25-year-old María Elena. She described the work of *jineteras* – their access to housing, their clients and their services – as extremely diverse. She basically divides her clients into “*cubanos*” and “*turistas*”, depending on what currency they pay in, pesos or dollars. For her, *turista* is a synonym for sex tourist, though she also refers to a john as a *pepe*. Just like the term *jinetera*, the range of meaning of the term *turista* suggests that the dividing line between sex tourist and ordinary tourist, between business and emotion, can be fluid. This is in keeping with the perspective of sex consumers, who do not see themselves as “sex tourists” and try to delude themselves that the relationship is not merely financial (O’Connell Davidson 1996: 43). This image of themselves is congruent with the commodity that sex tourists seek to acquire in Cuba: the illusion that the ‘girls’ are not willing because of their money, but because of their charm (O’Connell Davidson 1996: 46).

María Elena described street prostitution as a sphere for Cubans that was also frequented by stingy tourists. In a small park in Old Havana next to the Calle Monte near the Capitolio, women charging in pesos wait for clients to do the rounds and then choose one of them. To avoid costs, intercourse takes place outdoors, in an empty factory or in the park. The Villa Panamericana leading to the eastern part of town is the area for clients with a car. Finally, there are the *jineteras*, who, like María Elena, specialize in tourists. They spend their time in the appropriate discotheques, cabarets, hotel bars and restaurants such as the “Bar Turquino” in the hotel “Habana Libre”, the “Café Cantante” and the “Habana Club” discotheque in the hotel “Comodoro”. Since single Cuban women are not allowed to enter, one of their main preoccupations is how to get in. They require the help of tourists or need to bribe a doorkeeper. María Elena differentiates between clever *jineteras* (“*con la chispa encendida*”), who arrange a price of 50 to 100 dollars in advance for a fuck (*palo* or *batazo*) or negotiate a higher price for a whole night. Such *jineteras* may themselves rent rooms costing 2 dollars a night, or they will accompany a



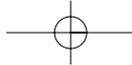
tourist to a room of his choice, which he must pay for in addition to paying the bribe for the doorkeeper.

There are also *jineteras* who specifically target foreigners just to “*luchar los verdes*”, “trick them out of their greenbacks”. They spend the evening chatting to them and dancing with them, only to extract money from them on parting by telling them, for example, that they need it to take a taxi back home (even if they only live a few blocks away). These *luchadoras* avoid as far as possible having sex with a *turista*.

In María Elena’s opinion, the alleged autonomy of the *jinetera* is a myth. She explains that the profitable fields of sex work are controlled, either by more experienced *jineteras* who take advantage of newcomers, as she herself experienced when she moved from Santa Clara to Havana at the age of 13, or by experienced women who act as a go-between for clients and charge a hefty commission for this ‘service’. Newcomers may also depend on hustlers, referred to as *chulos*, who may resort to drugs or violence to force women to work for them. The network of people who profit from prostitution includes the police. To what extent exploitation by the police is institutionalized – which was the case prior to the Revolution (Fernández Robaina 1998) – is a question I must leave unanswered. María Elena relates: “If the police pick you up, you have to give them money or go to bed with them, otherwise they will take you to the police station. If they catch you several times, then they imprison you in Villa Delicias. The policewomen there offer to set you free, but only if you continue to prostitute yourself and sell drugs to tourists. You usually consent to their proposal, so you won’t have to stay in jail. Back home at last, the husband of a *jinetera* awaits her. If you can indeed call him a ‘husband’! Sometimes I go out with the tourist and my *chulo* and tell the tourist that he is my cousin or brother. The *chulo* sells him cigars, takes him along to a *paladar* (private restaurant) and earns his money in this way. During the time that you are fucking the tourist, the *chulo* enjoys himself with your money, even inviting a friend!”

María Elena sees herself as one of the more “naïve” sex workers. She specializes in sex tourists who are looking for company during their entire vacation stay. This line of business can be profitable, but often it is not, because tourists constantly cheat these *jineteras* out of their earnings, something that María Elena has experienced several times. *Jineteras* specialized in these “staged romances” (cf. Cohen 1982; Askew 1999: 126) impersonate or act like a casual vacation acquaintance. She and others working in this way will never comment directly on the money they expect in return for their services, but María Elena reckons on 20 to 30 dollars a night plus “presents” like shoes or dresses, and after spending a week with a client, she expects a household appliance like a ventilator. She then sells most of the “presents” for cash. The articles are obtained in a roundabout way. María Elena draws attention to certain articles in stores and stresses that she is not able to afford them. She also describes at great length how poor her family is. The sex tourist then sees his payments as help for a family in need.

According to María Elena, she and other *jineteras* are not exclusively focused on immediate economic benefits. Paradoxically, she hopes that one day she will win the affection of a *turista*, and expresses this expectation indirectly. When I asked María Elena what exactly tourists were seeking in Cuban women, she answered somewhat aghast: “Sex, what else but sex? They are looking for the girl that gives them the best sex. That’s the way it is. They are in search of the sex that most pleases them. Even when you are in the company of a *turista*, he will constantly be on the lookout for somebody



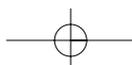
else. All they want is to be thoroughly satisfied in bed. He isn't even interested in how attractively you dance in the discotheque, or if you drink a lot of alcoholic beverages... What they're after is their own satisfaction. They don't care about how you feel."

Reality is more complex, however, as is shown by the fact that a Spanish client, after meeting María Elena repeatedly for seven years, proposed marriage and they were wed in 2003. According to her, she only married him for financial security and to enable her to travel abroad. She says she is sickened by his caresses. To satisfy her emotional needs, she lives with a Cuban mate. Quite a few *jineteras* engage in long-lasting relationships with foreign tourists and marry them to be able to emigrate. Commenting on this "open-endedness" of *jineterismo*, María Elena depicts it in a dubious light: "I know many who have married a *turista*, but they have to cultivate this relationship for at least five years. That's because the *turista* is very intelligent, don't believe that he is naive. Doesn't one always hear people saying: 'Those *turistas* are naive'? *Turistas* are definitely not naive. In front of you they always put on that nice face, but behind your back they are calculating how much you are giving them." Like her clients, María Elena vacillates between the poles of ascribing the other party the status of an object and perceiving him as a person. Both sex workers and clients therefore contribute to the paradoxical nature of *jineterismo*.

5. Conclusions

The overview of three historical periods has demonstrated how in Cuba prostitution, marriage and womanhood were modified in a global context long before the *Período Especial* of the 1990s. My research indicates that, contrary to popular discourse, women in Cuba do not readily assume the multiple roles of mother/wife/lover in accordance with the European ideology of romantic love. Instead paid sexual relations remain a pragmatic source of livelihood and an integral part of the social fabric. Nevertheless, images of a "sudden" emergence of *jineterismo* and of the autonomous *jinetera* still prevail in scholarship. These images deny continuities within the institutions and ideas related to prostitution. Studies of Cuban prostitution have also suffered from the fact that scholarly work concerning Cuba in general is politically instrumentalized (Fernández 2004: 166). This is evidenced by the fact that one of my sources (Trumbull 2001) was at the heart of a controversy between Bush and Castro in July 2004, the paper being cited by both statesmen as either proof or disproof that the socialist island was promoting or at least tolerating contemporary *jineterismo*.

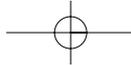
I have basically argued against such simplifications by examining prostitution, marriage and womanhood in the context of three historical periods. I subjected all of them to the same modern approach outlined in the introduction, relying on qualitative methods and focusing on the expectations and hopes as well as the actual experiences of sex workers and consumers. I favored a view of prostitution free from claims to universally shared morals, codes and experiences and paid attention to sex work as an option within the 'informal' economy in its changing social, cultural, economic and political settings (Kempadoo 1996: 80). In this way, I have attempted an analysis that assesses the particular characteristics of prostitution as an institution with both sexual and economic dimensions (O'Connell Davidson 2001: 12247). It is substantially influenced by ideas concerning gender, race and moral, which agents create and negotiate as they interact.



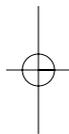
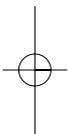
I have pointed to the possibilities that Cuban women have and to the initiatives they have taken in these fields in spite of their underprivileged position in a global context. Worldwide differences in earnings and the technology of transport have produced ideal conditions for sex tourism, in Cuba as well as in other countries. Macroeconomic forces alone, however, do not explain the changing modalities of institutions like marriage and prostitution. In the course of time, a kaleidoscope of different meanings has been ascribed to them with reference to gender and race as well as to ideas about partnership and love. Matrifocal family organization, patterns of women's work, 'informal' economy structures as well as ideas about womanhood and partnership often diverged from dominant structures and values in an important way. Cuban women have resorted to these institutions and ideas as arenas of empowerment, sometimes challenging dominant values – at other times they were not able to. In still other cases they did not even consider challenging them, reinforcing dominant ideologies. In the long run, however, they certainly decisively shaped prostitution, marriage and womanhood - to a larger extent than most others are willing to believe.

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