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Living the Brand: Authenticity and Affective Capital in Contemporary Cuban Tourism

Rebecca Ogden

Cuba's brand is hot. In recent years, tourists have been flocking to the Caribbean island in increasing numbers. Mammoth queues snaking up to the check-in desks and around baggage carousels at José Martí International airport in Havana speak firstly to Cuba's current popularity as a tourist destination and the failure of its struggling infrastructure to cope with waves of visitors. This latest boom in tourist numbers is undoubtedly correlated to the island's recent increased visibility in the media in general. Key events, including the announcements of US policy changes towards Cuba in December 2014 by President Barack Obama (and partial reversals of those changes by his successor Donald Trump), the former's 2016 visit to the island and the Rolling Stones' free concert in Havana, have sustained the oft-repeated discourse that Cuba is experiencing a moment of radical, unprecedented, and irreversible change on economic, political, and cultural levels. The idea that Cuba should be seen 'before it changes', as the dominant narrative goes, implies that it is at risk of becoming 'like everywhere else', or losing its essential authenticity. Cuba is commonly perceived as an anomaly in a globalized world of digital super-connectivity, as well as one of the last bastions of socialism. The very notion of change is adding fuel to the fire of Cuba's appeal.

Cuba's most recent tourism branding campaign, bearing the slogan 'Auténtica Cuba', strongly suggests an attempt to engage with this perception and to distinguish from competitors whose overexposure to global flows of visitors, capital and technology have apparently flattened them out, rendering them inauthentic. In particular, this chapter argues that the intimate,

(ostensibly) unposed scenes of everyday Cuban life in the campaign position a construction of authenticity as a form of competitive difference. Within the crowded marketplace of international tourism, a brand plays to a country's strengths by identifying and emphasizing distinction and singularity in its cultural and natural assets. Indeed, it may be considered especially pressing to carve a niche in the Caribbean tourism marketplace, given that the West has generally maintained a homogenous imaginary of the region (Sheller 2003; 2004). Tourism therefore represents a highly relevant context within the broader phenomenon of nation branding, in which national identity has become a competitive resource (Aronczyk 2013, 11).

Intimate and sensory experiences are valued by tourists in the broad pursuit of authenticity, just as travel to the Latin American and Caribbean regions has long been imbued with the idea of discovery, encounter, and exotic and affective potential. This chapter considers the 'Auténtica Cuba' campaign as a strategic exploitation of the island's status as a singular site of supposedly authentic, person-to-person connection in an inauthentic world. As the chapter elaborates, Cuba's unique selling point is rooted in the strategic marketing of affective capital, or in other words, the value found in intimate and interpersonal experiences. In foregrounding 'ordinary' Cubans as its stars, the campaign relies on the population to be simultaneously the object, subject, and means by which the brand is mobilized: as this chapter goes on to explain, there is evidence of a shift of the designation of nation-brand ambassadorship from official roles, such as tour guides, to the population at large. However, despite the expansion of contexts in which Cubans and tourists might realize encounters (for various ends), persistent and stringent state regulations attempt to regulate contact between them, suggesting a complex series of conflicts and contradictions behind the brand.

Affective Capital

Tourism's selective and deliberate assignation of value to certain storylines and images can be understood through the concept of symbolic capital. Latin America and the Caribbean have been depicted and consumed as sites of affective wealth, rich in the potential for the pursuit of intimate, sensory, and often sexual encounters, as numerous scholars have shown (Bandyopadhyay and Nascimento 2010; Cohen, 2010; Frohlick 2008). Indeed, as Mimi Sheller argues, "the Caribbean has been repeatedly imagined and narrated as a tropical paradise in which the land, plants, resources, bodies and cultures of its inhabitants are open to be invaded, occupied, bought, moved, used, viewed and consumed in various ways" (2003: 13). The points on this affective cartography have been historically mapped by imperial circuits of exoticization, commodification, and consumption, according to Marta Savigliano's important study (1995). For Savigliano, Argentine tango symbolizes one form of exotic capital - a raw export representing symbolic wealth in an imperial system of cultural production and consumption of Latin America by the West. Amalia Cabezas draws on and develops this conceptualization of exotic capital in her study on contemporary sex and tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic (2009), modifying it to examine how *affective* capital is extracted from the Global South and circulated in the contemporary sexual economies of these countries. From the exploitation of affect by transnational corporations in marketing narratives, to the ways in which tourism workers perform intimate forms of labor, the production and consumption of affective capital is crucial to the industries of tourism and hospitality in Latin America.

Affect becomes especially relevant when we consider the value placed on embodied feeling in individual tourists' pursuit of authenticity. Affect refers to states of body and mind,

with an emphasis placed on emotions and feelings experienced in and through the body (Tolia-Kelly 2006), and thus is used to widely describe a range of embodied feelings beyond emotions, including sexual desire. Moreover, affect has been framed as “those intensities that pass body to body...in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 1). It is partly this sense of resonance, ‘contagion’ (Probyn 2005), or ‘stickiness’ (Ahmed 2014) that distinguishes affect from concepts such as feeling or emotion. Intimate experiences that allow access to these intensities and resonances are often considered crucial to the sense of truly knowing or experiencing a place (MacCannell 1973). Trying local food or gaining entry to sites ‘off the beaten track’, for example, allow an individual to demonstrate their concern with authenticity and thus assert their self-identity as a ‘traveller’ (Pearce 1982, 31) – rather than having the much-derided status of ‘tourist’. As such, it is tourists’ desire to gaze on private ‘back spaces’ – the lives of visited populations appearing somehow more authentic than their own – that has led to the proliferation of staged authenticity, according to MacCannell (1999, 95). However, there is a distinction between the authenticity of *feeling* and the authenticity of objects (Selwyn 1996). The authenticity of objects relates to a perception of a visited site or purchased product being traditional, or produced according to local customs. However, it is also the experience of connection with locals that lends a sense of authenticity (Conran 2011; Simoni 2016; Sin 2009). Clearly, locals may be the gateway to special knowledge, customs and language. However, the point is not simply whether a touristic experience is attributable to some certifiable original, such as a Cuban *mojito* served in Ernest Hemingway's favorite bar. What also matters is how the tourist *feels*, and that they feel they are being their ‘true self’ – that they are accessing a form of existential authenticity (Wang 1999,

358). Genuine feeling emerges from the possibility to affect and be affected by an (O)ther. As we will see, the photographs of intimate portraits and scenes privileged in the ‘Auténtica Cuba’ campaign speak directly to this affective quest.

Authenticity and Affect: Cuba’s USP

To speak of economic competitiveness in tourism branding, one must first take Cuba’s rather unique political and economic context into account. Cuba’s reinsertion into the global marketplace of tourism in the 1990s occurred under dramatic and exceptional conditions. Following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the period of intense economic austerity that followed (known as the ‘Special Period’), the hard currency generated by a newly revived tourism industry constituted a fundamental source of income. Tourism was an economic safety raft which would allow the survival of the revolutionary project. A series of economic reforms emerged from extensive, urgent debate, proposing compromises that would have been considered impossible during periods of stability, and forcing an urgent reconsideration of new exports and industries to generate hard currency (Kapcia 2008, 159). Alternative export potentials such as nickel and biotechnology appeared inadequate in the face of Cuba’s enormous economic deficit. Having invested in tourism over the previous decade in tentative, measured steps, the only course for economic survival appeared to lie in the rapid expansion of the industry, predicated on Cuba’s geographical advantage, climate, and natural attractions. The development of tourism constituted the first major attempt since 1959 to project a competitive identity to the international marketplace – to practice nation branding. The Cuban context

therefore represents a unique and accelerated example of nation branding's impulse to apply the strategies and rationale of commercial branding in order to monetize cultural and territorial resources (Aronczyk 2013, 3).

Early promotional strategy was characterized by inexperience, according to my interviews with executives at the Cuban Ministerio de Turismo (Ministry of Tourism) - or MINTUR. The first major tourism campaigns in the 1990s followed long-standing, formulaic tropes of the tropics used to market rum and tobacco, such as the figure of the *mulata*. The same interviews revealed that a lack of internet access on the island during this period also hampered MINTUR's awareness of rival campaigns and thus the development of a modern, competitive marketing strategy. In the early 2000s, MINTUR's 'Viva Cuba' campaign featured photos of idyllic empty beaches; brochures made heavy reference to unspoilt and uncrowded white shorelines. Such images are a cornerstone of Caribbean tourism branding, in which the tourist is positioned as the sexual *conquistador* of virgin territory (Cohen 1995). In these representations, Cuba appeared a solid if unremarkable example of the generalized tourism marketing of Caribbean destinations as discoverable, conquerable, and possessable (Guerrón Montero 2011, 21), in turn symptomatic of a broader imaginary that links pristine landscape and an undeveloped society to sexual allure and virginity (Cohen 1995, 405).

However, in analyzing the evolution of Cuba's campaigns over the last three decades, we can see the progressive adoption of a more strategic approach that engages directly with neighboring competitors, contemporary market tendencies, and external representations. 'Auténtica Cuba', launched in 2011 by MINTUR with the input of Canadian design agency Brandworks International, is an example of this development. In contrast to the previous branding campaigns, 'Auténtica Cuba' privileged the everyday lives of 'ordinary' Cubans,

featuring a series of unposed scenes: a couple on their wedding day (figure 3.1), children playing in the street, musicians and dancers at a party, and spectators enjoying a baseball game. The promotional video released as part of the ‘Auténtica Cuba’ campaign features a montage of Cuban faces; the individuals featured are not posing workers in official tourism contexts, but farmers, fisherman, ballet dancers, school children, and general members of the population. In its selection of recognizably Cuban cultural scenes and locations, this new branding strategy appeared to tacitly recognize the outside world’s growing fascination with all things Cuban – what has elsewhere been described as the ‘Buena Vista Socialisation’ phenomenon (Behar 2002), or the renewed appreciation for Cuban culture aided by the global success of Wim Wenders’s *son* documentary (1999). No-one could confuse the photographs used in the campaign with those of another Caribbean competitor; the slogan (even the choice not to translate the Spanish phrase) denoted a decision to emphasize singularity. Gone were the typically Caribbean landscape shots of virgin sands and palm trees, and in their place featured the identifying characteristics of Cuban life, replete with distinctive *almendrones* (vintage American cars), *son*, salsa, pastel-painted colonial architecture, and tobacco fields.

<figure 3.1 near here>

The campaign responded to a more specific interest in Cuba, based on the notion that the country is an exception to tourism’s broader ‘McDonaldization’ (Ritzer 1998) – that is, the rapid expansion into all areas of the globe of chain restaurants, shops, and other businesses characterized by a uniformly recognizable aesthetic and service. There are still no ‘golden arches’ or equivalent franchises in Cuba, and the law continues to limit the extent of foreign

investment, especially in the tourism sector. Furthermore, Cuba has a special nostalgic value as a place ‘frozen in time’ (Babb 2011; Scarpaci and Portela 2009), a view which generally hinges on the island’s relative political, geographic, and cultural isolation since the early 1960s, basic telecommunications, and still patchy internet access. Government restrictions and US embargo-related constraints concerning infrastructure and freedom of information have resulted in an uneven, staggered development of internet access on the island. Despite the very recent creation of Wi-Fi hotspots in parks and near bus stops in Havana, figures from 2016 indicated that only 5% of Cubans have internet access at home (BBC 2016). Moreover, using the internet in public hotspots is still expensive in relation to local wages. According to Cristina Venegas, Cuba is an example of a context in which ‘new’ and ‘old’ technologies coexist (2010, 118): old infrastructure is used out of necessity and modernization is realized through various methods of *resolver* – the uniquely Cuban practice of surviving or ‘getting by’ through ad hoc means. This aspect of Cuban reality marks a contrast with competitors such as Mexico and the Dominican Republic, who comparatively appear as modern, developed, and digitally connected, with a great degree of visibility on the well-beaten tourist tracks. Despite the advantages of such mod-cons within a competitive tourist market, contemporary narratives frequently frame technology as a burden, as something from which it is necessary or desirable to escape. Indeed, one of Cuba’s unique appeals is that it is one of the few places left in the world that is untainted by the apparent ‘burden’ of digital connectivity. The Cuban and Canadian designers of ‘Auténtica Cuba’ were keenly aware of this external perception: at its launch, Brandworks’ Michael Clancy revealed that their first inspiration for the campaign came from a line in an Lonely Planet guidebook, which described Cuba as “one of the last truly unspoiled countries.”¹

Tapping into this tourist motivation to escape modern life in general and its technological aspects in particular has made authenticity a touchstone of marketing approaches in Latin America and the Caribbean, with contemporary examples including Costa Rica's 'No Artificial Ingredients' campaign. Central to such marketing tactics and the type of tourist practices they target is access to intimate spaces, which are contrasted with official host-guest contact zones governed by the dynamics of servility and economic exchange. Tourists instead prize the opportunity, as Polly Patullo observes, "to be invited to a private party; to be given fruit from a yard or help with directions; to be shown around a school or join in a game of dominoes" (1996, 146). It is the everyday contexts of scenes such as streets, fields, and homes – and not plush hotel lobbies – that appear in the photography used in the 'Auténtica Cuba' campaign. By foregrounding intimate settings and unposed portraits of 'ordinary' Cubans (those who are not working in official tourism contexts), the campaign engages with a common perception of the population as the gatekeepers to what Cuba is *really like* – a matter of increasing importance to visitors. One explanation for this preoccupation is the external perception of the revolutionary government as censorial and repressive, making it hard to access the 'real' Cuba. We might also conclude that Cuba's relative isolation from global flows since 1959 has lent it a mysterious or unknowable air, heightening its appeal but further fueling the concern with authenticity.

Moreover, and as mentioned previously, the touristic quest for authenticity does not center exclusively on the touring of and gazing on authentic objects, access to which is brokered by local 'hosts'. Rather, the pursuit is underpinned by a desire to experience authentic feeling intimacy and immediacy. As an extreme example of deferred technological development, Cuba seemingly offers unique opportunities for the type of real human contact lost to residents of advanced capitalist countries, seemingly isolated from each other by ubiquitous device screens, a

chance for “unmediated contact with the Other in a hypermediated world” (Cohen 2010, 154). A clear interconnection therefore appears between Cuba’s status as untouched and unspoilt, its staggered and uneven development of digital technologies, and its affective promise of authentic encounter. It is this interconnection that is at the heart of the ‘Auténtica Cuba’ brand message. Implicit in this message, as the next section elaborates, is the enrollment of the population in a system of ambassadorship: Cubans themselves are at once the object, subject, and means by which the brand of affective capital is mobilized.

Being the Brand, Living the Brand

Branding experts remind us of the indispensability of individuals in upholding the message of the brand (Anholt 2007). For Anholt, it is both essential and effective to the branding project if the population is motivated by “benign national ambition, and instinctively seizes every opportunity to tell the world about its country” (2007, 105). Tourism, of course, is a context in which the articulation of national and regional identity by employees is highly managed. Actors in formal and informal tourism spaces mediate and normalize stereotypes and interpretations (albeit often unintentionally) through their engagement with guests: these interactions, or *petits récits*, coalesce to form a general representation of place (Hollinshead 2004, 37). Just as the expression of an organization’s corporate identity relies on its personnel, tourism’s celebration of selected myths and its suppression of unwelcome narratives are sustained by its workers (Hollinshead 1999, 7). The task of ‘living the brand’ – of embodying expected (positive) traits and perpetuating a certain image - falls mainly to tourism industry workers. It should not be

surprising therefore that those working in ‘official’ contexts – that is, at hotel desks or as tour guides - typically perform scripted types of work (Aguilar and Marten 2010).

During the early influx of foreign visitors in the 1990s, tourists’ principal contact with the visited population was principally with Cubans working in the industry. Tourism spaces such as hotels and beaches were demarcated and policed, excluding Cubans and provoking accusations that the government was creating a ‘tourist apartheid’ (Espino 2000; Roland 2006). A major factor in these decisions was a generalized anxiety about the social and political impact of tourists’ contact with the visited population and a perceived threat to revolutionary ideals (Sánchez and Adams, 2008: 32). This anxiety seemed to be justified by the emergence of the practice of *jineterismo*, the figurative (and literal) ‘riding’ of tourists ranging from touting private restaurants and homestays to prostitution, the latter being an especially sharp thorn in the government’s side. These developments were particularly concerning for the government because of the intense global scrutiny and conjecture that characterized this period of the Revolution. Tourism opened the island up to a greater degree of visibility, and therefore increased scrutiny, but also held the potential to generate international sympathy: museum displays and videos played on tour buses directed tourists’ attention to the country’s unjust treatment by the US (Sánchez and Adams 2008), for example. Tour guides, trained by the state in specialized vocational institutions, were therefore at the front line of early brand management, responsible for counteracting negative perceptions and emphasizing positive ones.

Vocational training directed guides to enact, perform, and embody a positive image of the country and its political system. Consider, for example, the opening paragraph of a 1997 study commissioned by state operator, Havanatur, regarding the ideal profile of the tour guide:

Being a guide... is not a task which all are able to perform, because, in addition to the necessary academic preparation, it is necessary to have an excellent attitude regarding personal and behavioral qualities, that is, to have no personality defects or vices that may impair the performance of their work, a high spirit of service and the desire to show our country. A guide with a poor attitude regarding his work will develop a poor tourist product... or de-motivate the tourist by an inadequate projection and/or interpretation of our society.²

This paragraph confirms the key role that tour guides play in creating a positive experience for the tourist as well as a positive portrayal of the nation. At this time in Cuba tour guides also had to contend with the relative infancy of the industry, the inadequate infrastructure, and the reliance on tourism to bolster the failing economy: the document reiterates that guides should “demonstrate social recognition in the current conditions from which tourism in this country is developing, alongside its overriding importance to the economy”.³ The year before the report was written has latterly been considered the most extreme of the crisis. In parallel, guides’ responsibility to represent the nation in a positive light intensified as troubling social realities came to a head, including sex tourism, which emerged from a combination of general economic hardship, a debilitated state, and the new opportunities provided by tourism. Increased attention on these factors meant that it was expected that guides would positively reinforce the image of the nation, and in particular, the political system, by highlighting the Revolution’s *logros sociales*, or social benefits, such as low rates of crime and illiteracy.

Anthropologist Florence Babb notes that Cuban tour guides continue to negotiate this form of brand ambassadorship in fielding questions of a politically sensitive nature (2011). One

of the ways that they do this, Babb shows, is through light cynicism and humor (2011, 57–58). From my own observations of guided tours in 2012 and 2017, I witnessed that guides dealt with foreigners’ questions regarding the social contradictions of tourism, including the exacerbation of wealth disparity, by drawing on emotional resources, such as tongue-in-cheek humor. Interviews with Cuban tour guides conducted as part of this research also revealed that improvising through affective means – humor, playfulness, and cajoling – was frequently required to compensate for material limitations at short notice, which were frequent in the early 1990s. For example, one former guide explained to me that she often relied on her charm and humor when scheduled tour-bus routes were postponed due to failed petrol supplies. This compensatory function of affective capital to overcome difficult material and political realities is evident in both the day-to-day dealings between hosts and guests and in the macro, discursive level of the campaigns (‘we may not have infrastructure, but at least we are authentic’).

It is clear, then, that affect is a key component in the work of nation brand ambassadorship. Beyond the exigencies of education and training, being an ambassador for the nation requires qualities rooted in affect. Cuban tour guides are trained to exhibit, embody, and reproduce emotions through their labor in ways which support a positive image of the nation. This form of emotional labor – to use Arlie Hochschild’s term (1983) – involves publicly observable facial and bodily displays of good feeling: tour guides should “always maintain a smiley and friendly expression towards clients, in tune with the hospitality and human warmth *which characterizes the people they represent*” (emphasis added).⁴ The circulation of affective capital involved in this work is a reflection of the positive traits of the wider population as open, hospitable, and friendly to foreigners, which are normalized through texts such as these.

Tour guides ought to be viewed as important brand ambassadors, given the extended periods of time they may spend with tourist groups, but changes since the 1990s have meant that they are no longer the exclusive points of host-guest contact. Tourist ‘contact zones’ (Pratt 1992) now extend far beyond the resort enclaves of Varadero. This is largely due to the sanctioning of a number of private businesses directed towards tourists as part of a significant program of economic reforms under Raúl Castro since 2007. For example, private guesthouses or *casas particulares* are now extremely common, with Air BnB jumping on the lucrative bandwagon and recruiting properties since April 2015; the website now also hosts adverts for fee-charging experiences such as cocktail-making and salsa dance classes with ‘genuine’ Cubans. New mobile apps Junky and A la Mesa, which direct tourists towards private guesthouses and restaurants, are further manifestations of the new markets opened up by dual developments in policy and technology. Divisions between informal and formal sectors are less and less evident, both in terms of the restrictive mapping of tourist areas, and state controls over the individuals who occupy them. Indeed, the idea of the ‘informal’ sector has changed considerably since early scholarship charted its emergence as an apparent vanguard of resistance (Jackiewicz and Bolster 2003). The ‘Auténtica Cuba’ campaign reflects these shifts, symbolizing a bending towards contemporary tourist demands for intimate and unregulated contact with Cubans, and so legitimizing that contact, in turn.

Behind the Brand: Challenges, Conflicts, Contradictions

The specific context of Cuba described in this chapter presents particular challenges to the applicability of nation branding practices and offers interesting avenues of further

investigation. For example, branding practitioners insist that the brand has to be enacted on the ground – ‘lived’ – in order to be cohesive and successful (Anholt 2007; Dinnie 2015, 72), underscoring the significant but under-emphasized role of affect within the nation brand project. However, how this is actually enacted, by whom, and according to what ‘scripts’ is not clear. Despite the emphasis that this chapter places on the role of marketing narratives to mold or confirm expectations of intimate experiences and encounters, outside the world of tour-guide training materials there is no official protocol for this kind of work; expectations between hosts and guests are inevitably navigated face to face, in an affectively-charged but ad-hoc, spontaneous manner.⁵ An ethnographic approach to this line of enquiry might open up the possibility of examining how and to what extent Cubans can themselves benefit from the brand’s manipulation of affective capital for their own ends (as entrepreneurial homestay owners, for example).

Certainly, it can be argued that tourists’ current interest in ‘authentic Cuba’ and the associated marketing approach chosen by MINTUR allows Cubans to actively enroll themselves as ambassadors – or even as ‘affective entrepreneurs’ – for their own financial and personal gain. In the 1990s, when basic necessities were scarce and hard currency was king, contact with tourists meant the possibility of access to tips and gifts of toiletries and clothes. For *casa particular* owners, the financial incentive of renting a room remains extremely high (currently up to \$30 convertible pesos a night, plus extra potential income from meals, laundry, and bicycle hire). Yet despite these advantages there are also multiple problematic implications. The message of intimacy legitimizes tourist expectations to inhabit intimate spaces, and to ‘go native’. However, asymmetries in economic agency and mobility between hosts and guests continues to be striking, even if Cuba has seen some economic recovery since its worst moments of austerity.

Tourists cannot ‘go native’ because they have the economic advantage and mobility to enter and leave the dynamic. As such, the complex, emotional work that is required to smooth over the colonial underpinning of the encounter, and naturalize its sense of intimacy, calls on affective skill sets in the host (and perhaps also to a lesser degree, the tourist). The tourist-host relationship is inherently colonial: tourists’ quest to experience intimacy (rather than to confront these indicators of inequality and their associated bad feelings) can be critically understood as an attempt to eclipse the structural inequalities on which the encounter rests. By seeking and satisfying emotions through encounter in ways that feel emotionally authentic on a personal level – an attitude that might be described as ‘going native’ – the tourist is able to avoid questioning the larger inequalities that allow them to occupy that contact zone in the first place (Cravatte and Chabloz 2008).

Such questions are further complicated when the role of brand ambassador is symbolically passed on to the population in general, and not enacted by paid representatives of a corporation or government agency, as this chapter has discussed. Many branding experts agree that the population is essential to conveying the brand in a successful way. Yet this enrolling of citizens into brand ambassadorship can be interpreted as a somewhat top-down, repressive model. In fact, common interpretations of the return of tourism in Cuba cast the state as monolithic: either stifling citizens’ engagement with new markets, or seemingly discarding social equity for foreign capital. In turn, Cubans’ participation in the affective economies of tourism is too rigidly categorized as a defiant vanguard of capitalism or too easily explained through discourses of vibrancy and inventiveness. Further research drawing on ethnographic methods would be instrumental in teasing out the reality that lies between these constructions and in expanding our understanding of the enactment of branding practices on the ground.

It is already evident, however, that the marketing of affective capital in the ‘Auténtica Cuba’ brand gets caught up in various snags when it is transposed to ‘real life’. There are clear contradictions between its message of intimacy and the government’s continued efforts to monitor and regulate host-guest contact in various ways. Stop-and-search policing, for example, is not yet a thing of the past: police still make random requests for identification to Cubans who are seen fraternizing with tourists, particularly if they are dark-skinned, as I witnessed during two research trips to Havana in 2017. While foreigners may now choose between an increasing range of homestay options, the owners of these private guesthouses are still subject to exacting administrative regulations, as well as substantial taxes. Furthermore, accusations that tourism has engendered a social and racial apartheid have once again come to the fore following reports that black Cubans are turned away from Havana nightclubs where patronage of white tourists has increased (Jiménez Enoa, 2017). A disconnect appears: in order for a brand based on the affective capital generated by host-guest contact to succeed, the creators of that brand (the State) must relinquish some control over the way that those narratives and images are engaged with on the ground.

Moreover, Cuba’s agency in determining its branding aspirations is tempered by the interventions of external perceptions, in addition to the fact that during times of economic crisis and uncertainty, the need to compete may override alternative aspirations regarding how the nation is seen from outside. For instance, the tourism campaigns’ appropriation of affective capital from Latin America reinforces global power relations, confirming certain sites as rich stores of affective capital but impoverishing alternative aspirations to be seen as modern and forward-facing. As this chapter has argued, the campaign’s positioning of Cubans as the gateway to authenticity is directly correlated to the concept of human intimacy and immediacy in a world

that has been rendered impersonal through digital hyper-connection. In commissioning ‘Auténtica Cuba’, MINTUR is clearly responding to contemporary interest in Cuba as the world’s last untouched and uncorrupted corner, a so-called time-warp where technology can be escaped and human contact may be rediscovered. Yet there is a resonant irony in this nostalgic framing, not least given that the transatlantic slave trade positioned the Caribbean firmly ‘at the origin of the plot of Western modernity’ (Sheller 2003, 2). Moreover, it has been largely through the Internet that Cuba has been able to capitalize on the global fascination with the country; the accelerated expansion of tourism in Cuba would not have been possible without the foundation of telecommunications (Venegas 2010). In the early days, engagement with digital technologies, particularly within the visible areas of Havana’s hotels, became a marker of Cuba’s distinction and competitive, modern edge (Venegas 2010, 101). The ‘Auténtica Cuba’ brand clearly and deliberately tells a rather different story.

Despite these various concessions and contradictions, we may in fact interpret the extended queues at José Martí international airport as subtle evidence of the government’s reassertion of agency and control. MINTUR’s latest price hike of hotel rooms to quell recent surges of tourists has been described to me by the manager of a state tourism agency as a means of applying *frenos* (‘brakes’) to what has presumably been the *desenfrenado* – frenzied and rapid – growth of the tourism industry. Certainly, one intended outcome of applying the brakes in this way is to allow time for the flagging tourism infrastructure to catch up with demand. But these measures also reveal the government’s desire to control the speed of tourism development according to its own terms, and to mediate tourism’s reach into Cuban social, cultural, and economic life. The ways that it attempts to broker host-guest interactions also hint at this desire to continue to claim back control. Concessions to market trends and tourists’ desires are

tempered by political and social objectives within the nation, and vice versa. The conflicts and contradictions described here are evidence of a complex and often disharmonious dynamic between branders, brand ambassadors, and brand audiences, between desires, imperatives and drawbacks.

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¹ <http://travelindustrytoday.com/2010-07-05-autentica-cuba::10733>

² "El ser guía...no es una labor para la que todas sean adeptas, pues, además de la preparación académica necesaria, se requiere tener una excelente actitud en lo referente a las cualidades personales y de conducta, es decir no tener fallas de personalidad, o vicios que puedan menoscabar el desempeño de su trabajo, un alto espíritu de servicio y el deseo de mostrar nuestro país. Un guía con una deficiente actitud con respecto a su trabajo desarrollará un deficiente producto turístico...o bien desmotivar al turista por una inadecuada proyección y/o interpretación de nuestra sociedad ('Experiencias de Havanatur en la formación de guías de turismo: Recomendaciones para la conformación de futuros programas de formación y recalificación'. All translations author's own.

³ "La necesidad de su reconocimiento social en las condiciones actuales en que nuestro país desarrolla la actividad turística con un peso preponderante en la economía".

⁴ "mantener siempre una expresión sonriente y afable ante los clientes, que esté en correspondencia con la hospitalidad y el calor humano, *característica del pueblo que representa*" (my emphasis, my translation).

⁵ See, for example, Hazel Tucker's work on the subtle negotiations between hosts and guest in Turkey (2009).