

UTILIZING INTERSECTIONALITY TO ANALYZE SOCIAL DIVERSITY IN CUBAN SELF-EMPLOYMENT

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Between 2010 and 2015, legal self-employment in Cuba (known locally as *cuentapropismo*) grew more than three-fold (Feinberg 2016; Ritter and Henken 2015). Now, more than 500,000 Cubans are licensed workers in 123 categories of small-business (e.g., food and clothing sales, accommodation rentals geared towards foreigners, tech/commodity repairs, etc.), a historic shift in a strict state socialist economy (Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas 2015). Scholars have heralded this transformation as critical in growing Cuba's suffering economy (Pérez Villanueva and Torres Pérez 2015; Pérez Villanueva 2016; Mesa-Lago et al. 2016; Feinberg 2016). *Cuentapropismo* has also become a hot topic for scholarship on Cuba's emergent mixed-market economy (see, e.g., Brundenius and Torres Pérez 2014; Díaz Fernández and Echevarría León 2015; Mesa-Lago et al. 2016; Ritter and Henken 2015; Romanò and Echevarria-Léon 2015). However, statistics often conceal the variety of experiences that exist for a diverse group of self-employed Cubans, and recent scholarship generally overlooks how growing inequities and inequalities intersect and shape social diversity in this emergent economic sector.

Based on interconnected power systems (e.g., racism, patriarchy, heterosexism, etc.), as well as trends based on age or geographic locations, I argue that social and demographic factors intersect and overlap in Cuban society—thereby shaping the opportunities and challenges that face a diverse group of self-employed Cubans. I use theories of “intersectionality” as a critical research strategy to pursue the nuances in the social diversity of *cuentapropismo* and the variety of

cuentapropista experiences that emerge from various intersecting axes of social differences. Theoretical and methodological approaches to intersectionality suggest that social differences, such as race, biological gender, and sexuality, are not mutually exclusive but rather relational, interconnected, and interactive. Intersectionality also centers on contextualized systems of power and reveals how inequities and inequalities give meaning to and in that way produce social differences, and how unequal circumstances and injustices mark and codify social experiences. When applied to the study of self-employment, the premises of intersectionality suggest that people who belong to different social categories experience societal conditions (e.g., state policies or resource scarcity) in different ways, thereby contributing to intersectional variations in business experiences. And yet, intersectional approaches to self-employment are rare (Romero & Valdez, 2016; Valdez, 2011, 2016). To address this void, this paper uses ethnographic data with its attention to the details of everyday life in order to identify salient axes of diversity in self-employment and to describe nuanced experiences in personal business operations from a diverse range of subject position.

The paper's purpose is to explain how intersectionality may be used to analyze the range of experiences (some positive, some negative) that exist for an array of licensed *cuentapropistas*. I begin with an overview of intersectionality and its usage as a critical analytical process. Then, I situate my own ethnographic research within the literature that documents the recent growth in the inequalities in Cuba. Specifically,

I draw on my observations in the field—across six research trips since summer 2016—as well as social science scholarship since 1990 to outline a few axes of social differences that shape social diversity in *cuentapropismo*. In the conclusion, I address some new changes in state policies and regulations that mold *cuentapropismo* in Cuba, and how these changes impact experiences and outcomes for a diverse group of *cuentapropistas*.

“INTERSECTIONALITY” AND ITS POTENTIAL AS A CRITICAL ANALYTIC TOOL

The basic premise of intersectionality is that individuals are comprised of separate identities (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, etc.) that, when intersected or overlapped, indicate the complex oppressions, challenges, or privileges they face. For example, black lesbian women face tremendous oppression across the world because social prejudices typically favor whiteness over blackness, heterosexuality over other sexualities, and men over women, and institutionalized discrimination exists along lines of racism, heteronormativity, and patriarchy. The roots of intersectionality come from 19th century feminist theories formulated by women-of-color who, during the fight for women’s suffrage in the U.S., “dispute[d] the prototypicality of white women’s experiences in defining women’s oppression” (Carastathis 2016, 15). Indeed, Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper—women’s suffrage activists—helped articulate that Black women’s empowerment required/s the contestation of both racism and sexism (Collins and Bilge 2016; Cooper 1892; Truth [1851] 1981). Moreover, as Hancock explains, “intersectionality theory to date has emphasized [...] the tremendous variation within categories such as ‘Blackness’ or ‘womanhood’” (2007, 66). Thus, it is insufficient to suppose that black experiences are universal and, instead, must be analyzed according to other intersections like gender and sexuality because these intersections produce an array of differences within the social category of blackness.

Since its first articulations, diversity research has transitioned from examining single social differences (e.g., race or gender) to examining multiple social

differences as isolated phenomena (e.g., race and gender) to intersectional studies that examine the interaction of social differences (e.g., race interacts with gender) (Hancock 2007; Marfelt 2016). Power is inherent to these interactions and highlights the interpersonal domain of intersecting social differences, as well as the advantages and disadvantages in each interaction (Collins and Bilge 2016).

Intersectionality traces categories to intersections, and vice versa, a process which can yield tremendous complexity. To make this process manageable, I use an “intra-categorical” approach:

A key way that complexity is managed in [intra-categorical] narratives is by focusing on the single group represented by the individual. How does this minimize complexity? Individuals usually share the characteristics of only one group or dimension of each category defining their social position. The intersection of identities takes place through the articulation of a single dimension of each category. That is, the “multiple” in these intersectional analyses refers not to dimensions within categories but to dimensions across categories (McCall 2005, p. 1781).

In other words, intra-categorical approaches analyze intersecting factors within specific social groupings, paying attention to how social differences intersect and create a diversity of outcomes for members of said group. Indeed, *cuentapropistas* are a social group and, thus, I am interested in how social differences shape outcomes within a variety of *cuentapropista* experiences. I utilize a set of “anchor points” to define the specific social differences I am interested in and which further guide the data collection and analysis processes (Christensen and Jensen 2012, 112). To date, I have identified race, gender, sexuality, age, and business location as salient social differences that shape the current socio-historical context of *cuentapropismo*. There are certainly other social differences, like ability/disability, which shape *cuentapropista* outcomes. However, to date, I have not observed these differences in the field and are therefore left out of my analysis. When layered with structural conditions like state policies and regulations or social stigmas and discrimination, my specific anchor points and intra-categorical research approach help identify and describe the ways that social differences intersect and influence the capacity for *cuentapropistas* to mobilize

the resources that foster business success (Valdez 2016; Romero and Valdez 2016).

SALIENT SOCIAL DIFFERENCES AND SOCIAL DIVERSITY IN CUENTAPROPISMO

Cuentapropismo has grown amidst an array of domestic and international political economic reforms. These include Cuban policy shifts that encourage more foreign investment in tourism infrastructure, permission for Cubans to privately own and sell homes and automobiles, and an increase in foreign remittances after the U.S. government removed limits to the amount of money people could send from the U.S. to Cuba. These reforms ostensibly enhance opportunities for a diverse group of *cuentapropistas*. For example, more foreign remittances allow Cubans better resources to buy or fix up homes or automobiles, which can be used to attract the increasing number of foreign clientele visiting the island more with progress in tourism infrastructure. However, certain policies also hinder and constrain *cuentapropismo*. The Cuban state bars most wholesale markets (Ritter and Henken 2015). Cubans are often denied state-financed credit opportunities (Mesa-Lago et al., 2016). And, Cuban state policies prohibit directly importing commercial items to sell in the non-state sector, constraining access to material resources and creating unfair competition with lower state prices (Castro Morales and Sánchez Serra 2014).

Cuban state discourse suggests that their policies and regulations maintain equity. However, inequalities continue to grow since the disappearance of the Soviet trading bloc in 1990, and recent political economic reforms are contributing to the growth of social and demographic inequities, particularly with regards to race. For example, the majority of Cubans living abroad are white and disproportionately send remittances to white Cubans (Hansing 2017; Cleland 2017, 146). Tourism employers also exclude many Afro-descendant Cubans because they supposedly lack *buena presencia* (good appearance) (de la Fuente 2001b). Consequently, Cubans of more visible African descent disproportionately represent public aspects of the informal economy—like street hustling or sex work—and are policed as such (see, e.g., Cabezas 2009; Roland 2011).

The expanded racialization of inequality in Cuba impacts *cuentapropista* outcomes in several important ways. First, recent research in Cuba acknowledges that the greatest opportunities for social mobility revolve around personal social networks, and *cuentapropistas* with stronger or more reliable social networks receive more aid to develop their businesses (Romanò and Echevarria-Léon 2015). Per my own observations, stronger social networks almost always lead to more opportunities for employment in lucrative private businesses. While the Revolution brought important advancements for racial equity (e.g., more opportunities for black Cubans to access more prestigious professional positions), the combination of disproportionate remittance patterns and past housing trends that gave white Cubans better access to contemporary spaces of lucrative *cuentapropismo*, leave many darker skinned Cubans without the strong social networks needed to operate lucrative *cuentapropista* ventures. Secondly, recent studies show that people who work in more lucrative private businesses—like home rentals or small restaurants—are markedly whiter (Hernández 2017; Gámez Torres 2017). This is most obviously because more lucrative businesses are in areas where the general population is whiter. However, considering hiring trends in tourism, which coalesce around the notion of good appearance, we can also glean that hiring trends in *cuentapropismo* also indicate a preference towards a particular phenotype.

While the racialization of inequality in Cuba is undeniable and increasingly important, there are additional social differences which shape specific *cuentapropista* experiences. Indeed, there are unequal age patterns of private sector employment. While 31% (and growing) of total licenses are held by young persons (-ages 17–25) (Mesa-Lago et al. 2016, 33), and more lucrative ventures geared towards tourism are hiring younger employees at higher rates (Hernández 2017), the vast majority of private businesses are owned by people over 30 (Mesa-Lago et al. 2016). According to a business consultant who works with *cuentapropistas* in Cuba (name omitted for confidentiality), the most lucrative ventures in Cuba—often requiring a staggering \$200,000 USD or more in investment—are owned by people age 40–55. This

complements observations by Díaz-Briquets (2014) and Pérez-López & Díaz-Briquets (2006) who found that Cubans over 50 were receiving the most remittances—better positioning them to own and grow their businesses. As for older Cubans (60+), researchers (including myself) have found that private sector work can prove exhausting because of the long hours and a constant search for resources (Strug, 2017).

This is important to dwell on for a moment. The Cuban population is aging at a rapid rate, which is an effect of higher life expectancy, persistent low fertility, and high emigration rates (Díaz-Briquets 2015). Currently, Cubans over age 60 make up 20 percent of the population, and will make up more than 30 percent by 2030 (Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas 2012). The majority of older workers (60+) work for the state, with salaries that often do not cover the costs of basic needs (Brundenius and Torres Pérez 2014). Social security pensions have lost significance because of rising food prices and limitations in the ration system (Mesa-Lago and Pérez-López 2013). While the private sector is a viable alternative source of income for this cohort, when older Cubans do open their own businesses they often do so in small-scale operations like phone card sales or small-scale cafeterias because these operations are less physically demanding. However, attracting a consistent clientele stream can be difficult because of oversaturation in these specific types of businesses. Some of these owners opened a second venture in the same location (i.e., selling phone cards while also selling small food items). However, reforms in the last year have unfortunately disallowed Cubans from having multiple *cuentapropista* licenses, forcing these business owners to close one of their operations and thereby affecting their client base.

Biological gender is another category with divergent experiences in *cuentapropismo*. Currently, 34% (and growing) of the self-employment licenses are held by women—with a clear concentration on more “feminine occupations” such as manicurist or nanny (Díaz Fernández and Echevarría León 2015). According to some sources, women who work in higher end restaurants are often young and without children—

revealing certain discriminations in Cuba’s private sector (Hernández 2017). And, even though new regulations directly address workplace discrimination (see conclusion), gendered social expectations continue to present challenges for Cuban women, particularly those who are mothers or wives/domestic partners.

Scholars have documented socially constructed gender expectations of feminine domestic responsibilities across the Caribbean, where women often face second or even third shifts as their work and private lives conflate (see, e.g., Barrow, 1996; Freeman, 2000). Despite efforts to redistribute domestic responsibilities more equitably during the Revolution (see Safa 1995), Cuban women are often still expected to manage household duties. As one self-employed woman’s husband told his son, “tú sabes, en esta casa, tu [*mamá*] *hace todo*” (you know, in this house, your mother does everything), explaining to me later that his wife cooked, cleaned, cared for children (frequently hers and the neighbors’ at the same time), and shopped, all the while trying to maintain a small-scale food sales operation out of her own kitchen. While a second or third shift is common for many Cuban women, in this ethnographic example, “third-shift” is even an understatement.

Sexuality is another important mode of social diversity. Non-normative sexual identities (e.g., homosexuality or bisexuality) have been oppressed by both the government (during the Revolution) and broader society (Stout 2014). In some instances, this oppression has caused homosexual and bisexual Cubans to ostracize themselves from society in an attempt to discover “spaces of autonomy” (Allen 2011, 97). And yet, in these cases, underlying scenarios of stigma, discrimination, and marginalization may have actually encouraged alternative income generating practices and possibly produced certain levels of (informal) training in self-employment. According to an entrepreneurial adviser in Havana (name omitted for confidentiality), discrimination and marginalization have driven lesbian women, in particular, to search for incomes outside of state-sector employment, where they often face rampant harassment based along lines of heteronormativity and patriarchy.

Auto-ostracization can create a sort of niche market for some *cuentapropistas*. However, more often the case is that overarching scenarios of marginalization, discrimination, and stigma prevent many “non-normative” people from full participation in *cuentapropismo*.

Location is perhaps the most obvious factor shaping self-employment outcomes in Cuba. A business’s location determines its access to clients and potential for growth. In Cuba, if a business is in a tourism zone or an area where it can access visitors with means (e.g., Cubans visiting from abroad) the business is more likely to generate an influx of revenue/profit. If the business is in a more impoverished or peripheral area the prospective clientele is less likely to contribute substantially to the growth of the business, even if they do help maintain its operation.

While the previous discussion describes some of the more salient social differences that shape *cuentapropismo*, intersectionality helps discover greater complexity in it, and how some axes of social diversity shape certain outcomes. There are too many intersections to cover in this paper. Instead, to make the case for an intersectional approach to the study of *cuentapropismo*, I describe three different intersections of race, gender, sexuality, age, and location and their potential effects on *cuentapropista* experiences. The following section expands on the separate differences listed above and demonstrates how *cuentapropistas* face nuanced diversity depending on how various social factors intersect and interact.

OUTCOMES OF INTERSECTING SOCIAL FACTORS WITHIN CUENTAPROPISMO

Race and Location

The axis of race and location is an important intersection for *cuentapropismo*, producing both opportunities and challenges for an array of *cuentapropistas*. Looking specifically at Havana’s metropolitan area, the areas of the city that are in better condition are whiter (e.g., municipalities: Plaza and Playa). This is historically contingent as structural changes in the early 1900s attracted wealthier and whiter Cubans to these areas. Specifically, after Cuba gained independence in 1902, new infrastructure encouraged wealthier (whiter) Cubans to move from congested

neighborhoods in the city’s core to more upscale and spacious neighborhoods like Vedado (municipality Plaza) and Miramar (municipality Playa). Thus, whiter Cubans who live in these upscale neighborhoods are better placed to engage in the most lucrative contemporary forms of *cuentapropismo*, namely rental of rooms in their homes or small restaurants called *paladares*. Poorer and darker skinned residents are often concentrated in sectioned housing in central zones—known as *solares*—that are not conducive for private, home-operated businesses.

Large scale housing projects, built during the 1970s, also added to the racialized residential patterns of housing in Cuba, as well as contemporary racial patterns in *cuentapropismo*. To end homelessness and eradicate slum areas, populated mostly by black people, the government constructed large housing projects on the outskirts of Havana, where former slum residents were relocated, leading to physical marginality for many black Cubans. According to Eckstein, “[The housing projects are] large, isolated, and impersonal, and some distance from where most people can find work. The prefabricated apartment units do not allow residents to modify their dwellings as their family needs change and their income allows, or to easily use their quarters for income-generating rental and commercial purposes” (2003, 159).

The outcomes of these housing trends are two-fold. First, black Cubans are overrepresented in areas with the worst housing conditions. As such, prior housing trends force many black Cubans to operate more public-facing *mobile* ventures (e.g., street vending or bicycle taxis) if they wish to legally access coveted foreign currency. In turn, mobile ventures can subject black Cubans to more surveillance, adding to the persecution they already face based on racial prejudices (see below).

Second, and a possible but rare opportunity, is that while black Cubans are marginalized based on past housing trends, some black spaces have become “authentic” cultural centers which regularly attract tourists. For example, Callejón de Hamel, a section of a predominately black neighborhood called Cayo Hueso located in municipality Centro Habana, has become what Lonely Planet and Trip Adviser describe

as a “high temple of Afro-Cuban culture.” That is, this small alley located between Havana Vieja and Vedado (two epicenters of Cuban tourism today) has itself become a popular tourism destination, common for people who are interested in observing Afro-cultural or even religious events. Indeed, *Santurismo*, a form of religious tourism centered on Santería, an African-derived religion in Cuba, draws a large number of religious practitioners as well as tourists who are interested in the “mysterious” elements of this “exotic” religion (see Hagedorn 2001). As such, *Santurismo* and Callejón de Hamel both coincide with what Jean and John Comaroff refer to as “the empowerment of culture.” That is, “in the case of ethnic groups, [the empowerment of culture] is frankly associated with finding something essentially their own and theirs alone, something of their essence, to sell. In other words, a brand” (2009, 15). This so-called brand has enabled many Cubans the ability to access cultural resources that entice clientele and self-employed people who live in or nearby Cayo Hueso can generate income from visitors, especially during the Sunday rumba (a weekly event focused on Afro-Cuban rhythms/dance). Callejón de Hamel has also become so common on the tourism circuit that home owners are finding great success utilizing the cultural center as a tool to rent their living quarters to foreigners. In fact, a quick keyword search in AirBnb results in a plethora of rentals within one block of the alley, or home owners who use Callejón de Hamel as a marketing strategy to entice prospective clientele.

Of course, not every black neighborhood is created equal and the success of Callejón de Hamel comes from its central location in Cuba’s main entry point for tourists: Havana. What is more often the case is that black areas, including Cayo Hueso, are stigmatized, discriminated, and imagined as spaces of crime and promiscuity. This is a sequel of colonial era racial discourse which fashioned black people as hypersexual, hyperviolent, or simply socially deviant (de la Fuente 2001a). And yet, racialized imaginations remain. As Anguelovski explains:

In 1987, 31 percent of the areas officially classified as delinquency centers were in the three municipalities with most Afro-Cubans—Centro Habana, Habana Vieja, and Marianao—even though they com-

prised only 20 percent of Havana’s population and studies demonstrated that crime rates in these areas were not above the average rates in Havana as a whole. (2014, 85)

Since the disappearance of the Soviet trading bloc in 1990, the ensuing economic crisis during the 1990s known locally as the Special Period, and permission for Cubans to access and spend coveted foreign currency, racial conditions have worsened for black Cubans. Again, they are often excluded from lucrative jobs in the tourist sector and *cuentapropismo*. They are also hindered from accessing formal, legal, and lucrative private business opportunities because of their physical marginality. Even worse is that blackness has also become synonymous with informal activity in Cuban tourism, thereby creating a barrier for them to access this lucrative industry.

In Cuba, the term *jineterismo* (jockeying) is colloquially used to refer to sex work as well as a wide array of street hustling techniques used on foreign visitors. Typically, this term is reserved for the informal sector of the tourism industry, as it generally refers to Cuban-foreigner interactions where material goods are exchanged without government regulation. While scholars have found that Cubans engage in these practices at similar rates regardless of race, black Cubans have become the face of *jineterismo* because they are more visible in their interactions with predominately white foreign visitors and social imaginations, prejudices, and, ultimately, stigmas of blackness render these sorts of behaviors plausible.

In years past, the state enacted a sort of “tourism apartheid,” leaving already marginalized and discriminated black people further criminalized by way of strict government regulations. As Taylor and McGlynn describe it:

Thus, the government adopted a strategy, popularly called ‘tourist apartheid,’ as a way of immunizing Cuban society from the evils of international tourism, while simultaneously protecting *turistas* from crime. The most conspicuous dimension of this policy was the harassment of Cubans, especially young black men, publicly seen with tourists: police would ask for identification and sometimes, even arrest them. (2009: 409)

This control mechanism has intensified surveillance and permitted police, particularly in tourist zones, to

stop and detain anyone they want, reminiscent of the stop and frisk procedures in New York City or the “show me your papers” provision of Arizona law, both of which also result in rampant racial profiling and the unnecessary criminalization of young people of color. Racialized imaginations of black Cubans severely impact the possibility for them to move freely about Havana or to participate in public facing *cuentapropismo* because they are often surveilled and harassed, particularly when they conduct business in tourism zones.

Race, Biological Gender and Age

Depending on the gender, the aforementioned trends in locale and race can have different implications for black Cubans who own or work in private businesses. According to a survey conducted by Cleland (2017) (n=385), 58 percent of men, compared to just 33 percent of women, acknowledged they had experienced discrimination from racial profiling by the police or felt criminalized by the broader population. Indeed, Cleland also notes that black, white, and *mulatto* (mixed-race) interviewees all admitted that the police stop black Cuban men much more frequently than those of other racial groups. My own research in Cuba confirms these observations, as black male friends have been stopped on multiple occasions while walking in Havana with me, something that has never happened to my lighter-skinned Cuban friends. Moreover, I have watched as many black Cuban men are denied entry to tourist spaces like hotels or boutique restaurants. When I asked the doorman why they did not let the black person in, I have been told outright that they were *jineteros* and thus were not allowed to come in and “bother” the guests.

Meanwhile, black women are often stereotyped as sex workers when interacting with foreign visitors and are surveilled at higher rates than their white counterparts. Indeed, much research has been done on the sexualization of Afro-Cuban women (see, e.g., Berg 2004; Facio 2000; Fernandez 1999; Fusco 1998; Roland 2011). Consistent throughout these texts are racial imaginations of sex work as a black vocation, even though it is frequently observed across races. Indeed, Roland comments, “while white women were often conceived to be ‘dating’ foreign men, black

women who associated with foreign men—because of their visibility and the sexualized stereotypes of them—were understood to be *jineteras* [(read: prostitutes)]” (2011, 56).

Together, these circumstances create inequitable barriers in *cuentapropismo*, particularly in tourism areas. Black Cubans who carry out their daily business activities in public—essential to most if not all *cuentapropista* endeavors—must factor in surveillance, police harassment, and public stigma into their daily routines. Black Cubans must also act with care while interacting with foreigners, for fear of being perceived as hustlers (men) or sex workers (women).

Age further complicates this. According to Cleland’s survey—where the age of the respondents was divided into five cohorts: those born in the 1990s, 1980s, 1970s, 1960s, and 1950s or earlier—black Cubans born in the 1970s and 1980s are most likely to report an experience with discrimination (2017, 155). Indeed, these individuals were in their teens or twenties when economic reforms took shape during the Special Period. Therefore, these respondents were old enough to experience, and remember, a rise in racial profiling as well as employment discrimination, as opposed to the younger generation (1990s cohort) who were under 18 years old when the survey was conducted (2008–2009), and who did not report statistically relevant experiences with discrimination. Of course, this does not mean that the 1990s cohort did/does not experience or is not aware of racial discrimination. It simply means they are less likely to report it on the survey, possibly because they have normalized it in their minds.

This narrative fits with one of my key findings of field work I conducted in 2012 that indicated that younger Cubans were more willing to engage in Cuban-foreigner interactions because they had grown up after the dissolution of the Soviet trading bloc, had only known economic crisis, and, therefore, were less molded by socialist values established during the golden years of the Revolution (1970s and 1980s). Furthermore, I found that Cubans raised during the Special Period or later, were more accepting of Cuban-foreigner interactions given the prevalence of international tourism throughout their lifetime, and

were less concerned about the repercussions they faced when interacting with foreigners because police harassment had become part and parcel to their quotidian experiences, especially in tourism zones (see Vertovec 2012). As such, I suggest that younger Cubans are more comfortable in operating businesses that directly pursue foreigners as their main client bases, even if it means police officers may harass them.

Indeed, two instances stand out from my prior ethnographic research. First, in 2013, a close friend (23 years old and black) and a sort of informal tour guide (i.e., unlicensed) told me before showing my brother and me around Havana that he was sure that police were going to stop us since we were two (white) foreigners with one black Cuban. As we left the house, he assured me it was not a problem and that we would just need to pick him up from the local precinct—as if this was a normal occurrence. As foreseen, we were stopped in Vedado and I had to speak with the local police chief before my friend was released. Second, in 2017, when I asked a research participant (24 years old and black) why he liked being a doorman for a *paladar* in Havana Vieja, he responded that he loved the possibility of meeting foreigners and spending time with them later. When I asked if he was ever afraid of being “caught” with them outside of work he replied: “Afraid? Why? They are my friends, there’s no crime in being with your friends!” What is interesting here is that the *cuentalpropista* license may grant certain privileges and give a sort of legal permission to Cubans who are “caught” spending time with foreigners. Indeed, certain *cuentalpropista* licenses (e.g., for *paladares* and home rentals) give Cubans a reason to interact with foreigners and therefore provide a plausible excuse as to why a Cuban and a foreigner may spend time together outside of work.

Biological Gender, Sexuality and Age

The intersection of biological gender, sexuality, and age is also historically contingent. In the 1960s, the Cuban state sought to eliminate “sexual deviance” (i.e., sexual behavior outside of heterosexuality). During this period, the state implemented a cultural regime of heterosexuality and heteronormativity that

targeted effeminate men and fixated on masculine gender conformity. Furthermore, the government used homophobic campaigns to consolidate state control over health, reproduction, marriage, and housing arrangements (Stout 2014, 37). This helped establish sexual ideologies that permeated into private affairs and prejudices of the Cuban populace, then and now.

Returning to the comment that the entrepreneurial adviser made regarding a possible reason why there are many lesbian women *cuentalpropistas*, I argue that government-led initiatives, like the 1975 Family Code, shaped gender ideologies on masculine and feminine roles in domestic responsibilities and labor expectations and may have inadvertently pushed lesbian women into alternative forms of employment. For example, the Family Code asserted equal responsibility for parenting and domestic duties in the household (Espín 1991). In turn, this encouraged women to join the labor force, and ostensibly empowered women who wished to pursue their own sources of income (Safa 1995). However, intersections of patriarchy and heterosexism seeped into workplaces creating discrimination and lesbian women began to pursue incomes through self-employment because of uncomfortable, even traumatic situations they face(d) in the state sector and other forms of employment.

While later campaigns promoting homosexual tolerance helped improve situations with respect to prejudice and discrimination, homosexual Cubans still face feelings of exclusion in their daily experiences. As Stout explains, “mainstream Cuban society still [does] not see gays as equal to heterosexuals, and more insidious forms of discrimination often replace outright harassment in many neighborhoods, workplaces, and families” (2014, 54). Indeed, discrimination remains in personal interactions, including a multitude of frequently used slurs or euphemisms (see Fernandez 2010 and Perry 2015 for a similar discussion on race and racism). In turn, this discrimination can shape the ways that *cuentalpropistas* (and their clients) choose to do business. For example, when a *cuentalpropista* told me that he is not homophobic but would not go to a gay pride march be-

cause he is concerned what his neighbors would think, he acknowledges that, while he is “okay” with gay Cubans, his underlying prejudices shape the way that he participates in broader society. For *cuentapropismo*, this can mean that he is hesitant to regularly purchase goods or services or conduct business with homosexual *cuentapropistas*, for fear of what his neighbors or others would think. Admittedly, this man is older (44 years old), and therefore more connected to previous ideologies and intolerances towards homosexuality in Cuba. However, it is still critical to point out that underlying prejudices shape the ways that Cubans interact and participate within society more broadly and *cuentapropismo* more specifically.

Younger cohorts are starting to challenge heterosexism and heteronormativity in Cuba. This comes as the state promotes gay tolerance through state-sponsored developments in the arts, telenovelas, public health campaigns, and nightlife in urban neighborhoods, to name a few (see Stout 2014, 39–51). Now, younger Cubans have implemented more transnationally expansive social imaginaries (Perry 2015) that, regarding sexuality, include things like gay pride, drag culture, or the demand that marriage equality be added to the country’s new constitution. In turn, this has also helped expand *cuentapropismo* geared towards gay identities, with ventures like gay nightlife or boutique fashion utilizing transnational gay pride insignia. For example, the popular fashion brand *Clandestina* is selling a t-shirt—the “Gay Pride Tank”—which says “*lo malo de ser gay es contárselo a los padres*” (the bad thing about being gay is telling your parents) in rainbow font, and on its website states “The only bad thing about being gay is... nothing!!!” (see <https://clandestina.co/collections/genuinecubandesign/products/unisex-tank-top>). Both statements illustrate how progressive stances towards sexuality are opening opportunities for small businesses in Cuba despite continuing discrepancies between gay pride and homophobia, usually depending on the generation.

When intersected with gender, race, or location, it comes into relief that “homonormativity” has already taken shape in much gay-oriented *cuentapropismo*,

much like the rest of the world. For example, most gay nightlife takes place in tourism zones and is focused on gay men, while lesbian women can be marginalized from these spaces (Santana 2018). Gay-centered private businesses have garnered a lot of success because of the higher frequency of gay men tourists, particularly white gay men, a common trend for gay tourism worldwide. Concomitantly, black lesbian women are often marginalized and face more barriers when trying to market their businesses to their personal identities and communities because of the oppression they face due to their sexual preference, race, and gender. Indeed, most black lesbian women often must choose to either operate in peripheral areas of Havana—sometimes a 30 to 40 minute drive from the city center—or “soften” their gay images in order to have success (Santana 2018).

CONCLUSION

Cuentapropismo in Cuba is at a moment of flux. Many changes are taking place that will have significant impacts on business experiences and outcomes as well as inequities and inequalities in this emergent economic sector. During the past year, the Cuban government placed the sector in a sort of hibernation when it froze the issuance of new licenses for many categories of self-employment, including some of the more lucrative ventures like home rentals and *paladar* restaurants, among others. The state justified this measure by stating that there were excesses and illegalities and that the sector needed better control. On July 10, 2018, nearly one year after the license freeze began, the government issued a 129-page draft of new regulations, which take effect December 7, 2018 (Ministerio de Justicia 2018; see Díaz 2018b for a condensed version). These cover an array of topics, including taxation, labor contracts, and requirement of establishing bank accounts, among others. While there are positive aspects to the new regulations, e.g., requiring contracts with employees, increasing limits for authorized tax deductions, and penalization of workplace discrimination—the government remains silent on the most urgent concerns of *cuentapropistas*. These include no access to wholesale inputs and prohibiting commercial imports (Henken nd). The likely result of the new measures taken together, is that

struggling *cuentapropistas* will be pushed out of business or (even further) into using informal and black-market strategies (Díaz 2018a).

The new regulations will also have certain consequences with regards to the inequity and inequality that is now inherent to the *cuentapropista* sector. While the issued draft of new regulations explicitly states that attitudes of discrimination towards different skin colors, genders, sexual preferences, and disabilities are strictly prohibited, it will be interesting to see how this is managed and regulated. As I outlined above, discrimination often exists in more subtle and quotidian ways. Hiring trends are also already demonstrating particular inequalities in access to lucrative *cuentapropista* positions and one new regulation will likely worsen these hiring trends. This is the elimination of a tax waiver for the first five employees hired by a private business, and the requirement that employers pay two times, three times, and six times the minimum wage for businesses that have 6–10, 11–20, and 21+ employees, respectively. This will force employers to be more selective in hiring. Younger people will likely be preferred since employers can get more out of them physically. Whiter Cubans will likely be selected based on *buena presencia*. Younger women may face discrimination arising from fears that the prospective employee may get pregnant and then the owner will have trouble removing them from their position because of the new anti-discrimination provisions. If the above propositions hold true, as a result of the new regulations, young white men will have more access to lucrative positions while older Cubans with darker skin will face barriers.

The state is also implementing stricter workplace condition requirements, with potential for higher frequency of inspections of workplaces. New applicants will also have to undergo an inspection of the workplace conditions before a license is granted. While this is certainly an appropriate measure to ensure that places like cafeterias and restaurants meet health standards, for example, it will also hinder and constrain people who live in areas with higher rates of poor housing conditions from establishing workplaces in their homes or neighborhoods. Again, this

is likely to privilege wealthy white Cubans as they already overwhelmingly occupy areas with better housing conditions and are statistically more likely to have connections from abroad who can help fund any repairs the business may need.

Of course, many of the impacts of these changes remain to be seen. Yet, an intersectional approach allows fully analyzing how current and future policies, as well as situations of resource scarcity, will affect *cuentapropistas*. The intersections outlined above are but some examples of the interconnected social diversity that exist in *cuentapropismo*. No doubt there are more axes of diversity that shape *cuentapropista* experiences and outcomes, like intersections that also include disability. There are also intersections I did not cover in full, such as those between location, sexuality, and race. Nonetheless, this paper sheds light on the importance of an intersectional approach to the study of Cuban self-employment and helps begin a thoughtful discussion on the complicated social factors that mold the inequities and inequalities that exist in *cuentapropismo*.

I gave an overview of some separate characteristics of *cuentapropistas*: race, biological gender, sexuality, age, and location. Then, I discussed how some of these social differences intersect and shape different outcomes and experiences for Cuban *cuentapropistas*. As illustrated, it is necessary to consider each experience, each structure, each characteristic (of each individual research subject) separately, before analyzing their intersectionality. It is an intentional movement from the general to the specific and back again. As Cuádriz & Uttal describe it:

Methodologically, the point here is that if simultaneity is being pursued, the researcher must engage in shifting and reordering individual accounts, history and theory. By way of an analytic process, first, [we] investigate the features and specific characteristics of individual experience, second, [we] consider how individual experience is related to and interacts with the other structuring forms of domination (in structural and historical terms)... (Cuádriz and Uttal 1999, 177)

In this paper I have explained some of the complex social diversity in *cuentapropismo*, and how *differences* (e.g., different access to resources or different experi-

ences with stigma or discrimination) are relevant to the experiences and outcomes that self-employed people face in Cuba.

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