

# Cuban Color: Untrustworthy Discourse

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**H**alf a century after the seismic events of 1959, the constructive inability of identities has become sophisticated. Exclusive nationalism, Cuban society's life-line, is its point of origin.

Cuba is a veritable laboratory for miscegenation and transculturation, but its society continues trapped in the labyrinth of its identities. The ideology of color continues to batter the island's social body, while it inflicts insecurity, exudes rage and humiliation. It is an exclusionary exercise that, like a mask, is alienated from the discourse of hate that imposes its hegemony over 'others.'

Racism has not been exiled from the collective consciousness; it is a transgression

that circulates amongst us like coin of the realm. It is the original sin that continues to ferment within society internally; it has not yet been obliterated. Racism is a corrosive emotional force that insists on legitimating physical impunity and violence. For many, it is a hieroglyphic not yet deciphered; for others it is a permanent threat. Ever since 'King Sugar' reigned supreme, blacks and mestizos constitute the most damaged part of our social fabric and spirituality. Still, others consciously deny this punishing reality by opting to be indifferent.

In our society, hatred of blacks was and still is a basic and essential element of José Antonio Saco's ideological thought. For

many neo-conservatives, blacks are dregs, filthy, disagreeable—the basic parasitic ill amongst us. Silence imposes itself on the difficult shadow of integration, while the absence of discrimination suggests a utopia in the socialist garden.

Blacks and mestizos are on the lowest rung of the social ladder, an at-risk group that finds itself anchored to the Revolution's periphery. They are excluded from the most lucrative areas of the economy: tourism, corporate and commercial ventures, and highly profitable, self-employment. They are under-represented in the upper-level management of state companies and in titular administrative or professional positions. Even the media contribute to the social devaluation of blacks, and all of this is an attack on the quality of their lives in our society, because at-risk population groups are forced to follow the path to crime and marginalization. This contributes to the existence of an environment of prejudice as a backdrop for all of this.

In 1999, a group of writers and artists that was apparently sensitive to our bitter reality tried to launch the “Color Cubano” (UNEAC) project. It was intended as a political and cultural action born of a utopic quote of poet Nicolás Guillén's: “Ojalá algún día en Cuba se deje de hablar de razas y sólo se hable del color cubano” [I hope some day in Cuba we will stop talking about races and speak only of Cuban color].

The project's goal was to create an environment in which theoretical reflections and cultural actions would permit a deeper analysis of race as a social construction, taking multiracialism, marginalization and discrimination as a starting point from which to develop community action initiatives in vulnerable areas.

Today, “Color Cubano” has not attempt-

ed to expand its sphere of action and is unknown as a social platform. It is an isolated, intermittent phenomenon that traffics with human pain; an intellectual accomplice to silence, which satisfies its personal dysfunction in trying to arbitrate on behalf of those who are excluded.

Any discussion of the issue of ethnicity was silenced by official policy, by decree of commanders and lawyers. Today, it is subordinated to political interests, which has resulted in an established hierarchy of discrimination.

In the media, the outward platform of the “Color Cubano” project can be seen as a space the so-called organic intelligentsia and carnivorous diehards negotiate and find common ties. Its discourse is untrustworthy because it is attempting to muffle society's emerging rebel cry. Its strategy is private and subject to control by the one and only ideological apparatus of the governing Communist Party's Central Committee, which is fraught with opportunism and ideological rigidity. The project has chosen *insilio* [internal exile] within legalized spaces in which only half-truths reign and blackmail and loyalty to the regime are the norm.

An initiative like “Color Cubano” is the result of an opportunistic relationship that has come about between the organic intellectuals and orthodox Party members, who together, as an ideological group, have the very real power to exclude whosoever strays from the official party line and to include literary apparatchiks who opt for playing the piteous role of marionettes and henchmen. It is a discourse trapped in the tangle of web that diverts and manipulates our reality. The adventure ends up in defeat, because orthodox and restrictive criteria control the smoke and mirrors that contaminate the media's funeral pyre.