

# Caribbean Bodies of Global Desire: Tourism and Eroticism in Contemporary Cinema

**Justo Planas**  
**Le Moyne College**  
**[planasj@lemoyne.edu](mailto:planasj@lemoyne.edu)**

Tourism is a crucial economic sector in many Caribbean nations and the primary channel for direct interaction between the local population and visitors from around the world. Although not typically recognized in official statistics, Caribbean bodies effectively transform into a tourist attraction that supports the livelihoods of low-income families and makes a significant contribution to the domestic economy of the islands. Through an analysis of films set in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Cuba, this article debates the intricate connections between pleasure economies, traditional gender roles, and familial structures, while it challenges the prevailing victim-victimizer narrative and provides a multifaceted perspective on sex tourism. Access by first-world tourists to international mobility and foreign currency creates a power imbalance in their interactions with Caribbean individuals. This imbalance worsens existing disparities related to gender, race, and age. In this context, selected films are examined as examples of the deconstruction of conventional narratives of erotic commodification in the Caribbean, depicting sex and tourism as a multifactorial issue that serves both to fight and deepen power structures.

**Keywords:** Caribbean cinema, sex and tourism, tourism and gender

El turismo es un sector económico crítico en muchas naciones del Caribe y el principal canal de interacción directa entre la población local y los visitantes de todo el mundo. Aunque no suelen ser reconocidos en las estadísticas oficiales, los cuerpos caribeños se transforman efectivamente en una atracción turística que apoya el sustento de las familias de bajos ingresos y hace una contribución significativa a la economía nacional de las islas. A través de un análisis de películas ambientadas en la República Dominicana, Haití y Cuba, este artículo expone las intrincadas conexiones entre las economías del placer, los roles tradicionales de género y las estructuras familiares, a la vez que desafía la narrativa predominante de víctima-victimario y proporciona una perspectiva multifacética sobre el turismo sexual. El acceso de los turistas del primer mundo a la movilidad internacional y a las divisas internacionales crea un desequilibrio de poder en sus interacciones con los individuos del Caribe. Este desequilibrio empeora las disparidades existentes relacionadas con el género, la raza y la edad. En este contexto, se examinan películas seleccionadas por su deconstrucción de las narrativas convencionales de la mercantilización erótica en el Caribe, representando el sexo y el turismo como una cuestión multifactorial que sirve tanto para combatir como para profundizar las estructuras de poder.

**Palabras clave:** cine del Caribe, sexo y turismo, turismo y género

## Introduction/Background

In the epilogue of the French film *Heading South* (*Vers le Sud*, Laurent Cantet, 2005), Brenda, a middle-class white American woman, decides not to return to her home country following the assassination of her Haitian lover. As she sails across the Caribbean Sea, her eyes scanning the horizon, she realizes: “I want nothing to do with men from the North. I want to visit other islands in the Caribbean: Cuba, Guadeloupe, Barbados, Martinique, Trinidad, Bahamas... They have such lovely names. I want to know them all.”

Brenda’s reflections illuminate the intricate dynamics between sex and tourism in the Caribbean. Having lived under her husband’s control, Brenda crosses racial, age, and gender boundaries of the 1970s United States through her entanglement with Legba, an Afro-Caribbean man, thereby becoming a freer, new version of herself. At the same time, her indifference to the poverty afflicting Haitian communities near her lodging, as well as to the eventual murder of Legba, exposes entrenched power disparities within erotic transnational exchanges in the Caribbean.

This article delves into the nuanced and multifaceted erotic encounters between fictional characters from diverse nationalities, such as Brenda and Legba, set against the backdrop of Caribbean tourism. How do these relationships lead to the empowerment of historically non-dominant groups, while also contributing to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals? How do these transnational exchanges interrogate prevailing notions of gender and race? What factors drive this unique dynamic of pleasure and money in the Caribbean? Although these questions have been debated across various academic domains, including anthropology and sociology, there is a noticeable absence of research within film and media studies. In contrast, tourism, as a major economic sector and a primary mode of interaction between islanders and foreigners, consistently appears as a theme in films set in the region.

This approach does not confine its analysis to sex and tourism within a single work or location. Instead, it seeks to establish the foundation for a wider investigation by covering multiple films and countries. In doing so, it delves into cinematic approaches that range from the ambiguous interpersonal dynamics shaped by the tourism economy to the sexualized portrayal of the Caribbean in transnational film industries. Considering the relatively uncharted territory of this research, this paper is organized into four main sections aimed at exploring the spectrum of cinematic perspectives on the relationship between sex and tourism in the Caribbean and their significance. Initially, the Cuban film *Fable* (*Fábula*, Léster Hamlet, 2011) is examined, focusing on the ambiguity driven by the exchange of money, affect, and sex within the tourism world. This analysis reveals how such ambiguity challenges conventional perceptions of gender, family roles, and love. Following this, the study of *Heading South*, set in Haiti, delves into how sex tourism

creates zones in which national, racial, gender, and cultural interactions not only highlight the Caribbean's unique position in a globalized world but also introduce a particular array of transnational subjects and connections.

The last two sections address hypersexualized portrayals of the Caribbean—global images exploited by both transnational tourism and films, which also impact the daily lives of vulnerable groups. This analysis demonstrates how the Cuban comedy *Ana's Movie* (*La película de Ana*, Daniel Díaz Torres, 2012) and the Dominican comedy series *Sanky Panky* (José Pintor 2007, 2013; Eduardo Ortiz 2018) use humor to deconstruct prevalent stereotypes surrounding sex work. The final section offers a comprehensive analysis of the Dominican film *Holy Beasts* (*La fiera y la fiesta*, Laura Amelia Guzmán and Israel Cárdenas, 2019). Through the narration of a film within a film, where foreign sexual desire is likened to vampirism, *Holy Beasts* dismantles the typical venues of the Caribbean's erotic commodification on and off the big screen. Directors Guzmán and Cárdenas craft a parodic representation of spaces, bodies, and cinematic narratives that play a role in the touristification and sexualization of the region. The films under examination, set in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, expose scenarios that resonate throughout the Caribbean in places where tourism intersects with systemic imbalances in North-South, gender, and racial relations.

Seminal research on the Caribbean often characterizes the region as a quintessential nexus of multiple transnational entities. In *The Repeating Island*, Antonio Benítez-Rojo employs sexual imagery to underscore the Caribbean's pivotal role as the birthplace of the Atlantic worlds, portraying its geography as a womb where Europe, using the blood of Africa, gave rise to capitalism (1996, 5). Édouard Glissant underscores the region's elusive, nonuniform, and often contradictory nature, attributing these features to the constant overlapping of global cultures (1992, 254). These and other studies suggest that the Caribbean's identity is intricately formed through encounters from varied origins, with trade and sex frequently serving as defining forces.

Tourism has emerged as a central arena for transnational interactions in the Caribbean during the later stages of capitalism. Although the United States government, along with the World Bank and other international organizations, advanced the tourism industry during the second half of the twentieth century to replace the plantation system with a service economy, the benefits for Caribbean populations have been questionable. As tourism income surpassed the sugar industry in almost every Caribbean country, it also mirrored colonial practices entrenched in the plantation economy. Given that transnational corporations control not only most of the sector in the host islands but also marketing and travel technology in the guests' countries, Amalia Cabezas situates tourism within the Caribbean's long-standing transfer of wealth to Europe and North America at the cost to the former colonies' peoples and natural resources (2009, 29). Moreover, Mark

Padilla compares the sexual labor of Caribbean enslaved people with contemporary sex work, as the developed world and local governments nurtured and profited from these practices to grow their economic interests (2007, 3).

The Global North's interest in the Caribbean as a tourist destination has spurred two distinct but not mutually exclusive processes. On one hand, as Jamaica Kincaid demonstrates in *A Small Place* (1988, 4), tourists tend to unsee the visited islands' harsh social and ecological realities for the sake of enjoying their stay. And, on the other hand, there is the spectacularization of Caribbean worlds to tantalize the senses of potential tourists. As Jossianna Arroyo (2023, 92) explains, Caribbean ruins in contemporary capitalism are less evident than those produced by the colonial plantation economy, because they are driven, among other factors, by the media's touristification of the region and the presence of ghosts—invisible bodies and spaces. Ingrained in a longstanding cycle of symbolic and physical violence, tourism has perpetuated the Caribbean's positioning as a lucrative crossroads of transnational pleasure.

Even if tourism in the Caribbean is grounded in prolonged unequal exchanges between the North and the South, the local population has also managed to capitalize on the industry in many ways. The booming informal market in heavily toured areas attracts people from impoverished neighborhoods and immigrants who learn how to make a living despite the persistent harassment by the police (Gregory 2007, 56). As Polly Pattullo explains, it is through the informal tourism economy that women on many islands became wage earners for the first time (1996, 53). The interplay of sex and tourism will be shown to both reinforce and challenge hegemonic social structures as well.

Understanding the dynamics of sex and tourism can be elusive even for those directly involved. Therefore, a diverse range of terms has been employed in order to foster a nuanced approach to this interplay and its cinematic representation. Labels such as sex work or prostitution are avoided, unless explicitly defined as such by the fictional characters involved, thereby acknowledging the perspectives of individuals in the Caribbean who may not perceive their transnational entanglements as fitting within the framework of prostitution. Moreover, scholars like Amalia Cabezas argue that the label of sex worker is more often than not weaponized against racialized working-class women in cross-cultural relationships (2009, 4), while others, like Erica Williams, recognize how one unintended consequence of sex tourism is the suspicion cast upon all transnational relationships (2013, 60). At the same time, as Mimi Sheller explains, given that transnational sexual exchanges in the context of Caribbean tourism often occur without any upfront monetary transaction but with the expectation of gifts and other forms of less defined remunerations, they must be understood in tandem with the unwaged racialized labor of slavery and post-slavery times (2012, 301).

Drawing on anthropological and sociological studies on the interplay of sex and tourism in the Caribbean, this study adopts terms such as "erotic relationships" (Cabezas 2009, 118) and "sexual-economic transactions" (Kempadoo 2004, 83). This language helps steer clear of assumptions and ensures accuracy when understanding the often-multifaceted interactions depicted in the films. In fact, through her research in Cuba, Megan Daigle has noted that money is not the sole driver of the erotic exchanges, which usually involve affects on both sides and the pursuit of autonomy, self-worth, and enjoyment (2015, 207).

The films selected for this research also corroborate how complex erotic relationships between nationals and foreigners challenge conventional narratives that depict characters engaging in transnational relationships involving different forms of economic and erotic incentives as "naive, ignorant, vulnerable 'victims' " (Williams 2013, 17). Contrary to the easy dichotomy of victim and victimizer, contemporary cinema usually portrays sex and tourism in the Caribbean as a multifactorial issue that serves both to fight and deepen power structures.

### **Ambiguous Entanglements in the Cuban Film *Fable***

*What's Love Got to Do with It?* anthropologist Denise Brennan questions in the title of her book on sex tourism in the Dominican Republic, later revealing how both locals and foreigners forge new practices and meanings of love, where the boundaries between pretending to be and actually being in love are systematically transgressed and blurred (2004, 22). Similarly, in her book revealingly titled *Ambiguous Entanglements*, Erica Williams explores specific transnational intimate relationships in Brazil in which discerning the motivations, desires, and intentions of those involved proves difficult (2013, 3). Here, *Fable* will be analyzed to understand how the film depicts the sexual-economic transactions shaped by the tourism economy in Cuba. This section explores how these ambiguous connections destabilize notions of gender, family roles, and love.

In *Fable*, erotic work transforms the organization of a Cuban nuclear family as well as the gender roles and identity of its members. Even though Arturo, a Cuban artist and college student, admits to being in love with Cecilia, he pays her for sex during their first encounters, and she agrees to receive only a symbolic remuneration. Still, when they get more emotionally involved, Cecilia is offended by Arturo's attempt to keep paying for her time and decides to have a child with him. As Arturo's paintings do not sell well in the art tourism market, Cecilia engages in a relationship with Paolo, an Italian tourist, who is also acquainted with Cecilia's mother and, eventually, helps raise Arturo and Cecilia's daughter. When Arturo discovers Cecilia's parallel affair with Paolo, he participates in their erotic exchanges, and Paolo becomes the Catholic godfather of their child.

Although it is clear that tourists' access to hard currency creates a power imbalance in their interaction with locals, *Fable* reveals how the dynamic of pleasure and foreign money simultaneously blurs and strengthens racialized and gendered perceptions of dominance. Cecilia is compared to the protagonist of the foundational novel *Cecilia Valdés* by Cirilo Villaverde (1882), however, despite being a marginalized mulatto female much like the nineteenth-century character, she manages to become the provider of the family through her liaison with Paolo.

The ambiguity of roles in Havana's pleasure economy permeates both traditional family functions and conventional gender norms. In *Fable*, for example, Paolo ensures the economic survival of Cecilia, Arturo, and their daughter, who, in return, treat him as a second father figure and allow portraits of them in his house. Cecilia's mother would describe Paolo as a gentleman, while Arturo's mother attends her granddaughter's baptism, during which Paolo is chosen as the godfather. The sexual-economic transaction between Paolo, Cecilia, and Arturo extends well beyond the conventional narrative about prostitution. The triangle of Arturo, Cecilia, and Paolo illustrates Williams's concept of "ambiguous entanglements" as the meanings of their sexual encounters, affective liaisons, and economic exchanges are challenging to pinpoint with clarity (2013, 3). At the same time, their relationship can also be viewed in connection with the exploitation chain of erotic labor that sustains the island's informal economy.

The case of Arturo also defies the stereotypical representation of erotic workers as uneducated. The protagonist of *Fable*, like many other college-graduated Cubans, abandons his low-wage profession to find a living in the tourist sector. Selling his paintings to foreigners, he soon discovers that even the arts are an extension of foreign eroticism in the Caribbean, as the tourists are only interested in his portrayal of Cecilia naked. Even before finding out about Paolo's liaison with his family, Arturo is already monetizing the erotic intimacy of his marriage in the tourist economy. Arturo finds in art a form of personal fulfillment that also serves to support his family. At the same time, Arturo's and many artists' entanglements with the tourist market are ambiguous, as they feel obliged to comply with supply and demand cycles that reinforce the hypersexualization of female Cubans, even if they experience in their own community the negative consequences of it. As Pattullo explains, Caribbean creators struggle to find a way to use foreigners as patrons rather than being used by them (1996, 179).

In the introduction, the film defines its own title: a fable is "a short story intended to teach a moral lesson about life, in which animals speak." However, the story evolves into a parodic version of a fable, wherein Cuba's social labels and the concept of black-and-white morality are problematized. Arturo, the protagonist and narrator, struggles to find his place within a complex triangle of love, money, and tourism commerce. Meanwhile, through their ambiguous entanglements, he, Cecilia, and Paolo challenge the traditional

definition of prostitution as merely an exchange of sex for money. They highlight the broader spectrum of exchanges in transnational relationships in the Caribbean, which includes gifts, care, and, in some instances, love. Furthermore, Paolo's varied roles within the relationship, including his erotic exchanges with the two Cuban protagonists and his role as the godfather of their daughter, question traditional notions of family, marriage, and gender. Additionally, Arturo's engagement in the tourist art market and his use of erotic art to appeal to the foreign gaze suggest a more complex debate about the interplay between sex and tourism in the Caribbean, where not only local sex workers but also artists are positioned to trade affection in order to participate in the global economy.

### **Ethnosexual Frontier in the Haitian Film *Heading South***

In the film *Heading South*, middle-aged women from Canada and the United States during the 1970s freely flirt with young black men on the beaches of Haiti. The choice of the setting for these transgressions is deliberate. The beach symbolizes a recurring landscape in the region where eroticism and money intersect to such an extent that, on some islands, male sex workers are commonly referred to as “beach boys.” This analysis will explore how *Heading South*, an adaptation of three short stories by Haitian author Dany Laferrière, demarcates specific geographies where transnational interactions follow particular protocols. These zones, where diverse individuals from the changing global landscape—including tourists and sex workers—converge, exemplify what Arjun Appadurai terms “ethnoscape” (2005, 33). Such areas reflect the nuanced dynamics at play within these transnational relationships on the fringes of the Caribbean Sea.

The beach in *Heading South* is a landscape for the characters to break racial, gender-based, and national constraints. The female tourists in the film wonder why they are not interested in Afrodescendants from their own countries. It is also apparent that they are not attracted to Haitians on the street either. These American and Canadian women engage in erotic liaisons only with local black men at the beach near the hotel. The tourist facility barely tolerates these interactions. For example, the guests cannot have dinner in the hotel restaurant with their Haitian companions. The beach is the place where they can get together and play games, chat, and dance to Haitian rhythms. This zone is what Joane Nagel defines as an ethnosexual frontier, a borderland of social divides, in which sexual exchanges take place among individuals of different ethnic, racial, and national groups (2003, 14).

At the beach, the characters engage in interactions that are morally or legally censured in their worlds. For example, American women could flirt with Afrodescendants even if interracial couples were illegal in some places of their home country until 1967. In the ethnosexual frontier, sex is only one of the diverse borderline exchanges. Female tourists tacitly agree on a common moral code that allows them to share their Caribbean lovers

and confide to each other how they felt discriminated against as women at home. They create a strong social bond through their interactions at the beach. The intersection of the hotel and the Caribbean is the place for these women to liberate themselves from their husbands and their bosses' sexual objectification while they, ironically, commodify the bodies of Haitian men in distress.

*Heading South* reveals how specific locations in Haiti and other nations harbor erotic interactions among locals and tourists that are forbidden beyond that frame. Through the erotic encounter with the other, not just heterosexual men but also women like Brenda in *Heading South*, and diverse individuals from developed nations experience in their bodies a degree of class, gender, and race privilege that is available in their countries only to dominant groups. Middle-class European, Canadian, and American men's use of hard currency in the Caribbean gives them access to services only the wealthiest in their home region can enjoy (Wonders and Michalowski 2001, 563). Similarly, queer tourism is in tandem with a colonial history of travel and mobility, even if it represents a disruption of traditionally heterosexual roles and spaces (Puar 2003, 936–937).

The interactions between Afro-Haitian men and women tourists at the beach are not a mirror image of their countries' economic or diplomatic relations, but they are not detached from their dynamic either. In *Heading South*, Albert, an employee at the hotel, reveals that his family fought the Americans during the occupation in 1915. While diligently serving foreign guests, he does not forget that his father and grandfather never saw a white woman, though they feared them. For Albert, the female tourists' "follies" with local men are "not to love" because they are the consequence of Haiti's status after the invasion and the flow of dollars, which, in his view, corrupt everyone in contact with them. The character understands first-world tourism in Haiti as a continuation of the US Marines' presence and defines the two encounters in racial terms. For him, white women's interest in Afro-Haitians is a refashioning of the same racial order that validated the military occupation. In the 1970s, Haiti's involvement in the world economy as a recipient of tourists left Albert and other people with no choice but to work in the industry or be marginalized.

At the same time, as Rosamond S. King explains, *Heading South* illustrates how Caribbean men can be subjects as much as they are objects in their relationship with women tourists (2014, 171). Although foreigners typically hold financial control, they can be manipulated, as the character Legba demonstrates by playing Brenda and Ellen against each other for his economic gain (King 2014, 175). Legba is named after the spiritual entity associated with crossroads and destiny in various Afro-Caribbean religions, including Haitian Vodou and Cuban Palo. This leads King to suggest that the protagonist of the film has a preordained plan for the female tourists he engages with, despite his spontaneous and innocent demeanor (2014, 175). Moreover, within Afro-Caribbean religious



traditions, the crossroads represent a pivotal space where conflicting forces are brought into conversation with one another (West-Durán 2021, 1). As many Caribbean sex workers do, Legba facilitates a zone of contact between the North and the South that problematizes conventional gender, racial, and sociopolitical dichotomies.

Through the portrayal of the beach as an ethnosexual frontier, *Heading South* underscores how spaces of leisure can also act as arenas for resistance and redefinition, where individuals navigate and occasionally subvert the constraints imposed by their societies. Transnational entanglements in this context arise from various disparities, yet participants systematically negotiate these differences in ways that challenge the prevailing gender, racial, and geopolitical orders.

### **Tourism Film Humor in *Ana's Movie* and *Sanky Panky***

Imagination plays a crucial role in the experiences of those involved in sexual-economic transactions. While the film industry often reinforces conventional narratives about pleasure and tourism in the Caribbean, a group of filmmakers has employed humor to challenge stereotypes and contest the international audience's scopophilia. This section examines how *Ana's Movie* in Cuba and the *Sanky Panky* film series in the Dominican Republic use humor to debunk widespread narratives about sex workers that impact the daily lives of vulnerable individuals.

Even before arranging their travel, tourists consume what Edward Bruner defines as “pretour narratives” about their Caribbean destination in a variety of formats, including audiovisuals, that they seek to emulate after the arrival and retell as “posttour narratives” over and over again (2005, 24–26). According to John Urry and Jonas Larsen, the tourist gaze—a socially patterned and learned way of seeing tied to the act of tourism—also encompasses the technological act of documenting the experience. At the same time, the tourist gaze is aesthetically and socially in aligned with film and TV modes of representation (Urry and Larsen 2011, 2).

The global depiction of the Caribbean is caught between two contrasting views both influenced by and contributing to tourist interest. On one side, it is shown as an ideal paradise with beautiful beaches and lively street dances, offering a simplistic, appealing picture. On the other, it is depicted through images of rundown buildings, disorderly communities, or dangerous nature, suggesting that the region falls short of typical civilized standards. This sharp contrast creates a simplified narrative that affects how visitors see and interact with the Caribbean, painting it either as a perfect escape or a place of caution. For example, Ana Maria Dopico explains how post-Cold War Cuba attracted professional and amateur photographers as it combined the scopophilia for regular third-world scenarios with the nostalgia of socialism (2002, 477). The rush of

seeing with one's own eyes and keeping a record of Fidel Castro's Cuba "before it is too late" has been an essential component of the island's foreign pleasure economy.

Stereotypes of gender, race, and social class, ingrained in the tourist gaze, significantly influence the experiences of both foreigners and locals. Williams demonstrates how the "specter of sex tourism" raises suspicion against any transnational and cross-racial exchange (2013, 46). Conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Cuba, Megan Daigles noted that *jinetera*, a term used to define female erotic workers, is an empty signifier heavily laden with long-standing gendered and racialized assumptions (2015, 97). The stereotype of *jineterismo* takes a toll on the everyday life of young Afro-Cuban women who face a constant risk of harassment, sexual assault, and police arrest in tourist areas (17).

The global influence of the tourist gaze, significantly reinforced by major film industries like Hollywood, leads Mimi Sheller to question: "Can we look back at colonial representational practices in a way that makes them strange or recognizes the estrangements that disturb the tourist's gaze? Can we discover Caribbean agents working within the representational practices of the tourist picturesque to undo its power?" (2012, 217). Films made and watched locally, such as *Ana's Movie* by Cuban director Daniel Díaz Torres and the Dominican *Sanky Panky* series by José Pintor (2007, 2013) and Eduardo Ortiz (2018), confirm how comedy can serve as a powerful tool to look back and question these widespread depictions.

*Ana's Movie* conveys the experience of a sex worker in parallel to that of the actress Ana, who pretends to be a *jinetera* in a German documentary about prostitution on the island. Ana experiments with costumes, make-up, and gestures to embody the European filmmakers' imagination of a *jinetera* and alleviate her family's financial troubles, while the filmed sex worker's erotic exchanges with tourists contradict this representation. *Ana's Movie* unearths how both the work of sex and the work of art are forced to match up with preconceptions about the Caribbean to please international markets.

The Dominican film series *Sanky Panky* also plays on global narratives about male sex workers to create a parody for local consumption. On the one hand, the ludicrous arises from the Caribbean spectator's awareness of the stereotypes about the beach boy, or *sanky panky*, and the protagonist's failure to turn into one. On the other hand, the Caribbean audience can find credible elements in the depiction of erotic work as the protagonist gets emotionally involved with his clients in his pursuit of economic success or international mobility.

Despite their differences, *Sanky Panky* and *Ana's Movie* illustrate how parody serves to distance the audience from tourist narratives of erotic pleasure deeply seated in the old hierarchies of gender and race. The use of parody casts ideological suspicion on its

subjects (Hutcheon 2000, xii). Although the Cuban and the Dominican films had disparate circulation, their respective comic viewership derives from what Linda Hutcheon calls the intertextual bouncing of parody (2000, 32). In other words, some sequences about sex tourism become ludicrous only when they defy either a social stereotype or the spectator's own experience.

## **Parody of Global Desire in *Holy Beasts***

Unlike their critically acclaimed and influential *Sand Dollars* (*Dólares de arena*, 2014), directors Laura Amelia Guzmán and Israel Cárdenas employ a sober parody in the film *Holy Beasts* to shed light on the depiction of gender and race in tourist narratives. *Sand Dollars* is clearly centered on the erotic relationship between a French woman and a Dominican woman, and the difficult dynamics resulting from their differences in age, social class, and ethnicity. However, *Holy Beasts* is, first and foremost, a tribute to the late Dominican filmmaker Jean-Louis Jorge and his polyhedric worlds of gender and national-border-crossing characters, cabaret, and sex work.

Despite the differences in tone and plot, *Holy Beasts* can be interpreted as a continuation of *Sand Dollars* and *Noelí Overseas* (*Noelí en los países*, Guzmán and Cárdenas 2017), which is a take on the Dominican character in *Sand Dollars*, Noelí, during her travel to Europe. Not only did Geraldine Chaplin play the leading role as a troubled and solitary French woman in both *Sand Dollars* and *Holy Beasts*, but directors Guzmán and Cárdenas also move ahead with their examination of eroticism among characters of different origins and backgrounds in the latter film.

## **Spaces in *Holy Beasts***

In contrast to *Ana's Movie* and *Sanky Panky*, *Holy Beasts* is not ludicrous but constrained in its parodic representation of tourism and its construction of an imperial gaze on the local people and the environment. When the European characters discuss problems in the Dominican Republic, they fail to identify any social issue. For them, the only downside of the country is the hurricanes and erupting volcanoes. The Caribbean island is, for them, a natural landscape with scarce human presence. In fact, there are only a few Dominican characters in the film, such as a lone hotel room attendant who usually remains in the background. As a general practice, tourist areas in the Caribbean are insulated from the surrounding population. In Cuba and the Dominican Republic, Afro-Caribbean individuals in these zones are oftentimes subjected to police scrutiny in order to safeguard the tourist atmosphere (Daigles 2015, 5; Gregory 2007, 54). To a greater or lesser extent, these tourism discrimination patterns reflect the reality on the other islands. *Holy Beasts* exaggerates this feature by reducing the participation of the locals in the plot.

At the same time, *Holy Beasts* elaborates a parodic irony of the foreign characters' interest in Dominican natural landscapes. Even if the Caribbean consists of different natural resources for them, they almost never leave the hotel and other modern buildings. Caribbean beaches turn into swimming pools, and tropical forests are replaced by indoor flowers and plants in pots, vases, and even paintings. Therefore, *Holy Beasts* parodies the actual disconnect between tourists and the Caribbean world that they ironically wanted to experience in the first place.

The main characters are shooting a movie by the sea in Santo Domingo that involves Afro-Dominican dances and music. However, they brought a choreographer from the United Kingdom, a cinematographer from Colombia, and crew members from Argentina, in addition to the French actress Geraldine Chaplin, who is the director. Conversely, most of the dancers in the movie are Afro-Dominican. This division mirrors the distribution of labor in the Caribbean tourism industry because foreigners or the national elite generally take skilled positions while the local people perform low-paying work or participate in the informal economy (Pattullo 1996, 54; Gregory 2007, 25–30). Steven Gregory explains that notions of race, gender, sexuality, and citizenship markedly shape the value and qualities of labor in the Dominican tourism industry as, for instance, hotels refrain from hiring dark-skinned or Haitian candidates, and women usually do the corporative version of domestic tasks (Gregory 2007, 26–31).

Not only are most of the characters external to the topic of the movie they want to shoot, but also the film set. It is clearly ironic that the characters need to fill a tank with almost three million gallons of water and introduce intricate machinery that generates sea waves when they had the ocean available behind the artificial stage. It does not take long before these external human and material elements result in the collapse of the movie, as the Dominican dancers cannot commit to the project, and the actual sea and tropical rain flood the set, killing the performers.

### **Bodies in *Holy Beasts***

The international characters in *Holy Beasts* not only feature Dominican bodies in their cinematic representation of a tropical story and as hotel servants, but they also feed on their blood. The French director and her Dominican associate, a man with strong public connections on the island, are saddened by the death of their friends but do not hesitate to go on with the production after a young female dancer is bled to death. The British man, who is the vampire, is able to claim other victims, given the blind support from the Dominican elite character for the film, which becomes more important for him than the safety of expendable cast and crew members. The behavior of the vampires, then, parallels that of foreign sex tourists who usually take an erotic interest in young Caribbean individuals and follow a separate set of values in their time of leisure abroad. The

Dominican elite character, who covers up the mess created by the European vampires in order to protect the film production, echoes the thinking of the Caribbean dominant class with regard to the tourism industry. Although foreign tourism primarily benefits transnational corporations in the first world, it operates with the support of Caribbean governments and the class in power.

### **Scopophilia in *Holy Beasts***

Another element in *Holy Beasts* that mirrors the narrative of international eroticism in the Caribbean is the depiction of scopophilia. Scopophilia refers to the predominantly male, white, or imperial gaze in cinema, which takes erotic pleasure in objectifying different Others, including women, Afrodescendants, and third-world people, as mere objects to be looked at, rather than subjects with their own agency. This is clearly the case with the European characters, who disregard the creativity of the Dominican dancers and use them to craft a film that pleases first-world viewers. *Holy Beasts* directors Laura Guzmán and Israel Cárdenas withhold from the spectators most of the representation of the Afro-Dominican dances as well as erotic or violent acts. Instead, the camera is centered on the gaze of the European vampires during the shootings and their own dances, which are sharply distinct from the Caribbean rhythms.

It is not random that Colombian director Luis Ospina plays a character in *Holy Beasts*, because he has theorized about “misery porn” in Latin American cinema (Ospina and Mayolo 2015). Ospina and Carlos Mayolo define misery porn as the pleasure that some international viewers feel at consuming films about third-world people in distress, as this type of cinema reassures first-world audiences, by contrast, of the good quality of their lives in the North. Unlike the misery porn trend, the *Holy Beasts* aesthetics draws on the constant denial of pleasure, which is the ultimate parody of the movie the characters are trying to make, because the title of that movie is *Water Follies*, and its theme is, apparently, none other than pleasure in the tropics.

*Holy Beasts* not only addresses the interplay of sex and tourism in the Dominican Republic but also highlights the role of the media in the creation of Caribbean narratives of erotic desire and exotism. Through parodic references, *Holy Beasts* unveils how foreign filmmaking in the Dominican Republic can draw on the eroticization and commodification of black culture to reach a first-world audience.

### **Conclusions**

In the films analyzed, hierarchies of race and gender come into play through the complex social dynamics of the pleasure industry in the Caribbean. In *Heading South* and *Fable*, historically disempowered individuals from the North travel to the islands and cross

moral boundaries of their worlds, challenging the dominance of race, gender, and national constraints. At the same time, these international characters are not entirely unrelated to the power relations between their countries and the host islands. In fact, their use of hard currency is a critical factor in the erotic entanglements with the locals.

Contemporary fiction of tourism in the Caribbean defies the victim-victimized duality in addition to other stereotypical depictions of erotic work. The exoticization of black Caribbean bodies is deeply problematized as the films bring the sociopolitical outlook into the exploration of the characters, including Cecilia and Arturo in *Fable* as well as the protagonist in *Sanky Panky*.

Through different strategies, filmmakers contest the global consumption of Caribbean narratives in word-of-mouth tourist tales, advertisements, news, and feature films that reinforce entrenched imperialistic perceptions of third-world humans and nonhumans. For example, parody serves to reflect on scopophilic depictions of Caribbean individuals as unintelligent in *Ana's Movie* and *Holy Beasts*, while the *Sanky Panky* saga and *Fable* depict sex workers as individuals with valid and reasoned motivations leading them to participate in the erotic economy.

Much like the tourism industry, Caribbean films draw on the cultural and natural resources of the islands to participate in a hierarchical and centralized global world. As fictional characters and real people from diverse races, genders, and ethnicities engage in border-crossing interactions in specific local zones, the analyzed films reveal that these peripheric entanglements with tourists and international viewers are also part of the erotic avenues of power in the Caribbean.

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**Justo Planas** is an Assistant Professor of Spanish and holds the Endowed Chair for the Study of the Americas at Le Moyne College. He earned his PhD in Latin American, Iberian, and Latino Cultures from The Graduate Center, CUNY (2021) and his MA in Latin American Studies from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He is the author of *El cine latinoamericano del desencanto (The Latin American Cinema of Disenchantment)*; Havana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2018) and coeditor of the peer-reviewed compilation, *Isla diseminada. Ensayos sobre Cuba (Disseminated Island: Essays on Cuba)*; Madrid: Editorial Hypermedia, 2022).

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