BEHIND THE SMILE: NEGOTIATING AND TRANSFORMING
THE TOURISM-IMPOSED IDENTITY OF BAHAMIAN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

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This research seeks to describe the links between whiteness and tourism in the construction of ‘Othered’ identities. It adds to the challenge of theorizing identity as posed by Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall, and presents sociopolitical and theoretical insights informed by the historical constructions of whiteness from the lived experiences of black Bahamian women’s struggles for agency. Throughout this dissertation, I use Frantz Fanon’s inquiry into black identity formation—that is, as a construct in opposition to whiteness—as a framework to examine the development of tourism and identity negotiations in the Bahamas. Fanon himself—colonized French, black, expatriate, and activist—knew all too well the pitfalls of being at the margins of many identities.

Moreover, with the advent and development of tourism throughout the Bahamas, whiteness became the protracted mode by which Bahamian progress was assessed. The minority white elites in the Bahamas benefited financially from the tourist industry, building an economy and a country where rich wealthy whites are served by the majority black populace, hence the development of a ‘white tourist culture.’ I use the term ‘white tourist culture’ in this dissertation to describe how Bahamian national identity is constructed through our dependency on a tourist economy that has built its financial system on a myth of paradise, where white tourists are catered to, and black Bahamians serve, entertain and cultivate the exotic.

Through examination of my own life experiences and the experiences of women working both in and outside of the tourist industry, this work helps to reposition whiteness as a form of
oppression for racialized Bahamian women. This project uses the voices and experiences of women working in the Bahamas Cultural Markets (the straw market, as it is known by the local people of the Bahamas). It discusses the lived experience of women, who on a daily basis are compelled to ‘perform’ their constructed indigenous identities created through the marketing of the Bahamas to the rest of the world, as the “ultimate tourist destination.” It also focuses on the production and maintenance of representations of whiteness in the way these are constructed and contested in the lived experiences of Bahamian women. I, along with Babb (2002), contend that whiteness is a social location of structural advantage, power and privilege. In this context, I demonstrate that, in tourist populated places like the Bahamas, markets like these are designed to reposition Bahamian women as an exotic proletariat, and they contribute to the continued subjugation of black Bahamian women, while giving white tourists legitimized access to feelings of power and privilege.
For my sister Tamara, who always knew; the conquering lion shall break all chains.
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Introduction

From the Caribbean to the Philippines, to Asia and Africa, past encounters between colonized people and their colonizers have resulted in numerous examples of oppression and, at the least, marginalization of native peoples. Indeed, there are many works, literary and expository, that deal with enslaved/colonized people’s perceptions of colonization and whiteness since the earliest phases of contact with Europeans. Today, colonization still exists in many parts of the world, but its forms have morphed from their earlier, physically violent nature into what we now recognize as postcolonial conditions of economic and social marginalization.

Lenses of Hegemony

For the purpose of this dissertation, I examine the present postcolonial situation in the Bahamas, where the centuries-old perceptions of Europeans’ whiteness, as well as Europeans’ influence, have been intensified through the development of tourism. I study postcolonial Bahamas to theorize how whiteness is enacted among colonized peoples in order to describe the mechanisms under which whiteness functions—along with the “othered” identities that tourism creates. The major motivation that guides this study is the need to examine and understand how historically-marginalized black Bahamian people construct their identities within the context of global(ization and in a nation-state. I argue that these identities are determined as a result of black Bahamian peoples’ interactions and encounters with tourists and that, as such, tourism produces, rather than reduces, difference: a production that helps to create, sustain, and reinvent racialized tropes of marginalized people.

Throughout this dissertation, I use Frantz Fanon’s inquiry into black identity formation—that is, as a construct in opposition to whiteness—as a framework to examine the development of
tourism and identity negotiations in the Bahamas. Fanon himself—colonized French, black, expatriate, and activist—knew all too well the pitfall of being at the margins of many identities. Though he occupied the margins eloquently, of course he was not content there, and would fight for a number of years throughout the African Diaspora to relieve people of color of their role as the world’s proletariat. In his analysis of identity, Fanon gives three phases which best articulate identity formation throughout the African Diaspora. Fanon’s first stage is a rejection of self, while the colonized identifies with the colonizer. In the second phase, the subject romanticizes the past, and identifies with their African ancestry. The third phase is an integration of cultures, taking the better of the two and creating a ‘usable’ identity. Given the advent of Cultural Studies in academia, with its focus on interdisciplinary critical theory and an ever-broadening notion of identity formations and cultures, it is more possible today than before to examine Fanon’s complexities with regard to constructions of African Diasporic identities.

Moreover, this dissertation adds to the challenge of theorizing identity that Fanon, and later, Stuart Hall initiated, and presents sociopolitical and theoretical insights informed by the historical constructions of whiteness in tourist spaces from the accounts of lived experiences of black Bahamian women struggling for agency. Through my own experiences and the experiences of women working in and outside of the tourist industry, this work helps to reposition whiteness as a form of oppression of racialized Bahamian women.

Additionally, this dissertation provides a new focus on producing and maintaining representations of whiteness in the ways it is constructed and contested in the lived experiences of Bahamian women. I contend, along with Babb (1998), that whiteness is a social location of structural advantage, power and privilege. In this context, I demonstrate that in tourist-populated places like the Bahamas, Cultural Markets that sell souvenirs, like the Straw Markets in the
Bahamas, are designed to reposition Bahamian women as exotic proletariat, and thus contribute to the continued subjugation of black Bahamian women by virtue of legitimizing white tourists’ access to illusory feelings of power and privilege.

**Seeing My Bahamas, Myself, Through the Lenses**

To illuminate this process, I use my own personal reflections and interview data collected over the course of three months in my hometown of Freeport, Bahamas, where I worked at my sister’s store—the site where daily I played the role of hostess to the many tourists who visit the shores of the islands of the Bahamas. The dominance of the ideals and expectations of the consuming tourists are illustrated by the manner in which they interacted with me and other women working in the Bahamas Cultural Market. In this environment, I was expected to cater to preconceived notions of what natives should be and how natives should act. On a daily basis, I was forced to perform my “Bahamianess,” or what these tourists expected to be as indigenous, exotic, primitive and (to use Fanon) cannibal.

For three months, I experienced first-hand the structure of service in the Bahamas, and how the economy of the Bahamas is scripted upon my black female body and the many bodies of the women who endure the sweltering heat of the Straw Market. I learned that even though I am educated in North America and pursuing a post graduate degree (which positions me in an elite group in my country), as I talked to these tourists about my privileged positioning, class played no role in their perception of me: I was viewed as, and reduced to, just a black body. Under their gaze, I realized that my individuality was constantly vulnerable to erasure. I became conscious that my blackness made my social position invisible, erasing distinctions of class and status. I was just another black body whose purpose was to serve: if I wanted to make any money for my sister, I was expected to conform and fit the image of the ‘happy native’.
Moreover, my summer experience studying the Straw Market highlights the economic conditions of workers in the Bahamas tourism industry: they embody a new version of indentured servitude. Money is still the main imperative, but for the majority of the employees in the Bahamian tourist trade, and specifically for the women working in the Straw Market, they will never earn enough to own a home or attain the lifestyle of those from whom they pay rent or lease their space. Furthermore, many of the problems associated with the tourist industry stem from hegemony, past colonial domination and American-generated consumerism. On a theoretical level, the most interesting feature of tourism is how locals’ involvement rests on using their “Blackness” as part of the commodities they sell. The legacy of slavery underpins much of contemporary culture and the expression of it pervades many aspects of tourism.

Though I was born and raised in the Bahamas, my days working in the Straw Market, or any part of the tourism industry, was previously limited to one summer spent in my grandmother’s store when I was eight years old. Before returning to the market to conduct my research, I had never, as an adult, worked directly with tourism in my country. But I remember, as a teenager, listening to speeches by politicians and government leaders, proclaiming that our survival as a nation depended upon tourism; even though tourism had proven incapable of providing sufficient economic opportunities for the majority of the populace.

Rather, along with selling products and services, whether acting as a guides, Straw Market vendors, maids, bartenders or gigolos/prostitutes, the Bahamian people are selling part of themselves. The Bahamas Tourism board has made the Bahamian people a commodity, and I felt this way, of my black body, every day I worked in the Market serving tourists. The Bahamas government’s continued reliance on tourism contributes to perpetuating specific images of
subordination, which are maintained and extended culturally, since the Bahamas must continually remake itself to fit the image sought by the tourists.

This dissertation stems from the need to clarify and ultimately transform the different roles that I and my countrywomen were forced to play this summer—and throughout our lives—for the tourists that visit my country. My time in the Straw Market changed me profoundly: I began to question my role in that society, the ways tourists coming to our shores made sense of me. Did they compare me to them? Whether they did or not, I asked myself, “What does this gaze mean for my black female body?” Who was I imitating and why? Hence, this project has developed from a necessity of sorts, one that is both personal and public: personal, because I am a black Bahamian woman and impacted by how representations of Bahamian black and female embodiment are constructed and projected; Public, because these representations are projected in the public domain and, as scholars have noted, it is the public sphere where representations are interpreted with real implications for black Bahamian womanhood. Therefore, it is my hope to address how racial influences and tourism distort, and continue to wrongly portray, the identity of Bahamian women and girls, and posit healthy and productive constructions of identity. My goal is not only to make this analysis a historical outline, but also a blueprint to liberation—beyond the notion of national independence—for these women. Only in freedom from identity constructions whose sole basis is as a servant of tourism can Bahamian natives, as a whole, arrive at the third phase of Fanon’s theory and define for themselves a usable identity.

Chapter Breakdown

The sequence of dissertation chapters begins by establishing the initial impetus and methods for the study, and then examines the histories and legacies of tourism in the Bahamas. Next, the conflicts and connections between identity construction and the mechanics of tourism
are established in the history of the straw market, and then examined using black feminist theory as a way to transform Bahamian identity. The dissertation concludes with stories from women in the straw market, as they articulate usable identities.

Chapter I: The Politics of Making a Living at Home

The first chapter is a narrative, the story, of my own insertion as an academic researcher into the Straw Market. It is as much a reflection as it is a realization of my identity as being different from, and the same as, the Straw Market women.

Chapter II: Examining the Process “Behind the Smile”

This chapter provides background information for research questions, describe the methodologies, and review the different forms of literature used for the study. The literature review discusses the significance of whiteness, post-colonial theory, and cultural studies.

Chapter III: Reading the Blueprint for Tourism

This chapter examines how the Bahamas’ political history created the conditions for tourism, and defines the logic by which tourism would continue to exist.

Chapter IV: The Creation of the Bahamas as a White Escape

This chapter traces and defines how tourism became the central aspect of the Bahamas’ economy, and how whiteness was re-deployed in this new era of tourism. It also examines the impact of this deployment on the local culture, and articulates women’s placement in this effort to re-invent the Bahamas as the ultimate tourist destination.

Chapter V: The Straw Man of the Straw Market Woman

This chapter examines the current situation of women caught up in the Economics of Skin, and foregrounds the connection between the dissertation’s analysis of tourism with the actual conditions of the Straw Market.
Chapter VI: Bahamian Identity: The Construction of the Nation

This chapter examines how Frantz Fanon’s theories of identity negotiation unwrap the complexities of the formulation of self for the black Bahamian women who struggle daily with the reality of minimizing their own self worth in order to survive in a tourist economy.

Chapter VII: Producing, Sustaining, and Perpetuating the Tourist-Imposed Images of Black Bahamian Womanhood

This chapter uses Black feminist theorists Patricia Hill-Collins and bell hooks as foundations to discuss contemporary Bahamian women and the images which keep them at the bottom of the economic and social stratum. It addresses questions such as:

- How does the tourist industry use racial ideologies to construct notions of beauty?
- How do these constructions affect women in and outside of the tourist industry?
- How is it that the black Bahamian female body depicted through tourism is both a site of cultural exoticism and a site of oppression?
- How is whiteness scripted on the economy of womanhood in the Bahamas?
- What role does whiteness play in the identity construction of the female body?

Hill-Collins’ and hooks’ observations are useful in understanding how controlling images in the Bahamas serve as a catalyst in formations of Bahamian national identity.

Chapter VIII: The Participant-Observer Becomes the Object

This chapter concludes the dissertation by centering analysis of tourism within my own narrative of the straw market, and within the voices of the women who work there. It is a testament to black Bahamian women’s quest, and ability, to construct usable identities.
Chapter I: The Politics of Making a Living at Home

On May 20, 2007, I was to work my very first day in my sister’s store; I remember waking to the sounds of the drums and cowbells of Junkanoo music on the radio that day—just like they had awakened me as a child. My first thoughts were of how long I had been in the United States before my return to the Bahamas and, during that time, how much I had missed waking up to those pulsating sounds filling my bedroom. I could not wait for the coming adventures of the day—a most welcome escape from the halls of academia. Working in my sister’s store meant working with the ladies of the Straw Market, working with the hair braiders who frequent the colorful market and shops of Port Lucaya. I greatly anticipated this adventure, for it meant not only a return to my home, but more importantly, a chance to understand how my home is defined, and explore how my education can improve the conditions of that home.

Port Lucaya, in Freeport Bahamas, is a tourist port where people from all over the world dock their boats for a period of time, and enjoy the wharves and hotels of the island. The locals do not live in this area; they only come to Port Lucaya to work, operating local Bahamian eateries, bars, clothing, crafts and souvenir stores and other businesses. Port Lucaya is designed to house and entertain tourists, but it was here I learned how the locals transformed themselves into salespeople and attract tourists’ money.

I was excited to be a part of this activity, to work with my people, to interact and talk to them about the issues of our countries, to listen to their animated story telling. I could not wait. On my very first day, I realized that this process would be more difficult than I had thought. Looking at the tourists, and then at the women working in the market, I knew that assuming this role of participant-observer would mean that I would have to immerse myself in the role of
‘host’, so that I gain the confidence of the women working in the market. Arriving at the Straw Market, I heard immediately the first topic of conversation: whether any cruise ships were scheduled for that day. After checking the schedules and realizing that two ships were scheduled to arrive into port, the women talked about how they hoped that this group of people would spend money. I did not know yet to get excited about the Cruise Ships, but I anticipated talking with the many people I would encounter during the day who came from various countries.

First, I introduced myself to some of the ladies who were sitting outside their stalls eating breakfast and talking. They chatted and shared local gossip, news about the local lottery (the numbers as it is called in the Bahamas), the weather forecasts, and details about a myriad of evening social events in which they were involved. All the ladies in the Straw Market were very receptive to my presence, and some who knew I was also there to work—and who knew my sister well—gave me advice on how to deal with tourists.

I recall a very vibrant lady, dressed in a long flowing skirt with multicolored, prints flowers and a big straw hat, who walked up to me and said, “Chile, I need to school you on how to act wit dese toorists, see how I dress, dis what dey like ta see. I does dress like a island gal, so I does make all da money out here, ask anybody.” They all agreed that upon arrival, the tourists would always walk to her store first, even though all of the vendors sold the same souvenirs. “And anoder ting, gal, ya gat ta smile. Smile, gal! Ya mus always have a smile on ya face when dey come in here, chile, how you spect to make any money if ya aint gon smile? Dese tooris always wan you to be happy, even if ya had a bad night or day, ya mus always smile and be happy. Chile, dat’s da truth, if ya wan eat, you’ll learn to smile, ya ever hear the song ‘don’t worry be happy’? Chile, dat’s our motto out here in da market, if ya wan eat”.
But this lesson was not to be my first that day. After about an hour of sitting and chatting with these beautiful ladies, my first customer came into the store. I was excited, “Good morning, welcome to our little store”. They didn’t even acknowledge my existence let alone respond to my greeting. At that moment, I felt invisible. After about two minutes they began to ask questions about the jewelry and the bath and body products in the store. I began explaining to them the rarity of the stones and the process of obtaining the Pecolite, Ammolite, and Conch shells, some of the stones used to create the jewelry and the ingredients for the lotions and oils. I realized, though, that they did not want to know about the origin or quality of the stones—they just wanted to bargain with me, to pay the least that they could for the jewelry. It did not matter to them that these were all hand-made, beautifully-crafted and detailed pieces. Rather, because the jewelry was made in the Bahamas, they should be able to bargain and pay less for the items.

Later that day, one of the ladies came into the store, she looked around the store at the jewelry, admiring it, then said, “Gal, ya know dese tourists ain’t come here to spend dat kind a money, ya’ll better bring down dem prices and ya better stop telling dem about dose shells and natural ingredients in dose products. Dey aint wan hear dat, and I also been wanting to tell you dat you better stop talking like ya better dan dem, ya better act like you need da money. Coming out here in ya pretty skirt and matching sandals, ya look just like dem, dese toorist ain’t want see dat. We tell ya sister da same ting when she first come out here. She was just like you, sitting here dress up acting like she better dan dem, dese tooris don’t like dat, ya better learn quick. See, I been doing dis all my life, I done learn how to act like dey wan see me act, and den when I finish out here, I is be me when a go home, you know what I mean? I gat to make da money first, and den be me later”.
At that moment, I remember thinking, how did this old woman know that she had to act a certain way, to fit into a certain image, to earn money? For that matter, how did they all know? This was not an isolated case. Many of the women working in the market said the same thing, relating how they made themselves into the Bahamas Tourism Board’s idea of Bahamian culture.

Just as the vendors adopt an image to sell their wares, so, too, do they adopt behaviors that appeal to the tourists. Abram and Waldren (1997) explain this behavior in Identity with People and Places, where the commodification of tourist cultures is played out by “locals’” roles of perpetuating and buying into constructed misconceptions of culture. “The tourists effectively create the place, as their presence constitutes an audience that can be construed as non-local, thus reconstituting a distinction between those ‘of’ the place and those merely ‘in it’” (8). In the case of the Bahamas, faced with tourists’ demands for “authentic culture,” the Bahamas government responded by constructing a pastoral identity of people living in areas largely untouched by modernity and change, where both hosts and guests conspire together in the production of authentic Bahamian cultural identities.

Comparatively, as Jane Desmond (1999) notes, “public display of bodies and their materiality, (how bodies look, what they do, where they do it, who watches, and under what conditions), are profoundly important in structuring identity categories and notions of subjectivity… when commodified, these displays form the basis of hugely profitable industries” (xiii). During my time in the Straw Market, I realize that people come to places like the
Bahamas to experience “difference,” physical difference like race, language, song and dance. Port Lucaya stages a cultural show where women dress in “traditional” Caribbean outfits, brightly-created, singing and dancing for the tourists. The entertainment at Port Lucaya Count Basie Square includes frequent visits from Calypso groups, solo artists and steel bands, not to mention local floor shows with limbo dancers and fire-eaters. These live performances authenticate these packaged differences and allow tourists contact with them (xii). Thus, these shows and performances become the real Bahamian culture, and result in large profits for the creators and benefactors of tourism in the Bahamas. These performances of culture, through song and dance, is then etched on the minds of the consuming tourist, who then expects all of the locals to be performers. As a poster in Dominica in the early 1980s put it: “Smile. You are a walking tourist attraction” (cited in Patullo 1996, 62). That such forms of entertainment are purported to represent indigenous culture is stereotypical in itself. However, generalizations that lead to stereotyping become even more explicit when supposed national characteristics are linked to entertainment (Dann 1996, 74). Thus, tourists, on a daily basis, come to expect the women in the Straw Market to perform this packaged, constructed culture.

A Story of Performance and Survival

On one occasion during my time in the market, one of the ladies whom I had befriended was dancing and performing with one of our many visitors. It was obvious that she did not want to dance, but the gentleman took her hand and started dancing with her. He said to her, “If you want me to spend some money with you, then you must dance with me. Dance like I know you can. Let me see you wind those hips like the song says.” This lady, with whom I had spoken all morning about her grand-children and the beautiful bedroom furniture and linens they had brought her a few weeks ago for Mothers’ Day, got up and danced with this man, shaking her
body like her life depended on the money that he would spend in her store. I sat there with tears in my eyes, wanting to go over and stop this spectacle, but the other ladies had joined in. They were all dancing around him in a circle. In the end, he bought a two-dollar shot glass.

Afterwards, she came over to me and said, “Young ting, what you tinking? I know ya tinking sometin so ya might as well tell me.” I was quiet for awhile, trying my best not to disrespect her in anyway, trying to choose my words carefully. But before I could say anything, she said, “I see da look on ya face, ya wondering why I dance?” I looked around at the other ladies and they were still celebrating her dance, and talking about how cheap the man was not to have bought more. The dancing lady continued, “Chile, I done been out here so long you tink I don’t know that when dey look at me dey don’t even see a person, dey on vacation, dey come here to have fun, I is a Bahamian and dat’s what I was put here for, dat’s our culture, dat’s toorism, if I wan make money I gat to perform. How you tink I live dis long? Chile, ya gatta put ya pride aside and tink about feeding ya chiren.”

Moving to the doorway of my sister’s store, she motioned me to come over to her, pointing at the many tourists walking around the market. She said, “Looka dem, dese white people head ain’t good, dey coming round here asking all kinda foolish questions, speking me to know when it gon stop raining. Chile, I is just make someting up and, chile, like ya jus see, dey gon want ya to dance wit dem when dey drunk, just do what ya gat to do to make ‘em happy; cause at the end of the day, dey is ya bread and butter.” As I left her and returned to the store, I felt a sorrow in my heart that I had never felt. I had known before starting this project that this experience would not be what I had initially anticipated, I had known that my summer spent working in the Straw Market would change the way I viewed my country. I look at all of these women performing on some level their role as “tourist product”. I begin to think of our identities
as black Bahamian women in this tourists saturated space. And sadly came to the realization that though the Bahamas was celebrating its thirty fourth year of independence, we were still enslaved and colonized, only now it is by our own making.

_The Academician at Work in the Straw Market_

I wrestled with a contradiction I had not felt before. My first customers wanted to know why the jewelry was so expensive. I remember looking at them and feeling a sense of pride that they looked like they could not afford to buy any of the jewelry in the store. They said how beautiful everything was, and left. I was glad that they did not buy anything, because I did not want them to have anything in the store. These feelings persisted throughout the summer, but as the days and then weeks went on, and I encountered more tourists, I realized that the way that I was dealing with them did not make any money for my sister, and I had to pay rent back in the U.S. After a few weeks, I found myself smiling more and acting like the ladies across the way in the Straw Market. I started performing the way the ladies did, or the way that I thought the tourists perceived me. I played the part of the happy native, welcoming them to our shores and letting them know how happy I was that they were here enjoying our beautiful weather and our beautiful beaches. I finally realized what these women were trying to tell me all along. Smile! Tourism is your bread and butter.

What I learned from these ladies is that they play out a contradiction in their identity each day. Living out that contradiction is also the way these women in the Straw Market make a living in Freeport, Bahamas. Thus the failure of these women, and the people of the Bahamas to ‘smile’ and be ‘nice’ to all tourists at all times would mean a loss of economic resources, sending the country into virtual poverty. As Peter Morgan, Barbados first Minister of tourism writes:
In small communities, which most of our Caribbean islands are, everyone is involved in tourism whether they believe it or not or like it or not because it is the total impression of his or her vacation which decides a person whether or not they plan to return. The price might be right, the climate perfect, the rum just what the doctor should have ordered but, above all, if a person doesn’t feel welcome then he is not coming back” (cited in Patullo 1996, 62).

The Caribbean’s generic message “Be nice to Tourists” is not just directed at the women working in the Straw Market, but also at hotel employees, customs and immigration officers (the welcoming committee), taxi-drivers (the “service ambassadors”) the beach vendors, farmers and school children. The whole population, then, is charged with a responsibility towards the tourist, and is encouraged to feel part of the tourist industry.1

It would be easy to reach the conclusion that if the Bahamian people, especially the women working in the Straw Market, do not mold themselves and their environment to meet the tourists’ expectation of a welcoming people, as well as their experience as a whole when they visit the Bahamas, then tourism will decline. The tourist ideal influences local self-representation and shapes the Bahamas to its own image. At the same time, the people of the Bahamas, as the previous stories of the women working in the Straw Market demonstrate, are not passive in the tourism process. As long as these women can shape, to some extent, the environment of the Market in their own way, to provide adventures in a way perceived to be authentic Bahamian “Bahama Mama” culture by the tourists, the Bahamas will be maintained as a tourist site.

1 Every summer when I return home, I am bombarded by advertisements from our local television network ZNS by commercials with messages encouraging children to help tourists “whenever you can, in anyway possible.” These “tourism awareness” ads are designed to indoctrinate Bahamian children from a young age into the beliefs that tourism is their only way of life and must be a part of the ideology which inscribes their Bahamian identity. These ads aim to educate the local population into an
Chapter II: Examining the Process “Behind the Smile”

The Africans who made the Middle Passage and came to live in the West Indies was an entirely new historical and social category. He was not an African he was a West Indian black who was a slave. And there had never been people like that before and there haven’t been since.

_The Making of the Caribbean People_ C.L.R James (1966)

**Slavery/Colonialism and the Creation of “Other”**

_Home_, my introduction to this project, constitute the present experience of the women in the Straw Market and all Bahamians working in the tourist trade. But the experience is not easily understood, nor easily defined. History provides a concrete means of understanding that the contradiction exists as a social process of “Othering” that has its roots in slavery and colonialism, and is expressed in the tourist trade today.

The institution of slavery for African captives was established in the Caribbean shortly after Columbus’ exploration brought him to the Bahamas in 1492. Although the islands lacked the natural resources important to the royal coffers of Spain, the Arawak Indians constituted a valuable labor source and, as such, were rapidly pressed into slavery throughout the Caribbean (Saunders 1994). Many died from exposure to European diseases and, by 1520, the Bahamas had been all but completely depopulated. The British first settled the Bahamas in 1649, and by the late 1700s, the population of the Bahamas had grown. Slaves and free blacks made up the bulk of the population (Rommen 12).

But how did this business of colonial slavery develop? One argument states that European culture produced people who needed an “other”, a class of people who were inferior and incorporated qualities rejected or even demonized by European culture. In this way,
Europeans would be predisposed to the development and acceptance of a system of white racial privilege (Randall 2000, 4). However, Nancy Stepan (2000) qualifies this idea by arguing that until European involvement in the African slave trade, starting in the fifteenth century, slave systems (such as those in Greek and Roman societies) were not based on distinguishable racial differences between masters and slaves. In fact, the absence of racially-distinguishing marks in slaves made the use of artificial signs, such as shaved heads, tattoos or mutilations necessary to identify the slave (67). But by the eighteenth century, three hundred years into, and at the height of, the European slave trade in Africa, slavery was “almost entirely black,” where blackness itself “came to be associated negatively with the degraded condition of slavery” (56). By the eighteenth and nineteenth century, colonizers in the Caribbean saw their racial identity in part as color-coded—as “white”, as opposed to “black” or “negro”—and also saw whiteness as both normal and the natural corollary of superiority and privilege, although this privilege tended to be assumed rather than explicitly stated (76).

Whiteness as a socially constructed phenomenon should be traced back to W. E. B. DuBois, whose *Black Reconstruction* elevated the concept of “whiteness” as an analytical problem in determinations of class and racial stratification. As many race scholars note (Roediger, R.D.; Rodriguez, N.; and Saxton, A.), “whiteness” represents the standard, the norm, which allows for it to go practically unnoticed and untouchable as a racial category. For centuries, “white” has became the yardstick by which everyone else is measured (Collins 1997, 23). Nakayama and Krizek (1999) define it as a “relatively uncharted territory that has remained invisible as it continues to influence the identity of those both within and without its domain.” But the invisibility of its normalcy does not equate to a passive maintenance of the status quo. “It affects the everyday fabric of our lives but resists, sometimes violently, any extensive
characterization that would allow for the mapping of its contours. It wields power yet endures as a largely unarticulated position” (Fanon78). But how can something invisible, relatively transparent, affect and penetrate societal structure? Many scholars have begun to pose answers to this question. Recently, the everyday use of whiteness has come under serious scrutiny from scholars ranging from the fields of cultural studies to communication, from sociology to psychology, just to name a few. But many people of color have already developed some understanding of whiteness, especially for survival skills. Black feminist theorist bell hooks (1995) describe whiteness in the black imagination. She contends that, “Black folks associated whiteness with the terrible, the terrifying, the terrorizing.

White people were regarded as terrorists, especially those who dared to enter that segregated space of blackness … Their presence terrified me. Whatever their mission, they looked to me much like the unofficial white men who came to enact rituals of terror and torture. As a child, I did not know how to tell them apart, how to ask the real white people to please stand up. The terror that I felt is one black people have shared (171).

For hooks, whiteness in the black imagination is often a representation of terror, which is not just confined to blacks in North America. She notes that “black folks all over the world do not escape this sense of terror… “Did they journey across the tracks with the same ‘adventurous’ spirit that other white men carried to Africa, Asia, to those mysterious places they would one day call the “third world?” (170).

In the aftermath of slavery, colonialism and imperialism, whiteness and the terror associated with it in the minds of black folks, as hooks so aptly describes, can be found in many different countries and among many different cultures. For instance, post-colonial Bahamas is shaped by the knowledge, ideologies, norms, and practices of whiteness, all of which affect our
identity and sense of self. In colonial Bahamas, being black, not owning land, nor having a
certain amount of money in the bank meant that you cannot partake in the political and economic
decisions of the country, you cannot vote in government elections. If you are white and a part of
the European elite, you were afforded every political and economic privilege of citizenship
(Saunders 1994, 23). This stark division necessarily carried important ramifications for agency,
moral authority, intelligence, and belonging. As Randall (2002) explains, “To be black implied a
certain degeneracy of intellect, morals, self-restraint, and political values; to be white suggested
moral maturity, self assurance, personal independence, and political sophistication” (10).

Furthermore, this division—borne from colonialism—has destructive psychological
repercussions for all colonial subjects, not simply individuals. In *Black Skin White Masks*,
Frantz Fanon asserts that black identity is shaped by the oppressive sociopolitical structures of
colonial culture:

The effective desalination of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social
and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:
primarily, economic; subsequently, the internalization—or, better, the Epidermalization—of
inferiority (1969, 10–11).

In this work and others like it, Fanon charts the psychological oppression of black people,
specifically focusing on the effects of racism and oppression. This book is part manifesto, part
analysis, in that he draws data from his own experiences as a black intellectual in a whitened
world, and elaborates the ways in which the colonizer/colonized relationship is normalized
psychologically. He believes that a racist culture prevents psychological health in black people,
because it generates harmful psychological constructs that both blinds black people to their
subjection to a universalized white norm and alienates their consciousness. Fanon contends that
the black man dons a white mask, or thinks of himself as universal, internalizing or “epidermalizing” cultural values into his consciousness, and thereby produces a disjunction between the black man’s consciousness and his body. By behaving according to white norms, he is alienated from himself.

For Fanon, an inferiority complex is developed through economics and the process of racial stratification. Whiteness encapsulates and structures both the history of Bahamians’ economic and sociopolitical cultures and the ways they perceive and make meaning of themselves in the aftermath of European slavery, colonization and now—tourism. As Rothman (1998) contends,

…tourism is barely distinguishable from other forms of colonial economies. Typically founded by resident proto-entrepreneurs, the industry expands beyond institutional control, becomes institutionalized by large-scale forces of capital, and then grows to mirror not the values of the place but those of the traveling public” (16).

Moreover, with the advent and development of tourism throughout the Bahamas (Johnson 1994), whiteness became the protracted mode for which Bahamian progression was assessed (19). The minority white elites in the Bahamas benefited financially from the tourist industry, building an economy and a country where rich wealthy whites can be served by the majority of the black populace: hence, the development of a “white tourist culture.” The Bahamas Government and managers in the Ministry of Tourism constructed and presented Bahamians to the world as perennially willing, hardworking people, “warm and genial Bahamians” (Saunders 1994) who were indeed ready and willing to serve. Picard (1996) has called this development a “touristic culture,” or becoming “touristified servants” through the process of tourism production (86). To
support the perception of a constructed "white tourist culture," I turn to Caribbean historian Dereck Walcott. On accepting the 1992 Nobel Prize in literature, Walcott expressed his outrage at the process of tourist development in the Caribbean, a region that in his words is in danger of being reduced to sun, sand, sex, smiles and servility by multinational capitalism and with the eager cooperation of its own local and economic elites:

In our tourists’ brochures the Caribbean is a blue pool into which the [American] republic dangles the extended foot of Florida as inflated rubber islands bob and drinks with umbrellas float towards her on a raft. This is how the islands from the shame of necessity sell themselves; this is the seasonal erosion of their identity, that high-priced repletion of the same images of service that cannot distinguish one island from the other, with a future of polluted marinas, land deals negotiated by ministers, and all of this conducted to the music of Happy Hour and the [proverbial] smile. What is this earthly paradise for our visitors? Two weeks without rain and a mahogany tan and, at sunset, local troubadours in straw hats and floral shirts beating “Yellow Bird” and “Banana Boat Song” to death (cited in Strachan 2002).

For Walcott, folk culture has become a marketable commodity, readily and monotonously packaged. The Caribbean has merely replaced one form of slavery and exploitation with another; only this time, it’s the region’s nations that encourage its people to promote and create the fantasy, the exotic, for the tourist who wants to experience the “so called nativeness” (16), packaged and sold as Caribbean or Bahamian culture. That “nativeness,” the hospitable nature of Caribbean peoples, requires for Caribbean people to always wear a happy smile, so that tourists who came to the islands encounter the hospitable “native” that is sold

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2 I use the term “white tourist culture” in this dissertation to describe how Bahamians’ dependency on a tourist economy—one that has built its financial system on the myth of paradise, where white tourists are catered to and black Bahamians serve,
throughout the world as a part of the Caribbean. With this process, the peoples of the Caribbean must negotiate new identities for themselves while relating with foreign tourists. Cultural invention and perpetuation then becomes an integral part of Bahamian and Caribbean social history in the region’s quest to capitalize from mass tourism. Caribbean peoples take pride in their ‘hospitable cultures,’ but the governments and leaders of the region have packaged and promoted it for tourism. The sun which had once been a coarsening threat to white skin (Pattullo 1996) has become the new icon, and the age of the sun, sand and sea have replaced, silver, gold, tobacco, cotton and sugar. The people of the Caribbean again struggle with claiming an identity, but through re-inventing themselves, they have become mere caricatures in the region’s attempts to parcel experiences of paradise.

Walcott’s criticism is grounded, of course, in reality. Every day I spent in the markets forced me to feel the “shame of necessity,” as Walcott defines it. I felt my black body being sold in the proliferated atmosphere of a ‘white tourist culture’ that the Bahamas government manufactured and sold. Consequently, the popular misconception of the entire Caribbean as a ‘beach replete with swaying coconut palms’ is the direct outcome of tourist advertising/and promotional campaigns, and the literature plays out the contradiction in its depiction of a tourist paradise, in contrast to the impoverished conditions (Cohen 1997, 23). The daily realities of urban concentration, poverty and poor housing in the Caribbean are selectively weeded out from the stereotype. In a similar vein, the local population’s behavior is represented as that of a group of smiling, servile natives ready to respond to the bidding of predominantly white tourists (Potter et al. 1999: 102–3). In this way, a contemporary travel discourse is comprised of four discursive elements: 1) privilege, 2) desire and longing, 3) sightseeing, and 4) fanciful play, all of which the locals must ensure tourists receive when visiting the Bahamas, not to mention other Caribbean

entertain and cultivate the exotic other—both impinges upon and constructs Bahamian identity.
islands, because of dependency upon tourist dollars. Simmons (2004) noted that an “element of tourists” privilege presumes that tourists are already privileged within their Western culture. “Narratives in these texts stipulate tourists’ exclusive access to luxury and unspoiled nature or them being distanced from, or elevated above, local inhabitants … These are common strategies used to create Tourist-Other relations: superior tourists and inferior local inhabitants” (cited in Hall and Tucker 2004).

Tourism born out of slavery and colonialism mirrors every encounter blacks have with whites and has rekindled memories of servitude. As Maurice Bishop, the former prime Minister of Grenada, said in a speech to regional policy-makers on tourism:

It is important for us to face the fact that in the early days and to some extent even today, most of the tourists who come to our country happen to be white, and this clear association of whiteness and privilege is a major problem for Caribbean people just emerging out of racist colonial history where we have been so carefully taught the superiority of things white and inferiority of things black (cited in Patullo 64).

Traditional Bahamian acceptance of social order helps to account for the foreign image, more frequently held and perpetuated throughout the world, of the Caribbean as a paradise where whites can luxuriate while they are served by black people. Thus, Bahamians’ identity is developed into and determined by a ‘white tourist culture,’ a culture that creates an environment where predominantly white tourists can come and know that they are safe to experience the exotic, the heritage of a culture, scripted for them by actors who need their gaze for the advancement and virtual survival of their country.

During my time in the Straw Market, I observed how the predominantly North American and European tourists brought to “their holiday island” their own racist attitudes and behavior,
and treated me and the other women working in the market as the type of dehumanized curiosities and exotic objects that are so frequently portrayed in tourist literature. But the performance is cooperative as Welch (2005) points out:

As we sell bits of the [Bahamas], we sell a bit of our soul. We market our country, all wrapped up in a lovely package of “all inclusive”; but it should be called all exclusive, because the only people included are the world’s wealthy … There is a price on our country, the sand, the sea, the water, the air itself, as we parcel it out and sell it to anyone with the ability to buy (89).

Consequently, like most of the Caribbean, the Bahamas are packaged for the consumption of visiting tourists. Walcott (1974) links this packaged creation of paradise to an extension of the colonial plantation. The significance of this connection of course is the conclusion that tourism has marginalized the people of the Bahamas and the rest of the Caribbean in their own countries.

Similarly, in his discussion of Caribbean tourism as an extension of the colonial plantation, Strachan (2002) in a section of his book entitled *The Plantation Hotel* states:

In a number of crucial ways, tourism has grown out of and sustains the plantation economy. The plantations laid economic, political, cultural, and social groundwork that has enabled tourism to function so effectively in the Caribbean. As an institution of colonization, the plantation established a political and economic dependency on the metropolitan centers that tourism merely extends … many former plantation Great Houses have been turned into hotels in the Caribbean, the hotel is literally a plantation … “served to resuscitate the dying master-servant culture of the Great House era” (Taylor
Tourism thus reinforced the social superiority of whites, encouraged black subordination and servility, and fed white prejudice and narcissism (10).

This connection between slavery and tourism was also made by the Trinidadian-born V.S. Naipaul, who argued in the 1960’s that the Caribbean had this time chosen its path to a new slavery: “Every poor country accepts tourism as an unavoidable degradation. None has gone as far as some of these West Indian islands, which, in the name of tourism, are selling themselves into a new slavery” (Patullo, 27). At about the same time as Naipaul, Fanon wrote in The Wretched of the Earth that tourism recreated the labor relations of slavery and the colonial situation. More directly than Naipaul, Fanon blamed the local bourgeoisie as the enablers of this “new slavery”: “the national middleclass will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise, and it will in practice set up it country as the brothel of Europe” (Fanon, 28, cited in Patullo 1996, 65).

Further, Hilary Beckles’ (1990) analysis of the relationship in Barbados between the white business elite, the state and the people, defines tourism the new plantocracy. “The new financial tourism base means that the state has become the overseer … The feeling is that black people are more marginalized now, that there is a return to colonialism. Because whites own all the land, commerce, and have all that major duty-free outlets and now the sea ports—the same group is in control” (110). In tourism, blacks have no status in terms of decision-making. In neighboring Antigua, opposition politician and journalist Tim Hector (1989) observes a similar pattern. “In the beginning, a tiny foreign elite ownership and management controlled sugar; in the end, a tiny, foreign elite, in ownership and management, controls tourism. Slavery or wage-slavery: that has been our lot” (cited in Patullo 30).
In like manner, Dann (1996) argues that natives who lie closest to the inner tourist domain (hotel employees, maids, domestics, waiters, bartenders, and so on) are linked to the tourist by their service roles [wage slavery], unequal roles that past [colonial] and present travel brochures, display visually, often showing tourists eating and drinking while the smiling attendant, either carrying a multi-hued cocktail, filling a glass or serving from a long buffet table, stands nearby. Often tourists are seated in these pictures, while the servants stand or stoop. In other pictures where the parties are of different racial backgrounds, tourists are usually white and the native black, thereby adding a ‘massa-slave’ dimension to the phenomenon. In plantocratic tourist destinations, at the table ‘massa’ is portrayed often as the mistress and the slave male. Female attendants formerly associated with the Great House were shown to be carrying on this tradition as maids (Dann 1996, 73, cited in Selwyn 1996). The history of this marketed material, then, plays a large role in determination of roles and expected roles of Bahamians.

In conclusion, in the Bahamas, tourism and the genesis of a ‘white tourist culture’ conceived out of the plantation system has played a vital part in identity construction, the social and cultural structures of society, and has contributed to creating stark divisions and to widening the gap between rich and poor, white and black. In contemporary Bahamas, most of the population perceives little racial prejudice or discrimination throughout the islands, not only because of our independence from the British, but also due to our black government and our growing black professionals’ roles as managers in various hotels throughout the Islands. Instead, the dominant view in the Bahamas is that class is the most salient social division, on which everyday Bahamian discourse on inequality and social identity focuses. However, it is precisely and ironically in the process of forging class identity that black Bahamians connect upward mobility with whiteness—formerly in the pursuit of colonization, and presently in tourism. This
process, in the end, inadvertently enables racial discrimination to construct and determine Bahamian social, political, and economic self-worth, thus sustaining the old hierarchical societal mode of the plantation system out of which tourism was spawned.

**Performing Tourism: Race and the Black Body**

Before examining the gaze and the “norm” of whiteness, it is important first to examine the effects of the gaze of whiteness. Ronald Takaki (1994) notes regarding the views of European conquerors toward Africa, “It is constantly pointed out as a proof of his racial backwardness that in Africa the Negro was never able to achieve a culture of his own. Descriptions of hideous conditions in Africa have belonged to this popular theory from the beginning. Civilization is alleged to be the accomplishment of the white race; the Negro, particularly, is without a share in it” (15). Takaki’s assertion of the assumed inferiority of blacks is as true for Bahamians as it is for the Africans of his argument.

Not being recognized as a whole woman, assumed to be inferior, has had harmful results for every non-white Bahamian woman—an experience I shared during my summer working in the Straw Market. In the market, I was reduced to a black torso without a mind or history. In my own country, under the gaze of the white tourist culture created by the Bahamas government, I felt for the first time in my life that I was racially observed as the “Other,” and as a representative of an inferior race, while these tourists consumed me as a part of experiencing paradise. More importantly, Fanon (1968) speaks about all colonial subjects, at the same time he recognizes the impact of the colonial gaze upon individuals. Regarding being considered among an inferior race, he writes,

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-
toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, and racial defects … I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world, that I am a brute beast, that my people and I are like a walking dung-heap that disgustingly fertilizes sweet sugar cane and silky cotton, that I have no use in the world. Then I will quite simply try to make myself white: that is, I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human (98). Thus, the colonial gaze posits that black people are “primitive,” while white people are culturally superior.

The axis of “superior-primitive” under which I lived this summer rendered me, a colonized intellectual, into a mere performer, a black inferior body in the quest for the white tourist dollars. Even though I knew that some of these tourists could not afford to pay for my sister’s merchandise, on occasion, I still felt the pain and inferiority that was taught to black folks for centuries. My blackness had rendered me invisible. And as Chapter Seven, entitled, My Time in the Straw Market: The Participant-Observer Becomes the Object, explains, it also brought me to the center, a place to find beauty and peace in my identity.

Unfortunately, this type of realization is not the norm, and there are reasons for it, additional to the fact that many people of color have internalized grand perceptions of whiteness, there is also a color caste that has been used among various groups of people within colonized African communities—a color scheme that privileges lighter skin over darker skin. Color prejudice involves the unique humiliation of knowing that one is seen by others as physically frightening, ugly, or loathsome. As Harris (2000) explains, by focusing on the body, color
prejudice incorporates the powerful recognition of a physical distinctiveness that permits currents of sexual repulsion and attraction, fear, loathing and desire to twist themselves around the notion of “race” (9). One consequence of color prejudice’s focus solely on the body is that the experience of black people is reduced to the body. Iris Marion Young (1990) contends that:

Much of the oppressive experience of cultural imperialism occurs in mundane contexts of interaction—in gestures, speech, and tone of voice, movement, and reactions of others … Pulses of attractions and aversion modulate all interactions, with specific consequences for the experience of the body. When the dominant culture defines some groups as different, as the Other, the members of those groups are imprisoned in their bodies (23).

Young’s argument is clearly illustrated in Frantz Fanon’s (1967) account of inadvertently frightening a small white child, where he realizes that he is viewed as frightening and loathsome. Fanon notes:

My body was given to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning on that white winter day. The Negro is ugly, the Negro is animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it’s cold, the nigger is shivering, because he is cold goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother’s arms; Momma, the nigger’s going to eat me up… I sit down at the fire and I become aware of my uniform. I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly. I stop there, for who can tell me what [is] beauty (114).

Fanon’s narrative is one of the most powerful moments in the literature of anti-racism. But it also set the stage for performance of color, which is inevitably connected to the white gaze’s behavioral expectations of blacks—in essence, displaying the ugliness, the animal nature, the
otherness that Fanon himself critiques. I myself, a black Bahamian woman, find that theorizing race as a performance offers several benefits. First, it facilitates the recognition that, as a woman of color from a predominantly black Caribbean country which depends on the tourist industry for actual survival, I (and my fellow Bahamians!) have been performing this inscribed racial and ethnic identity almost all of my life. Second, it reveals the particular ways black women in the Bahamas are forced to perform these constructed identities to meet the requirements of a racist tourist culture—and in doing so, points to the way that white tourist culture shapes the most intimate parts of our identities as those women make a living. As Stuart Hall (1997) suggests, identities are inextricably linked to and shaped by both contemporary social positioning and self-constructed narratives. Positions and counter-positions are named and arranged as individuals negotiate their identities while in interaction with others. Hall concludes that self-definitions are complicated by cultural registers and social coordinates, which over time become concretized and situated between the center and the periphery. For me, performing and positioning my identity within the realm of the gaze of white tourism rendered my black body a mere puppet in the tourist show, a show where my subjectivity was questioned, and cultural objectivity solidified. Put another way, I played out exactly Hall’s assertion that “we may know or suspect that they [identities] are representations constructed by others, but nonetheless we invest in the particular position, recognize ourselves in it, and identify with it” (98).

Moreover, it should be understood that, as a paradigm, performance is not just about stereotypes and negative images; it is about the particular treatment of black bodies as commodities, which has persisted for hundreds of years and continues today (Johnson (2005). This development, of course, must be acknowledged as having begun with slavery, where slave owners fostered a climate of separation that would not allow the communion of slave and slave
masters as human beings. The civilized-savage and human-inhuman dichotomies were intentionally arranged by the owner to maintain distance and disdain, to prove to his self that black bodies were inferior, and devoid of basic thinking and reasoning skills (Memmi, 1991, 13). Though illogical, it seemed the slave exteriority was all that was of concern. It was that which facilitated the slave master’s detachment from seeing the black body as human. Implicitly, this exploration of performing tourism suggests that black Bahamian bodies are canvases on which the exotic proletariat is inscribed and expected to be performed. As Johnson (2005) explains:

Since the emergence of race as a social construct, black bodies have become surfaces of racial representation. To say it bluntly, race is about bodies that have been assigned social meanings … The body was legibly encoded and scripted as an object of secularity and, consequently, became its own discursively-bound identity politic. This politic is embedded in white supremacist ideology and black corporeal inscription (38).

This implication that black bodies are amoral and their roles scripted throughout history also legitimates an unspoken assumption about the virtues that come with white bodies. As used in the Bahamian tourism industry, this construction of black bodies as cultural tourist attraction furthers the exploitation of black Bahamian people. As their “blackness” and their bodies become a part of the commodity in which they must perform; The people of the Bahamas must stage their “race,” and must force themselves to “smile” on a daily basis. This performance is not simply an assumption of identity, but a violently psychological, and contradictory, script to mold identity. Dubois expounds this point in *The Souls of Black Folks*:

the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellow men; that to maintain
this privilege men have waged war until today war tends to become universal and
continuous, and the excuse for this war continues largely to be color and race (25).

Racial difference is, of course, socially-constructed, and it continues to have social,
psychological and cultural significance. The concept of race does not reflect an objective
condition, but its concrete, deleterious effects neither make it an illusion.

**Invisible Whiteness**

The ‘Othering’ effects of the colonial, white gaze upon black bodies, however, cannot be
a complete discussion without examining whiteness. Anti-colonialist Frantz Fanon (1967) was
clear when he wrote, “To speak is to exist absolutely for the “Other” (17). Writer-scholar Ralph
Ellison (1952) also lucidly addressed this matter when his narrator in *Invisible Man* states, “I am
an invisible man … I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me” (3). In
addition to Fanon’s and Ellison’s assertions, I contend that the ability for whiteness to remain
unmarked and unmasked aids in its production of white privilege. Peggy McIntosh (1998)
defines white privilege as “an invisible weightless knapsack of special tools and provisions that
white people can cash in on each and every day without any conscious effort” (cited in Warren,
2003, 15). This privileging act is often at the expense of people of color. In many cases, people
of color become exploited, marginalized, invisible, and dehumanized in order to sustain a system
that glorifies white people and whiteness. This form of miscegenation and white privilege has
been a means of rendering and keeping black people inferior since the advent of the European
slave trade.

Nakayama and Krizek (1995) offer a way to understand how whiteness can be examined
from a historical point of view. Their examination parallels Omi and Winant’s (1994) theory of
racial formation, which examines race and racism from different contexts and historical periods.
In their examination of whiteness, Nakayama and Krizek write, “Whiteness, stated or unstated, in any of its various forms, leaves one invoking the historically-constituted and systematically-exercised power relations” (302). But even more importantly regarding the history of colonialism, Shome (1999) applies these theories by contending that,

As a power-laden discursive formation that privileges, secures, and normalizes the cultural space of the white Western subject, whiteness ‘travels’ and has historically traveled to ‘other worlds’—whether it was the physical travel of white imperial bodies colonizing ‘other worlds’ or today’s neocolonial travel of white cultural products—media, music, television products, academic texts, and Anglo fashions—to “other worlds.” (108)

Thus, whiteness has been sustained historically among many people, not just the white western subject.

Moreover, whiteness consists of a body of knowledge, ideologies, norms, and particular practices that have been constructed since the beginning of slavery and colonization in the West. The knowledge, ideologies, norms, and practices of whiteness affect how we think about race, what we see when we look at certain physical features, how we build our own racial identities, how we operate in the world, and how we construct epistemology—that is, what and we “know” about our place that world. Whiteness is shaped and maintained by the full array of social institutions—legal, economic, political, educational, religious, and cultural. As individuals and groups affected by whiteness, people in turn influence and shape these institutions. Whiteness serves to preserve the position of the ruling white elite who benefit economically from the labor of people of color. Whiteness, as knowledge, ideology, norms, and practices, determines who qualifies as “white,” and maintains a race and class hierarchy in which the groups of people who
qualify as white disproportionately control power and resources. Furthermore, within that group of white people, a small minority of elites controls most of that group’s power and resources (Randall 2002, 2).

Ironically, whiteness is usually constructed by what it claims not to be. Whiteness is the opposite of “otherness”. It occupies a space by negation, allowing one to understand what it is by what it is not. Historically, whiteness has always occupied a central location and, mostly, in opposition to the others. As Bhaba (1986) asserts, Otherness is an episteme in White colonialist discourses used to mark socioeconomic boundaries of racial difference and announce the superiority of the hegemonic subject—in this case, whiteness and white bodies (14). Dyer (1997) explains further, “White discourse implacably reduces the non-white subject to being a function of the white subject, not allowing her/him space or autonomy, permitting neither the recognition of similarities nor the acceptance of differences except as a means for knowing the white self” (544).

After positing this idea of reductiveness, Dyer (2002) later likens the rhetoric attached to whiteness to a fantasy that has the power to manufacture whiteness and anything associated with it as synonymous with purity and truth and goodness. He goes on to explain that power in contemporary society habitually passes itself off as embodied in the normal, as opposed to the superior—a behavior all-too common to forms of power (165). However, it works in a peculiarly seductive way with whiteness, because of the way it seems rooted in common-sense thought, in things other than ethnic difference … Thus it is said (even in liberal textbooks) that there are inevitable associations of white with light and therefore safety, and black with dark and therefore danger, and that this explains racism … people point to the Jewish and Christian use of the white and black to symbolize good
and evil, as carried still in such expressions as a “black mark,” “white magic,” “to blacken the character” and so on. Socialized to believe the fantasy, that whiteness represents goodness and [people] assume this is the way black people conceptualize whiteness.

Dyer’s message succinctly explains how people who benefit from colonialism and whiteness experience racism profoundly differently from colonized subjects: “They do not imagine that the way whiteness makes its presence felt in black life, most often as terrorizing imposition, a power that wounds, hurts, tortures, is a reality that disrupts the fantasy of whiteness as representing goodness” (167).

For black people in the Bahamas; the traumatic experiences and representation of white as “good” and black as “bad” is still a part of our history of racial domination and colonial hierarchal torture that has shaped the social and political constructions of identity formation of black Bahamian people. Black self-denigration has played a major role in Bahamian affairs. The presumption is that whiteness is to be admired; blackness not only is equated with impoverished, it also means one is to be despised. These general expectations have been internalized and, along with the historical reality of the Bahamas, have created a reality that closely mimics these beliefs.

This manufactured reality pervades multiple facets of everyday life. In a progressive understanding of whiteness—focusing on how whiteness is performed in everyday life—Warren (2003) describes how whiteness is performed in the educational classroom and how it is sustained through mundane activity. “Whiteness is a reiterative performance—an identity that is maintained and naturalized through our everyday communication” (8). He urges scholars to take a more formidable approach to whiteness, “calling for a more complex way of seeing whiteness
and the body … arguing that the research on whiteness needs a more performative analysis. Fundamental to my discussion here is the assertion that changing the way whiteness is examined may also change the way in which blackness has been constructed and examined. There is, however, disagreement regarding this proposal.

Johnson (2005) advocates understanding blackness not in opposition to whiteness, but as a cultural identity that is multi-dimensional, fluid, and varied from location to location. In his discussion, he advocates that we examine blackness from a performance trajectory, and insists that blackness “is slippery—ever beyond the reach of one’s grasp. Once you think you have a hold on it, it transforms into something else and travels in another direction” (2). Stuart Hall addresses similar concerns in his article, *Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities*. He states, “Blackness as a political identity in the light of the understanding of any identity is always complexly composed, always historically constructed [:] it is never in the same place but always positional” (152).

bell hooks (1992), however, while addressing the critical work of post-colonial critics, argues for a wider awareness: “I found much writing that bespeaks the continued fascination with the way white minds, particularly the colonial imperialist traveler, perceive blackness, and very little expressed interests in representations of whiteness in the black imagination” (165). She traces the invisible power of whiteness by “addressing the way in which whiteness exists without knowledge of blackness, even as it collectively asserts control,” and notes the barriers to understanding both blackness and whiteness by recalling James Baldwin’s *Notes of A Native Son*, which “explores these issues with a clarity and frankness that is no longer fashionable in a world where evocations of pluralism and diversity act to obscure differences arbitrarily imposed and maintained by white racist domination” (166). In the essay, “Stranger in the Village,”
narrates hooks, Baldwin writes about being the first black person to visit a Swiss village with only white inhabitants. The following lengthy excerpt illustrates lucidly the power of the colonized mind to ascertain the mechanics of whiteness, even as the normalizing behavior that whiteness performs disables its own possibility of understanding its (“invisible”) Othering imperative. The village conducts a yearly ritual of painting individuals black, positioning them as slaves and then buying them, so that the villagers could celebrate their moré of converting “natives’” souls. Baldwin narrates:

I thought of white men arriving for the first time in an African village, strangers there, as I am a stranger here, and tried to imagine the astounded populace touching their hair and marveling at the door of their skin. But there is a great difference between being the first white man to be seen by whites. The white man takes the astonishment as tribute, for he arrives to conquer and to convert the natives, whose inferiority in relation to himself is not to be questioned, whereas I, without a thought of conquest, find myself among a culture a people whose culture controls me … [who] in a sense, created me, people who have cost me more in anguish and rage than they will ever know who yet do not even know of my existence. The astonishment with which I might have greeted them, should they have stumbled into my African village a few hundred years ago, might have rejoiced their hearts. But the astonishment with which they greet me today can only poison mine (cited in hooks 167).

Baldwin’s reflection is eloquent at the same time it is terrible, but is revealing in that his own gaze makes the invisibility of whiteness visible. Baldwin encounters whiteness performing blackness, or rather, whiteness capturing its perception of blackness for the purpose of praising its own values, praising the use to which it puts blackness for its own ideological gain.
The significance of this analysis is central to this dissertation: Only in critique of whiteness can any black, colonized person understand the instruments of her own oppression, as it has been manufactured from the beginnings of colonialism until today. When whiteness’ knapsack is not unpacked (McIntosh 1998), and more importantly, when that knapsack’s contents are not figured into the equation of tourism in a neocolonial context, Fanon’s counter-imperative of a usable identity cannot be formulated. Connecting the history of colonialism to tourism, then, understanding the ways in which the colonized mind ignores, assimilates to and rejects the legacies of the colonial mentality, and listening to the voices of how women in the Straw Market cope with the everyday realities of the tourist economy create the stage by which a usable identity for all Bahamians, in their own regional diversities, may be constructed.

**Methodology**

*Ethnography and Feminist Ethnography*

Ethnography has grown considerably over the past several decades, and the term itself now encompasses a wide array of varyingly divergent practices. Ethnography, which is rooted in anthropology (Malinowski, 1922; Mead, 1928; Boas, 1938), provides an analytical and holistic description of a culture or social world based on intensive participant-observation research. Van Maanen (1988) describes it as decoding one culture while recoding it for another. He sees ethnography as offering portraits of diversity in an increasing homogeneous world. The goal of ethnography is to provide an authentic account of a culture by examining members’ experiences and concerns and their meaning in that social world. Denzin (1994) describes ethnography as a montage where different voices come together through the practice of interactive context; part of the voices are from the researcher, while others are from conversations, observations, interviews, and relevant documents.
Ethnography has a specific epistemological and worldview as its foundation. It adheres to the belief that a culture exists “out there” to be found, and that it is provable by means of observation. Additionally, ethnography assumes that it can offer an authentic representation of a culture or social world by being objective, distant, and non-interacting. As Barker (2000) notes, ethnography is based on an implicit realist epistemology, meaning that it believes “truth” is objective, accessible, and universal. Hence, ethnographers believe that they can explore a cultural setting and find objective truth that can be easily generalized to the society under study. Spry (2001) describes the realist epistemology of ethnography as privileging the researcher over the subjects, the method over the subject matter, and maintains a commitment to truth. Ethnographers’ conception of the field as a natural entity, isolated from other cultures, assumes that cultures exist in an original or pure state. Buzzard (2003) believes that ethnography privileges “travel as knowledge,” a way to go there and study the culture of a spatially-localized people. However, in their edited compilation, Women Writing Culture, Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon (2004) changed the research and writing practices whereby ethnography could embrace more egalitarian way of existing in the world. The book consists of several articles demonstrating that the methodological prescriptions called for in the previous anthropological methods text, Writing Culture, had already been substantially developed and practiced by feminist anthropologists. Their work had gone unnoticed at best, though, by their mostly white male colleagues. Nevertheless, the work of Writing Culture and Women Writing Culture marked an important turning point in the practice of ethnography.

More importantly, in the early 1970s, the influence of Ester Boserup and “the burgeoning field of ‘women and development’” encouraged a generation of feminist ethnographers working in these regions to analyze the impact of economic development on the status of women.
Boserup defines “development” as a shift from a rural, subsistence-based agricultural economy characterized by generalized technological advancement” (cited in Freeman and Murdock 2001, 9). She argues that development and modernization are one in the same, and could be advantageous for women if they were treated equally. Freeman and Murdock expand on this point by explaining that:

In her ground breaking study of the impact of colonialism and modernization upon women’s economic status, Boserup found a decrease in women’s status, due to gender biases that favored men’s integration into the “modern” cash economy, and women’s relegation to an increasingly devalued subsistence economy (429).

An additional contrast to the status-quo of traditional ethnography is feminist ethnographer Kamala Viswes-Waran, whose work focuses on issues of identity and feminist politics. She calls for the deconstruction of the sex/gender distinction and the adoption of a more postmodern lens (cited in Freeman and Murdock 427). Because of scholars like these, ethnographies of women in the Caribbean have generated a vast body of research addressing issues of capitalism, imperialism and the political economy of the Caribbean. Feminist ethnographies have moved women’s issues and its vulnerable placements in this dominated field from the periphery to the center.

**Practice of Ethnography to Examine Black Identity in the Caribbean**

In composing this dissertation, I take a great deal of inspiration from several studies that have discussed colonialism and neo-colonialism by engaging ethnographic methodology. Many Caribbean scholars have a long line of research that explores culture, colonization and identity as constructed within specific contextual sites, and it is my hope to continue this tradition with this project. Some studies that have influenced my work are feminist ethnographies by Caribbean and
Latin American scholars that discuss recent structural analyses of women’s economic problems, and which point to the importance of such issues as class, poverty, women’s work, structural adjustment, and global capitalism.

Feminist ethnographer A. Lynn Bolles’ (2002) work *Sister Jamaica* is based on ethnographic fieldwork the author carried out in the 1970s on black female factory workers in Kingston Jamaica during the U.S.-influenced destabilization of then Prime Minister Michael Manley’s regime. In this work, Bolles uses her data and time spent in the factories to argue that “in regard to international capital, women’s ‘agency’ is severely constrained by ‘underdevelopment’ (4). Perhaps the most important point this book makes is that women’s “agency” becomes more or less visible according to what kind of social interactions are invested. She offers important insights into the study of women’s agency in the arena of marriage and household constellations, countering the political currents that had defined Anglophone-Caribbean relations as “dysfunctional” and Caribbean women in particular as “deviant” (cited in Freeman and Murdoch 436).

Another feminist ethnographer whose work has influenced my own is Irma McClaurin’s (1996) *Women of Belize: Gender and Change in Central America*. This ethnographic work examines how different women are shaped by and simultaneously challenge, in her words, a “culture of gender” (09). This study highlights how women are “working to change the gender rules, ideas, attitudes, and behaviors that govern the meaning of what it is to be woman in their communities and country” (06). McClaurin focused more on the women’s oral history, allowing them to tell their own stories. Her concern was with “the meaning of women themselves attach to the events of their lives,” and her aim was for the voices of these women to form the central part of the ethnography while she serves as “interlocutor” (cited in Freeman and Murdoch).
For this reason, I posit that one of the goals of feminist ethnography is to bring women’s lives and voices into closer conversation. McClaurin accomplishes this goal eloquently with her fluid narrative, in which the experiences and reflections of women in Belize forces her and other scholars to interrogate their own claims of how gender operates.

Last, Zora Neal Hurston’s book *Tell My Horse* (1981) uses an ethnographic approach to explore African American folktales in the American South and voodoo life and culture in Jamaica and Haiti. Hurston tells the story of black folk in the United States and the Caribbean in an attempt to bridge the gap between African Caribbean and African American communities. Hurston uses her voice as a black woman to tell the stories and bring to life the histories and daily struggles of “her people” (17). Hurston begins her study in Eatonville, Florida, and progressively engages subjects from the Caribbean. To follow Hurston’s method for giving “her” people a voice is most challenging and most rewarding, for without scholars like her trying to bridge the gap between African peoples of North America and the Caribbean, so much of our histories would be lost.

In the footsteps of all these scholars, I employ ethnography to provide a distinctive view of women in the Bahamas: one that looks at women and Bahamian culture in a non-exoticizing and non-colonialist manner. Additionally, this ethnographic approach allows me to discuss the Bahamas from the black Bahamian woman experience, an experience that may resonate with other black women as these women grapple with their ‘Bahamian-ness,’ their ‘woman-ness.’ This approach also allows me to give a detailed view of the lives of black Bahamian women working in the Straw Market, the center of the so called ‘Bahamian Cultural Experience’. My experience in the market is of vast importance, for much research has been conducted on colonies in the Caribbean—and now in our vastly neo-colonial situation; yet, seldom has an
emotionally-rendered tale been told of women’s lives in a tourist-saturated Caribbean country, where women and their bodies become a part of cultural commodity ready to be consumed as a part of ‘tourist product’. The approach I employ here seeks to make visible the perspectives, or even standpoints, and experiences and conditions of those who stand on the underside of relations of power: the subaltern, the marginalized, the dominated, the outcast, the oppressed (Kempadoo 2004). More importantly, this method allows me to understand myself in deeper ways as a black Bahamian woman who, as a child, walked around the house with yellow towels draped on my head, pretending that they were the long flowing locks of the rich white people who came to luxuriate in the sun while my grandmother and women that look like me service them. This research method allows me to account for myself.

**Qualitative Approach**

A qualitative research design is selected to demonstrate the unique and complex experiences and attitudes of Bahamian women as it relates to the Bahamian tourist industry. Certainly, a statistical analysis of Bahamian women’s attitudes could have been used. However, a qualitative study captures the unique historical significance of the black body, capitalism, and tourism as these concepts uniquely affect black Bahamian women’s conception of their self and their perceptions of whites through socialization in the marketplace. Thus, qualitative interviewing is a valuable technique and skill that privileges and centers the voices and experiences of the target group rather than attaching importance to the research outsider. In order to explore the complexity of Bahamian women’s employment in tourism, this dissertation utilizes a triangulation methodological approach to collecting the data regarding the women’s attitudes, their experiences in the market place, and their perceptions of white tourists’ attitudes.

**Data Collection—Triangulation**
Triangulation is a mixed-method approach to understanding social reality that allows the researcher to analyze the context or target group understudy from multiple approaches (Denzin, 1970). Therefore, this dissertation employs three data collection methods: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. To some extent, the above data collection methods occurred in a process beginning with gaining the trust and confidence of the women during the participant observation phase, advancing to semi-structured questions, and eventually, to full structured interviews.

**Participant Observation**

Working on a daily basis with the women in the markets, and observing their daily lives and interactions with tourists visiting the Bahamas, provided me with a basis for understanding the nature of tourism and roles that black Bahamian women play to achieve success and ensure sustenance. I was provided the opportunity to work in the Straw Market for the first time for three months during the summer of 2007. During this time I was introduced to most of the women working in the market. There initial reaction to me was that of indifference, they did not pay much attention to me, as I ventured out and began to talk to the women about working in the Straw Market, they begin to feel comfortable and disclose information to me. The conversations were friendly, never recorded, just Bahamian women working in the Straw Market. As the weeks progressed, I told them about my work and the topic of my research they were happy that someone was “taking the time to write about us” as one of the women enthusiastically said. However not all of the women in the market shared her feelings; many of the women thought that I was just like the many tourists that came to the island “and take pictures of us”, so gaining their confidence proved to be a challenge.
As the months passed as I worked in the market, I began to establish a relationship with some of the women in the market and many of the women genuinely liked me and included me in the conversations and their arguments. I would often have to play mediator in little disagreement that would arise, never taken sides, I would offer a resolution to the conflict. This was not a daily occurrence by any means, because the women in the Straw Market behaved more like sisters, always taking care of each other. Finally, after about six weeks in the market they allowed me to observe and record their interactions with the tourists, they began to trust me as one of them and a part of the Market.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

Informal conversations form the bulk of the interviews, and they were conducted during the slow periods of the day or when there were no boats expected to arrive that day. We would talk sometime for hours, the women laughing and playing around as they answered the questions I posed. I found that when I started asking them about the Bahamas Tourist Board, and the way that they were treated in the market, most of the women became very serious. The ten women I interviewed echoed the sentiment of the nearly one hundred women in the market, saying they felt like their lives and economic well-being were not a priority to the government of the Bahamas.

During my daily interactions with the women in the market, I would just observe the women as they worked and interacted with the tourists and with the other women. In this daily working environment I was just another straw vendor, I had no structured questions: our conversations and our interactions were all informal. This approach to research allows me to reflect on my own experiences, thereby becoming the “other” in the role of researcher. It is the
only method that allows me to further interrogate and conceptualize evolving notions of whiteness/blackness in the context of the Bahamas.

**Structured Interviews**

The final data collection method I used was structured interviews which lasted approximately 50–130 minutes. The sessions focused on the questions that I had prepared for them, their individual perceptions of change in the Straw Market, and the impact working in the tourist industry has had on their lives. At the beginning of the interview I explained that the purpose of the project was to gather their opinion regarding their perceptions about the tourist trade in the Bahamas. In addition, I explained that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and their answers would remain confidential. Finally, I distributed the consent form to the women and I read to them the contents of the consent form and all ten women agreed to participate in the study by signing their name on the consent form and those that wanted to read the consent form on their own, I gave them the opportunity to do so. We sat in their stalls, and conducted the interviews during the hours that it rained or that there were no tourists present. Some of the women did not feel comfortable talking in the market, so four of the interviews were conducted at a local restaurant nearby. In the formal interviews they were comfortable about being recorded as long as they were re-assured that the other women would not have access to their interviews.

**Sample Distribution and Socio-demographic Characteristics**

There are about 100 women that work in the Straw Market located in Freeport, Bahamas. From the 100 women, 10% of the Bahamian women participated in the research project.

Among the women who work in the Straw Market, the ages ranged from young adults to the elderly. Two women are in their twenties, two in their thirties, two in their fifties, two in
their forties, and two women in their seventies. The social class status of the women did not vary. All of the women were poor and lived below the poverty line. The education status of the women varied only slightly. The majority of them had at least a high school education with the exception of one woman who had an associate degree. Two of the women were illiterate, three had some secondary education but did not graduate, and four women graduated from high school. The women interview indicated an extensive amount of time working in the Straw Market. Two women have worked in the Straw Market for more than fifty years; two of the women have worked in the straw market between ten and twenty years; four said they have worked their between six and ten years, and two worked between one and five years.

**Description of Research Site: The Bahamian Straw Market**

The site of this research project was located in the Straw Market in Freeport Bahamas. This research occurred over three months during the summer of 2007. Approximately, 4 million people visit the Bahamas each year, almost all of them will visit one of the Straw markets throughout the islands. There are two major Straw Markets in Freeport, which houses around one hundred shops and about one hundred and fifty workers. There are smaller market at various hotels and beaches, but on a much smaller scale than Port Lucaya and the International Bazaar. The Straw Market cite where I conducted this research consist of approximately eighty stalls selling Bahamian t-shirts, beach towels, wood work, conch shells, jewelry, straw bags, baskets, dolls and a variety of souvenirs.
The Straw Markets and the Straw industry in the Bahamas started in the 1920s, following the construction of the Prince George Wharf\(^3\). A group of enterprising Bahamian women began taking their sisal\(^4\) goods to Rawson Square\(^5\) to sell to ship passengers. They were soon followed by fruit and vegetable vendors who began selling straw work on the Market Range. In 1936, Albertha Brown arguably set up the first straw stall in more or less the same site the market exists today in Nassau Bahamas. Over the next few decades, the straw trade and the tourist trade flourished … the straw market was the principal trading place for fruit and vegetables, meat, fish and sponges. But over time, the government moved most of the market functions out of the city. Fish, fruit and vegetable vendors ended up mostly at Potter’s Cay, and what remained on Bay Street was the tourist-oriented straw and craft market (Smith 2007, 2).

According to historians Michael Craton and Gail Saunders (1992), during the political turmoil of the 1950s, the growing number of straw vendors became an issue for the government of the Bahamas, competing as they did with the powerful Bay Street merchants for tourist dollars in the heart of the city. During this time the merchants on Bay Street were all a part of the white elite, who were not happy with sharing their profits with local black Bahamian women. However, they also saw that there was an obvious need for a novel experience; a tourist attraction embodied by the black Bahamian woman sitting outside a [hut], thus creating both the “native” and a glimpse at what was to be later marketed as “indigenous culture” of the Bahamas.

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3 Prince George Wharf is the harbor built in Nassau to accommodate cruise ships.
4 A Mexican or West Indian plant with large fleshy leaves used for making rope.
(02). By 1967, at that same site, which would become known as, “the gateway to the city” (Smith 2007), there were about 700 straw vendors, and the motley collection of market stalls had become an attraction.

5 Rawson Square is the Center of the Government of the Bahamas, located on Bay Street in the heart of downtown Nassau.
Chapter III: Reading the Blueprint for Tourism

When the missionaries arrived, the Africans had the land and the missionaries had the Bible. They taught us how to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible.

Jomo Kenyatta (1938)

Tourism and Post-Colonialism in the Bahamas

Robert J.C. Young (2001) defines colonization as an economically-driven activity involving the subjugation of one people by another, a geographical violence used against indigenous people and their lands with real objectives of trade, economic exploitation, and settlement. The two forms of colonialism are colonies established for settlement, like the U.S., and colonies established for economic exploitation, like the Philippines and Puerto Rico. The distinctive feature of colonialism is “the persistent efforts of Europeans to undermine and reshape the modes of production, social institutions, cultural patterns, and value systems of indigenous peoples” (Abernathy 2001, 10). In addition Aimée Cesaire (1955) describes [this process] where colonization equals “thingification”: human beings no longer being regarded as such; rather, colonization dehumanizes and demoralizes. William Drysdale, a North American visiting the Bahamas in 1885 and writing a letter to a friend about the virtues of the islands, embodies Cesaire’s analysis of the colonized as “thing” and not human:

“Altogether it was a very proper picture of a morning in the West Indies, where, of course, nobody has anything to do, and where anybody who has anything to do doesn’t do it. And that’s just the sort of country I like. Here ten thousand darkies who will do anything you want for a shilling, and I don’t see the least reason for any white person doing any work at all—as long as he has a shilling” (cited in Strachan, 2002, 11).
However, to look at the history and modernization of the Bahamas through exclusively a colonial lens would tell only half the story of Bahamian identity. Colonialism, its historical developments—neocolonialism and postcolonialism—must be examined, along with imperialism. Unlike colonialism, imperialism is driven by ideology and a theory of sorts, which Young (2002) describes as an exercise in power through direct conquest or through economic and political influence, in institutions and through ideology. It has two duties: to exploit available raw materials, and exploit the people of a country and their culture and civilization. Young explains further that imperialism imposes a general system of power relations of economic and political domination. But a more recent development in colonialism is also an important actor in this story: neocolonialism. Neocolonialism is a product of colonialism; it is very similar to colonialism in that a colonizing country grants the colonized its independence, but still rules, though indirectly. The colonizing country controls all aspects of the political economy of the nation. Postcolonialism refers to the period after both colonization and imperial rule, in their original meaning of direct-rule domination, become the norm. But, postcolonialism is still positioned within imperialism in its later sense of a global system of hegemonic economic power.

Postcolonialism marks the historic fact of decolonization and the determined achievement of sovereignty, but also marks the realities of a nation emerging into a new imperialistic context of economic and sometimes political domination. This baseline description defines many postcolonial countries. Additionally, and importantly for the Bahamas and other Caribbean regions, tourism replaced colonialism and imperialism. As Craik (1994) recognizes, “tourism has an intimate relationship to postcolonialism, in that ex-colonies have increased in popularity as favored destinations (sites) for tourists … the detritus of postcolonialism have been
transformed into tourists sites (including exotic peoples and customs; artifacts; arts and crafts; indigenous and colonial lifestyles, heritage and histories” (5). In addition, Crick (1994) argues that “tourism is a form of ‘leisure imperialism’ and represents ‘the hedonistic’ face of neocolonialism, because the metropolitan center has control of the alien and tourist development” (cited in Desmond 1995, 2).

Such development provides value, while at the same time exacting a cost. Apollos Nwauwa, in an essay entitled, The Legacies of Colonialism and the Politics of the Cold War (2003), describes the legacies of colonialism and the political, cultural, social, and economical impact that it left on African countries. He describes the indirect benefits that resulted from colonization. Indirect benefits created a transportation and communication infrastructure such as railroads, roads, electricity, hotels, and buses. It also established a money economy built on cash crops. But colonization also produced harmful effects. It created unequal regional development, because colonists only invested in areas that were profitable for them. In response, rural masses migrated to the urban areas, causing mass congestion within cities. So, just as whiteness travels and disperses, so, too, do populations of people as subjects to colonial rule.

Land use policies then set the stage for tourism, the growth of which in developing societies has not come without controversy. When developing countries promote tourism, the provision of tourism-related goods and services to foreign visitors, they are, in effect, embracing greater integration into the world economy. It is the terms of this integration, and the direct economic and political effects stemming from them, that invite this controversy (Clancey 1992, 2).

Moreover, Momsen (1994) notes that “tourism seeks consciously and specifically to capitalize on differences between places, and when these include differences in levels of
economic development, then tourism becomes imbued with all the elements of domination, exploitation and manipulation characteristic of colonialism” (106). Krippendorf (1987) expands the conflict stemming from tourism by lending a political angle to debates that rest on economic dependency. He claims that tourism is colonialist in nature, a nature that undermined the autonomous decision-making power of local people. Such views are endorsed both by dependency theorists and by activists within tourist-driven economic countries. Tourism, therefore, reinforces and is embedded in postcolonial relationships. Issues of identity, contestation and representation are increasingly recognized as central to the nature of tourism (cited in Hall and Tucker 2004, 65).

**Post-Colonialism, Culture and Theory**

For the Caribbean, the separations based on language, colonial political and economic structures, land and the treacherous seas allow us to understand and question the formation of nations based only on island boundaries. Also, the multiple peoples and languages of this part of the world offer us interesting postmodernist ways of seeing identity. Further, the Caribbean understood (within the context of the Americas) as the history of genocide, slavery, physical brutality.  

_Bahamian Anthology_, Rex Nettleford (1983)

A colonization-centered theory is a viewpoint or explanation of trends of the order of things in the world within the context of colonialism. Like this excerpt from Nettleford, by explaining the poverty and identity constructions of Caribbean nations, such a theory would emphasize the impact of the colonial experience of the Caribbean and other colonized nations, such as the process of racialization and sexualization. Also, current theories and concepts on race, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality, which form the fabric of the field of Cultural Studies, laminate our understanding of the perceived and/or imagined markers that have been historically used to categorize, reward, and subjugate groups of people within different societies. Theories revolving around these issues of difference inform our understanding of what
is considered “mainstream” and, therefore, acceptable, and what is considered the “Other” and, therefore, unacceptable. On one level, therefore, one could say that these theories and concepts provide a lens through which the social landscape, i.e., the structure of groups of people in the Caribbean and around the world, is stratified; how they interact amongst themselves and with the institutions in place; how they define themselves against the idea of a dominant nationality/culture; and how the dominant groups, or those who have the power to label and define “Others” may view, define, and construct pervasive ideas of “them” and “their” personhood.

Postcolonial theory most clearly presents the conflicts underlying the political and economic interaction between groups of people the world over. This conflict is racialized, ethnicized, nationalized, sexualized, classified, and gendered. Postcolonial theory encompasses the ideas and the consciousness of previously-colonized peoples who grew out of the colonial experience. It is an articulation of their experiences under colonial domination, and an attempt to define and rediscover their identity free of external pervasion or expedient distortion.

Postcolonialism represents both a reflexive body of western thought that seeks to reconsider and interrogate the terms by which the duality of colonizer and colonized, with its accompanying structures of knowledge and power, has been established as well as the state of being “post” or therefore “after” the condition of being a colony. Students of postcolonialism are therefore interested in spatial and temporal dimensions of the cultural production and social formations of the colony and postcolony[,] and the ongoing constructions of representations of specific spaces and experiences (Hall and Tucker 2004).
Thus, when former colonial subjects propounded postcolonial theory, it had both a strong element of resistance and an imperative toward self-determination, as seen in the work of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Kwame Nkrumah, Gloria Anzaldúa, Arjun Appadurai, Albert Memmi, and Salman Rushdie, to mention only a few.

Although the genealogy of postcolonial theory is historically complex, extensive, and itself an example of the trans-cultural admixture that it so often analyzes, it is possible to identify its formal origin. Edward Said’s (1978) critique, *Orientalism*, of the cultural politics of academic knowledge, from the basis of his own experience of growing up as an ‘Oriental’ in two British colonies effectively founded postcolonial studies as an academic discipline. His work invests in the political commitment and the “locational” identification of its practitioners (Said 25), arguing that because Britain had empires, all of the academic knowledge about his respective countries was somehow distorted and constructed around imagined political and cultural facts. Said’s quest in this book was not only to develop a vocabulary to describe the ways in which non-Europeans are demonized in society, but to “reverse the way we think culture works” (65). Said reminds us that:

Theory … is won as the result of a process that begins when consciousness first experiences its own terrible ossification in the general reification of all things under capitalism; then when consciousness generalizes (or classes) itself as something opposed to other objects, and feels itself as contradiction to (or crisis within) objectification, there emerges a consciousness of change in the status quo; finally, moving toward freedom and fulfillment, consciousness looks ahead to complete self-realization, which is of course the revolutionary process stretching forward in time, perceivable now only as theory or projection (98).
This book opened debates about the interrelationships of postcolonial literatures by investigating the powerful forces acting on language in the postcolonial text, and showed how these texts constitute a radical critique of Eurocentric notions of literature and language. Rather than reflecting on “the political,” Said argues, “culture actually produces [theory], so that the text can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe” (95). With the publication of this book, the language used to refer to colonial territories and its varied cultures and people changed, and a new discourse was created—one which enabled colonial people around the world to have a distinct cultural expression, one that represented the identities and social and political constructions in a unified, but autonomous space.

Young (2004) notes that colonized peoples are highly diverse in their nature and in their traditions, and as beings in cultures they are both constructed and changing, so that while they may be “other” from the colonizers, they are also different one from another and from their own pasts, and should not be totalized or essentialized through such concepts as a black consciousness, Indian soul, aboriginal culture and so forth. This totalization and essentialization is often a form of nostalgia which has its inspiration more in the thought of the colonizers than of the colonized, and it serves to provide the colonizer a sense of the unity of his culture while mystifying that of others (78).

Although the development of postcolonial theory has been heavily impacted by Said and the progression of the notion of the “other” in western thought, it was Ashcroft’s (1989) study of postcolonial literature in *The Empire Strikes Back* that has had the greatest effect on contemporary scholars of postcolonial theory. Ashcroft used the term, “‘postcolonial,’ to cover all culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated
by European imperial aggression” (2). According to Ashcroft, the idea of postcolonial theory, literary or otherwise, has emerged because of the inability of European theories (themselves having emerged from particular cultural traditions which are hidden by false notions of “the universal”) to deal with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of postcolonial texts (15). Consequently, he contends that one of the main features of European imperial oppression is control over language and text, because of the imperial education system installed a “standard” version of the metropolitan language (e.g., Britain’s notion of “the Queen’s English,” or the consolidation of over 200 dialects into the Japanese language during the Meiji Restoration) as the norm, and other versions as impurities. Language then becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of “truth,” “order” and “reality” become established (cited in Hall and Tucker 2004).

In like manner, Gayatri Spivak (1997) explores “the margins at which disciplinary discourses break down and enter the world of political agency” (24). She interrogates the politics of education, language and culture from a marginal perspective in her article, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak describes the death of an Indian woman who occupied the peripheral of her society, who did not have the agency or the voice to articulate her concerns, and was thereby relegated voiceless; thus, Spivak concluded that “the Subaltern cannot speak”. This conclusion gives rise to the question of whether the subaltern is allowed to speak. bell hooks illustrates the subtle way in which the voice of the subaltern is inevitably subverted:

No need to hear your voice when I talk about you better than you speak about yourself.

No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story.

And then I will tell it back to you in a way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority.
I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the centre of my talk (1990, 151-152).

In this sense, colonized people the world over are the same: the status quo equates “otherness” not simply with silence, but in occupation of a place where the words of those on the periphery are canceled and ignored by the “standard” language and politics. At this point in my discussion, I echo Hollinshead’s (1999) question, but directed at the Bahamas and other Caribbean countries: can tourism blossom “into a market where the marginal can speak?” (31).

Before I answer this question, however, it is important to articulate my theoretical grounding. For this study, Spivak’s works are essential. She argues that the postcolonial or neo-colonial subject still does not have agency and is still not heard. She argues that the postcolonial is marginally positioned in her life and in the world’s perception of her; for the women of the Bahamas working in the Straw (and other!) Market, marginality has become an integral part of their existence.

Undoubtedly, the engagement of postcolonial writing was born out of the trauma of slavery and colonization. The postcolonial scholar/writer/intellectual speaks the same politically-consigned language of the oppressed and marginalized. Furthermore, their literary struggle and commitment is also bound to the quest for self, or a “usable identity,” as Fanon asserts—a defined historical culture. For example, in the case of the Caribbean proletarian, Strachan (2002) notes:

Emerging form the ranks of those viewed and viewing themselves as worthless, many Caribbean writers encouraged the people to value themselves and to reject the lies of imperialism that had been, in C.L.R. James’s words, dedicated to their “depreciation”. Colonialism not only set about “devalue[ing]” the past of the indigenous, as Frantz Fanon
has put it, but it also struck at the core of Caribbean self-esteem, making them doubt their ability to rule. Like prisoners guarded in a Panopticon, the colonized became self-policied, theirs became a self-subjection, bolstered by the lies and eyes of imperialism” (22).

If it is a valid argument to equate culture and identity (given, of course, this connection be composed of fluid processes rather than static cause and effect), then a “usable identity” becomes difficult to assert. The idea of culture has been the subject of exhaustive and divergent attempts at definition in anthropology and other disciplines. Kroeber and Kluckohn (1952) provide of the better-known definition of culture as “an historical product including ideas, patterns and values; it is selective, is learned, is based on symbols and is an abstraction from and a product of behaviour” (76). Whether one accepts this definition or not, it serves a useful purpose in indicating that cultures is an assemblage of activities, including the production, distribution and use of material artifacts and sets of meanings and symbols that may be more or less integrated in different parts of the overall pattern. Culture is usually manipulated and changed by people as they adapt to their various physical, social and cultural environments. Appropriation is thus an inevitable part of socio-cultural process (Teague 1997,174, cited in Abram, Waldren Macleod).

Consequently, in postcolonial theory, the writing itself becomes the means through which authors symbolically reclaim, name, and return to the community the cultural past and identity of which she has been deprived. Cultures for the colonized then become an anomaly, as do languages and symbols. Similarly, Fanon (1967) believes that to be colonized by a language has large implications for one’s consciousness, because to speak means to assume the culture and weight of that civilization. Comparatively, Alleyne (1985) argues that the predominant languages in the Caribbean colonies, whether creoles or nonstandard dialects of European
languages, were the consequence of a prolonged struggle between the masters and their slaves over the medium of communication. The outcome of this struggle reflects the metropolitan hegemony, and becomes a further means for maintaining social inequalities. Alleyne reminds us that an important element of “cultural imperialism” is that the Europeans viewed the cultures of peoples over whom they ruled as “savage” or “primitive,” and the Creole cultures of the Caribbean were not considered “culture” at all. The Creole languages developed by Africans and their descendants were evaluated by Europeans as pathological versions of European originals, as “deficiencies,” “corruptions,” and “mutilations” (15).

An analogy is appropriate at this point to offer perspective regarding the process of creating an authentic identity through language. Ironically, usable identities as posited by colonized writers are mirrored by U.S. American rap singers, whose music has been defined by the conventional music industry with much the same adjectives Alleyne documents. With the bulk of rap singers being black, a comparison is not so ironic, after all. The comparison seems inappropriate on the surface, but as Rex Nettleford in Bahamian Anthology (1983) notes when speaking specifically about the Bahamas’ colonization, the politics are the same.

Out of the belly of the beast of colonization and slavery and the consequences of dehumanization and suffering have come the art of survival, the skills of struggle and the manifestation have of human courage. The celebration of much of this in an indigenous literature—with the lexicon Europe, the tonal texture of Africa and the syntax and special peculiarities of the Caribbean and the Americas—is a Bahamian acknowledgement of a rich heritage which challenges us all to exploration and to creativity that bears the mark of revolutionary integrity (09).
The similarities between rap singers and the Bahamas does have a distinct line, of course, and that line has to do with an authentic national identity—something which U.S. rap singers can automatically assume. On an oddly positive note, however, for Bahamians, the representation of the [Caribbean] colonized as savage and unmanageable at least testifies to the resistance and the continuing failure of the colonialist enterprise to do its work of “civilizing”/exterminating. On the sheerly negative ground of what the colonialist calls savagery and monstrosity, a platform of refusal could be erected. Insofar as colonialism operates through domination, struggle in these terms seems doomed to be a dialectic caught within colonialist discourse, however deep and broad its ambivalences and fissures might be (Goldberg 2006, 5).

Furthering the scope of these scholars’ theoretical discussions of postcolonial voices and resistance, African born scholar Ngugi wa Thiongo (1997) used postcolonial theory to develop a brand of decolonizing ideology. Postcolonial theory has forged the discourse out of which the language of imperialism emerged and the idea of the “civilizing mission”. For Thiongo, rejection of the colonizer’s language meant reclaiming a part of his Gikuyu identity. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Thiongo describes language as a way “people have not only of describing the world, but of understanding themselves” (45). For him, writing in Gikuyu is a way of decolonizing the mind and going back to his mother tongue, thereby dismantling the dominant culture’s insidious form of oppression. As Ashcroft (1995) contends, “the colonial space is therefore an agonistic space. Despite the ‘Imitation’ and ‘mimicry’ with which colonized peoples cope with the Imperial presence, the relationship becomes one of constant, if implicit, contestation and opposition” (09).6

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6 In my childhood, I knew when people spoke “bad” English, which was the Bahamian dialect, or “proper” English, which was European English. In school, our teachers spoke “proper” English, although they sometimes communicated in “Bahamian English”. Whatever language they chose to communicate in, they made us children aware that there was such a thing as “proper” English, which was not the same the English we spoke at home. That was the beginning of my formal education and of my understanding that there was a privileged language, a language and way of speaking, a more prestigious language than
Conclusion: From a Personal Perspective

For my personal journey through the canons of academia, postcolonial theory has provided a space where I may negotiate, according Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony, my history of oppression under British colonization. I am the “subaltern” who can write from the margins, but who can also encapsulate the center. Through postcolonial theory, I have been able to navigate through a Eurocentric discourse that has placed me—a black, foreign woman—at the peripheral of a discursive terrain. It helped me to understand my location; it helps me understand issues of home, diaspora, place, space, boundaries and borders—multiple identities/multiple ways of seeing the world through multiple positions. Certainly, postcolonial theory will structure my current and future work, since the location of my identity is one of marginalization.

As Clifford (1994) asserts:

Theory is always written from some “where” [that] is less a place than itineraries: different, concrete histories of dwelling, immigration, exile, migration. These include the migration of third world intellectuals in the metropolitan universities, to pass through or to remain, changed by their travel but marked by places of origin, by peculiar allegiances and alienations (77).

Echoing the sentiments of Clifford, because of my privileged position, being from a black Caribbean proletariat who now studies in the United States, unlike other groups of people, when I write, I have a responsibility to the people of the Bahamas. Fanon, along with Clifford, calls the “broken” English I spoke at home and with my friends and on the streets … Early in my socialization, therefore, I was made conscious of the differing status of ‘proper’ English and ‘Bahamian English,’ which academia has dubbed, “Creole”. While I did not realize it at the time, my early language experience spoke of politics and society, telling stories of class, race, and also gender. The way we spoke became a factor in making the Bahamian people feel even more inadequate. I remember my parents urging us to always speak ‘proper’ English. “Stop talking bad” my mother would always say. Even today when I return home on vacations I am so happy to speak my dialect: it’s a freedom, a connection with something that is unique to the Bahamas, the words, the inflections, the way I can tell a story at home, as apposed to telling that story to my friends in the U.S. The freedom of talking uninhibited, not having to talk slowly and explain what I saying sometimes is a wonderful feeling. My mother and other family members don’t see the pride, though; I am always reminded that I am being educated in the U.S.
this responsibility combat literature: “it calls upon a whole people to join in the struggle for the existence of the nation. Combat literature informs the national consciousness, gives it shape and contours, and opens up new, unlimited horizons” (173). At various time in my tenure at Bowling Green State, this responsibility has been a heavy burden, and I know that in my future endeavors and if I actively pursue a career in academia, this burden will increase. But, this would also be a responsibility I would be proud to bear as I seek to make a difference in the lives of people and scholarship of postcolonial theory, and contribute to the change of how the Caribbean is written.

For my own purpose of examining the complex position of all Bahamians, those who do and do not work in the tourist trade, postcolonial theory allows me to forge, within my own specific historical and cultural contexts, a new way of exploring and educating my people through the revolutionary power of a discourse—one which allows me to deconstruct racist, oppressive mainstream theories that place on the peripheral people considered to be “other” like me: black, Bahamian and woman. The necessary topic to examine, then, in order to assert an autonomous identity is to deconstruct the colonial identity that has, since Columbus, determined Bahamian identity—an identity that today is argued as a particular definition of whiteness.

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schools, so I should speak ‘good English’ like Americans. I resist the urge to laugh and tell them that North Americans have reduced the complexity and flexibility of our Bahamian Dialect to a single word, “Mon”.

Chapter IV: The Creation of the Bahamas as a White Escape

In this chapter, I explore the Bahamas’ connection to tourism, tracing and defining how it became the central aspect of the country’s economy, and how whiteness was re-deployed in this new era of tourism. I examine the impact of these phenomena on the local culture, and articulate women’s placement in the effort to re-invent the Bahamas as the ultimate tourist destination. Further, an examination of the recent history of The Bahamas will help to understand how current pattern of tourism in the Bahamas emphasizes tourists’ comfort over Bahamians’ productive constructions of self.

In the tourist-driven economy of the Bahamas, modernization equals development, which equals European and North American cultural and sociopolitical ideologies of progress. From the 1950s to the 1970s, discourse regarding Bahamian identity was dominated by strategies and approaches that arose from the modernization theory, which was based on the assumption of a dualism between the “undeveloped” Third World and the “developed” Western world, with the latter occupying a superior status to which the former should aspire (Scheyvens 2002). While industrialism and technology was seen as the tool that would generate income and increase the economies and standards of living of the Third World during this time (Clancy 1999), it was also ascertained that tourism was an important tool of development. Tourism was assessed as having great growth potential, as well as offering a means of providing employment in a formal economy (Clancy 1999). Proponents of modernization also felt that tourism development could encourage social development through the spread of new skills and technology. As such, tourism would also allow for infrastructural improvements in such areas as communication and transportation (Scheyvens 2002).
Undoubtedly, in the emerging era of tourism and its economic expectations, some Caribbean governments pursued tourism development with a passion. While diversification of economies occurred in some cases, in other cases tourism simply took over forms of agricultural production. Unlike other Caribbean countries, whose sugar production dominated the economy of the British West Indies, and satisfied the sweet tooth of Britain and the European continent, the Bahamas did not produce sugar, nor any other valuable exportable staple or raw materials. It was not viewed as beneficial to the economy of Britain. Poverty was endemic and life for the majority of the Bahamian people was harsh. Most of the people fished or farmed (or did both) for a living, but the soil to a large extent was unyielding, and so agricultural conditions were difficult. By 1800s, salt was the principal staple of the Bahamas, and its production was supplemented by sponge fishing, both of which sustained the Bahamian economy for three-quarters of a century (Johnson 98).

In 1861, very soon after the U.S. Civil War, President Lincoln ordered a blockade of the southern ports of the United States. Britain declared its neutrality and promised severe punishment to those British subjects who violated it. However, the southern states needed to trade their cotton for goods, including guns. Due to its strategic position and its proximity to ports in the south, Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas, became a trans-shipment area, where goods bound for Europe and Confederate ports were traded. For the Bahamas, blockade running increased trade significantly. The number of ships entering and leaving Nassau increased by over one hundred percent (Saunders 1993, 97). As Elijah Stark stated of those years fewer than three decades later:

Everyone was wild with excitement during these years of the war. The shops were packed to the ceilings, the streets were crowded with bales, boxes and barrels. Fortunes were made
in a few weeks or months. Money was spent and scattered in the most extravagant and lavish manner. The town actually swarmed with southern refugees, captains of crews of blockade runners. Every available space in- or out-of-doors was occupied. Not since the days of the buccaneers and pirates had there been such times in the Bahamas (cited in Hughes and Saunders, 1994,6).

It must be mentioned that it was Nassau, the capital, and not the Bahamas in general, that benefited. Only a few violators of the blockade were Bahamians. Those who profited most were outsiders. Locally, the white merchant class, which included Nassauvians, British residents and land proprietors, also benefited. However, the vast majority of the population, who were mainly black and a small number of poor whites, remained extremely poor (Hughes and Saunders 1994). When the Civil War ended, Nassau’s frenzied trade plummeted. The Bahamian economy once more was dependent on its agricultural products and sponge fishing. No efforts were made to develop farming on a systematic basis, and most black Bahamians, locked out of ownership of land because of inflated prices, were to suffer for many years to come.

The gradual decline in the traditional agricultural and sponge fishing industries, and the possibility of quick money, encouraged the colonial administrators and House of Assembly to embrace the tourists industry. For the local elite, there was nothing more valuable in the Bahamas than the beautiful beaches, marvelously variegated seas, and a pleasant climate conducive to the promotion of international tourism. So, during this time, fundamental changes took place in the Bahamas and throughout the Caribbean. Many former colonies were becoming independent, and sought to develop their own political, economic, and cultural patterns. During this process, the tourist industry became part of the landscape. By the early 1900s, all Caribbean territories were in the tourism business, as the politicians proclaimed it “the engine of growth”.
Images of movement and acceleration, of power and prosperity had been touted to launch Caribbean peoples into “development” and “modernity,” away from the impoverished periphery of the world (Pattullo 1996, 5).

However, it was during the U.S.’s interwar years (1919–1939), that a tremendous growth in tourist travel internationally occurred. By this time, the Bahamas had gained a reputation as a winter and health resort for “invalids” and others from the United States and Canada seeking a change and warmer climate (Hughes and Saunders 1994, 65). The Bahamas government began actively to promote tourism. The Caribbean, a Paradise in European imagination, had come full-circle “from Paradise to wasteland and back again” (Strachan 1995, 38). Accordingly, by the early twentieth century, the Caribbean, particularly, the Bahamas began to be transformed into playgrounds for the itinerant Europeans and Americans in search of “health and enjoyment” and the once tropical plantations, thought to be unfit for whites, “were being touted as veritable gardens of Eden” (36).

Moreover, in the Bahamas, British colonial Governor of the time, Sir Bede Clifford, realized that tourism could quickly bolster the flagging economy and replace the revenue lost on exports by prohibition profits. He recalled in his memoirs his advice to his Executive Council: “Well, gentlemen, it amounts to this—if we can’t take the liquor to the Americans, we must bring the Americans to the liquor”: a decision the Governor saw as “a choice between the tourist industry and bankruptcy” (7). By the mid-1930s, the Bahamas was well-established as a resort area, owing to its unrivaled winter climate, yachting, “old-world atmosphere” and the government’s aggressive policy towards “selling” the Bahamas. The government spent thousands of pounds in advertisements to attract wealthy Americans and Canadians to the islands
Infrastructure, including communication and hotel accommodations, was improved, and the Bahamas was well on the “path to modernization”.

Subsequently, Prohibition and the development of the tourist industry had a profound effect on the roles of black women in the Bahamas. Prohibition and the tourism industry had brought quick money, and provided the financial foundation for the local white population to cement their status as the social political ruling class of the islands. The substantial white population (representing at least 10 percent of the population) had long had historical ties with the southern United States, which subsequently led to antagonistic race relations. Jim Crow attitudes prevailed throughout the Bahamas during this time. Racism, fanned by an increasing number of American visitors and investors, worsened during the late 1930s (Saunders 34).

While new positions in offices and business houses in downtown Nassau were becoming available to whites and to some colored, black women were debarred from the more prestigious jobs because of their color. The local governments tried to rectify the problems by training blacks as cooks, waiters and domestic servants, so they would be qualified for the lowest-paid jobs that were available to blacks, and at which they might be capable. These workers were also supplied to wealthy white homes during the winter season.

Consequently, much of the seasonal, “unskilled” employment labor, with long hours and low pay, was taken up by local blacks and Out Island women who migrated due to lack of stable employment at home. During this time, black women were also employed to roll barrels of liquor from the wharves to warehouses. They were also hired by liquor merchants to repack and sew imported liquor into burlap sacks. Black Bahamian women were also seen as “cheaper” workers than black Bahamian men, not in terms of pay but rather because they would sweep and tidy up at the end of the day and do the little jobs that men refused to do (Cash, 1998, 30).
increasing number of women, especially black women, worked in the domestic fields as cooks, laundresses and cleaners. Again, women dominated the more precarious occupations, those with little job security and low hourly wages, and which represented a continuation of household and domestic duties. Women viewed the work as being backbreaking and poorly paid, but they saw it as a way to enter a career in tourism and become somewhat independent (9).

The migration to the capital (Nassau) created new socio-economic problems. In light of the fact that the tourist industry brought in more money, it should have created new jobs and training skills for Bahamian laborers. However, it did neither of these things, because of discriminatory policies of various managements. The majority of people derived only a “small share of the profit” from tourism, since the hotels and foreign residents imported most of their staff (Cash, 67). Managerial positions in the many hotels were consistently filled by foreigners.

In Nassau, the relatively larger white population expanded as other whites from the Out Islands migrated in order to work—which meant that more whites were both available and preferred by the ruling class, especially since many were catering to an increasing number of white North American tourists.

Since whiteness operates on suppositions of normalcy, and there were many new migrants to reinforce that normalcy, black Bahamians suffered from discrimination in most tourist related facilities. The system of segregation was supported not only by the local elite, but also by the Governor. Black Bahamian bellboys were not employed in the hotels until 1935. Wages for black workers were very low, and the black population barely survived. Despite growing optimism brought by the development of tourism, there were great social disparities within Bahamian society (Saunders 37).
Most black Bahamians were critical of the ruling elite’s concentration on tourists and money-making to the detriment of locals. An anonymous writer in protest against a road diversion in a long series of diversions intended to streamline tourist transportation, wrote:

I can only come to the conclusion that we really need a thorough change among our so-called leaders today. They have sold Sunday for the almighty dollar; they have sold themselves for a mess of pottage and now they are trying to sell the last and only privilege that Bahamians have and pride, our walks along the waterfront. I wonder sometimes they don’t ask ourselves to lock up ourselves in our homes at certain hour of the day so that tourists can have the rights and privileges of the tourists for themselves (cited in Cash, Gordon & Saunders 1991:285).

Jean Holder of Caribbean Tourism contends, “There appears to be a deep-seated resentment of the industry at every level of society—a resentment which probably stems from the historic socio-cultural association of race, colonialism, and slavery” (22). He adds that the Caribbean is “forced to choose between an industry it ‘deep down’ does not really want, and [that] the economic fruits of that industry[,] which it needs and which, it seems more and more, only tourism will provide” (22). He concludes that significant number of employees “are not proud of what they do, and harbor resentments rooted in the inability to distinguish between service and servitude” (cited in Patullo 63).

Indigenous culture was also “packaged” for tourists’ consumption. Bahamian entertainers would dress up in native costumes and sing and dance down up and down the streets for the mostly American and Canadian tourists, especially when cruise ships were in port. Similarly, young black boys dived for coins on the docks, much to the amusement of tourists.

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7 And since imperialism informs tourism, it is no surprise that blacks in the Bahamas, as in the Caribbean generally, today continue to occupy mainly service positions in the tourism industry, catering mostly to a white clientele in an “intrinsically …
(Malone & Roberts 1941:42). As Professor Elliot Parris, of Howard University, noted in 1983: “If we ignore our history and the cultural legacy that it has left us, we run the risk of developing tourism as an industry which puts the dollar first and our people last […] We are saying to ourselves, perhaps unconsciously: we are the field labourers on the modern plantation of the tourist industry” (4).

Tourism created a dependency syndrome which was damaging socially, culturally, and psychologically. Felix Bethel (1989) argues that “it is clearly the case that, as result of tourism, the Bahamas is chronically dependent,” and not only economically: “Such a state of dependency has had a pervasive effect on its population and economic growth” (135). This dependency on the wealthy United States and European tourist traffic, fundamentally parasitic, has incalculable consequences for the Bahamian way of life. It has made the ruling groups [into] paranoid tourist-worshipers”. He further commented that life for the black majority was “a grim struggle for existence in a deceptively idyllic Eden”.

neo-plantation enterprise” (Saunders 38).
Chapter V: The Straw Man of the Straw Market Woman

The daily passage of market women up and down Market Street, under the stone arch named after Governor Gregory, completed in 1852, was one of the picturesque Nassau sights. Some vendors walked great distances, their goods expertly balanced in flat wooden trays on their heads.

Islanders in the Stream, by Michael Craton & Gail Saunders

It is possible that images, as perceived by individuals in the travel market, may have as much to do with an area’s tourism development success as the more tangible recreation and tourism resources.

Nature of Tourism by John Hunt

The Lost Horizons have been found and put into [my] brochure.

The Evening Standard, by George Beales

Tourism in the Bahamas represents a crucial element of the dynamics of change, particularly in that it affects social structures, institutions, and women’s placement in the political and economic configurations of the country. Tourism has introduced to the islands of the Bahamas not only the possibility of new sources of income, but also new ways of looking at the world, different values and modes of behavior. However for women in the Bahamas, tourism has further contributed to varying forms of marginalization in their quest for political and economic autonomy.

While this chapter specifically documents the nature of tourism in the Bahamas, it focuses primarily on the women within tourism’s many fronts of cultural change and marginalization. “Marginalization,” here, can be understood using Marshall’s (2001) definition, where, “having relevance both in time and space, marginalization is a way of describing relationships that are intrinsically unequal, regardless of whether or not they are consciously comprehended or accepted as legitimate or desirable” (166). However, this marginalization is
not characterized by simple exclusion from a specific community. Rather, it must be understood from the basis of gender politics, racism and political economy. Wekker (2006) clarifies that marginalization can be understood as

the ways in which women are positioned as marginal both within the economy and within the political apparatus of the state, [and which] is the general backdrop against which women organize their lives. Her central understanding is that even though [black Bahamian] women have a long tradition of economic independence and authority within the household; they … are still maneuvered into secondary status within society at large (57).

Historically, women working in the Straw markets and for the Bahamas tourism sector have been marginalized in their ability to influence the economic and political life of the island, and they continue to be alienated both by and from the community structures that determine the future direction of tourism (101).

It has been said that all tourism is about illusion, or perhaps more kindly, about the creation of atmosphere. Crick (2001) theorizes further the nature of tourism by explaining that “the emphasis has shifted away from production itself to image advertising and consumption” (45). This conclusion is not surprising, given that the longest established perspectives regarding tourism are those of stranger-hood and authenticity. The view that serves largely as a precedent was posited by Eric Cohen (2003), who argued that tourism is a manifestation of people’s desire to visit other places and other peoples in order to experience the differences which exist in the world. Morgan and Pritchard (1998) explain the significance of Cohen’s view: “[it] suggests that the desire to experience difference and to search for both novel and strange experiences are prime motivators of the tourism phenomenon (7).
By looking into the tourist image, therefore, we can investigate and explore that which is obscured. Image, the visual, is central to the tourism experience: images entice people to visit places and, once there, people “gaze” at that point which initially drew them. Photographs are then taken and postcards are sent to those who, unfortunately, are left out of the “gaze”. In such a process, particular images are carefully selected and “endlessly reproduced and recaptured” (90). Thus, while tourism is all about daydreaming, “such daydreams are not autonomous; they involve working over advertising and other media generated sets of signs” (Urry 47, cited in Morgan and Pritchard 10). Further, Urry argues that, “The tourist gaze is constructed through signs and tourism involves the collection of signs” (67). When tourists see brochures of the black Bahamian people in roles of service, or see a black Bahamian woman sitting in her hut in the Straw Market surrounded by novelty souvenirs, these images become embedded in their visual memory, with the resulting expectation of what they will see when they arrive in the Bahamas.

Accordingly, as Ian Strachan states, “Tourism requires an almost completely black work force to serve a wealthier, healthier, mostly white clientele, which arrives with notions of their own superiority and many unrealistic, preconceived ideas of the experience they will be getting for their money and ingrained ideas of how ‘natives’ ought to behave towards them”(9). These advertisements marketing the Bahamas and the Bahamian people as serving mostly white tourists’, suggest a link back to slavery, indicating that white people can come to the Bahamas, relax and enjoy the sand and sea while black Bahamians are at their service. Once these advertisements are created, the government must make sure that tourists receive the paradisiacal vacation. Unfortunately, the goal of tourism media is to promote the Bahamas as a product, not as a country. Such use of images by Bahamas Tourism Board traps the Bahamian people,
especially women, into stereotypes of being objects that are vulnerable to consumption. It also symbolizes that the bodies of the tourists’ visiting the Bahamas will be taken care of, while black Bahamian bodies are regulated to a working status, albeit sexual work or domestic.

Furthermore according to Akama (2004), the design and development of promotional messages and images that are used in sales promotion and marketing of tour packages in tourist-generating countries derive from and are usually based on existing dominant Western cultural values and economic systems. Further, the promotion and marketing of Third World tourist destinations in major generating countries in the West also derive from forms of historical and economic relationships that exist between the developed and the less developed countries (148). Morgan and Pritchard (1998) clarify this point, as well:

Tourism image (as constructed by … tourism marketers) reveals as much about the specific tourism product or country it promotes. The images projected in brochures, billboards and television reveal the relationships between countries, between genders and between races and cultures. They are powerful images which reinforce particular ways of seeing the world and can restrict and channel people, countries, genders and sexes into certain mind-sets (6).

As Stuart Hall has said, “the question of meaning and representation in [tourism] arises … in the construction of identity and the process of marking difference” (13).

As a world discovered by entrepreneurs, packaged and then marketed to the wealthy, the curious and the seekers of difference, tourism displays explicitly the process of marking difference. Cohen (1972) contends that, “modern man is interested in things, sights, customs and cultures different from his own, precisely because they are different. Gradually a new value has evolved: the appreciation of the experience of strangeness and novelty … valued for their own
sake” (165). Cohen continues by arguing that novelty and strangeness constitute essential elements in tourists’ experience, and as such were primary motives for promoting tourism. Thus, the tourist gaze is molded by professional image creators and brochure writers. Tourism marketing is but one strand of contemporary society, a society dominated by historical, social, economic and cultural relationships which favor particular groups and particular perspectives. At the same time, it is a product of those very relationships—the essence of consensual marketing. People and places thus become constructed through limited and circumscribed representations to appeal to particular groups. The process of representations for tourist consumption thus constructs and presents one culture for the consumption of another essentially creating a false image from a fallacious mold (cited in Hall and Tucker, 38).

To this end, the creation of the Straw Market helped to craft the image of the black Bahamian “market woman,” and forced women to assume roles that keep them at the bottom of the economic and social strata. As tourism developed in the Bahamas, the need for Bahamian souvenirs was in demand, and who better to sit outside shanty huts made of plywood and straw to sell these artifacts than black Bahamian women? In her essay, Report from the Bahamas, June Jordan’s observations of class consciousness and the position of black Bahamian in the economic and political structures of the Bahamas are evidenced in her experiences with black Bahamian workers at the straw market. Jordan notes,

… It matters not that these women do not live in these windowless, dens that lack bathrooms, no matter that these other black women incessantly weave words and flowers into the straw hats and bags piled beside them on the burning dusty street. No matter that these other black women must work their sense of beauty into these things that we will take away as cheaply as we dare, or they will do without food. Positioning black women
outside them with their crafts perpetuates the image of the Bahamas as a place that has not only sun and sand, but also offers glimpses of the ‘native[s]’ in their natural surroundings (116).

The Straw market, then, has been constructed to fit tourists’ expectations; the women in the Straw Market have become the so-called “authentic” Bahamian experience as a way to fulfill tourists’ need to experience visual and cultural difference. This reality makes one fact clear: the vestiges of colonialism remain, and are played out in a neocolonial context as women’s bodies continue to serve as sites of oppression. As Hill-Collins (2000) contends, “These … images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (69).

Thus, it did not take long for the Straw market vendor to be cast in the less threatening role of entertainer or local scenery. It is not surprising, then, to learn that the fetishization of the ”market woman”—that staple of the Caribbean brochure—is found in the travel literature written during the first half of the twentieth century. Like all the “colorful” Bahamian figures, “the smiling market women have no life, no history, beyond the fact that she adds local color” (Dahl 1995, 98). Curry’s (1928) Bahamian Lore promises his readers that “A visit to the market is always a pleasure. The fruit is strange, the fish extraordinary, an occasional vegetable quite
unfamiliar, the colored folks unceasingly interesting” (71). All these items—fruits, vegetable, and colored folk—are there to be inspected and consumed by the tourist in one way or the other. The black Bahamians that appear in Jack Culmer’s (1948) edited collection *A Book of Bahamian Verse* (poetry composed by winter residents) are of what Dahl describes as “the passive, tamed variety” (62). The market woman is among them. Her fruits, are a symbol of the abundance of paradise; her colorful dress, her bright smile, her warmth, and her swinging hips are symbols of Eden’s vitality and exotic fertility … Her presumably peculiar habit of holding fruit baskets adds to the exotic effect (cited in Strachan 2002, 108).

Remarkably, as Chapter Six notes, as part of the Bahamas’ tourism efforts today, tourists who enter the airport in Freeport or Nassau are greeted by this portrait of the happy native woman, ready, willing and happy to serve them. She is always dressed in colorful “indigenous” wear depicting sun, sea and sand; she holds baskets filled with hand-made dolls and fruits. Both this woman and the wares she distributes are intended to remind visitors that they are in an island paradise, one that is marketed to fit tourists’ expectations. Black feminist theorist Carole Boyce-Davis (1994), grew up on the island of Trinidad, refers to the so-called “Market Women” as, “Tourist Annie” (107). One of the few scholars to explore the lives of Caribbean women, Boyce-Davis’ focuses on migrating narratives. In her scholarship, she addresses black women’s objectification in oppressive Caribbean societies.

Visions of Tourist Annie of my childhood surface and I remember now how she costumed herself exaggeratedly in stereotypical Caribbean folk dress, with big colorful skirts, bright make-up, large earrings and several necklaces, shack-shacks, baskets with fruit and dolls which she sold to tourists as she welcomed them to the Caribbean. Hers was an elaborate mask, a performance which allowed mostly white tourists to photograph
themselves with her in the Caribbean, to see her dance for them. Her costume based both on Afro-Caribbean historical dress and tourists’ constructions subsequently became part of what is often exported with Caribbean dance (24).

Boyce-Davis’ “Tourist Annie” illustrates how the marketing of images become established as part of one’s culture, specifically to the extent that Tourist Annie’s existence on the tarmac of Bahamian airports shows that she plays such a relevant role in contemporary Bahamian tourist culture.

Equally important to Tourist Annie, the turban-wearing market woman (a variation of the [North] American stereotype of the black jezebel) must be added the old or heavy-set female vendor, that cousin of the black mammy. Always portrayed in North American films as mothers without children; “who can ever forget the sickening spectacle of Hattie McDaniels waiting on the simpering Vivien Leigh hand and foot” (hooks 1992, 119) in the movie Gone With The Wind. This popular portrayal of African American women in the role servant is the ancestor of the modern Bahamian brochure favorite, the straw vendor:

Always she sits on her chair, smiling broadly, her wares hanging around her or at her feet … this heavyset market woman presents herself in all her matronly glory. Many of the market women depicted in the earliest illustration and photographs [marketing the Bahamas as ultimate tourist destination], were not smiling visions of contentment. But by the time the modern brochure comes along, such license is revoked, and the vendor must put forth the proper face for the camera (cited in Strachan, 2002, 108).
Such images allow for black Bahamian women to be cast in the role of matronly servant. Such a constructed image also serves a symbolic function in maintaining oppressions of gender. In the Bahamas, women in positions of service, such as maids, or the women working as vendors in the markets, are viewed as substandard citizens, and their jobs are considered unskilled and socially inferior. Moreover, the working conditions in the markets are hard: the hours are irregular, there is a seasonal overload, overtime is more compulsory and workers are at the mercy of the guest. Working in the tourism industry, in particular, the Bahamian woman is rendered by the Straw Market as being socially and economically inferior in her own country. Because of the calculated construction of the so-called, “Market Woman” created through visual media that market the Bahamas, the straw vendors in the market have become a staple of the tourist brochure, the type of advertising media which has become the yardstick by which some women in the Bahamas are measured. Classic Marxists theorists see [this kind of advertising] through media as instruments of the dominant class, and as a means by which capitalist promote their profit making interests. Contemporary cultural theorist like Stuart Hall (1997), believe that media disseminate the ideology of the ruling classes in society and thereby oppress other groups … Media content is seen as a commodity to be sold in the market place, and information dissemination is controlled by what the market will bear (90).

Furthermore, the Bahamian government helps to maintain this oppression by allowing foreign investors to bring in their own workers to fill high-ranking positions in expensive, beachfront hotels, leaving the Bahamian people in roles of virtual servitude. Agreed, there are natives in the hotel and on the beach, but very few are executives in high-ranking positions; the majority of employees in and around the hotels in the Bahamas all constitute some kind of
servant class: waiters, maids, guards, and souvenir sellers. This social location reinforces feelings of inferiority in locals and superiority in tourists.

Finally, tourism is a medium that spreads awareness of the Bahamas throughout the world and brings people to the islands. It might seem that tourism creates a palette for Bahamians to display their culture to visitors who could then take home a true knowledge of Bahamian culture. However, this optimistic view is not a reality. The reality is that Bahamas tourism generates a false Bahamian culture through perpetuation of idealistic images constructed through tourism marketing. Marketing the Bahamas through visual media in this sense can be viewed as a means of constructing culture in the Bahamas, which leads to domination of the ideology of the elite class who benefit from tourism in the Bahamas. Antonio Gramsci (1971) identified this form of control as hegemony—a ruling ideology that flows from the intellectual, political, and moral leadership. It refers to a set of ruling ideas that permeate a society in such a way as to make the established order of power and values seem natural. Through postcards and brochures—the Bahamas creates a mediated, visual fantasy in order to draw people to the islands. This is not only apparent in postcards and brochures, but also on web sites promoting the Bahamas as “paradise vacation.” These postcards and brochures offer a myopic perspective of the Bahamas for the rest of the world to see. The greatest injustice that springs from the transmission of a false culture is the depiction of the Bahamian people as inferior “natives” that lies in tourist propaganda.

Tourism is not a product since it cannot be sampled in advance. It is a collection of projected images which establishes the boundaries of experience (Papson, 1981). The images define what is beautiful, what should be experienced and with whom one should interact. Understanding the people of tourism is thus, above all else an analyses of images.
Chapter VI: Bahamian Identity: The Construction of the Nation

In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the natives when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man’s values. In the period of decolonization, the colonized masses mock at these very values, insult them and vomit them up. *Wretched of the Earth*, by Frantz Fanon

The works of Frantz Fanon provide the framework from which I discuss the processes of the formation of Bahamian identity in the Bahamas from 1930s to the present; a brief overview of his observations is in order. Frantz Fanon noted that the native goes through three stages in his encounter with colonizer. The first stage is unqualified assimilation; the second involves the recovery of identity and remembrance; and in the third, the intellectual motivates the people to resistance and rejection of the oppressor. This rejection and resistance requires that the colonized value his full identity. In order to actualize this step, the native combines his pride in both nation and state with an appreciation and embrace of native culture. This three-stage model theorizes the relationship between the colonized and colonizer.

Given that the Bahamas was once a colonized nation, this model is useful in understanding how Bahamians identify themselves in a postcolonial or neocolonial moment. It also offers valuable insight into Bahamian national identity today, because identity formation in the Bahamas is the result of power relationship from before and after emancipation. In order to understand the formation of black Bahamian national identity, one must understand the history of the Bahamas.

Although it has been independent for 34 years, the Bahamas still faces numerous development tasks, including the formidable challenge of fostering cultural identity. Existing cultural identity for the Bahamas has its roots in colonization. The entrenched political and economic elite had always been white, or light-complexioned. Though the political influence of
whites has decreased throughout the islands of the Bahamas, their economic and cultural
dominance is still very much a part of the fabric of Bahamian society. It was not until January
10, 1967 that the majority black population was first represented in government when the
Progressive Liberal Party won the national election. As a result of its new independence from
Britain, black Bahamians began to explore what it meant to be Bahamian. In the foreword to
_Bahamian Anthology_, NettleFord (1983) championed the Bahamas’ quest for an autonomous
identity. He writes, “To a people emerging from institutionalized dependency and a prolonged
impoverishment of that spirit associated with being integrated self-directed souls, the urge to
celebrate the new won liberation in forms more lasting than the light hearted minstrelsy of
plantation and the colonial years is both desired and desirable” (02).

How Bahamians would find their true identity, however, was a source of great concern.
It was as obscure to define then as it is today in 2007. Patricia Glinton-Meicholas (2000) claims
that after three decades of independence, national identity of the Bahamas remains a nebulous
concept. She also suggests “as important as it is to statehood and national unity, [Bahamians]
have thus far failed to define or develop a clear understanding of who we have been, who we are
and who we want to be as a people” (104).

To understand who [Bahamians] are as people, Catherine Hall (2000) turns to culture.
Naturally, in the nation’s conscious efforts to reconstruct a new society and define its national
identity, the question of a definable culture was brought to the forefront. Hall raised questions
such as: What importance should we place on culture, on our existence as a distinct unit and
differentiated people in the national community? What use it is to declare that we are
Bahamians, or that we are Caribbeans? How will this serve us as an independent nation? Who
are we? Where do we come from? Which “we” are we talking about when we talk about “we”?
In exploring national identity, Bahamian scholars turned to culture as a lens through which to explain Bahamian identity. But what culture is there? And whose is it?

To define Bahamian identity by using culture, one must keep in mind Fanon’s first stage of identity formation, in which the colonized assimilates to the colonizer. Even though Bahamians have been emancipated, British culture is still a major part of their identity. Our laws are still British laws. Our government still follows British creed. It still shocks me when I return home and turn on the local television stations, now 34 years after independence, and still see in the House of Assembly, Supreme Courts and Parliament black people adorned in blonde wigs, like Britain’s own Parliament. What it means to be Bahamian still is largely defined and shaped by what it means to be British. Reflecting on the issue of Bahamian identity, Anthony Cash (1998) contends:

The cultural/familial ties that bind us together become more important as we are absorbed into a virtual global community of ideas and action. Culture, described as the way of life of a people, refers to the ties that make us one, and remain central to our sense of self-identity and to our ability to achieve as Bahamian people. This is the contention of those who desire recognition of our community of unique ideas and that we are an island with a distinct identity and history. This new space or abode and the change to bring it about, can only begin in the minds of Bahamian men and women. The shackles have fallen, but the duty remains to think ourselves free or into a position of self-determination and self-love. Is our culture simply folklore and festivals, food and dance? (8).

Although white European culture is a part of how Bahamians come to identify themselves, Bahamian identity is also rooted in indigenous Arawak and African cultures, a legacy which has been maintained through food, festival, folklore and dance. Cash’s questioning of these aspects
of culture, as reflected in folklore, festival, food and dance, seems to be a disavowal of the significance of these aspects of culture in a postcolonial society. All four elements are vestiges of an African culture, and remain a part of Bahamian African culture.

Problematic in formulating a Black Bahamian national identity are the myriad perspectives—it is impossible in some ways to posit a definitive identity which resonates with all black Bahamians. So, how do we theorize the mingling of cultural forms that developed? Stuart Hall’s analysis of identity describes two possibilities. Hall contends that, “there are at least two different ways of thinking about ‘cultural identity’. The first position defines “cultural identity” in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective “one true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (111). “The second position recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are’; rather—since history has intervened—‘what we have become’” (112). For Hall, the first position defines identity as “being” (which offers a sense of unity and commonality), while his second position defines identity as “becoming” (a process of identification that acknowledges the discontinuity in identity formation).

Hall’s framework nicely complements Fanon’s. Fanon’s model facilitates understanding of the psychological processes that colonized Bahamians endure in the process of developing a ‘usable’ identity. It also allows for ways to conceptualize Bahamian identity in general; however, one model alone does not encapsulate the complexity of understanding black Bahamian identity. Bahamian identity remains too complex to be fully reduced to one model. The various ways in which Bahamians identify themselves contribute to this complexity. The

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8 Which also served as cultural resistance during colonization!
relevance of its first stage is demonstrated by the fact that, for example, some black Bahamians do not claim an African ancestry. For example, in a letter published by the *Tribune* (local Bahamian paper) in October of 1975, an anonymous writer asserts:

> From the time we attained our independence, we have gradually disassociated ourselves from England and have shown in our public and political life less and less respect for her. However, like it or not, England is our mother country, not Africa. We still need help and guidance and Africa can’t give these to us as she needs help herself” (2).

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the aforementioned views reflected the sentiments of all Bahamians. They did reveal, however, the pernicious effect that centuries of European rule have had on the minds of much of the Bahamian populace. A white bias had come to prevail and, with it, a concomitant devaluation of the sense of self of the citizens of African descent who, interestingly enough, comprised the vast majority of the people. The internal tensions and self-doubt that were undoubtedly the consequences of this racial and cultural devaluation made, and continue to make, it difficult for a positive a black identity to take root and flourish (Glinton-Michelos 2000, 104).

**Hidden Identity: The Suppression of Africa**

The difficulty of defining a “true” Bahamian identity has been around since slavery, and throughout colonization. This difficulty is heightened by the sheer diversity/heterogeneity of the population. This situation mirrors Hall’s assertion that “the notion that identity has to do with people that look the same, feel the same, call themselves the same, is nonsense. As a process, as a narrative, as a discourse, it is always told from the position of the other (114). The Bahamas, as Hall defines it, is a ‘hybrid’ country made up of people from all around the world. British
colonization and, later, the tourism industry have contributed to the many faces of the multifarious Bahamian people. Rex Nettleford supports Hall’s perception of the Caribbean:

For the Caribbean is the story of “arrivants” from across the Atlantic and beyond, each group bringing a cultural equipage, including for some the legitimacy of power supported by gunpowder, scientific knowledge and a later developed sense of racial superiority. M.G. Smith describes the islands of two million souls as a deeply segmented aggregation of descendants of European masters, African slaves and in-between offspring of both. Each group has built up cultural institutions independent of each other but each with its own inner logic and consistency (01).

Furthermore, as Fanon asserts, “colonization is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it” (Fanon 111). As Fanon argues, colonialism not only physically disarms the colonized subject; it also robs her of a “pre-colonial” cultural heritage. One example of this (il)logic (Craton and Saunders 1994), according to the myth of the paradise plantation, states that Bahamian slaves “had it good,” and were so well looked after that they had no thought of revolt (23). “If that [were] so,” writes (Glinton-Michelos 2000, 106), then “why were there uprising in the Out Islands between 1829–1834, raising such fears as to cause detachments of the West India Regiments to be sent out, and even a warship on several occasions.” For the Black population in the Bahamas, identity has been imagined and inaccurate.

How would the Bahamas find its true identity when colonial authorities did not provide a true history, when they did not provide the people of the Bahamas with “one” shared knowledge of Bahamian identity? Stuart Hall provides one possible approach to addressing this, writing:
Our actual cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as “one people” with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This “oneness,” underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of “Caribbeaness,” of the black experience. It is this identity which a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate (and) bring to light (111).

Hall suggests that black Bahamians must, then, move beyond their surface dissimilarities to embrace their history. For the Bahamas, he explains, there were three interconnected elements that went into the formation of a collective self-image: a sense of place, a sense of history, and a heightened awareness of an African origin of the nation’s black majority. The sense of place necessitated recognition of the distinctive physical landscape of the Bahamas, an archipelago of approximately 700 islands and 2,000 cays extending from the coast of Florida to Haiti. The sense of history acknowledged the fact that the Bahamas represented a pattern of social and economic development which diverged from the plantation economy and society model that defined most of the territories in the Anglophone Caribbean (Bethel 2000, 17). But history was as obscure for the Bahamian people as the meaning of “Bahamian identity,” since identity politics are necessarily connected to their awareness of an African origin. Due to Bahamians’ inclination to focus on class to the exclusion of race, celebration of their Africanness also was inaccessible.

Concerning the complexity of acquiring a Caribbean identity that valued its African connection, Rex Nettleford asserts:

African surface forms of culture have become progressively diluted in the behaviour of most … (Bahamians). But the African heritage survives…(Bahamian) culture is indeed a
“degradation” or “corruption”—not so much of a European culture as of [an] African culture. The cultural history of …(the Bahamas) is one in which Black people constantly struggled to maintain their African heritage in the teeth of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism in the guise of modernization (cited in Bolland 2002, 15).

Nettleford qualifies his assertion that Caribbean identity has been diluted with the argument that the connection to Africa can never die in the heart of its people. This argument is central to positing a usable identity, since it defies that powerful institution in the Bahamas which, historically, degraded such an identity: colonial education. Since one of the purposes of colonial education was to promote the history of the metropolitan countries, that same education also demonized the native peoples’ history. As Bilko (1978) notes:

The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed …

The logic behind white domination is to prepare the black man for the subservient role in this country. Not so long ago this used to be freely said in parliament, even about the educational system of the black people. It is still said even today, although in a much more sophisticated language. To a large extent the evil-doers have succeeded in producing at the output end of their machine a kind of black man who is man only in form. This is the extent to which the process of dehumanisation has advanced (17).

Biko’s observation illustrates how accurately Phase one of Fanon’s analyses reflects colonized Bahamas. That Bahamians scholars have raised the subject of educating the Bahamian people of their true history perhaps marks the start of the second phase of Fanon’s model.
The Politics of Transition

In June 1996, an Afro-Bahamian Club was formed. It approached the Ministry of Education for more teaching of African and black history: “As the great majority of Bahamians are of African descent, and black man’s history and culture … [that culture] has up to now been very largely neglected” (Hughes 4). In furthering this argument, Anthony G. Dahl observes, “I didn’t realize what an important role blacks had in making history and culture in the Bahamas since they first arrived in the islands in 1648, and that meant as a Bahamian I didn’t know really well who I was culturally and socially” (19).

At the time of independence, the most widely-read history of the Bahamas was that of Michael Craton, first published in 1962—a history of the dominant white elite, which expressed negative views of the African past, and the history of black Bahamians. Craton wrote of the diverse ethnic groups from the West African coast: “Practically their only common denominator was ignorance and primitive barbarism” (Craton 1962 cited in Glinton-Meicholas, 2000, 12).

For most colonized Caribbean people, this separation from, and demeaning of Africa by the colonized country has always been a part colonial history, even in black nations such as the Bahamas. For example, in The Tribune, a local newspaper owned and operated by white Bahamians, a reporter wrote that a “proper” Bahamian history should be taught first: “Let us teach our children to be Bahamians—first, last and all the time. This visionary association with Africa will get us nowhere … In response to The Tribune, the chairman of the club’s education committee explained that the existing curriculum was designed to make blacks feel inferior:

Our children are compelled to study about the European bright men (the conqueror so to speak) and nothing about themselves. After 300 years our schools do not have a proper history of the Bahamas. Why? I will tell you why. It is impossible to write a proper
history of the Bahamas without mentioning Africa and the achievements of our own black people (cited in Glinton-Meicholas 126).

Comparatively, Fanon notes that blacks living in colonized Martinique felt their allegiance primarily and singularly to France and expressed it thusly: “What is all this talk of a black people, of a Negro nationality? I am a Frenchman. I am interested in French civilization, the French people. We refused to be considered “outsiders,” we have full part in the French drama … What have I to do with a black empire” (203). However, among colonized people, claims of nationality that identify with the culture of the colonizer are not uncommon. Fanon explains:

Every colonized people —in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle (18).

Certainly, this excerpt, and the illustration of how the Bahamian connection to its “true” history becomes repressed, reflects how deeply Fanon’s first stage of identity formation was entrenched in the Bahamas. British imperialism forced the Bahamian people to reject everything Bahamian or African, and to grasp instead for a postcolonial identity that fosters British colonial ideology. It compelled the Bahamian people to believe that an African or Bahamian cultural identity was substandard and British cultural identity was superior to their own. This illustration of how the Bahamian identity has been repressed, and the connection with Africa completely trivialized, is a clear example of why Fanon’s model is accurate in defining the Bahamian identity. Stuart Hall summarizes the result:

Africa is the name of the missing term, the great aporia, which lies at the centre of our
cultural identity and gives it a meaning which, until recently, it lacked. No one who looks at the textual images now, in the light of the history of transportation, slavery, and migration, can fail to understand how the rift of separation, the “loss of identity,” which has been integral to the Caribbean experience, only begins to be healed when these forgotten connections are once more set in place (112).

In this way, the African Bahamian psyche faces blatant denials of history and ethnic heritage. In many places, African Bahamians contend with a history of lies. If the truth were re-discovered and embraced as Hall maintains, its potential for providing new energies would be profound.

**The Search for a Valued National identity**

An important aspect of Hall’s theory of identity is that identity is fluid, always changing. After emancipation, the Bahamas found itself in need of a black Bahamian identity that would be both liberating and empowering. Despite this new black rule, the Bahamas remained psychologically and culturally colonized. The question then shifted from one that seemed simply to define how Bahamian national identity was constituted to one that sought to define how the Bahamas could formulate an identity that fulfilled its needs. Hall’s and Fanon’s analyses of identity formation and power provide answers to this Bahamian quest.

In the process of self-definition, the nation increasingly assumed the most important element was the racial identity. The emphasis placed on a black racial identity represented a rejection of the white counter-identity of the recently-ended period of white supremacy in which the black majority had (in the society, economy and in the history books) been marginalized (Johnson 1998, 73). Letters to the editor published in *The Nassau Guardian* in 1973, in the months before independence, indicate that there was wider support for an identity that
emphasized the African dimension in the nation’s past and its cultural expressions. *The Nassau Guardian* of 16 February, for example, published two letters linking the issues of national identity with Bahamian culture. Kingsley Munroe, referring to the nature of colonial education, and signaling a shift in intention, where the Bahamian people would embark on a search for a valued identity that fostered this connection to Africa, observed:

> We were denied the knowledge of our past and informed that we had no present. We were taught to regard our culture and traditions as barbarous and primitive…it is vital that we should nurture our own culture and history if we are to develop that Bahamian personality which must provide the educational and intellectual foundations of our Bahamian future (3).

Here, the utilization of Fanon’s second stage illustrates the complexities and various aspects of Bahamian identity. In the second stage of Fanon’s model, identity and remembrance are recovered. According to the letters sent to the local newspaper, it is apparent that most of the population was concerned about constructing an identity that embraced their African ancestors. For the Bahamian people, the recovery of identity involved getting rid of the colonizing ideology that suggested black Bahamian people did not have an “appreciable” history, an ideology that rendered the black Bahamian people inferior. Munroe rallied for the people to remember Africa and to embrace the aspects African culture that was Bahamian culture. He asked the Bahamian people to uncover their connections to Africa and to learn the history of the black Bahamians and how they came to the western world. He urged them to be proud of their ancestors, who their colonial rulers had so bitterly tried to remove and distort. For Munroe, an understanding, a recovery, an embrace of Africa, would be the only way that the Bahamian people could achieve a sense of identity that encouraged pride.
Fanon’s model, then, offers a valuable way of considering the impact of the suppression of the country’s African history by black Bahamians, colonial rulers and state-sponsored education. While unqualified assimilation still exists in the Bahamas, its frequency is decreasing. An embrace of their pre-colonial history has been essential as black Bahamians considered how they should and need to identify themselves today. Someday, perhaps Fanon’s third stage—an integration of both cultures, and taking the better of the two—will be closer to what qualifies the Bahamian identity. African film producer Gaston Kabore calls this third stage, “recovering a usable past,” which means taking the best of both cultures, “African-and-European,” and creating what seems to be a “new” cultural way of being. The true hope for my country lies in reaching the third stage, when residents resist and reject the cultural oppression of our former colonial rules, cast off our ethnocentric yoke and become not only politically autonomous, but socially, culturally and psychologically free.
Chapter VII: Producing, Sustaining and Perpetuating the 
Tourist-Imposed Images of Black Bahamian Womanhood

Most Bahamians are ashamed of being black or glad that they are not. I have read letters to the editor in local dailies repudiating an African heritage and rebuking those who seek to place it on a pedestal as high as the one occupied by the white loyalists.

Patricia Glinton-Miecholas

I have often wondered about my place in the society of the small island of the Bahamas where I grew up. As a child, I was considered beautiful, while my sister, who is of a much darker complexion, came home crying almost every day because children called her names such as Tar Baby and Mud Pie. My maternal grandmother, who was very light-skinned, always degraded my sister, calling her “Blackie” or “Monkey.” I saw the shame these experiences caused my sister and the way they affected her sense of self-worth and self-esteem. I wondered who decided that she was not beautiful because she was dark-skinned. I also wanted to know what happened in my grandmother’s life that made her so ashamed of her own blackness that she would hurt and degrade her own granddaughter.

I understand now that my grandmother’s treatment of my sister is rooted in concepts of Bahamian identity that were developed under colonization. Anne Stoler (2002) explains:

Colonial authority was constructed on two powerful, but false premises. The first was the notion that Europeans in the colonies made up and easily identifiable and discrete biological and social entity; a “natural” community of common class interests, racial attributes, political affinities and superior culture. The second was the related notion that the boundaries separating colonizer from colonized were thus self-evident and easily drawn. Neither premise reflected colonial realities (98).
Stoler’s observations of the colonizer’s ideology towards those who are different from themselves provide an historical background to my grandmother’s predicament and the transference of that predicament—her treatment of my sister. The notion that European identity is predicated on “discrete biological” and “racial attributes” is the very ideological notion underlining how black Bahamians came to an understanding of their own identity. Therefore, to feel a part of or included in this “superior culture,” many Bahamians were socialized into a belief that skin color, a sign of “racial attributes,” made it possible for them to claim an European identity. In other words, the whiter or lighter their skin, the less obvious the boundary between colonizer and colonized. Thus, skin color became a line of demarcation between those who belonged to a “superior culture” and those who did not, which explains why some Bahamians to this very day ignore their African ancestry. Because of the power to construct one’s identity remained in the hands of their oppressor, such power resulted in the erasure of African and Arawak cultures. It was thus difficult for Bahamians to identify with their African roots.

As a result, their identity remained tied to the Queen, the Queen’s English, the English way of life. Because their English conqueror exaggerated the physical differences between the indigenous peoples that Africans themselves brought to the Bahamas, this ideology—internalized by black Bahamians—caused self-alienation among Bahamians. Moreover, Stoler explains, colonial authority depended on visual differences that discerned the ruler from the ruled. Because these assumptions were defined by skin color, racial inequalities were essential to the structure of imperialism. Under this power, black Bahamians internalized ideas about both the worth of the white skin they could never have and the inferiority of their black skin they forever inhabited. They, then, became conspirators in their own oppression.
It was under this authority that my grandmother grew up, and it is the legacy of black women in the Bahamas. Despite emancipation in 1972, black Bahamians still equate blackness with inferiority and whiteness with power, wealth, and upward mobility. In this chapter, I examine the legacy of colonization as it relates to the production of women’s images in the tourism marketing that exists in the Bahamas today, as well as the implications of these images and the socio-cultural impact of such imagery on the identity formation processes of black Bahamian women.

As Enloe (1989) notes, tourism has long been characterized in patriarchal terms “infused with masculine ideas about adventure, pleasure and the exotic”; yet, a feminist critique of the gendered production and consumption of tourism experiences and images remains consistently peripheral to tourism studies (20). Bahamian scholars and postcolonial scholars also have yet to explore these issues. In fact, little work has been done on black women in the Bahamas, and especially with regard to issues of identity, sexuality and gender. The works of Patricia Hill-Collins regarding controlling images of black womanhood constitute some of the first analyses of these issue, and not only explain historical conditions for African American women, but also examine historical conditions of black women in the Bahamas. Hill-Collins argues that the authority to define societal values is a major instrument of power used by elite groups, which, in the Bahamas, involves manipulating ideas about Black womanhood. The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed images of black womanhood. Likewise, the dominant ideology of colonialism and now even postcolonialism fosters the creation of images designed to control black [Bahamian] women’s bodies (72). Hill-Collins’ descriptions of controlling images of black womanhood are applicable to black Bahamian women. For example, the corollaries to the U.S. “mammy,” “jezebel,” “hoochie” and
“black lady” can be found in Bahamian society, where the roles of Mammie, Earth Mother, nurturer, breeder, caretaker and worker were foisted upon black women during slavery, and are now being replayed in a post-independence society. These categorizations encourage black women to uphold racial imperialism in the form of white supremacy and sexual imperialism in the form of patriarchy

**The Effects of Tourism’s Images on Black Bahamian Women**

The most obvious internalization of shame that impacted on the self-esteem of black folks historically and continues to the present day is the shame about appearance, skin color, body shape, and hair texture. Had white colonizers chosen to exploit and oppress black people without stigmatizing appearance, the psychological trauma endured by the slaves would not continue to react itself in similar forms today.

*Black Looks* by bell hooks (year)

Today, long after the end of slavery, the perception of blackness as undesirable is very much a part of some Caribbean societies. Colonizing discourses effectively taught black people to hate themselves and to see beauty only in European features. In *Coming out of Shame*, therapists Gershen Kaufman and Lev Raphael (1972) write that shame is a perplexing emotion that is “passed from each generation to the next,” becomes “internalized through imagery,” and then reactive and reenacted with others” (65). This observation helps to explain why negative images associated with blackness are powerful enough to make black Bahamian women feel ashamed of their dark skin.

Moreover, argues bell hooks (1995), most black Americans from slavery to the present day, along with white Americans and other non-black folks, have passively accepted and condoned color caste. “Shaming on the basis of skin color is one racially-based trauma retention that has been passed on from generation to generation” (65). This is not exclusively true for
people in the United States; shame based on skin color has also been passed on from generation to generation in the Bahamas. Low self-esteem, rooted in negative images of blackness, reinforced by racist ideologies stemming from colonialism, has led black people throughout the Bahamas to detest their blackness, their African-ness.

As a result, I find myself acknowledging I am from a country where young women ruin their skin daily with chemicals that promise to make them light-skinned. As a child, I never heard the slogan “black is beautiful,” which was popularized in America in an effort to undo some of the effects of negative racist iconography and representations of blackness that had persisted throughout slavery and then become an accepted norm in visual culture (hooks 76).

The Bahamas is located south of Miami but, despite being a former British possession, its visual culture has been decidedly Americanized. Cable television from the United States and American magazines such as Glamour, Vogue and Elle, which stores carry more frequently than black magazines such as Essence, Jet, and Ebony, serve as vehicles for U.S. American visual aesthetics. Thus, while white European standards of beauty still circulate throughout the Bahamas, America’s cultural hegemony has usurped British influence.

Of course, the vestiges of a colonized mentality do not automatically disappear because of independence, and the lingering mentality of oppression is very present in contemporary Bahamian culture. Tourism promotion in the Bahamas is another clear example of how this colonized mentality is still very much a part of the Bahamas, and helps to construct an ideology that says that dark-skinned women are not beautiful.

In the process of marketing the Bahamas as the ultimate tourist destination “paradise,” mediated images of a privileged white body appear to be the strategic focus for marketing the
Bahamas to wealthy North American tourists. In postcards that advertise the Bahamas, an invitation to “Come to the Bahamas: Where Summer Never Ends” is accompanied by photos of a semi-nude white woman with the caption, “Feeling Hot, Hot, Hot in the Bahamas” (Alexander 95). In fact, the many postcards and brochures produced by Bahamas Tourism show white couples and white women engaged in leisure, relaxation, and romance, implying that white can enjoy these possibilities. Meanwhile, as other images found in these brochures show, black servers will cater to white tourists’ needs. For instance, one postcard has the image of a black male dressed in a butler uniform, holding a tray of exotic drinks and standing in the blue waters of the Bahamas.

Many of these postcards also contain images of white couples in wedding attire, white women in hammocks, white women walking along the beach, white men playing golf. One postcard advertises the Bahamas as “a great place to say ‘yes,’” and pictured above the caption is a white man in a tuxedo as he carries his bride: a white woman in a white wedding gown. Another reads “A Walk on Grand Rock Beach, Grand Bahamas,” with a white couple holding hands in a romantic walk on the beach. One of the most popular postcards frequently found in stores throughout the Bahamas contains an image of a completely nude (with the exception of a straw hat on her head)
dark-skinned black Bahamian woman with her arms covering her breast, and her legs crossed in a way that covers her vaginal area. She is positioned to draw the viewer’s attention to her vaginal area: the way her legs are crossed leaves a gap of darkness so that it appears that her legs are opened. Above her head, the caption reads, “It’s better in…” and below, where she sits, continues “The Bahamas.” This card invites public access to her private parts. Implied in “It’s better” is the possibility of sex. Such language, coupled with the image, the hypersexualization of her nude body, becomes an invitation for sexual use of her body at will—because, after all, she can do it better. Comparing these images offers valuable insight into the logic of tourism-generated images: the Bahamas is both a travelers’ paradisiacal getaway, where the white woman is seen walking leisurely with her romantic partner or reading a book while reclining on a hammock; the black Bahamian woman is naked, waiting to be used physically, just like investors and white capitalists use Bahamian land to gain wealth. Alexander (1995) further suggests that the relentless celebration of sexual imagery—here, the phallic imagery is suggestive—is in part a playful response to white stereotypes in that primitive black female wantonness signifies on the erotic tropes of racial imagination. However, the stark contrast in these images (as well as their consumption) embodies the same historical connotations colonialism ascribes to: images of black women are used for sex tourism, while images of white women symbolize a wholesome, pure vacation—marriage, romance and love.
It seems like a contradiction, then, when the Bahamas, a predominantly black nation with women of many hues, chooses to use white women in their ads to promote tourism. The logic of capitalism and tourism, however, rationalizes the contradiction: white female bodies are pampered, while black female bodies are regulated to working status, sexual or domestic. Although the government and members of Parliament are primarily black, the racism and sexism which accompanied colonial rule clearly lingers still, as the government’s tourism advertising strategy shows. Fanon writes, “Colonialism is the business of adventurers and politicians” (Fanon 91). He further states, “There is a fact, black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect. How do we extricate ourselves?” (Fanon 11). Is the predominantly black government still, after thirty years of independence, using such tourism-driven images to prove that it is equal to its former colonizers? If so, what is the cost of this strategy for black Bahamian women?

It is reasonable to conclude that, as the very least, playing out the role of tourist-servitor clashes with identity constructions that eschew the logic of tourism. At both Nassau and Freeport airports, managed by the Bahamian government, paradise begins for the white tourist. Greeting the visitors, black women in tropical yellow, blue and white dresses play the “natives,” ready to serve the tourists’ requests. One would think that Bahamian people wear these types of clothes and drink out of coconuts, but they do not. To create representations of this paradise, the government creates ads that show dark-skinned women in maids’ uniforms and white and light-skinned women relaxing and frolicking on the beach. This device both suggests to potential tourists what they will find on the beach—including white and light-skinned women ready to luxuriate with them—effectively telling darker-skinned women that their only place in society is
in the service of others. The Bahamian government’s recycled version of paradise thus helps to create and sustain the disparity between whiteness and blackness, wealthy and impoverished.

Further complicating the relationship to tourism are lack of educational opportunities, management training programs, and other kinds of economic uplift for Bahamians, which means that life in the tourist industry is inevitable for many. Moreover, life as domestic workers becomes the norm of most Bahamian women. While a few dream of going away to Canada, England, or the United States for college, many black Bahamian women see their future as servers to tourists, workers at the Straw Market, and public entertainers of paradise, while in their private lives, they struggle to survive.

The Bahamian government’s obvious lack of appreciation for its black women has marginalized and categorized women into subsidiary roles. Women in the Bahamas have resorted to bleaching their skin, regardless of the medical warnings that doing so could damage their skin irreparably. For many dark-skinned women in the Bahamas, skin color is such a disadvantage in a world where all the advantages seem to be associated with whiteness and light-skinned people: Power, Success, Recognition, Beauty, Respect. This unfortunate understanding has come about because of hegemony and the ruling class’ thirst for economic empowerment through promoting the Bahamas as “paradise.”

In the Bahamian government’s launch of a campaign for mass tourism that uses these images, dark-skinned Bahamian women have been reminded that they are not part of the dominant group, and thus reject their “blackness” as a source of their poverty and which also hinders their advancement. Black Bahamian women have internalized these images, as perpetuated by the Bahamian governments’ tourism campaign. Fanon, Hooks and Hill-Collins describe this internalization in their analyses of identity formations. The black Bahamian woman
rejecting her physical attributes affirms Fanon’s first stage: her “black Bahamian-ness”
constructed by the government, portrays her in a degrading way, and is also tied to the invisible
norm that privileges whiteness. It is no wonder there are women in the Bahamas who are
desperate to change their physical makeup in the pursuit to be “beautiful,” (white). hooks notes:

We will never know when enslaved black folks began to understand fully that the more
they imitated the mores of their white colonizers the better they might be treated. We
will never recall that exact moment in time when a significant number of dark-skinned
enslaved Africans began to see lighter skin as better. A color caste system existed in the
minds of white colonizers long before the systematic rape of black women produced
children with mixed skin colors (62).

Black people had been beaten and demoralized for hundreds of years, and hooks’
observation suggests that they began to believe that if they looked and acted like the “masters,”
then life would be bearable. For a small, predominantly black island like the Bahamas, a color
caste system has been around since the arrival of the first loyalist. Consequently, bleaching the
skin has long been popular there, as well as in predominantly black nations like the Bahamas.
“A complexion as charming as a movie star’s,” promised the advertisements for skin-lightening
creams in 1930s African-American magazines, which were imported into the Bahamas in record
numbers. These creams were made to erase the “leprosy,” or disease, of the black skin. During
this period, whiter skin was openly equated with success, glamour and access to a world denied
to the average black woman. More than 70 years later, surprisingly little has changed. In the
Bahamas and other Caribbean predominantly black nations, these creams and adverts are still
colossally popular.
Throughout the Bahamas’ vast underclass, and sometimes the upper class as well, women are ignoring public health warnings and resorting to skin bleaching in what doctors and government officials describe as unprecedented numbers. This controversial phenomenon, which has been on the rise for a number of years, is largely rooted in a belief among Bahamian poor that a lighter complexion may be a ticket to upward mobility, both socially and professionally. The government’s tourism promotion campaign, based on images that lighter is to be catered to, plays into this larger history, and leaves the black Bahamian woman thinking that her life will be better if she assimilates to the European standards of beauty.

“In practice,” Frantz Fanon argues, “an inferiority complex connected with the colour of the skin is found only among those who form a minority within a group of another colour. The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior” (93). The images of the attractive white body, flaunted in the face of the black Bahamian woman by the Ministry of Tourism, indirectly create an inferiority complex for the majority black woman, a complex that hinders the Bahamian woman’s quest for a valued identity. Today, of course, the search for a usable identity is a universal theme found in the hearts and minds of all Caribbean people. However, women of the Bahamas are faced with negotiating the multiple, interlocking discriminations of race, class and gender. Coupled with the negative images produced in the name of tourism, it is difficult to find and accept an identity which fosters pride. The attributes of the black Bahamian woman—kinky hair, broad nose, thick lips and dark skin—are now considered ugly. To echo Nettleford’s deliberations, under colonial rule, the black woman was put in a position of inferiority. Now, in an independent country, the subordinate role of the black woman is still being reproduced daily in the pursuit of the tourists’ dollars. The images of the role, the assumption of the role and the role itself continue to degrade
black Bahamian women, and impede the creation of a usable identity beyond the logic of tourists.
Chapter VIII: The Participant-Observer Becomes the Object

Colonialism’s Legacy: The Politics of Inferiority

Working in the straw market provided me the opportunity to serve the many tourists that came daily to my sister’s store. Before working there, I had not anticipated the psychological impact of being an exoticized vendor. The many feelings, doubts and resentments inherent from being a descendent of colonialism welled unexpectedly to the surface as tourists’ eyes pierced and penetrated with superiority my black skin. I knew that they knew I needed them and whatever amount of money they decided to spend in my sister’s store that day. And that need in itself made feelings of inferiority to re-surface, feelings I had not experience for since I was young girl. As I smiled and made small talk with the tourists’, I hated myself for needing their money. I hated the way they looked at me, the way they belittled me with their eyes. I hated the way some of them did not even speak to me when I greeted them; always with a smile. That smile my sister made me practice; that smile that I saw on my grandmother’s face and from the many women who worked in the market for far too long—that smile that said, “I am here to serve you”. But I hated my country and my government even more for creating this single crop economy where my survival depended upon tourist dollars. I had to sit and let them look at me, look at me with eyes that made my black body occupying this small island country seem invisible. I also wondered what these people saw when they looked at me, why was I so curious to them? As bell hooks notes in her analysis of “whiteness in the black imagination”:

Sharing the fascination with difference that white people have collectively expressed openly (and at times vulgarly) as they have traveled around the world in pursuit of the Other and Otherness, black people, especially those living during the historical period of racial apartheid and legal segregation, have similarly maintained steadfast and ongoing
curiosity about the “ghosts,” “the barbarians,” these strange apparitions they were forced to serve (165).

hooks’ observations here echo my feelings of becoming the “Other,” as whites in the market made me feel the inferiority of my body apparent through their gaze. For hooks, this gaze has been a part of black civilization and the black imagination in the West since slavery and later colonization. As white people try to figure out black folks, black people were trying to make sense of and understand the actions and modes of white folks. For me in the Straw Market, this brought hooks’ analysis full-circle, as I grappled with the questions of how they (tourists) made sense of me, and how would I make sense of them. It also made me think of the meaning of womanhood and the placement of my black female body within the embodied ideology.

Moreover, “The cult of true womanhood” constructed women to be virtuous, pious, submissive, and pure. As I sat in the heat of the market and looked around at the women, thinking about my task of writing and trying to interpret these women’s lives and their material conditions, I began to think about women in Caribbean societies, and the meaning of “true womanhood”. I realized that neither I, nor the other women around me working in the Straw Market, fit into this mold or category. Bahamian womanhood, however, was constructed in binary opposition to “true womanhood” because of slavery and colonization. And in contemporary Bahamas, with the rise of mass tourism, capitalism, and cultural imperialism, and the fact that the Bahamas government has marketed and packaged the exotic Bahamian woman as part of paradise waiting to be tamed, I realized that my black body was constructed and packaged as inferior. And when they—outsiders—look at me, most see me through tourism, and I experience my inferiority. In similar fashion, these feeling of inferiority and invisibility were felt by other women in the market. One interviewee, Mrs Williams, stated, “these people
(tourists) don’t see nobody, especially sitting out here in this Straw Market, it just like you invisible, see how they walk pass not even looking at you. That’s because they don’t want you ask them to buy anything, so they pretend like you ain’t even there, like you invisible”.

As I sat everyday and endured the pain and degradation of both the realities of working in the Straw Market and the tourists (who felt like they should not have to pay forty dollars for a necklace made in the Bahamas), I wondered about other job opportunities for the hundreds of young women and men walking about in Port Lucaya. What other jobs opportunities would help them escape the feelings of inferiority that so many of us have come to know as we worked in the Straw Market and other areas of the tourist industry. I wondered who their role models would be. Who will they aspire to be when they grow up: a cook, a hotel maid, a waitress, a front desk clerk? Do they have any option for survival but the tourist industry? The increased presence of tourism in Freeport has influenced the work aspirations of young Bahamian people, both male and female. An increasing number of female and male students who finish high school go onto programs like Bahamas Hosts,9 and schools like the Bahamas Hotel College, which offers diplomas/certificates in varying aspects of the tourist industry.10 Parents cannot afford to send their young people to universities abroad upon graduation from high school, and

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9 The Bahama host program was started in 1978, only a few years after independence, and there are now 14,000 graduates, including teachers, bankers, as well as those directly connected with tourism. Students attended a series of lectures in subjects such as the history of the Bahamas, effective communication, culture and folklore and basic first aid, and take an exam at the end. Participants are told: ‘Our aim is to increase awareness of the importance of tourism to our economy and to set the stage for attaining the highest level of customer service satisfaction in the world’ (cited in Patullo, 72).

10 Programs offered at the Bahamas Hotel Training College include (continues on next page):
- Diploma in Hospitality and Catering Operations
- Diploma in Apprentice Chef
- Certificate in Culinary Arts
- Certificate in Housekeeping Skills
- Certificate in Food and Beverage Management
- Certificate in Bookkeeping and Accounting Management
- Certificate in Front Office and Bookkeeping Skills
- Diploma in Culinary Arts
- Diploma in Apprentice Chef Pastry
- Certificate in Bakery Skills
- Certificate in Food Service Skills
- Certificate in Travel and Tourism Management
- Certificate in Supervisory Management

http://www.oas.org/TOURISM/schools/bahamas.htm
so they see the tourist industry as offering new employment opportunities for their children, whereas young people view the tourism industry as a positive place of employment.

**Mapping Identity: Aspirations Meet Material Conditions**

It is June and graduation time. So many students in their crisp white shirts and bright smiles walk by with their families on the way to celebratory graduation meals before attending the high school graduation ceremonies later that evening. As I watch these students and their families, all so proud of their accomplishments, I cannot help but feel sorry for them. Where would they seek employment? What options would they have other than to work in one of the many hotels around the island? Where would they be in ten years? Would they be working as maids or guards in one of the hotels or resorts on the island? How will they feel about themselves in this tourist industry, playing the role of servant so clearly constructed as being part of the nature of Bahamian culture?

I grapple with these questions on a daily basis as I try to imagine a bright future for these graduates. In the Bahamas, many, if not all, of them will end up working in the tourism industry, performing some variation of the role of servant.

As I walk outside on a very hot day, I notice a group of girls who had just attended their graduation ceremony. I approach them, introduce myself and ask about their plans for the future. Many of the girls say that they had applied for jobs at “Our Lucaya,” the largest hotel on the island of Freeport, located in Port Lucaya.11 I ask about the kinds of jobs they had applied for, and most say they want to work at the front desk, or in the human resources department. I ask them if they had applied for maid or waitresses jobs. They all say, “no,” and scoff at the idea of

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11 Our Lucaya Resorts and Casino is now the largest employer on the island of Freeport, because of the 2004–2005 hurricane seasons, which destroyed the Isle of Capri Resort and Casino (which was formerly the Princess Towers Hotel and Casino), forcing its closure and the unemployment of thousands of Bahamian workers.
being a maid. I then ask about working in the Straw Market, they all laugh at me and say they never could imagine working as a vendor in the Straw Market.

But when asked if they know anyone who works in the market, all of the girls reply, "yes." They all have a grandmother, a cousin or an aunt who works in the market, but they think working in the market is demeaning.\textsuperscript{12}

As they walk away, I look at the women working and talking amongst themselves, and wonder if I should share what the girls had just said about working as straw vendors in the market. I wonder if these women, young or old, ever imagined that this is where their lives would lead them. I wonder if they, too, once viewed working in the market as demeaning. But I also know that if I were to ask them, the majority of these women would say that this was not what they had envisioned for their lives when they were graduating from high school.

Now, as I analyze my data, crucial patterns emerge from the testimonies of these brave women. When asked the question, if they would like their daughters to work in the Straw Market most of the women firmly said, “no.” An example from my interviews:

\textit{(Melinda Marsh)} “I have three daughters and I encourage any one of them to do whatever it is they want to do. Whether they want to follow in my footsteps or take their own path, it’s entirely up to them. I wouldn’t mind if one of them wanted to work in the market like I do but it’s a very hard life, when you’re depending on whatever you make that day to put food on the table. And I don’t want them to have to struggle like I do I want a better life for them.”

\textsuperscript{12} This is a caption of a thread from a local internet journal, “The Straw Vendors Upset Over Damaged Stalls! ANGRY!!!” This Straw Market site is located in the Bahamas’ capitol, Nassau. I use this here as an example of how Straw vendors are treated and perceived all over the Bahamas. Appendix 1 contains the content of the article.
(Ronald Adderley), “Listen to what I tell you, this is hard work with long hours. I send my children to school so they can have a better job and life than I had. I want all my children to have a government job, because government money is sure money.”

(Addy Sands), “I would want my daughter to fulfill her dreams. If it is what she wants to do then I support her. It is an honest living. But I can’t see my daughter ending up out here. To tell the truth, no I don’t want my daughter out here; she is so much more than this”.

In my interviews with the women in the market, out of the ten that were interviewed and from the many others that I interviewed through informal conversation, it was shocking that only two of the women said that they would want their daughter to follow in their footsteps. Even the women who said that they enjoyed working in the markets did not want their daughters to work there. There was only one woman who said that it was okay for her daughter to work there, asking simply, “what else is she going to do?” She thought that working in the market, if a vendor owned her own space, would be better than working in the hotels for little or no money. She said that at least if [her daughter] works in the Straw Market, at least she would have the opportunity to work for herself and not have to answer to anyone. At the end of the day, the money she made belonged to her.

**Stories from the Market**

It was an acknowledgement that ethnographic research, whatever else it is, is a form of human relationship. When the lines long drawn in anthropology between participant-observer and informant break down, then the only truth is the one in between; and anthropology becomes something closer to a social art form, open to both aesthetic and moral judgment. The situation is riskier, but it does bring intellectual labor and life into closer relation.

McCarthy Brown

In the many interviews I conducted with the women working in the market, a constant theme of powerlessness and shame emerged that contradicted the myth of the “strong black
Bahamian woman.” I have always looked at women working in the Straw Markets, and those as maids in the hotels, as pillars of strength, survival and fortitude. These were the women who scolded me on the way home from work. These were the women I would watch as they came off the public buses that brought them home from work, their faces tired but always smiling. These women stood so strong and tall when I was seven years old. So, for me, it was shocking to listen to them talk this way, for me to listen to them tell stories of regret and unfulfilled destinies, tell stories of pain, heartache and sorrow at the hands of tourists’ and the Bahamas Tourism Board.

I listened to these women relay stories of their children who wanted to touch the tourists’ skin and hair to see if it were real, and then ask why their hair was not as beautiful. I asked most of the ladies where or how their children decided that these tourists’ hair was somehow more beautiful than their own? They said that they didn’t know, but most of them looked at me in disbelief that I could even ask such a question. Most of them looked me right in the eye and asked why I would not want such beautiful long hair? I realized that for the majority of the women in the markets, skin color and hair length and texture were still very much apart of contemporary Bahamian society, the remnant of slavery and colonial occupation. Parents have passed this idealization down to their children.

On a daily basis, I listened as the women relayed stories of foreign children requesting that they dance for them for a few dollars, children who approached them as if they had known each other from an early age. I listened as these “market women,” who needed their money, did as they were requested. One of the women recounted an afternoon where she and her twelve year-old daughter sang and danced for a group of drunken tourists for $50. As she told me how belittled and demeaned she felt for being made a spectacle, and for having her daughter play a
part, I felt her discomfort and resentment of her lot in life. As I tried to hold back the tears, her continued objectification became a reality for me as I mourned for these strong women.

How could they endure this kind of objectification and humiliation for so long? How could they endure the stifling heat for so long? And then I realized that they had no other alternative, and that I was placing myself in the role of spectator. I felt ashamed, but continued questioning their conditions and their roles, because I knew that these women had children, and if they wanted to survive and feed their family, they had to continue to endure and perform for the tourists who visited the island. As I continued to talk to the women, I begin to wrangle with the idea and authenticity of telling their story, giving them voices without permeating my own thoughts and feelings and my university-inscribed language onto their elegant and energizing Bahamian dialect. I worried about being able to capture the essence of these women, the way they spoke, colorfully—so bold!—they way they acted and moved their bodies when they talked of their lives in the market. I wanted to be true to the language, the culture, true to their stories.

Tuhiwai Smith (1999), a Maori researcher offers an insight about how research and truth are viewed by the colonized:

From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term “research” is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, [the] world’s vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful (1).

Furthermore, Ngugi (1986) locates language as a cause of self-othering, “The choice of language and the use to a people’s definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment … by our continuing to write in foreign languages, paying homage to them, are we
not on the cultural level continuing that neo-colonial slavish and cringing spirit? (46). Portelli further reminds us that “the story builds the identity of the teller and the legacy which she leaves for the future” (32). I knew that these women stories and their ability to tell their story was more important than my interpretation of the story. I knew that as I tell their stories it was my responsibility to them to tell there stories like they told it, and not change the way they spoke to fit into the imperializing space of academia. As Crick (1996) saliently points out:

> Without close attention to the local voice (indeed, we must be careful here, local voices, for tourism produces a range different local reactions), our social scientific work risks being descriptively poor and ethnocentric … We need to know the local perceptions and understandings of tourism, we need to know the local perception of change and continuity, and we need to recognize that any culture is likely to have contradictory things to say about both. (Glenn Bowman cited Selywn, 85).

Research, then, seeks to capture and articulate experiences beyond those of the researcher. But in so doing, it alienates the subject (as topic and as recipient of historical legacies). Smith, Ngugi, Portelli and Smith clarify that such alienation need not create a disparity between research and the researcher. Rather, researchers need to know how to let their own silence serve as the conduit through which their subjects speak, and thereby educate.

**Glendenna’s Story: Undiscovered Dreams**

Glendenna, a 36 year-old mother of four children between the ages of four and fourteen, works in the Straw Market for $200 per week. She catches my attention because of the way she almost begs a tourist couple to buy something.

In the market, most of the women are very independent, and do not show such desperation. While they offer to bargain with tourists, and always flash that generic Tourist
Annie smile, they never display such desperation. Most of the women’s sales pitches are playful, child-like and almost intimate, always referring to the tourists as “honey,” or “baby” or “sweetie”—creating a situation where the tourists almost feel compelled to stop and chat, if only for a moment. But Glendenna is different. She looks to be almost in tears as she begs the man to buy the “lovely outfit” that she was selling for his “beautiful lady”. Unfortunately, the couple leaves without buying the dress.

I cannot help but approach her, and as I do I see the embarrassment in her face as she forces a smile. I want to walk away and leave her alone. At that moment, I feel ashamed of myself for approaching this woman with a notebook, wanting her to talk about what was clearly an embarrassing situation.

But I know that I have to talk to her at this very moment, while the interaction that had just occurred was still fresh and she was still raw with emotion. But as I approach her, she says, “Chile, dese tooris will make ya make yaself small fa dem. But I ain’t make a dime yet and da day almost over, I gat to do what I gat to do”. She steps inside of her dark store, her body telling me that she does not want to talk outside, among the other women. I follow her inside the store, and as I open my book and gather my thoughts, I cannot say anything to this woman. After all, who am I to ask her to be open and honest about her feelings and her obvious humiliation at that moment? So I shake my head in a gesture to let her know that I understand her pain, her humiliation and her role in the Straw Market, and that she did not have to talk to me. We sat in her stall for about ten minutes without saying a word. It was this day and these ten minutes of silence that brought us together as women, as black women in this space where her bodies became objectified and we both knew that we were, and will always be, in some way or the other, connected to the tourism industry and the pitfalls that came with it for the rest of our lives.

13 All names have been changed to maintain anonymity.
It was in these ten minutes that I knew that I had to interview Glendeena about her life and work in the straw market. It was in these ten minutes that I realized that I had a great responsibility to these women, to her, to tell her story, the way that she would tell it.

To this day, I feel both lucky and gracious Glendenna told me about her life. She moved to Freeport at age 15 upon graduation from school. She had lived on the island of Mayguana, which is one of the less-developed islands of the Bahamas, having still around only 100 inhabitants. Glendenna noted that, being the oldest of four children at the time, it was expected that she leave her home to travel to Nassau or Freeport in search of a job. Because the tourism industry did not extend to Mayguana at the time, and because there were no money-generating industries on the island, she was unemployable. When she arrived in Freeport, she moved in with an aunt who tried to get her a job at one of the island’s hotels. But she was told that she had to be at least 16 years-old. In the Bahamas, high school students usually graduate around the age of 16, but on some of the “out islands,” it sometimes happens at an even younger age.

In order to make money, Glendenna started working in the Straw Market at Goombay Park, adjacent to the then-Princess Towers Hotel. This was the largest straw market on the island of Grand Bahama; others were scattered about the island, but none equaled the size and number of vendors of Goombay Park. She noted that, in the beginning, even at age of 15, the money she made at her aunt’s stall was, “quite satisfying.” She said, “I could send money home to my people, and clothes and candy to my younger sisters and bothers. This was wonderful”. She went on to explain her fascination with living in Freeport, and interacting on a daily basis with people from all over the world (she had never been out of the Bahamas). She was so happy to meet all the “fine” people with their fancy clothes and their endless wallets. “I was just going
to work in the Straw Market until I turned 16, but that was 20 years ago. Never got to work at
the front desk; I think they thought that I was too black”.

During our interview, as Glendenna speaks, I reflect on her interactions with the tourists. I
realize how different our plots in life are, and I cannot imagine myself acting like that towards
anyone for any amount of money. But the reality of the situation is that I never had to; in our
society, in this environment of the market, as tourists “gaze” at us, I know we are all equal. But,
I know that because of my education and my privileged position of returning to the comfort of a
university campus in the United States. I know Glendenna and I are different. As discomfort
engulfs me, I begin to imagine how to unpack these notions of inequality and difference that I
feel between Glendenna and myself. I cannot imagine how I look, and how she perceives me at
that moment, with my notepad and tape recorder.

Oral historian Alessandro Portelli (2001) reminds us of the importance of thinking
through the roles of equality and difference in field research. The two concepts, equality and
difference, are two related aspects of social positions:

Only equality prepares us to accept difference in terms other than hierarchy and
subordination; on the other hand, without difference there is no equality—only sameness,
which has a much less worthwhile ideal. Only equality makes the interview credible, but
only difference makes it relevant. Fieldwork is meaningful as the encounter of two
subjects who recognize each other as subjects, and therefore separate, seek to build their
equality upon their difference in order to work together (43).

This feeling of awkwardness separates Glendenna and myself, exactly as Portelli argues.
Now, as I reflect on Portelli’s words, I understand the difference, the separateness. It made me
the spectator viewing, judging and interpreting Glendenna. At the time, I felt like I was yet
another person placed in her life to make her feel even worse. I did not feel equal to this woman who I knew that at the economic and social level, and that I would always occupy a space Glendenna and many of the women in the market would never attain.

What made me different from these women? I grew up in the Bahamas and in the velocity of tourism; I have never known a Bahamas without tourists. But there I was, back in the market, with women with whom I obviously felt comfortable, but I felt like I made Glendenna the “other”.

At the end of the interview, I walked away from Glendenna, because I knew that there was nothing I could say that would make her or myself feel any better about our roles in the Straw Market, our roles as women, straw vendor, and academician. I could not reconcile that which made me different from the many tourists’ who visited our shores, the many tourists who have consumed and abused women in the Bahamas for centuries with their “gaze.” Unknowingly, they have left the Bahamian woman powerless in some aspects, and I felt this powerlessness as I, too, became spectator in this space where agency did not exist for black women in the straw market.

*Cora’s Story, My History: Shame, Marginalization and Whiteness*

The women in the Straw Market dress to attract tourist eyes to them and their merchandise. Cora is no exception. On the day I meet her, she is dressed in a brightly colored wrap skirt, with a head wrap to match. She rents a store next to Glendenna, and she habitually motions for the tourists to come into her store. She starts out by telling them about how beautiful her hand-woven straw bags are. “Dey cost tirty-five dollars a piece, but I’ll let you have dem for tirty. Come on look at da beauty and detail in dese bags.” Just as she reaches to take one of the bags from the shelf, a little girl appeared. She quickly puts the fashionable adult bag back on the
shelf, and gets a smaller straw bag depicting the cartoon character “Dora the Explorer,” and talks to the little girl. “Hey pretty girl, you like dis bag? I know you like Dora, tell mommy to buy dis fa you”. Like she had anticipated, the little girl loves the bag with the face of Dora, and the caption, “Dora Exploring the Bahamas,” and she makes the sale. The mother’s face is none too happy, but she cannot refuse her child.

As she smiles as she sees me watching, Cora motions to me and says, “chile, dats how ya gat to do it, you know dese white people is give dey chiren everyting; chile, I don’t know dat’s must be to prove dey love dem”. Cora is a beautiful 46-year old woman with the skin of wine ripened grapes, she walks around the market like she knows that she is the epitome of the socially-constructed “market woman.” Every day, she dresses in the most brightly vibrant outfits and refers to herself as a “Bahama Mama”. Cora is well educated, having completed an associate degree in “Tourism Hospitality” from the college of the Bahamas, she is referred to as the smart and cultured one among the women.

When I first started talking to the women about this project, most of them told me that I needed to talk to Cora. Word had gotten around that I was writing about the women in the market, and Cora sought me out, introducing herself as “Cora Butterfield, the original Bahama Mama”. I was so intrigued and could not wait to talk to her further, so I asked her what she meant by the “Original Bahama Mama”. She said, “Chile, we are all apart of this tourist product that our governments has sold as Bahamian culture. We have a choice, fight against it and try to re-establish that which we known as Bahamian culture. In that strength, pride, and sense of family, we know that there is no such thing as a “Bahama Mama,” but I learned a long time ago, if you can’t change it, in the case of the Bahamas, profit from it, so that’s why when I come out here I am “Bahama Mama” and not Cora Butterfield. If we all learn how to do this, to
separate our “true selves” from this thing we call tourism, we as a people would not be so messed up”.

As we continue to talk, I am fascinated by the knowledge and compassion of this woman. The way she talks about the market and tourism as a whole, the way she outlined for me how she came up with the notion and the idea of her alter ego, “Bahama Mama.” She is what I have been looking for all these weeks in the market, a woman who is aware of her virtual marginalization in the context of the market, but uses it to empower and benefit from its materiality.

Cora says that her studies and her knowledge of the industry have been advantageous for her, because she knows what the Bahamas government sells as authentic Bahamian culture. But it has also been a shortcoming, because it saddens her so much when she sees fellow Bahamian women working in the market play into and act out these roles of marginalization in the quest for a few dollars. Cora relays to me that sometimes she wishes that she did not go to college and was able to “live in the ignorant bliss of the market.” She tells me many heartbreaking stories of the conditions, and the lives of women working in the Straw Market. She notes that the most heartbreaking for her is to watch the children buy into the notion of black Bahamians as inferior. I understood exactly what she was talking about.

Every day, I watch as the women in the market talk softly and attend to the tourists’ children, admiring their beautiful, colored eyes and the color and texture of their hair. I sit and wonder what is going through their heads as they marvel at these children, while they more than often act harsh and dismissive toward their own children[^14]. As I look at the market children

[^14]: Most the women working in the Straw Market thought that the market was ideal for mothers with small children. When one woman was busy with tourist, another straw vendor would look after her children. While working in the Straw Market I found that there was a real sense of community among the women in this space, it afforded many opportunities for social interactions and friendships. Because this is the summer and most of the women cannot afford babysitters, they bring their children to work. Bahamian children are intrinsically a part of the straw market, with most children coming there after school to work with their mothers. It is not an uncommon sight to see children also working as vendors in the markets throughout the Bahamas.
sitting inside the windowless huts, I try to imagine how they feel watching their mothers’
attentiveness to the little white children who are dressed in beautiful bathing suits with matching
color wraps and flip flops. I try to imagine how they feel, but I know how they feel. Not so long
ago, I was the one in their position, admiring these other children, their beautiful toys and
carefree attitudes.

Being both immersed in the market and aware of the roles being played before me, and
reflecting on Cora’s interview, I revert back to my childhood and the days I spent in my
grandmother’s stall. She rented a stall on the grounds of the former Princess Towers Hotel and
Casino. The stalls were commonly built in the shape either of a cabana or an outside patio,
circular with dividing walls, a more upscale version of the traditional Straw Markets. There
were about four of these stalls on the patio overlooking the pool. So, while the tourists frolicked
in the pool, they could also shop and experience the “native” people and artifacts. I remember
sitting and wishing that I were just like them, and I made up games pretending that they were my
friends, and I frolicked in the pool with them. My time in my grandmother’s stall marked my
first contact with tourism and our white tourist culture.

As an eight year-old, sitting in the corner of the store so as not to get in the way of the
tourists, I recall the shame I felt when these children—sometimes wet, running and touching
everything, showing no respect for my grandmother—came into the store. I remember eating the
homemade sandwich my grandmother had brought, made with bread so thick I could hardly get
my hand around it. This was fresh bread that she had made the night before, bread she took such
care in making so that “we could have something good to eat tomorrow,” bread that served both
to teach me and to let me play, as I kneaded it before baking and then used the leftover dough to
make bread in the shapes of dolls. This bread that she made, that we made with so much love, became my source of shame as these kids entered the store with their beautiful toys and candy. I felt ashamed sitting in the corner as they watched me eat my bread drizzled with a little honey. As their eyes pierced mine and fell upon my sandwich, I felt so small, so insignificant and inferior. At that moment, I felt the privilege associated with their whiteness and the defectiveness of my little black body. Even at that age, I knew that there was something wrong with my black skin; I knew that there was some drawback to being a black Bahamian. Frantz Fanon argues (1968), “In practice, an inferiority complex connected with the colour of the skin is found only among those who form a minority within a group of another colour. The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior” (93).

For the first time in my life, I felt the shame of being a “have not”. I did not know this feeling before being in the Straw Markets, because everyone around me had the same things and we were never hungry. But over the course of days and weeks spent in the market, listening to and watching my grandmother play a subservient role to the tourists, I realized that I was among the impoverished of the world. From that point, I began to think about why white people were more financially secure than black people. Why were they so important? Why did grown women allow these children to disrespect them, and what made them so important?

As I hid my sandwich, even at this age, I knew that their white bodies were worth more than mine, even in my own country. I knew that I never wanted to come back to the straw market ever again. I never wanted to feel this shame, this sense of being of no value in this atmosphere of the straw market. In this space, I felt ashamed of my little blue sun dress that my

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15 Formerly Country Club at Bahamia & Bahamas Princess Hotel; it opened its doors in 1971 as the King’s Inn Hotel. The former Tower at Bahamia & Princess Tower opened in 1964 as The International Hotel.
grandmother had made, I felt ashamed of my hand-made doll and the lemonade that I drank out of a mayonnaise bottle. I felt ashamed of the little cupboard that my grandmother used as storage to house her goods, and which I converted during the day to my imaginary castle where I was the queen. This cupboard brought me hours of entertainment, because the straw vendors working on the property of the Princess Towers Hotel could bring their children. But, we could not be seen.

We were not allowed to fraternize with the guests or walk around the grounds of the hotels. My days were spent in a little corner of the stall in the cupboard imagining that I was one of these children. Now, all of the things that brought me complete happiness and pride were meaningless, and made me feel ashamed of being Bahamian. Ashamed of being a little black girl from an island where ‘difference’ was sold and used to attract tourists; where everyone could come and luxuriate, and I had to hide in a cupboard on the grounds of the Princess Towers Hotel so that I did not disturb “our” guests at play. I felt ashamed of the way my grandmother spoke to the tourists when she was trying to get them to buy a bag or a straw hat. They did not know the hours that she had spent making the hat, and of course they never saw the blisters on her hand from plaiting the straw. All they wanted was to bargain and pay almost nothing for beautiful hand-made dolls, bags, and hats.16 I felt ashamed for her because, at home, she was this matriarch of our family, a strong independent, outspoken woman. On the grounds of the Princess Towers Hotel, my hero, my beautiful grandmother—who on Sunday morning looked

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16 It is not uncommon to find advertisements explaining just this scenario, instructing tourists on how to bargain for the lowest prices when visiting palaces like the Bahamas. “Shoppers should note that although bartering is not a part of shopping at the hotels, it is very much a part of shopping at the Straw Market, and some of the other public markets in the Bahamas . . . Any traveler who has been to a bartering market knows that vendors will naturally extend the highest possible price to anyone looking like a tourist . . . Don’t be afraid to try and talk the price down to something that seems a bit more reasonable . . . Tips regarding bartering can also be provided by your hotel concierge” (Davis, 2006, 89).
like African royalty—became a servant, one object among many who had been constructed and marketed to exemplify “Bahamian culture.”

What I could not know at the time, but which my time as a participant observer clarifies, is that economically underdeveloped tourist destinations are marketed as culturally different places, and all tourists are encouraged to view this “difference” as a part of what they have a right to consume on their vacation. The construction of difference takes place around ideas such as “natural vs. civilized,” “leisure vs. work” “exotic vs. mundane,” “rich vs. poor,” “sexual vs. repressive” and “powerful vs. powerless.” So long as it remains acceptable to use “difference” as the Caribbean’s unique selling point, the tourist industry will continue to provide a framework which permits (even encourages) the denigration and subordination of black women. This, in turn, serves to entrench not only inequalities between the West and developing countries, but also the very forms of racism and sexism which structure patterns of exclusion and exploitation.

Tourism in the Bahamas and the Caribbean, and the process associated with it, emanates from gendered colonial societies and therefore, are likely to show signs of gendered master, server relationships creating difference in autonomous space (Crick 2001-78). As previously discussed, women in colonial Caribbean countries were portrayed as asexual “mammies” in the tourist-infused Straw Market. Black Bahamian men were absent in the market; thus, women were cast in the role of the exotic “other.” Black studies scholarship and postcolonial theory both suggest that defining people of color as less human, animalistic, or more “natural” denies African people’s subjectivity, and supports the political economy of domination that characterized slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism (Hill-Collins 2000, 71). Moreover, in the Bahamas and around the Caribbean, women are involved differently than men in both the production and
consumption of tourism and so they are likely to be impacted differently, thus becoming the marketing tool and brand, for which “difference” and subordinate “other” is hawked.

**Mama Flo’s Oral History: Constructing and Re-Constructing “Bahamian”**

To tell a story is to take arms against the threat of time, to resist time, or to harness time. The telling of a story preserves the teller form oblivion; the story builds the identity of the teller and the legacy which she leaves for the future.

Alessandro Portelli

Mama Flo is a vibrant lady who always dresses in “traditional” Bahamian wear; every day, I watch as she comes to the market dressed in colorful skirts and brightly-colored, matching head dress. She is the “typical market woman” from the brochure. She is the one who walks around and visits every woman working in the market with kind words of encouragement, always has a song for tourists. I find myself fascinated by her, because of her age and the way she dresses.

When I met her for the first time, I told her about my research. She hugged me, and said that I was doing something very important, and that she would help me in any way possible.

“Mama Flo,” as she is called by everyone in the market, is Florene Johnson. She is a beautiful woman whose many colorful stories make everyone laugh. She got the name “Mama Flo” after her many years of working in the market (she started working in the markets at the age of twelve, and has been working their ever since). She is now 60 years old. Mama Flo started working in the market one day after school with her mother, who was ailing at the time, and by the time she was fourteen, her part-time job had become a full-time job. In order to help her mother care for her three younger siblings, Mama Flo quit school. Mama Flo could not read or write, she always struggled in school, and was very happy to leave the embarrassment she had endured in the classroom for the money of the market.
As we talk and get to know each other, she tells me of her days working in the Goombay Park Market, and she smiles as she remembers. *Dose were da days, money was making during dese times and, chile, I send two children to college in da states from working in da Goombay Park. Dat’s when money was making and da tooris was spending money. Back den it was a different time, and all a we was in dis togedder, I feel like da government and tooris board, knew that we were important to dis industry so dey use to make tings easy fa us. In da Goombay Park, ya come dere, and sometime by noon I done make over tree hundred dollars. Chile, I could go home den. But dese days it like ya begging just to be out here and nobody care if ya make a dollar or not, ya still gat to pay da rent though.*

*And, chile, now in Port Lucaya tings different dan when we was in da Park, cause dis ain’t own by the Government, dis own by the port (Grand Bahama Port Authority)*[^17] *and dem white people ain’t care ‘bout nobody. Dey only care bout dey image and how dey gon make dey money, never you and me. But ya see dese women around here, I does stay here so dey could learn something from me. My chiren always saying to me, “mommy why you still gern out in dat market?” But, chile, to tell you da truth I can’t stay home, I is a women been working since I was twelve years old, what I gon do with ma self if I can’t work? (She laughs). I just wish dat tings could change out here and we could get more respect from dese people.*

[^17]: In Freeport, city management and economic development are the mandates of a private corporation, The Grand Bahama Port Authority, Limited (GBPA). The GBPA is responsible for nurturing and regulating all commercial and residential development within the 230 square mile “Port Area” of Grand Bahama ... During the early 1950s American investor, Wallace Groves, and British financier, Sir Charles Hayward pioneered development on Grand Bahama Island. Their vision for development led to negotiations with the Government of The Bahamas and the signing of the Hawksbill Creek Agreement ... The Agreement, executed on August 4th, 1955, created, the “Port Area,” and gave birth to the City of Freeport. The agreement required the dredging of a deep-water harbor at Hawksbill Creek in the western sector of the Port Area. It also granted to GBPA responsibility for the provision, management, and administration of all infrastructure, municipal and community services, and for development of 50,000 acres of crown grant land, which was later extended to 138,000 acres. The Grand Bahama Port Authority (GBPA) now operates the free trade zone under special powers conferred by the government under the Hawksbill Creek Agreement, which was recently extended until August 3, 2054. The GBPA is the major provider and developer of services in the free trade zone, and offers an expanding portfolio of opportunities that includes investment in its own subsidiary companies ... Under the Hawksbill Creek Agreement, businesses in the free trade zone pay no taxes on profits, capital gains, inheritance, income, earnings, distributions, gifts, or on imported and exported goods. (Bahamas Journal 2000, 8).
Cause nowadays people look at you like you ain’t nothing, if ya own country treating ya like you ain’t worth nothing then how you expect dese people coming to the island ta treat us. Some a dem come here look at me like I is a dog, mine you only some, but das why I does stay out here cause after a while people treating you like you ain’t nothing you act like you ain’t nothing. I try to teach dese women dat dey don’t have to beg and gravel for nothing from dese people, be black, white or Chinese, dey may have lil more dan dey have but dey ain’t better dan dem in no way. (pause) But, chile, ya see, we only is get use out here, ga government let all dese people come here with they big hotel, provide all they need at the hotel, so da people ain’t gat to leave the hotel for nothing. But dey like to walk around and see the island, and see da people, so da hotel owners had to come up with some kind of entertainment for dem, we is dey entertainment. And sometime dat hard to deal with, but cause like I said in my day tourism was about of the Bahamian people, now they just is use us for entertainment and sometime we make some money form it.

As I get to know Mama Flo a bit more, we talked endlessly about her days in the market, as you might note; at this point I was intrigued to hear this woman talk about the Bahamas government and the hotel corporations on the island, using her and the other women of the market for “entertainment” as she refers to her role in the Straw Market. I begin to pry into her thoughts a bit more to try to get her to talk about what she considered being “used” by the Tourism Board. She talked about working in Port Lucaya and getting letters from the manager
requesting that she and the other ladies stay a bit late because they have some special tourists that want to “experience” the Straw Market. “I know it’s just they way of wanting us to be on display, but sometimes they buy stuff, but sometimes it’s like we just there for them to look at for entertainment.”

She goes on to tell me of girls working the front desks in the hotels that told tourists to look to the women in the Straw Market to find “real Bahamian culture” when they were asked where they could go to experience the essence of Bahamian culture. The Women in the Straw Market were the unofficial “People to People” program of the Bahamas.\textsuperscript{18} She told stories of women working in the market who felt obliged to entertain the tourists feeling it was inherently a part of working in the Straw market. To support Mama Flo’s story I use a response from Sheena, one of the women I interviewed, “Dese white people you see walking around here, chile, I love dem, I’ll do anyting for dem, look dey gat the money, what I have. Nothing! So I could for to say that I does act dis way all da time, dis who I is, a vendor in the market and if sometime I gatta dance so be it.

I could see the benefit of understanding de Carteau’s (2002) book, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life} as it applies to the Bahamian context. This book provides an investigation of the ways in which everyday people operate—the modes of operation. He attempts to theorize the ways in which ordinary people use tactics and practices to subvert the everyday economic and racialised orders. He rejects the notion of total domination implicit in the term “consumer”. Rather, he sees consumption as power and as an active process where people use urban spaces, televised images, and commodities for their own end. He believes that just because people live

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\textsuperscript{18}The People-to-People Program is a community involvement venture that brings visitors and Bahamian residents together on a one-to-one basis. This on-shore promotional program was inaugurated by The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism in Nassau, New Providence, in 1975 and was extended to Freeport, Grand Bahama Island, in 1976. Those involved in the program are principally volunteers, visitors and social hostesses of our hotels.\end{flushright}
within an imposed system does not mean that they have no freedom; rather, they are “artful poachers” who are using the products provided by the dominant cultural economy in the service of projects or desires that elude public definition and control (cited in hooks 158). For Sheena and many of the women working in the market, becoming “artful poachers” of a constructed Bahamian “authentic” culture is a way for them to benefit from the image of the inferior black Bahamian and the superior tourists’ dichotomy the Bahamas Tourism board have created as “tourist product,” as it sells the native Bahamian people as a part of the local scenery.

For Mama Flo, these stories were her way of contributing to the future of tourism in the Bahamas, as she so gently puts it. “I want my children to know that we don’t have to be nobody entertainers, I speaking to the leaders now, know dat we gat something to offer da world, we is a people fill with culture and good hearts. We like to smile, and we is be happy most of the time, but you don’t gat to make us be no poppy show for nobody. Remember what you put in the world dat’s what you get back.

Long after my return to the U.S., I reflect on Mama Flo’s words often, and try to make sense of all of her stories and the stories of the other women I worked with and interviewed. I identify how the issue of respect was an ever-occurring theme for most of the women working in the market. Their discussions reveal how they felt like people throughout their community viewed them as Freeport’s bottom feeders. For Mama Flo, her presence in the market was to try to make these women feel like though they worked outside in these huts, and that they may not get the respect that they deserve, they were still very important as individuals and straw vendors. Mama Flo’s story and the many stories of the women working in the market echoed a feelings of inferiority, in the face of a white tourist culture that positioned them as “different” in a capitalist
system of domination, imperialism, neo-colonialism and racism which actively coerced these women into negative perception of their black bodies in this racialized tourist saturated space; this social space where so much of Bahamian identity work takes place.

The women talked about how the girls who worked in the jewelry stores and hotels would walk around the market with their “heads held high,” thinking for some reason that they were better off than the women who worked as vendors in the Straw Markets. This made the women angry. They spoke as one when they explained that they made more money during the tourist season than the girls who work in the stores and the restaurants around Port Lucaya and the hotels. They felt because they worked in the straw market without air conditioning and private bathrooms, that others looked at them unfavorably. “Even the black Bahamian does look at us like they better than us, so the white people only doing what they see them do”. Ultimately, they felt like most of the community, not to mention the Bahamas as a whole, viewed straw vendors as mere peddlers, rather than as contributing members of Bahamian society.

**Conclusion: The Convergence of Voices; The Demand for Respect**

I felt the frustrations of the women in the market every day that I worked there. I felt the pain and often embarrassingly so, the humiliation of working in the heat of the markets with not even a private restroom. When friends and people with whom I attended high school came into the store and assumed I worked there, I was tempted daily to tell them that I was doing academic research for a post-graduate degree, and that I would be returning to America in a few weeks. I did not want anyone to associate me with the depravity of the market. I felt ashamed that performing the very labor that gave my sister and many of the women working in the market, so much pride and some financial independence made me feel inferior. I fought the urge daily, as people whom I had not seen in years walked in and out of the store, assuming that becoming a
vendor had been my aspiration. Some people knew that I had gone to college, but were equally happy to see that I was a failure, simply by merit of working in or near the market—it was no matter that the jewelry and bath and body products I sold at my sister’s store were the type of upscale products that none of the other straw vendors could afford to sell. But, because I worked in the market environment, I felt like I was a failure, even though I knew that my work constituted academic research. I hated myself every day for having these feelings, and today, I feel like I betray these women every time I feel ashamed of working in the market. I feel like I betray their friendships, their kindness and their trust.

So, many of my days in the market were spent laughing and talking about politics and the daily lives of the women. Many of the women also wanted to hear stories of my life in Bowling Green, Ohio. They found the name very funny, and often joked about it. But I enjoyed listening to them more. As time went on, we grew fond of each other, and I developed many friendships. Cora, Glendenna and Mama Flo were especially fond of me. On some occasions during my research, I felt guilty questioning them about their lives working as vendors in the Straw Market, writing down everything they said. It was difficult trying to negotiate my role as researcher and friend, and trying to authentically write these women, so as to capture all that is pure and true about the individual and collective Bahamian straw vendor. As I talked more with them, I could not help but to fall in love with their personalities and their resilience for surviving in the markets for so long and for the way they cared for each other. The time spent in the Straw Market with these women reminded me of a time as a young child where one could be disciplined by any member of the community if they saw you ‘acting up’ if your parents was not around. Being away from home for so long, it was refreshing to see the level of respect that they

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19 Because Freeport is such a small island, (around 50,000 people), when someone leaves the island for a period of time, people usually notice. So many of them knew I had left the island to pursue university study in the U.S.
showed each other. The respect that the older women in the market received from the younger women; every morning someone would come to Mama Flo and bring her a cup of tea and ask if she had eaten breakfast. Even in the sometime harsh conditions of the market, the sense of community and pride these vendors’ shows for their craft and their colleagues.

Also, as I listened to Mama Flo talk about her days in the market, I felt captivated by how happy she was and the many opportunities and advantages that the market had brought her. This knowledge made all of my frustrations and shame that I felt seem unwarranted, because this old woman who could not read or write was the mother of a prominent lawyer in the community. The market brought her many years of financial independence and pride, even though she hated the current state of the Straw Market and tourism as a whole, despite the recent devastation of the Hurricanes and despite the government’s lack of making the women’s rights a priority. She felt that the women in the market were the “backbone of the Bahamas,” and should be treated with more respect and dignity.

Comparatively, in Erotic Autonomy as Politics of Decolonization: An Anatomy of Feminist and State Practice in the Bahamas Tourist Economy, M. Jacqui Alexander (2002) offers one of the first critical inquiries into the objectification and marginalization of black Bahamian women. She notes the importance of Black Bahamian women to remain vocal in their political and economic struggles in the Bahamas. Their voices serve as a “conscious political move on the part of women in the contemporary women’s movement in the Bahamas,” as they choose from “particular feminist genealogies, particular histories of struggle, especially at a moment when the legacy of British gentility and respectability continues to assert itself and threatens to mold and usurp understandings of the self”(63). Alexander’s observations are significant in that tourism has replaced “British” colonization and neo-colonial rule. Tourism
and our “white tourists’ culture” continue to assert itself and threaten to mold the identity of Black Bahamians. Like Mama Flo ascertains, along with Alexander, women of the Bahamas, especially women working in the market, should form a stronger alliance, which might begin to unravel these ideas of difference—because it is this white tourist culture that serves as a measuring stick for Bahamian way of life in the postcolonial era.
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Appendix A: Internet Article

“The Straw Vendors Upset Over Damaged Stalls! ANGRY!!!”

Article

“Outraged straw market vendors are claiming that workers responsible for cleaning up the market are damaging their stalls. Locker doors have been ripped off, display boards torn down, and steps and extensions used to showcase goods have been removed, according to a group of angry vendors.

“When The Nassau Guardian’s news team visited the downtown market sometime after 9 p.m. Monday, pieces of plywood once used to display vendors’ wares were in heaps as the clean-up crew prepared to take the “garbage” to the dump. After hearing the news that their stalls were being “damaged,” more than a dozen vendors stormed down to the straw market to protest.

“The situation became out of control and security officers, unable to get the vendors out of the market, had to call the police to help control the crowd. One of the officers explained to her after speaking with the workers that the steps and other additions to the stalls were preventing environmental health officers from digging out the rat nests.”

Response to the article

“I say too bad for them, if they where not so nasty in the first place this would not have to happen. They are reaping what THEY sowed, so be it! No sympathy at all for the FLEA MARKET vendors.”

Source: http://www.thenassauguardian.com/nat3313007409.ph
Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent to participate in a study on women, race and culture in the Bahamas
Study by Dellareese Higgs, Student, American Culture Studies, Bowling Green State University

Dr Laura Lengel, Ph.D., Advisor  Dr. Radhika Gajjala, Ph.D., Advisor
Department of Communication  Department of Communication
Bowling Green State University  Bowling Green State University
(419)372-7653  (419)372-0528

You are invited to take part in this research. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you have any questions, please ask.

Purpose of Research: The purpose of this study is to understand Bahamian women’s feelings and daily experiences while working in the straw markets.

Description: I will observe your interactions with the tourists and record the way you sell your products. During the study, you will be asked a number of brief questions concerning your experiences with tourists, past and present. Individual interviews will take between 30 minutes and 1 hour to complete.

Benefit of Research: The goal of this research is to gain an understanding into the ways in which Bahamian women in the markets are viewed by the Bahamas Government Tourist Board. Bringing their concerns and issues to the forefront, may improve their lives and provide more financial opportunities for the women.

Confidentiality: All data collected and signed consent forms will be kept strictly confidential, such that only I and my Advisors have access to your identity. Your names will not appear in the paper that results from this study. At the time of the interview, you can choose any name you wished to be used for this study.

Participation is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions or discontinue participation at any time for any reason without explanation.

Risks involved in research are minimal – that is, they are no greater than the risks you encounter in your daily life.
**Consent:** I have read the information provided. I have been informed that I can ask questions or withdraw at anytime, and that I must be at least 18 years old to participate. I consent to participate in this study, and to the use of visual images (photos, videos, etc.) involving my participation in this research.

_____________________________________________________________________________

Name of respondent                      Date

**If you have any questions or concerns about research participant rights, contact:**
Chair
Human Subjects Review Board
Office of Research Compliance
Bowling Green State University
Phone: (419) 372-7716
E-mail: hsrb@bgsu.edu

**If you have any questions about this study you can contact me directly.**
While in Freeport: 373-7522
In the United States: (419) -72-7122
E-Mail: dhiggs@bgsu.edu
Appendix C: Research Questions

1. How long have you been working in the tourist industry?
2. Do you like your job?
3. What is the best part about working in the markets with the tourist?
4. What is the worst part?
5. When you come out here every morning do you think that you will make money?
6. What do you think tourist sees when they look at you?
7. Would you say that you change who you are when you come out here working with the tourist? If yes, how so?
8. Do you feel that they are better than you in any way because they can come here on vacation?
9. As we all know most of our tourists are white people, what do you think about this, or no concerns at all?
10. What does whiteness mean to you?
11. Do you think you act differently when you are serving white tourists, as oppose to other tourists?
12. How does it make you feel when you are selling your product to them and they try to bargain for the lowest price?
13. How do you feel about tourism being our only money generating source in the Bahamas?
14. Would you want your daughter to follow in your footsteps and work in the markets?
15. If you had a choice, what would you rather be doing other that working out here?
16. How do you think the ministry of tourism markets the Bahamas or sells the Bahamas to the rest of the world?
17. Define Identity? What is Bahamian Identity? What do you mean when you say that you are a Bahamian?
18. Has tourism had any affect on our identity?
19. Would you say that girls bleaching their skin has anything to do with our tourist industry?

20. What would you suggest to the Bahamas Government and Tourist Board in terms of changing tourism in the Bahamas?
Appendix D: Interviews

Mrs. Hortence Williams, Age 72

Della—So Mrs Williams how long have you been working in the tourists industry?

Mrs. Williams—Chile, I’ve been working with the tourist for the past 50 odd years (laughs). I was the first to bring the androsian print to our tourism industry. I is the one who cause tourism in the Bahamas to flourish the way that it is today. I was born in Que, that’s a island in the Turks and Caicos island, I know you know that cause I know your people, they from there to; Kessie generation was ever smart breed of people. Chile, what you ask me again (laughs)?

Della—Okay Mrs. Williams umh … we can move on. (laughing). Do you like your job? And why are you still working in the Straw Market at your age?

Mrs. Williams—awright I guess I embarrass you, (pause) anyway, I been working here so long what else I gon do, I had a store once, I use to sew for all the important people in the tourism industry. But that’s was a long time ago, now they treat me like I is nothing. You see all that island print shirts they wear in all these hotels, I is the one who give them that idea. You know how many dresses I sew for the Pindlings wife?²⁰ I was the one they use to come to make all the shirts they wanted to give to heads of governments form around the world; I was the one they use to come to. Important people from all over the world wear my clothes, clothes I make with these hands (raising her hands). These hands use to sew for royalty. So yes I use to like more job, then they throw me out like I was trash, people use to respect me in this industry. But when new people come and start changing things they forget about people like me, and leave us out here to

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²⁰Sir Lynden Oscar Pindling, was the prime minister of the Bahamas for 25 years. He became premier in 1967 and held the position until 1992. Throughout his tenure as prime minister, Sir Lynden led the Bahamas through its transition from British colony to independent nation in 1973. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1983 (Bahamas Journal).
burn in this sun like they put trash out to burn. Why you think they call this place the straw market, what is burn faster that straw?

Della—how do you mean they throw you out with the trash?

Mrs. Williams—That’s just what I said right, when these people come out here calling they self designer this and designer that, (pauses). I was doing this thing a long time now, I been designing and sewing from I was a girl, but you know when people think something new they think it mean means better. It ain’t no better, they just steal my designs, you see I created the seven way wrap dress, that was my design and they steal it and now selling it like they created it, and they no it mine. ( lowering her head, long pause), obviously sad.

Della—Are you okay, can you go on Mrs. Williams?

Mrs Williams—I alright child, I just is be sad when I talk about my life and how the ministry has treated me. These people just use me up and then throw me away, now I old and what I got? Chile, what your next question is for I get mad?

Della—What is the best part of working in the tourist industry?

Mrs Williams—Well I think it’s the people, sometimes you meet some real good people out here, some real good ones. That’s all I have to say bout that.

Della—Alrighty then, uh, moving right along, what is the worst part about working in the Straw Market?

Mrs. Williams—Well you have to understand that uh…. I been working with this tourist industry almost all my life, not just the Straw Market. Working in tourism has it good day and it bad days. Sometimes people want to spend money, sometimes they don’t. Back in the 70s and 80s before we had these one day cruise ships business use to be better, because people would stay in
the hotel and walk around and buy food and clothes and souvenirs and all of us made a profit. Nowadays these people come here for a couple hours, don’t spend a dime with us and then they leave, so I know the goodness and bad side, I would say these people that come on the ship, they is the bad side.

Della—when you come out here everyday do you think that you will make money?

Mrs. Williams—Yes I do, but like I say sometimes you don’t make a dime, cause these people coming in on the boat don’t spend a dime out here, and when they do, they want your things for little or nothing. I ain’t use to begging for nothing, so it does be hard for me sometimes, this store is my daughter own, but she does let me sell my wrap skirts and my shirts in here, but they like to buy her cheap two dollar shot glass. (smiling) They don’t want to spend $30 dollars on a shirt.

Della—Okay a different type of questions now, answer has best as you can and as honest as you can.

Mrs. Williams—I always does.

Della—What do you think the tourist see when they look at you?

Mrs Williams—child these people don’t see nobody, especially sitting out here in this Straw Market, it just like you invisible, see how they walk pass not even looking at you. That’s because they don’t want you ask them to buy anything, so they pretend like you ain’t even there, like you invisible. At least when I had my store they came to me and then I could talk to them, but in this open market, they just walk around, sometimes they will come over to my stall, but most of the ladies done catch em before I do. So sometimes I just feel like a pest, and I guess that’s what they see when they look at us out here, they think of us as pests.
Della—Wow! I also feel that way most of the times like I bothering someone. Okay I guess that answers my question let’s move on. Mrs. Williams would you say that you change who you are when you come out here working with the tourist?

Mrs Williams—well (long pause), sometimes I see these women acting foolish out here for these people, but that ain’t my style. I have always been a prideful woman and that’s the way I gone die, so no I is who I is, God make me prideful. When I was young, my friends always use to tell me that me pride will be the death of me. But that’s who I is and I can’t change that, so I guess my answer is no.

Della—Alright moving right along, I can see you is a prideful woman, check out those lips, still glossy and pretty even at 72.

Mrs. Williams—Chile, this how I always was, old age ain’t gone change that (laughing loudly).

Della—Okay, do you feel that our tourists are better than you in any way because they can come here on vacation?

Mrs Williams—chile, ain’t nobody better that me, some of them may have a little bit more than me, but some of them just as poor as we. They have to save they money to come here, just how we have to save our money to shop in Miami. So child I don’t care how rich they are I am rich with love, and that’s all I need.

Della—Got you on that. Okay next; as we all know most of our tourists are white people, what do you think about this, or no concerns at all?

Mrs Williams—that don’t concern me, if they white black yellow, they all the same to me.

Della—That’s it?
Mrs. Williams—Yes that’s it.

Della—okay, next; what does whiteness mean to you?

Mrs Williams—whiteness, what you mean? You mean white people?

Della—whatever the word mean to you?

Mrs Williams—well I guess it just means being white.

Della—Okay good, next question, do you think you act differently when you are serving white tourists, as oppose to other tourist?

Mrs. Williams—All the same to me, I act the same with al, they all is tourists.

Della—How does it make you feel when you are selling your product to the tourists and they try to bargain for the lowest price?

Mrs Williams—they does get on my nerves with that, they think just cause it made here in the Bahamas that it not as good as anything they sell in they country. So they try to bring you down as low as possible, and then try to talk down to you, like you trying to rob them. I is a seamstress by trade, so I know what it takes to make a shirt, or a seven way wrap dress, it takes a long time, so when they try to make me feel like I trying to cheat them out of something that makes me mad.

Della—I know I’ve experienced the same thing our store. So how do you feel about tourism being our only money generating source in the Bahamas?

Mrs Williams—(laughs), well I think that as long as we got something generating some money it a good thing. There use to be a time when we ain’t had nothing, no money for nothing, I ain’t gon say that we was ever starving in the Bahamas, or Turks for that matter, cause we could always grow food and go fishing. But nobody had no money, and then when tourism started to
boom that’s when people started making some money, and black Bahamians could have some money in they pockets. Before then black people ain’t never had no money, that’s why I leave Turks cause no money, but money was making here, now it making there, if only I was younger I would go back and make some of that money. (laughs).

Della—Chile that’s right I here all kind a people moving to Turks, a lot of my friends and family already left. Alright let me stop that’s another subject, let’s move on, next question. Would you want your daughter to follow in your footsteps and work in the markets?

Mrs Williams—she already here, she does make do, but I wish she could work Batelco or the Port.

Della—If you had a choice, what would you rather be doing other that working out here?

Mrs Williams—Now that question don’t ain’t for me, where else I going, I just wish I could stay home and not work, but I does get tired in the house and can still sew, so I may as well come to work. But I wish these younger girls working out here in this heat could find something else to do, cause this ain’t no place for no young woman.

Della—Why do you say that?

Mrs Williams—Look around, you got to eat your lunch outside, rain come you got to look for plastic to cover your things, it hot as hell, so they can’t fix theyself. Chile, this ain’t no place for no young woman trying to find no husband (laughs).

Della—Alright, how do you think the ministry of tourism market the Bahamas or sell the Bahamas to the rest of the world?

Mrs. Williams—I don’t know nothing about that, I know I tired of these people coming her and thing we live in trees or something, and the thing is it’s been that way forever. You’ll think that
within fifty years, all them years I been working with these tourists that they will no better, but nothing changed. Maybe it’s because of them tourists posters.

Della—Mrs Williams what would you say Bahamian identity is? What do you mean when you say that you are a Bahamian?

Mrs. Williams—First I am no Bahamian, I from Turks Island, done been here more than fifty years, but they still view me as a foreigner. So I don’t want get in to that.

Della—Okay Mrs Williams of the subject of identity, would you say that tourism had anything to do with Bahamian girls who bleach their skin?

Mrs. Williams—I don’t know, I just think that these young girls want to be anything but black. I use to bleach my skin too when I was younger, it seems the men like you more with white skin. But it don’t last cause you turn right back black (laugh). But seriously it is so sad when I see the girls bleaching, I just want to hug and make them feel better, cause something ain’t right inside.

Della—I know it is so sad, last question, what would you suggest to the Bahamas Government and Tourist Board in terms of changing tourism in the Bahamas?

Mrs Williams—I will tell them to respect people and don’t throw them away, for something new. That’s all I gat to say, respect your people man! They all you got.
Melinda Marsh, Age 27

1. How long have you been working in the tourist industry?

Melinda—*I have been working in the industry for the majority of my life. I grew up with my mother working in the straw market and eventually took it over from her. Coming here to be with her after school and helping her serve the tourists* *(laughs).*

2. Do you like your job?

Melinda—*I love my job. After all growing up in the environment it’s almost all I know. You get to meet very interesting people after doing this for so many years. Many people come back year after year.*

3. What is the best part about working in the markets with the tourist?

Melinda—*Seeing the variety of people, it never gets boring. Sure there are slow days but it never gets to the point where I would want to pack it in for good. You always try your hardest to make the tourists feel welcome. You want them to feel comfortable as if they were home.*

4. What is the worst part?

Melinda—*Ugh… the worst part I would say would be the heat or the occasional drunk tourist. The heat can definitely be unbearable sometimes but you learn to adjust as the day goes by. Whenever I come in contact with a drunken tourist I just laugh it off. I never make them feel as if they are not welcome at my stall.*

5. When you come out here every morning do you think that you will make money?
Melinda—No I have to honestly admit that I don’t. There are some days that I’ll sit out here from 7:30am until 7:30-8:00pm and I won’t make a single dollar. Then there will be days when I actually do really well. It just depends on the crowd and the time of year.

6. What do you think tourist sees when they look at you?

Melinda—I would hope they see me a person just like the rest of them but I feel as if when certain tourists come here they think we live in thatch huts and use outdoor plumbing, like it’s a real ‘Gilligan’s Island’ type life, without any technology.

7. Would you say that you change who you are when you come out here working with the tourist? If yes, how so?

Melinda—No I don’t change who I am. I’m me and want people to see me as me. Not as someone that I’m trying to be just for them. Most people can tell if someone’s being unreal with them so I’m just myself 100% of the time.

8. Do you feel that they are better than you in any way because they can come here on vacation?

Melinda—No I just feel they are lucky to travel wherever they want to and since they choose to come here that’s even better. This is a great place to visit and an even better place to live. And they spend money!!!

9. As we all know most of our tourists are white people, what do you think about this, or no concerns at all?

Melinda—Yes most of our tourists are white people but I have no concerns about that, people are people no matter what color they are. They spend money right?
10. What does whiteness mean to you?

Melinda—Whiteness means nothing to me it’s just a color. My great-great grandfather was a white man so I know somewhere down the line I have it in me although you can’t see it. That’s the reason why I teach my children to never judge someone by the color of their skin. Always go by what’s inside. That’s what counts, so whiteness just a color.

11. Do you think you act differently when you are serving white tourists, as oppose to other tourists?

Melida—No not necessarily different. I am who I am with every tourist I deal with. Whether they are white or black it makes no difference to me. Sometimes white tourists will spend a lot of money with me, or no money at all, and sometimes black tourists will do the same, so I treat them all the same.

12. How does it make you feel when you are selling your product to them and they try to bargain for the lowest price?

Melinda—Well The thing is they are told to do that before they even get here. A lot of the cruise ships tell them ahead of time to bargain for the lowest price you can get. I don’t have a problem in going a little lower on my prices but I’m not going to sell something dirt cheap. I make a lot of my own crafts and products and I put a lot of time into them, so although I know that they want the best prices, I also need to make a profit.

13. How do you feel about tourism being our only money generating source in the Bahamas?

Meinda—I think it’s terrible. There are many things that can be done here in The Bahamas but no one is trying to do them. We import everything from food to clothing to medicines. To me we can do a lot of these things ourselves and we don’t I think it’s a shame. And I think that it’s a
shame that the Bahamas government would not make more opportunities available for people who want to go into business on their own. People can go to the bank and get all kind of money for a house or a car, but can’t get a loan to star a business. So then what else are we suppose to do, but work in the tourists industry.

14. Would you want your daughter to follow in your footsteps and work in the markets?

Melinda—I have three daughters and I encourage any one of them to do whatever it is they want to do. Whether they want to follow in my footsteps or take their own path, it’s entirely up to them. I wouldn’t mind if one of them wanted to work in the market like I do but it’s a very hard life, when you’re depending on whatever you make that day to put food on the table. And I don’t want them to have to struggle like I do I want a better life for them.

15. If you had a choice, what would you rather be doing other than working out here?

Melinda—I don’t think there is anything I’d rather do. I don’t have any skills other than being very creative but if I really had to choose I’d want to paint. I always wanted to try maybe I’ll get the opportunity someday. If I don’t I still love working around the people I work with and love mixing with the tourists.

16. How do you think the ministry of tourism markets the Bahamas or sell the Bahamas to the rest of the world?

Melinda—I honestly believe that The Bahamas is not marketed to its fullest potential. We have 700 islands not all of which are inhabited but we have so much to offer. I think that if we are developed more and put out there for the world to see I feel we could do very well.

17. Define Identity? What is Bahamian Identity? What do you mean when you say that you are a Bahamian?
Melinda—To be a Bahamian for me is to be proud. We have come a long way in our lives and we have a lot of culture to pass on to others. I don’t think the Tourism Board does a good job of representing our culture to the rest of the world. We have the best music, the best food, and definitely the people. We are very strong, proud people and as we say ‘I’m proud to be a Bahamian.’ I guess identity is being proud to be Bahamian.

18. Has tourism had any affect on our identity?

Melinda—With the younger generation yes. I feel that because of tourism and all this access to T.V and radio that our Bahamian youths are not willing to embrace the Bahamian in them. All they want to listen to is American music and dress like hip hop, gangsters. So I believe that t.v and music videos more than tourism has had the most effect on our national identity.

19. Would you say that girls bleaching their skin have anything to do with our tourist industry?

Melinda—No not really I think that many of these girls don’t realize what it is to be a beautiful black woman. They see these white girls and they feel as if they’re prettier than they are and the go ahead and bleach their skin to get lighter when all their doing is trying to hide the beautiful way God made them.

20. What would you suggest to the Bahamas Government and Tourist Board in terms of changing tourism in the Bahamas?

Melinda—I would suggest that they just get out there, show us off and develop the island in such a way that more tourists would want to come here. Not necessarily change the islands but make them more appealing to the tourists, see when you here reggae music, people automatically thinks of Jamaica. Her in the Bahamas we need a hook, they trying to make Junkanoo it, but we need something more.
Addy Sands, Age 58

1. How long have you been working in the tourist industry?

Addy—I have been in the tourist industry for seven years. I use to work in the hotel, most all my like, but then they fired me, said they downsizing.

2. Do you like your job?

Addy—Every day is a different day and every day I feel differently about it. Cause I use to working with tourists, been in house keeping for 20 years, and some of the tourists could be very mean, but some like they don’t want you cleaning up behind them. But out here is different, cause in the hotel I clean all my rooms and I sure I get a paycheck at the end of the week. But out her if they don’t buy something, then I have nothing to carry home.

3. What is the best part about working in the markets with the tourist?

Addy—Like I said, I work with tourist all my life, so serving one here and or in the hotel, all the same.

4. What is the worst part?

Addy—I would have to say dealing with some of the tourists that visit here with negative ideas of my country and my people. Because of working with them for so long, you begin to know how they think. When I was in the Hotel, I know I was they maid. But sometime I feel like they think that I was they slave or something. Or I didn’t have anything, sometimes I had to tell them that I have two boys in the States in college, they get basketball scholarships. But I just wanted them to know that I was somebody, it wrong to go to other people country and think you better than them. Sometimes I use to wonder what kind of people these is because, I could never treat anyone like the way they tried to treat me, and I is a proud woman. And working in the Straw
Market even worse sometimes, cause it’s like you begging for them to buy something, this is a hard life.

5. When you come out here every morning do you think that you will make money?

Addy—I can only hope but I know that how I present myself and treat our guests will help me to make some money, so I try my hardest to be nice to them and always smile with them.

6. What do you think tourist sees when they look at you?

Addy—They just see someone there to serve them; I learn that a long time ago.

7. Would you say that you change who you are when you come out here working with the tourist? If yes, how so?

Addy—No I do not. Who I am, I smile more but I think that is the person that tourists want to see when they visit.

8. Do you feel that they are better than you in any way because they can come here on vacation?

Addy—I never feel that anyone of any status is better than me. We were all created equal and no matter where you come from it doesn’t change that fact.

9. As we all know most of our tourists are white people, what do you think about this, or no concerns at all?

Addy—There are no concerns at all from me because my country in itself is made up of many different kinds of people. I learn to deal with white people a long time ago, so they don’t phase me.

10. What does whiteness mean to you?
Addy—It means nothing to me. Why should it?

11. Do you think you act differently when you are serving white tourists, as oppose to other tourist?

Addy—I act according to the way that I am treated and by the tourists and not based on their color, as far as I’m concern all of them come here thinking the same way, so I smile and act nice to all, they all the same to me.

12. Della—How does it make you felt when you are selling your product to them and they try to bargain for the lowest price?

Addy—It is all apart of the package to me and hopefully we can both walk away satisfied.

13. How do you feel about tourism being our only money generating source in the Bahamas?

Addy—I would have to say that I detest it. I would love to see our country depend on its own resources to support or people. We have so many other things people can do here, like fishing and exporting or fish and conchs and lobsters, our fruits, how many people outside the Bahamas ever tasted a sugar apple or dilly, or hog plump. I think that there are so many things we can do, I’m not saying that give up on tourism all together, but we need to stop depending on others to feed and clothe us.

14. Would you want your daughter to follow in your footsteps and work in the markets?

Addy—I would want my daughter to fulfill her dreams. If it is what she wants to do then I support her. It is an honest living. But I can’t see my daughter ending up out here.

15. If you had a choice, what would you rather be doing other than working out here?
Addy—At my age I would love to be in retirement and be able to spend more time with my grandchild. But I have to work, because I have always been an independent woman, and I’d like to keep it that way.

16. How do you think the ministry of tourism market the Bahamas or sell the Bahamas to the rest of the world?

Addy—I think they market it very poorly, because a lot of tourists that come here think that we are primitive people living and huts. I am personally tired of the tourists being served Pina colada on all the beach commercials. I think we have more to offer than the sun sand, liquor and the beach.

17. Define Identity? What is Bahamian Identity? What do you mean when you say that you are a Bahamian?

Addy—How can anyone define the identity of what makes them a country man? All I can say is that it is my pride in who I am that gives me my identity and not my country.

18. Has tourism had any affect on our identity?

No I don’t believe that it has, we still Bahamians.

19. Would you say that girls bleaching their skins has anything to do with our tourist industry?

Addy—I would say that girls bleaching their skin has more to do with the media and their own self-worth than with tourism.

20. What would you suggest to the Bahamas Government and Tourist Board in terms of changing tourism in the Bahamas?
Addy—They need to show the true and real Bahamian people, and stop showing us serving rum on the beach. When you show people that, that is what they expect, an I will not be serving anyone no rum, because I is a Christian woman
Sheena Newbold, Age 36

Della—How long have you been working in the tourist industry?

Sheena—From I was a girl, chile, I started working here from I was 19 years old and been here ever since. It’s okay, but it does get to hot for me sometime and chile, when it rains, dog eat ya lunch.

Della—Do you enjoy working here?

Sheena—Like I said it’s okay sometime, but I wish dat I could get a government job, like Batelco, or a Port.

Della—What is the best part about working with the tourist in the market?

Sheena—da money! Ha, ha, ha! Lets be serious, I tink the best part is getting to meet all kind of people from around the world, I just met a man from Romania dis morning, I don’t even know where to look for dat on the map, what part of the world dat is? Anyway, dat answer ya question?

Della—yes. What is the worst part about your job?

Sheena—(Laughs) dat’s easy, when I don’t make no money, and I wish it wasn’t so hot out here all da time. If they could enclose dis place and put air condition out here I would not ask for anything else in the world.

Della—I know, I would have like some air, too. Okay next, when you come out here every morning do you think that you will make money?

Sheena—Chile, before I come out here I does get on my knees and pray dat I make enough to at least stop to da store and buy something for my children to eat. I have to be positive, ya can’t
come out here not to hustle, I come out here everyday like dis is da day when I will make a
hundred dollars, ya gat to or ya will just stay in the bed and die. What else could I do? Every
morning I get up, I think that I will hit the number and I will make plenty money. (laughs).

Della—Okay, what do you think that the tourist see when they look at you?

Sheena—What do dey see, I ain’t noting, dey gat it all, all dey see is a woman trying to sell dem
something, sometimes ya I don’t know if dey even know I dere. Some of dem come in and see
what dey want never even speaking to me, and just buy what dey want. But I don’t care, cause in
the end they spend money with me and that’s what important. Sometime I does feel bad when
dey don’t speak but that’s okay, such as life. Long is dey leave da money here we ain’t gat to see
each other, just let me see da benjamins, ha, ha, ha (laughs).

Della—Would you say that you change who you are when you come out here working with the
tourists? If yes, how so?

Sheena—Change what? I is me and I ain’t changing for no one. I here all dese women out here
talking to you about changing and performing for the tourists; da way I look at it, dis my job and
I gat to do it. I come out here to sell, and dese tourist is who does give me my money, not no
government. I like tourism cause without it how we in da Bahamas is going to make it? We ain’t
gat no, argriculture, we ain’t gat no oil, no diamonds, what we gat? Not a gaddam ting. If it
wasn’t for tourism we will all be dead. Chile, dat’s why I ain’t want dem open Cuba now.
(Laughs). Dese white people you see walking around here, chile, I love dem, I’ll do anyting for
dem, look dey gat the money, what I have. Nothing! So I could for to say that I does act dis way
all da time, dis who I is, a vendor in the market and if sometime I gatta dance so be it.
Della—Why do you feel you have nothing?

Sheena—Cause I don’t, everyday I have to catch 2 buses to get here, sometime I don’t even make the money I spent on da bus back home. I live in a 2 room clapboard house in Eight Mile Rock with ma 2 children, I can’t even by them a treat, talking bout vacation, dey never been off dis island, (whispers), well I only been to Miami once and I is a woman 28 years old. What ya next question I ain’t feel like talking about dat

Della—Okay let’s move on then, how do you feel about the way that the Bahamas government markets the Bahamas?

Sheena—I don’t know nothing about dat, I know that I is a Bahama mama and I like it. I like when da tourists call me dis, and all da postcards I see around the island is beautiful, and I don’t see anything wrong with dem.

Della—What about the postcards that has the white people getting married or relaxing, and black Bahamian women like me and you dress in the made uniforms or serving them?

Sheena—What wrong with dat? Dat’s our job right, ssee all a yall who go away to the states and England come back home talking about black dis and white dis. I don’t get into all dat, we ain’t no racist people, yall does go to da States and pick up dem black Americans mindset and den come back here trying to make us racist against white people and I tink dat’s wrong. We ain’t never had to struggle against no racism in dis country. All of us black, some maybe richer than the next, but all of us black.

Della—Wait, wait, what about slavery and when Pindling had to fight and for our independence from Britain? I understand that we a black majority in this country, but what about when we had no rights and this country was run by the Bay Street Boys, all white.
Sheena—Stop right dere I was never no slave, see what I talking about, come back here with all this slave rubbish, my family name is Scottish and dat’s where I from, so if you want talk about all dis slave shit you can stop dis interview right now.

Della—But don’t you want to know the truth about our history, have you ever wondered majority Scottish people are white and you black? Our names came from the families that bought us, that’s how most of the Bahamian people have European names. Do you want your…

Sheena—stop right dere, my children ain’t and never was no slaves, and I ain’t sign up for all dis, what oder questions you have for me, cause I like you but right now you making me mad.

Della—I don’t mean to make you mad, but I think that….

Sheena—I say what oder question you have for me?

Della—Would you like your daughter to work in the market?

Sheena—If dat what she choose I have no problem with it, cause maybe she could find one white man out here and get married and move away from dis place.

Della—So that’s the only reason you would have no objections to her working in the market?

Sheena—I ain’t saying dat, but if she here and dey seeing her every day, den maybe she has a chance on getting out of here. Cause lord knows a white man will treat her better dan a Bahamian man.

Della—why do you say that?

Sheena—Look at how dey does treat dey wife and chiren when dey here, and look at da t.v, white people so much better dan black people, dey don’t fight, dey into dere kids, dey take em on vacation, what could a Bahamina man do for her? I want more for my daughter? You tink I
want her ending up like me? Dirty in dis Straw Market, catching bus, always hustling, chile, no! no! no! I want her ta marry white so she could be something!

Della—And she can be something only if she marries white?

Sheena—I ain’t like you or your people, could go away to school, I done talk to your sister I know all a y’all been to college, I ain’t gat dat kind a money to send my children to school, I wouldn’t even know what to do, (laughs embarrass). So if she marry one of dese tourists you see walking round here, she will be better off

Della—Okay, let’s move on. As we all know most of our tourists are white people, what do you think about this, or no concerns at all?

Sheena—We all know dat dey da ones wit da money, black people ain’t gat no money, so I like dem. (Laughs).

Della—Or you like there money, that brings me to my next question. What does whiteness means to you?

Sheena—Whiteness, I guess it means white people. What I don’t understand? If I had to think of answer I would say, it means richness, being rich, being able to travel, buy new clothes, that kind a thing, whiteness, like I say before it mean white people, just being white.

Della—Okay onto the next question.

Sheena—Bring it on, dis ain’t has hard as I thought, dis just like common knowledge, I glad you making me tink about dese kind a tings, okay what da next question?

Della—How does it make you feel when you selling your products to them and they try to bargain for the lowest price?
Sheena—Now dat does make me mad, cause we poor people and dey da ones with da money, dey come her and stay in Our Lucaya, I can’t ever dream of ever staying in dat hotel and dey wanna bargain and take my tings for free. I see one man come in here and wanted to pay fifty cents for a shot glass that was two dollars. I paying one dollar for it and he want me to sell it for nothing, dat ain’t gon work, cause I gat to eat to, maybe not steak or anything like dey eating, but I gat children to feed, and dat does frustrate me.

Della—Do you feel that they are better than you in anyway because they can come here on vacation?

Sheena—Of course dey better dan me, when I ever gon leave dis island, when I ever could take my chiren on vacation, when I ever could wear dem clothes dya does be wearing, I am not saying that because they white they better than me, I just saying that because they rich, and I guess most white people rich right? Dis make dem better than me in a way. But I gon get mine in heaven, cause I believe that we only suffer for a season, ha, ha ha, I gon be rich just like dese tourist in heaven.

Della—Next, What would you suggest to the Bahamas Government and Tourist Board in terms of changing tourism in the Bahamas?

Sheena—Da only is ting I could tell dem is to bring more tourists so dat I could make more money. (Laughs loudly).
Mr. Ronald Adderely, Age: 44

Married: Father of three, Baptist Church Deacon

1. How long have you been working in the tourist industry?

Mr Adderley—When I leave long Island in 1979 I come to Nassau to live wit my auntie. She had a stall set up in the old Straw market before it burn down. She bring me to work with her.

Do you like your job?

Mr.Adderley—Yes. I like my job. I like work here and I like working for my self. I have two young cousins working under me.

2. What is the best part about working in the markets with the tourist?

Mr. Adderley—Besides being my own boss. I enjoy meeting the peoples who come here from all over the world. Every kind of people from every part of the world, some of these people I see every year or two. Sometime I make some good friends and they will bring me things when they come back to the island. One time I even been to Virginia to visit one of my tourist friends. He was a church man though, very nice, a lot of them ain’t like that though.

3. What is the worst part?

Mr.Adderley—I guess it is the long hours, I try to get here at day break and I never leave till dark. Time is money. Time wait four no man. I try to be on the job when the big boats get in and stay till they leave, so like I say the long hours.

4. When you come out here every morning do you think that you will make money?

Mr Adderley—Yes, I always make money. Sometimes It could be enough to pay the rent and the next day just enough to buy a chicken in da bag. But I always make some change. That’s the
thing about working out here it is always a hustle, if you ain’t got the sense to hustle, then you should not be working in this field. Cause that is what is all about, so I always make something.

5. What do you think tourist sees when they look at you?

Mr. Adderley—I do no what they see. Different people see different things. I hope they see me working hard trying to make a living for me and the children.

6. Would you say that you change who you are when you come out here working with the tourist? If yes, how so?

Mr. Adderley—Yeah, I change. I have to smile and be friendly. I have to be a outgoing man so and try and get them to stop and see my stall. I talk to them. and ask them questions about they life and wear they come from, so that they could think I interested in them and what they do, all people like that, they like to think they important and let them feel that. So in terms of changing who I is when I come out here, yes I have to smile with them more and be they friend, that’s how I make my couple dollars.

7. Do you feel that they are better than you in any way because they can come here on vacation?

Mr. Adderley—Better than me. I am a child of God. No body better than me. I not better than them and they not better than me. I work for my living and they work for they living. I does go to the States when I need to shop and they does come here when they need a vacation, so they ain’t no better that me, no one better that me. I ain’t sure what they thinking but I is a proud Bahamian.

8. As we all know most of our tourists are white people, what do you think about this, or no concerns at all?
Mr Adderley—My bible say to love everyone. The white people is the one with the most money so I glad to see them when to come. I care what color the people is long is the money green.

9. What does whiteness mean to you?

Mr. Adderley—I is black I don’t know what white mean. I guess it mean people with money to buy my goods. Years ago when they run things I guess it was different and in some places they might still be the masters, but we in the Bahamas and the PLP change things like that long time.

10. Do you think you act differently when you are serving white tourists, as oppose to other tourist?

Mr. Adderley—Listen I is a business man and I been out here long time. Some time the white man will not buy, and the black man or other people will buy. So I treat people the same cause they all have money to spend. You will never know till they come to your stall.

11. How does it make you fell when you are selling your product to them and they try to bargain for the lowest price?

Mr. Adderley—Every body will try to get a better deal. Some one tell them that if they talk us down they can get a better price. We do that when we go to the flea market in Miami, It is ok. But I know how low to go.

12. How do you feel about tourism being our only money generating source in the Bahamas?

Mr. Adderley—It is ok for now but I think that the government need to look for something different. I don’t know much about these things but some time the business get on go slow. We need some thing we can keep all year round and something then we all can count on. Just like they have in other places, they don’t just depend on the tourists, the sell sugar, and tobacco and other things, why we cant do that.
13. Would you want your daughter to follow in your footsteps and work in the markets?

Mr. Adderley—Listen to what I tell you, this is hard work with long hours. I send my children to school so they can have a better job and life than I had. I want all my children to have a government job, because government money is sure money.

14. If you had a choice, what would you rather be doing other than working out here?

Mr. Adderley—This all I know and I know just what to do when I get out here. So I just thank god for all his blessings. I ain’t young no more, when I was young I wanted to be a police, but some day I make more than them and I don’t get shoot. (laughs).

15. How do you think the ministry of tourism market the Bahamas or sell the Bahamas to the rest of the world?

Mr. Adderley—I really think they can do a better job. People always ask me when I go to the States if I is Jamaican? Not matter what I do. That because they always here about Jamaica on tv and not the Bahamas. They know what Jamaican food and music is like, but they do not know what a Bahamian is.

16. Define Identity? What is Bahamian Identity? What do you mean when you say that you are a Bahamian?

Mr. Adderley—Just like I say what is a Bahamian some people do not know and every body say something different. ZNS say it is music, food and culture. What music, which foods and every body have culture far as I can tell. I is a Bahamian cause I was born in this country black and free. I am able to work and be my own boss.

17. Has tourism had any affect on our identity?
Mr. Adderley—Yes, when we go to them meetings at the ministry of tourism they try tell us what the tourist want and how we should handle them, but they do not know nothing about what we do and see every day. They never ask us anyways.

18. Would you say that girls bleaching their skin have anything to do with our tourist industry?

Mr. Adderley—What the hell girls bleaching have to do with anything. I don’t know anything about that stuff; you think they want to be white? I say love the skin you in.

19. What would you suggest to the Bahamas Government and Tourist Board in terms of changing tourism in the Bahamas?

Mr. Adderley—Focus on the country. When we let people make movies here we should make sure they tell everybody about the Bahamas. All over the world people know Curry and jerk chicken. They need to know about conch fritter and chicken in the bag. Tell the world about Bahamians on t.v like the Jamaicans do. Why you think everybody know Jamaica, Bob Marley and good food. We have the same things here even better, so the government just needs to do more to bring more tourists to the Bahamas.
Royanne Parker, Age 19
Mother of one

Della—How long have you been working in the tourist industry?

Royanne—Well I been working out here for seven months now, I use to work in a jewelry store, but when I got pregnant and had to go on maternity leave they fired me. So this where I had to work, cause I have to feed my child.

Della—Do you like your job?

Royanne—Chile, who you think like it out here, I only here till I get my job in the hotel. I applied to Our Lucaya, they soon call. I praying (laughs).

Della—What position you applied for at the Hotel?

Royanne—Front desk clerk, so hopefully I get it.

Della—I hope you get it too. Okay let’s move on, what is the best part about working in the markets with the tourist?

Royanne—ahh, ahh, (long pause), I can’t think of any, sorry.

Della—You mean that there are no benefits of working in the Straw market.

Royanne—I anit trying to put down nobody, but this just ain’t for me, some of these ladies been out here for ten, twenty, damn fifty years, I give them all the props, but I can’t do it, I am a young woman, I want dress up and be in air condition, these old women, well all ain’t old, but they use to this, I ain’t trying to get use to this, being out here will make you old quick, and I ain’t trying to get old no time soon. I still young, I can still meet a rich white man in the hotel,(laughs), fix up myself and chile, I’m a sexy mama. Out here you ain’t gone meet no one, who want talk to any
woman sitting out here on a crate plaiting straw and sweating. My aunty them use to this but I ain’t making this no career.

Della—You said that you would like to meet a rich white man…..

Royanne—I know and I mean it, they just treat you better.

Della—How do you know that, have you ever dated a white man before?

Royanne—no, but that’s what I want, look at how they does treat they wife and children when they come out here, I does look at them and wish that was me. I young and pretty em… why can’t I get treat like that, and I know what I want, so while I young and only have my daughter, I can still find me a man who will take care of me, that’s why I gots to get the hell out of here.

Della—(laughing) okay, we can go back and forth on this subject all day, because this brings up issues of inferiority, privilege, class, identity, but we will get to all that in the following questions. My next question, oh you answered that, moving right along. When you come out here every morning do you think that you will make money?

Royanne—No, I always got to struggle to make a dollar out here, these women wont let you make a dime, before the tourists got time to relax and walk a minute, they on them, begging them to buy something. And all of us selling the seem things, so who they gon buy from, not me cause I can’t run after them like some of these women out here do. You all lucky, you does sell different things in your store, I always tell your sister how beautiful her necklaces is, man she got some talent. She is blessed.

Della—Yes I agree my sister is brilliant, I’m not, my mind don’t work like that.

Royanne—Chile, don’t feel bad, some people just have the gift of creativity, and some don’t.
Della—I know right? (laughing), okay for my next question, what do you think tourist see when they look at you?

Royanne—I don’t know, this place does make me shame, so I guess they see that shame.

Della—Wow, shame, so it embarrasses you to work in the market.

Royanne—Yes.

Della—Okay, so would you say that you change who you are when you come out here working with the tourist? If yes, how so?

Royanne—Yes, I do change, by nature I am a friendly, bubbly person, but when I come out here that all disappears, that’s why I don’t make no money (laughing). My auntie always telling me I got to smile more, I try cause I know I got a child to take care of, but you know when you ain’t happy with what you doing, smiling is hard.

Della—Would you say that, your unhappiness had anything to do with a feeling of inferiority? I mean do you feel that the tourists are better than you in any way because they can come here on vacation?

Royanne—A little, I think they have more money and more time, so their circumstances are better than mine. Look around you, when you finish you going back to the States, you better than these women out here. Shit everybody better than Straw vendors (angry), well I guess not the Haitians, but yes sometimes I think because of their circumstance they are also better off than me. So that’s why sometimes I does be so unhappy out here, I guess like you say, feeling inferior.

Della—As we all know most of our tourists are white people, what do you think about this, or no concerns at all?
Royanne—I have no concern about their skin color. They are spending money, so I don’t look at anything like that.

Della—What does whiteness mean to you?

Royanne—Like I say I don’t worry myself with nobody skin color, but I guess to be white means you have less stress with everyday life, and better opportunities.

Della—Better opportunities, why better opportunities?

Royanne—Well they seem happier, and when you look at most of the rich people in the world they are white, so I guess their whiteness gives them a better chance in life.

Della—Do you think you act differently when you are serving white tourists, as oppose to other tourist?

Royanne—No! All tourists the same to me, that ain’t important to me.

Della—How does it make you fell when you are selling your product to them and they try to bargain for the lowest price?

Royanne—I feel like they are always trying to get something for nothing and that they don’t respect me or appreciate my products or this island.

Della—How do you feel about tourism being our only money generating source in the Bahamas?

Royanne—Afraid! We need to be able to survive on more than just tourism.

Della—Would you want your daughter to follow in your footsteps and work in the markets?

Royanne—No!

Della—Just no, why?
Royanne—Do I need a reason, look around you, why would I want my child to be out here?

Della—Are you saying that the market is not good enough for your daughter?

Royanne—That is exactly what I’m saying, I want more for my child than this.

Della—If you had a choice, what would you rather be doing other than working out here?

Royanne—I would rather work in the hotels with the tourists, there I will have a better opportunity to meet my prince and move out of this hell. (Laughs).

Della—How do you think the ministry of tourism market the Bahamas or sell the Bahamas to the rest of the world?

Royanne—Sometimes they do a good job, but think that they concentrate to much on Nassau and Freeport. They need to promote more of the outer islands and show its natural beauty.

Della—Okay changing gear just a bit now, define identity? What is Bahamian Identity? What do you mean when you say that you are a Bahamian?

Royanne—Bahamian identity is something that is unique to me, what makes us unique as a country. What I mean is that I am from a strong, proud group of people and that what makes a Bahamian.

Della—Has tourism had any affect on our identity?

Royanne—Yes! I say this because nowadays Bahamian people trying to be American, trying to act like our tourists.

Della—What do mean?

Royanne—You see all these young men walking round here with their pants falling of the butts. And, most of my girlfriends, now have dogs like Paris Hilton (laughs), they so stupid, cause
know they ain’t got no money to maintain those dogs, they need shots, special food, trying to perpetrate like they have something and they don’t.

Della—But would you say that that is more of cable television than tourism?

Royanne—All is the same thing, all the people from t.v come here right? So they see it on t.v and they see it in the hotels.

Della—Would you say that girls bleaching their skin has anything to do with our tourist industry?

Royanne—Maybe, cause we identify light skin with beauty and most of our tourists is white. I think that we as Bahamians think that being lighter makes life easier.

Della—How so, why would you say something like that?

Royanne—I know you doing this for school but come, tell me you never bleach your skin? At some points in our lives, as women we all get into it because we think that it’s pretty; personally I don’t know where it came from but yes I use cream and yes I think that it makes me look better. I wouldn’t say that I want to be white, but I just like having lighter skin, that’s all.

Della—Do most of your friends bleach their skin?

Royanne—Yes they do, it’s a part of us, ain’t no shame in our game, like the saying go if you mango skin you win. And that’s that, can we move on now, I have to pick up my child.

Della—What would you suggest to the Bahamas Government and Tourist Board in terms of changing tourism in the Bahamas?

Royanne—I would suggest they promote only what’s 100% Bahamian especially our straw works and music.
Mildred Murphy, Age 30

Della— How long have you been working in the tourist industry?

*Mildred—I have been working in the tourist industry for seven years and counting.*

Della—Do you like your job?

*Mildred—Yes I do, It has it’s good days.*

Della— What is the best part about working in the markets with the tourist?

*Mildred—The best part about working in the markets with the tourist is you get to meet so many different types of people and learn about different cultures. It also gives you an opportunity to create bonds and build a relationship with your customers.*

Della—What is the worst part?

*Mildred—The worst part, because there is so many different types of people it can all lead up to multiple types of personalities. You can never treat one customer the same as you treat another. The other part of it is, if you are self employed. Weekly income is never the same, there are slow seasons, and this can start as of late August into early November, so no money making during the times*.

Della—When you come out here every morning do you think that you will make money?

*Mildred—No I do not, because it's a gamble, everyone is basically selling the same product and there are so many booths. It is not a must that they (tourists) spend money with me, because they have lots of others to choose from.*

Della—What do you think tourist see when they look at you?
Mildred—When tourists look at me depending on the type of person that is looking, I hope that some see a striving and extremely talented black woman. The reason for saying this is because most of our products are hand made and through our work, our creativity is exposed. And on the other hand some sees us as uneducated and poor, in desperate need of there American dollar, I know this because of the way some of them treat us when they come out here, like we ain’t nothing. But for the most part and the way that I carry myself I hope that they see that I am a proud hard working Bahamian woman.

Della— Would you say that you change who you are when you come out here working with the tourist? If yes, how so?

Mildred—No I would not change a thing because the Straw Market is a part of the Bahamian Culture, and a Bahamian is who I am. So I don’t change nothing about me when I come to work.

Della—Do you feel that they are better than you because they can come on vacation?

Mildred—No I do not. I take vacations as well. I may not be able to just jump up and go because the money is not sitting there, it takes me a while to save and plan a vacation for me and my family. Last year I took my children to Disney World, so no way they better than me or my children.

Della—As we all know most of our tourist are white people, what do you think about this, or no concerns at all?

Mildred—No concerns at all! I mean if white Americans did not come to the Bahamas, we would not survive. So I don’t care nothing about color and the end of the day, they pay my bills, so no, I really don’t think of it.

Della—What does whiteness mean to you?
Mildred—White is just the outer layer of a person skin color, we all bleed the same color blood. I don’t believe on all that race business all people are the same.

Della—Do you think you act differently when you are serving white people, as oppose to other tourist?

Mildred—I do think that I act differently when serving white people or any other kind of people. The only thing I do differently with white people is you have to talk proper English in order for them to understand. And I have to speak slowly because they always say they don’t understand the dialect, I also find that they tend to be afraid of black people so we have to handle them very fragile.

Della—Why do you say that?

Mildred—Well some of them just scared of the color black, I don’t know why, but they does act like we are going to rob them, so we always have to reassure them that they are okay and safe when they come on the island and into the Straw Market. Umm, you know my sister works in the hotel at the front desk and she said that the white managers always tell her and the other girls to talk very soft to the white guest. I don’t know, but you know how they view black people and I guess they think that we all the same. It’s sad but such as life, we just have to work hard to make them like us and feel safe when they come here.

Della—How does it make you feel when you are selling your product to them and they try to bargain for the lowest price?

Mildred—It makes you feel like your product is worth nothing. Especially the straw items, each and every straw item has been made by hand, we spend money to buy our equipment to make
these products and then to have them bargain down for the lowest prices is just a feeling that makes you feel so degrading.

Della— How do you feel about tourist being our only money generating source in the Bahamas?

Mildred— Tourism may be our biggest generating source in the Bahamas, but it is not the only source of income. Time has brought changes and now we have billion dollar companies such as Freeport Container Port, Polymers International LTD and now coming soon are two major companies, the Bahamian Brewery and Industrial Distributors. These companies will provide many jobs for our Bahamian people. So I am so glad that the Port and the government is letting these companies set up shop, so that the Bahamian people can work and make money and not have to depend on tourist the season.

Della— Would you want your daughter to follow in the same footsteps and work in the markets?

Mildred— I would like my daughter to get a college education and build dreams of her own, be much more successful in her life. I want her to have a sure weekly income, but never forget her Bahamian culture and always be proud to say I am a Bahamian!

Della— If you had a choice, what would you rather be doing other than working out here?

Mildred— If I had a choice, I would be somewhere in an office sucking up some A/C (laughs). I would rather have an office job with a sure weekly income and some health insurance, but that’s not in the card for everybody. Umm, when you look at it though, I can’t complain because I have always been able to feed my children and that’s what important. (Long silence), I would not change who I am, because the lord gave me this talent, and it’s not to be bottled up. So I would say I won’t change a thing. I like working with straw.
Della— How do you think the ministry of Tourism markets the Bahamas or sell the Bahamas to the rest of the world?

Mildred—I think they do a good job because most tourists come here to get away and relax. They compare this Island to what they think is paradise. Their expectations are always very high, they want that friendly greeting, warm atmosphere and pretty beaches. This is what they expect before they arrive, so advertisement must be excellent, and I think that the Ministry of Tourism markets us as paradise, so no complaints.

Della— Define Identity? What is Bahamian Identity? What do you mean when you say you are a Bahamian?

Mildred—When I say that I am a Bahamian, I mean that I am a part of black nation that is strong, I am a native of the Bahamas, we are independent, and English speaking country, so that makes us very good for tourist from the U.S. When you say identity, (long pause), I mean my identity is Bahamian, is black and is proud, I think that’s what makes us Bahamian, because we are such proud people. Umm, I don’t think other black people are as proud as us Caribbean people. Look at how people in America be idealizing these stars, you know we don’t care about all that, because we to proud, we don’t think nobody better than us.

Della— So your identity is your pride of being Bahamian, black and Caribbean?

Mildred—When you say it like that you make me sound smart.

Della— You are smart.

Mildred—You know I always wanted to go to college to talk about these same things, race identity, culture, I was always interested in those kinds of things. But life happens and you have to do what you have to do. But back to you question, yes being black, being, Caribbean and
being Bahamian is who I am and that makes me proud. I don’t think that people in the U.S. or other parts of the world that has had slavery, can say that they are as free as we are in the Caribbean. They may have more than us, but umm, what Bob say “emancipate yourself from metal slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds” (laughs), my brother is a Rasta, I know a little about black consciousness.

Della— So would you say that tourism had any affect on our identity as a people?

Mildred— In a way it has, most of our guest thinks that tourism is still our main income for the Bahamas, so they tend to look at us as poor and again in need of there American dollars. And because we are an island in the Caribbean they think that we are short of something, for example concrete block houses, they think we live in shanty huts. And sometimes I think that we buy into this and change who we are so that they spend their money with us. So yes I think tourism has had some effect on our identity because we are considered Paradise we have to act it.

Della— What do you mean?

Mildred—You know what I mean, we have to give the people what they come here to see, sometimes that mean acting foolish for them, and you know that aint us as a people, but I see it everyday in the market. I know you see it, too.

Della— Would you say that the shows in the square (Port Lucaya) is a part of that?

Mildred—Yes! We don’t dress up in know feather and be dancing bout the place like that, ugh like we is some Las Vegas show. But it’s all about entertainment and that’s what we have to do, keep them entertain and they will keep coming back.

Della— Okay on to another very important subject, would you say that girls bleaching their skins has anything to do with our tourist industry?
Mildred—No I don’t think so, everyone uses a toner now and again, for the most part people tend to crave smooth looking skin. I think Revlon and Oil of Olay commercials would be at fault for that (laughs).

Della— You know that both of us can see that you use a little cream from time to time.

Mildred—A lot you mean (laughs)! Umm, I know that I bleach my skin, my brother always getting on me for that, but I been using cream since I was a girl. All my aunties used it, my mother used it, everyone I knew used it and they skin looked good. (Long pause), umm I guess that ain’t no excuse, but I just think that I look better when I am lighter. I don’t think that tourism had nothing to do with that though, I have had so many conversations about this with me brother. So I know that a lot of it comes from slavery and the white man making black people feel like that black skin isn’t good enough. I don’t have to get into all that stuff cause you know what I talking about, been in college, but I just don’t like my skin when it dark and have pimples. And yes it makes me shame that I use these creams, especially at this very moment talking to you. Ah, but, I like the way it makes me look.

Della— So I guess I don’t need to go know further with that question, but do you think that the Ministry of Tourism use light-skinned girls more in advertisements marketing the Bahamas?

Mildred—Yes, that bring us back to the whole light is better thing, I know that it is so wrong and I buy into it, but we still do it and we will continue to do it, I don’t see that changing anytime soon.

Della— Why do you say that?

Mildred—Could we please move on? I feel like a hypocrite talking about this, you say people will not know this me right? Anyways, everywhere you go you see white or light skin women
being paraded around when it comes to beauty, you can even pass, you fair skinned, but you hardly see women dark like me, with the caption beautiful in the Bahamas. Please next question (laughs).

Della—Okay, okay, but this is very important, why do you think that we hardly see dark-skinned women in adds that advertise the Bahamas and we are a nation of black people?

Mildred—You just mean you ain’t gone let this go, this is all I have to say on the subject. Look at who owns the hotels around here, white people, the government don’t own any of the hotels, so people who responsible for bring people to their hotels, want people to feel comfortable when they come here, and seeing people that maybe light like them will make them more comfortable. I don’t know, but seriously, can we move on?

Della—Okay, I’ll take you off the hot seat, but I still think you need to talk more about this issue. But moving right along, what would you suggest to the Bahamas Government and Tourist Boards in terms of changing tourism in the Bahamas?

Mildred—I have nothing to suggest, you done stress me out. I just want to say keep selling the island, more tourist better business for me, can I go now?

Della—Yes. But eventually we will have to sit and have a long talk about this skin bleaching business.
Anthea Rigby, Age 74
Mother of six

Della—How long have you worked in the tourist industry?

Mrs Rigby—About 40... 49 years.

Della—What is the best part of working in the market with the tourist?

Mrs Rigby Well they are friendly! It was very important of I working there because of my future it was the future for me and my family.

Della—Okay, what is the worst part?

Mrs Rigby—The hard work, dis is hard work, ya got to have a strong will to be out here dese years: Aint had no worst.

Della—When you come out here every morning do you think that you will make money?

Mrs Rigby—Yes I always hope I will make it for that day.

Della: Um, so what do you think tourist sees when they look at you?

Mrs Rigby—I treat them very nice so when they look at me dey see dat I am kind and I enjoy working with dem.

Della—Would you say that you change who you are when you come out here working with the tourist? If yes, how so?

Mrs. Rigby—No I don’t change nothing when I come to work, change what? Why? Sometimes you in a bad mood and you still got to smile with them, but that’s it.
Della— Do you feel that they are better than you in any way because they can come here on vacation?

Mrs Rigby—Oh no! I never had that kind ah mind, and I don’t think they got that kind ah mind, we just work together, they come here for vacation and I try to make dem happy.

Della— Ok, as we all know most of our tourist are white people, what do you think about this, or no concerns at all?

Mrs Rigby—It never makes a difference if the tourist was white or black we all deal together mix, it never make a difference I never see no difference in them.

Della: Ok, so when I say whiteness what does that mean to you?

Mrs Rigby—never make no difference to me, white is white, they white I black, what dat mean?

Della— Do you think you act differently when you are serveing white tourist, as oppose to other tourist?

Mrs Rigby—Chile, they all the same with me, I love working with all of them I always loving with the tourists and they loving with me.

Della— How does it make you fell when you are selling your products to them and they try to bargain for the lowest price?

Mrs Rigby—I still is feel happy because my, ah my, ah what you call it, products, always please them so if I had to reduce the price five or ten dollars, that was fine and was satisfied.

Della— How do you feel about tourism being our only money generating source in the Bahamas?
Mrs Rigby—Well I think that for the Bahamas tourism has been the best thing when it come to making money. People make money and support dey family and that’s what’s important, so all they have to do is keep the people coming here and we will be okay. Tourism make a lot of people dey own boss, and you make money, that’s a good feeling when you ain’t got to work for nobody.

Della— Would you want your daughter to follow in your footsteps and work in the markets?

Mrs Rigby—Yes I would like for any of them to walk in my foot steps, but they don’t want to (laughs), working in the Straw market have been good to me and them, but all of them doing they own thing, but I just wish that one of them would continue my legacy in tourism, this a good life.

Della— If you had a choice, what would you rather be doing other that working out here?

Mrs Rigby—No other choice for me, this is my life, I don’t know anything else, doing art, making my straw work is all I know and it’s very special to me. My mother showed my how to do straw work when I was a young girl and I have passed on that art by showing plenty women how to do straw work. I does make all the bags and baskets, most everybody out here does order my work because they say that mine is neat. That’s because I take pride in what I do, and I love what I do. It makes me feel so good when I see the tourists dress and wearing one of bags, it’s a good feeling.

Della— How do you think the ministry of tourism market the Bahamas or sell the Bahamas to the rest of the world?

Mrs. Rigby—I think they do a good job about selling the Bahamas, I just hope the Ministry of Tourism just keep doing what they doing so the next generation could enjoy the tourists too.
Della—Define identity and what is Bahamian Identity? What do you mean when you say that you are a Bahamian?

Mrs. Rigby—That just what it means, Ise a Bahamian, well it mean my culture and this straw I holding in my hand, this straw and what I do with, the way I and the other women plait the straw to make art, that’s what Bahamianess mean.

Della— Has tourism had any effect on your identity?

Mrs. Rigby—No, tourism ain’t change no Bahamian.

Della— Would you say that girls bleaching their skin has anything to do with our tourist industry?

Mrs. Rigby—People bleaching ... No I don’t think the tourist have nothing to do with that they umm, the black people want to bleach white and the white people wont to turn darker that’s all I know of them. We is have a lot of fun about that when the white people come and say I want to be dark like you, boy hey (laughs).

Della— What would you suggest to the Bahamas Government and tourist board in terms of changing tourism in the Bahamas?

Mrs Rigby—I wouldn’t adjust to change nothing because it is very good for the umm, nation so I wouldn’t advice them to change this is the future for the next generation to come.
Mary Fernander, Age 39
Mother of two

Della—What is your name?

Mary—My name is Mary.

Della—How long have you been working in the tourist industry?

Mary—I’ve been working in the tourist industry for about ten years.

Della—Do you like your job?

Mary—Sometimes I like my job, I like learning about different people and different cultures. But then there are times when you have to work so hard and make no money.

Della—What is the best part about working in the market with the tourists?

Mary—Meeting all kinds of people with different backgrounds.

Della: Ok, What is the worst part?

Mary—The worst part about my job working in the market is, some of them, you know the white tourists still come over here like they back in America and try to treat us like they black people over there. They expect you bow down to them, they expect your full attention some of them it doesn’t matter to them that you in the tourist business and you have to cater to all, but where they still have that um mentality of you black and I’m white in I don’t want to mix you know they travel with that kind of thinking even though they are on vacation some of them still travel with that so they want you to leave what you doing, even if you dealing with someone else and deal with them, they want all of you attention, sometimes that does get on my last nerve, but for the
most part I like talking with all the people from all around the world. I have friends as far as Germany and I even got a friend in India, so I guess that’s the best part of this job.

Della— When you come out here very morning do you think that you will make money?

Mary—I would like to think so but no, sometimes I does be out here for ten twelve hours and don’t make a dime.

Della— What do you think tourist see when they look at you?

Mary—When tourist look at me they see a … striving black Bahamian woman out there trying to make life and make it better for her children and the Bahamas.

Della— Would you say that you’ve change who you are when you come out here working with the tourist? If yes, how so?

Mary— I don’t know, I don’t think I change much because you have to be your self when dealing with the tourist and that’s what they are looking for the realness of you as a Bahamian, so you have to be your self. I’m bit more friendly, but that’s it, I don’t change.

Della— Do you feel that they are better than you in any way because they come here for vacation?

Mary—No I don’t think so because a lot of times we can’t even afford vacations some of us just save for years and I know some of them have to save to, you can tell you know, some of them does be very poor, so no!

Della— As we all know most of our tourist are white people what do you think about this, or no concerns at all?
Mary—Well, I have a little concern about it, basically we have more white American’s first of all, so we will have more white tourist and you know that’s basically what our tourist business is all about we have a lot of Americans that come over and most of them white, so you just welcome them and hope you get some nice ones.

Della—Ok, what does whiteness mean to

Della— Do you think you act differently when you are serving white tourists, as oppose to other tourists?

Della—Do you think you act differently?

Mary—No I don’t, because they are all tourists.

Della— What does whiteness mean to you?

Mary—I guess it mean being white.

Della— How does it make you feel when you are selling your products to them and they are try to bargain for the lowest price?

Mary—It makes me feel or come to realize that they don’t know the quality of my products and I just have to make it more known to them that what the product I sell is all about and and the quality and time that go into making and buying all this stuff. So I too need to make a profit, sometimes I have to compromise and let my products go for less, but that’s just how it is sometimes.

Della—How do you feel about tourism being our only money generating source in the Bahamas?

Mary—It saddens me because right now especially the tourism business in the
Bahamas is not good so that is sad that we only have the tourist business to rely on. I wish we had more here, especially for these young people just coming out of school. They have no where to go, but in the hotels serving drinks, or food, and right now it slow, and we practically only got one hotel, so they screwed. I just wish we had oil or something. (laughs).

Della— Would you want your daughter follow in your footsteps and work in the market?

Mary—Kind a difficult to answer that question, but I would say yes because it’s different things that she could do besides selling straw. She could sell t-shirts, you know there is different things you can do with the culture and with your hands, we make so much things right here in the Bahamas that she could get started here in the Straw Market and then expand and export her products to the other islands. So yes, only if she use it as a stepping stone to something bigger and better (laughs).

Dellla—Why?

Mary—yeah, because there’s different things you can do.

Della— If you had a choice, what would you rather be doing other than working out here?

Mary—I would be a fashion designer (laughs!!), that’s my dream, I like fashion, I ain’t give up on that yet either.

Della— How do you think the ministry of tourism market the Bahamas or sell the Bahamas to the rest of the world?

Mary—I think they market the Bahamas and sell the Bahamas to the rest of the world by letting the ministry of tourism tell the rest of the world about our culture, the music, the Bahamian food, like the fish the guava duff, the conch, and our beaches. I think they do a good job, that’s why the people keep coming back.
Della— What about the straw vendors, when they use pictures of the vendors, how do you think they use it?

Mary—All the postcards and pictures I see of us is all be good, the pictures does be pretty, and they always have some old woman dress up in androsian print, like that’s what we does where out here everyday. But on the same token, it is pretty and they have to use things that look good to attract the tourists right?

Della: Ok, um define … define Identity? What is Bahamian Identity? What do you mean when you say that you are a Bahamian?

Mary—Bahamian identity, well I think is when you have something to say is your own to identify our self with to say that it is uniquely Bahamian. Our straw work, our African print shirts, our dashiki shirts, all of this is Bahamian. Look around you, I think that the beach, the sun, the fruits, the pot cakes (local dogs), our music, and the way we dance to the Jukanoo, all of this is what makes us Bahamian, so Bahamian Identity and what it means to be Bahamian is wrapped up in all of these things.

Della— Has tourism had any effect on our identity?

Mary—Yes! The tourists enjoy coming to the Bahamas the friendliness of the people, and they can relax when they come here and themselves, they enjoy the beautiful water and in the sunset the food drinks. And they just like being here.

Della— Do you think that their presence on the island has had any effect on Bahamian people, our culture, our identity, who we are as a people?

Mary—Well yes, because we have to make changes to accommodate them, look at all the Burger kings, McDonalds, Dunkin’ Donuts, Subway, Kentucky Fried Chicken; we never use to have all
these things. The government had to introduce all of this to the island for the tourists, not us, you know Bahamians, we never use to eat out, but now it easy to just stop and get something quick to eat instead of cooking. And now we have so much fat children, you could say that is because of tourism, because we have to make them feel at home when they come here, so that is an effect on our culture.

Della—Would you say that girls bleaching their skin as anything to do with our tourist industry?

Mary—No I wouldn’t say, well I wouldn’t really call it bleaching, I just call it using a little cream so that you enhance your beauty and to make you feel better about yourself; cause sometime people might not like the way they look or something like that or you might just have a bad skin and you need something to clear your skin it up so you know I wouldn’t think that the tourist industry had anything to do with that. Women all over the world have been doing that for years; when your skin light and bright and clear, you feel better about yourself.

Della—What would you suggest to the Bahamas Government and Tourist Board in terms of changing tourism in the Bahamas?

Mary—I would  suggest that they have a culture school have a school where you can really learn about the Bahamian culture and you can learn about different things you can do and different things you can make with your hands and sell to the tourist that was made right here in the Bahamas when the tourist come so that they can experience the real Bahamian culture. And if they do this, so many of us would not have to just work in the hotels, we could be entrepreneurs and really profit from this tourists industry.
Shekeita Storr, Age 23

Della—How long have you been working in the tourist industry?

Shekeita—I been working out here for six year now, ever since I come out of high school dis is where I been working. It’s a job, and I got to work (laughing).

Della—Do you like your job?

Shekeita—Well what’s there to like? It’s a job and I got to do it, (pauses) ugh… well I guess sometimes it’s okay, some days when the sun cool and the tourists them spending money, they some good days.

Della—Okay, so what is the best part about working in the markets with the tourist?

Shekeita—Da best part, well like I say them days when da tourist spending money

Della—What is the worst part?

Shekeita—Da worst part is coming out here everyday rain or shine, and not making no money, I does work for Mrs. Jolly and sometimes, even when it thunder and lightning she wants ya to be out here working. Ask anyone of dese ladies, sometimes I does be da only one out here. And dat does get on my nerve, but dat’s when ya working for people.

Della—When you come out here every morning do you think that you will make money?

Shekeita—No, cause sometimes ya don’t make a dime, but Mrs. Jolly is pay me a hundred and fifty dollars a week. So she has to pay me even when I don’t make no money, but she trying to change that now, talking bout I only gone get pay when I make money cause she losing money. I tink she tink I does be stealing from her but I don’t, but let her put did new idea into place den she gone see some thieving going on.
Della—Okay changing the subject a bit, what do you think tourist sees when they look at you?

Shekeita—I don’t know, you know how dese people go, sometimes dey don’t even look at you, oder times dey staring like dey see something funny.

Della—How does their staring make you feel?

Shekeita—Sometimes it makes me feel bad, cause you don’t know what dey tinking.

Della—So what do you think they thinking?

Shekeita—Hard to say, but it ain’t nothing good.

Della—What do you mean?

Shekeita—I mean I done meet some very nice people who just come here to enjoy da island and da people. And then I done meet some who come here like dey looking at monkies, dem da set I don’t like, cause dey like dey don’t even want you to touch dem. But I don’t pay dem set no mind cause dey come wit dey issues.

Della—Okay let’s move on, would you say that you change who you are when you come out here working with the tourist? If yes, how so?

Shekeita—Chile, I only is change for dose ones who come wit dey stink attitudes (laughing), just how dey is treat me sometime I does treat dem, I ain’t dat kinda person I see a nice person, but people is make change.

Della—Do you change for the nice people?

Shekeita—No I don’t change I does just be myself, and be nice to them, remember I out here in dis heat to make money.
Della—Do you feel that they are better than you in any way because they can come here on vacation?

Shekeita—Hell No! I know most of our tourists richer dan me but dat don’t make dem better dan me. Sometimes dey does try to act like dat, but like I said before I don’t be studing dem set.

Della—How do they act like that?

Shekeita—You know how dey does look at you and sometimes dey don’t want even touch ya hand, but most of dem don’t act like dat, but ya got some dat truly do (laughing).

Della—As we all know most of our tourists are white people, what do you think about this, or no concerns at all?

Shekeita—dat don’t concern me cause da black set does sometimes treat just as bad or even worst. White or black it don’t matter to me, all tourists is da same.

Della—What does whiteness mean to you?

Shekeita—Whiteness ugh, dat’s when ya white right? Whiteness, blackness it all da same, just about color, if ya ask me people is put too much into color.

Della—But do you think that some form of privilege or being rich comes along being white?

Shekeita—Well maybe it does, cause when ya look at it white people have most of the money, and most of da people traveling on vacations is white, so I guess dey do have it better off dan black people sometimes. But dat don’t mean dat all of dem rich, cause plenty black people rich nowadays.

Della—Do you think you act differently when you are serving white tourists, as oppose to other tourist?
Shekeita—Like I say all a dem da same, dey just tourists. But to be honest I does sometimes pay more attention to a white customer than black one, cause white people usually spend more money day black people, especially black Americans, dey the cheapest of dem all. Always want something for nothing.

Della—How does it make you fell when you are selling your product to them and they try to bargain for the lowest price?

Shekeita—Oh dat does piss me off, dey don’t know da value of nothing and den want ya tings for a dollar. When I go to da states I can’t go ta Walmart and say can I have dis for dollar, yes dat’s da worst part of working out here; everybody always want someting for nothing.

Della—Okay I can see that you are very passionate about that subject, but switching gears here. How do you feel about tourism being our only money generating source in the Bahamas?

Shekeita—Well it ain’t no more cause look at the Container Port and other places like dat, but we still need more companies to come in here and set up shop, den maybe we can make dis place better for young people who don’t want to go into da tourist industry.

Della—Okay, so would you want your daughter to follow in your footsteps and work in the markets?

Shekeita—No! dis ain’t no place for you ta want ya child ta work.

Della—But you work here?

Shekeita—I ain’t gat no choice, I want more for my daughters.

Della—What do you mean you don’t have a choice?
Shekeita—I mean ugh… (pause) I don’t read so good, so I have to be out here, dat’s why I gon make sure my children get a good education so dat dey could do whatever dey want.

Della— So if you had a choice, what would you rather be doing other than working out here?

Shekeita—I would like to be an executive in a office, make big decisions, travel, eat in good restaurants, just be somebody my children can look up to.

Della— And you don’t think that they can look up to you working in the Straw Market?

Shekeita—No cause dey getting at da age where dey asking me for help in school and I can’t hardly help dem. And when dey come out here with me sometimes, I does see dem looking, especially my seven year old, she does look like I don’t never want work out here, I don’t know dat’s just how I feel.

Della—How do you think the ministry of tourism market the Bahamas or sell the Bahamas to the rest of the world?

Shekeita—Dey do a good job.

Della—What about, the images of us always serving tourists, or the images of them happy getting married and we serving them, or of women working in the market?

Shekeita—Dat’s what we does do right?

Della—But do you have any concerns that maybe people will think that is all we do, or how they portray straw vendors?

Shekeita—I don’t understand, dat’s what we does do, and da government have to use us to sell da island, so it makes sense to me.
Della—Define Identity? What is Bahamian Identity? What do you mean when you say that you are a Bahamian?

Shekeita—I guess Bahamian identity is our culture, da Straw Market, da beach, our food, das all I got, dat’s what make us Bahamian.

Della—Okay would you say that tourism had any affect Bahamian on identity?

Shekeita—No, I don’t tink so, we as a people need tourism to survive, and who we is as a people is what we got for da tourists that comes to the Bahamas. So I will say no, it ain’t had no affect on our culture and identity.

Della—Would you say that girls bleaching their skin have anything to do with our tourist industry?

Shekeita—Ugh …… (laughing), now I don’t know nutting bout dat, cause we been bleaching forever, my cousin done bleach her skin so bad, dat she ain’t got no more skin. She does have to go to the doctor so much now, I does be sorry for her, but dat’s what you get when ya wan be white (laughs loudly).

Della—So you don’t think that the presence of so ma ny white tourists on the island plays no role in women like your cousin ruining their skins to be white?

Shekeita—Chile, da tourist ain’t had nutting to do wit dat, from I know myself and odder black women in da Bahamas, ugh…. ya know dem set who was really black, dey always been bleaching dey skin, trying to get brighter. So ya can’t blame tourism for dat, ya gat to blame however say being white is better than being black.

Della—So who do you think came up with that idea?
Shekeita—I don't know, we as Bahamian always taught dat being bright is better dan being dark, I could remember my daddy calling my sister ugly because she was black (dark-skinned) and always telling me how pretty I was because I was red (light-skinned). So I guess dat’s where dat come from, not da tourists.

Della—What would you suggest to the Bahamas Government and Tourist Board in terms of changing tourism in the Bahamas?

Shekeita—Nuttin, cause I don’t know nuttin bout da tourism board, but one ting I will tell dem is ta make more stalls, so dat I can have my own and not have to work for Mrs. Jolly. I know it gon be hard at first trying to find da money to start someting of my own, and dat’s where I will need da help. Maybe ya could talk to someone for me when ya finish dis work, cause I tink you gon be somebody big. Just don’t forget da small people.

Della—I won’t.