

Stephen Cruikshank

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Modern Languages and
Cultural Studies, Faculty of Arts

Image created in Havana, Cuba

Havana's Shadows

Honourable Mention

The following image reveals the contradictions of Cuban society: the incredible architectural aesthetics, for example seen in the figure of the Havana Capital (el Capitolio) here and the deterioration and impoverishment of the capital city depicted in the dark garbage-ridden streets. Light and darkness; aestheticism and degradation; ramshackle buildings and radiant people — these are the dialectics of modern-day Cuba.

Such contradictions are also at play in the socio-economic conditions of Cuba. On one end exists a flourishing black market filled with the capitalist entrepreneurship of prostitution and illegal business while on the other exists a socialist system advocating for a past revolution's victory. My PhD research analyzes how the expressions of the black market — including the rise of sex-tourism — has been recently expressed in Cuban arts. Ever since this last trip in 2013, I have seen this photo as a great metaphor for my work on Cuban culture. It is a summary of the Cuban condition caught between the shadowy black markets of the streets and the luminescent optimism of the socialist government, between prostitutes and tourists, trashy streets and vibrant beaches, and the debris piled upon the ground and the baroque that reaches to the skies.