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# Negotiating and navigating colourism in Cuba and Ghana: Perspectives represented in the work of Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén and in Ghanaian TikTok and YouTube content

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# Negotiating and navigating colourism in Cuba and Ghana: Perspectives represented in the work of Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén and in Ghanaian TikTok and YouTube content

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**Abstract**
There is a strong body of literature on colourism—discrimination among people of colour on the basis of darkness or lightness of skin tone—as it has manifested, and continues to manifest, among Black communities in the Americas and Africa. The phenomenon, with its roots in colonialism, is sufficiently powerful to produce a wide range of social, cultural, and economic effects and a wide range of responses, including skin-bleaching practices that can have severe health consequences. This study explores the dynamics of colourism in two national contexts, Cuba and Ghana, which are highly distinct from each other and at the same time both strongly marked by the sociocultural legacies of colonialism, including the phenomenon of colourism. The study examines Cuban colourism as it is explored and combatted in the 1930s poetry of Cuban writer Nicolás Guillén, and Ghanaian colourism as it is both promoted and critiqued in contemporary TikTok and YouTube social-media content.

**Keywords**
mixed-race people, colourism, skin-whitening, bleaching, Cuba, Ghana, poetry, social media, Nicolás Guillén, TikTok, YouTube

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## 1. Introduction

According to Frierson (2019), the term "colourism" was originally introduced by American writer and activist Alice Walker, who was pointing to system of discrimination among people of colour based on skin tone. Walker (1983) wrote of "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color" (1983, p. 290). In the words of Hunter (2005, p. 68), colourism "is the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of colour over their dark-skinned counterparts".

The strongest tradition of scholarly engagement with colourism and its manifestations is in the US. American scholar Hunter (2007) highlights that colourism is directly related to racism in the US and around the world, wherein "African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other people of colour are routinely denied access to resources and fair competition for jobs and schooling" (2007, p. 237). Findings from various studies carried out in the US point to the fact that "lighter-skinned people of color enjoy substantial privileges that are still unattainable to their darker-skinned brothers and sisters" (Hunter, 2007, p. 237). These studies stress that light-skinned people may earn more money, be able to complete more years of education, live in well-planned and better neighbourhoods, and may marry higher-status people than darker-skinned people

of the same race or ethnicity (Arce et al., 1987; Espino & Franz, 2002; Hill, 2000; Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Hunter, 1998, 2005; Keith & Herring, 1991; Murguia & Telles, 1996; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007).

Arce et al. (1987) emphasise how the phenotypes of people of "*chicano*" background (people of Mexican descent in the US) affect their life choices whilst Espino and Franz (2002) highlight the impact of skin colour on occupational status. Keith and Herring (1991) underline skin tone and stratification in the Black community in the US. Cosbert et al. (2021, p. 3) explore the origins of colourism and suggest that "although the roots of these ideations originated during slavery, the concept of colourism continues to be relevant in many cultural aspects". Cosbert et al. (2021, p. 4) suggest that "companies such as Johnson and Johnson and Dove helped reinforce the sentiment that African Americans should feel dissatisfied with their skin color to encourage them to bleach their skin despite the negative effects to their health (eg. skin cancer)".

Colourism is, thus, a pervasive form of discrimination that privileges lighter-skinned people of colour over their darker-skinned counterparts. It is a global phenomenon, is deeply intertwined with broader systems of racism, and operates within existing racial hierarchies by reinforcing the idea that proximity to whiteness carries greater social, economic, and cultural value. Colourism thus perpetuates and sustains the same power structures established through racial discrimination. In this study, we examine how colourism manifests in national contexts beyond the US—Cuba and Ghana—and specifically in the work of 20th century Cuban poet and journalist Nicolás Guillén (1902–1989) and in contemporary content posted by Ghanaian social-media personalities on TikTok and YouTube.

## 2. Cuban and Ghanaian contexts

### *Cuba*

Spanish colonialism in Latin America, including Cuba, established rigid social hierarchies through modalities such as the caste system, which ranked individuals based on their racial ancestry and gave priority to those of Spanish (European) descent (Mörner, 1967). These structures, backed by military conquest and reinforced through political and economic control, institutionalised inequalities that linked power, wealth, and social status to whiteness. This situation in turn, laid the foundation for enduring forms of racial and skin-colour-based discrimination (Wade, 2010). Colourism in Latin America therefore stems from the social stratification that determines social power and influence. Traditionally, the social stratification pyramid had at its peak the "*criollos*" (people of full or predominant Spanish descent born in the Spanish-American colonies). The *criollos* were the highest symbols of authority and affluence since their white/light skin was associated with authority, affluence, modernity, and civility. The "*mulattos*" (people born from a union between a *criollo* parent and a non-*criollo* parent) were next highest in this classification. Then came the Indigenous people who occupied the land prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. The lowest group in the pyramid were the Black African slaves and the descendants of these slaves.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries in Latin American countries, including Cuba, there were pushes for increased *blanqueamiento* ("whitening"). Novieto (2020, p. 46) writes that: "towards the end of the 20th century, in response to a constant restiveness in many Whites about the possibility of free Blacks becoming a threat to society, Latin American countries developed an approach of gradually 'whitening' their populations through interbreeding"—encouraged through, inter alia, imposing restrictions on marriages between Black people. González-Sobrino and Hughey (2014, p. 172) describe this approach as "the ideological and material process and practice of whitening or distancing Latin Americans from blackness, in other words, of 'becoming white'". Guerra (2005, p. 34) frames whitening as "the process through which individuals and families had adopted the religious practices of Catholicism and the speech styles and cultural mores of the educated and wealthier classes in order to improve their social standing by becoming culturally more acceptable to white society and therefore racially whiter".

Historian and critic Swanger (2015, p. 58) explains that "to Cuba's white rulers, the association of their country with blackness was troubling and the arrogance of the Platt Amendment[1] was angering", and, in accordance with the adoption of the policy of blanqueamiento, they "sought to tip the racial balance in favour of whites

1 The Platt Amendment was a 1901 law that outlined the conditions for the withdrawal of US troops from Cuba after the Spanish-American War. It allowed the US to directly intervene in Cuban affairs and established a naval base at Guantanamo Bay, thus significantly limiting Cuba's sovereignty.

by offering land grants to attract white immigrants from Spain". The concept of blanqueamiento was rife in Cuba at the beginning of the 20th century. According to De la Torre (2003, p. 104):

> [...] Cuban racism manifested itself in two distinct forms during the early twentieth century. The most influential form was based on a theory of racial evolution that advocated the inferiority of Cubans who were not "pure" descendants of the evolved white Spaniards. The second, advocated by intellectuals like Martí and Ortiz, maintained that blacks had the potential of being equal to whites but were 'stuck' in an earlier stage of cultural development.

Meanwhile, the Cuban context has also been characterised, from the early 19th century onwards, by strong Afro-Cuban social movements linked to struggles against racial exclusion, political marginalisation, and the enduring legacies of slavery. During slavery, resistance emerged through *cabildos de nación*, ethnically organised mutual aid societies that preserved African religious, linguistic, and cultural practices (Howard, 1998). As early as 1812, *cabildos* also functioned as venues for anti-colonial resistance, alongside armed rebellions such as the Aponte Conspiracy (1812) and the La Escalera uprising (1843–44), both of which challenged the plantation order (Childs, 2006; Finch, 2015). Afro-Cuban activism intensified after the abolition of slavery in the country in 1886.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Black resistance coalesced in the Afrocubanismo movement, which challenged celebrating African cultural contributions and sought to redefine Cuban national identity. During this period, scholars such as Ortiz sought to reposition Blackness as the centre of Cuban culture (Brock & Castañeda Fuertes, 1998).

The theme of colourism was also present in the Cuban intellectual and cultural discourses of the 1900s, including in the work of the writer whose work we focus on in this study: the journalist and poet Nicolás Guillén. One of the notable intellectuals and leaders of the Black Negrista movement, Guillén was a *mulatto* who advocated for equal opportunities for both Black and white Cubans. Designated as the Cuban national poet, Guillén's writings included poems that advocated for Black people to be proud of their Blackness, including their physical features, and to work towards challenging social structures that devalued forms of Blackness.

***Ghana***

Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2018) trace colourism in Ghana back to the colonial era, during which the lighter-skinned *mulattos*—children of mixed European–African parentages—were "considered as white" by Africans "who witnessed the special education and privileges given to them by their European heritage" (2018, p. 105). This preferential treatment for *mulatto*s was also tied to their intermediary role in the colonial administration, where proximity to Europeans translated into greater access to education, employment, and spatial privilege along coastal enclaves such as Elmina, Cape Coast, and other Euro-African settlements where colonial administrative and commercial activities were concentrated. This dynamic reinforced a racialised social order in which whiteness—and approximation to it—became a marker of modernity and authority, thereby embedding colour-based hierarchies into Ghanaian society in ways that persisted beyond formal colonialism and continued to shape post-independence social relations (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2018). Buah (1998) explains that mixed-race children often became successful merchants and businessmen, because they had little difficulty dealing with British merchants due to their light-skinned appearance and privileged status.

In Ghana, as in many other parts of the world, lighter skin also became closely associated with beauty. One of the strongest manifestations of this reality, in Ghana and numerous other African countries, is the practice of skin-bleaching. In Ghana the practice has been traced back to the late 1940s, when women used bleaching-soap products such as Asepso and Neko (Adu-Gyamfi & Gyasi, 2017; Arthur, 2002; Dorkenoo, 1990). The soaps were gradually replaced by bleaching creams, which, by the end of the 20th century,

had turned skin-bleaching into a large and profitable sector (Adu-Gyamfi & Gyasi, 2017). In a study by Teddy (2002) in Greater Accra, many interviewees described bleaching as a "bad practice" (40%) and "not beautiful" (78%), with 86% refusing to encourage it. However, at the same time, 54% of interviewees viewed lighter skin as more attractive, and 82% believed that it is socially more valued (Teddy, 2002). Around 52% of the participants agreed that Ghanaian culture promotes this preference, especially among women.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has found that nearly 40% of Ghanaian people engage in skin-bleaching (WHO, 2023). The WHO has also reported on the adverse effects of skin-bleaching, identifying harmful consequences such as dermatitis, steroid acne, discolouration, changes in skin thickness, inflammatory disorders, and severe conditions like mercury poisoning, nephrotic syndrome, and exogenous ochronosis (WHO, 2023). In a study by La-Anyane et al. (2022), Ghanaian health professionals spoke of patients who engaged in skin-bleaching experiencing difficulties with the healing of wounds. Adetoogun et al. (2023) situate skin-bleaching in African countries within a global capitalist framework, emphasising the scale and profitability of the skinlightening industry. It is common to see light-skinned Ghanaian celebrities featured in advertisements for skin creams and other beauty products, reinforcing the notion that lighter skin equates to desirability and success. Such choices by advertisers, which are found at a global level, can "subtly contribute to discriminatory beauty standards that re-inscribe social inequalities" (Butkowski et al., 2024, p. 290).

## 3. Cuban colourism as explored and combatted in Guillén's poetry

In this section, we analyse the content of six Guillén works that address elements of colourism in Cuba.

### *Negro Bembón (Guillén, 1930)*

In the poem "Negro Bembón" ("Thick-lipped Black man"), the speaker, who is presumably an elderly lower-class Black Cuban who understands the politics of *blanqueamiento* and its negative effects on society, addresses a young Black man who is not happy with his physiognomic traits:

> *poqué te pone tan brabo,*
> *cuando te dicen negro bembón,*
> *si tiene la boca santa,*
> *negro bembón?*
>
> ("why do you get so angry
> when they call you thick-lipped Black man,
> if your mouth is a holy thing,
> thick-lipped Black man?")

The poem asserts that the Black boy should be content with his physical traits, as a harmonious unification of the physical and the spiritual. Rather than rejecting the term *bembón*, which is often used as an insult to mock fuller lips, the poem embraces it. Calling the mouth *santa* ("holy") redefines Blackness as a spiritual being that should not be devalued. The older speaker teaches the younger man that self-rejection serves the logic of *blanqueamiento*. Accepting one's African features is to refuse that logic. In this way, the poem transforms shame into resistance.

### *Mulata (Guillén, 1930)*

In the poem "Mulata" ("Mixed-race female"), a Black male speaker delivers a monologue in which he confronts a *mulata* who denigrates his African features while celebrating her own lighter complexion. The poem exposes colourism as an internalised colonial pathology linked to Black-on-Black racism, where proximity to whiteness is considered socially valuable. The *mulata*'s disdain for a dark-skinned appearance mirrors broader skin tone hierarchies in Cuban society, and by extension in contemporary societies such as Ghana, where skin bleaching reflects a similar form of internalised anti-Blackness. The Black speaker's confrontation with the *mulata* represents, as Arnedo-Gómez (2006, p. 70) suggests, a conscious affirmation of Black physiognomy and a rejection of the societal pressure to appear more European.

***Mi chiquita (Guillén, 1930)***
In the poem "Mi chiquita" ("My little girl"), a Black male speaker expresses his unconditional devotion to his dark-skinned partner. Through the speaker's emphatic declaration, "tan negra como e" ("as black as she is"), his partner's Blackness is positioned as the primary source of her desirability and worth, rather than a deficiency to be overcome. Using possessive language such as "mi" ("my") and "yo tengo" ("I have"), Guillén creates a narrative of Black pride, ownership, and dignity. As White (1993, p. 91) notes, these sentiments reflect broader affirmations of Black womanhood. The speaker's refusal to pursue social mobility by having a lighter-skinned partner highlights the Cuban colourism hierarchy.

***Mujer nueva (Guillén, 1931)***
In "Mujer nueva" ("New woman"), the Black woman is portrayed not as having been damaged by history, but, rather, as a sovereign force within it. Scholars have rightly described the poem as a manifesto of Black beauty (González, 2005; Luis, 1993; Smart, 1982). In a society where lighter-skinned women dominate Cuban visual culture, Guillén's depiction of the dark-skinned Black woman as the equator, the centre of the world, constitutes an act of aesthetic rebellion. He replaces a hierarchy of colour with a hierarchy of power and places the Black woman at its summit.

***Madrigal poems (Guillén, 1931)***
In the "Madrigal" poems published in 1931—"Tres madrigales negros" ("Three black madrigals"), "Madrigal" [first], and "Madrigal" [second]—dark skin is dignified and desired. These poems place Blackness within the domain of Cuban colonial aesthetics that was almost exclusively reserved for whiteness. By restoring Blackness and redefining it, Guillén challenges the belief that whiteness is aspirational and Blackness merely tolerable.

***La canción del bongó (Guillén, 1932)***
In "La canción del bongó" ("The bongo's song"), Guillén speaks through a drum that calls Cubans of every shade to dance. The drum is presented as a human who refuses to alter their Black identity. The drum does not imitate another instrument, and neither does it soften its timbre to be appreciated. The lines "*ya me darás la razón, / ya me golpearás el cuero, / ya bailarás a mi voz*" ("you will admit I'm right, / you will beat my drum, / you will dance to my voice") proclaim that anti-Blackness sentiments will not prevail. The drum's inclusive call—*"convoca al negro y al blanco, / que bailan el mismo hijo, / cueripardos y almiprietos"* ("summons the black and the white, / who dance the same dance, / brown-skinned and dark-skinned")—challenges the social divisions that marginalise people with darker skin. Guillén ultimately asserts that authenticity and cultural unity do not emerge from denying Blackness, but rather from embracing it as central and unifying—thus positioning colourism as both artificial and unjust.

**4. Ghanaian colourism as promoted and critiqued in TikTok and YouTube content**

In recent years, several social media personalities in Ghana have openly discussed colourism and its impact on their decisions. One example is Aba Dope, a TikTok star who shared her experiences in a YouTube interview with Delay, a well-known Ghanaian social media figure.[2] During the interview, Aba Dope touched on the discrimination that she faced in senior high school due to her dark skin, which motivated her to pursue skin-lightening. Another social media celebrity, socialite Queen Farcadi, shared her journey with skin-bleaching in a YouTube interview with Delay, touching on issues surrounding desirability, the male gaze, and the economic benefits of having a lighter skin. Thus, we can see that social media is a critical forum for Ghanaians' explorations of colourism.

In this section, we analyse the content of 19 examples of Ghanaian social media content—nine TikTok videos and 10 YouTube music videos—that engage with matters of colourism. It is important to note here that the videos were selected based on explicit references to skin colour and measurable levels of engagement, in terms of both views and comments. While the sample provides examples of trends, it does not claim to represent all Ghanaian TikTok and YouTube content linked to colourism.

2 Delay TV. (2023). https://youtu.be/XcwISDvU1HI?feature=shared

***TikTok videos***

The nine TikTok videos (cases) were selected through purposive sampling based on relevance, engagement, and explicit references to skin tone and beauty or status. Six of the cases (cases 1–6) perpetuate colourism and three of the cases (cases 7–9) challenge it.[3]

In case 1, a TikTok marketer explicitly promotes a bleaching product using phrases such as "Light your skin", "Tone your skin a little bit", and "If you seek to whiten your skin, go with this one". These are reinforced with aspirational messaging such as "People will see you and say wow" and "Wow you are looking good". Such statements directly construct lighter skin as a source of social admiration and desirability. User engagement with the video supports the normalisation of these ideals, with comments such as "Vry [sic] effective, am using the product", "Faster white all the way", and "Please recommend kids cream for me".

In case 2, an aesthetic clinic advertises a "Skin whitening Cocktail" administered via an IV drip and described as "a blend of skin whitening minerals, multivitamin and other elements beneficial for skin rejuvenation and wellness". Engagement with the video is dominated by users asking questions such as "How long will it last and how many sessions do I need and price". This case is critical because it shows how colourism is being branded as a health and wellness practice.

Case 3, another product promotion, includes the statement "*Wun p3 s3 wo beye korkor a*, Don't touch" ("If you do not want to become fair, do not use it"), and clearly positions the product as a tool for becoming lighter-skinned. Reactions to the post include "Wow beautiful", with users from Ghana, the UK, and the US expressing interest.

Case 4, also a product promotion, speaks of a "Brightening set for chocolate and caramel skin", and invites those who want a "brighter or lighter shade" to use the product. User responses such as "How long will I see results" indicate a positive response and demand for rapid transformation of skin colour.

In case 5, a promotion of "Whitening Molato soap" taps into the valorisation of "mulatto" ("mixed-race") people with lighter skin that we also saw above in the Cuban context.

In case 6, a dark-skinned male seller promotes whitening products with the statement "If you want to whiten up your skin in peace, guys get this lotion". This is an example of an individual who does not embody the light-skin aesthetic still participating in its commercialisation. One user comments as follows: "Please I'm fair but I want to be whitening a little bit can I try one". This user's desire to increase the lightness of their already-"fair" skin "a little bit" shows that there is no clear endpoint and perpetuates the idea of repeated product use.

Cases 7–9 provide examples of counter-narratives. Case 7 is a video emphasising the health risks of skin-lightening, with the creator warning against bleaching and receiving supportive comments such as "Avoid bleaching. Black is beautiful" and "Charlie, I like the way you are creating awareness". Yet resistance to this messaging is also evident, with one user stating that "people have been bleaching for so many years, and there is no scientific proof [that it is harmful]".

Case 8 is a video that uses humour to critique colourism, asking: "What crime at all did your black skin commit to warrant this punishment?"

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3 The nine TikTok cases are:
Case 1 – Queenscode gh (2025). https://www.tiktok.com/@queenscodegh/video/7581047638217280824
Case 2 – Plush_aesthetics_medspa (2024). https://www.tiktok.com/@plush_aesthetics_medspa/video/7430319607044443397
Case 3 – Queen Afia Kande Schwar (2026). https://www.tiktok.com/@queenschwar/video/7617095373600984341
Case 4 – Jennyposhbodysecrete (2025). https://www.tiktok.com/@jennyposhbodysecrete/video/7549974148722789688
Case 5 – Jannat_beauty_essentials (2026). https://www.tiktok.com/@jannat_beauty_essentials/video/7602363000875470101
Case 6 – Movement_cosmetics (2026). https://www.tiktok.com/@movement_cosmetics/video/7615034184674987277
Case 7 – Yeboah_4hl (2026). https://www.tiktok.com/@yeboah_4hl/video/7591127283910413580
Case 8 – The Saito Show (2025). https://www.tiktok.com/@thesaitoshow/video/7586936000123849996
Case 9 – Britneydolphine_ (2025). https://www.tiktok.com/@britneydolphine_/video/7557863381684866360

In case 9, the poster of the video explains that she used to bleach her skin but made a U-turn and decided to embrace her dark skin. She shares her transformation journey. Her video receives comments such as "You look amazing with that chocolatey skin", "The best decision girl", and "Welcome back sister". These responses indicate the presence of a supportive community that values natural skin tones. At the same time, however, another user says: "I want to stop too but thinking of what people will say [so] I will continue", demonstrating the power of social pressure in sustaining bleaching practices and colourism.

***YouTube music videos***

Music plays a vital role in the everyday life of Ghanaians, serving as a background for both joyous occasions—such as festivals, weddings, and parties—and sombre events like funerals. In this section, we analyse 10 Ghanaian YouTube music videos, all with strong online popularity, that demonstrate some of the dynamics of colourism.[4]

In case 1, the music video for Ambition's Akan-language song "Bibini Broni" (which, in this context, translates as "Black White Girl"), the musician is referring to his lover, who is fair-skinned.

The term *bibini broni* also appears in the lyrics in case 2, which features musician Samini's popular hit, "My Own". Samini sings as follows:

> *Eeh me bibini broni ee*
> ("Eeh my black white girl")
> Golden tree chocolate *ee*

The term can also be found in case 3, the song "Anadwo" by Sarkodie featuring King Promise. The lyrics include the following:

> *Ama me bibini broni, ofi me ho a, meyare (ah)*
> ("Ama, my black white girl, if you leave me I will fall sick")

Another Ghanaian expresssion extolling the virtues of light-skinned women is the Akan phrase "*mi tumtum broni*" ("my dark-skinned white/fair girl"). The term *tumtum broni* appears in case 4 (the song "Tumtum Broni" by Alpha Bankz featuring Fameye), and in case 5 ("Melanin" by Y Kerk).

Case 6 is a music video for the song "Plantain Chips" by R2Bees. The song's chorus is as follows:

> Last night I had a plantain chips
> *Mbaa kokoo* plantain chicks
> Plantain chips
> *Mbaa kokoo* plantain chicks
> Last night I had a plantain chips
> *Mbaa kokoo*
> Plantain chicks

The Akan-language term "*mbaa kokoo*" means "plantain women" and implicitly extols the desirability of light-skinned women (with their skin colour being compared to the golden colour of plantain).

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4 The 10 YouTube cases are:
Case 1 – Ambition Music Vevo (2021). https://youtu.be/tUMhJHrC06M?feature=shared
Case 2 – Samini (2017). https://youtu.be/C0jF8519TTQ?feature=shared
Case 3 – Sarkodie & King Promise (2019). https://youtu.be/wnLUgubom_M?feature=shared
Case 4 – Alpha Bankz ft. Fameye (2020). https://youtu.be/nosyupc62nI
Case 5 – Y Kerk (2026). https://youtu.be/7DwlIoYs3LM
Case 6 – R2Bees (2017). https://youtu.be/4fuTy94xb8g
Case 7 – Sidney, N (2007). https://youtu.be/amCfd61-9bE
Case 8 – R2Bees (2013). https://youtu.be/XEQYQQiEsVU
Case 9 – Shatta Wale (2016). https://youtu.be/If22MICiXWg
Case 10 – Wanlov the Kubolor (2008). https://youtu.be/PPeECums1UA

Case 7 is the music video for the song "Obaa kokoo" ("Light-skinned woman") by Nananom Sidney. The lyrics, in Akan, include the following:

> *Obaa korkor dier neho y3 fe*
> ("As for the light-skinned woman, she is very beautiful")

In contrast, cases 8 to 10 challenge colourism and its manifestations.

Case 8 is the video for the song "Slow Down" by R2Bees featuring Wizkid. The lyrics explicitly praise the natural skin of a Black woman and criticise the practice of bleaching:

> Black woman, skin smooth
> *Wey* she no bleach, she no burn up
> Make we take it back to the root

Similarly, case 9—the video for the song "Too Much Chemical" by Shatta Wale—critiques the widespread practice of skin-bleaching with the following lyrics:

> Every woman *ah* bleach *dem* skin with chemical cream
> Too much chemical
> Too much chemical
> What kind of world are we living in

Case 10—the song "My Skin" by Wanlov the Kubolor—provides a nuanced exploration of colourism through personal experience. As a biracial individual, Wanlov describes being labelled, in derogatory fashion, "mulatto" in Ghana, while simultaneously feeling excluded when in Romania for not being "white enough". His lyrics include the following:

> If I tell you what I go through for my life inside
> you no love to *dey* ("be") in my skin

In this song, we see that while being a light-skinned Black person may be desired by many, this desire does not extend as far as wanting to be of mixed-race. This song highlights the fact that colourism operates not as a binary, but as a complex spectrum affecting those who exist in and between categorisations.

**5. Conclusions**

Colourism is a societal issue that continues to manifest in diverse ways across Black communities around the world. Based on our examination of how colourism is represented (1) in the 20th century poetry of Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén, and (2) in contemporary Ghanaian TikTok and YouTube content, it is evident that this phenomenon is complex and deeply rooted in colonialism, slavery, and their aftermath.

Colourism's manifestations in both Cuba and Ghana are far-reaching, as they shape perceptions, in Black communities, of the very essence of identity, self-worth, and belonging. Guillén's poetry from the 1930s in Cuba critiques racial inequality by portraying the lived experiences of Black people while affirming Afro-Cuban identity through the use of vernacular language and rhythm. His poetry encourages Black pride and urges people to embrace their Blackness and not be drawn towards whiteness. Colourism in Ghana also reflects inherited hierarchies from the colonial era, when lighter skin was valorised. These two national contexts reveal a shared transatlantic history in which colonial values influence notions of identity, beauty standards, and social belonging long after the end of the colonial era.

Also seen in this study is the fact that social media platforms such of TikTok and YouTube are playing a dual role in the negotiation of colourism in Ghana. On the one hand, these platforms act as powerful amplifiers of colourist ideologies, via content often driven by commercial ventures seeking to promote and profit from a desire among some Black Ghanaians for lighter skin. Through marketing systems, influencer culture, and popular music, these platforms contribute to the normalisation and commercialisation of colourism. In this sense, colourism is not merely an individual preference but a collectively reinforced and economically driven system.

On the other hand, social media also provides spaces for resistance and counter-narratives, where messages celebrating dark and unbleached skin can challenge colourism's beauty standards. However, in the case of TikTok, these positive interventions are often overshadowed by, inter alia, commercial content promoting skin-bleaching products and procedures. In the TikTok content that we examined, the commercial content tended to have stronger audience engagement and endorsement than the non-commercial content.

Combatting the negative effects of colourism requires holistic and multidimensional approaches that critically evaluate (social) media representation and cultural practices that sustain colourism's constructs. Among other things, regulation is needed to combat commercial social media content that promotes skin-bleaching products and procedures that have proven detrimental health consequences.

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