



Book Review

From Cuba with Love: Sex and Money in the Twentieth Century. By Megan Daigle. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015. 276 pp. \$29.95 paper.

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Understanding and addressing sex work, or prostitution — defined as the exchange of sexual relations for money or material goods in most countries and cultures — has long been fraught with either paternalism or moral outrage. However, in recent decades, this view has been contested by feminists and sex workers themselves, who have a more sex-positive view of women’s liberation. In the 1990’s, the unexpected return of prostitution in the form of sex tourism to Cuba — or *jinetismo* — was one of the most publicized responses to the “Special Period in the Time of Peace,” the Cuban government’s term for its economic crisis. There were also other creative and much less publicized responses, which I witnessed firsthand in my travels since 1990 coleading U.S. women’s delegations to the island.

Jinetismo, known locally in Cuba as “jockeying,” by mostly young, heterosexual, *mulata* (mixed-race) and Afro-descendant Cuban women (and some men as either procurers/pimps or *jineteros*) reflects a range of short- and long-term sexual and/or relational responses with foreign tourists. In the midst of Cuba’s economic crisis, it helped young Cuban women feed their families and obtain the most basic goods to survive. For many of the mixed-race and Afro-descendant Cuban young women, the need to help support their families through the pursuit of relations with primarily white male tourists was intensified as the economic crisis deepened.

Daigle asserts that *jinetismo* “created a tourist-oriented sexual affective economy which is not purely based on *economic* transactions such as sex for money, but also deals in affect, love and solidarity” (5). That is, for Cuban young women, *jinetismo* can include a broad continuum of interactions

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with foreign men: direct exchange of sexual relations for goods and money, companionship that may or may not lead to marriage, and/or sexual assault and blackmail. For some women, practicing *jinetismo* added some economic security to their own austere lives; however for other women, *jinetismo* took the form of coercive and abusive relationships, stemming from either their *jinetos* or from the foreign tourists themselves.

Much of the attention around the politics and economics of sexuality in Cuba centers on the idea of a self-consciously progressive government seeking to forcefully intervene in the sex lives of the very citizens it claimed to have liberated more than 45 years ago — women, and especially Afro-descendant Cuban women. Based on extensive research and review of the literature, Daigle claims that “much has been written in the media and in academia about the ‘glaring ideological contradictions’ of resurgent prostitution under socialism” (10). Most debates about the return of prostitution in Cuba attempt to ascertain causes and apportion blame, but few foreground the lived experiences of the young Cubans who are actually involved with sexual affective economies of tourism. Virtually none of the accounts depict “the other side of the story” from the perspectives of those practicing *jinetismo*. This pioneering scholarship opens space for the voices of *jinetas* to define their own position in Cuban society. Daigle insists that “what’s at stake, then, is not how certain women come to be labeled as prostitutes or *jinetas*, or what that labeling does, but rather who is to blame for the rise in *jinetismo*. . . [H]ow are bodies are governed in Cuba? Or rather, why are these bodies — young, black and mixed-race women — governed differently and made available for state intervention?” (11).

In order to interview women who are practicing *jinetismo*, Daigle must navigate around or bypass Cuba’s complex regulations and some reluctance from academic and governmental institutions in order to learn directly from the lives and conditions of the 50 young Cuban women labeled (by others, themselves and/or the government) as *jinetas*. Daigle’s ethnographic reporting of the informants’ story-telling — by the very diverse group of individual women themselves and by some of the men involved as clients or procurers — helps readers understand how and why this type of sexual tourism is not easily categorized as sex work or prostitution. She listens to Cuban women tell about the range of personal and family motivations and the positive and negative impacts from government and community responses, including violence and intimidation generated by both private and state actors.

Over the past 15 years, the Cuban government has taken primarily an educational and rehabilitative approach to address and prevent *jineterismo*. Rather than examine systemic and structural reasons, the government has located its cause and growth in women's individual and moral limitations. The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), the National Center of Sex Education (CENESEX), and the National School of Social Work have mostly attempted to help women participate in the Cuban economy in order to support their families (67). However, the Cuban government's increasingly punitive approach to the return of prostitution in Cuba has focused solely on the "supply side," or limiting and punishing the behaviors of the women labeled *jineteras*, rather than addressing the growth of mostly white male tourists, or the "demand-side." Daigle claims that the kind of treatment by the police, media and the state has left young Cubans feeling like they are less than human — without rights, dignity, and integrity (212). She concludes that for some, the practice of *jineterismo* entails more than just an alternative source of income, but a fundamental indifference (to all or some) of the ideals of the socialist state (227). She also questions whether this behavior is a part of a larger movement by a number of young people who are defying Cuba's rapid and deep social and economic changes.

Set against the economic and political backdrop of the United States' 55-year trade embargo, dramatic efforts by the Cuban people and government to both survive the economic crisis and rapidly grow the Cuban economy by expanding tourism as the major focus of economic development created many unintended consequences — the growth of *jineterismo* being one of them. One of the most important of these efforts is preserving the social and economic equality gained in the Revolution. We can measure these advances in women's professional and nontraditional employment by the fact that the majority of Cuba's doctors, scientists, technicians, teachers, and attorneys are women.¹ Enshrined in the Cuban constitution are such legal rights as equal pay for equal work, one year paid family leave, and unrestricted access to reproductive health care and abortion rights. In addition, Cuban women currently make up 45% of Cuba's Parliament, one of the highest percentages in the world. However, many Cuban women's advocates and socialist feminists view the growth of *jineterismo* as a threat to the major advances gained by Cuban women in the last six decades.

From Cuba with Love offers important recommendations on how to transform *jineterismo*, starting with the recognition of its underlying

1. *Cuban Women in Figures* (Havana: Federation of Cuban Women, 2012).

structural causes resulting from widening economic inequality and increased racial and sexual discrimination in the expanding economic development of tourism. Conversations with Cuba's leading scholars and activists who have been on the frontlines in raising questions of and solutions to impacts of *jineterismo* and Cuban society could have amplified the analysis. Overall, Daigle's insightful and careful research provides an important addition to the fields of global and multicultural women's and gender studies and the politics of sexuality. Scholars of Cuban Studies in particular will benefit from her historic and contemporary analysis of the construction of race, class, gender, sexuality, and colonialism. Through use of Cuban imagery, this analysis deconstructs the traditional white and masculinist markers that categorize Cuba's national identity into periods of war and resistance. Perhaps most importantly, Daigle's research contributes to a deeper understanding of women and Cuba by privileging these rarely heard young Cuban women's voices and moving them, as powerfully stated by bell hooks, "from margin to center," where they belong.

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