

MEGAN DAIGLE. *From Cuba with Love: Sex and Money in the Twenty-First Century*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015, 276 pp.

From Cuba with Love: Sex and Money in the Twenty-First Century explores the numerous facets of the Cuban economy tied to sexual tourism. Although the mythical idea of Cuba as a land of sensuality, exoticism, and eroticism has existed since the colonial era, Megan Daigle argues that since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 the Caribbean island has experienced the birth of a new type of economy: what the author calls a “tourist-oriented sexual-affective economy [. . .] that is not purely *economic* but deals also in affect, love, and solidarity” (4-5; emphasis in original). This post-Soviet economy is personified in the *jinetera*, a female hustler who offers sexual favors to international tourists in exchange for hard currency, gifts, and, at times, love.

Through her analysis, Daigle points out the paradoxes of the Cuban economy as a whole, an economic system that openly rejects capitalism, but subsequently indulges in delighting foreign tourists by not only controlling but also promoting the consumption of brown Cuban bodies. In this way, the book is shaped by two central questions: “How are bodies governed in Cuba? Or rather, why are *these* bodies—mostly young black or mixed-race women—governed differently and made available for state intervention?” (12; emphasis in original). By taking her readers on an ethnographic and sociological tour of Cuba, Daigle explains how the perception of Cuban bodies has changed (or, paradoxically, remained the same) over the course of the last fifteen years, both from a Cuban and foreign perspective. Daigle ponders whether Cuban women fall within the realm of sensuality and bodily pleasure, whether they embody the strong, maternal figure proposed by the Revolution, or—a third, more modern option—have Cuban women perhaps created a new image for themselves?

The book is divided into five chapters and adorned with twenty illustrations—pictures taken by the author during her many trips to the island. The first chapter, “From Mulata to Jinetera: Prostitution as Image of Thought,” zooms in on the figures of the *mulata* and the *jinetera*, both imbued with an imposed sexuality, although associated with two distinct historical and social spheres. The *mulata*, a figure of the colonial period, symbolizes the illicit and passion-driven

relationship generally carried out between a white man and a black woman. Unlike the chaste and proper white woman who saw sex as a burdensome duty, it was believed that the *mulata* was “born of lust and made of lust” (31), thus rendering her body subject to objectification and consumption by the white man. The *jinetera*, on the other hand, pertaining to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, is a woman who willingly chooses to sell her body and/or affection to foreigners in exchange for money, gifts, or a chance to leave the country. In contrast to the prostitution characteristic of the Machado and Batista years (so common that Cuba was known as the “bordello of the Caribbean”), *jineterismo* arose as a strictly post-Soviet phenomenon, born during the darkest hours of Cuba’s Special Period. Although the Cuban government today does not condone *jineterismo* and punishes *jineteras* caught soliciting tourists, it also turns a blind eye to the thousands of foreign men (and women) who travel to Cuba in search of sex. Therein lies the paradox of Cuba’s sexual economy: it punishes the supply, rather than eradicating the demand.

The second chapter, “Love, Sex, Money, and Meaning: Interrogating Jineterismo on the Ground,” analyzes the 21st-century practice of *jineterismo* through four interviews with Cubans involved in and/or with said practice. The author shows that while the Cuban state has created a stereotypical image of how the *jinetera* should look and act and from what social class should she come, in fact, there is no clear demographic that encompasses all of the women (and men) who might partake in such activities. As Daigle writes, “There is no essential category of individuals with any demonstrable similarities or common characteristics that explain their behavior and their ideological impertinence” (85). The author, however, also points out that, in addition to racial, economic, and social background, gender is another determining factor in whether or not an individual might be labeled or targeted as a *jinetera*. Gender, in fact, plays an important role in state scrutiny and bodily control, as it is believed that only poor, dark-skinned, uneducated women from the countryside could be involved in *jineterismo*. Men, by contrast, are not as controlled, and consequently use their sexuality to attract foreign women, further reinforcing the established *machista* culture. While those women who accept money and gifts or engage in sexual activities are seen as deviant for failing to embody the quintessential obedient and sexually repressed woman, heterosexual men who express their sexuality (whether with a Cuban

woman or with a female tourist) are perceived as acting the way men should act by embracing their masculine desire to the fullest. The juxtaposition that Daigle creates throughout the chapter underscores the great disparities that still exist in Cuba by showing how the state controls individuals based on skin color, gender, career path, ways of dressing, social status, and economic standing. Daigle also demonstrates, however, that by choosing to become *jineteras* young Cuban women are breaking away from traditional societal expectations and carving out a space in which socialist values and economic well-being are not mutually exclusive.

Chapter 3, “Lessons in Subterfuge: Everyday Acts of Repression and Resistance,” denounces the psychological and physical violence that *jineteras* (or those perceived as *jineteras*) suffer on a daily basis, not only from the police, but also from *chulos*, a specific type of pimp. Although prostitution is legal in Cuba, Article 72 of the Penal Code allows retaliation and even imprisonment for those found in a “dangerous state” or conducting themselves in a way that contradicts socialist morals. The vagueness of Article 72 gives free power to the police to choose who should or should not be arrested and punished for such (perceived) violations. Women who appear to be *jineteras* for the way they dress, their skin color, their (supposed) social background, or for simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time, are the victims of *operativos*, or mass arrests, and are often sent to reformation camps (which, according to Daigle’s sources, are essentially prisons). In other cases, police use their power in order to gain personal advantages (monetary or sexual) from young women unable to fight back because of their vulnerable position and subaltern status within Cuban society. Finally, Daigle mentions the figure of the *chulo*, a pimp who maintains a romantic relationship with the *jinetera* whose services he offers to tourists. Similar to police officers, *chulos* use physical strength and psychological intimidation to coerce their partners into offering affection and sex to foreigners. Racism, sexism, and structural vulnerability ultimately serve to enable violence against the sexualized bodies of women of color, allowing policemen and *chulos* to abuse their society-granted patriarchal power for their own personal gain.

In Chapter 4, “There Is Only One Revolution: State Institutions and the Moral Revolution,” Daigle studies the presence and perceived problem of *jineteras* from the point of view of state institutions,

particularly, the Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual (CENESEX) and the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC). Although *jineterismo* did in fact arise as an unequivocal consequence of the economic crisis during Cuba's Special Period, official government organs fail to see the connection and instead attribute the existence of *jineteras* to a lack of socialist revolutionary values and morals among these "fallen women." No woman in Cuba today, according to the higher-ranking members of the CENESEX and FMC, is forced out of economic need to sell her body and affections to tourists, rather, *jineteras* choose this immoral path in search of capitalist first-world goods and hard currency. As Daigle points out, "the image of the *jinetera* as a woman who (supposedly) rejects long-term relationships and pursues sex actively and licentiously for pleasure or for material gain, exists outside this [revolutionary] framework" (158), and must, therefore, be saved, reformed, and reintegrated into society as an active member who contributes, through work, to the greater revolutionary good. The government and the official institutions that focus on gender ultimately view women as "gatekeepers of sexuality and social morality" (180) who must reject sex as a form of monetary gain, just like the Cuban socialist state must reject capitalism. Given Cuba's particular brand of tourism, however, which focuses precisely on the advertisement and consumption of young mixed-raced (female) bodies, the eradication of female prostitution proves to be a far more burdensome task than the government is willing to acknowledge.

The fifth and final chapter, "Conduct Unbecoming: Bodily Resistance and the Ethics of the Self," discusses the importance of the Cuban body, for it is through and with the body, Daigle argues, that young Cubans today express their dissent towards a controlling government. Speaking of *jineteras*, the author states that by "[u]sing sex, sexuality, affect, and even love as tools of resistance, *jineteras* engage in a kind of aesthetic self-creation, which pointedly challenges the operations of power and subject formation in Cuba" (181). Because the Cuban body (in particular, the Cuban black or mixed-race female body) occupies a paradoxical role in Cuban society, the island's government must act upon its paternal role in order to control the sexualities of young women to better match the larger revolutionary goal. In contrast to the pre-revolutionary woman, imagined and depicted as sexually available to foreign visitors, the post-revolutionary woman must comply with the Revolution's conception of morality, distancing

herself from capitalism and material goods in order to embrace her role as a wife, mother, and worker. Modern women, however, no longer wish to be anchored to the hearth or to a low-paying occupation, and consequently, use their mythicized bodies and sensuality in order to fulfill their desires. According to Daigle, it is this freedom of choice (despite the possibility of severe repercussions) that makes the dissident stance of today's Cuban youth so powerful, for it breaks away from the discipline and regulation that the higher revolutionary power would like to instill in its citizens.

In *From Cuba with Love*, Daigle offers a fresh perspective on sex work and sex tourism in modern-day Cuba by focusing specifically on the quasi-mythical figure of the *jinetera*. By proposing that the raced, gendered, objectified body of the young Cuban woman (and man) is used as a form of political dissidence and resistance, Daigle rejects the stereotypes and clichés perpetuated by the Cuban government, and also by foreign tourists, offering a new perspective on the post-Soviet form of hustling that is *jineterismo*. The centrality of the text's ethnographic and sociological components within the book is what makes *From Cuba with Love* visceral and compelling, as well as an important cornerstone in the understanding of the sexual-affective economy of contemporary Cuba.

Jennifer L. Monti
University of California, Los Angeles

