

Feminists, Queers and Critics: Debating the Cuban Sex Trade*

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Abstract. Cuban scholars and women's advocates have criticised the widespread emergence of sex tourism in post-Soviet Cuba and attributed prostitution to a crisis in socialist values. In response, feminist scholars in the United States and Europe have argued that Cuban analysts promote government agendas and demonise sex workers. Drawing on nineteen months of field research in Havana, I challenge this conclusion to demonstrate how queer Cubans condemn sex tourism while denouncing an unconditional allegiance to Cuban nationalism. By introducing gay Cuban critiques into the debate, I highlight the interventionist undertones of feminist scholarship on the Cuban sex trade.

Keywords: tourist sex trade, feminism, homosexuality

Introduction

On a warm October evening in Havana, I sat with Fredi, a gay 27-year-old medical student from Cienfuegos, and we watched as *pingueros*, *jineteras*, gays and tourists crowded the Malecón.¹ Next to us, a group circled around the resident guitarist as he improvised English lyrics to the Eagles' *Hotel California*. An 18-year-old *pinguero*, wearing a threadbare pullover that read 'Thank God It's Friday' and holding the arm of a middle-aged Canadian

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¹ '*Pinguero*' is the Cuban term for a male sex worker. See Derrick Hodge, 'Colonization of the Cuban Body: The Growth of Male Sex Work in Havana', *NACLA Report on the Americas* 34, no. 5, 2001, pp. 20–8; and Jafari Sinclair Allen, 'Means of Desire's Production: Male Sex Labor in Cuba,' *Identities*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 183–202. '*Jinetera*' literally means jockey, but is commonly used to refer to Cuban women in the sex trade. I use the term 'gay' to describe Cubans who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual and *travesti*, or transgender women. I understand that some sex workers identify as gay, but am interested in how many queer Cubans make distinctions between the two groups. The Malecón is the sea wall along Havana. The names of all Cuban interviewees have been changed.

tourist sauntered through the crowd. Fredi shook his head and took a sip out of a bottle of Mulata rum. 'Before there wasn't the same competitiveness', he said watching the parade of young men. 'If you liked someone you went with them. Now, everyone is trying to get something out of each other. They compete for the attention of the tourists. The whole attitude used to be more free.' Fredi felt that the government restrictions on gay enclaves had loosened since the 1990s, but thought that the influx of consumer culture had stymied many of the benefits of increasing tolerance toward gays. He explained, 'You know, in the past things were much more restricted but it didn't matter what clothes you wore or how much money you had. Everyone was just out to have a good time.'

Fredi's suggestion that gay social worlds were changing to reflect materialistic value systems was a common sentiment in Havana. Yet criticisms of the Cuban sex trade articulated by gays in Havana are largely absent from the scholarly debates regarding sex work in post-Soviet Cuba.² More importantly, recent queer perspectives challenge a trend in the discourse on Cuban sex tourism that equates criticism of *jineterismo* with a blind allegiance to the Cuban state. In this article, I explore how the current feminist discourse on Cuban sex tourism forecloses the possibility that Cubans connected to the sex trade, such as participants in Havana's same-sex enclaves, may articulate legitimate critiques of *jineterismo*. Many gay Cubans had close interpersonal ties with *jineteras* and *pingueros* who frequented same-sex enclaves in Havana, they witnessed the rise of the sex trade, and often discussed its effects on queer communities. As gay Cubans scrambled to find jobs in a rapidly changing economy, many worked long hours with little pay and faced limited options for upward mobility, despite their talents or educational achievements. Fueled by this frustration, many gays distinguished between hard-working members of same-sex enclaves and sex workers who they described as 'young people who did not want to work'.³

The return of sex tourism to Cuba in the early 1990s has been a highly controversial aspect of the nation's transition to late-socialism.⁴ As the sex

² For an important exception see Gisela Fosado's PhD dissertation, 'The Exchange of Sex for Money in Contemporary Cuba: Masculinity, Ambiguity and Love' (University of Michigan, 2004).

³ For an interesting commentary on this trend see Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, 'De un pájaro las dos alas': Travel Notes of a Queer Puerto Rican in Havana'. *GLQ* 8: 1–2 (2002), pp. 7–33.

⁴ I use the term 'late-socialist' to describe the period in Cuba following the dissolution of the Socialist Bloc during which the Cuban government instituted economic and social reforms to maintain socialist programs in the face of crisis. I do not use 'post-socialist' because the government had not adopted a mixed economy or accepted neo-liberal reform.

trade came to symbolise the poverty and social contradictions that plagued post-Soviet Cuba, analysts turned to studies of *jineterismo* in Havana as a way to understand the crisis of the Special Period. Cuban scholars and women's rights advocates, charged with the task of explaining the reemergence of sex tourism, have suggested that *jineterismo* reflects a crisis in values, that sex workers are seduced by superficial desires for commodity goods, and they have supported mandatory rehabilitation for *jineteras*.⁵ In response, some analysts in the United States and Europe have characterised Cuban critics of *jineterismo* as unsympathetic to the plight of Cuban sex workers and the realities of poverty they face.⁶ More pointedly, a number of foreign analysts have described Cuban women's advocates as stuck in a 'Victorian past' by promoting repressive racist and elitist ideologies,⁷ defenders of the status quo who falsely claim to champion women's rights,⁸ and towing the same party line as right wing Western politicians.⁹ My examination of these representations of Cuban women's advocates builds on an assumption that we, as feminist scholars, have a responsibility to acknowledge how different frameworks for gender and equality make sense when placed in the social and historical contexts within which they emerge.

My analysis of studies on the Cuban sex trade extends the work of Amalia Cabezas in which she examines how the academic discourse on Cuban sex tourism has constructed *jineteras*, most often working-class women of color, as amoral, vain, greedy and immature.¹⁰ I shift the focus, however, to question how analysts' defenses of Cuban *jineteras* have inadvertently demonised Cuban critics of the sex trade, most notably queer and feminist Cubans.

⁵ See for example, Rosa Miriam Elizalde, *Flores Desechables: Prostitución En Cuba?* (La Habana, 1996) and Celia Sarduy Sánchez and Ada Alfonso Rodríguez, *Género: Salud y Cotidianidad* (La Habana, 2000).

⁶ See for example, Jan Strout, 'Women, the Politics of Sexuality and Cuba's Economic Crisis' *Cuba Update*. New York: 30 June 1995. vol. XVI, pp. 2–3; p. 15; Coco Fusco, 'Hustling for Dollars: *Jineterismo* in Cuba', in Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema (eds.), *Global Sex Workers: Rights Resistance, and Redefinition* (New York and London, 1998), p. 162. Teresa Marrero 'Scripting Sexual Tourism: Fusco and Bustamante's *STUFF*, Prostitution and Cuba's Special Period', *Theatre Journal*, vol. 55 (2003), pp. 235–50.

⁷ Hülya Demirdirek and Judy Whitehead, 'Sexual Encounters, migration, and desire in post-socialist context(s)', *Focaal – European Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 43 (2004), p. 7.

⁸ Silje Lundgren, 'You're a useless person: The understanding of prostitution within a Cuban context of gender equality and machismo-leninismo', *Uppsala* (2003), p. 59.

⁹ Julia O'Connell Davidson and Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor, 'Child Prostitution and Sex Tourism in Cuba', *ECPAT International* (1996), p. 10.

¹⁰ Amalia Lucia Cabezas, 'Discourses of Prostitution: The Case of Cuba', in Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema (eds.), *Global Sex Workers: Rights Resistance, and Redefinition* (New York and London, 1998), pp. 79–86. Also see the forthcoming work of Karina L. Céspedes on this issue.

Although I agree that official perspectives toward *jineterismo* in Cuba have at times perpetuated gender inequities, I contend that many depictions of Cuban women's advocates present an unbalanced portrait of women's organising in Cuba. Most notably, some European and US analysts fail to acknowledge the successes of mass women's mobilisation on the island. Cuban women's advocates have secured a number of advances that feminists in the United States are still working toward such as subsidised child care, paid maternity leave, an equal rights amendment, universal access to higher education and health care, the de-stigmatisation of women in the military, and free access to reproductive technologies, including abortion.¹¹ In addition, my examination counteracts a tendency in Cuban studies that reduces Cuban reality to the government or a ruling elite on the one hand and a passive multitude on the other.¹² Although queer critics of the sex trade share many of the same concerns as Cuban women's advocates, such as the rise of materialism and shifting social values, they tend to challenge members of the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (FMC) who argue that *jineterismo* poses a nationalist threat to Cuban socialism, while also calling into question the US and European interventionist perspectives that imply that Cubans have mismanaged the return of sex tourism.¹³

My findings are based on nineteen months of ethnographic field research in Havana's same-sex enclaves, beginning in the summer of 2001, with repeated trips including the entire year from 2003 to 2004 and, most recently, three months during the spring of 2007. Most of the time I lived in the working class district of Central Havana, but have spent months in the middle class area of Vedado and the upper class neighborhood of Miramar. I owe my understanding of *jineterismo* to the patience and generosity of the

¹¹ The Federation of Cuban Women is the state-sponsored organisation established in August 1960 to foster women's participation in revolutionary goals. Sheryl Lutjens, 'Reading Between the Lines: Women, the State, and Rectification in Cuba', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1995), p. 103 describes how the FMC recruited women into mass mobilization campaigns, including defense training, and helped to shape efforts to reform class, racial, and geographic hierarchies. Policies for working women included the creation of day care centers, a new maternity law, and the founding of a 'Feminine Front' within the national union structure in 1969. Vilma Espín, *Cuban Women Confront the Future* (Australia, 1991), p. 11 recounts how during the 1970s, leaders of the FMC saw to it that a Family Code was passed that demanded shared obligation between men and women in the arenas of parenthood and domestic duties and special arrangements were made to help relieve the 'double shift' of working women, such as 'Plan Jaba' which distributed of a bag of groceries and household goods at the workplace to save women time.

¹² Rafael Hernández, 'Looking at Cuba: Notes toward a Discussion' (trans. Dick Cluster), *Boundary 2*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2002).

¹³ It is important to note that the FMC has not historically referred to itself as a 'feminist' organisation, but rather a 'women's' organisation. Many Cubans, however, including scholars and journalists publishing on *jineterismo*, do define themselves as feminists.

many *jineteras*, *pingueros*, scholars, tourists and gay Cubans who took the time to answer my questions and to incorporate me into their social networks.¹⁴

Rehabilitation versus Repression

One of the most contentious topics in the scholarship on the Cuban sex trade has been the criminalisation of post-Soviet prostitution in Cuba. FMC leaders have supported government-sponsored crackdowns on sexual commerce around the tourist industry as a way to prevent the growth of prostitution. In 1994, Vilma Espín, the founder and former president of the FMC, spearheaded a commission charged with finding solutions to quell the spread of prostitution. Speaking at a trade union congress in 1996, Espín celebrated the elimination of prostitution in Cuba as one of the most 'beautiful victories of the revolution' and lamented the return of sex work:

Women who got the opportunity to work thanks to the fact that there were schools and day-care centers for children remember this as one of the most beautiful victories of the revolution. Now all this returns with tourism.¹⁵

By 1998, the Ministry of the Interior had started '*Operativo Lacra*' (Operation Vice), a special police force dedicated to eliminating prostitution around the tourist trade. As a result, many of the major nightclubs that had become popular settings for sex workers to find clients were closed. Police intensified the arrests of sex workers and opened special rehabilitation centers for *jineteras*. The government continued to tighten restrictions on the sex trade, and in 2003 President Castro signed a decree that ordered the confiscation of all properties used for prostitution and the making of pornography, as well as illegal discotheques and underground video stores.¹⁶

Feminist scholars writing in the United States and Europe have criticised the FMC's participation in government efforts to 'rehabilitate' sex workers, arguing that the criminalisation of prostitution further marginalises poor and Afro-Cuban women.¹⁷ In their critiques of the FMC, many analysts have offered contradictory readings of the Cuban government's reaction to the sex

¹⁴ My research did not address child prostitution, pedophilia or underage teen prostitution. Although I interviewed *jineteras* and *pingueros* who had started work in the sex trade when they were in their late-teens, at the time of the interviews all were 18 years old or above.

¹⁵ Lundgren, 'You're a useless person', p. 59. ¹⁶ *Reuters*, 27 January 2003.

¹⁷ Demirdirek and Whitehead 'Sexual Encounters' p. 7; Fosado 'The Exchange of Sex for Money' p. 23; Sujatha Fernandes, 'Transnationalism and Feminist Activism in Cuba: The Case of Magín', *The Women and Politics Research Section of the American Political Science Association* (2005). Cultural critic and exceptional performance artist Coco Fusco maintained that the Cuban government's 'clean-up campaigns' were not sincere attempts to remedy the rise of the sex trade, but rather reflected the fact that *jineteros* threatened the state's control over the economy because they did not pay taxes. Fusco, 'Hustling for Dollars' p. 162.

trade, claiming that the Cuban state is promoting sex tourism and, at the same time, unfairly cracking down on *jineteras*. US-based feminist geographer Cynthia Pope astutely highlights how *jineterismo* is distinct from pre-revolutionary prostitution and points out how commercial sex work has profoundly influenced contemporary systems of class, race and gender in Cuba.¹⁸ In her analysis, however, Pope criticises the Cuban government for actively promoting 'the nation's women as a natural "asset" to attract international tourism.'¹⁹ Paraphrasing a secondary source, Pope claims that Fidel Castro 'defended prostitution' and quotes the former president as saying that the sex trade was acceptable 'provided it satisfied the needs of tourists.'²⁰ But Castro's 1992 speech, from which Pope borrows the quote, actually reads: 'There are prostitutes, but prostitution is not allowed in our country. There are no women forced to sell themselves to a man, to a foreigner, to a tourist.'²¹ She then denounces Fidel Castro for calling on 'Special Troops to crack down on prostitution' arguing that, '*Jineteras* went from officially being the pride of Cuba to unwelcome deviants.'²² Pope attacks Cuban leaders for encouraging the sex trade to attract hard currency, and, simultaneously, criticises them for orchestrating campaigns to suppress prostitution.

The successful social policies of the Cuban government and the FMC are also presented as ultimately detrimental to Cuban women. According to Pope, the FMC has advocated for laws that guarantee free birth control and abortion, the right to divorce, pay equity and access to education, but she suggests that the 'higher social standing of women' has *increased* the likelihood that women will become sexual commodities.²³ Pope contends that advances for Cubans allow sex tourists to feel that they are dealing with empowered women, thereby 'assuaging their guilt about taking advantage of another person's hardship.'²⁴ She summarises her argument: 'The State provides strong health care and social programs that instead of deflecting sex tourists, can actually attract them to the island with the promise of physical and medical safety.'²⁵

Many Cubans support the criminalisation of *jineterismo* because they have experienced success with eradication programmes in the past. In 1961, the government began a systematic rehabilitation programme through which prostitutes attended schools and received pensions to support their

¹⁸ Cynthia Pope, 'The Political Economy of Desire: Geographies of Female Sex Work in Havana, Cuba', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2 (June 2005), p. 101.

¹⁹ Pope, 'The Political Economy of Desire,' p. 101.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ British Broadcasting Corporation (1992). I present and analyse the speech in greater detail later in this paper.

²² Pope, 'The Political Economy of Desire,' p. 101.

²³ Pope, 'The Political Economy of Desire,' p. 110.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

dependents while they received employment training.²⁶ Through these programs, female sex workers were encouraged to publicly denounce prostitution and the capitalist system that had made them victims of exploitation. Pilar, a participant in the government's programme, made the transition into legal employment at a state-run factory. She explained that initially her co-workers saw prostitutes as 'whores, rehabilitated or not' and refused to fraternise with her, but her boss intervened. Pilar recounted, 'The director told them how lucky they were that they'd never had to become prostitutes, and she said they should admire us for wanting to find a better life. The women were very moved and most of them cried. After that we had no more trouble.'²⁷ More than an occupational training programme, the reform movement encouraged citizens to reconsider their moral assumptions about prostitutes and shift their judgment from individuals to the capitalist system that commodified women's bodies.

The image of Cuba as the 'whorehouse of the Caribbean' and the implicit connotation that foreign men could penetrate Cuban women served as an allegory for the economic exploitation in pre-revolutionary Cuba. In 1964, Cuba's nascent state-run film industry released *Soy Cuba (I Am Cuba)*, a feature-length Cuban and Soviet co-production written by Enrique Pineda Barnet and Yevgeni Yevtushenko that narrated the lives of four Cubans whose dilemmas had been resolved by the revolution. In the first vignette, Betty, a young *mulata* prostitute, invites an older US businessman to her dilapidated shack to have sex; the middle-aged tourist berates her and steals her crucifix. In the morning, Betty's boyfriend, an earnest fruit peddler, walks into the shack and discovers that his young fiancée is a prostitute. The film suggested that the elimination of the sex trade would exorcise the remnants of capitalism still lurking on the island.

The rehabilitation programmes also reflected socialist feminist frameworks, which posited that integration into the state-run labour force was a viable way to ensure gender, racial and class equality. The FMC challenged the traditional belief that the ideal place for women was in the home, and members went door-to-door recruiting women for the workforce, civic duty and military service. As women joined the labour force, the traditional gender systems within the nuclear family came into a period of crisis that leaders sought to address through cinema. Cuban filmmakers reinforced women's emerging independence from their husbands, fathers and brothers in state-sponsored films such as *Lucía* (1968), *De Cierta Manera* (1974) and *Retrato de Teresa* (1979) that dealt with the conflicts that women's new public responsibilities presented. The films portrayed women as important agents of

²⁶ Oscar Lewis, Ruth Lewis and Susan Rigdon. *Four Women: Living the Revolution: An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba* (Illinois, 1977) p. xvii.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

Cuban history and society, and chronicled the personal struggles of their male counterparts as they maintained masculine identities within rapidly shifting social roles.

Efforts to integrate women into the labour force were successful in eliminating the majority of prostitution in Cuba, a goal that feminists in numerous countries have aspired to but never achieved. Yet as female prostitutes became the focus of reform efforts, their individual actions became fodder for national debates, and their sexual practices increasingly came under public scrutiny. The links between nationalism and women's advocacy and, in particular, the use of the female body as a bearer of national purity, placed an uneven burden on female citizens. By establishing the elimination of prostitution as one of the crowning achievements of the Cuban Revolution, state leaders invited international scrutiny of the island's sex trade and enabled critiques that socialism had failed once prostitution returned in the 1990s. Furthermore, reforms aimed at building equality within the nuclear family and addressing male sexism against women stopped short of questioning naturalised gender roles and addressing issues such as homophobia. Rather than organising sex workers into unions and legitimating the labour aspect of the sex trade, Cuban women's advocates adopted an abolitionist view that continued to inform understandings of *jinetismo* in post-Soviet Cuba.

In her insightful comparative analysis of Cuban and Dominican female sex workers, Amalia Cabezas argues that the Cuban government's current rehabilitation camps for *jinetas* represent a flagrant violation of human rights. She contends that the FMC, by supporting the criminalisation of sex work, has 'blamed prostitution on women rather than the tourist industry.'²⁸ Cabezas complicates categories of 'sex tourism' to show how romance, financial support and sex are often fluidly intertwined. Maintaining that the FMC supported gender inequities in police crackdowns on male and female sex workers, Cabezas writes 'While male sex workers are perceived as national heroes, their female counterparts are considered deviants and a detriment to society.'²⁹ Although Cabezas accurately portrays the harassment and dangers that *jinetas* face, her analysis overestimates the extent to which *pingueros* are immune to scrutiny and criticism.³⁰ Far from interpreting *pinguismo* as national heroism, I found that Cubans and state agencies alike were critical of both female and male sex workers. Like *jinetas*, male sex

²⁸ Amalia Cabezas, 'Between Love and Money: Sex, Tourism, and Citizenship in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. *Signs*. Chicago: Summer 2004, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 987–1016; p. 1005.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ At the time Cabezas published her analysis there was limited scholarly work on this topic, and Cabezas based her understanding of *pinguismo* largely on the work of Hodge, 'Colonization of the Cuban Body'.

workers faced police detention, received 'warning letters' and paid fines when they failed to present an identification card with a Havana-based address.

As an alternative solution to mandatory rehabilitation, Amalia Cabezas suggests building a sexual rights movement that includes female sex workers as 'sexual dissidents',³¹ thereby extending human rights advocacy for sexual minorities to *jineteras*. Cabezas astutely observes that Cuban homosexuals and sex workers have been victims of state campaigns to 'rehabilitate delinquents', and therefore they share a common group interest. I agree that human rights frameworks should be applied to the struggles of sex workers, but contend that positioning sex workers as 'sexual dissidents' risks erasing the actual struggles of queer communities in Cuba. Gay Cubans often articulate stark distinctions between homosexuals as hard working, law-abiding citizens who participate in underground same-sex enclaves and sex workers, many of whom identify as heterosexual, who exploit these enclaves for personal financial gain. As gay Cubans critique *jineterismo*, their positions are often complicated by their participation in transactional sexual relationships with *pingueros* and long-term friendships with both *jineteras* and *pingueros*. Many queer Cubans have also dealt with extreme poverty but have made difficult sacrifices to remedy their situations while remaining critical of the effects of the tourist sex trade. The advances in gay visibility and rights discourse since the early 1990s has offered queer Cubans new forms of visibility, social respectability, and acceptance. A stronger argument can be made for supporting the burgeoning gay rights movement in Cuba, which does not advocate for the legalisation of sex work, but rather uses established legal venues and public health models to strengthen gay rights on the island.³² Furthermore, gay Cubans often made distinctions between the 'unjust' arrests of gays in Havana who were mistakenly caught in police sweeps of sex workers, and the government's attempts to halt the rise of the sex trade.

The idea that Cubans generally, and the FMC in particular, should advocate on behalf of *jineteras* assumes that a shared female subjectivity or 'sisterhood' would override socialist frameworks of gender equity that stress labour integration. Just as 'gender' is not a universal category of difference, models of women's empowerment and liberation also reflect particular cultural histories and political struggles.³³ Post-colonial critiques of the universal

³¹ Cabezas, 'Between Love and Money,' p. 1006.

³² See the important work being done by activists at the *Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual* in Havana, including advocacy for the legalisation of gay marriage and a constitutional amendment protecting homosexual rights.

³³ See for example, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, 'Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Feminist Practices' *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2000); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial

female subject illuminate the cultural biases inherent in discourses regarding prostitution and bring into relief the ways in which studies of Third World sexual commerce often overemphasise the victimised female sex worker. For instance, Saba Mahmood presents an ethnographic investigation of an Islamic revival movement to demonstrate how Egyptian women's participation in a mosque can 'speak back to normative liberal assumptions about freedom and agency' upon which feminist models are based.³⁴ Similarly, the goal for Cuban women's advocates is not to develop a sex workers' rights movement based on female solidarity, but rather to eradicate prostitution as an important social and political gain for Cubans.

The Morality of Economic Motivation

In *Género: Salud y Cotidianidad*, Cuban scholars Celia Sarduy Sánchez and Ada Alfonso Rodríguez explain the return of prostitution in Cuba by arguing that the Special Period brought about a moral crisis that encourages 'a philosophy of consumerism without worrying about the methods of acquiring the goods'.³⁵ In a similar vein, Cuban researcher, Rosa Miriam Elizalde carried out interviews with 33 male and female sex workers for a collection of articles entitled, *Flores Desechables: Prostitución en Cuba?*³⁶ Elizalde maintains that Cuban prostitution is distinct from the traffic in global sex work because Cubans are not faced with life or death decisions that force them into *jineterismo*:

Lo que distingue a Cuba de los demás países es un detalle esencial: la mayoría de los treinta millones de mujeres y dos millones de niños prostituidos en el mundo, no se parece a la prostituta que va [...] al mercado del sexo estigmatizada por una cultura de la ostentación y del lujo, sino que son víctimas terribles de un orden económico que los condena a la esclavitud sexual para *sobrevivir* – que no es más que eso, evitar morir.³⁷

Discourses' *Feminist Review* (1988); Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Indiana, 1989); Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*; Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.) (Urbana, 1988).

³⁴ Saba Mahmood, 'Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2001), p. 203.

³⁵ Sarduy Sánchez and Alfonso Rodríguez, *Género*, p. 200.

³⁶ Elizalde, *Flores Desechables*.

³⁷ 'What distinguishes Cuba from other countries is one essential detail: the majority of the 30 million women and two million children prostituted in the world are not like the prostitute who goes to the sexual market place stigmatised by a culture of ostentation and luxury, but rather are the terrible victims of an economic order which condemns them to sexual slavery in order to *survive* – [what they do] is no more than this, avoiding death'. *Ibid.*, p. 72. Emphasis in original.

Elizalde asserts that *jineteras* and *jineteros* do not have to engage in sexual commerce to survive, which leads her to question why Cubans would sell sex for hard currency and commodities. Elizalde concludes that the re-emergence of widespread prostitution must be the result of crisis in 'spiritual values at the social level – brought about by the economic crisis and influx of materialism during the Special Period.'³⁸

Mirta Rodríguez Calderón, a prominent Cuban journalist and co-founder of the group Magín, also conducted interviews with sex workers and reports that the majority of *jineteras* she spoke with participated in the sex trade to access consumer goods and dollar-only spaces, such as upscale restaurants, resorts, and clubs, while a minority used the sex trade to support their families.³⁹ Although the work of Rodríguez Calderón is often used to represent the 'official' perspective of the FMC,⁴⁰ her organisation, Magín, was actually an independent feminist group dedicated to eradicating sexism in the Cuban media. According to Sujatha Fernandes' unique ethnographic account of the establishment and dissolution of Magín, many of the members accepted *jineterismo* and the organisation had difficulties competing with the government-sponsored FMC.⁴¹ The contestations over *jineterismo* among Cuban women's advocates hinted at a more complex picture of the various critiques of the Cuban sex trade.

Across their studies, however, Cuban feminists and women's advocates hesitated to describe *jineteras* as victims, and instead emphasised how sex workers were citizens whose decisions reflected a crisis of moral and social values that needed to be addressed. This perspective reflects historical efforts to craft Cuban female subjectivity around images of strength and determination – themes that have served as the basis of women's mass mobilisations over the last four decades. For example, members of the FMC worked to transform traditional gender stereotypes and to portray Cuban women as equal partners in militias, neighbourhood Committees to Defend the Revolution, work places, and the home. According to Cuban models, women controlled their destinies, especially in the face of extreme hardship, and were encouraged to pursue education, military service, and employment.

In the context of the late 1980s and 1990s in Cuba, *jineterismo* symbolised an impending individualism that threatened to reintroduce class hierarchies and unravel gains for Cuban women. After the Socialist Bloc dissolved in the early 1990s, political and cultural efforts to preserve Cuban revolutionary programmes intensified. In 1992, the Cuban National Assembly amended

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁹ Jan Strout, 'Women, the Politics of Sexuality and Cuba's Economic Crisis' *Cuba Update*, New York, 30 June 1995, vol. XVI, nos. 2–3; p. 15.

⁴⁰ Marrero, 'Scripting Sexual Tourism,' p. 247.

⁴¹ Fernandes, 'Transnationalism and Feminist Activism' p. 445.

the Constitution to encourage foreign capitalist investment in a limited number of industries, with an emphasis on Cuba's international tourist trade.⁴² The government viewed the partial opening toward foreign tourism as a necessary evil⁴³ and, far from an accession to global capitalism, wanted to make a transition into 'feasible socialism', or a series of reforms with a renewed commitment to socialism.⁴⁴ Government leaders embarked on a socio-economic model that would use hard currency from tourism in order to construct 'islands of capitalism' within an 'ocean of socialism', or a centrally planned economy.⁴⁵ In their analyses, Cuban women's advocates such as Elizalde and leaders of the FMC, link sex workers' desires for material goods to the influx of Cubans living abroad and capitalist tourism.

Cuban women's advocates are not alone in their critical perspectives toward the rise of the sex trade and its implications regarding materialism in Havana. As Javier's comments indicate, gay Cubans criticised new inequalities by emphasising how differences in income were resulting in superficial values and unattainable standards of attractiveness. Many sex workers gained access to dollar economies that provided them with lifestyles out of reach to gay Cubans. Hector was a white, attractive, 32-year old with deep blue eyes, a shaved head, and a notorious reputation for seducing straight men he met on the street. Trained as a medical researcher, Hector worked the graveyard shift as a security guard for a gay German businessman who lived in Havana. He found the work tedious and intellectually unsatisfying, but the job paid in dollars and a technician's salary was nearly impossible to live on. His boyfriend Tito, a 25-year-old *mulato* psychology student at the University of Havana, described himself as studious and hard working and complained that *pingueros* in same-sex enclaves took the easy way out. He and Hector agreed, '[*Pingueros*] don't have the head for it. They're not smart enough or they don't want to work. They want easy money. They can earn in one night with a tourist what I earn in two months. They don't want to sacrifice all that work when they could hustle.' Critiques of the growing materialism of gay

⁴² By 2007, models of economic development moved away from capital-intensive tourism toward exports such as nickel, medical and educational services, and petroleum as a way to earn foreign exchange.

⁴³ Maria Dolores Espino, 'Cuban Tourism During the Special Period', in *Cuba in Transition ASSE*. Vol. 8 (2000), p. 362.

⁴⁴ Myra Paula Espina Prieto, 'The Effects of the Reform on Cuba's Social Structure: An Overview' in *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2001), p. 37. The preamble to Cuba's Foreign Investment Act warned that Cuba could benefit from foreign investment only if the investments would 'boost the efforts the country must undertake in its economic and social development' (Foreign Investment Act 1995).

⁴⁵ Jorge F. Pérez-López, *Cuba at a Crossroads: Politics and Economics after the Fourth Party Congress* (Gainesville, 1994), p. 190.

enclaves provided a concrete way to talk about the larger structural changes that were widening the gap between the rich and the poor.⁴⁶

Scholars writing outside of Cuba fervently criticise Rodríguez Calderon, Elizalde, and members of the FMC for attributing *jineterismo* to a crisis in values and have argued that Cuban critics of the sex trade downplay how poverty has forced women into prostitution. US-based and European scholars contend that we must acknowledge how Cuban women are performing sex acts in order to survive and account for the ways in which poverty and global disparities victimise sex workers.⁴⁷ For instance, Cynthia Pope agrees with Elizalde that no Cuban 'truly needs to sell their body to survive' because the state continues to provide Cubans with 'education, health care, housing, and subsidised food and clothing.'⁴⁸ Pope examines the interviews presented by Elizalde, however, and defends a *jineteras'* right to 'economic gain and access to dollar-only spaces, such as restaurants, nightclubs, and stores'. She maintains that this drive for access to dollar economies serves as evidence of economic need and therefore 'defies the Federation of Cuban Women's stance that the only women involved in selling sex or companionship had low moral standards.'⁴⁹ Likewise, Latina studies scholar Teresa Marrero argues that the FMC has vilified sex workers by describing *jineterismo* 'not as an activity that is economically driven [...] but as one that women engage in for the fun of it.'⁵⁰ In a creative combination of performance studies and sociology, Marrero asserts that *jineteras* participate in the sex trade 'because quality items such as some types of food, dress, or shoes cannot be acquired with Cuban money.'⁵¹ In her work, Marrero exemplifies a recurrent defense of a Cuban sex worker's decision to pursue 'el hi-life' and insists that the FMC should recognise this as a legitimate right.

The defence made by some US and European feminists of a Cuban's right to pursue *jineterismo* seems to suggest that women's advocates in Cuba have failed to grasp the realities of sex workers' lives and implies that foreign feminists need to 'save' Third World women from exploitation. In the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, the second wave of the women's movement gave birth to numerous theories that linked violence against women and prostitution as a way to highlight how the sex industry harmed women. Analysts argued that both the practice of prostitution and

⁴⁶ Many gay Cubans critiquing the spread of materialism, attacked *pingueros* by arguing that they were closeted gays in denial of their homoerotic tendencies. Certain views suggested that *pinguismo* was a safe outlet for men to engage in homosexual relationships without risking their heterosexual privilege.

⁴⁷ Strout, 'Women the Politics', Fusco 'Hustling for Dollars', Fosado 'The Exchange of Sex for Money', Teresa Marrero 'Scripting Sexual Tourism', Pope 'Political Economy of Desire'. ⁴⁸ Pope, 'Political Economy of Desire', p. 113. ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9; p. 11.

⁵⁰ Marrero, 'Scripting Sexual Tourism,' p. 238; 'Federation of Communist Women' in original. ⁵¹ Marrero, 'Scripting Sexual Tourism,' p. 248.

the commodification of sex were tied to systems of male power that perpetuated sexist domination and transformed women into objects that could be bought and sold into sexual slavery.⁵² At the same time, US feminists developed visions of a global feminist movement that addressed what scholars argued was the universal oppression of women. In particular, the oppression of Third World women became a cornerstone of arguments for global feminism that would address inequality and exploitation. The idea of global sisterhood fostered many productive dialogues between women's advocates and created opportunities to address both domestic and transnational issues related to women's rights. Yet attempts to organise across national boundaries also decontextualised a number of symbolically charged issues, such as prostitution, veiling, and female genital circumcision, which were used to prove the universality of patriarchy without attending to the power dynamics between women in the First and Third World. Narratives of global sisterhood implied Third World women needed to be rescued from victimisation, because they were not in a position to save themselves. It became the duty of feminists in the United States and Europe to advocate for and give voice to what they saw as powerless victims. This perspective also erased ongoing local efforts at gender equity that did not always reflect neo-liberal feminist assumptions about 'freedom' and women's liberation. Similarly, in the case of Cuba, representations of Cuban sex workers as perpetually marginalised dangerously equate agency with wealth and coercion with poverty – a common trope in studies of Third World prostitution.⁵³

Many foreign scholars maintain that the class bias of Cuban women's advocates prevents them from sympathising with the austere conditions faced by men and women who engage in sex work. For instance, Judy Whitehead and Hülya Demirdirek describe Cuban critiques of *jineterismo* as 'elite anxieties' that are 'projected onto the bodies and lives of non-elite Afro-Cuban women'.⁵⁴ Although in some cases inequalities separate Cuban critics from sex workers, during the island's transition to late-socialism the relationship between cultural and financial capital was often inverted.

⁵² See for example Kate Millet, *Prostitution Papers* (New York, 1975); Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery* (New York, 1979) and *The Prostitution of Sexuality* (New York, 1995); Carole Pateman 'Defending Prostitution: Charges Against Ericsson', *Ethics* 93 (1983), pp. 561–5 and *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, 1988); Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987) and *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Andrea Dworkin *Intercourse* (London, 1987) and *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York, 1989).

⁵³ Ratna Kapur, 'The Tragedy of Victimization Rhetoric: Resurrecting the 'Native' Subject in International/Post-Colonial Feminist Legal Politics', *Harvard Human Rights Journal* (Spring 2002).

⁵⁴ Hülya Demirdirek and Judy Whitehead, 'Sexual Encounters, migration, and desire in post-socialist context(s)', *Focaal – European Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 43 (2004), p. 7.

Cubans who engaged in tourist markets gained access to dollar economies that Cubans who stayed in state-sponsored employment could not. Income statistics for 2002 showed that a *jinetera* in Havana typically earned between \$240 and \$1400 a month, whereas a professor at the University of Havana made no more than \$22 monthly, an engineer or a physician grossed between \$12 and \$25, and an officer in the armed forces or a cabinet minister received no more than \$23.⁵⁵ Cubans were faced with ballooning inflation that resulted in items such as soap and shampoo costing between one and five dollars and a pair of tennis shoes commonly valued at \$25 or more.

Analysts who accuse the critics of *jineterismo* of being elitist fail to consider how the conditions of post-Soviet Cuba play into concerns over growing materialism. During my field research in Havana, *jineteras* and *pingueros* were often the only Cubans in their neighborhoods that could afford what many considered luxury items. For instance, Javier, a 17-year-old gay student, admitted that he was continually in trouble at school because he refused to take off his baseball cap during class. Javier explained that he was embarrassed to show his hair because he did not have access to dollars to buy shampoo and could not afford the hair gel that had become popular. He explained, 'I'd rather flunk out of school than give all the *pingueros* in my class the satisfaction of seeing my hair'. Poverty alone could not explain sex work because the majority of Cubans suffered through ration shortages, black outs, and exclusion from dollar economies, but not all Cubans participated in *jineterismo* as a way to alleviate scarcity.⁵⁶

Many US-based and European feminists indicate that criticising a sex workers' desire for commodities or 'el hi-life' is unfair, but like gay Cubans many sex workers also described *jineterismo* as 'easy money'. Mercedes, a white bisexual 21-year-old, had held a number of government-sponsored jobs before traveling to Havana to establish herself in the sex trade. She had worked as an elevator operator in a hospital, but found that 'being near sick people all day' made her queasy. She secured another job as a cashier at a petrol station but felt that the work was too tedious and paid next to nothing. Mercedes explained her decision to engage in sex work:

It takes four months to make what you can make in one night with a foreigner. It's risky, but *jineterismo* is an easy way to make money. That's why I started *matando la jugada* (hustling). If you work in a real job, you don't see the fruits of your labour. That's why so many young people work the streets.

⁵⁵ Carmelo Mesa-Lago and Jorge Pérez-López. *Cuba's Aborted Reform: Socioeconomic Effects, International Comparisons, and Transition Policies* (Gainesville, 2005), p. 75.

⁵⁶ Hernández, 'Looking at Cuba', p. 128 questions the vague notion of the 'elite' within this context and pushes scholars to define who exactly qualifies as elitist: Cubans with access to hard currency, such as musicians, artists, athletes and technicians who travel abroad, members of the communist party, or private peasant farmers who receive higher annual incomes than most workers.

The risk that Mercedes mentioned was the threat of being arrested, deported back to the provinces, or fined by police officers. She spent the hard currency she earned on food and rent in Havana, and also bought beauty supplies, clothes, shoes and fashion accessories. Mercedes was not trying to develop long-term relationships with her clients or use marriage to leave the island, but rather she described her involvement with tourists as a short-term career that paid well and allowed her to stay in the capital. After two or three months in Havana, Mercedes would return to the small town where she lived with her father, a judge, and her mother, an elementary school teacher. 'When I'm at home', she said, 'my life is totally different. I clean, help my mom wash clothes, watch soap operas with the neighbours, and go to church. Sometimes I even go the CDR [Committees for the Defence of the Revolution] meetings with my dad. Imagine it!'

The defence of a sex workers' right to pursue dollar-only spaces disassociates 'economics' and 'morality' as if need was an objective category devoid of political implications and cultural history. Both Cuban and foreign scholars have recounted similar interviews in which Cuban sex workers opt out of state-funded employment because they can make more money and access luxury goods through the sex trade.⁵⁷ For Cuban women's advocates seeking to protect socialist gains, harnessing sexuality to access luxury goods presents a fundamental challenge to historical efforts to establish gender equality through the labour force. Furthermore, critiques of *jineterismo* provide a vehicle to talk about the growing disparities in income and access to consumer goods within Cuba's same-sex enclaves, as incomes and living standards are increasingly disconnected from work.⁵⁸ More generally, criticisms of *jineterismo* reflected widely held anxieties that class distinctions were re-emerging, and even young Cubans involved in the sex trade frequently complained about the growing materialism they confronted.

The Dilemma of Choice

In 1992, as the rise of sex tourism in Cuba gained international attention as a symbol of the bankruptcy of Cuban socialism, President Castro distinguished between pre-revolutionary prostitution, in which sex workers faced starvation without income from sexual commerce, and the contemporary rise of *jineterismo*, in which a citizen's most basic needs were met by the government. Castro explained:

There are prostitutes, but prostitution is not allowed in our country. There are no women forced to sell themselves to a man, to a foreigner, to a tourist. Those who do

⁵⁷ For examples see Fusco 'Husling for Dollars' p. 163; Marrero 'Scripting Sexual Tourism' p. 245.

⁵⁸ Espina Prieto, 'The Effects of the Reform' p. 42.

so do it on their own, voluntarily and without any need for it. We can say that they are highly educated prostitutes and quite healthy, because we are the country with the lowest number of AIDS cases.⁵⁹

Castro expressed irony by noting that revolutionary programmes had made Cubans healthier and highly educated, and yet some women chose to engage in sex work. The comments of FMC members and Cuban feminists also signaled the idea that Cubans elected to participate in *jineterismo*, as women's advocates demanded that sex workers take responsibility for their decisions and make different choices. The idea of 'rehabilitation' programmes reflected this logic and assumed that sex workers could be reintegrated into state-sponsored employment through the transformation of individual consciousness.

Foreign scholars have interpreted Fidel Castro's reference to a Cuban's 'choice' to participate in sex work as blaming the 'victim' and abdicating responsibility for the rise of the sex trade, either by claiming that women are involved in prostitution because they like sex⁶⁰ or defending prostitution as long as it satisfies the needs of tourists.⁶¹ Julia O'Connell Davidson and Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor published some of the first studies of sex tourism in Cuba after conducting interviews with over 40 *jineteras* during 1995. Insightfully, the authors recommend focusing on sex tourists, who they discovered were often ignorant of the age of consent laws in Cuba, and combating racism and sexism in the men's home countries. They demonstrate how addressing these issues will help to put an end to sex tourists who target underage prostitutes. At the same time that the authors offer a refreshing view of the Western 'demand' countries as being responsible for the rise of the sex tourist trade, they also blame the FMC for failing to protect women and children from sex tourism. The authors attack the FMC for adopting the 'party line' on prostitution, which they described as 'similar to that adopted by right wing Western politicians about their own poor, homeless and sexually exploited.'⁶² They accuse the FMC of 'doublespeak' because the Cuban women's movement 'attributes "agency" to the powerless party and absolves the powerful party of all responsibility'.⁶³ The authors claim that the FMC and sex tourists are complicit because both call 'teenage girls "temptresses" and adult men their "victims"', though the analysts fail to offer a citation for their severe accusation that the FMC blames young girls for pedophilia.⁶⁴ O'Connell Davidson and Sanchez Taylor observe correctly that many Cuban scholars and women's advocates have attributed agency to

⁵⁹ British Broadcasting Corporation (1992).

⁶⁰ Fusco, 'Husling for Dollars', p. 161.

⁶¹ Pope, 'Political Economy of Desire' p. 101.

⁶² O'Connell Davidson and Sanchez Taylor, 'Child Prostitution', p. 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

jineteras, but the authors mistakenly conflate an acknowledgement of agency with blame.

At the start of my field research, I visited Yolanda, a prominent 56-year-old Cuban feminist and writer living in tiny apartment in Centro Habana. We sat facing each other on lawn chairs that served as her living room furniture and drank sugary espresso. When I asked her about the rise of *jineterismo*, Yolanda put her cup down. 'As someone who has been part of the women's movement from the beginning, I think it is very ironic that *jineteras* are not the victims of pre-revolutionary times but [are] considered women with access and financial success.' I expected her to criticise the decision of *jineteras* to engage in the sex trade, but she paused and then continued, 'I wish I was twenty years younger!' She laughed at the thought of taking up *jineterismo* to make much needed extra cash. 'Cuba is a complicated place. Very complicated', she said. Yolanda's comments reflected the ways in which *jineterismo* within post-Soviet Cuba was becoming significantly less stigmatised and more normalised than pre-revolutionary prostitution.

The language Cubans draw on to talk about sex work represents the shift that Yolanda described. Sex work is no longer called *prostitución*, but more commonly referred to as '*jineterismo*'. The word '*jinetera*' literally means horseback rider, but has been used to signify a woman selling sex primarily in the tourist industry. Rather than a misnomer for prostitution, *jineterismo* reflects a social world that frames sex workers outside of traditional notions of the victimised prostitute. The term *jinetero* inverts commonsense notions of sex work by casting the person engaging in *jineterismo* as an agent who literally 'whips the money' out of his or her victim.⁶⁵ Cuban men who have sex with men for money are also called '*jineteros*', but are more commonly referred to as '*pingueros*'. The word '*pinguero*' combines the slang term for penis, '*pinga*', with '*ero*' a suffix that refers to someone who works in a trade that does not require a university degree. Most *pingueros* identify themselves as heterosexual and this emphasis on using one's penis to make a living also connotes that they are the penetrating or 'active' partners in their sexual exchanges with other men. *Pingueros* often describe hustling in a militaristic way or as an act of extermination, and '*matando la cucaracha*' and '*matando la jugada*' have become common terms that portray *pingueros* as powerful, while dehumanising their clients.⁶⁶ The fact that *jineterismo* represents a number of black market activities, such as selling goods or working as an unofficial tour guide, indicates that sex work was seen as one among many practices related to the

⁶⁵ Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham, 2002), p. 282.

⁶⁶ The word *cucaracha* has been used in Cuba to refer to a coward, hence further reinforcing the notion that homosexual clients are weak and easily conquered by young hustlers.

influx of transnational tourism and did not imply a greater degree of depravity than other forms of hustling.

Cuban sex workers often argue that they are not prostituting themselves or even *jineteando* but rather '*luchando*' or fighting to get ahead. In Cuba, '*la lucha*' has historically been used to describe the ongoing battles to achieve the goals of revolutionary society. After the dissolution of the Socialist Bloc, '*luchando*' became a term that positioned sex work within broader struggles to make ends meet during the crisis. Sitting on the edge of her bed, Carmen, a 23-year-old *travesti*, explained that she had donned her tight jeans and off the shoulder blouse to work the streets the night before. 'I'm not prostituting myself or hustling', she said, 'from my perspective I haven't done either. I'm *luchando* (struggling). Struggling to survive, struggling to get ahead, do you understand me?' Carmen continued:

I don't like to *jinetear* (hustle). I don't like to *luchar* (struggle). I do it because I need things. If I had another way to make income, I wouldn't do it any more. There are people that yes, they like it. They like to go out every night, I don't. I prefer the tranquility of my house, so I only do it when I need some money, when I'm totally broke.

Carmen's situation was unique in that *travestis* often had difficulty finishing school and finding legal jobs where they felt comfortable dressing as women. She talked about her plans to participate in an employment-training programme established by the state-sponsored *Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual*, where *travestis* received health education and employment training. But in the meantime, she continued to support herself and her boyfriend with work in the sex trade.

Some gay Cubans have argued that sex workers freely chose to participate in the sex trade because gays themselves have had occasional sexual encounters for pay, but decided not to pursue *jineterismo*. Juan Carlos, a 20-year-old student in a continuation school in Havana whose father had sailed to Miami seven years earlier, described how he had experimented with sex work. A white 38-year-old Canadian tourist had approached him at Mi Cayito, Havana's gay beach. Juan Carlos explained:

We did sexual things, but not penetration or anything. Making out, that's it. He gave me ten dollars to get a car home and two shirts and an electric shaving kit. I haven't gone with foreigners again. I didn't like being with him. He wasn't ugly, but he was totally white haired, I didn't like it. I felt bad. It wasn't me. I wasn't ashamed, because no one had seen. I hadn't had relations with a foreigner before, so I didn't know how to act. I kept thinking, 'What am I doing?' It just isn't me.

Seeing himself as inextricably linked to social networks, Juan Carlos emphasised that the privacy of the experience prevented him from feeling the shame that would come from transgressing the social border between *jineteros*

and gays. Instead, by testing the waters of commodified sex, Juan Carlos was able to find an essential gay self in opposition to the sex trade, therefore allowing him to declare: 'It just isn't me.'⁶⁷

When Cuban sex workers refuse a victimised subjectivity, however, some foreign researchers reason that these *jineteras* and *pingueros* are duped by government propaganda or suffer from false consciousness that prevents them from recognising how they are forced into prostitution. Cynthia Pope describes how the *jineteras* she interviewed were 'almost indignant when responding to questions of victimization', and instead they emphasised their role as *luchadoras* or fighters. Pope, however, accuses *jineteras* of naïveté, maintaining that feelings of empowerment 'depend on their youthful appearance and feelings of commoditisation.'⁶⁸ When one woman tells Pope, 'I am not a *jinetera* or prostitute. I am a fighter! (*luchadora*)', Pope questions her feelings of empowerment and insists that *jineteras* are 'commodities that have currency in the global context and are thus subject to the whims of the global sex market'.⁶⁹ The idea that a *jinetera* or *pinguero* would use sex for individual financial gain, despite other (albeit low-paying) opportunities, challenges the fundamental premise of radical and liberal US feminist discourse on prostitution, which assumes that sex workers are forced into the trade. Jo Doezema observes how an insistence upon the 'injured prostitute' as the basis for feminist analysis of the sex trade forecloses the possibility of political confrontation with sex workers who claim a different experience.⁷⁰

Some analysts interpret Cuban perspectives that hold *jineteras* and *pingueros* accountable for their decisions as 'blaming' sex workers for the demands of foreign sex tourists. Vilma Espín disputed this idea when she encouraged Cubans, 'Don't forget that *jineteras* are not mere prostitutes. They are *our* prostitutes and we must not demonise them, because we run the risk of attacking the victim instead of attacking the wrong.'⁷¹ Within the frameworks presented by Cuban women's advocates', however, the agency of *jineteras* and *pingueros* reaches certain limits. At the same time that Espín

⁶⁷ Queer critiques of same-sex prostitution and materialism must also be read alongside historical discourses of Cuban sexual deviancy that linked homosexuality to prostitution. The conjoined nature of queers and prostitutes in national imaginaries did not arise from the ashes of the fall of the Socialist Bloc, but rather incarnated new dimension of decades-old social dynamics. In 1961 the Cuban revolutionary government conducted the first known crackdown on same-sex enclaves when Havana's police forces conducted organised street raids aimed at homosexual prostitutes. The original state crackdown led to the arrest of law-abiding homosexuals, including a number of well-known literary and artistic personalities who were detained along with so-called antisocial groups.

⁶⁸ Pope, 'Political Economy of Desire,' p. 111.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁷⁰ Jo Doezema, 'Ouch! Western feminists' "wounded attachment" to the "third world prostitute", in *Feminist Review*, no. 67, Spring 2001, pp. 16–38; p. 28.

⁷¹ Rosa Miriam Elizalde, 'Remembering Vilma Espín', *The Nation* (27 June 2007). Emphasis in original.

defends *jinetas*, her comments hint at paternalism as she places women's advocates in a position to 'protect' citizens from their own selfish tendencies. The emphasis on individual consciousness as an obstacle to social progress reflects a common trope within revolutionary campaigns. For example, when state-led efforts failed to transform interpersonal gender roles or racial hierarchies in the 1960s, individual prejudice became the primary explanatory mechanism. Once the government had eliminated institutional inequalities in the work place and home, for example, women's advocates had to find a way to explain why disparities still existed without criticising the revolutionary process. Many Cubans rationalised that the government could provide economic and educational opportunities, but could not force 'culture' onto citizens or hasten individual belief systems to 'catch up' with revolutionary idealism.

Cuban women's advocates often maintain sharp distinctions between socialist values and capitalist exploitation that place sex workers on the wrong side of dividing lines that have been cemented by decades of embargo politics during the Cold War. Rather than interpreting the rise of *jinetismo* as a valid critique of certain socialist values, such as the renunciation of material incentives and global commodities, many leaders of the FMC have explained the return of the sex trade as an invasion of capitalist desires. Cuban women's advocates have argued that consumeristic tendencies that arrived along with the influx of Cubans living abroad and foreign tourists must be exorcised from the national body, just as leaders had done in the early 1960s. But many young Cubans, including those involved in the sex trade, describe a more complex world in which socialised health care, food subsidies and universal education are inalienable rights that effortlessly co-exist with the drive to acquire stylish tennis shoes, clothes and the luxuries of the dollar economy.

Conclusions

At a human trafficking conference in Florida in 2004, President George W. Bush addressed a room of law enforcement agents and accused Fidel Castro of advertising Cuban sex tourism. Bush addressed the crowd stating, 'The dictator welcomes sex tourism. Here's how he bragged about the industry', Bush continued, 'This is his quote – "Cuba has the cleanest and most educated prostitutes in the world" and "sex tourism is a vital source of hard currency".' The accusations came around the time that the State Department released their annual report on global human trafficking, which listed Cuba among the top ten violators. Bush argued that the Cuban president posed an international threat as one of the world's most dangerous sex-traffickers and vowed to put an end to human trafficking by ensuring: 'The

rapid, peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba.⁷² (When questioned, White House Aides admitted that they had culled Castro's quote from a Dartmouth College undergraduate research paper they found on the Internet.) Bush's appropriation of feminist sex trafficking discourse to support military and economic intervention in Cuba reflects a recent trend in which human rights discourse has been (re)fashioned in order to justify US military attacks.⁷³

Feminist scholars in the United States and Europe have passionately and perceptively defended *jineteras* in the emergent scholarship of the Cuban sex trade, but, at the same time, many have demonised Cuban critics of *jineterismo* in a manner that has inadvertently encouraged interventionist attitudes. This rich body of feminist scholarship suggests that Cubans do not properly understand and are not capable of managing the reemergence of sex tourism on the island. Despite their best intentions, these analysts imply that we must rescue and protect Cuban sex workers from their fellow citizens and the Cuban government, which, according to these readings, both exploits and represses victims of the sex trade. Feminists writing in the United States have criticised Cuban scholars and journalists because they have emphasised the growth of materialism, underplayed the poverty of sex workers, and refused to acknowledge how sex workers are victims of global inequalities. Yet many Cubans do not envision sex workers as victims, and sex workers themselves often argue that they are making difficult decisions during challenging times. Is it possible to take seriously claims of agency while remaining sensitive to the limited options with which young men and women on the island are faced? If we take into account the adverse effects of the rise of the sex trade on Havana's queer communities, it becomes obvious that critiques of sex workers do not simply reflect governmental agendas. In the hope of creating a more balanced dialogue, I have argued here that the concerns expressed by critics of *jineterismo* reflect widespread anxieties about critical social transformations that have occurred since the dissolution of the Socialist Bloc.

⁷² When the author of the paper was contacted by the press, he could not provide a citation for his findings that Castro supported sex trafficking. Michael Janofsky, 'Bush Criticizes Castro and Human Trafficking', *New York Times*, 17 July 2004.

⁷³ For instance, Jasbir Puar highlights a collusion of gay rights activism with contemporary anti-Arab racism and military intervention in the Middle East; a discourse she calls 'homonationalism'. Images and stories of homophobia in Arab countries are used to foment Orientalism, racism and neo-imperialist tendencies, as the United States and Europe pretend to 'civilise' Middle Eastern nations by spreading queer rights through military occupation.