



What's Love Got to Do with It?: Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic (Latin America Otherwise)

By Denise Brennan

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In locations around the world, sex tourism is a booming business. *What's Love Got to Do with It?* is an in-depth examination of the motivations of workers, clients, and others connected to the sex tourism business in Sosúa, a town on the northern coast of the Dominican Republic. Denise Brennan considers why Dominican and Haitian women move to Sosúa to pursue sex work and describes how sex tourists, primarily Europeans, come to Sosúa to buy sex cheaply and live out racialized fantasies. For the sex workers, Brennan explains, the sex trade is more than a means of survival—it is an advancement strategy that hinges on their successful “performance” of love. Many of these women seek to turn a commercialized sexual transaction into a long-term relationship that could lead to marriage, migration, and a way out of poverty.

Illuminating the complex world of Sosúa’s sex business in rich detail, Brennan draws on extensive interviews not only with sex workers and clients, but also with others who facilitate and benefit from the sex trade. She weaves these voices into an analysis of Dominican economic and migration histories to consider the opportunities—or lack thereof—available to poor Dominican women. She shows how these women, local actors caught in a web of global economic relations, try to take advantage of the foreign men who are in Sosúa to take advantage of them. Through her detailed study of the lives and working conditions of the women in Sosúa’s sex trade, Brennan raises important questions about women’s power, control, and opportunities in a globalized economy.

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Editorial Review

Review

“A smart, timely, eye-opening account. *What's Love Got To Do with It?* makes both men's and women's hopes and strategies visible. It underscores poor women's capacity for agency and internationalized thinking without portraying the international system of commercialized sexuality as one in which women and men are meeting on a level playing field.”—Cynthia Enloe, author of *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War*

“In this finely hued ethnography, Denise Brennan questions how transnationalization gets transacted, imagined, and experienced through an examination of the sex trade in a specific locale, Sosúa in Dominican Republic. Interweaving the grand themes of political economy and power inequities with those of desire and fantasy—and from the sides of both (foreign) customer and (local) sex worker—she has crafted a richly textured study of a 'sexscape' and its brokering of dreams as much as of money and sex.”—Anne Allison, author of *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*

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About the Author

Denise Brennan is Professor and Chair of Anthropology and Sociology at Georgetown University.

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