

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

DENISE BRENNAN, *What's Love Got to Do With It? Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2004, xii + 280 p., Index.

In this well-written and compelling ethnography, Denise Brennan examines the “sexscape” of Sosúa, a Dominican Republic beach town. Brennan argues, with great ethnographic detail, that transnational sex tourism – particularly sex-for-sale by Afro-Dominican and Afro-Haitian women to foreign white men – is a key feature of economic and social life for a diverse group of Sosúans. Moreover, transnational sex tourism is central in both local and global *imaginings* of this migrant town. In her consideration of the nature and extent of sex workers’ control over their own circumstances, Brennan asks, “What’s love got to do with it?” The question cuts to the heart of the matter, and her answer encapsulates, with deceptive simplicity, a complex set of transnational relationships. Brennan argues that love, or more accurately “the performance of love”, is deployed strategically by Sosúan sex workers not merely in order to survive, but to get ahead (*progresar*) by exploiting the terms and conditions of transnational desire. Ideally, Dominican women selling sex hope to perform love well enough to marry a foreign man. But, combining sex work with the performance of love is both economically and emotionally precarious.

Sosúa is a migrant town, attracting Dominicans from elsewhere in the country as well as foreigners. Foreign and Dominican imaginings of Sosúa are as diverse as its many inhabitants and visitors. What links these fantasies together is what Brennan calls Sosúa’s “opportunity myth”: “Despite the wide array of perceptions about it, Sosúans agree that the locale represents a space of transformation...Sosúa’s power to act as a transformational space is bound up with its transnational ties” (14).

Sex tourism is central to these fantasies: German men imagine themselves as wealthy and desirable playboys; and women selling sex imagine that short-term monetary benefits will lead to the perceived long-term financial security of a marriage to a foreign man. Brennan draws upon extensive interviews with sex workers and clients, as well as many others whose lives are touched by sex tourism, in order to explore the disconnect between myth and experience, especially for the women sex workers who are the main focus of the ethnography.

The book's greatest strength lies in Brennan's ability to seamlessly weave together the political economic and "imaginary" aspects of sex tourism to portray the Sosúan sexscape. Looking through the lens of love enables Brennan to address both the political economy of the sex trade, as well as the hopes, fantasies, dreams, and desires that inform it. Rather than privileging one over the other, she relentlessly and repeatedly demonstrates their mutual influence. This is accomplished by Brennan's adept re-telling of her informants' stories, which make abundantly clear the possibilities, and especially the limits, of performing love in order to get ahead. These limits are often economic, but are just as often the result of the differences between local and foreign gendered expectations about how to convincingly perform romantic love, especially when transactional sex is concerned. For Brennan, the performance of love is part of the "sexscape" of Sosúa, but readers might use the material she presents to map a transnational "lovescape" as well.

This book is relevant to anyone interested in the anthropology of tourism, transnationalism, sex work, and cross-cultural understandings of love and sex. I was initially interested in this book for two reasons: as a feminist examination of the potential agency of sex workers; and as a solid ethnographic depiction of an inter-racial "sexscape". *What's Love Got to Do With It?* delivers on both counts. Brennan herself admits that "the waters are murky" (211) when considering sex workers and agency, but she manages to do justice to both her informants' determination and creativity and to the forces that repeatedly thwart their efforts to control their own circumstances and to get ahead. As an ethnography of a tourist "sexscape", the book makes its substantial contribution to studies of transnationalism: Women who work in the Sosúan sex trade rarely leave their migrant town, but their desires are nonetheless transnational in scope. Brennan contributes much to our understanding of transnational desires, even in the absence of migration. She does so in a way that is always sensitive, never titillating, and well worth reading and teaching.

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