

Book Review

**Carrier-Moisan, Marie-Eve. *Gringo Love Stories of Sex Tourism in Brazil*.
Toronto University of Toronto Press, 2020, 200 pages.**

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Gringo Love discusses the relationships between foreign tourists and Brazilian women in the construction of social mobility projects grounded on the sex and marriage markets. The book is based on the research conducted by the sociocultural anthropologist Marie-Eve Carrier-Moisan as part of her doctoral research and is presented in graphic novel format, illustrated by Débora Santos and adapted by William Flynn. The book is the third title in the University of Toronto Press' EthnoGRAPHIC series, which aims to bring up to the public new languages and forms of communication in anthropology and ethnography. Given the format and language, the book is intended for a general audience interested in learning about these relationships and about sexuality. As such, the simple and attractive language successfully communicates the more immediate purpose of the book.

The book is presented in three sections: the graphic novel, a reading guide, and an appendix with theoretical-political discussions in the arena about sex tourism in the social sciences. The graphic novel illustrates the situations, subjects, and dynamics that constituted the relationship between men and women in Ponta Negra, a beach and neighborhood known for the presence of sex workers and tourists in search of romantic or sexual encounters.

Professor Carrier-Moisan lived between 2007 and 2008 in Natal, northeastern Brazil. The 2000s was a period of intense relations between Brazilian women and foreign tourists due to the expansion of the Natal's urban structure and the new configuration of the tourism industry (24–25). In addition, it was also a period of disputes in Brazilian and international legislation around “sex tourism” and the production of new devices to deal with “human

trafficking.” As result, there was a political landscape populated by subjects with contradictory interests around the notions of agency, sex work, and trafficking (Kempadoo, 2005).

The book consists of three parts. In “Arrivals” the author describes the construction of the ethnographic fieldwork and the formulation of her research interest around sex tourism, the agents that constitute it, and the debates that guided the discussion at the time. The second part, “Gringo Love?,” presents the divergences and categories employed by Brazilian women and foreign men in describing their affective, sexual, and financial agreements. Finally, “Sair dessa vida” [Leaving This Life] describes the connections between sexual and marriage markets. The first two parts are interspersed with short fieldnotes sections discussing ethical and methodological aspects of knowledge production in the field. The third part concludes with a brief epilogue addressing the changes after the author’s return to Natal, six years later, during the 2014 World Cup.

An important aspect in Carrier-Moisan’s approach is the mutual constitution between sex, affection, and money. It is fundamental to the description of the lives and mobility projects of the women the author talked with. Furthermore, the “gringo” category emerges to designate people from some specific nationalities in the global dynamics of finance and prestige. However, it does not imply that affective and sexual partners are wealthy or elite subjects. Class and racial relations in the context of these social mobility projects are relational and concern the images and positions Brazilian women and gringos produce in relation to each other (141).

Such dynamics also prevent the characterization of the relationships between Brazilian women and gringos as prostitution. As the interlocutors argue, prostitution is a possibility in this universe of practices in which sex, affection, money, prestige, and life projects are negotiated.

The production of the gringo as a particular subject emerges not only through the contrast with other forms of citizenship and nationality, but also through the apprehension of different ways of being a man. These forms distinguish the gringos and the Brazilians as contrasting units. On one side, there is the possibility of social mobility and of being well treated, in contrast to harsh realities alongside partners represented as “too macho” (30). Although these unities are neither fixed nor stable, they share some common

characteristics and create internal and external forms of differences – in other words, differences between good and bad gringos, as well as Brazilian in relation to gringos (153).

In this respect, the object of exchange in the relationships between Brazilian women and their gringo *namorados* is not only money but also sex, affection, caring, and protection. However, from the male perspective, it is followed by certain notions and values of a “traditional woman,” “genuine,” and “real”, both in relation to the sexual distribution of domestic and affective-sexual work (105). In this aspect, love and money both work as mediating power differentials. The first by connecting, and the second by organizing and separating.

Regarding the notion of “exploitation”, the author discusses with subjects and readers how money enacts relations. Charging for sex or getting money for the sexual and affective services they perform is what distinguishes what these subjects do from other people who would be exploited. (51; 156) That being said, “exploitation” is something different and related to other experiences people cannot define as their own personal project in life. Money is a language of appreciation, but also a constitutive element of the possibility of autonomy of these women in relation to the needs and difficulties of the working class’s life.

A considerable part of the work done by the author comes from illustrating the semantic arena in which meanings and practices move around. Among the subjects, categories and practices are constituted from moralities that seek to move away from the notion of prostitution and from the very realization of themselves as “exploited,” as usually framed by the official policies of the state. Thus, the categories of “company,” “help,” and “prostitution” alternate to describe different regimes of exchange.

Moving within the practices and discourses produced by different social actors, the author highlights how categories can approach and distance themselves from the contexts in which they are located. In this sense, women are described not as victims of a logic alien to themselves, but as active agents in the production of meanings for their own trajectories. The idea that sex is a language of exchange has been put forward before (Cabezas, 2009; Piscitelli, 2013), however, by describing these experiences in a clear and direct language, Carrier-Moisán opens the debate to a wider set of readers.

The work presents interesting aspects both in its language and in the political-theoretical debate. Regarding the format, the adaptation process

prioritizes storytelling and ethnographic elements. As a result, there is a distance between the disciplinary discussion and the communication strategy. In other words, sex tourism is presented most deeply in the appendices rather than in the fieldnotes, which makes the reader responsible for their own immersion in the political (and theoretical) aspects of sex tourism. And yet, *Gringo Love*, as a graphic novel, is a worthy contribution to the emerging genre of ethnography.

References

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