

Compañera or Ciudadana? The Double Life of the Jinetera in Daína Chaviano's *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*

Victoria L. McCard

North Georgia College & State University

As the Cuban government undertook its campaign to increase international tourism to the island in the 1990s to mitigate the economic hardship of the Special Period, large numbers of women –and more than a few men– began working as prostitutes to supplement or replace the meager salaries they received from the state. This career choice signaled a reversal of conditions in earlier years when officials had boasted that the revolution had succeeded in virtually eliminating the practice of the world's oldest profession.

The resurgence of the illicit sex trade has caused an epidemic of conflicting opinions and contradictory behaviors among Cuban citizens and authority figures. Some view it as a deplorable throwback to the days of nightclubs, casinos and *mafia* control that undermines revolutionary solidarity and victimizes women, while others consider it an admirable subversive activity that empowers its practitioners and defies the hapless central authorities who can no longer provide for their basic needs. By cooperating in the use of the sensual *mulata* image to promote tourism, the government has reinforced –perhaps unintentionally– an old double standard whereby men are encouraged to pursue women for sex, while the women who service them are often condemned by those that create the demand and the society that benefits from its existence. Negative perceptions have given rise to an explosion of subterfuge as many people feign disgust, portraying themselves in public as upstanding *compañeros*, while quietly engaging in prostitution or benefiting from its practice in their private lives.

Although national political figures, like Fidel Castro, were slow to comment officially on their return, fascination with prostitution and the sex trade in Cuba is widespread. National and international journalists and scholars like Amir Valle and Kamala Kempadoo were quick to weigh in with varying opinions and research related to their presence and potential social consequences. The topics of tourism and prostitution have also inspired writers of fiction, and since her introduction in 1987 in Luis Manuel Gracia's "El caso Sandra," in *Somos jóvenes* (a publication of the Communist youth organization), the *jinetera* has become a popular character in Cuban literature produced on the island, such as Juan Pedro Gutiérrez's *Trilogía sucia de La Habana*, and in the diaspora, like Lissette Bustamante's *Jineteras*. She has also appeared in novels by writers of other nationalities, such as Spaniard Jordi Sierra i Fabra's *Cuba: La noche de la jinetera*. While the portrayal of her motivations and life-style is fairly consistent, attitudes of and toward the *jinetera* reflect those of Cuban society at large, varying from text to text and even within the same text and running the gamut from derision and moral condemnation to indifference and admiration.

My objective in this study is twofold: to examine briefly the socioeconomic context that provides the setting for these novels; and to analyze the conflicting points of view surrounding (and occurring within) one fictional *jinetera* –Claudia/La Mora, the protagonist of *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*, the 1998 novel of Daína Chaviano, a Cuban writer living in Miami since 1991– as she negotiates this world of limited legitimate economic opportunities, subterfuge and double-standards.

Getting fired as curator at Havana's Museo de Bellas Artes for opposing the liquidation of Cuba's art collection to obtain hard currency is the first problem Claudia must confront as she faces difficult personal choices that conflict with her moral and ethical codes of behavior.

Branded as antisocial –a *ciudadana*– and therefore ineligible to receive state day care for her infant son, finding a new source of legitimate income is a challenge. Likening herself to Hamlet, she weighs unpleasant options: “¿Quedarse o huir? ¿Putear o morir de hambre? *To be or not to be?* La eterna disyuntiva” (235).

And like Hamlet’s Denmark, there is something rotten in Claudia’s Cuba, where education and employment within the state economy no longer guarantee an acceptable standard of living. Consequently, an ever increasing number of university graduates are abandoning their official positions in the pursuit of more lucrative illegal careers, infected (according to Claudia)

con el virus de la libre empresa, el sida del comunismo; un sida que se había ido extendiendo subrepticamente, a espaldas de la policía, y que infectaba cada vez más a los habitantes de la nación. Los negocios clandestinos iban en aumento, se sucedían las redadas; pero el número de portadores del virus seguía creciendo...

(301)

Claudia’s situation is one that many Cubans have experienced since the early 1990s. The scenarios and dilemmas portrayed in the novel are realistic, although Chaviano’s manipulation of her protagonist’s feelings of guilt through the use of supernatural characters –ranging from a five hundred year old Indian to José Martí– strains the ability to suspend disbelief. Events are depicted in a non-linear fashion by an assortment of first, second and third person narrative voices, including *las hembras*, Claudia and her alter ego La Mora; and *los hombres*, Rubén and Gilberto, two friends who, unbeknownst to each other, both have romantic relationships with the protagonist during her economic crisis.

The presence of “*el hambre*” in the title suggests that hunger plays a central role in the novel, as well. Chaviano blames a shortage of food –rather than the other frequently named

cause: “*bajo nivel cultural*” (Berg 196)– for Claudia’s entry into a double life. She is a single mother, and according to Isabel Holgado Fernández, author of *¡No es fácil! Mujeres cubanas y la crisis revolucionaria* (2000), the hunger of many young women with children results from one of Cuba’s greatest social problems: the tendency of many men to “desenten[derse] de la manutención de los hijos en común” (254). The hunger that drives women like Claudia into prostitution, however, is not only physiological. The arrival of foreign tourists with all their possessions and demands exposed the fact that Cubans were severely lacking in material goods considered essential by their visitors:

Hambre es también no poder elegir los alimentos, no poder condimentarlos a nuestro gusto, no tener una dieta balanceada. Pero además las necesidades humanas no son sólo digestivas. Una persona necesita asearse, vestirse, rodearse de objetos útiles. Renunciar al consumismo no significa volverse anacoreta. Pretender comprar un ventilador cuando se vive en una habitación sin ventanas no es un acto consumista (qtd. in Holgado 253).

In *Cuba on My Mind: Journeys to a Severed Nation*, Román de la Campa asserts that *jineteros* comprise “an indispensable sector of the Cuban economy” (162) that arose during the rush to establish capitalist-style tourism in the 1990s. While the official Socialist system, with its cumbersome bureaucracy and lack of commissions and other material incentives, provided service that was slow, the *jineteros*, like any enterprising entrepreneurs, were a few steps ahead of the government in “adjusting to the needs of the unofficial capitalist culture on which the nation depends” (163). De la Campa describes them as “picaresque figures ready and willing to procure whatever a tourist needs, including tour guides, shopping tips, errands, sex, discounts,

black market rum, cigars, CDs, drugs, and, if necessary, even orthodox lectures on the history of the Cuban Revolution, filled with quotes from the *Comandante*” (163).

De la Campa’s definition notwithstanding, the “unofficial capitalist culture” supporting the tourism industry depends in no small measure on the existence of *jineteras* and the sex they provide. Travel agents in Europe resurrected the colonial myth of the sensual *mulata* and official government ministries and agencies, such as Cubanacán, collaborated in its promotion by hosting teams of journalists that published articles, e.g., *Playboy* (March 1991) and Italy’s *Panorama* (December 1997), featuring glossy photo spreads of beautiful young, semi-nude Cuban women striking seductive poses to attract male tourists –another of the “*hombres*” referenced in the title of Chaviano’s novel.

As tourism and *jineterismo* blossomed, Cubans abandoned official jobs to enter the unofficial economy. Many saw the *pepes* (foreign johns) as “replacements for a paternalist government that [could] no longer provide for them” (Fusco 154). This was especially true for the 60% of the population without legal access to hard currency through remittances, self-employment, tips or cooperative farming (Trumbull 366). An October 1998 article in *El Nuevo Herald* reported that up to four people –e.g., taxi drivers, apartment renters, and pimps and other middle men– live off the activities of each *jinetera* (qtd in Trumbull 367). Holgado Fernández wonders if government officials have asked themselves what would happen “si un porcentaje importante de la población no se abasteciera de las necesidades esenciales si estas muchachas-mujeres hubieran preservado sus ‘valores revolucionarios’” (254). Not only would the most immediate beneficiaries suffer, but the government would lose out too, because it also benefits from their existence: “[p]rostitutes attract tourists and encourage them to spend more money. Men buy prostitutes drinks, food, clothes, and give them money that they eventually spend in

state owned stores (Trumbull 367) on “everyday items and electrical household goods [...that] are no longer available for Cuban pesos” (Berg 189).

Economic realities combined with sentiments of nationalism, giving rise to the conflicting feelings toward *jinetas*. According to Amir Valle, the author of *Jinetas* (2006), the fact that the initial wave of developers and tourists consisted primarily of Spaniards contributed to the development of a supportive public perception that the Cubans that exploited them for money were like the *mambises* of the 19th century, freedom riders fighting for their financial independence in the face of an unwelcome “segunda colonización” (Web. 23 Aug. 2008. <<http://www.amirvalle.com/>>). This convergence of economic expediency and patriotic pride comprised the context for Fidel Castro’s famously ambivalent comment to the National Assembly in July of 1992 that:

hay prostitutas, pero la prostitución no es permitida en nuestro país. No hay mujeres forzadas a venderse a sí mismas a un hombre, a un extranjero, a un turista. Quienes lo hacen, lo hacen por su propia cuenta, voluntariamente, y sin necesidad. Podemos decir que esas prostitutas tienen una alta educación y son muy saludables, porque somos el país con el más bajo número de casos de Sida. Hay países vecinos con miles de casos de Sida. Por eso, realmente no hay ningún turismo más saludable que el de Cuba.” (Web. 23 Aug. 2008. qtd on <<http://groups.google.com/group/soc.culture.cuba/>>)

Castro did not mention prostitution to the nation again for several years although *jinetismo* and “el virus de la libre empresa” infected ever more people as tourism continued to increase. Finally, in the fall of 1998, the government launched *Operación Lacra*, which closed down a few popular Havana nightclubs and rounded up, not only prostitutes, but also the pimps,

landlords and taxi drivers they worked with. In a speech celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Revolutionary National Police (1/5/99), Castro was no longer ambivalent about this segment of the Cuban economy. He was embarrassed. Citing several articles on Cuban sex tourism from the international media, including one that stated sarcastically: “el hombre nuevo y la mujer nueva demor[a]n en nacer” (Web. 23 Aug. 2008. <<http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/>>), he lamented the adverse affect such publicity was having on the reputation of the Revolution. Sounding like a disappointed father/patriarch (yet another “*hombre*” of the novel’s title), unwilling to hold women responsible for their actions, he said: “duele mucho que un país donde el 65% de la fuerza técnica sean mujeres, donde tanto se ha hecho por dignificar a la mujer, venga el extranjero, venga el cubano a engañarla, a someterla, a enviciarla, a corromperla. ¡Duele mucho!” (Ibid). He called for severe punishments for pimps and other corrupters of women, for reeducation and rehabilitation of their victims, and for a campaign to raise morality: “[C]reo que hay que levantar los valores morales: pienso que hay que presentar ante el pueblo, realmente, con todo lo que tiene de bochornoso esto, la gravedad, el daño que hace, la desmoralización que crea” (Ibid). His admission of hurt and embarrassment and his appeal to the collective moral conscience of the Cuban people suggest acknowledgement of the failure of the revolution to effectively consolidate its values in a generation of Cuban youth that have never known a different ideological system; and his representation of the *jinetera* as hapless victim stands in stark contrast to Coco Fusco’s observation in “Jinetas en Cuba” that these women are seen as heroic providers “cuyo poder sexual está mostrando los fracasos de un regimen machista en decadencia” (qtd in Holgado 254).

In a recent interview with *El Nuevo Herald*, Amir Valle blames increased contact with the capitalist world for this loss of revolutionary values:

A pesar de que durante décadas se educó a la gente en la creencia de que los estímulos morales eran más importantes que los estímulos materiales, eso se vino al piso en la medida en que los cubanos comenzaron a entrar en contacto con los modelos de vida extranjeros: primero con los viajes de la comunidad [exiliados cubanos en Estados Unidos], a partir de 1979, y luego con el turismo. La gente comenzó a cuestionarse las cosas impuestas, porque empezó a tener nivel de comparación (Web. 23 Aug. 2008. <<http://www.amirvalle.com/>>)

And, in a subsequent conversation with *La Opinión* of Los Angeles, he accuses Castro of tacitly supporting illegal activities by ignoring them publicly for more than six years:

Y aunque algunos parecen olvidarlo, quiero precisar que el gran culpable de esa ceguera es el propio Fidel Castro. En Cuba, bien lo sabemos, todo lo que él condena se hace condenable, y por eso, en aquel discurso en el que él reconoció que en Cuba había prostitutas, pero que eran las prostitutas “más sanas y preparadas del mundo”, se le dio luz verde al pensamiento conformista y se extendió como concepto la permisibilidad; es decir, había que preocuparse, pero no tanto, porque si “el Jefe” lo tomaba tan a la ligera ¿para qué preocuparse de más? (Web. 23 Aug. 2008. <<http://www.amirvalle.com/>>)

Valle’s accusation is supported by the proliferation of stores and entire shopping centers that accept only dollars and that tempt the Cuban people with the items in their display windows. All of these are run by the state. Holgado Fernández also mentions the contradictory position of the government regarding its stated desire to raise moral values and its creation of these businesses:

“¿Qué hacer para acceder a estos, si no se cuenta con dólares? Los cubanos y cubanas que

transgreden las normas ‘morales’ y jurídicas no quieren otra cosa que lo ofrecido por el propio Estado, que crea la expectativa pero no favorece su logro” (255).

By 1999, ambivalent public opinion regarding illegal activities was well established and those who earned the most money had come to enjoy the greatest status, regardless of the source of their income:

Desde hace 20 años ser profesional en Cuba no significa nada: los marginales alcanzan mejores niveles de vida que los universitarios. Las prostitutas y los vendedores de ron y tabaco se han convertido en símbolos de éxito. Son como pequeños alcaldes de los lugares donde viven (Web. 23 Aug. 2008. <<http://www.amirvalle.com/>>)

Valle summarizes the difficult situation of all Cubans (male and female) when he states: “Si quieres sobrevivir utilizando las estructuras creadas por el gobierno, debes acatar sus leyes y aún así tienes que ‘luchar’ la vida. Y es simple, o luchas tu vida en los ámbitos de la ilegalidad, de la doble moral, de la corrupción social, o sencillamente te mueres” (Web. 23 Aug. 2008. <<http://www.amirvalle.com/>>). He acknowledges that engaging in illegal activities is virtually unavoidable, and concedes that the carriers of “el virus de la libre empresa” have become the new symbols of success, but in *Jineteras*, Valle takes issue with that perception, voicing the opposing view that, no matter how successful, the prostitute is a person from the bottom of the social order, not a figure worthy of praise:

¿No es preocupante en lo ético y lo sociológico que hoy la prostituta sea vista como una figura líder en su entorno por haber triunfado, mejorado su nivel de vida e incluso virado (lo más preocupante) la escala social tradicional en Cuba

para ocupar uno de sus más altos escalones, cuando antiguamente estaba en las escalas más bajas de esa estructura? (*Jineteras* 282)

Valle's negative opinion notwithstanding, given the choice between "[p]utear o morir de hambre," Chaviano's Claudia decides to "putear." Her financial crisis worsens when her boyfriend Rubén, an artist who earns a legal living in dollars by making and selling leather wallets to tourists in the Plaza de la Catedral in Old Havana, is arrested for securing his supplies through black market vendors, and sent to prison for two years as part of a round up of "artesanos y personas que trabajaban por cuenta propia: [...] delincuentes que se enriquecían a expensas del pueblo" (110-111). Rubén had joined the tourist economy after being dismissed from an official position as a teacher for antisocial behavior. He and Claudia had enjoyed a comfortable, well-fed life style, including dinners at *La Bodeguita del Medio* and a cash reserve of several hundred dollars, until the police took him away in the middle of the night.

La Mora is a reluctant *jinetera*. Cajoled by her friend and former college classmate Sissi (Elena), she agrees to go out with Gilberto, a married Cuban economist who works as a butcher's assistant: "Ahora tengo carne extra para mis chamacos y vendo el sobrante en la bolsa negra. Le saco unos cuantos dólares, y con eso me voy a las diplotiendas y consigo varias cosas, desde aceite hasta champú. Créeme, hermano, ser carnicero es toda una carrera" (33). Gilberto is happy to share his illegal good fortune with La Mora and soon he is completely smitten with her: "La Mora me sacó de la rutina. Me revolvió las tripas y el seso. Me viró al revés. [...] Estaba obsesionado con mi Mora, y ella parecía apegarse cada vez más a mí" (134).

After three months, however, La Mora ends their relationship because Gilberto shows no signs of willingness to leave his wife: "No sirvo para andarme escondiendo. Me pone los nervios de punta" (138). As a university educated professional woman, La Mora is steeped in the

traditional middle-class values of moderation, decency, restraint and non-promiscuous behavior (Berg 196). Transgressing those established norms of female conduct lowers her cultural status, because the prostitute is historically a member of a social class and/or race that the hegemonic male deems inferior, while the wife is an ideal bourgeois woman. The prostitute falls victim to “the overpowering sexual drive of the male” (Cabezas 81), while the wife maintains her purity.¹ Sociologist Kamala Kempadoo’s assertion that heteropatriarchy “privileges heterosexual, promiscuous masculinity and subordinates feminine sexuality, normalizing relations of power that are intolerant of and oppressive toward sexual desires and practices that are outside of or oppose the dominant sexual and gender regimes” (9) clarifies why a sexual relationship that thrills Gilberto and enhances his social standing, depresses La Mora and diminishes her self-esteem. While not yet a prostitute in the literal sense, La Mora balks at the prospect of losing social status, even though the affair with Gilberto lessens her economic difficulties. Her friend and baby sitter, Nubia, points out that there are many women like her: “–Por Dios, ni que fueras la única en esa situación. Hay montones de mujeres que...” (139); but La Mora is unmoved: “– ¡No me importa lo que haga el resto de la humanidad! Yo soy yo” (139). Nubia’s interest in her friend’s love life is motivated by more than concern for her social status: “–Sólo quiero saber algo – pidió Nubia–. ¿Cómo vas a alimentar a David?” (139).

After breaking up with Gilberto, La Mora initially resists Sissi’s entreaties to join her in hooking up with foreign tourists: “Tiene que existir un modo de vivir que no implique oficiar de hetaira moderna” (141); but she ultimately gives in, agreeing to go out with her friend and a couple of Mexican men. The afternoon and evening are awkward but upon seeing the dollars on the night stand the following morning, La Mora knows that she has become just like Sissi: “Ella

¹The national patriarch’s (Castro) call for severe punishments for pimps and other corrupters of women, and for reeducation and rehabilitation for their victims, suggests the persistence of male hegemony in Cuban sexual attitudes. The state has educated women, yet they are still under male control and not responsible for their actions.

sintió que la sangre le subía al rostro, pero una idea borró de golpe todo escrúpulo. Con ese dinero podría entrar a cualquier diplotienda y comprar comida y ropas para su hijo. Casi no reconoció su aplomo al tomar los billetes y meterlos en su bolso” (149). Her entry into a double life is now complete, and it is here that Chaviano confirms the reader’s suspicion that La Mora and Claudia are two sides of the same person.

She feels ashamed of herself, but the virus of free enterprise invests Claudia/La Mora with economic power:

Era como vivir en el capitalismo. Qué maravilla: ser independiente, trabajar a cambio de dólares y, por si fuera poco, ganar más por cada jornada adicional. Ya no tendría que hacer trabajo “voluntario” a cambio de nada. Así era un gusto. Así era un placer la vida de proletaria. Así valía la pena sobrecumplir las metas, ser jinetera vanguardia; pero no a cambio de medallitas de latón, ni de diplomas hechos en papel cartucho, sino a cambio de artículos para vivir, de comida para matar su hambre vieja como la misma revolución que la había creado. (220)

By assuming a life style of individual agency as a *jinetera* she challenges the model of subordination and moral turpitude associated with the traditional patriarchal construct of the prostitute; and by satisfying the desires of the international male visitor, she is doing what the government wants: selling her labor power in the production of a service that benefits the national economy. In return she is “seeking power in the new tourist marketplace, the power of access to consumer goods and otherwise unobtainable amusements and diversions that are associated with the privileges of tourists and foreign businessmen” (Facio 67).

The reactions to the emergence of Claudia’s alter-ego are varied. Her neighbor Georgy, who helps care for her son, sees an opportunity for personal enrichment:

-Yo sé en lo que andas, Claudita. Aquí nada es secreto, pero a mí esas cosas me resbalan. Cada cual tiene que buscárselas como puede –bajó la voz–. Si yo tuviera tu edad y tu cuerpo, dejaba la escuela y me iba al Malecón. Con esto te digo que puedo cuidar a David cada vez que quieras, por un dólar o un jabón o un tubo de pasta a la semana. Me da igual. (219)

Nubia is critical at first: “–Dejaste de salir con un hombre para andar con muchos” (162), but is soon softened by the luxuries her friend shares with her: “Queso salado, con su masa suave, con su olor sabroso que no es peste de milagro; el queso preferido de los ratones de Walt Disney...Mmmm. Estoy pensando seriamente en cambiar de profesión” (216). Ursula, a childhood friend, who is now a nun, expresses surprise: “–Claudia, ¿en qué te has metido?” (176). But, even she is won over by the smell of black beans cooking on the stove: “–Tengo que irme rápido, pero puedo probar para no hacerte un desaire...¿Frijoles, verdad?” (236).

While she is honest about her double existence with her female friends, La Mora attempts to hide it from the men. Inevitably, she fails:

¡Qué mala pata! Venirse a encontrar con Gilberto en aquel preciso momento. [...] le encabronaba lo que pudiera pensar alguien que fuera tan cercano. A nadie le gusta que quienes lo han visto en mejores tiempos asistan a su desamparo o decadencia. Es humillante. (234)

Gilberto pretends not to notice her *jinetera* attire because he still has feelings for her. He invites her for a drink but La Mora brushes him off, a rejection that wounds his machismo: “¿Tú sabes lo que es buscar a una jeva durante un año y encontrársela de puta? [...] Yo me quito a esa tipa de la cabeza o dejo de llamarme Gilberto. [...] Una cosa es que te la dejen en la mano y otra que te dejen por puta” (238-240). Claudia is petrified of running into Rubén under similar

circumstances. Fortunately, she is wearing her *compañera* clothes when that happens. She goes to his house for lunch, but steals away without telling him about David or her new life. Rubén has been looking for her since his release from prison and cannot understand her behavior:

“¿Cómo iba a imaginarme que una tipa que he dejado en la cama va a irse mientras me echo un poco de agua?...Voy a montar una guardia permanente en el barrio, pero ¿y si estaba allí por otra razón y no porque viviera cerca? ¡Es para volverse loco!” (191). Claudia flees because she is afraid of telling him about her livelihood: “Yo no quería verlo, entre otras cosas porque esperaba que me comiera a preguntas. ¿Y qué le diría? ¿Que había sobrevivido a base de acostarme con turistas? ¿Qué tuve que alimentar a su hijo con el sudor de mis nalgas[?]” (177).

Claudia assumes that the two well-educated Cuban men in her life ascribe to the same patriarchal norms that govern her own moral code and feed her growing self-loathing: the prostitute as “pathological, vain, greedy, and lacking morality, social values, emotional maturity, and ultimately revolutionary consciousness” (Cabezas 83). The men’s macho banter suggests that this is, in fact, the case. At the same time, however, as Yvette Fuentes points out in an article on masculine discourse in the novel, it is also true that both men have utterly failed to keep Claudia/La Mora under their control:

Rubén y Gilberto hacen alarde de su virilidad y su hombría, [pero] manifiestan la impotencia a varios niveles. Primero, a pesar de sus actitudes patriarcales, aparentes en sus palabras, ninguno logra realmente controlar a “su mujer”. Su inhabilidad de mantener a la mujer a su lado surge tanto a consecuencia de su falta de comprensión y actitud machista hacia las mujeres como por las circunstancias políticas y sociales fuera de su control. La impotencia es doble: a

un nivel personal y a un nivel sociopolítico. (Web. 24 Jul. 2007.

<http://www.dainachaviano.com/articulo_YvetteFuente_contrapunteo.html>)

Claudia never imagines that the men's inability to control their own personal and economic situations might lead them to view her unofficial activity more charitably than she herself does: perhaps as "a response to intense exploitations, oppressions, discrimination, and violations that have been visited upon women in a world dominated by [...] racialized desire, and masculine definitions and needs" (Kempadoo 203); or even as a form of rebellion: "la doble moral, de algún modo, es también una forma de rebeldía y es la única libertad que tienes, la libertad de manifestarte en contra de lo que se te ha impuesto, aun cuando sea a la sombra de tu vida íntima, en secreto" (Web. 23 Aug. 2008. <<http://www.amirvalle.com/>>). Her friend Aquiles is one male who voices a decidedly supportive position: "Media Cuba es jinetera y todavía tú te preocupas por el qué dirán. Ella lo miró atónita. –¿Tú lo sabías?– Aquí todo se sabe. Y no hay nada malo en eso; mira, hasta yo estoy de jinetero" (266).

His words do not convince, however, because Claudia/La Mora's guilt for leading a double life is aggravated by Muba, El Indio and Onolorio, three supernatural characters who guide her on a journey to Havana's past, showing her scenes from history that are not taught in revolutionary classrooms. She witnesses a massacre of Indians by Spanish conquistadors in the early 16th century, apprentice slaves earning salaries for their labor during the colonial period, an erotically exuberant Afrocuban Carnival celebration, the people's defense of the port of Havana during the 1762 English invasion, and an adolescent José Martí leaving his secondary school in 1868 with a pile of schoolboy newspapers under his arm. She comes to the conclusion that "el esplendor de su pasado y la maravilla de su historia habían terminado en ruinas por la idiotez de algunos hombres" (279). By romanticizing and idealizing the past, Claudia embraces traditions

and stereotypes rejected by revolutionary ideology and reaffirms her adherence to the 19th century moral values that have led her “al borde de la esquizofrenia” (236).

Unable to reconcile the social conventions of the past with her current situation, Claudia abandons her life as a *jinetera*. She dreads the loss of material goods she has grown accustomed to: “Pronto carecería de esos lujos: los jabones acabarían por gastarse, sus zapatos se romperían y, lo peor, se quedaría sin ropa interior. David tendría que renunciar a sus compotas” (294); but her depressed psychological state prohibits her from continuing: “Todo me deprime. Esto de llevar una doble vida, me mata. No puedo ser puta y santa al mismo tiempo” (236). She finds employment at a pizzería in her neighborhood and in less than a week she joins her colleagues in their world of private enterprise, “contrabandea[ando] con la harina, el queso, los tomates y los escasos productos que llegaban de algún sitio indeterminable” (300), thereby insuring that “no tendría por qué renunciar a sus lujos de antes. Ahora que todo el mundo traficaba en dólares ella empezó a vender el queso a cambio de los billetes verdes” (300).

Having achieved a less morally reprehensible (but less lucrative) source for the dollars she earns, Claudia fantasizes about reconciling with Rubén. Before she can act on this desire, however, fate brings her together, not only with Rubén, but with Gilberto, as well. She and her son are swept up in a crowd running towards the *malecón*, where people are boarding rafts and boats, in a frenzy to leave the island. Presented with another dilemma worthy of Hamlet– “¿Qué hago? ¿Me voy pa'l carajo o me quedo?” (309)– she is nearly knocked down by a small boat being carried toward the sea. The two halves of her double life converge at that moment, as her two lovers emerge from behind that boat: “Su corazón se paraliza al ver los ojos de Rubén” (310). A scene of confusion and enlightenment follows as the two men discover they have been love sick over the same woman and Rubén sees that Claudia has a son. Recovering from his

initial shock, Gilberto invites her to join them on the boat: “Vamos, Mora. No hay problema” (311), an invitation that is seconded by R ben. The visions of Muba, El Indio and Jos  Mart  remain on shore as the protagonist, who had recently assured her friends –“Yo no me ir  de aqu  nunca (213)– contemplates “el promisorio horizonte lleno de sue os que flotan a la deriva” (312).

The flip-flop in Claudia/La Mora’s convictions and the ambiguity of the ending are the final expressions of the double standards and contradictory attitudes depicted throughout the novel. The principal characters, *hombres* and *hembras*, adhere to the double moral standard of participating, actively or vicariously, in the underground economy while paying lip service to the official rules and long held revolutionary standards. They are not the only two-faced players, however. Constantly changing government policies regarding what is legal and what is forbidden foster feelings of frustration and economic impotence that motivate some, like Rub n and Gilberto, to abandon the island. Fidel Castro boasts of educating women for professional careers, but the official economy no longer affords them an opportunity to earn a living utilizing the skills they have learned. To the contrary, in response to economic crisis, and in order to insure its economic survival, the government has collaborated in the creation of seemingly unlimited employment opportunities for young women willing to exchange their *compa era* status for that of *ciudadana* by assuming the mythic colonial identity of the sensual *mulata* that subordinates them socially and morally to the hegemonic male.

As Claudia/La Mora illustrates, becoming the object of male tourist sexual fantasy may lead to depression and self-loathing because the *jinetera* is historically a woman of inferior social status, rejected by the *bourgeois* middle class. Chaviano’s protagonist validates the 19th century, patriarchal tradition that is reinforced repeatedly in Amir Valle’s *Jineteras*, where seven chapters

begin with Bible verses condemning prostitution. Valle also articulates his nostalgia for tradition in one of the questions he poses at the end of the book. “¿No es preocupante sociológicamente que un acto repudiado en épocas anteriores hoy sea visto como algo natural en los ámbitos ciudadano y familiar?” (282).²

Rejection and psychological deterioration notwithstanding, Claudia/La Mora is empowered by her contagion with the virus of free enterprise. She takes control of her destiny, and earns dollars that benefit herself, her son, and her friends. Unlike Chaviano and Valle, Kamala Kempadoo views prostitution nonjudgmentally, as an essential “part of Caribbean life upon which family, nation, and development are constructed” (203): a reality that should be brought into the light, a profession whose members should organize. For her, the double moral standard consists of denying its existence at the national level and silencing the voices of its practitioners, because doing so: “Reinforce[s] existing patterns of Caribbean heteropatriarchy where the sexuality of poor black and brown women is disciplined, policed, and kept within the parameters defined by the state, the church, and the elite, yet profoundly relied upon to service ‘naturally’ promiscuous men and to prop up various national industries (203).

For Kempadoo, the failure of government bureaucracies to address with transparency the socioeconomic and political aspects of prostitution is a greater moral failure than practicing prostitution as a means of economic agency or an expression of political resistance. While Chaviano and Valle would agree with Kempadoo’s position on the hypocrisy of government regarding prostitution, they might stop short of endorsing the sociologist’s suggestion that the heteropatriarchy they both evince is a target more worthy of moral condemnation than the women who satisfy their hunger for food and material goods by exploiting hegemonic males. To the contrary, *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*’s idealization of Cuba’s pre-revolutionary past

² I wonder what he would say about interracial marriage or gay rights.

and its deference to 19th century patriarchal values trump the *jinetera* protagonist's economic successes that might have been portrayed more objectively by novelists with a different point of view. In this text, nonetheless, Claudia/La Mora, not unlike her creator Daína Chaviano, abandons the island for a promising horizon, in search of dreams that are adrift and likely unrealizable within the current upside-down world of a state-run economic system where engaging in illegal free enterprise confers more rewards and greater status than operating within the traditional economic, social, and moral structures.

Works Cited

- Berg, Mette Louise. "Sleeping with the Enemy: *Jineterismo*, 'Cultural Level' and 'Antisocial Behaviour' in 1990s Cuba. *Beyond the Blood, the Beach and the Banana*. Ed. Sandra Courtman. Kingston: Ian Randle, 2004. 186-204.
- Cabezas, Amalia Lucía. "Discourses of Prostitution: The Case of Cuba." *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and redefinition*. Ed. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema. London: Routledge, 1998. 79-86.
- Campa, Román de la. *Cuba on My Mind. Journeys to a Severed Nation*. London: Verso, 2000.
- Castro, Fidel. Address to the National Assembly. Havana. 11 July 1992. Web. 23 Aug. 2008.
<http://groups.google.com/group/soc.culture.cuba/browse_thread/thread/18dd5ea05a7805d7/45d48d68bd0971b2?lnk=st&q=hay+prostitutas%2C+pero+la+prostituci%C3%B3n+no+es+permitida+en+nuestro+pa%C3%ADs.++No+hay+mujeres+&num=1#45d48d68bd0971b2>.
- . Address Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Revolutionary National Police. Karl Marx Theatre. Havana. 5 Jan. 1999. Web. 23 Aug. 2008.
<<http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1999/esp/f050199e.html>>
- Chaviano, Daína. *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*. Barcelona: Planeta, 1998.
- Facio, Elisa. "Jineterismo During the Special Period." *Cuban Transitions at the Millennium*. Ed. Eloise Linger and John Cotman. Largo, Maryland: Internacional Development Options, 2000. 55-74.
- Fuentes, Yvette. "Contrapunteo de dos cubanazos: representación del discurso masculino en *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*." Segundo encuentro internacional sobre creación y exilio: con Cuba en la distancia. Cadiz, Spain. May 2003. Web. 24 Jul. 2007.
- Hispanet Journal 1 (December 2008)

<http://www.dainachaviano.com/articulo_YvetteFuente_contrapunteo.html>

Fusco, Coco. "Hustling for Dollars: *Jineterismo* in Cuba." *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and redefinition*. Ed. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema. London: Routledge, 1998. 151-166.

Holgado Fernández, Isabel. *¡No es fácil! Mujeres cubanas y la crisis revolucionaria*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2000.

Kempadoo, Kamala. *Sexing the Caribbean*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Trumbull, Charles. "Prostitution and Sex Tourism in Cuba." *Cuba in Transition –Volume 11*. Washington DC: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, 2001.

Valle, Amir. *Jineteras*. Bogotá: Planeta, 2006.

---. Interview. *El Nuevo Herald*. 25 June 2006. Web. 23 Aug. 2008.

<<http://www.amirvalle.com/entrevistas/nuevo.htm>>

---. Interview. *La Opinión*, Los Angeles. 19 Nov. 2006. Web. 23. Aug. 2008.

<<http://www.amirvalle.com/entrevistas/opinion.htm>>

