Cuba’s economic restructuring in the past decade has involved the country’s reinsertion into the global tourist market. One of the undesired consequences of the new tourism-based economy has been the phenomenon of jineterismo, literally horseback riding, but used to indicate hustling or prostitution. Prostitution is associated with the pre-revolution era and is therefore a sensitive issue for the socialist government. At the same time, sex tourism has become an important source of hard currency income. This article proposes to see jineterismo as a complex social phenomenon that brings issues of race, class, gender and nation into play, ultimately challenging the revolutionary narrative of social and racial equality.

This anthropological research project explores the relationship between voluntourism (the travel which includes volunteering for a charitable cause) and the socio-economic phenomenon of jineterismo (the ‘riding of tourists’) in Cuba by using a case study of a volunteer brigade. Whereas volunteer tourists engage in this type of travel in search for authenticity and personal growth, many of the tourist clients are seeking sexual gratification.

Throughout the Revolution era, cinema has had various political roles. It has served as a didactic instrument to promote and explain the Revolutionary movement and its new social and political policies. In order to accomplish this promotion many of the documentary and feature length films have focused on viewer responses as a means of strengthening the Revolution’s hold. Pérez presents the concept of jineterismo or hustling, a common practice in Special Period Cuba since the beginning of the dollarization (jineterismo’s meaning has expanded beyond a sexual and monetary exchange), as a part of the cultural imaginary. These encounters for Pérez not only represent the economic exchange but also portray the emotive weight of Cuba’s position.