Daliany Jerónimo Kersh, *Women's Work in Special Period Cuba: Making Ends Meet*.

Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. xiv + 255 pp. (Cloth US\$84.99)

On September 11, 2019, the president of Cuba, Miguel Díaz Canel, announced a potential return of the worst moments of the so-called “Special Period”—the profound economic and sociopolitical crisis that lasted from 1989 to 2005. In this context, Daliany Jerónimo Kersh’s analysis of the consequences of that crisis for women’s work is necessary and timely. The late and timid arrival to the island of the #metoo movement, albeit criticized by the dominant Cuban patriarchy, also calls for more studies of gender relations in “revolutionary” Cuba. *Women's Work in Special Period Cuba* deals with questions relevant to advancing issues of gender equality in Cuba and globally, namely, in times of crisis, how do state socioeconomic decisions affect gender relations? Is it possible to speak of the feminization of a crisis? What are the mechanisms women develop to cope with the crisis and how are they informed by ideology and propaganda? What are the connections between past and present that explain those strategies? How can we interpret the relations between the public and private spheres in terms of gender issues, and how do those relations affect what happens in labor relations, particularly in times of crisis?

Jerónimo Kersh establishes meaningful comparisons with other countries of the Global South to discuss the supposed Cuban exceptionalism in terms of gender equality, while trying to examine the interconnections of gender, race, age, education, and class in defining the situation of women in times of crisis. She conducted interviews in 2013–14 with 30 women living and working in a small town, near the touristic Varadero, as well as with three important Cuban intellectuals who have worked extensively on issues related to gender equality in Cuba (Mirta Rodríguez Calderón, Sara Más, and Marta Nuñez Sarmiento). She uses a polyvocal framework to offer different perspectives and memories on the same period and compares the testimonies with official publications by the Cuban press during the worst years of the crisis. In general, she offers important contributions, including a questioning of Cuba’s current progress in terms of the protection and advancement of social equality for women.

Throughout the book’s eight chapters, Jerónimo Kersh examines the internationally recognized achievements toward greater equality for women during the first three decades of the Revolution. These successes serve as a pivot to analyze the decline in women’s advances during the crisis. She recognizes some of the issues that complicate the use of the interviews as a source, like the fact that they were conducted more than a decade after the period in question, by a foreigner, and with Cuban women accustomed to the “*doble moral*” that characterized most of Cuba’s revolutionary history. One of them, sociologist Marta

Nuñez Sarmiento, lived outside of Cuba all through the 1990s. Nonetheless there is certainly validity in analyzing these women's perceptions and memories.

Jerónimo Kersh's principal reliance on a Cuban Ministry of Justice's 1977 publication to examine the Revolution's initial gender policies is problematic. Her book doesn't actually reflect on the patriarchal thinking and attitudes that have guided the "historic" revolutionary leadership, particularly, the role of Fidel Castro in defining gender policies. In analyzing the pre-1989 situation she does not mention the absence of women in key political leadership bodies. Because she does not take the state's historical patriarchal positions into account, her assertion that the Special Period created a disconnect between the public and private spheres in terms of gender equality becomes problematic. An intersectional analysis of all factors affecting the private sphere would really be needed to understand that, in a country where the personal-as-political has been demanded and imposed, neither the private and public nor the labor and political spheres can be analyzed separately. The book seems to suggest that there was a radical difference between the pre- and post-1989 situation for women, while it is obvious that the "advances" were not rooted in a carefully designed gender equality agenda based on strong grassroot movements. The "feminization of the crisis" was not a sudden phenomenon that appeared in 1989, as the book suggests, but rather a logical consequence of a process that failed to foster or allow for a real, profound change in gender relations and ideology at all levels. Jerónimo Kersh frequently ignores the direct responsibility of the government and the Federation of Cuban Women for their inability to create foundations that might have avoided the feminization of the crisis. With Cuba on the verge of another economic emergency, imposed from without and within, the conversation around this book will hopefully contribute to opening new paths for understanding and changing Cuban women's lives.

Marisela Fleites-Lear

Humanities Department, Green River College, Auburn WA, USA

mfleites@greenriver.edu