Noelle M. Stout

After Love: Queer Intimacy and Erotic Economies in Post-Soviet Cuba. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2014. ix + 238 pp. (Paper US\$ 23.95)

Based on nearly a decade of ethnographic engagement, the fine-tuned analysis in *After Love* reveals the ways in which the growth of sex tourism in the “mixed market economy” of post-Soviet Cuba can exacerbate shifts in values, and therefore change Cubans’ social and familial relationships. To illuminate gaps between values and everyday practices, the introduction eloquently weaves in the story of Ruso—a dynamic figure that comes to represent the life cycle of queer sexual encounters (for cash or not) in Havana. Challenging narrow categories of sex work, Noelle Stout details the many ways in which affect is commodified in Cuba’s post-Soviet period. By doing so, she demonstrates that materialism and forms of self-interest can spill over from work relationships into family and other social circles.

After Love builds on a rich history of scholarship on the political economy of sex and love in the Caribbean to focus specifically on queer intimacy in Havana with varying degrees of commodification. Stout aptly situates the particular social and economic histories of Cuba within the larger story of eroticization of Caribbean bodies. The book begins with an important history of state reforms immediately after the 1959 Revolution as “forms of homophobic state repression.” In the decades leading up to the Revolution, the socialist government associated homosexuality with the depraved underclass of the mafia, prostitutes, and criminals. Emphasis on the nuclear family and heterosexual marriage as part of the socialist state reinforced homophobia in the 1960s and 1970s, but beginning in the 1980s there was a rise of “gay tolerance.” Stout details the growth of sex work in the post-Soviet era with the influx of international tourism to Cuba beginning in the 1990s. Throughout the beginning chapters her in-depth analysis of “urban gays” demonstrates the ways in which the rise of the sex trade “threatened to unravel hard won victories” against homophobia in Cuba (p. 54).

For some queer Cubans, Havana’s queer community and the rise of “modern” approaches to intimacy has felt like an increase in their freedom of sexual expression and ability to be out, but Stout notes that for others, sex work reinforced normative roles and reduced them to forms of patronage and pandering to their clients’ desires and fantasies. Furthermore, she gracefully weaves in questions of race and class throughout the narrative, demonstrating where white privilege intersects with homophobia or heteronormativity in this context.

After Love further reveals that following decades of homophobic forms of exclusion, social bonds and chosen family became increasingly important for affect and for capital. However, for both queer and straight Habaneros the commodification of intimacy may signal a potentially “dystopic future in which everyone faced the challenges of daily life and state control alone” (p. 39). For some Cubans, this realization, coupled with the ways in which working in tourism has reshaped their lives and impinged on their relationships, may indicate a shift in subjectivity. Still, despite the homophobic sentiments behind much of the socialist state’s social reform, Stout shows the ways in which queer Cubans draw on and believe in socialist moral discourse, also noting that the provisions of the socialist economy are absolutely necessary for them to get by. Even those with forays into sex work actively criticize the commodification of sex and affect as part of the unraveling of Cuban society. Hard work is still valued over easy money, signaling the value of certain forms of labor over others, and the ways discourses of respectability are continually reinscribed.

After Love necessarily focuses on people young enough to be desired for sex work, and Stout is aware that there are limitations in concentrating on those under thirty. In the final chapter she clearly indicates the need for further studies of queer Cuban lives that deal with the impact of migration, rising rates of HIV on the island, and “non-normative” sexualities outside of Havana. Her reflexive approach, which includes relevant personal details about her life and her own forays into somewhat commodified relationships with both Cubans and tourists, offers a refreshing balance, though her careful writing still foregrounds the lives of queer Cubans and is respectful of the differences between her experience as a white foreign researcher and theirs as people of color living in still-socialist Cuba.

Beyond its strong contributions to scholarship on Latin America and the Caribbean, *After Love* is a must read for queer studies and for anyone interested in the ways in which neoliberalism, globalization, and migration impact everyday life. In addition, the book is wonderfully suited for undergraduate and graduate courses on gender, race, and political economy, as well as courses in anthropology or Latin American and Caribbean studies more generally.

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