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sexual revolutions in Cuba: passion, politics and memory

Carrie Hamilton, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2012, 320pp., ISBN: 978-0-80-78-3519-7, \$39.95 (Cloth)

Hamilton's book offers a cross-generational view of sexuality and gender relations in Cuba. Her materials address how sexuality and desire changed (or didn't) since the triumph of the 1959 Revolution. To set the stage for evaluating these changes and continuities, the book begins with an overview of sexuality, family and gender pre-1959. The remainder of the book draws on the oral history material, speeches, state policies and a range of other primary and secondary sources. Throughout the book, Hamilton promotes oral history as a methodology, and as part of this agenda reflects on how her own identity and sexuality may affect the interviews—both in what is said and in what is left unsaid. With a careful ear she attends to silences in her interlocutors' narratives as they skirt taboo subjects such as domestic violence, interracial relations and HIV/AIDS. The methodological and analytical approach of the research adds significantly to the current literature on sexuality and gender in Cuba in a number of important ways.

Hamilton's book is based on over 30 oral histories collected from 2004 to 2010. These interviews were part of a larger research project that collected over 100 oral histories. This larger project was noteworthy for involving a joint team of foreign and Cuban researchers and for soliciting interviews from respondents across the island—broadening and deepening field-based research, which until now has focused primarily on Havana and has rarely incorporated Cuban researchers. The portion of life histories from this project woven into Hamilton's book cut a wide swathe of Cuban society—old and young, urban and rural, and from a range of skin colours and class positions. The diversity and depth of the sample allows Hamilton to discuss issues of sexuality from a cross-generational perspective, rather than simply providing a snapshot of the present moment.

Hamilton takes a feminist intersectional approach to explore sexuality in relation to race, class and gender. While common among social scientists, Hamilton demonstrates the utility of intersectionality as a theoretical perspective for historians. An intersectional view enables Hamilton to present how her subjects are constructed in multiple positions of privilege and oppression, and combinations of the two, yielding a complex picture of each individual interlocutor. For example, she examines how categories of privilege

(e.g. whiteness or heterosexuality) intersect with class and race in what is said and unsaid, such as the use of racialised language by a white homosexual interviewee and the general lack of attention to race in the literature on male homosexuality. Her interviews urge us to hear the connections between these realms of experience (race, class, sexuality and gender), rather than separate out each arena.

Central to her discussion is the dialectical relationship between masculinity and femininity in the context of heterosexual dynamics and the tensions of generational change. Rather than finding neat cohorts or straightforward historical progress, she documents varying levels of commitment to revolution's ideas of gender equality along with strongly held beliefs of innate gender differences (e.g. men as sexually predatory and socially irresponsible). Juxtaposing life narratives from old and young yields unexpected continuities (men abandoning their families), as well as monumental changes (women entering the workforce). Her analysis of women's and men's narratives investigates often overlooked topics such as the relationship between sexuality and parenthood, the social construction and lived experience of fatherhood, and the issue of missing men/fathers mentioned in a number of the oral histories. Her focus leads readers to reconceptualise masculinity as multidimensional, as her interviews both play on and challenge stereotypes of Cuban men. Her analysis of Cubans who have sex with foreigners is equally nuanced, here too moving beyond stereotypes to show the complicated nature of these Cuba/foreign couples. The tourism economy, Hamilton argues, creates divergent economic options for Cubans of different class and racial groups, making it problematic to label the wide range of activities and exchanges occurring in the erotic market surrounding tourism.

Three chapters of the book deal with both male and female same-sex relationships and homophobia. Despite recent government efforts to recognise the equality of homosexual and transgender people in Cuba, the impact of popular and institutionalised homophobia remains a central concern for these men and women. While much has been written on male homosexuals in Cuba, Hamilton makes a significant contribution by recounting the experiences of women with same-sex desires. In the context of transnational queer studies, her material on same-sex desires in Cuba problematises the urban/rural binary and studies of queer time and place, and by focusing on women adds new dimensions to the active/passive model of homosexuality said to predominate in Latin America.

How sexuality is shaped by the political and economic moment forms a visible thread throughout the book. For example, she investigates the impact of the perpetual housing crisis on sexuality and family relations—cracking the oft-repeated views about Cubans' preferences for living in extended families. Her narratives, as often as not, reveal family conflicts and tensions, rather than unity

and harmony. In addition, she argues that the changes in gender relations (e.g. the eroding of heterosexual male privilege) and sexuality (e.g. high level of sexual activity among youth) were less a result of official revolutionary policies, but more a consequence of general social transformations after 1959. The strength of the book is not found in her conclusions, but in the rich material she analyses to support these conclusions and for the previously overlooked topics she addresses. Students and researchers in the fields of Gender Studies, Cuban Studies, Social History and Anthropology will find the life histories and Hamilton's analysis compelling.

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