

Review Essay/Ensayo de Reseña

Tourism, Sexuality and Power in the Spanish Caribbean

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- *Economies of Desire: Sex and Tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic*, by Amalia L. Cabezas. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009.
- *The Devil behind the Mirror: Globalization and Politics in the Dominican Republic*, by Steven Gregory. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007.
- *Caribbean Pleasure Industry: Tourism, Sexuality and AIDS in the Dominican Republic*, by Mark Padilla. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Doing long-term ethnographic research on the Dutch Caribbean island of Curaçao, the main stereotype I encountered with regard to the large group of immigrants from the Dominican Republic (and more broadly, Latina women) was that they were all prostitutes. Perhaps reviewing three books that address sex tourism in the Dominican Republic, including one comparative analysis with Cuba, was not the best way to counter this dominant impression. However, the three ethnographies reviewed here all go a long way in contextualizing the intersections of Spanish Caribbean practices and discourses of gender and sexuality with a neoliberal Caribbean political economy. Each work takes a different angle: where Mark Padilla sheds light on gay sex tourism, Amalia Cabezas compares female sex work in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, while Steven Gregory takes on the larger project of relating neoliberal globalization to the lives and livelihoods of working people and communities in a Dominican tourist zone.

Based on three years of ethnographic research in two Dominican cities, Mark Padilla's *Caribbean Pleasure Industry* focuses on men who exchange sex for money with foreign gay men. His approach is to understand these Dominican men's intimate lives – their lived experiences and practices of sexuality – within the context of structural shifts in the Caribbean political economy, and to develop a 'critical medical anthropology' (CMA) perspective on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Dominican Republic. Such a perspective means understanding the epidemic as driven by local and global sexual inequalities, and tracing the linkages between gay sex tourism, tourism dependence and HIV risk behaviour amongst men who have sex with men (MSM). In the Introduction, he sketches out the contours of this approach to the intersections of tourism, sexuality and power. He argues for an understanding of contemporary sexual-economic relations within historical structures of global power, in particular the positioning of racialized and eroticized Caribbean bodies within systems of colonialism and slavery. Researching this 'political economy of sexuality' in the present means linking large-scale political economic changes related to tourism and more broadly globalization processes to actors' own

understandings of sexuality. Padilla argues that 'queer tourism', while liberating for the 'global queer consumer', is in some ways a form of neo-colonialism, as it shapes an international economy of stigma in which the negative social consequences of homoeroticism are distributed from North to South.

The first chapter discusses the social and sexual spaces of homoeroticism in the capital of Santo Domingo and the tourist town Boca Chica. An emerging gay identity politics, drawing on global notions of what it means to be gay, contrasts with the *bugarrones* and *sanky pankys*. *Bugarrones* represent a longer 'local' tradition of men who have sex with men in Santo Domingo, while *sanky pankys* in Boca Chica are a more recent group of male sex workers associated specifically with the tourism industry. Both groups also tend to have sex with female partners (either in exchange for money or not), and they identify themselves as 'normal men', *hombres normales*, rather than as 'gay'. While some in Santo Domingo's gay-identified community would like to see such 'self-deceiving' *bugarrones* kept out of the main gay commercial spaces, the demand for the sexual services of precisely these *tigueres*, or macho men, means they cannot be excluded. Nonetheless, access to these spaces in the capital and to the tourist spaces of Boca Chica remains structured by local hierarchies of race and class. These same hierarchies are evident in understanding who benefits from tourism development, the topic of the next chapter. As tourism was promoted as the main economic sector within the structural reforms implemented in the Dominican Republic from the 1980s on, labour became increasingly informalized. For many lower-class young men, hustling, making do, or *buscársela*, means engaging in various informal services within the tourist 'pleasure industry' including sexual services. These forms of livelihoods are less visible, and less 'talkable', than those of female sex workers, who are to some extent organized and institutionalized and may identify as *trabajadoras sexuales*.

The next three chapters examine the cultural politics of sexual identity, the strategies of stigma management developed by male sex workers, and the ways in which love and money feature in gay sex tourism. Padilla argues that the pleasure industry shapes the sexual identities, cultural politics and bodily experiences of both gay men and non-gay identifying sex workers. He discusses the 'traditional' Latin American role-based sexual culture, in which the man taking the *activo* role in anal intercourse is seen as normal in contrast to the *pasivo* homosexual. While this understanding of homoeroticism is quite different from 'global' Euro-American identity-based constructions of same-sex desire, Padilla contends that the role-based identities of *sanky panky* and *bugarrón* must be understood as contingent on, rather than external or prior to, the transnational structures of tourism and globalization. Despite their convictions that they are *hombres normales*, the stigmatized nature of homoerotic behaviour means that these men still need to develop techniques to minimize the social effects of this behaviour in their relations with family, wives and girlfriends. These stigma management techniques include drawing on traditional masculine gender models such as the male breadwinner, or the *tiguere*, whose trickster-like ambiguity explains the men's 'sexual silence'. Meanwhile, they must also deal with the demands of their foreign male clients, some of whom require the 'performance of romance'. As in heterosexual sex tourism, these are power-laden relations that rely on racial and economic 'othering'. The final chapter critiques the dominant characterization of the HIV/AIDS epidemic as het-

erosexual and the attendant focus in public health interventions, arguing for closer attention to the bisexual behaviour and sexual silence of many of those involved in gay sex tourism.

Amalia Cabezas' *Economies of Desire* addresses the more familiar topic of females engaged in heterosexual sexual-affective relations within tourist economies. Drawing on over a decade of research in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, she focuses on the unifying tendencies of specific neoliberal policies and politics in tourism development in her comparative analysis of these relations. She argues that categories such as that of the 'sex worker' need to be rethought and that more attention needs to be given to the 'affective economies' within which locals and tourists develop social ties characterized by affection and obligation, rather than straightforward exploitation and victimization. Such an understanding must also take into account the ways in which increasingly informal, intimate labour circulates within the global economy and various racialized, eroticized forms of 'care work' involve the extraction and transference of affect from South to North. However, rather than posing a monolithic structure of oppression, such an economy also allows for the contestation of existing inequalities and the emergence of new identities. Such an approach, which questions the idea that love and money are necessarily opposed and mutually exclusive, enables an analysis of the entanglement of love and sex in tourism and the global economy. Following an Introduction outlining these arguments, two chapters give a background of the development of tourism and neoliberalism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Like Padilla, Cabezas points to the ways in which a history of colonialism and slavery continues to inform the structures of international tourism in the Caribbean, and how racialized tourism economies parallel previous monoculture sugar-based economies. She gives an outline of structural reforms implemented during the Special Period in post-1989 socialist Cuba, as it sought to reinsert itself into the global capitalist economy, demonstrating that these reforms and their social effects are shockingly similar to the process of neoliberal transformation in the Dominican Republic.

These background chapters are followed by a discussion of the eroticization of labour in all-inclusive resorts, focusing on the Cuban resort community of Varadero, where the tourism industry reactivates raced and gendered inequalities that existed before the Revolution. The workers here are encouraged by the management of the transnational corporations running the hotels to insert intimacy and affection into the labour process. However, Cabezas argues, workers actively create and exploit this emotional labour and eroticization when they enter into relations of sex and friendship with tourists. Such relationships are always ambiguous, and sincere affection cannot be disentangled from economic motives. In a following chapter, Cabezas elaborates this point, outlining the different monetary, affective but also spiritual considerations women bring to what she calls 'tactical sex'. For instance, women sometimes narrate the appearance of sex tourists as an answer to their prayers to the Orisha Yemayá. Rather than sticking to an either/or analysis that posits strategic market exchanges against 'authentic' friendship and intimacy, she makes a case for a more syncretic approach. The insertion of affection allows women to transcend the commodified aspect of their relations with tourists, while the lack of an organized sex industry in Cuba helps circumvent 'congealed' sex worker identities. The last chapter is a critical examination of the utility and ambi-

guity of human rights discourse in relation to sexualized tourism. Many women use sex work to achieve the economic independence necessary to escape abusive partners. Yet this form of livelihood then renders them vulnerable to the violence the state inflicts against women, for instance through police violence and the regulation of women's mobility and access to tourist spaces. Even as global organizing around human rights gender violations reinforces narratives of women in the South as victims in need of rescue, human rights language functioned as a useful political tool in the Dominican sex workers' movement, allowing them to challenge oppressive state policies. However, in Cuba, where such a clearly defined 'sex worker' identity does not exist, it is precisely this liminality in identity and action that functions as a space from which to resist state oppression.

In *The Devil behind the Mirror*, Steven Gregory is also very much concerned with the possibilities for agency within structures of a neoliberal tourism economy. Based on fifteen months of ethnographic research in the Dominican tourist town of Boca Chica and the nearby former *batey* (sugar company town) of Andrés, this book studies how the lives and livelihoods of the working people of these towns have been impacted by globalization and neoliberal reform, and how they engage with these developments. He argues that many previous studies of globalization have overemphasized processes of deterritorialization and the power of transnational capital and technology vis-à-vis the nation-state. His ethnography of tourism in the Dominican Republic, then, attempts to demonstrate how the social division of labour and the reproduction of inequalities are still firmly 'territorialized' in space and rooted in national and local politics.

The first chapter analyses the politics of livelihood, emphasizing the ways in which the everyday politics of making a living are fused with the politics of identity. Tourism-related workers within the informal economy – outside of state regulation and formal wage-labour relations – often come into conflict with state authorities such as the tourism police and the offices dispensing the papers (the *cédula* and certificates of good conduct) required in order to work legally. Gregory stresses the oppositionality of informal labour, as it entails a struggle over defining relations between tourists and hosts, struggles over which labour and which bodies are considered valuable. The next chapter delves more deeply into the sociospatial practices of division underlying the social division of labour, discussing the differentiation between the *zona turística* and *la comunidad* of the working poor and their neighbourhoods through a description of meetings of the tourism development association and a neighbourhood association. Gregory shows how the spatial practices of exclusion characterizing the former are countered by assertions of local sovereignty from the latter, while showing that these two discursive and social spaces also have internal divisions along national or gendered lines. The third chapter analyses the politics of representation, following a local television station in its news reports and the development of a never-aired soap opera in which Gregory himself had a lead role. He shows how these broadcasts assert the specificity of local history and culture and create an alternative public sphere, in which assessments of cultural meaning and social relations can be re-imagined and expressed, albeit within the existing relations of capital and politics.

The next two chapters focus on the gendered and racialized practices and discourses through which the social division of labour is enacted. The fourth chapter

situates female sex workers' activities within what Gregory dubs 'imperial masculinity'. This chapter is a nuanced yet powerful analysis of the ways in which racial, national and class difference are produced and naturalized through the subordination of women. This eroticization of social distinctions in fact centres not so much on the women themselves; rather, the rituals of foreign male socializing in the context of sex tourism – performances of dominant male identities – serve to reaffirm relations of political and economic power. In the meantime, the female sex workers challenge dominant norms of identity and behaviour in their pursuit of economic independence. The fifth chapter, through a discussion of the author's relation with Gérard, a successful Haitian hustler, shows how labour in the tourist economy is structured through ideas of race and cultural identity that locate Haitian workers within the labour market based on their 'blackness' or 'Africanness'. Gregory demonstrates the ethics of solidarity those of Haitian descent have developed, and how they draw on African-American and Jamaican popular culture and politics to situate themselves within larger black diasporic imaginaries and to counter their stigmatization within the Dominican Republic. The final chapter focuses on the contested development of a megaport next to Boca Chica, using this case to study how transnational capital is always grounded locally and in the nation-state and needs to position itself strategically within discourses of nationhood, class and gender.

All three books focus on the dramatic ways in which neoliberal transformations and specifically the tourism industry have changed the living conditions and opportunities of the poor. Padilla's *Caribbean Pleasure Industry* is a critical analysis of the intersections of masculinities and sexuality within a political economy of tourism. The book is a welcome correction to the heterosexual focus of most work on sexual economies. Gay sex tourism is a phenomenon that has received little scholarly attention, especially within the region. While at times a bit jargon-laden, the book is well written and gives insight into both the intimate and broader political economic contexts of male sex workers. Cabezas' *Economies of Desire* is briefer, an elegant book that highlights both the exclusions and the opportunities associated with transactional sex. She makes an important point by emphasizing the ambiguous nature and context of such activities, and the dangers of categories such as 'sex work'. Her link to broader affective economies and 'care work' effectively nuances a field in which moral judgments tend to lurk in the background. Gregory's *The Devil behind the Mirror* is probably the most sophisticated work of the three, both theoretically and ethnographically. While well written, it may be the least accessible to non-anthropologists due to its heavy engagement with debates specific to the discipline, yet its detailed, absorbing multi-page descriptions of meetings, events, and various other fieldwork experiences offer non-specialists a feel for the issues at hand as well.

These books offer new analyses of the way macro-level changes interact with gender, sexual, class and racial inequalities, reinforcing existing hierarchies but also facilitating new challenges to them. They place a heavy emphasis on the agency of those locals involved in sexual-economic exchanges. While this is a welcome shift away from earlier work that may have depicted sex workers as passive victims of evil tourists, there is some danger of overstating this position. In Cabezas' work in particular, the (sex) tourists and their motivations remain some-

what obscured, leaving the impression that most of them are rather benevolent and deflecting blame towards transnational corporations and complicit governments. Padilla includes a brief discussion of the rationale of one sex tourist, evincing a certain empathy that is balanced by a slight disdain for the tourists, whom he refers to repeatedly as ‘red-faced’. Gregory pays most attention to the ways in which sex tourists, who in his account come off as decidedly despicable, rely on local women to shore up their own position of power. Still, the struggles here are depicted mostly as involving the local poor, national political and economic elites, and transnational capital, largely relieving consumers in the global North of responsibility or, for that matter, agency.

The works sometimes waver in their positioning of the Spanish Caribbean within bodies of regional research and literature – are these islands Caribbean or Latin American? Obviously, any study of these countries can and perhaps *should* draw on both Caribbean or Latin American regional literatures and debates, specifically debates on gender and sexuality in the case of the books reviewed here. Not to do so means running the risk of reinventing the wheel, and sometimes ignoring important insights that have emerged within academia in the broader region itself. An additional, more explicit engagement with the effects of the regional positioning of the Spanish Caribbean as a subregion, within area studies but perhaps also within international tourism imaginaries, would have been welcome. Cabezas, for instance, introduces the idea of ‘syncretism’ in relation to both Cuban santería and sexual-economic relations, where it might have been more productive to refer to the extensive Caribbean literature on creolization. Padilla, in turn, positions the Dominican Republic within Caribbean gender theory in one chapter and within Latin American ‘sexual culture’ in the next. This comes across as a bit opportunistic, while a more explicit articulation of these different theories could have led to important new ways of seeing the Spanish Caribbean. Gregory does not really refer extensively to debates within either regional literature. More detailed reference to recent work on the on-the-ground subtleties of racial configurations as developed within recent Caribbean anthropology might have been useful to his work as well as to that of the other authors.

The three books reviewed here do pay appropriate attention to the production of ethnographic knowledge and the position of the researcher within local configurations of gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality. Such a reflexive position is especially important in the production of knowledge on such intimate, value-laden topics such as sexuality and the commodification of bodies and emotions. In their use of lively vignettes (in the case of Cabezas and Padilla) and extensive ethnographic description (in the case of Gregory), these works make important contributions to going beyond simple ‘prostitution’ stereotypes to a more profound understanding of the lived experiences of tourism livelihoods, sexuality and power in a neoliberal world.

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