

AFTER LOVE

QUEER INTIMACY AND EROTIC ECONOMIES
IN POST-SOVIET CUBA

NOELLE M. STOUT



After Love

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Erotic Economies in Post-Soviet Cuba

NOELLE M. STOUT

Duke University Press Durham and London 2014

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Typeset in Chaparral Pro and Avenir by Graphic Composition, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Stout, Noelle M., 1976–

After love : queer intimacy and erotic economies in post-soviet

Cuba / Noelle M. Stout.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8223-5673-8 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-8223-5685-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Gays—Cuba. 2. Homosexuality—Cuba—History—20th century. 3. Gender identity—Cuba. I. Title.

HQ75.6.C9S76 2014

306.76'6097291—dc23

2013042795

Duke University Press gratefully acknowledges the support of the Humanities Initiative Grants-in-Aid, New York University, which provided funds toward the publication of this book.

Contents

vii	Acknowledgments
1	INTRODUCTION: Can't Be Bought or Sold? LOVE AND INTIMACY IN THE AFTERMATH OF CRISIS
33	CHAPTER 1: "Tolerated, Not Accepted" THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF QUEER CRITIQUES
57	CHAPTER 2: "A Normal Fag with a Job" THE COMPLICATED DESIRES OF URBAN GAYS
85	CHAPTER 3: "Tell Me You Love Me" URBAN GAY MEN NEGOTIATE COMMODIFIED SEX
111	CHAPTER 4: "Smarter Than You Think" SEX, DESIRE, AND LABOR AMONG HUSTLERS
145	CHAPTER 5: "Get Off the Bus" SEX TOURISM, PATRONAGE, AND QUEER COMMODITIES
171	CONCLUSION: Love in Crisis THE POLITICS OF INTIMACY AND SOLIDARITY
187	Notes
207	Bibliography
227	Index

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the generosity and kindness of the friends, collaborators, and contacts I grew to know during my time in Havana. They shared their lives and their stories with me, introduced me to their families and friends, fed me, took care of me when I was sick, and showed me the power of lasting friendship. Cuban scholars generously offered their time and insights, in particular Alberto Roque Guerra, Jorge Pérez at the Pedro Kouri Tropical Medicine Institute, Victor Fowler at the International Film School, and film professor Gustavo Arcos. For endless conversations about all things queer and historical in Cuba, I am especially thankful to my colleague, friend, and partner in crime, historian Abel Sierra Madero.

At Harvard University, I would like to thank Mary Steedly who taught me, in the classroom and beyond, the power of ethnographic storytelling. Jorge Domínguez taught me nearly everything I knew about Cuba before I landed in Havana. His disciplined and thoughtful approach to Cuban studies is something to which I continually aspire. Lucien Taylor believed in my abilities when I had little to show for myself and taught me to see the world through a new and more fascinating lens. His encouragement, behind the camera and in life, has been an enduring gift. A number of individuals also provided their insights during various stages of my research: Arachu Castro, Byron Good, Susan Eckstein, Brad Epps, Michael Herzfeld, J. Lorand Matory, Anna Tsing, Kay Warren, and Kath Weston. Graduate students at Harvard engaged in ongoing discussions that contributed to

this project especially: Angela Garcia, Joon Michael Choi, Akin Hubbard, Katrina Moore, Tim Smith, Michelle Tisdell, and Peter Benson (who encouraged me to pursue this research one fateful night over a beer, despite my protests that studying Cuba was a “leftist cliché”). The David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard generously dealt with the endless paper trail that comes with travel to Cuba. In particular, Lorena Barberia and Yadira Rivera offered me guidance and critical contacts in Cuba. My former advisors from Stanford University, Sylvia Yanagisako and Jane Collier, continued to offer invaluable support. To this day, I continue to draw on the lessons—both personal and intellectual—that they have taught me.

I was fortunate to work on this book during my first years in the Department of Anthropology at New York University. For their tireless mentorship, friendship, and feedback I am grateful to Faye Ginsburg and Emily Martin. Cheryl Furjanic was a friend, co-teacher, and master storyteller who pushed me to keep my work relevant. Fred Myers offered daily advice and reassurance. The “junior league” writing group, Sonia Das, Tejaswini Ganti, Haidy Geismer, Nathalie Peutz, and Anne Rademacher, gave me critical feedback and commiseration. I am also grateful to the following individuals for comments on my research and writing: Ada Ferrar, Nadine Fernandez, Bruce Grant, Rayna Rapp, Renato Rosaldo, Michael Ralph, and Rafael Sánchez. A small but mighty nation of Natives at NYU, especially Max Liborion, Rick Chavolla, Anna Ortega Chavolla, and Desiree Barron, helped me to feel more at home and never gave me a hard time when I had to skip Fry Bread Fridays to write.

Funding for my work was generously provided by the National Science Foundation, the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard, the Harvard Film Study Center, the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard, the Department of Anthropology at NYU, the Center for Caribbean and Latin American Studies at NYU, and assistance for publication costs was provided by the Humanities Initiative at NYU.

Editors and reviewers helped me strengthen my analysis and polish my writing in substantial ways. Susan Murko offered unrivaled editorial assistance in the final months of revisions. At Duke University Press, my editor Ken Wissoker offered patience and advice, as well as the reassuring sense that publication was a happy inevitability. I am especially thankful to Deborah Thomas and the three anonymous reviewers who strengthened the book with their careful attention and comments.

I am forever indebted to Alphonso Morgan who first introduced me to gay enclaves in Havana and since that night has traveled alongside me as a collaborator and brother. In countless ways, this book would not have been possible without him. I am also grateful to Dominique Fontenette who took a hiatus from medical school to suffer through nine months of blackouts by my side during fieldwork, and to friends who journeyed with me in Cuba: Farren Briggs, Sandra Dong, Sherri Taylor, and Omar Washington.

My deepest gratitude goes to my family. My mom, Dolores Gray, whose love and sense of adventure provided the confidence needed to undertake this book. I am thankful for the support of my aunts Michelle Comeau and Linda Kunsemiller and my dad, Ervin Stout, who taught me that sometimes being lucky is more important than being good. I am especially grateful to Matthew Lehman for eight years of unconditional love, support, and daily encouragement. His tireless proofreading was matched only by his willingness to pack and move my mountain of books from island to island and from state to state. He's shown me the profound benefits of having someone permanently on my team. And finally, to Damian who bravely, and often against his will, shared his infancy with this manuscript. I am forever grateful that he weathered my divided attention during his early years. I dedicate this book to him with the hope that by the time he's old enough to understand it, the concept of sexual inequality will be forgotten history.

Love happens in the street, standing in the dust.

—José Martí, *Love in the City*

Ruso took long strides down the smooth cement slope of 23rd Street toward the sea. Inhaling on his Hollywood cigarette, which he preferred over the cheaper Cuban brand, he belted out the lyrics to La Charanga's latest hit. "Soy Cubano, soy natural. Y eso nadie me lo quita. Porque yo traigo la razón y te regalo la verdad, lo que tengo ni se compra ni se vende. (I'm Cuban, I'm real. No one can take that away from me. I bring you the reason and give you truth: What I have can't be bought or sold.)"

At the ocean, Ruso jumped on the Malecón, the thick cement wall that snaked around Havana. He shouted to a group of boys waiting to dive off the rocky shore, shivering despite the merciless August sun. Getting no response, Ruso focused on me. I had been tagging along with him for almost a month but had never asked him about his sexuality. I asked if he identified as gay.

"Look, we in Cuba have something that is called *bisexual*," said Ruso. "A *bisexual* is someone who sleeps with both men and women. I like to have sex with women, but I like men more. Because I like both, I am *bisexual*." He paused again and instructed me to write down the term in my notebook.

"It's the same word in the United States," I told him.

He looked skeptical.

"What is a *jinetero*?" I asked. The question hung in the air between us.

"It's a Cuban who goes with gays. They take them to a place and have sex with them for money or clothes, and rip them off by charging too much."

“Why are you a *jinetero*?”

“I’m not,” he told me, taking a drag off his cigarette.

“Why did you come to Havana from the provinces then?”

He hesitated, gulped water from my bottle, and wiped his mouth with his T-shirt. “Because I needed things—money and clothes,” he said. “I came to Havana to see if some gays could help me out, help me get stuff. But I’m not a *jinetero*.” Before I could press the issue, he turned away and leapt down to join the boys on the rocks below.

Almost twenty-two years old, Ruso had come to Havana from Ciego de Ávila, a province known for cattle ranching and pineapple farms, to make hard currency working with gay tourists. Lithe and muscular, he had quickly become one of the higher paid hustlers on the Malecón. Ruso’s dirty blond hair and gray eyes had inspired the nickname Ruso or “the Russian,” a leftover from the previous three decades when Cuba had close ties with the Soviet Union. Ruso’s mother, a heavy drinker, had abandoned him when he was a toddler, and his grandmother had taken him in. He had the irreverent confidence of a boy raised by a doting grandmother who had been too aged and kind to discipline him. He spent a good portion of his earnings on a collection of cotton nightgowns that he planned to take back for her.

I first met Ruso in the summer of 2002 outside the Yara cinema on a Friday night as he ran between clusters of men in tight flared jeans and fitted polyester shirts. He stood out with his spiked hair, a small gold hoop in each ear, and a cherry red T-shirt. Within a month, I had become Ruso’s full-time sidekick. I accompanied him as he tracked down gay clients, met with foreign tourists for liaisons in rented apartments, and sold clients’ used clothes on the black market. We spent afternoons eating garbanzo beans and rice on the couch that he rented for a dollar a day from a middle-aged Cuban mariachi singer called “el Mexicano.” We loitered outside of the Yara as Ruso floated moneymaking schemes by hustlers and smoked their cigarettes. He told people that I was his half-sister *de parte de padre* from the United States to explain why we were together so much but not having sex.

Why would Ruso remain cagey about his relationships with foreign clients, even as I witnessed his work with foreigners? Ruso wanted to distance himself from the *jinetero* (hustler) identity because of rampant criticism that sex workers symbolized a lapse in socialist values. Ruso distinguished between having sex as a legitimate form of labor, thus

keeping with the hard work ethic of socialism, and overcharging people or “ripping them off,” which would reflect an embrace of the emergent capitalist economy associated with self-interest. After the dissolution of the socialist bloc in 1991, Cuba lost massive Soviet subsidies and entered a severe economic crisis that continued to impact life on the island. Daily conversations centered on the rise of relations *por interés* (motivated by status or money), as urban residents expressed anxiety over how rising poverty and inequality reshaped intimate relationships. These discussions were particularly pronounced around sex work because prostitution had largely been eradicated within Cuban socialism, and after four decades without formal prostitution, Havana witnessed a flood of sex work following the introduction of foreign tourism in the 1990s.

Criticism of the sex trade was especially acute among Havana’s marginalized sexual niches, where young heterosexual men arrived to find gay clients. In our discussions, many urban gays, lesbians, and *travestis* forcefully distinguished between those who had sex for money and those who had sex for pleasure or love. The rise of material inequalities alongside unprecedented opportunities for individual, rather than collective, gain inspired important debates about the potential for “genuine” affection to survive in the new economic landscape. What happens to people who are forced to use someone they love? Do new modes of entrepreneurial self-interest leave people “empty” or without feelings? For men, women, and *travestis* born after the 1970s and raised under socialism, these questions shaped decisions from how to distribute food within a household to more complicated issues of sexual identity and desire.

In this book, I am interested in what these disagreements about intimacy in the context of rising inequality can teach us about how young Cubans made sense of their lives, their relationships, and their place in this post-Soviet nation. I explore how people on Havana’s sexual margins marked boundaries between labor and love, affection and exploitation, and desire and decency. I do not arbitrate between who possessed genuine sentiments and who false affections.¹ Instead, I am interested in how these newly erected boundaries constantly blurred in practice. From openly homophobic hustlers having sex with urban gays for room and board to lesbians disparaging sex workers but initiating intimate relationships with foreign men for money to foreign tourists espousing socialist rhetoric while handing out Calvin Klein bikini briefs, the shifting economic terrain opened unexpected gaps between values and practices.

Unprecedented encounters between gay Cubans, foreign tourists, and sex workers reorganized life on Havana's sexual margins in a way that embodied the contradictions of the new Cuban society. While each group inhabited a distinct social network, they collided nightly in Havana's informal, public queer nightlife in parks, outside cinemas, and along the Malecón. Gays, sex workers, and tourists came to rely on one another in a way that led each to blame the other for rising materialism and social decline. Hence, rather than focus my analysis on one group, such as gay Cubans, I explore the multiple and shifting encounters between groups to better understand how divisions around intimacy and respectability were drawn. In doing so, I illuminate how, a decade after Cubans began their rocky transition from Soviet-style communism to late socialism, people whose sexual desires or practices failed to conform to mainstream standards struggled to redefine love in the aftermath of disaster.

In studying postcommunist transitions, analysts have often focused on macroeconomic questions, tracing the rise of black markets or predicting the instability of government regimes. Anthropologists have been especially adept at illuminating how massive economic restructuring influence how people make sense of their own desires, and how these desires foster new, often fraught, connections between people. Hence, I aim to show how intimacy and desire were not private, innate feelings but rather were fundamentally shaped by and in turn influenced the cultural meaning of the introduction of capitalism to Cuba.² As feminist and queer theorist M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) asserts, in the postcolonial Caribbean context public displays of nonnormative gender and sexuality, such as homosexuality and prostitution, continue to challenge aspirations to present the nation as developed and disciplined. In the post-Soviet Cuban context, sex served as both a powerful instance of boundary crossing between social groups and an opportunity for self-regeneration, influencing people's fundamental values and forcing them to question deeply held assumptions about themselves and others. At times, intimacy offered a refuge, a potential sanctuary, but it also emerged as a dangerous terrain in which the new inequalities inherent in capitalist markets could undercut loyalty and reframe the meaning of genuine affection.

FRAMING LOVE AND INTIMACY

At the start of the twenty-first century, a decade after the official transition to post-Soviet socialism, Cubans continued to experience an onto-

logical crisis within which love and intimacy symbolized neoliberal incursions and national uncertainty. According to many in Havana, true love threatened to rot on the vine during the decades following the economic crisis of the 1990s. True love, however, is a tricky affair. While love and intimacy may appear to spring from the depth of an individual, untainted by cultural forces, instead they are always a product of never innocent social power.³ A vast scholarship has traced the multiple forms of cultural ideas about love and intimacy in different historical moments (e.g., Ahearn 2001; Giddens 1992; Jankowiak 1995).⁴ Particularly germane to understanding how the Cuban entry into global capitalist markets reshaped everyday ideas about love and intimacy, anthropologists have described the connections between changing regimes of markets and subsequent shifts in ideas about love, intimacy, marriage, and romance (Collier 1997; Constable 2003; Freeman 2007; Friedman 2005; Hirsh and Wardlow 2006; Lipset 2004; Rebhun 1999). Jane Collier (1997), for example, has shown how the entry of an Andalusian village into the global market in the 1980s shifted people's understanding of domestic arrangements. Marriage, which was previously seen as an important social obligation, was transformed into a product of individual desires.⁵ In preindustrial Spanish society, notions of love existed, but romance and the promise of emotional self-fulfillment through marriage were not precursors to conjugal relationships as they are today.

In a related vein, anthropologists have recently attended to how aspects of seemingly private and intimate relations have been increasingly commodified within neoliberal globalization. Through ethnographic research on female caretakers, nannies, sex workers, hostesses, and mail order brides, anthropologists have uncovered the increasing demand for commodified affect as well as the gendered power dynamics of new global economic systems (e.g., Allison 1994; Bernstein 2007; Brennan 2004; Choy 2003; Constable 1997, 2003, 2005; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Parreñas 2001). In her study of contemporary sex work in the United States, Elizabeth Bernstein (2007) argues that global economic restructuring has fostered new erotic dispositions as male clients are looking for "bounded authenticity" or an experience in which a woman performs the emotional and sexual labor of a girlfriend without the ongoing obligations. The appearance of forms of intimacy in the postindustrial sexual transaction contrasts with industrial forms of sex work, which were seen as a form of sexual release devoid of emotion. Like the

scholarship on marriage and modernity, the rich scholarship on the commodification of intimacy has focused largely on heterosexual encounters, with primarily female caregivers and male consumers.

When anthropologists have discussed homoerotic relationships in relation to contemporary globalization, they have often focused on identities, politics, migration, and sex work. Scholars have debated whether or not “gay globalization” or the spread of Western queer identities and values beyond their geographical borders would either liberate or homogenize non-Western same-sex communities (Altman 1997, 2001; Drucker 2000). As anthropologists studied these trends more closely, however, many began to question the idea that local sites would be either liberated or colonized by the introduction of gay tourists, gay-themed media, and gay rights politics from the West (e.g., Boellstorff 2003, 2007; Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002; Donham 1998; Manalansan 2003; Parker 1999; Povinelli and Chauncy 1999; Rofel 1999, 2007).⁶ Accounts within queer studies have similarly focused on the rise of modern homosexual identities and communities, which were enabled by capitalist industrialization and the liberation of people from the heteronormative expectations of family life (D’Emilio 1983).⁷ These investigations of homosexuality, industrialization, and, later, recent forms of capitalist globalization tend to focus on how people define queer identities, practices, and liberation politics in relation to economic shifts.

The development of two distinct realms of scholarship addressing sexuality and contemporary transnational capitalism inadvertently associates practices of love, intimacy, and kinship with heterosexuality, while leaving identities and sex practices to queers. By analyzing the “political economy of love” (Padilla et al. 2007) I combine the scholarship on the commodification of love and intimacy with research on homoeroticism and globalization to provide a more accurate view of how people interpret, resist, and reproduce forms of global capital, sexual subjectivity, and intimacy in their daily lives. In doing so, I join with analysts who have explored what Ara Wilson (2004) describes as “intimate economies,” or dynamic entanglements of markets and everyday intimacies that clarify how global capitalism is embodied and reproduced. As Elizabeth Povinelli (2006) highlights, analyzing “intimate events” promises to reveal the otherwise obscured connections between “micro-practices of love” and “macro-practices” of state governance and political economic systems (2006: 191).⁸ Hence, I follow the domestic cycle of households to

illuminate the lived realities of topics that were defining themes of the post-Soviet era such as family and kinship, gendered divisions of labor, racialization, economic inequities, and migration. Examining contestations over queer love and intimacy introduces themes of kinship and family because discourses of love continue to play such a fundamental role in crafting kin ties (Padilla et al. 2007). As Florence Babb (2006) notes, “queering” love and globalization requires reexamining deeply held assumptions about gender and the domestic sphere, in addition to sexuality.

THROUGH THE LENS OF TOURISM

I arrived in Cuba eager to investigate how state-sponsored initiatives to promote gay tolerance beginning in the 1990s had had an impact on the lives of gays and lesbians. After nearly half a century of institutionalized homophobia, a number of research studies and journalistic accounts had celebrated an opening up toward homosexuals in Cuba, as gay themes appeared in state-run media and arts industries. Yet when I asked gays, lesbians, and *travestis* about these new social gains, people redirected the conversation to criticize the changes brought about by rising inequalities and the sex trade. I came to recognize that important gains in official and everyday forms of gay tolerance were often overshadowed by the rise of poverty and the return of socioeconomic disparities. Most studies of Cuban homosexuality that I had read before my arrival in Havana had been conducted before or during the early years of the post-Soviet crisis, when the sex trade was just gaining prominence in Havana’s queer nightlife.⁹ By the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, the explosion of sexual labor in Havana had become a defining factor of queer social life. Following my respondents’ cues, I investigated the impact of the most far-reaching capitalist reform in Havana—the introduction of the tourist industry and the rise of the sex trade—as a means to explore the dilemmas of new post-Cold War intimate economies that my interlocutors described.¹⁰

For my respondents, the rise of the tourist sector embodied how daily life had been reordered by the transition to post-Soviet socialism. When the Socialist Bloc disbanded, the Cuban economy was almost completely dependent on Soviet subsidies, making the loss of support catastrophic.¹¹ Cuba had imported two-thirds of its food, nearly all of its oil, and 88 percent of its machinery and spare parts from the Socialist Bloc (Hamilton

2002: 23). Making matters worse, the United States government tried to use the crisis to force a change in Cuban leadership by tightening sanctions in 1996 and penalizing any foreign company that traded with Cuba. Known as the “Special Period in Times of Peace” due to the destitute wartime conditions, Cubans suffered massive shortages of food, electricity, and fuel, and the return of nutritional deficiencies.¹² The government was forced to decrease food and eliminate “nonessentials,” such as clothing and toiletries, from the rations. Cubans suffered extreme income polarization as approximately half of the population gained access to dollars either through family remittances or work incentives, and 15 percent of families came to control 70 percent of the wealth (Ferriol 1998).

Despite the extreme hardship, leaders rejected state decentralization and refused widespread foreign investment or privatization.¹³ To buoy the failing economy, however, in 1992, the Cuban National Assembly amended the constitution to allow for controlled foreign investment in the tourist sector.¹⁴ Within the first decade, the number of foreign visitors to the island increased from 370,000 in 1990 to 1.8 million by 2000 (Brundenius 2002: 383) and continued to rise to 2.53 million by 2010.¹⁵ The Cuban tourist industry promoted values that orthodox communists had struggled to eliminate, including leisure, sexual indulgence, and privilege, while exacerbating inequalities of race and class, as white Cubans were hired preferentially within the tourist trade.

The tourist industry therefore exacerbated racial inequalities that were already resurfacing during the post-Soviet transition. For instance, white and black Cubans had unequal access to remittances, which were a mainstay of the post-1990s Cuban economy. White Cubans were more likely to be wealthy at the time of the 1959 revolution and left in far greater numbers than Afro-Cubans, who benefited from the revolutionary promises of economic redistribution and racial integration. Because white Cubans experienced higher rates of emigration, their kinship networks allowed increased access to hard currency from relatives abroad during the post-Soviet crisis. Constraining the roles that black Cubans could play in the tourist industry compounded the already limited access that darker-skinned Cubans had to hard currency and made informal black markets a primary option for survival.¹⁶

As the recipient of the majority of foreign tourists, people in Havana disproportionately felt the negative impacts of the tourist trade. Residents witnessed increased urban migration as rural dwellers sought op-

portunities in nascent black markets that sprang up around the tourist industry and new forms of conspicuous consumption became available in dollar stores geared to foreigners.¹⁷ Perhaps the most troubling consequence was the psychological impact of tourist segregation. As the government opened the island to capitalist foreigners, officials prohibited Cubans from staying in tourist hotels and required using separate taxis, restaurants, hospitals, nightclubs, and shops that dealt in hard currency. After decades of egalitarian rhetoric, Cubans were suddenly second-class citizens.¹⁸

Rampant inequalities reemerged in what Cuban sociologist Myra Espina Prieto (2001) has identified as the “restratification of Cuban society.” Before the 1990s, wages had been relatively equal, with the highest salary theoretically not exceeding the lowest by more than five times (Espina Prieto 2001). During the 1990s, however, a salary earned in black markets or the tourist sector could easily exceed by ten times even the most prestigious career in state employment. In an environment in which a waiter’s tips could surpass the six-month salary of a university professor, highly skilled labor migrated toward low-skilled jobs (Martínez et al. 1996; Urrutia 1997). The tourist sex trade exemplified this stark inversion of cultural and financial capital.¹⁹ For example, in 2002, an income study of residents in Havana showed that a female prostitute working with foreigners typically earned between \$240 and \$1,400 a month, whereas a university professor made no more than \$22 monthly, an engineer or a physician grossed between \$12 and \$25, and an officer in the armed forces or a cabinet minister received no more than \$23 (Mesa-Lago and Pérez-López 2005: 75).

The development of the Cuban tourist industry in Havana also reintroduced forms of emotional and sexual labor that had been largely eradicated under socialism. Prerevolutionary Cuba had been known as the “brothel of the Caribbean” and, through employment and educational programs for female prostitutes, the revolutionary government had largely eradicated the sex trade. Following the loss of Soviet subsidies in 1991, sex work became pervasive even though the socialist government still prohibited prostitution, strip clubs, erotic massage parlors, and adult entertainment industries.²⁰ The elimination of prostitution had been a great source of pride among Cubans, so the dramatic return of the sex trade to Havana embodied the most troubling aspects of the transition to post-Soviet society (Whitfield 2009: 30).

For many Cubans, the young people who hustled foreign tourists for *visa y divisa* (a visa and hard currency) personified the devastation following the collapse of the Socialist Bloc. As a powerful emblem of the changes that capitalism would wreak—what Ariana Hernandez-Regaunt (2009) has called the wheeling, dealing, and gleaning that characterized daily life—the *jinetera* or female sex worker emerged in the works of Cuban social scientists, journalists, artists, writers, and musicians as an icon of post-Soviet demise.²¹ Prostitutes were no longer viewed as the unwitting victims of capitalist exploitation but rather as strategic *jineteras* (literally horse-jockeys) or *pingueros* (literally dick-workers) who would ride foreign tourists for fast cash.²² In her study of Cuban sex work, Amalia Cabezas usefully reframes incentivized relationships as “tactical sex” to highlight Cuban perspectives that distinguished the post-Soviet sex trade from earlier eras (Cabezas 2009: 118).²³

Although many relationships were transformed by the rise of market relations in the post-Soviet era, the impact of liberalization on queer social life was especially concentrated and pronounced. Given the historically marginal status of homosexuals in Cuba, at the time of my research, there were only a handful of public places that gays publicly gathered in Havana—three public parks, two cinemas, and a block-long stretch along the Malecón sea wall. By the early twenty-first century these informal gatherings had been largely reoriented around commodified sex. As Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (2002) describes, the introduction of foreign tourism split Havana’s queer social worlds between “respectable” gays involved with the arts and those tied to *jineterismo* and the sex trade. Wherever urban gays were known to congregate, one would find young hustlers, fresh from the provinces, hoping to make a living from gay Cuban and foreign clients. In part, male and female sex workers’ attraction to informal queer enclaves reflected the marginality of these spaces, which allowed sex workers to blend in with other social outcasts (Allen 2011). The overwhelming presence of sex workers also justified police crackdowns and often led authorities to disband the gatherings for days or weeks at a time, intensifying feelings of marginality. How individuals navigated these changes, often simultaneously embracing and criticizing nascent forms of commodified love and sex, shed light on how wide-scale political economic transitions were internalized, manifesting their effects in the most intimate practices of quotidian life.

Exploring the new forms of masculinity that emerged among male sex workers, ethnographers including Jafari Allen (2007, 2011), G. Derrick Hodge (2001), Gisela Fosado (2005), Amalia Cabezas (2009), and Abel Sierra Madero (2012) found that the economic crisis morphed traditional categories of same-sex practice among straight men into new identities tied to the market.²⁴ While gay men have often appeared in these studies as the clients of sex workers, less attention has been paid to their concerns over the rise of inequalities and materialism exemplified by the sex trade. By focusing on the Cuban consumers of commodified homoerotic relationships and the lesbians and *travestis* whose lives were also changed by the rise of commodified sex, we can discover even more about dilemmas regarding intimacy and belonging. Comparative perspectives on homoerotic labor in the Dominican Republic offer a fruitful comparative model (e.g., Cabezas 2009; Padilla 2007; Padilla et al. 2007).²⁵ For instance, in research on the Dominican homoerotic sex trade Mark Padilla (2007) has expanded the scope of analysis beyond the sex tourist-sex worker encounter to investigate the sex trade's impact on intimate relationships between Dominican male sex workers and their female partners.

Exploring the myriad of forms of queer intimacy that emerged in post-Soviet Cuba also provides an important comparative perspective on capitalist contexts throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. The impact of tourism's reintroduction in Cuba reflected broader global trends in which an explosion of sex tourism has perpetuated inequalities and neocolonial forms of domination throughout the region, even as it might offer new opportunities and identities to sex workers (see Altman 2001; Brennan 2004; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Sanchez Taylor 2001). In the Caribbean, where national economies have become increasingly reliant on tourism, the transformative impact of erotic-economic exchanges with foreign tourists has been particularly profound (Brennan 2004; Cabezas 1998; Castaneda et al. 1996; Kane 1993; Kempadoo 1999, 2004; Padilla 2007; Pruitt and LaFont 1995). Citing the history of slavery and colonialism, many scholars have pointed out how sex tourism perpetuates racist ideas about the hypersexuality of the region as sexuality becomes a commodity on the global market in ways that national governments can capitalize on (Kempadoo 1999; Padilla 2007). While the parallels between Cuba and other Caribbean nations are striking, key differences demand consideration. Most significantly, Cuba's socialist history and the government's attempt to curb sex tourism radically differ from

other contexts, where economic restructuring has included an embrace of neoliberal capitalism and wide-scale privatization.

QUEER CRITIQUES OF COMMODIFICATION

People on Havana's sexual margins forcefully criticized the sudden and seemingly omniscient reach of sexual and affective commodification. I interpreted nostalgia and melancholy for "authentic" love and intimacy to represent anxieties about broader socioeconomic changes. For many urban gays in their twenties and thirties, years of dedication to career tracks and educational goals were dramatically upended in the post-Soviet economy. Across the households, my white and lighter-skinned respondents had all been raised by parents who were staunch revolutionary communists. Like their Afro-Cuban counterparts whose families had remained in Cuba and had no access to remittances, the only way they could access hard currency was through work in the tourist industry or informal black markets. This uneven economic landscape meant that those who held cultural capital, such as educated urban gay professionals from patriotic families, often lacked access to dollars, while the incomes of uneducated young Cubans with inroads into informal economies, such as sex work, surpassed the earnings of gays. By criticizing rising materialism embodied by the sex trade, gays, lesbians, and *travestis* challenged these emergent post-Soviet hierarchies.²⁶

Although people criticized the unequal class configurations of wealth and status resulting from the mixed market economy, many reinvested in the privileges of skin color, education, and urban origins through a discourse of "culture." Rather than perpetuate a moral panic over the promiscuity of prostitutes, gay men and women often criticized the *nivel cultural* (cultural level) of sex workers. Historically, notions of "cultural level" had provided a coded reference to race and class in an environment in which the state prohibited these discussions because socialism had supposedly eradicated inequalities (Fernandez 2010: 134). While the Cuban Revolution racially integrated workplaces and neighborhoods, lighter skin privilege continued to organize social hierarchies both institutionally and culturally. In post-Soviet Havana, lighter-skinned Cubans benefited from racial privileges in the hiring practices of the formal tourist industry as well as greater protection in informal markets, where they were less likely to be considered "criminal" because of their skin color. The idiom of "cultural level" indicated how cultural and symbolic capital

and habitus—the habits of everyday life—could define one’s social status just as much as wealth (Bourdieu 1984).²⁷

Despite hostility toward the post-Soviet economic landscape, young Cubans with nonconforming gender and sexual identities were increasingly forced to participate in the new cultural-economic systems they disparaged. Many of the urban gay men and lesbians I knew participated in black markets—some even siphoned goods from state factories and sold them—but they described their efforts as hard work, whereas to sell sexual acts devoid of pleasure or, even worse, to commodify emotional bonds suggested the erosion of fundamental human values. Witnessing the lives of younger generations of white and lighter-skinned urban gays over a number of years also revealed interesting contradictions, as many who had harshly criticized strategic intimacies also engaged in relations *por interés*. For instance, lesbians met foreign boyfriends who would send them money, and gay male students or professionals would experiment with commodified sex with older tourists whom they found unattractive. Despite forays into commodified sex and affect, my gay friends and respondents would never describe their tactical sexual relationships with foreigners as “sex work.” On the contrary, for many urban gays the growing gaps between values and daily realities intensified their criticism of sexual commodification. From my perspective, it seemed that skin color played a crucial role in protecting their activities from accusations of *jineterismo*, as blackness could often become synonymous with criminality in the post-Soviet context.

As the tourist industry commodified Cuban culture and bodies for foreigners, what counted as “hard work” versus “easy money” signaled value judgments about the legitimacy of certain types of labor and the appropriate spaces within which labor should occur.²⁸ Cubans involved in Havana’s queer social networks explicitly rejected and refused the tenets of cultural capitalism despite their entrenchment in its new forms of labor, production, and consumption.²⁹ An ethnographic perspective illuminates how people made sense of their own involvement in the very systems that they denigrated and reveals how they strained to erect boundaries between decent desires and forms of intimacy in the new mixed-market context. The boundaries around commodification proved to be deeply cultural, and through close observation of daily practice, I began to ascertain how certain desires, sentiments, and relationships came to be viewed as outside of the market economy (Yanagisako 2002). My attention to

how ideas about decent forms of love and intimacy related to forms of privilege, such as whiteness, offers a critical complementary perspective to studies on blackness and marginality in post-Soviet Cuba.³⁰

SOCIALIST MORALITY AND DISCOURSES OF RESPECTABILITY

The everyday dramas that played out in Havana's queer nightlife and social networks were unique in the sense that they reflected a specific history of marginalization and stigmatization for those with nonconforming genders and sexualities. Yet, at the same time, my respondents' anxieties, doubts, and hopes for the future embodied general trends in post-Soviet society. Questions about intimacy and instrumentality plagued relationships in Havana—straight and gay, foreign and local, kin and commodified—as new unstable economic imaginaries blurred the boundaries between these distinctions. While my respondents' stories can be read as an important chapter in the history of gays in Cuba, it more accurately elucidates widespread social trends in post-Soviet Cuba told through the lens of a group of people poised to articulate the impact of these new social and economic realities.

Prompted by the post-Soviet crisis, people lamented the rise of relationships *por interés*, but it was not the first time strategic intimacies existed on the island. Before the crisis, people had utilized sex to gain access to power and the comforts reserved for party officials, but these strategic intimacies did not dominate people's perceptions of love. Yet gay and straight critics alike ignored how relationships frequently involved material considerations and incentives, such as decisions about livelihood, housing, and migration (Cabezas 2009). If self-interest had historically shaped love and sex in Cuba, how do we explain Cubans' fixation on the demise of true love in the post-Soviet era?

A historical emphasis on marriage within revolutionary socialist projects politicized intimacy as a lens through which citizens could map economic inequality and social decline. Elise Andaya (forthcoming) argues that, historically, love and marriage had been fundamental components of socialist nation building; in the post-Soviet era intimate relationships became a symbol for social unrest. In the 1960s and 1970s, Andaya observes, revolutionary leaders politicized intimate relationships when they argued that love and marriage perpetuated the inequalities of patriarchy and capitalism through an unequal inheritance of wealth. Government leaders promoted an egalitarian society in which young people would

build families based on sincere desire, not economic considerations.³¹ The implementation of marriage campaigns also meant to formalize heterosexual relationships and lower the number of matrifocal families, which were particularly associated with poor and black families (Safa 2009).³²

After suffering years of state homophobia, the extent to which urban gay men, lesbians, and *travestis* drew on socialist moral discourse to disparage the impact of neoliberal reform might come as a surprise. Since the 1959 revolution, socialist government officials, work brigade captains, and community leaders had accused homosexuals of laziness and used hard labor to “exorcise” homosexuality from citizens. In an example of reverse discourse (Foucault 1990: 101), urban gays drew on similar ideas about hustlers taking the “easy way out” and refusing “to work” as a way to criticize the materialism and self-interest they associated with the sex trade.³³ Likewise, *jineteras*, *pingueros*, and others trading sex for money or goods also made use of state rhetoric to criticize the growing inequalities that inspired their work in the sex trade. They described their labor as *luchando* or fighting, the word that leaders often used to describe the struggle for independence and freedom.

While people echoed socialist ideologies, however, their appropriation of official rhetoric did not indicate their uncritical support for the Cuban government. Like most Cubans, many of my respondents felt entitled to social safety nets such as free education and health care but had grown cynical and tired of state control in an era of national insolvency. This dynamic echoes other postcommunist contexts in which resistance to state ideologies has not been automatic, even in situations where people had experienced the brutality of Soviet systems (cf. Bloch 2003; Grant 1995).³⁴ Their appropriation of state discourse also reflects what Michael Herzfeld has coined “cultural intimacy” between citizens and the nation-state, in which similarities reign between state ideologies and social life even when citizens oppose the state (2005: 3).³⁵

Younger generations of Cubans raised under socialism criticized the rise of materialism and self-interest embodied by Havana’s informal sexual economy, criticisms that could also be read as an attempt to impose standards of decorum that have long been associated with an elite class in the Caribbean and Latin America. As scholars have shown, notions of decency and respectability originating with the colonization of the Americas divided populations between proper and deviant subjects. Most often linked with an aspiration to whiten and thereby civilize the na-

tion, nineteenth-century colonial ideologies naturalized European dominance through ideas about gendered virtue, the dangers of miscegenation, and the importance of formal marriage (Findlay 1999; Martinez-Alier 1989; Putnam 2002; Wilson 1969, 1973).³⁶ While radically transformed over time, ideas about respectability continue to inform sexual practices and conjugal relationships throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (Freeman 2007). By eliminating the church, leveling inequalities of social class, and working toward racial and gendered integration in the job sector, the 1959 Cuban Revolution complicated the interrelated tropes of class decorum, whiteness, and sexual purity but did not eradicate them.

Moral discourses of respectability across the Caribbean and Latin America often reflect changing modes of production.³⁷ In Caribbean Costa Rica, for instance, export booms and the rise of banana plantations in the late nineteenth century reshaped fundamental ideas about gender, race, and sex (Putnam 2002). Similarly, during this era in Puerto Rico, discourses about respectability, which shaped “sexual practices, racial meanings, and sexual regulatory strategies,” were tied to developments in the sugar industry (Findlay 1999: 6). Prostitution has often played a central role in igniting these discourses as elite observers reinforce class hierarchies and notions of gendered virtue that stigmatize working-class women as outside of the reach of honor and decency. Likewise, in Cuba a shift from a communist to a mixed-market socialist economy, and especially the introduction of foreign tourism to Havana, produced new norms and expectations in regard to sexual propriety and the public sphere.

At first glance, criticism of the sex trade might echo these morality discourses that seek to denigrate the moral turpitude of street culture in favor of propriety. Yet it is critical to recognize that gay, lesbian, and *travesti* Cubans were not necessarily promoting an adherence to traditional forms of decency. While privileges of color, class, and culture still informed people’s perspectives of what counted as proper forms of labor and commodification, they did not do so in a straightforward manner. First, many sex workers whom they criticized were also white or light-skinned and shared similar class and family backgrounds. Second, criticism could be seen as an attempt to undermine burgeoning class inequalities rather than an instantiation of elite economic rule. Finally, urban gay critics defended same-sex unions and households against an endemic heteronormativity by idealizing same-sex liaisons, in opposition to sex workers’ materialistic trysts; urban gays could thus position their

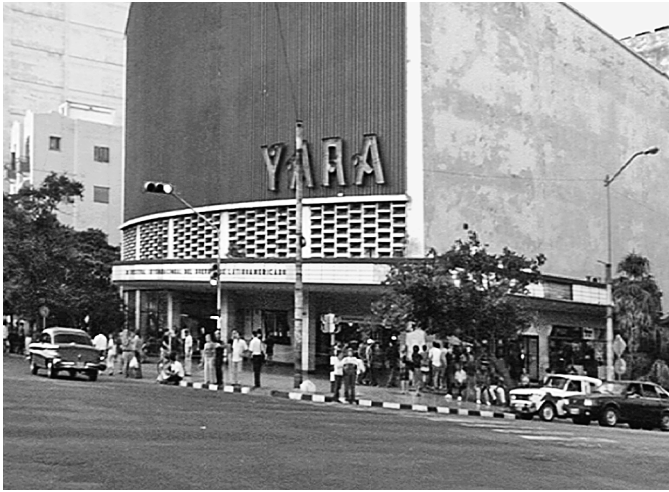


Figure I.1. The Yara cinema theater in Vedado.

identities and practices within the mainstream. Urban gays presented their genuine feelings of love in ways that naturalized nonnormative desires while questioning rising inequalities, by describing their intimacies as “natural,” “normal,” and “true.”

CHRONICLING QUEER ENCOUNTERS

Havana boasts no formal “gay neighborhood” with bars, clubs, bookstores, theaters, and shops, so my entrée into the daily lives of my respondents began in the informal, ad hoc nightly gatherings that Abel Sierra Madero (2006) has described as an “ambiente homoerótico” or homoerotic scene. My initial exposure to Havana’s queer nightlife in 2001 focused on an area called *La Rampa* (the Ramp), which is bookended by the Malecón sea wall at one end and the Yara cinema theater at the other.³⁸ In the 1990s, La Rampa had been renovated to accommodate travel agencies, hotels, and restaurants catering to foreign tourists. Every night, around 10 PM, gay men and women, sex workers, *travestis*, and tourists would convene on the brightly lit corner outside of the Yara theater. An hour later, police officers would herd the crowd down toward the Malecón, where everyone would drink cheap rum from shared plastic cups, gossip in rapid-fire street slang, and make out in same-sex couples.

I returned to La Rampa and followed the lives of the Cubans and foreigners whom I met there for nearly a decade, encompassing the sum-

mers of 2001 and 2002, thirteen consecutive months from December 2003 to January 2005, and the springs of 2005 and 2007.³⁹ By connecting with respondents' friends, lovers, and families, I conducted approximately 100 formal and informal interviews with gays, sex workers, and foreign tourists.⁴⁰ I spent time with my collaborators at home, at work, running errands, and waiting in endless lines. Difficult days led me to the police station or the hospital, good days to the beach or the ballet. I shared in birthdays and breakups, and witnessed countless nights of cruising as my friends scouted new lovers or clients in queer gatherings in Vedado and Centro Habana. The majority of queer respondents, fifty-two in total, were gay men and lesbians, with a smaller group identifying as *bisexual* or *travesti*. Among the people with whom I spoke, at the time nine openly acknowledged their work as *jineteras* and sixteen as *pingueros*. While the women worked predominantly with heterosexual male tourists, they frequented queer enclaves with their boyfriends, who were hustling gay men.⁴¹

The generational context of this study is especially important to highlight. My respondents belonged to a certain generation in terms of their relationship to Cuban national history—they were raised under socialism and experienced the crippling economic crisis during a moment in which they understood the dramatic impact it had on their daily lives and futures. Yet, most important, I encountered them at a certain moment in their life cycle. Male and female sex workers, in particular, would typically age out of the sex trade or simply retire and establish families in their late twenties and thirties. I met these young men and women at a particular moment in their lives that should be interpreted as a reflection of the decisions and perspectives of a chapter in a much longer and more complex life story.

Given the changes in a life cycle, my long-term engagement was important to counteract superficial accounts of Cuban homosexuality that often circulate internationally. For decades, Cold War politics prevented U.S.-based scholars from conducting fieldwork in Cuba, and scholarship was limited to an analysis of statistics, interviews with officials, and studies of government documents. Even as Cuba has opened to foreigners, visitors often make assessments about homosexuality based on short trips to the island. Cuba, however, is a particularly complicated place, and the quotidian workings of Havana are especially opaque to outsiders. A perspective from the ground reveals the complexity of people's lives in a way that surpasses reductive politicized representations that

reduce gay Cubans to victims of state oppression or exemplars of socialist liberation.

A handful of pioneering studies on Cuban homosexuality, some ethnographic (La Fountain-Stokes 2002; Leiner 1994; Lumsden 1996; Young 1981) and others literary (Bejel 2001; Quiroga 2000) have provided an invaluable foundation for my own research. I aim to offer an important counterpart to this scholarship by emphasizing the lives of lesbians and bisexual women.⁴² In part, the dearth of scholarly attention to lesbianism reflects the erasure of lesbianism within revolutionary discourse as the Cuban Revolution itself remained silent about female pleasure and desire (Davies 1997). I thereby join a second wave of scholars focusing on homoerotic sexualities in Cuba, including Jafari Allen (2011), Carrie Hamilton (2012), and Tayna Saunders (2009a, 2010a, 2010b), who have used ethnographic techniques to consider the relationship between non-normative gender and sexuality. More than including women for the sake of equity, I uncover how gender normativity played a role in deciding what counted as socially acceptable forms of homoeroticism.⁴³

While I met many people, my greatest insight into their lives came from integrating myself into the daily routines of households for months at a time. In this book, I focus on three households that embodied trends within queer enclaves, which allows the reader to imagine my collaborators as I knew them, within their social and kin networks.⁴⁴ My emphasis on the ramshackle apartments and modest houses that sheltered my respondents also stays true to the context of Havana, where private social scenes have flourished in people's homes, given the absence of gay public space (Arguelles and Rich 1984: 697). When people could secure privacy in their home, it immediately became the grounds for alternative networks of love and support.

As I collected stories on Havana's sexual margins, I did not single out people with specific racial identities, such as black or white Cubans, but skin color and ethnicity played an important role in my analysis. For the most part, I found that homoerotic relationships occurred between people of similar skin colors, and this kept with larger trends among heterosexual white Cubans, who tended to be endogamous (Fernandez 2010). In Havana, race was talked about more openly than in the United States, but racism was discussed less. Describing people by their racial characteristics was so common that nicknames were often based on racial appearances—many people, for example, shared the same nickname, such as "*la negra*"

(the black woman) or “*chino*” (the Chinese-looking man). People also openly discussed their sexual types with reference to color, unabashedly declaring that they preferred a certain color over another. I seize on these references to race in the stories I present to understand how people reinforced forms of racial privilege at a moment of shifting social hierarchies.

I focused primarily on relationships between Cubans, but I also wanted to understand the encounters between foreign tourists and Cubans and to consider how tourists viewed their presence in Havana’s queer social life. Tourists often confided in me as an equal, as our position as mutual outsiders inspired them to tell me detailed stories of their experiences with Cubans. I spent time with gay tourists in their hotels, on group dates with their Cuban partners, at restaurants, city tours, and nightclubs, and often maintained e-mail contact after they returned home.⁴⁵ The twenty-two foreign tourists I interviewed were primarily gay men from Spain, Mexico, Canada, England, and the United States, with a few from the Bahamas, Aruba, and Scotland. I befriended fewer lesbian than gay male tourists because there were fewer foreign lesbians who participated in Havana’s queer nightlife. Those from Canada and the United States were predominantly white, with a smaller number of black, Latino, and Jewish respondents. The majority of the tourists considered themselves middle- to middle-upper-class in their home countries, although all were wealthy by Cuban standards. Most were repeat visitors and had been traveling to Cuba for more than two years in a row. Just like Cubans, gay tourists did not conform to any particular type—they represented an array of sentiments toward Cubans and forged radically different relationships with the people they met. For instance, some maintained friendships with Cuban lovers that spanned decades, sending money for hustlers’ families, while others arrived in Havana eager to find the cheapest sex in the Caribbean. To subsume all gay travelers under the same “tourist” category threatens to erase the tenderness and humor in many of these relationships and collapse important national and ethnic differences between visitors to Havana’s queer enclaves. Hence, I use the term tourist as a placeholder to discuss how Havana’s tourist industry structured their experiences, while using ethnography to attend to their unique differences.

MY ROLE IN QUEER ENCOUNTERS

In part, my sensitivity to the diversity of foreigners in Havana’s queer *ambiente* stems from my own experiences as an outsider who, at times, com-

miserated with other travelers and, at others, sought to distance myself from the racism and naiveté of some gay tourists. Analyzing the queer encounters between tourists, urban gays, and sex workers allows me to draw on my own experiences as a source of insight. I join with anthropologists who have long recognized the fundamentally subjective nature of ethnographic research, in which using the self as a tool of investigation prohibits any pretense of objectivity. Rather than see this as a limitation, I embrace reflexivity as a strategy to provide some degree of transparency. When it comes to studying gender and sexuality, these strategies of acknowledging our feelings toward those we meet in the field are all the more crucial (e.g., Behar 1996; Kulick and Willson 1995; Newton 1993).⁴⁶

As my relationship with Ruso suggests, I was targeted by hustlers seeking hard currency, and, at times, I served as an intermediary for Cubans working foreign clients. My respondents' willingness to take something from me often made it easier for me to take their stories from them. But like urban gays who questioned the authenticity of friendships, I dealt with the reality that friends were using me for money or access to goods, and this helped to reveal my own cultural assumptions about intimacy and instrumentality, which I reflect on throughout the chapters. While I remained critical of the systems of inequalities that granted me privileges, I was often left exhausted by constant requests to provide cash, clothing, or access to services available only to foreigners. Rather than suppress my reactions, I include my own experiences in order to uncover something about the range of relationships between foreigners, gays, and sex workers within Havana's post-Soviet landscape.⁴⁷

While "sharing" a queer identity might have put some of my respondents at ease, to be clear, it did not offer automatic acceptance or mutual understanding. In fact, claiming that you are "the same" as your collaborators can obscure power dynamics and justify forms of domination (Rosaldo 1980; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995). Indeed, much was lost in translation. I am confident that my questions often distorted the sentiments of my respondents, who grew tired of my probing and could occasionally have placated me with the easiest answer. I found myself in this position often as Cubans inquired about my own sexual and intimate preferences. The first night I met Ruso, for example, he agreed to take my girlfriend, a medical student from the United States, and me to an underground gay party on the outskirts of the city. He ushered us into a car and asked, "Which one of you is the man?" "Neither of us, we don't think of

it that way,” I said. “Okay, but really,” he insisted. It seemed ridiculous to launch into discussion of the nuances of female sexuality over the blaring reggaeton, so I simply pointed to my girlfriend.

Likewise, I initially remained blind to the social class distinctions my gay friends and respondents emphasized. In my eyes, professional urban gays and sex workers were “poor” in that they suffered equally from diminished employment opportunities and dwindling state subsidies. Growing up working-class in the United States, I viewed economic security as the determining factor of social class, with cultural capital playing an important albeit subordinate role. Hence, my collaborators taught me to see important differences in marginality and respectability through their constant comments about my crossing social boundaries to foster friendships with more “marginal” elements of queer nightlife. Most important, being queer or from a working poor background failed to protect my work from the power dynamics inherent in ethnographic research, especially when working with communities more vulnerable to social stigma and state intervention.

In addition to class and sexuality, my skin color also played an important role in shaping my research experience. Because I am light-skinned and blue-eyed, Cubans in Havana’s queer nightlife often assumed that I was the tourist client of my American girlfriend, whom they mistook for a *jinetera* because of her reddish brown skin and curly black hair, signatures of her Louisiana Creole heritage. My own ethnicity, a combination of French Canadian and Native American (Cherokee/Choctaw)-German heritage, was irrelevant to my Cuban friends, who had a specific notion of what being *indio* looked like and translated my identity as white or more commonly *americana*. Writing about the prominent role of race in determining their social position during fieldwork in Cuba, Kaifa Roland (2010) and Jafari Allen (2011) have reported being mistaken for hustlers by tourists and criminalized by Cuban security officers, who failed to recognize them as foreigners because of their blackness. These prominent racial dynamics undoubtedly influenced the relationships in numerous ways, for instance leading to more friendships with lighter-skinned Cubans and encouraging my focus on notions of “whiteness” often left unarticulated by my collaborators.

During my research, racial and class divisions were exacerbated by the pronounced segregation policies, which required that tourists inhabit distinct economies, living quarters, and forms of transportation. Known as



Figure 1.2. Painted sign near my apartment in Central Habana.

“tourist apartheid” by their critics, these regulations were overturned by Raúl Castro in 2008 but structured much of my fieldwork experience. The Cuban government welcomed the hard currency of capitalist outsiders but feared their influence. Suspicion toward foreigners was heightened by the George W. Bush presidency, which escalated political tensions between the United States and Cuba.⁴⁸ Cuban government posters and television commercials superimposed Bush’s face over Hitler, as rumors of an impending United States invasion circulated. These political battles converged on the Malecón, where billboards with the photographs of the victims at Abu Ghraib implied that the United States could make Cuba its next target.⁴⁹ More insidious than dramatic moments of political theater, however, were how these suspicions structured and inflected my most mundane tasks—determining how and where I could procure food, housing, transportation, and goods. The government required all tourists to stay in hotels or to rent a room in a house with a Cuban family, so legal private apartments were not available. After six months of searching, including spending a month in an “empty” apartment where the landlady slept in the living room and used the bathroom in my room twice a night, I found an apartment in the working-class *barrio* of Centro Habana, where the landlord kept a locked room to keep the appearance that he lived there.⁵⁰ The longer I stayed in Cuba, the more comfortable I became circumventing the legal and cultural segregation between foreigners and Cubans. Yet the vivid experiences of boundary crossing from privileged tourist enclaves to Cuban realities no doubt informed my decision to focus on the rise of new class systems related to tourism.

Anti-Castro Cuban American activists have often cited Cuban state homophobia as part of their broader campaign to denounce the human rights abuses of the Cuban government. Hence, these representations of Cuban homosexuality politicized my research in ways that were out of my control. Often culturally conservative, these movements seem less interested in advocating for gay rights for Cuban Americans and more concerned with using Cuban state homophobia to advocate for U.S. military intervention. These ideologically laden representations of Cuban homosexuality often excluded the experiences and perspectives of gays living on the island.⁵¹ Further complicating the issue is how gay rights organizations in the United States often support U.S. military efforts to “liberate” gays abroad (Puar 2007).⁵² Hence, in exploring the Cuban case, I focus on the lives and stories of people with nonconforming genders and sexualities to uncover the experiences and concerns that define contemporary Cuban social life on its own terms.

TRANSLATING FLUID CATEGORIES

Same-sex practice does not automatically result in “homosexual” or “bisexual” identities, although it might in contemporary Anglo-European contexts (Allen 2011; Boellstorff 2007; Valentine 2007; Weston 1993). Michel Foucault, one of the most prominent analysts of sexual subjectivity, analyzed how medical, judicial, and psychoanalytic ideas about sexuality converged during the nineteenth century to give birth to the “homosexual” subject. Same-sex practice had existed before that point, but the idea that one’s homoerotic practice would result in a “homosexual identity”—described as an essence of one’s self—was a historical concept specific to the confluence of models of thought in Europe. Anglo-European definitions of homosexuality therefore reflect specific histories of industrialization and colonization, and link same-sex practice to a fixed identity in a way that contradicts the meaning of same-sex practice in many non-Western cultures.⁵³

Since homosexual identities reflect specific cultural systems and historical moments, it is important to resist projecting them onto the Cuban context. At the same time, insisting that all categories of Cuban sexuality are unique to the island exoticizes Cuba and ignores the far-reaching transnational circulation of terms and categories over the last century.⁵⁴ Keeping these constraints in mind, I have developed an imperfect solution to translating categories of sexual practice and identity.⁵⁵ I use

“gay” and “homosexual” as gender-neutral words to refer to gay men and women. I recognize that “gay” has, at times, implicitly meant “gay men” and therefore privileged a masculinist bias, but my collaborators used the Spanish word *gay* to mean both men and women. Similarly, female respondents in relationships with women most often used the word *lesbiana* to refer to themselves, which I translate here as “lesbian.” Cuban scholar Norma R. Guillard Limonta (2009) maintains that the embrace of the term “lesbian” by Cubans helps to undo the invisibility of female sexualities, arguing that “avoiding the word that defines these relations provides more evidence of rejection” (Guillard Limonta 2009: 70). I maintain that these terms are not simply direct translations of Western or scientific discourses of nonnormative sexuality, but hope to show their shifting, flexible nature by remaining sensitive to how terms were used and transformed in practice.

I prefer the term “subjectivity” over “identity” because it describes the formation of a self through social and historical processes. Whereas identities are based on our identification with a concept—race, gender, sexuality, class, and so on—the notion of subjectivity implies that there is no fixed, inherent self. While our identities can offer a platform for political activism, they can also trap us in systems of self-definition in which we are judged against standards of authenticity. Subjectivities, in contrast, encompass the idea that we are not fixed selves beholden to racial, gender, or sexual “truths” about us, but rather shifting embodiments of the moment in history in which we find ourselves.⁵⁶ By observing how post-Soviet economic changes infused nonnormative desires, I hope to reveal how specific historical and political circumstances generated sexual practices and identities.⁵⁷

I use the term “queer” not to impose a universal queer subject onto the Cuban context but to highlight the shifting nature of desire and the fluidity of sexuality that queer encompasses. Cubans did not use “queer,” and there was no clear Spanish equivalent. Instead, this distinction developed out of my own experiences in U.S. gay communities, in which my generation found “queer” a helpful alternative to sexual binaries (fixed homo-, hetero-, and bi- sexualities). The term “queer” provides a critique of these essentialist stances because it allows for a more nuanced understanding of desire.⁵⁸ Hence, “queer” refers to contexts in which nonnormative sexuality dominated but people did not adhere to homosexual identities, including heterosexuals engaging in same-sex practices, such as male sex

workers. For instance, the presence of heterosexual sex workers in predominantly gay settings changes “gay enclaves” to “queer enclaves.”

The word *travesti* I leave untranslated because the term “transgender” for U.S. readers too strongly suggests a transition from one gender to another.⁵⁹ *Travestis* very rarely used the Spanish word “transgender” (*transgénero*), and when they did, they were referring to women who had sex change operations. *Travestis* saw themselves as distinct from these women and used the term to mark that difference.⁶⁰ Many of the *travestis* with whom I worked narrated their sexual development as an evolution beginning with their identification as gay men and increasingly adopting traditionally feminine modes of dress and affect. They sought and maintained romantic relationships with men, most of whom identified as heterosexual. Many *travestis* took estrogen acquired from tourists to develop breasts, but none that I met desired the surgical removal of male genitalia. Moreover, they distinguished themselves from *transformistas* (drag queens), who were often men, gay or straight, that dressed in drag for entertainment.

Throughout the text, I interchange *male sex worker*, *jinetero*, *pinguero*, and *hustler*, and *female sex worker* and *jinetera*.⁶¹ Although occasionally distinguished in social scientific literature, these terms took on similar meanings within common usage, and through detailed description, I hope to tease out their nuances. When Cubans referred to the sex trade that emerged in the 1990s, they no longer used the term “prostitution” but more commonly referred to it as *jineterismo* or hustling. A *jinetero* is literally a horseback rider or jockey. Rather than a misnomer for prostitution, *jineterismo* framed sex workers outside of traditional dichotomies of victimized prostitute and oppressive client. Stephan Palmié has highlighted how *jineterismo* cast the *jinetero/a* as an agent who literally “whips the money” out of his or her client (2002: 282). Similarly, Kamala Kempadoo has suggested that *jineterismo* potentially countered the existing social hierarchies that have perpetuated racialized and class dominance (1999: 124). Because a *jinetero(a)* could engage in a number of black market activities, including sexual labor, I find this term akin to the category of *hustler* in the United States, which can mean someone who engages in sex work but also refers to those making a living through street smarts and shadow economies.

In a similar vein, *pinguismo* emerged in the 1990s alongside the widespread development of same-sex hustling in the tourist industry

and combines the Cuban slang term for penis, “pinga” with “ero,” which in Cuba indicates a person who works in a trade, such as a *cocinero* (cook) or a *plomero* (plumber), which does not require a university degree.⁶² The term *pinguero* is akin to an older term, *bugarrón*, which typically signified a heterosexual man who enjoyed clandestine male lovers. In theory, the *bugarrón* would always be the active, insertive partner during anal sex. Although a *bugarrón* may have some form of exchange with his partners, the term *pinguero* is distinct because it consistently carries the connotation of a man who has sex with foreigners for money. The people with whom I worked often used *bugarrón* and *pinguero* interchangeably, allowing the context to determine whether a man expected pay for sex or not.

Similar to the complex relationship between sexual identities and desire, the racial classification of my friends and respondents proved difficult to translate. According to the official 2002 Cuban census, the racial composition of the population was 65 percent white, 25 percent black, and 10 percent *mulato*, including a small percentage of Chinese descendants. Confusing matters is the fact that in Cuba a correlation of skin color, hair texture, facial features, and eye color combine to determine one’s racial status. Six categories were most prominent, listed from white to black in increasing degrees of color: *blanco(a)*, *jabao(á)*, *trigueño(a)*, *mestizo(a)*, *mulato(a)*, and *negro(a)*. Given the options of white, black, or *mulato*, most Cubans would likely place *jabao*, *trigueño*, and *mestizo*—all varying shades of light skin and mixed racial ancestry—into the “white” category. As Nadine Fernandez notes, these classifications are also in constant flux because the “race” recorded on a person’s official documents could change in each incarnation because it is determined by the observer (2010: 18). My friends and collaborators spanned the spectrum, with the smallest groups identifying as black or white, more often choosing one of the mixed categories. In lieu of projecting a black-white racial binary onto my respondents, I have tried, throughout my book, to let them identify their racial category or described their appearance in a way that illuminates these distinctions.

Likewise, following the lead of Cuban historian Abel Sierra Madero (2001), I consciously refrain from using the term “gay community” in the Cuban context. Gay community refers to a collective entity, similar to an ethnic minority, in a usage popularized during the gay liberation movements in the United States during the 1970s.⁶³ It has since come to

represent both gay people and a collection of gay spaces including neighborhoods, bookstores, cafes, and bars. The absence of private property in Cuba makes the conflation of a unified group with a social space inappropriate for a socialist context. In the United States, activists and journalists often describe gay Cubans as lacking the “freedom” to create gay communities because socialist laws prohibit gays from creating industries that cater to a gay clientele. Cuban trajectories of nonnormative sexuality reflect different histories, which I explore in greater detail in the next chapter. Even in the United States, however, dominant ideas of a gay community do not apply to everyone. Working-class and queers of color have often not sought autonomy from their families or social groups, which often provided nurturance and protection from discrimination. In Cuba, many urban gays were likewise incorporated within their neighborhoods, workplaces, and families, and did not express a need to establish a separate community to stave off isolation.

My findings offer insight into the experiences of queer Cuban social life, yet I was surprised to find that my collaborators did not discuss HIV/AIDS as much as I had expected. I often asked about safe sex practices, and the majority of gay and bisexual men, as well as sex workers, that I interviewed were aware of the risks and claimed to use condoms most of the time. Although it came up occasionally, HIV/AIDS did not dominate daily discussions. This absence can be explained by Cuba’s low rate of HIV transmission (0.1 percent), between six and ten times lower than that of other Caribbean countries. The lack of emphasis on HIV/AIDS also reflected the fact that it did not emerge in Cuba with the stigma of a “gay cancer” as it did in the United States. The first cases of HIV were introduced through heterosexual soldiers who had served in Angola and infected their wives upon their return.⁶⁴ Homosexuality and sex work are often framed through the lens of HIV/AIDS in media representations and scholarly accounts, so by emphasizing other facets of nonnormative sexual subjectivity and practice I hope to honor the perspectives of my interlocutors and broaden the scope of scholarly understanding of their lives.

THE SCHEME OF THE BOOK

Attending to the contestations of queer intimacy in post-Soviet Cuba I aim to shed light on the politics and inequalities of love in a moment in which socialist and capitalist systems collided and cannibalized one another—each in perpetual crisis and fragile recovery.⁶⁵ To begin, in chapter 1,

I set the stage for gay critiques of the sex trade by contextualizing gay urban life within official campaigns of gay tolerance, which emerged after half a century of homophobic policies. Rather than assume a predetermined progression toward sexual equality, I link the rise of gay tolerance to wider governmental efforts to preserve fragile revolutionary accomplishments during the transition to mixed-market socialism. I present and analyze the birth of tolerance in state-sponsored medical and cultural agencies, along with the rise of an informal gay nightlife in Havana. I argue that the efficacy of tolerance campaigns largely depended upon advocates' ability to disassociate prostitution and homosexuality because the two forms of sexual "deviance" had been historically entangled. Understanding the stakes of political inclusion for urban gay men and lesbians helps to elucidate why they were so fervent in their criticism of commodified sex and affect and sensitive to increasing social stratification in the post-Soviet era.

In chapter 2, I introduce gay siblings, a brother and sister, raised in Havana, who lamented the contemporary transformations within queer enclaves. They and their partners shared a house on the outskirts of the city and sought to maintain their distance from the explosion of commodified sex. Yet I demonstrate how they believed that the changing economy inevitably impinged upon their relationships. Illuminating how the inversion of cultural and economic capital frustrated gays and lesbians, I argue that working-class and middle-class urban gays reprised state-sponsored moralism to criticize sex workers through tropes of decency, labor, and the body. I demonstrate how, as urban gays disparaged commodified sex, they inadvertently perpetuated certain forms of preexisting class, racial, and urban discrimination. I point out the irony of these critiques, since many urban gays also utilized relationships with foreigners for personal gain or hired sex workers themselves.

Not all urban gay men and women, however, sought to distance themselves from transactional sexual relationships; some reacted very differently to the rise of the sex trade. In chapter 3, I examine a household of gay men who hired and supported male sex workers on an ongoing basis. Access to hard currency offered the men a middle-class lifestyle, but they were not invested in discourses of decency, or distinguishing "upstanding" gays from criminalized participants in queer enclaves. They partook in commodified sexual relationships, often supporting hustlers for months at a time, while decrying the state of emotional "emptiness"

they attributed to young *pingueros* whom they cared for. Ironically, some gay men adopted a market mentality of contracts, labor, and “heartlessness” in their domestic dealings with hustlers and one another, even as they criticized these characteristics in the young hustlers they supported.

In chapter 4, I delve into the daily lives of female and male sex workers sharing a household in Centro Habana. Sex workers speak back to the accusations of delinquency leveled by urban gays. Focusing on the woman who headed the household and her best friend, a *pinguero* from the provinces, I trace how sex workers undermined reductive readings of gender and sexuality yet still reinforced normative roles. I examine how hustlers understood sex work as a temporary fix to financial dilemmas and defended prostitution by detailing the realities of post-Soviet poverty.

While urban gays criticized sex workers, sex workers frequently disparaged their foreign clients. Hence, chapter 5 attends to the perspective of gay tourists in Havana. Little scholarly work has explored the experiences and perspectives of gay tourists looking to pay for sex while on vacation. By demonstrating how queer tourists often interpreted their sexual encounters in queer enclaves as a form of political solidarity, I analyze how the system of Cuban-foreigner segregation limited tourist knowledge about Cuban social systems and inadvertently eroticized tourist experiences. I demonstrate how a pernicious ethnocentrism often pervaded well-meaning attempts to forge solidarity, as international gay activists frequently projected U.S.-based sexual identities and politics onto the Cuban context.

In concluding, I argue that in order to understand the nuances of gay social life in contemporary Havana and to forge solidarity movements with gay Cubans, international scholars and activists must remain sensitive to the unique trajectories of Cuban sexual equality even when their strategies are at odds with our own. I revisit my initial argument that the structural poverty bred by the loss of Soviet subsidies limited the promise of sexual equality for gays in Havana. As the Cuban government hesitantly embraced limited neoliberal capitalist reforms in the 1990s after decades of orthodox communism, discourses and practices of desire and sexuality embodied these national transformations. Havana’s queer enclaves were caught at the crossroads of political struggles over sexual equality and the widespread introduction of transactional sex, thereby

providing a poignant example of the impact of social economic restructuring on the most intimate practices of ordinary life.

FLEETING ENCOUNTERS

As a witness to the many contradictions that plagued people's lives in the post-Soviet era, I often inspired self-reflection, denial, and humor among my friends and respondents as they struggled to make sense of their decisions. More important, they emphasized how making ends meet had become as important as making sense of their sexualities, if not more so. It was this erotic-economic perspective that inspired Ruso to deny his role as a hustler, even as I joined him on his many adventures. His response also signaled how he would not allow his foray into strategic sex to define him.

Ruso eventually left Havana. After five years, he had aged significantly. Partying with tourists' hard drugs, skipping meals, and spending his cash on things like gold teeth had morphed his schoolboy image into a wiry, tougher persona. Before he returned to the provinces, he sat in my living room and cried. Nothing was the same. He wasn't making money like he used to, he rented a cot from a cold and alienating family, and most of his friends had been arrested or sent back to the *campo*. Before, someone had always offered to lend him a dollar or to cook him a meal, but now he often went without food. My original questions about *jineterismo* and his sexuality seemed irrelevant as I watched him wipe his eyes with the back of his hand. I gave him enough money to buy his ticket home and then some.

A week later, I spotted Ruso lying on the Malecón. I remembered the many stories that I had heard about *pingueros* literally crying to foreigners about how they needed cash to go home as a ploy to get money. "They will kill anyone in their stories—even their own mothers—to say they need the money to go back to the *campo*, and then they stay in Havana," one friend had told me. I walked up to Ruso, ready to confront him about his lie. "Look," he said, anticipating what was coming. He opened his battered, grayed cloth wallet, with the two twenties tucked into the cash pocket for my inspection. "I just wanted to pick up one more trick before I went home." I took my place next to him on the wall. I didn't care if he was lying; he knew the answer that I needed and I found that comforting.

When Ruso finally returned to the *campo* he married a young woman who had been a childhood sweetheart, took a job doing manual labor, and

eventually started a family. I heard through mutual friends that he still took male lovers in secret. I met him during a moment in his life that was so radically different from the rest that it feels unfair to focus on it. Yet, it illuminates why I emphasize desire rather than sexuality, because desires, unlike identities, accommodate fluidity and change. Our drives manage to reconstitute our life trajectories again and again. The experiences that I witnessed and shared with Ruso shaped who he would become, but in no way determined his future selves. At the time, when he had prompted me to take out my notebook and write down his answers to my questions about his sexuality, perhaps I had underestimated his response. Write the term “bisexuality” down, he implied, because it could change by the next time I saw him. The stories that I present here, like Ruso’s, offer a snapshot of who my friends, collaborators, hustlers, and confidants were during the moment that our lives collided. Many would not recognize me now, nor I them. But by recounting these fleeting encounters, I hope to uncover something true about who we were, or at least who we hoped to be, and shed light on the changing social worlds that briefly brought us together.

Notes

Introduction

1. Rather than parse whether or not declarations of love and intimacy were authentic, I join with analysts who are interested in what these performances mean in practice (e.g., Brennan 2004; Faier 2007).

2. An analysis of medical, scientific, and government discourses reveals the shifting production of categories of homosexuality but does not go far enough to explore how these discourses shaped the experiences of ordinary people (Donham 1998; Robertson 2005). While discourses profoundly affect ideas and practices, people think and act at the intersections of discourses (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995: 18).

3. See, for example, Abu-Lughod (1986), Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990), Boellstorff and Lindquist (2004), Klima (2004), Lutz (1988), Lutz and White (1986), M. Rosaldo (1980, 1984), and R. Rosaldo (1989). In particular, Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990) have highlighted that sentiments are socially produced during moments of exchange, rather than as emotions waiting to be expressed. In a similar vein, Boellstorff and Lindquist (2004) as well as Klima (2004) point out how the social construction of emotion can offer a useful lens for understanding economic crisis.

4. Feminist scholars have highlighted how discourses of love and intimacy often disguise underlying issues of status along the lines of race and class that inspire partner choice. Similarly, Marxist feminists have argued that heterosexual women may be expected to provide domestic and emotional labor in the name of love, which renders their work invisible. Throughout this scholarship, analysts emphasize how cultural assumptions about love and intimacy have shifted dramatically over time.

5. In some contexts, this move away from social obligation was not always met with praise but rather was suspect in its links to the market. In Ado, Nigeria, Cornwall (2002) identifies a similar dynamic to Cuba in which men and women alike criticized how a “perverse love of money” replaced a bygone era when love stemmed from “dutiful obedience.”

6. Lisa Rofel (1999, 2007) studied the intersection of political economy and queer sexuality in postcommunist Beijing. She observed that “global” gay identities did not supplant Chinese categories, but rather gay Chinese men strategically invoked a universal gay identity to define themselves as more Chinese, not as Western (1999: 459). Likewise, Tom Boellstorff (2002) has argued that local Indonesian nonnormative sexualities were not replaced by Anglo-European categories, but rather reformulated in new ways. Boellstorff challenged the premise that people with nonconforming genders and sexualities would be “modernized or contaminated” by the introduction of Western-style gay identities and activism (2007: 22). More generally within anthropology, this shift reflected other arguments that “the global” and “the local” operated as discursive constructions akin to notions of “modernization” within development rhetoric, rather than lived realities (Ong 2006; Trouillot 2003).

7. Likewise, Kevin Floyd has examined how the devaluation of a Fordist model of production and consumption in the 1960s accompanied a dissolution of traditional models of heterosexual masculinity in popular representations (2009: 79). Typically, Marxists have considered sexual inequalities as a secondary effect of capitalist exploitation, but Floyd demonstrates how gender and sexuality are cornerstones of capitalist accumulation, production, and consumption.

8. By connecting love and intimacy to broader social systems that foster inequality, such as colonialism and, more recently, neoliberalism and global capitalism, we can begin to understand how oft-assumed private feelings generate inequalities. In doing so, I contribute to a growing body of scholarship that demonstrates how the erasure of certain forms of intimacy stigmatizes certain groups and excludes them from the imagined national collective (Berlant 1997, 1998; Padilla et al. 2007; Povinelli 2002; Wiegman 2002).

9. For example, Arguelles and Rich (1984, 1985), Leiner (1994), Lumsden (1996), and Young (1981).

10. By emphasizing how the Cuban transition to a mixed-market economy influenced nonnormative sexual desires and practices, I do not mean to imply that contemporary forms of capitalist globalization are confined to the present day. Cuban sexual practices and identities have always been an amalgam of multiple cultures—including Africa, Spain, China, and the United States—during the island’s colonial, neocolonial, and diasporic histories. Rather than an “opening” to the world, I understand the reintroduction of foreign tourism as the latest chapter of a centuries-old tale, as Cuba had always been profoundly transnational.

11. Leading up to the disbanding of the Socialist Bloc in 1991, the Cuban economy was already suffering with its hard currency debt more than doubling

between 1985 and 1989 (Eckstein 1997). Due to the loss of income and imports, the gross domestic product (GDP) was cut nearly in half, from \$19.3 billion in 1989 to \$10 billion in 1993 (Hamilton 2002: 23). Cubans also lost their ability to produce domestic goods because of the lack of oil and machinery, as agriculture rotted in the fields for lack of transport (Ellwood 1998).

12. Reduced from adequate subsistence levels, food rations included only beans, milk for children and pregnant women, rice, and sugar, with other goods such as cooking oil, eggs, matches, pasta, soap, toothpaste, and textured vegetable protein occasionally available. By 2002, the ration system still adequately provided for young children, infants through six-year-olds, but Cubans between the ages of fourteen and sixty-five received about half of the calories and one-third of the protein recommended by the Cuban Institute for Nutrition and Food (Togores and García 2004: 260).

13. The Cuban government implemented intermittent economic restructuring. For instance, officials approved 140 different categories of self-employment, including “doll repairperson” and “pet stylist” (Córdova 1996: 361). Yet, between 2003 and 2007, the government halted the administration of new licenses—reducing the private sector employment from 209,000 to 142,000 in 2009. In a reversal of this trend, however, in 2010 President Raúl Castro announced that the government would lay off more than 500,000 state employees, 10 percent of the workforce, and expand job permissions in the private sector to absorb the unemployed. By the end of 2010, the government had increased the number of self-employment licenses more than 50 percent from 2009. In a similar gesture toward unprecedented privatization, in April 2011 the Communist Party Congress ruled to allow the purchase and sale of private property and crafted credit mechanisms for small business and cooperatives.

14. Government leaders viewed the partial opening toward foreign capitalism and outsiders as a necessary evil (Espino 2000: 362). For instance, the preamble to Cuba’s Foreign Investment Act warned that Cuba could benefit from foreign investment only “on the basis of the strictest respect for national independence and sovereignty” (Foreign Investment Act 1995).

15. The 2010 statistics taken from the U.S. State Department website featuring Cuba. These estimates include “medical tourists” from other Latin American countries seeking treatment in Cuban facilities.

16. My research complicates this racial divide, however, because I focus on white, mixed, or lighter-skinned families who had no connection to family abroad and therefore received no financial support.

17. Historically, Havana’s population had grown slowly as a result of balanced development policies, low birth rates, high rates of emigration, and an acute housing shortage in the capital. But net domestic migration to Havana spiked in the mid-1990s in response to the economic crisis (Coyula and Hamberg 2003: 4). An estimated 50,000 people moved to Havana in 1996 alone, and in the first four months of 1997, 92,000 people tried to legalize their status in the city (De la Fuente 2001: 328). By the late 1990s, Havana’s population reached nearly 2.19

million—around one-fifth of the country—in an urban area of 139 square miles (ONE 2001).

18. While the laws were repealed in 2008, much de facto segregation remained because of the expensive prices of tourist-oriented goods and services.

19. In distinguishing between symbolic capital and financial capital to describe gay Cubans' frustration over shifting configurations of class and sexuality in post-Soviet Havana, I do not intend to reify economic capital as if it were an acultural universal. I recognize that financial capital is in itself also a symbolic system, not one based in concrete, objective values.

20. The absence of establishments geared toward prostitution make accusations that the Cuban government is "pimping" women to foreign tourists seem implausible.

21. For instance, the scholarly and artistic work of Amir Valle (2001), Elizalde (1999), Fernández Robaina (1998), Gutiérrez (2000), and Valdés (1996). As anthropologist Nadine Fernandez highlights, the establishment of tourist zones heightened Cubans' sensitivities to race and class and fostered new systems of inclusion and exclusion (2010: 130).

22. At times, gay Cubans analyzed the commodification of sex and affect more astutely than scholars because they were able to think outside of traditional understandings of sex workers as victims. Often from the same socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds as sex workers, gay critics provided insight into the motivations for sexual labor while raising questions about how nascent capitalist markets impacted daily life.

23. Among the most prominent studies of prostitution in Cuba since the post-Soviet crisis are Alcázar Campos (2009), Allen (2007, 2011), Fernandez (1999), Fosado (2005), Fusco (2001), Hodge (2001), Kempadoo (1999), La Cabezas (2009), La Fountain Stokes (2002), and Rundle (2001). Dissertations include Céspedes (2007) and Forrest (1999).

24. Taking a unique view on the political potential of these new subjectivities, Jafari Allen has analyzed the intersection of nonnormative desires and blackness to argue that black Cubans crafted "intimate spaces of autonomy," which qualified as forms of resistance that moved "toward freedom" (2011: 14).

25. For important work on heteroerotic sex tourism in the Dominican Republic, see also Brennan (2004) and Gregory (2007).

26. By attending to the complicated intersections of nonnormative desire and the reinvention of respectability in the post-Soviet era, my work extends Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital because sexuality is largely absent from his studies. Moreover, I am taking some liberties applying Bourdieu to a socialist context devoid of private wealth because Bourdieu emphasized how forms of cultural capital could be converted into wealth—a reflection of the French context where he conducted his sociological studies.

27. Bourdieu recognized the role of social structures, but emphasized how social actors navigated them, a position that Michael Herzfeld has called a "militant middle ground" between structure and agency (Herzfeld 2005: 151). By moving

class distinctions away from economic determinism into the cultural realm, Bourdieu opened up an analysis of how power and difference operated in the most mundane habits of daily life.

28. In describing changes in Havana's queer enclaves after the introduction of foreign tourism, I do not want to suggest that gay tourists alone transformed nonnormative sexualities in Cuba. This would be especially remiss because it plays into the misleading notion that a Western presence brings change or progress to non-Western countries that lag behind culturally. Instead, the presence of foreign tourists embodied economic changes and the policies of state segregation that provided tourists with elite status transformed the opportunities that Cubans faced. Hence, the influx of foreign tourists to Havana provided a context for the tensions and experiences that I present in this book, but the changes to relationships between Cubans were the focus on my interlocutors.

29. Their resistance to new forms of inequality echoes other contexts in which people draw on local lexicons to make sense of and decry the rise of capitalist economies. For instance, Michael Taussig (1980) described black peasants in Colombia who criticized the exploitative forms of wage labor by drawing on folkloric tales of the devil.

30. For example, see the insightful work on blackness and race in Cuba by Jafari Allen (2011), Kaifa Roland (2011), and Mark Sawyer (2006).

31. The First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 1975 declared that sincerity and mutual respect should guide partner choice in the new Cuban society.

32. Andaya observes how heterosexual women in the post-Soviet era were influenced by these ideologies, decrying how material interests played a deciding role in forming romantic relationships. Like urban gays, straight women lamented the decline of morality, social solidarity, and familial cohesion because of these new market-oriented dispositions. Andaya, building on Arjun Appadurai, sees this as a type of "imagined nostalgia" for things that never were (Andaya 2012: 15).

33. See Tom Boellstorff for an insightful discussion of the potential of Foucauldian notions of reverse discourse to analyze queer resistance (2007: 23).

34. Bruce Grant (1995) has demonstrated how marginalized subjects can both identify with dominant socialist state projects and maintain a separate cultural identity.

35. In particular, the lawless and the state can use the same language to justify their actions. For example, Herzfeld describes the case of Cretan sheep rustlers and the authorities of the Greek state, all of whom invoke a "formerly perfect social order" to justify their contradictory actions (2005: 109).

36. Most famously, Peter Wilson (1974) framed the social dichotomy that arose from the enduring cultural traces of colonialism in his iconic model of reputation and respectability. Respectability, Wilson claimed, was the domain of women and found its roots in the colonial moral order that emphasized church attendance, domesticity, and formal marriage. Reputation, in contrast, was associated with street masculinity, sexual prowess, and wit, providing a form of resistance to

colonially imposed notions of respectability. While the gendered binary of male respect and female reputation is an oversimplification in a region in which women often use the tools of reputation (e.g., Barrow 1986; Freeman 2007), the tensions associated with reputation and propriety continue to play out in new ways in the social life of the region (Wardle 2000; Freeman 2007).

37. The historical relationship between race, class, and labor in postcrisis Cuba has been well studied (e.g., De la Fuente 1995, De la Fuente and Glasco 1997), but the shifting nature of nonnormative sexual identities and practices tends to be discussed apart from racialized modes of production and transnational flows.

38. During my time in Havana, La Rampa maintained a reputation as the most popular *ambiente* for urban gays. La Rampa was not just any neighborhood; with each era of Cuban history it had offered a symbolic canvas for social reinvention. The heart of Havana's prerevolutionary nightlife in the 1950s, La Rampa was once famous for luxury hotels, casinos, and nightclubs. In the 1960s, the cabarets with scantily clad women dancing for rich tourists were closed. The revolutionary government transformed the area, allowing all Cubans to stay for free in the hotels on subsidized honeymoons and adding affordable movie theaters and cafés.

39. During this time, I also shot and directed a documentary film exploring the lives of sex workers in queer enclaves. The process of collaborative filmmaking with sex workers served as a rich source of ethnographic insight and has profoundly informed my perspective.

40. Over the years, I have also consulted with and fostered ongoing collaborations with Cuban academics, writers, artists, filmmakers, and medical professionals whose work addressed sexuality, tourism, HIV/AIDS, and popular culture. I also attended a wide variety of arts and cultural events, including plays, film festivals, and art exhibits related to gender and sexuality. In order to survey Cuban social scientific and artistic production often difficult to find in the United States, I conducted archival research at the National Library in Havana, the University of Havana's Psychology Library, and the International Film School in San Antonio de los Baños.

41. By the completion of my research, 64 percent no longer sought clients. The high rate of retirement reflected how sex work was most often a short-term endeavor used to supplement diminishing wages and state subsidies rather than a lifelong career. Jafari Allen notes a similar trend (2011: 183).

42. Emilio Bejel (2001) and Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich (1985) provide important exceptions to this trend.

43. Following Judith Halberstam (1998), I see female masculinity not merely as a perverse supplement to dominant configurations of gender but believe that masculinity itself cannot be fully understood unless female masculinity is taken into account.

44. As Mark Padilla has pointed out, one of the benefits of analyzing the political economy of sexuality is that it highlights how same-sex exchanges do not exist in a world of homoeroticism but are connected to heterosexual relations largely through the household (2007: 25).

45. Although I conducted interviews with twelve Cuban Americans who were returning to Havana as tourists, I decided to focus on non-Cuban tourists as a way to examine how foreigners with little direct contact with the island imagined their presence in Havana.

46. For instance, Esther Newton, confessing her attraction to an older lesbian she interviewed during field research, encouraged ethnographers to be more upfront about our feelings (1993: 16).

47. My connection to Cuba was less charged than that of many researchers whose families have left Cuba, yet I did have a relationship to the island. Before I was born, my maternal grandparents and great-grandparents worked as live-in domestics for a wealthy Bostonian family who had amassed a fortune through Cuban sugar plantations. After the 1959 revolution, the Cuban government nationalized the sugar industry, and the family lost its fortune and fired my relatives. My grandfather reminded me of this link when we discussed Cuba, and I found it striking how social movements, transnational economic shifts, and the lives of the working poor had always been intertwined.

48. After 1959, Cuba nationalized all industries, and the loss of U.S. political influence on the island, just ninety miles from U.S. shores, became a thorn in the side of the U.S. government. Cuban migrants, supported by the U.S. military, initiated campaigns to oust Fidel Castro and return Cuba to prerevolutionary levels of foreign investment, an effort that continues to the present day. As Cuban studies scholar Jorge Domínguez (1997) puts it, in Cuba, the Cold War did not end, but became colder.

49. Two male sex workers I knew spent the night partying on the Malecón and fell asleep on the wall. After sunrise, they awoke to find themselves surrounded by a mandatory government march against George Bush that snaked along the Malecón. With nowhere else to go, they joined the protest.

50. During shorter visits, I also spent stretches in middle-class Vedado and the slightly wealthier neighborhood of Miramar.

51. During the Cold War, the absence of gay voices reflected broader trends in which Cuban scholarship in the United States was dominated by highly ideological work that focused on the state, the economy, or Fidel Castro (Bengelsdorf 2009: 140). As Cuban historian Abel Sierra Madero (2006: 15) points out, this absence is also compounded by the dearth of attention to nonnormative sexuality within the Cuban academy. More recent representations of homophobic policies in Cuba also reflect how gay tolerance has increasingly become a measure of governmental “civilization.” Akin to the ways that governments historically used the oppressed status of women to justify colonial rule, homophobia in “enemy” nations has become a common symbol for the absence of democracy.

52. Postcolonial and feminist scholars have warned us about homogenizing representations of a group of people in need of “rescue,” not by their own devices, but by the “charitable” forces of intervention (Abu-Lughod 1986; Mahmood 2001; Mohanty 1991; Ong 1988). Likewise, I have elsewhere argued that studies of prostitution published outside Cuba often suffer interventionist undertones (Stout 2008).

53. A number of scholars have written on this topic including D'Emilio (1998), Foucault (1990 [1978]), Stoler (1995), and Weeks (1977).

54. Sympathetic to the challenges of studying same-sex eroticism in cross-cultural contexts, I agree with Kath Weston's (1993) conceptualization of a "queer" anthropology, rather than a gay/lesbian anthropology, because it takes nonnormative gender and sexual practices as the point of departure rather than a universal.

55. For an important debate regarding the application of the term *homosexual* to same-sex practices, in Cuba see Roger Lancaster's (1986) comment on Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich's (1984, 1985) essays on homosexuality in Cuba. Lancaster argues that the use of the term *homosexual* in studies on Cuba imposes an ethnocentric, universalist model of same-sex practice. I agree with Lancaster's call to chart a movement for sexual equality that reflects the socialist and cultural logics of the Cuban context. At the same time, as Arguelles and Rich maintain in their response to Lancaster, categories of sexuality in Cuba such as "gay" or "homosexual" reflect a transnational history of precolonial, colonial, and revolutionary eras that complicate the notion of a "folk" model.

56. Gayle Rubin (2002) challenges Foucault's prominence in the field by pointing out how similar constructionist arguments were being made by sociologists who predated Foucault.

57. Here I am building on the works of Butler (1993), Duggan (1994), Foucault (1990 [1978]), Herdt (1981), Lancaster (1992), Parker (1991), Sedgwick (1990), and Weeks (1977).

58. Whereas the reification of desire would manifest in categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality, as Kevin Floyd (2009) has insightfully argued, the term "queer" offers no such solid ground.

59. I take my cue from Don Kulick (1998), who in his ethnographic study of Brazilian *travestis*, did not translate the term.

60. Kulick (1998) found a similar pattern in Brazil.

61. Infamous for its creative manipulation of the Spanish language, Cuban slang has historically relied on enlargement, reduction, replacement, switching, reduplicative creation, and personification to conceal the meanings of words (Rivas 2000). Cuban slang was particularly prolific when it came to describing sexual practices and body parts. For instance, the penis could be described by thirty-three different words.

62. Similar trends of homoerotic sex work exist within a variety of Latin American contexts, such as the Brazilian *michê* and Mexican *mayate*, and the *sanky panky* in the Dominican Republic (Padilla 2007; Parker 1999; Prieur 1998).

63. In an analysis of gay kinship in San Francisco, Kath Weston highlighted how urban gays used "community" to conflate a unified identity with gay institutions and geographic space (1991: 122).

64. Since my fieldwork, these numbers have grown, especially among gay men, and I discuss this as a possible direction for future research in my conclusion.

65. My focus on the intersections between affective sentiments and economic change also redresses a gap in social scientific literature on the Caribbean, which,

as Carla Freeman (2007) notes, tends to focus on the economy and leave sentimental attachments and love outside the scope of analysis.

Chapter 1: The Historical Context of Queer Critiques

1. Desperate, gays and hustlers established a makeshift gathering at a bus stop near the capitol building in Centro Habana. They told officers that they were waiting for a city bus that was delayed (a plausible alibi given Havana's chronic transportation crisis).

2. Many gay men and lesbians with whom I spoke attributed the raids to heightened political tensions with the United States. They reminded me that just a few months before the raid, Fidel Castro had relinquished political control to his brother Raúl after holding presidential power for over forty years. This had left the government vulnerable to foreign intervention and necessitated the control of public forms of deviancy.

3. During this era Dr. Benjamín de Céspedes published a study of prostitution that included "pederasts," men who had homoerotic sexual relationships with adolescent boys. Writing during a time when the number of brothels in Havana was estimated to be as high as 1,400 (Pérez 1999: 207), Dr. Céspedes emphasized pederasts' roots in what he described as a social class of career criminals, alcoholics, and staff that served prostitutes.

4. The emphasis on heteronormative masculine prowess as fundamental to national defense was typical of postcolonial and nationalist movements. For instance, see Anderson (1983); McClintock (1992); Mosse (1985); and Parker et al. (1992).

5. For a more in-depth history of revolutionary homophobia, see Arguelles and Rich (1984); Bejel (2001); Hamilton (2012); Leiner (1994); Lumsden (1996); Quiroga (2000); Smith and Padula (1996); Sommer (1991); Young (1981).

6. To demonstrate the power of male homoerotic sexual roles, gay Cubans would recount a popular urban legend. During the 1960s, at the height of governmental homophobia, when police caught two men having sex, they would declare the *pasivo* a homosexual and send him to prison, but release the *activo*. Working in Brazil, anthropologist Don Kulick (1997a) aptly describes a similar system based around an opposition between the "fucked and not-fucked," with women, gay men, and *travestis* on one end, and heterosexual men on the other.

7. As Bejel points out, Cuban health specialists were influenced by Freud and blamed male effeminacy on the presence of a weak or absent father and an obsessive mother.

8. Guevara did not address the issue of homosexuality overtly, but opposed the New Man to the inauthentic intellectual (Guevara 1965: 49)—code for queer artists and thinkers who failed to live up to masculinized standards.

9. Attitudes toward homosexuality stemmed from the conception that it was a choice, rather than a biological fact, as advocates would later argue. For instance, in 1967 Castro told a foreign journalist that to punish a person for something over which he had no control would be wrong (Lockwood 1967: 107).