This study of the emergence of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights movement in Nicaragua in the 1990s and 2000s raises interesting theoretical questions about the articulation of ‘new’ and ‘old’ social movements. The Sandinista revolution of 1979 was a classic Latin American mobilization of peasants, workers and intellectuals seeking basic democratic rights and economic justice. It occurred in an era of ascendancy of the new social movements in the global north that moved beyond the longstanding struggles of labour and political economy. The Sandinista government of the 1980s advanced an ambitious agenda of land reform, literacy, and social justice. The early revolutionary women’s organization, *Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza* (Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women, AMNLAE), focused on women’s issues entirely within the Sandinista framework without taking up issues preoccupying international feminism at the time. LGBT issues had no space in the revolutionary formation of the 1980s. The first organization to come into being in 1986 was treated with suspicion and repression by the Sandinista police.

Powerful reactionary forces led by a coalition of the big landowning class, churches (Roman Catholic and evangelical), and successive Republican administrations in the United States stood behind the government that came to power in the election of 1990. It imposed a new sodomy law in 1992 at a time when almost all such laws had been repealed throughout the Western hemisphere. This book documents how an LGBT movement emerged in this unique political environment of explicitly anti-LGBT legislation and a ready-at-hand revolutionary discourse of social justice. Howe documents the creation of a sexual diversity movement, “Sexuality Free from Prejudice,” consistent with the liberation discourse of the Sandinista revolution, that attempted to skirt identity politics by appealing to a universal human rights discourse. “Positioning sexual rights as intrinsic to humanity, and placing sexuality within the greater scope of human rights, activists propose that sexual diversity is not simply a ‘minority’ concern but one that implicates all of society” (pages 99-101). This universalizing strategy appeared to work reasonably well; in 2007 the sodomy law was repealed. It nevertheless raised questions that have run through LGBT movements everywhere by promoting a kind of integrationism that provides little
room for the specificity of LGBT people and their cultures. The book shows the difficulty of sustaining the universal sexual rights approach both for LGBT people, some of whom formed parallel groups that were overtly LGBT-identified, and for outsiders who understood that the civil rights issues of LGBT people were largely the sexual rights concerns on the table.

The other primary theme running through the book is the question of the intersection of indigenous and global forms of sexual subjectivity. My own work characterized Nicaragua of the 1980s as a society where there was homosexuality without a gay world. This book, located in subsequent decades, carefully examines the impact of global LGBT visions of same-sex sexuality and relationships on the role- and gender-inflected local understandings circulating in Nicaraguan society. The book is very focused on the potentially neocolonialist reformation of same-sex relations in the LGBT image, making the Foucauldian point that NGO-supported groups for LGBT people “are in fact actively creating the category that they claim to represent; activists are constructing la lesbiana through the work that they do” (page 64). In a particularly telling story, Howe shows how unconvinced the cochonas del campo (country dykes) of a small mountain town were by cosmopolitan, northern notions of egalitarian feminism advanced by NGO workers. The book is less interested in what both Nicaraguans and NGO workers from the north brought to the encounter. NGO workers, who often had formative political experiences in LGBT movements in their home countries were often attracted to the promise of revolutionary transformation in Nicaragua, while local people living quite a different reality nevertheless were also intrigued, if not attracted, to LGBT globalism that promised the respect and dignity they often lacked at home.

The final chapter looks closely at a Nicaragua-produced telenovela, Sexto Sentido, a production that sought to avoid the usual reactionary social values of the genre by dealing with a wide range of social issues in an entertaining format. Legal reform is one thing but cultural change can be quite another. Among the innovations of Sexto Sentido were likeable gay and lesbian characters set in a Nicaraguan context, “a significant departure from the character (or caricature) of the more locally familiar cochón, maricón, or loca” (page 138). Howe argues that “activist producers promoted a very particular homosexual habitus that featured properly gendered, and declared, lesbian and gay subjects” (page 157), a depiction that rehabilitated LGBT characters at the cost of marginalizing readily recognized and often gender-nonconforming local people.
*Intimate Activism*, then, provides a well-grounded, theoretically informed portrait of the intersection of the global and local in sexuality. It contributes to a growing research literature on the generation of new sexual subjectivities lived not only as discourse but as desire and selfhood. And it contributes to research on the multiplicity of LGBT movement formations, each built out of the social and political signifiers locally at hand yet resonating globally.

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