

## BOOK REVIEWS / RESEÑAS DE LIBROS

***Turid Hagene, Negotiating Love in Post-Revolutionary Nicaragua.***  
Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008.

The intriguing title will probably draw many readers to this book. It is not every day, as the author herself points out, that we see academic texts on the subject of love. This fact is definitely not the only reason to read the book. It is well written and has a thorough discussion and elaboration of theoretical concepts. Hagene's argument that love and emotions are important parts in the reproduction of gender asymmetry runs as a red thread throughout the work.

The book is set in the small community of San Juan in post-revolutionary Nicaragua. Hagene has done a longitudinal study that starts in the 1990s and runs into the new millennium. Before that she lived and worked in different capacities in Nicaragua since the early 1980s.

The empirical material is principally interviews and conversations with ten women who worked in a sewing cooperative that Hagene calls *La Esperanza*. She analyzes interviews with three of these women from the perspective of life story, story line and self-presentation. The tape-recorded interviews are informal and the subject of the talk is chosen by the women themselves. Some of the material also comes from non-recorded conversations and participant observation.

Hagene's main argument is that love is a central aspect in the life of the women at *La Esperanza*. She argues that the women have strong agency in economic and religious matters, but are definitely emotionally and partly socially dependent on men. 'Absentee patriarchy' is a term used by her for a situation in which men to a large degree are physically absent but still control much of the lives of the women. The women are thus part of a social construct that makes them protagonists in the reproduction of gender asymmetry. Men pressure women into dependency through threats of leaving them and also in fact often doing so. This precarious situation is due to the men practicing what the women call *amor compartido* (shared love) – having lovers or sometimes also a second family.

Hagene relies heavily on her interview cases. She stresses that she did not initially go to the field with the intention of studying love and

emotions. It was the women themselves who brought up the theme of emotional dependency and love in conversations with her when she was doing archival research in their cooperative. Hagene follows the methodology of analyzing life stories by using the whole interview, thus being able to show what the interviewee finds most important in her story, but also how the interviewee presents her story – her narrative. She then breaks up the interview into smaller parts that she analyzes in detail.

Hagene's heavy reliance on the interviews is both the strong and the weak point of her book. The close reading and detailed analysis of the three life stories that she has chosen to discuss in the book give an intimate knowledge of the lives of these women. But, here the weakness of her argument becomes evident – the women seldom explicitly talk about love. Hagene herself is aware of this. Even though she argues that love is an important theme based on the fact that the women often talked about it and their relationships in informal conversations, the reader has no way of knowing whether this is so or not, since only the interviews are analyzed. It would have strengthened the argument considerably had Hagene presented more of the context of the participant observation and the conversations, from which she seems to have the strongest indication of the importance of love for the women of *La Esperanza*.

However, as I mentioned in the beginning, this is a relevant and interesting book, which gives a contribution to gender studies and, of course, to the studies of emotions. It is well worth reading!

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