

Book Review

***The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men* By Lionel Cantú, Jr.
Edited by Nancy A. Naples and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz**

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In *The Sexuality of Migration*, Lionel Cantú, Jr. proposes a “queer materialist theoretical approach” (2) for analyzing and understanding “how migration is constitutive of sexuality, and how sexuality is constitutive of migration” (9). Focusing on “Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)” (22), Cantú traces the migrations of men from different regions of Mexico to Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. While the ethnographic component of his study was primarily conducted in the Los Angeles area, Cantú also completed fieldwork in Guadalajara, the capital city of the Mexican state of Jalisco. The author conducted interviews with MSM who have migrated to the United States, have migrated and returned, hope to migrate, or choose to not migrate. Additionally, Cantú studied elements of queer tourism in Mexico and the efforts of community organizations in Los Angeles. Cantú’s “queer political economy of migration” (21) outlines the diverse motivations driving the migrations of queer men, how men are embedded within (or excluded from) family networks and transnational communities, the legal and political contexts within which MSM migrate or not, and the ways that sexualities constitute north-south tourism.

Published posthumously, the book is an innovative collaboration, with multiple voices supporting and in dialogue with Cantú’s theoretical frame. The editors-Cantú’s dissertation advisor, Nancy A. Naples, and colleague and “intellectual comrade” (xvi), Salvador Vidal-Ortiz-are to be commended for situating Cantú’s contributions within current debates in the “Editors’ Introduction” and “Editors’ Conclusion.” The editors trace

the trajectories of various academic discussions that Cantú influenced and of which he certainly would have been part had he not tragically passed away early in his career. In the “Afterword by Dissertation Liberation Army,” Cantú’s friends and colleagues, former graduate school peers who formed a writing group with him, honor the author, demonstrating how the scholarly impact of Cantú’s work goes far beyond his publications and can be mapped within the work of numerous researchers with whom he socially and intellectually connected.

The concept of “borderlands” as theorized by Gloria Anzaldúa (*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1987) runs throughout the book and centrally informs Cantú’s theoretical frame. Based on what Cantú calls a “queer borderlands approach” (36), his research cuts across and draws on multiple disciplines, is methodologically creative and diverse, and challenges-and in many cases, bridges-theoretical boundaries. Building on Edward Soja’s notion of “Thirdspace” (*Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, 1996), Cantú identifies “new queer Latino spaces” (143). Cantú’s borderlands approach also provides a way to consider identity itself and the multiple and shifting expressions of sexuality within communities of “MSM,” “gay men,” and/or “queer men” (through the use of multiple labels, Cantú intentionally complicates categorization). As both reflections of and constructs that emerge from socioeconomic and political power structures, “queer sexual borderlands . . . are both liberating and oppressive” (117). The contradictions that come out of the transnational logics of power are a primary focus of Cantú, and his analysis of such paradoxes represents a significant contribution to both queer theory and migration studies.

Focusing on the U.S. state, Cantú outlines how heteronormativity and its contradictory effects play out through policies, state practices, and constructions of citizenship and national membership. Linking historical events and contemporary politics, Cantú compellingly demonstrates “how the state, through immigration policy, has produced identities in order to regulate groups of people located within and across national borders” (41). Here, Dorothy Smith’s concept of “the relations of ruling” (*The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, 1987) elucidates state power. Throughout the book, Cantú revisits and extends Smith’s analysis to study “the institutional workings of power” (26), authority that, paradoxically, results in exclusion and, at times, inclusion. For example,

in categorizing individuals based on sexuality, the U.S. state both excludes people from membership in the nation—such as those who were labeled as “afflicted with psychopathic personality, or sexual deviation” (47)—and can also be, albeit in limited cases and through essentializing discourse, a path to legalization for some immigrants seeking asylum, those who demonstrate “well-founded fears of persecution” based on sexual orientation (53). Throughout the book, Cantú explicates the efforts of organizations working for queer rights in local/global communities, ranging from legal action (Chapter 3) to HIV/AIDS support and prevention (Chapter 7).

Cantú acknowledges what is not included in his work, as he calls on others to move forward such analysis. For example, stating that “women’s sexuality constitutes a very important dimension of migration” (22), he explains that the experiences of lesbians in transnational context have not been sufficiently theorized, suggesting a direction for future research. Similarly, Cantú posits that heterosexuality, although not the topic of his research, also shapes migration, proposing that scholars further study the role of diverse sexualities in motivating, directing, and/or obstructing migration flows. A case that supports this point is Mexican migration that began with the Bracero program, through which the U.S. government contracted with Mexican guestworkers (1942-1964); as men migrated to the United States for agricultural work and women and children stayed in Mexico, intersecting masculinities and heterosexualities came to define who migrated and who did not. Cantú cites Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo’s seminal work on gender and Mexican migration, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration* (1994), as research that explores the links between heterosexuality and transnational movement (169-170). Recent studies that further develop this line of inquiry include Jennifer S. Hirsch’s *A Courtship after Marriage: Sexuality and Love in Transnational Mexican Families* (2003) and Gloria González-López’s *Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and Their Sex Lives* (2005).

Cantú’s work also contributes to a growing literature about transnational desires, particularly through his focus on transnational relationships and queer tourism. Like Nicole Constable (*Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and “Mail Order” Marriages*, 2003), Denise Brennan (*What’s Love Got to Do with It? Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in*

the Dominican Republic, 2004), and Lieba Faier (*Intimate Encounters: Filipina Women and the Remaking of Rural Japan*, 2009), among others, Cantú demonstrates how multiple agents express diverse forms of “desire” in a global context, again linking intimate relationships with structural factors. By focusing on the experiences of MSM in Mexico and the United States, and as they move between the two nations, Cantú illustrates how sexuality is indeed constituted transnationally. In his analysis of north-south movement-queer tourism-Cantú identifies a “queer manifest destiny” (108) shaped by (post) colonial relations and desires: “the phallic dream knows no borders” (111). Highlighting another paradoxical dimension of a “queer political economy of migration” (21), he outlines how relationships that begin while U.S. men are tourists in Mexico may facilitate future transnational movement and structure kin in significant ways.

Throughout *The Sexuality of Migration*, Cantú underscores how sexuality has not been a central topic of study within migration studies, and the ways that queer studies have not adequately theorized transnational movement. Here, Cantú anticipated another theoretical move in the academy—a focus on “queer diasporas”—explored in works such as Martin F. Manalansan IV’s *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (2003) and Gayatri Gopinath’s *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2005). Cantú’s analysis has been fundamental in initiating this shift, although, tragically, he was “unable to carry his project forward” (179). While Cantú is not here to continue discussions in these multiple emergent fields of study, his work has played a key role in advancing research agendas to this place. Indeed, queer studies, feminist inquiry, and the study of borderlands and transnational migration are “all the richer for the work he did” (179). Owing much to Cantú’s research, “a dialogue has begun” (170).

Biographical Note: **Deborah A. Boehm** is an assistant professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno, U.S.A. Her specializations include (im)migration and transnationalism; gender and women's studies; family, kinship, and childhood and Mexico, the United States, and the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. She conducts ongoing ethnographic fieldwork with transnational Mexicans in a rural community in the Mexican state of San Luis Potosi and several locales in the U.S. West and Southwest. Current research explores the gendered character of migrants' interactions with the U.S. state, gender subjectivities in the context of migration, cross-border families with mixed U.S. immigration statuses, transnational childhood, and the effects of deportation and "return" migration. She is finalizing a book manuscript about intimate lives and the U.S. state's production of "illegality," and is co-editor (with Cati Coe, Rachel Reynolds, Julia Meredith Hess, and Heather Rae-Espinoza) of *Everyday Ruptures: Children, Youth, and Migration in Global Perspective* (Forthcoming, Vanderbilt University Press).