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*The Sexuality of Migration* examines the role that sexuality plays in processes of immigration and identity formation from the standpoint of Mexican male immigrants to the United States who have sex with men. Viewing the immigrant experience from the standpoint of the “gay” immigrant raises critical questions regarding sexual identity formation in a transcultural setting and the linkages among human sexuality, state institutions, and global economic processes. As Lionel Cantú argues in this book, the concept and identities of “gay” do not translate perfectly into Spanish and the corresponding worldviews of the Mexican immigrants that he interviewed. Therefore, although he uses the terms “gay,” “men who have sex with men,” “queer,” and “homosexual,” he does this with the awareness that the translation is imperfect. Cantú puts these terms in quotation marks or brackets to signify their complexity and to reflect this tension, a practice that also highlights his understanding that sexuality is shifting and, therefore, changes over time and across space.

Cantú utilized a multimethodological strategy that drew on ethnographic methods, participant observation, oral histories, and archival data to offer a new way to frame the construction of sexuality in a migratory context. The central argument of the book is that sexuality shapes and organizes processes of migration and modes of incorporation. In turn, the contextual and structural transitions that mark the migration experience impact the ways in which identities are formed and reinvented. As social constructs, the sexual identities of gay immigrants assume multiple and shifting meanings as influenced by structural variables, institutional policies, cultural influences, social relations, and the dynamics of migration. *The Sexuality of Migration* both contributes to studies of international migration and sexuality and proposes a new the-
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Cantú’s queer materialist theoretical approach sheds light on how migration and sexuality are mutually constitutive. This book contributes to a relatively new but growing literature that incorporates gender, race, and sexuality in analyses of migration. At the time when Lionel began the research in the early 1990s, few scholars had explored the relationship between sexuality and migration. The Sexuality of Migration offers an important contribution to the still scarce academic literature on the significance of sexuality as a key factor in motivations for, and experiences of, migration. In addition, Cantú’s work breaks the presumed rigidity of the border by exploring the experiences of men who have sex with men both in Guadalajara and in Southern California, as well as of men who travel transnationally between these and other locales.

Cantú’s long-term academic project involved explicating the discursive and material practice of pathologizing Mexican men’s sexualities across many different institutional sites, including immigration policy, the family and community, and academia. The Sexuality of Migration provides a rich ethnographic analysis that adds to the important yet more general approach of texts like Sexual Cultures and Migration in the Era of AIDS: Anthropological and Demographic Perspectives, edited by Gilbert Herdt (1997). Although The Sexuality of Migration does not foreground health and HIV/AIDS, it does explore the relationship of sexuality and migration to HIV status. Cantú argues that it has been through HIV/AIDS prevention efforts that “gay Latino” organizing has taken place. By incorporating activities with nonprofit, sociocultural, and HIV-prevention community-based organizations as part of his mapping of the larger Southern California landscape for immigrant “gay Latino” men, Cantú shows not only the impact these nonprofits have had in the development of a “gay Latino” men’s culture but also, more importantly, the culturally specific (and negative) readings of Latino homosexualities as risk factors for HIV infection.

Cantú saw his project as a transdisciplinary one and, in this regard, in chapter 1 he refers to Edward Soja’s (1996) notion of Thirsdspace, “a transdisciplinary project that examines the ‘simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence’” (1996, 3). The Sexuality of Migration addresses gaps in various fields of study by simultaneously problematizing a fixed notion of sexual identity, exploring the complex factors that influence
immigration and migration experiences, and challenging current analyses of “otherness” in liberal multicultural frameworks. While the field of immigration studies has a long history and has produced a large number of classic studies (see, for example, Piore 1979; Portes and Rumbaut 1990), few works have incorporated an intersectional approach and even fewer studies have included sexuality as a significant dimension of analysis.

The texts that do attend to sexuality often draw distinct lines between culture and political economy (for an example of this distinction with reference to Latina adolescent mothers, see Erickson 2001; for a different reading on African American culture see Seidman 2002). Cantú’s approach calls this distinction into question and offers detailed ethnographic evidence to demonstrate the blurring of culture and political economy in the lives of gay Mexican men. As he explains in chapter 7, “not only do cultural arguments in the literature on gay Latino men serve to create a discourse of difference, but also such explanations mask the structural dimensions that shape gay Latino men’s lives.” Furthermore, *The Sexuality of Migration* offers a refreshing alternative to publications that stress sexual and gender difference based on oppositional notions of culture (that is, between the United States, or European cultures, and “Latin American” cultures) (Lancaster 1992; Murray 1995).

Cantú’s queer materialist approach provided him with a methodological and analytic framework for exploring how “relations of ruling” (Smith 1987) are experienced and contested by Mexican immigrant men who have sex with men. Before he died, Cantú was in the process of deepening his analysis, gathering new data, and broadening his interdisciplinary framework with greater attention to cultural studies and queer theoretical innovations that had developed since he completed his dissertation in 1999. During the seven years that have passed since his untimely death, new scholarship has been published that affirms and, in some cases, builds on his intellectual contributions. Some significant political events and demographic shifts have also changed the environment that contours the lives of gay immigrants from Mexico. One of the purposes of this introduction is to foreground the theoretical influences that shaped Cantú’s approach as well as to link his work to recent scholarship and contemporary debates over immigration and sexuality in order to illustrate the contributions of Cantú’s work to this larger body of research. In this way, we first place his work within several interdisciplinary fields of study and the contemporary political context.
surrounding immigration of sexual minorities to the United States, and second, illustrate how his work has influenced the various fields of study referenced in the first part.

**Changing Faces of the Political**

The events of September 11, 2001, changed much of the discourse on race, ethnicity, immigration, and nationality, as well as religion, as did the U.S. and other allied forces’ invasion of Iraq. While Arabs, Middle Easterners, Muslims, and South Asians have been a primary target for violence (Ahmad 2002), and discrimination has evolved to include religious beliefs and other cultural attributes, migrants from many other parts of the global South continue to experience racism and xenophobia that have intensified since 2001. As Vidal-Ortiz (2004) argues, these discriminatory practices enforce a White supremacist nation-building project as well as negatively impact the possibilities for coalitional work among the various people-of-color groups.

Mexicans have been historically viewed as among the least desirable of immigrants to the United States (Cornelius 2002; Gutiérrez 1995). From the violent U.S. acquisition of the Mexican territory of Texas in 1845, which included the stationing of troops at the mouth of the Rio Grande, to the current patrols placed along the U.S.–Mexico border, Mexicans who attempt to cross the border have been met with violence and fear. Those who do make the crossing, including many who have done so legally, face racism and discrimination as they establish homes and communities in the United States (see, for example, Naples 1994, 1996). The debates on the need for tougher immigration laws and the U.S. surveillance of the Mexican—U.S. border (including the Minute Men) have escalated in this post–9/11 era. Indeed, recent years have shown how the conservative U.S. society’s focus on “the border” fuses the anti-immigrant sentiment along the U.S.–Mexico line with fear of presumed immigrant terrorists, successfully (and in a frightening way) solidifying notions of “Americanness.”

The 2000 U.S. Census reported that there were 35.6 million Latinos living in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). This represented 12.6 percent of the population, a slightly smaller number than reported for African Americans, who comprised 12.7 percent of the population. By 2003, the number of Hispanics in the U.S. increased to 13.7 percent of the U.S. population surpassing African Americans to become the larg-
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The Hispanic population grew to 45.4 million and formed 15.1 percent of the U.S. population in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau News 2008). The number of African Americans was estimated at 40.7 million. Contemporary discussions of Latinos numerically surpassing African Americans reveal the tensions within ethnoracial politics in the United States that serve as an important context for Cantú’s research. Debates over immigration control are fueled by the political implications of these demographic trends. The impact of 9/11 has further fueled negative sentiments against migrants from many other parts of the world. These two sentiments come together in recent anti-immigrant publications and political rhetoric that affects racial minoritarian and immigrant communities’ coalitional work in the United States and solidifies the national tendency to view foreign as dangerous.

For example, Samuel P. Huntington (2004), author of Who Are We? The Challenge to America’s National Identity, presents the idea of Mexicans as antagonistic to the American dream and as a danger to the Anglo-Saxon and Protestant soul of the country. In such a context, Cantú’s analysis of the American social imaginary of the Mexican immigrant in relation to gender and sexuality offers a powerful framework for understanding contemporary anti-immigrant sentiments such as Huntington’s (see, especially, chapter 2). His work also highlights the ways in which immigration policy regulates and stratifies citizenship through heteronormative and racist constructions of the acceptable citizens (see chapter 3).

Alongside the growth of anti-immigrant sentiment, we have seen a growing recognition of same-sex relationships through legalization of same-sex civil unions and marriage. Civil unions for same-sex couples are now legal in Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Vermont. Domestic partnerships are legal in California, Hawaii, Maine, and Oregon. As of this writing, same-sex couples can marry in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York State recognizes same-sex marriages performed in other states. In May 2008, the California Supreme Court, in a 4-3 ruling, overturned the state’s ban on same-sex marriage (Dolan 2008). However, on November 7, 2008, California voters approved a ballot initiative designed to amend the State Constitution and limit marriage to heterosexual couples. Same-sex marriage advocates plan to appeal the new law based on both procedural and constitutional grounds. Many LGBT activists in states across the country, as well as national LGBT activists, have placed the struggle for relationship rights at the top of their agenda. Much of the work of some of the activists
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who served as informants for Cantú’s research is now directed by the same-sex-marriage agenda, although not all same-sex organized communities are rallying behind this agenda.

On November 9, 2006, Mexico City’s assembly passed a bill that gives legal recognition to same-sex civil unions, surprising many in the United States who believe that Mexican society is more traditional in terms of gender and sexuality than the United States and other so-called first world countries (Castillo 2006). Against the strong opposition of the Catholic Church and other conservative groups, Mexico City mayor Alejandro Encinas signed the bill into law. However, due to the Defense of Marriage Act, even if Mexico City approved same-sex marriage, same-sex couples would not be recognized as married for the purposes of immigration to the United States even if one member of the couple was a U.S. citizen. Immigration Equality, one of the organizations with which Cantú worked closely, is spearheading a campaign for the passage of the Uniting American Families Act, which would make it possible for U.S. citizens and legal residents in same-sex relationships with someone from another country to sponsor their partners for immigration to the United States.

Yet marriage and the related issue of adoption rights—and what they imply—are framed by a very limited notion of citizenship. The desire for marriage requires a minimal sense of entitlement that many immigrant communities do not have. Thus the political call for same-sex marriage and adoption rights, like other LGBT issues in the past, has its own set of exclusions. Even with the achievement of relationship rights at the state level, binational same-sex couples cannot use this as a basis for immigration by the non–U.S. citizen partner. The movement for same-sex marriage has also garnered intense backlash. States that did not already have Defense of Marriage laws that formally limit marriage to opposite-sex partners are passing similar laws. Conservative religious institutions are leading the charge. For example, in Massachusetts, the Catholic Church is seeking to prevent same-sex couples from adopting through Catholic adoption agencies (Wen and Phillips 2006).

During the last decade, we have also seen an increasing attack against “inside the closet” sexualities, including those of men who have sex with men but do not identify as gay or bisexual (for a review of these attacks embodied in African American men, see Boykin 2005). Scholars have begun to theorize beyond an inside- or outside-the-closet conversation (see, for instance, Decena 2004). The main criticism of this non–identity-linked behavior has to do with public health concerns over HIV infection
within communities of color. Government agencies and the media have framed non–self-identified gay men who engage in same-sex sex as having irresponsible, unsafe sex. These men have become the most recent sacrificial lamb in the government’s inability to reduce the prevalence of HIV in the United States. Not surprisingly, these men are most often portrayed as African American or Latinos (Mukherjea and Vidal-Ortiz 2006).

Under President George W. Bush’s administration, HIV-specific public health funding has been channeled through faith-based communities of color, thereby diminishing the amount of funds available for other community-based organizations serving more diverse populations. As a consequence, queer-of-color organizations conducting HIV prevention work, to which Cantú refers, have disappeared in the last decade, making the challenge to address HIV prevention among gay Latino men (and other gay men of color) much more difficult. For example, the National Latino/a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Organization (or LLEGÓ) was established in the late 1980s and became an important source of support for community-based organizations conducting identity-based Latino LGBT organizing, sociocultural community building, and HIV prevention. Originally funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the organization closed its doors after financial struggles in the fall of 2004. In various parts of the book (see especially chapter 7), Cantú addresses the important impact of organizations such as LLEGÓ and local organizations on the lives of the gay Latino men he interviewed.

Theoretical Context and Its Discontents

Cantú’s work speaks to and across three different theoretical perspectives. First, he was strongly influenced by feminist standpoint epistemology, especially as articulated by Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990a, 1990b). He drew on standpoint theory in order to explore the social location and positionality of the Mexican migrant men he interviewed. Second, Cantú was also in dialogue with Queer Theory but was critical of the lack of attention queer theorists paid to the political economy of queer lives. He used capital letters to refer to Queer Theory in order to mark it as an identifiable body of academic literature. And third, Cantú was also critical of political economic analyses of migration that failed to acknowledge the way sexuality shaped the lives of immigrants both before and after they leave their countries of origin to come to the United States.
By integrating key insights from feminist and queer theoretical perspectives with political economic analyses, Cantú deepens our understanding of how sexuality shapes immigration and, in turn, how immigration shapes sexuality. His queer materialist approach stimulates, informs, and emerges alongside groundbreaking research on the history and politics of U.S. border control and sexuality, such as Eithne Luibheid’s *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (2002), and on the political economy of heterosexuality within the context of Mexican immigration, such as Gloria González-López’s *Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and Their Sex Lives* (2005). *Queer Migrations*, one of the most significant collections in this new field, coedited by Cantú and Luibheid (2005), brings together important new analyses of sexuality, immigration, and U.S. policy and includes many insightful essays such as “Sexual Aliens and the Racialized State: A Queer Reading of the 1852 U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act,” by Siobhan B. Somerville, and “Mariel and Cuban American Gay Male Experience and Representation,” by Susana Peña.

In the next sections, we provide an overview of the three different theoretical approaches that influenced Cantú’s work (feminist standpoint epistemology, Queer Theory, and political economy of immigration and sexuality) and discuss how he incorporated insights from these approaches to develop a queer political economy of immigration. He envisioned this project as part of a broader effort to produce a political economic analysis of sexuality and, as evident from the research discussed above, his work contributed much to this new and expanding approach. We then illustrate the contributions of Cantú’s work to these and other fields of study. We offer further discussion of his contributions as well as assess contemporary developments in the field of sexuality and immigration studies.

**Queer Epistemologies of Border Crossing**

Cantú argued for sociological analyses of sexuality that did not limit themselves to essentialist assumptions, or individualized aspects of the self. His interdisciplinary approach included an assessment and critique of sexuality studies that fail to incorporate or attend to issues of race, ethnicity, and national origin in relationship to sexuality. An avid reader and teacher of feminist studies, Cantú had already studied the impact of universalizing practices in the lives of racial/ethnic minorities within the second wave feminist movement and could see this taking place in the development of gay and lesbian studies and in scholarship influenced by Queer Theory.
Cantú drew on feminist, and specifically Chicana feminist, readings to formulate his basic critique. Utilizing Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* (1987), among the work of other Latina and Black feminist writers like Cherrie Moraga (1981) and Patricia Hill Collins (1991), Cantú emphasized the multiplicity of sexualities as they intersected with class, race, national origin, and other dimensions of social and political life. Cantú was aiming high. He wanted to complicate analyses of sexuality and gender, not merely with a gesture toward intersectionality—the simultaneous study of gender, sexuality, race, and class—but by intentionally illustrating how migration is constitutive of sexuality, and how sexuality is constitutive of migration, and in this way, formulating a distinctive kind of analysis. He refers to his approach as a queer materialist paradigm and his goal, that of producing a queer political economy of immigration.

Cantú utilized feminist standpoint epistemology to argue for the power of a “queer” perspective on sexuality and immigration. “By examining immigration from a queer perspective,” Cantú argues in chapter 1, “we can better understand how sexuality impacts migratory processes as a whole and not only those of ‘queer’ immigrants.” Feminist standpoint theorists are critical of positivist scientific methods that reduce lived experiences to a series of disconnected variables such as gender, race, or class. They argue for the importance of starting analysis from the lived experiences and activities of those who have been left out of the knowledge production process rather than starting inquiry with the abstract categories and a priori assumptions of traditional academic disciplines or dominant social institutions. The notion of standpoint is conceptualized differently by different standpoint theorists. Naples (2003) has identified three different approaches to the construction of standpoint: (1) as embodied in women’s or other actors’ social location and social experience, (2) as constructed in community, and (3) as a site through which to begin inquiry, as in Dorothy Smith’s approach. Cantú drew on all three notions of standpoint in his work, and he remained sensitive to the importance of viewing standpoint as a place to begin inquiry into the experiences and organization of the immigrant men’s everyday lives.

Theorists who contribute to the embodied strand of standpoint theorizing argue that because of relations of domination and subordination, women, especially low-income women of color or others located in marginalized social positions, develop a perspective on social life that differs markedly from that of men and middle- and upper-income people. Black feminist and Chicana standpoint theorists demonstrate that the political
consciousness of women of color develops from their lived experiences. For example, in the preface to *This Bridge Called My Back*, Moraga passionately ties the political consciousness of women of color to the material experiences of their lives. This “politics of the flesh” (Moraga 1981, xviii) does not privilege one dimension and artificially set it apart from the context in which it is lived, experienced, felt, and resisted. Literary scholar Paula Moya (1997) argues that Moraga’s “theory in the flesh” provides a powerful “non-essentialist way to ground identities” for the purposes of resistance to domination (150).

Rather than view standpoints as individual possessions of disconnected actors, most standpoint theorists attempt to locate standpoint in specific community and political contexts with particular attention to the dynamics of race, class, and gender. This second strand of feminist standpoint epistemology understands standpoint as relational accomplishment. Using this approach, the identity of “woman” or other embodied identities are viewed as constructed in community and therefore cannot be interpreted outside the shifting community context. For her analysis of Black feminist thought, Collins (1991) draws on the construction of community as a collective process through which individuals come to represent themselves in relation to others whom they perceive as sharing similar experiences and viewpoints. She argues that a standpoint is constructed through “historically shared, *group*-based experiences” (Collins 1991, 375, emphasis in original). Cantú recognizes the significance of group-based experiences as he situates his exploration of the lives of Mexican immigrant men who have sex with men in the political, economic, and social context that shapes their lives. The immigration experiences profoundly shape these men’s understanding and expression of their sexuality and they, in turn, contribute to an analysis of these experiences as they interact with each other in various community contexts (see, especially, chapters 6 and 7).

The third strand of feminist standpoint epistemology provides a framework for capturing the interactive and fluid conceptualization of community and resists attaching standpoint to particular bodies, individual knowers, or specific communities or groups. Standpoint is understood as a site from which to begin inquiry. Smith (1990a) explains that her everyday-world approach does not privilege a subject of research whose expressions are disconnected from her social location and daily activities. Rather, Smith starts inquiry with an active knower who is connected with other people in particular and identifiable ways. This mode of inquiry calls for explicit attention to the social relations embedded
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in specific actors’ everyday activities. Cantú begins his analysis in the lived experiences of Mexican immigrant men who have sex with men to demonstrate the complex ways in which sexuality shapes all processes of migration and all immigrants’ lives. By viewing standpoint as a mode of inquiry, Cantú was able to explore how power dynamics are organized and experienced in a community context as well as to uncover the complex ways in which sexuality influences the migration experience for the men in his study.

Cantú resisted the reductive reading of standpoint that is often criticized by postmodern critics of standpoint epistemology. Some postmodern theorists argue that the notion of standpoint presumes that it is possible to identify and locate what are in fact socially constructed and mobile social positions (King 1994). While standpoint theorists emphasize that the vantage point of the oppressed remains partial and incomplete, a central problematic of feminist standpoint analyses is to determine how partial particular perspectives are (for example, see Haraway 1988). Cantú addressed this problematic by foregrounding standpoint as a site of inquiry rather than exclusively as an embodied identity and by demonstrating how identity “is constructed and draws meaning from marginality” (chapter 1). Taking inspiration from Anzaldúa’s (1987) analysis of mestiza consciousness and Moraga’s “theory of the flesh,” Cantú’s queer materialist framework maintains sensitivity to the fluidity of identity and the community context for the development of standpoints, as well as the structural relations of power that contour everyday life.

Queer Materialism and Postmodern Theory

Cantú developed his queer materialist approach in dialogue with queer theoretical analyses of normalization processes as they are accomplished in everyday life through social practices, discourse, and the production of knowledge (see Foucault 1990 [1978]). The significance of Queer Theory for Cantú’s work is especially evident in the way in which he resists imposing a fixed sense of identity onto the Mexican immigrant men he interviewed. He shifts between referring to these men as “men who have sex with men,” as “gay men,” and as “queer men.” This slippage should not be seen as an inconsistency in the text. Rather, it should be viewed as an expression of the limitation of existing identity categories in capturing the self-identity of the men in the study—not because they were Mexican, or could not identify as gay, but because Cantú’s study included a
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truly heterogeneous group of men. He was critical of the limited identity categories available in the sociological literature on sexualities, and he tried to capture the shifting sexual identifications of the men in his study by changing the terms he used throughout the text and by calling attention to the limitations of the terms he used. When he did use the identity construction “gay,” he typically bracketed the word to reflect his discomfort with the limitations of this label as it applied to the men in his study. We have styled his use of the terms “gay” and “queer” in italics at first, in order to emphasize their contested use.

Many other scholars in the interdisciplinary fields of gay and lesbian studies and Queer Theory have also questioned the intelligibility of a gay or lesbian subject. Many other scholars in the interdisciplinary fields of gay and lesbian studies and Queer Theory have also questioned the intelligibility of a gay or lesbian subject. Given the interest in political representation that served as the cornerstone of gay and lesbian studies within the academy, the limits and possibilities of identity categories are much debated among gay and lesbian scholars. In contrast, Queer Theory does not operate from politics that depend on representational practices. A primary source of Queer Theory’s emergence, in contrast to gay and lesbian studies, was the need to destabilize identities that serve as the basis of identity politics (see Butler 1990). As a postmodern epistemology, Queer Theory contends that identities are fluid, and not reduced to biological causality (Sedgwick 1990). Moreover, queer theorists point out that binaries such as homosexual/heterosexual are part of regulatory regimes and that identities flowing from these systems are oppressive (see, for example, Butler 1991). Queer Theory posits that these identities need not be eliminated altogether but should be suspended and challenged (Turner 2000). As a case in point, Butler’s (1991) work, as framed in “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” opens up and troubles the use of identity categories that may themselves function as part of homophobic “regulatory regimes” (13–14). Most recently, scholars such as David Valentine (2003) and Vidal-Ortiz (2005) have argued for the bracketing of these identity markers to avoid an automatic imposition of normative definitions of sexuality identities.

As mentioned above, Cantú had already seen the troubled relationship between these categories of identity, and his movement among “gay,” “queer,” “men who have sex with men,” and even the “gay and lesbian” and “LGBT” nomenclatures should be read as an attempt to destabilize the fixed notion of a “gay” identity or a clear-cut relationship between identities and communities. In doing so, Cantú was bridging sociological analyses with those of queer theoretical paradigms of identity, and was
challenging the limits of sociological analysis in this regard (for a recent project furthering sociology through Queer Theory, see Valocchi 2005).

In drawing on Queer Theory’s skepticism regarding fixed identity categories, Cantú was well aware of the many critiques of queer postmodernism, including the concern that the destabilization of identities signals the impossibility of mobilizing on the basis of gender or sexual orientation (see, for example, Hartsock 1996). Additional skepticism towards Queer Theory includes concerns that queer postmodernism presents some universalizing arguments, focuses almost exclusively on discourse to the neglect of structural and material conditions (Smith 1998), and emphasizes public sex over a multiplicity of other constructions of sexuality. This last critique is interpreted by some scholars as a masculinized and Anglocentric mode of analysis that limits a much broader theoretical and intersectional project (Harris 1996). As Turner (2000, 168) points out in his discussion of Butler’s article “Against Proper Objects,” if “queer” is left as an unmarked or undefined term, “‘queer’ could become the gender- and race-blind utopia of white males.”

Queer Theory, Race, and Immigration

Early conceptualizations of Queer Theory were marked by an erasure of Black and other minority sexualities. While Cantú acknowledged these tendencies within Queer Theory, he appreciated the sensitivity of Queer Theory to the multiplicity of identities that shape people’s experiences, as discussed above, and to discursive and nondiscursive constructions of heteronormativity (see Warner 1993). Cantú found useful for his project the concept of heteronormativity and analyses of discursive systems that maintain a general sense of heterosexuality as a normative regime. He linked heteronormativity to racialization and discussed the intersection of related hegemonic systems of oppression. Cantú was especially concerned with the ways in which family and home served as sites “where normalizing rules of gender and sexual conduct and performance are taught on a daily basis” (chapter 1).

Recent developments such as the critique of universalizing tendencies in feminist and queer studies, as well as queer diaspora analyses, owe much to efforts to theorize the intersection and “interarticulation” (Butler 1993) of heteronormativity and racialization. In the introduction to their edited collection, Queer Diasporas, Patton and Sánchez-Eppler (2000) point out,
The debate over identity’s essence or lack of essence has been well-rehearsed both in gender and in lesbian and gay studies. Similarly, the significance of translocation is taken as a presupposition among scholars of ethnic diaspora and within postcolonial studies. . . . Now, identity is viewed as strategic, rather than essential, contingent on, reproduced, decaying, co-opted, in relation to material and discursive factors that, especially in the context of sexualities, are always a complex lamination of local onto global onto local. (2)

These intersectional projects are informed by the theoretical work of women-of-color feminism, especially Black and Latina feminist critiques (see Guzmán 2006). A queer-of-color analytic approach in particular engages a similar set of questions as to the placement of queers of color in historical (Ferguson 2004) and popular discourse (Reddy 1998) by looking at their position in society as people of color. Cantú was similarly committed to discussions about the position of Mexican immigrant men in relation to mainstream gay male communities, HIV/AIDS community mobilization, the exploitative economy of employing immigrants in the United States, and claims of danger in their country of origin. In doing so, his work problematized the relationship between the state and its assumptions about the heteronormativity of its immigrant workers/subjects.

Cantú also drew on Queer Theory to critique the ways in which much of the literature on immigrants and on processes of immigration rendered sexuality invisible. Heterosexuality is the unmarked but taken-for-granted premise of this work (see, for example, Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Suárez-Orozco 1999). Heteronormativity also shapes much of the scholarship on sex, sexuality, gender, and gender roles in Latin America up to and including much of the 1980s. Even when researchers turn to same-sex sexual desire, complex sexual desires and behaviors are often understood within the limited gendered lens of pasivo/activo (see Almaguer 1993).

In the late 1980s, anthropologists and social scientists began to take a closer look at same-sex practices in Latin America (Lancaster 1992; Murray 1995). The research that resulted emphasized that same-sex relations in Latin American cultures were dominated by the absence of a gay identity (for a recent version of this model, see the discussion on secrecy/disclosure by Strongman 2002). Moreover, this scholarship positioned Latin American culture as imposing oppressive “machista” attitudes on
the lives of some men who had sex with men and violated hegemonic gender norms by playing a so-called passive sexual role. The main point of departure regarding this negotiation of sexuality and gender is the presumption that Latin American society and culture are more oppressive and therefore create greater stress for queer individuals. Sex disruptions understood through gender, or gender presentation (public presentation as a “feminine” person) and sexual desire (particularly receptive anal penetration) were lined up to emphasize that it was the “sissy” or the “third-sexed” individual who suffered the most. While Cantú critiqued this research, he also remained in dialogue with it. As a consequence, he reveals some of the contradictions of this work in light of his own research findings. For example, Cantú points out that some of his interviewees discussed the tensions they felt between the way they were able to express their sexuality in Mexico and the way it was experienced and expressed after they came to the United States. Cantú referred to the process of recreation and representation of sexual identity as a “journey to the self” (see chapter 6). He explains that “I do not mean to imply that there is some essential or ‘true’ sexual nature that awaits ‘discovery’; rather, I utilize the term as a means to convey informants’ expressed understandings of their sexual journeys.” He emphasized that while this process has specific implications for the Mexican immigrants he interviewed, the notion of the “journey to the self” could be used to capture others’ narratives and experiences of sexuality, regardless of migration status.

Building on Cantú’s work, Katie Acosta (2005), in a study of gay and lesbian Latin American immigrants living in the United States, discusses the way in which U.S. immigration policy participates in reinscribing heteronormativity by failing to recognize same-sex families (also see Luibheid 1998, Somerville 2005, Acosta 2008). In order to gain some form of legal residency in the United States, some of her respondents chose to enter heterosexual marriages. Acosta’s analysis further complicates the construction of Latin America as more oppressive for sexual minorities than the United States.

Another important contribution of Cantú’s work is found in his critique of a pattern of research on Latin American sexualities that blurs the distinction between gender and sexuality (see also Gutman 1996). In contrast, he demonstrated that sexual identity and sexual behavior do not have to be congruent. Cantú argues that the blurring of sex and gender in explaining Latin America sexualities left North American sexual
configurations outside of any analysis, and, in fact, framed them as normative in relationship to “third-world” sexualities. In other words, Cantú explains, this so-called sexual-object-choice/sexual-aim model prevailed in large part due to the erasure of racial/ethnic identities. Cantú concludes that the relationship between Western constructs of sex/gender/power and those from Mexico, are “more similar than different” than is typically understood in comparative studies of sexuality (see chapter 4).

Recent scholarship confirms Cantú’s discussion of the limits of analyses that present totalizing constructions of Latin American masculinity, femininity, and sexuality. For example, Manolo Guzmán (2006, 95) contests the “homophobic” construction of Latino families in popular culture and gay activism. In her pathbreaking study, Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and Their Sex Lives, Gloria González-López (2005, 4) demonstrates that, in contrast to “a generalized belief that Mexican Catholic women value virginity,” the majority of married women she interviewed “were not virgins when they married.” As Cantú also found in the lives of the men he interviewed, the women in González-López’s study experience a “fluidity” in their gendered experiences “that allow[s] [them] to have sexual agency and pleasure but also to be exposed to forms of control and danger” (4–5). The men in her study also “embraced regional expressions of multiple masculinities which were not necessarily hegemonic” (7).

The development of multiple masculine identities is shaped by diverse cultural and material contexts that undergird the experience and expression of sexuality. Cantú’s critique of a reductive notion of culture and analyses based on it captures the dangers in homonormative notions of “the closet” and the need for fixed gay identities. His work also anticipates a growing impatience with postmodern critiques of identity that fail to offer a materialist understanding of sexuality (Hennessy 2000). In a chapter entitled “Latino Cultures, Imperial Sexualities,” Jose Quiroga (2000) observes,

These links between sexuality and culture—as well as links between sexuality and empire—have been questioned, problematized, and nuanced in queer studies, and they have been important in the political and activist discourses around Latino sexual identity in the United States. But many of these discourses have to overcome not only generalized cultural homophobia, but most importantly, the homophobia ingrained in the hierarchical structures of minority politics. (201)
In Cantú’s analysis, these hierarchical structures are contoured by the political economy of sexuality. By creating a theoretical and empirical project that investigated the mutual constitution of sexuality and immigration, he broadened the scope of investigations in both of these fields of inquiry.

**Political Economy of Immigration**

Cantú’s queer materialist perspective draws on, and is in dialogue with, political economic analyses, including the now classic article by John D’Emilio (1993 [1983]). In “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” D’Emilio argues that the development of a gay identity arose alongside the urbanization that accompanied the rise of capitalism (also see Rubin 1992 [1984]). Cantú identifies a similar pattern of collective recognition of same-sex desire among the men in his study as they migrate from rural areas in Mexico to large urban areas in Mexico and asks, “If the literature on the social construction of a Western gay identity is correct in linking sexual identities to capitalist development, then why should our understanding of sexual identities in the developing world give primacy to culture and divorce it from political economy?” His answer is that among U.S. scholars, “culture becomes the mechanism by which difference is reified,” reproducing the imagined distance of “the others” in academic discourse itself (chapter 4). In this way, Cantú’s queer materialist analysis highlights the ways in which different traditions of academic research perpetuate ethnocentric and cultural-determinist views of sexual difference.

Immigration scholars such as Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut (1996) emphasize the importance of viewing “immigration as a process, not an event, and . . . the diversity of today’s immigrants” (xxi; also see Yans-McLaughlin 1990). Despite their attention to the diversity of immigrants, until recently little attention has been paid to the role of sexuality in shaping immigrants’ experiences. Portes and Rumbaut attend to the economic motivation for immigration and the role of family and ethnic enclaves in creating the support and economic incorporation of immigrants into different regions of the United States. Among the many aspects of Cantú’s queer political economic analysis of immigration is his examination of the relationship between the sexual identity of the Mexican men he interviewed and their economic dependence on, or economic support of, their families. In fact, Cantú’s findings illustrate
that Mexican men who migrate to the United States have been able to sustain their relationships with their families, as is the case for many immigrants from Mexico as well as many other parts of the world. In other words, a homosexual sexual identity does not necessarily create a rupture in this pattern of economic interdependence, as is suggested in some studies of homosexuality; however, many of the men interviewed for the study had not come “out”—in the confessional way that gay politics often expects—to their families about their sexuality.

Cantú also queers what counts as a family as he examines the living arrangements of the men in his study. In fact, most of the men he interviewed lived with other “gay” Latino immigrants. As he explains in chapter 6, these households served to expand the social networks of the immigrant men who lived there and functioned much in the same way more traditional heterosexual households did; namely, the men shared household tasks and economic responsibilities and gained emotional support from one another. He concludes, “Perhaps more important than the longevity of these household arrangements are their very existence and the spaces they provide Mexican immigrant men to develop as gay men.”

Ethnic enclaves provide new immigrants with spaces for economic opportunities and entrepreneurship. Cantú acknowledges the importance of the notion of ethnic enclaves for understanding the experiences of immigrant men who have sex with men. He finds that “gay Latino immigrants’ daily lives are in most ways tied more closely to the larger Latino community than to the larger gay one” (chapter 6). Drawing on a postmodern understanding of space, Cantú explores how “spaciality is more than physical location but also the site where social relations are formed and power is exercised; in essence, where social constraints and resistance is lived” (chapter 6). By linking a postmodern view of space with a political economic analysis, Cantú challenges “queer spatial literature” that “focuses on desire, often at the expense of other dimensions, especially race” (chapter 6).

By bringing a political economic analytic framework to the study of sexualities, Cantú shows how migration itself plays a role in the construction of Latin American sexualities. González-López (2005) highlights this process in her study. She explains that “[h]eteronormative models of sexuality are fluid and vulnerable to forces such as migration and modes of social and economic incorporation” (251). She demonstrates that “regional patriarchies . . . explain how women and men are exposed to diverse, fluid, and malleable but regionally uniform and
locally defined expressions of hegemony and their corresponding sexual moralities” (6). With this more complex understanding of the construction and experience of diverse gendered sexualities, it is possible to examine how changes in sexual identities and practices shift throughout the migration process.

Cantú reveals this complexity by exploring the sexual and gendered identifications of his informants in Southern California as well as in Guadalajara. However, he did not stop there. He furthered this exploration in his analysis of sexual tourism (chapter 5) and political asylum (chapter 3). As a consequence of his multisited approach, his analysis demystifies and dislocates the idea of a border. Building on Anzaldúa’s (1987) “border theory” and the work of social geographers who emphasize the importance of space and place (see, for example, Rose 1993; Massey 1994; and Soja 1996), Cantú highlights the significance of shared space, or spaciality, as a central aspect of his queer materialist approach. He explores what he calls “landing pads” developed by the gay immigrants, which include the more traditional sites such as households and community groups as well as bars and advocacy organizations.

Cantú’s political economic approach demonstrates the importance of contextualizing analyses of migration patterns, the law, and policy making with attention to national origin, sexuality, gender identity, race, and ethnicity. Dennis Altman (2001) explains that “a political-economy perspective means we have to recognize class, gender, race but also the role of the state; that is, we need to think in terms of structures rather than specific issues or identities” (34). In Cantú’s intersectional approach, structures and identities are mutually constitutive. The state constructs identities as well as structures how identities can be performed, shaping what can be understood as a deserving immigrant, an “authentic” asylum case, or a recognizable “gay” identity. Cantú anticipates Altman’s call for “a political economy of sexuality, one which recognizes the interrelationship of political, economic, and cultural structures, and avoids the tendency to see sexuality as private and the political and economic as public” (157). Furthermore, Cantú’s analysis demonstrates that “changes in our understandings of and attitudes to sexuality are both affected by and reflect the larger changes of globalization” (Altman 2001, 1).
Editors’ Introduction

The Sexuality of Migration explicates the power of a queer materialist analysis of immigration to illuminate the intersection of immigration and sexuality in the lives of Mexican men who have sex with men. As emphasized throughout this introduction and as further discussed in the text that follows, literature on the political economy of immigration typically ignores issues of sexual identity, and scholars writing in gay and lesbian studies too often privilege the cultural and local features of identity formation and resistance over the social structural context that informs individual constructions of identity. However, as Cantú persuasively demonstrates, sexual identity is shaped by the immigration experience as well as constitutive of it. Once the standpoint on these two areas of study is shifted to the experiences of gay and lesbian immigrants, scholars are forced to reconceptualize the relationship between economic and political process and national and sexual identities.

Of course, Cantú did not produce his analysis in isolation. He drew on feminist and queer theoretical writing alongside political economic analyses of immigration and theories of racialization. Among his many contributions is the demonstration that Queer Theory is advanced through a strong empirical research project. Furthermore, Cantú’s analysis provides a rich, theoretically driven empirical resource that speaks to more recent work on “queer globalizations” and “Latino homosexualities” (Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé 2002; Guzmán 2006), which we will elaborate more fully in our concluding chapter. By developing a materialist analysis of identity, his work also highlights the ways in which the men he interviewed engage in “border crossings” of many different varieties with diverse consequences for themselves. The many important insights revealed in this analysis provide a rich resource for activists and academics concerned with immigrant rights and sexual citizenship.

Conclusion

The Sexuality of Migration explicates the power of a queer materialist analysis of immigration to illuminate the intersection of immigration and sexuality in the lives of Mexican men who have sex with men. As emphasized throughout this introduction and as further discussed in the text that follows, literature on the political economy of immigration typically ignores issues of sexual identity, and scholars writing in gay and lesbian studies too often privilege the cultural and local features of identity formation and resistance over the social structural context that informs individual constructions of identity. However, as Cantú persuasively demonstrates, sexual identity is shaped by the immigration experience as well as constitutive of it. Once the standpoint on these two areas of study is shifted to the experiences of gay and lesbian immigrants, scholars are forced to reconceptualize the relationship between economic and political process and national and sexual identities.

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