Staying Tuned: LGBTQIA Politics in the Trump Era

Introduction

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As noted in the editors’ introduction to this issue of Politics & Gender, we have coordinated this section of our reviews of recent scholarship with the themes of its five research articles. We hope this will lend the issue a measure of cohesion and render it more intellectually and politically engaging. Equally importantly, we hope that the six books reviewed here, if only in a preliminary fashion, will demonstrate the rich diversity of scholarly work that is now being generated on LGBTQIA issues.

In selecting books to review, like the editors of this Special Issue, we sought to identify work that runs counter to the efforts of Trump and his ilk to marginalize LGBTQIA communities and, if possible, to render their issues of concern invisible. We have cast our net broadly, however, so we have not confined ourselves to books that respond directly to the divisive and destructive policies, legislative initiatives, and rhetoric of the current administration. Also, and as do the editors, we have employed the acronym “LGBTQIA” in this introduction, but we have not required our reviewers to do the same. We, too, recognize that the “question of naming is a hotly debated political question” (XX), and we have elected to defer to our reviewers’ choices on this issue. Consistent with the editors’ salutary emphasis on “interdisciplinary and intersectional literatures” (XX), in choosing our books we have not limited ourselves to...
authors who identify themselves as political scientists. Together, and quoting this issue’s introduction once more, we hope that in these reviews our readers will “find a call to intensify the multiple ways we do LGBTQIA politics in the academy and the street” (XX).

Of the many worthy candidates for review, the first of the six books discussed here is Elizabeth Curran’s *Marching Dykes, Liberated Sluts, and Concerned Mothers* (2017). Curran echoes the call Kimala Price advances in her article for “political intersectionality” via her focus on multiple and sometimes overlapping forms of resistance in the twenty-first century. Discussing the Women in Black vigils, SlutWalks, the Million Mom March, and other recent protest campaigns, Curran argues that all share a common feature: all effectively consider public space as a vital political resource, and all seek not merely to claim but also to transform this resource in the service of liberatory ends. Relying on her own observations, interviews, and archival as well as published sources, Curran draws from feminist, queer, and critical race theory in fashioning an ethnography that illuminates much about the ever problematic relationship between gender and geography. Doing so, she shows how these protests challenge the conventional and de-politicizing boundaries that now separate this sphere from that, and, as such, gesture toward possible futures we can now only imagine.

Our second book is Japonica Brown-Saracino’s *How Places Make Us: Novel LBQ Identities in Four Cities* (2018). Complementing the insistence advanced in Zein Murib’s article on the centrality of the local to the mobilization of resistance, Brown-Saracino explores how LBQ identities and communities are shaped by the particularities of everyday life in Ithaca, New York; San Luis Obispo, California; Greenfield, Massachusetts; and Portland, Maine. By showing how the social ecology of each of these cities vitally informs the enactment of queer contestations of dominant gender norms, Brown-Saracino challenges anyone who would claim that the homogenizing encroachments of global capitalism have rendered locality irrelevant to identity. Were that true, we could not understand why persons so often find that their conception of what it is to be lesbian, bisexual, or queer so often undergoes a fraught transformation as they move from one city to the next. In making this argument, Brown-Saracino adds a new twist to the representation of gender identity as a performance, for the character of the roles we play is in large measure place-specific.

For our third book, we commissioned a review of Amy Adamczyk’s *Cross-National Public Opinion about Homosexuality: Examining Attitudes across*
We regard Adamczyk’s book as a useful companion to Julie Moreau’s article in this issue, which concerns the increasingly transnational character of what she calls “LGBT advocacy and politics” (XX). In her work, Adamczyk asks a vital question: what accounts for the fact that some nations have now embraced gay rights as human rights whereas others remain wedded to a view of homosexuality as a fundamental violation of permissible gender norms? Relying on survey data from almost 90 nations, content analyses of newspaper articles, and extensive interviews, Adamczyk examines several variables that bear on this question, and, in particular, the strength of democratic institutions, levels of economic development, and national religious cultures. Complementing her statistical evidence, Adamczyk also advances a number of intriguing comparative case studies, including the United States, Uganda, and South Africa; Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey; and Spain, Italy, and Brazil. In concluding, Adamczyk argues that 80% of the nations she examines are becoming more liberal in their attitudes toward homosexuality. But she also notes a slow but by no means insignificant increase from 1996 to 2013 in the number of nations that have adopted constitutional amendments or legal bans on homosexuality. Given this mixed record, we are well advised to heed what Adamczyk can teach us about the causal factors that engender progressive as opposed to repressive policies as well as the public opinion that is marshaled in support of each.

For our fourth book, we selected Héctor Carrillo’s *Pathways of Desire: The Sexual Migration of Mexican Gay Men* (2017). Carrillo’s contribution is especially noteworthy when counterposed to the rhetoric of a US president whose mantra about building walls is as reprehensible as it is now banal. The aim of *Pathways of Desire* is to explore the lives of Mexican gay men who have left their home country to pursue greater sexual autonomy and sexual freedom in the United States. By exploring the lives of his subjects before as well after their migration, like Brown-Saracino, Carrillo indicates how the lived experience of sexuality is irreducibly shaped by place. Perhaps even more important, Carrillo shows how what we might call “sexual globalization” is uneven but also multidirectional in its construction of gay identities, communities, and what the author intriguingly calls the “discourse of sexual passion” (216). Harboring significant implications for studies of public health, migration, sexuality, and so forth, Carrillo tells the stories of men who hoped to migrate to a “more sexually liberal and enlightened country” (68), only to find this aspiration partly realized at best.
Our penultimate review addresses Stephen Dillon’s Fugitive Life: The Queer Politics of the Prison State (2018). Dillon’s story about feminist, queer, and antiracist activists who were imprisoned and/or became fugitives in the 1970s is one we cannot afford to forget, especially at a moment when it is not impossible to imagine that history’s recurrence. To tell that tale, Dillon draws on films, memoirs, prison writings, poetry, and other forms of public address issued by Angela Davis, the George Jackson Brigade, Assata Shakur, the Weather Underground, and others. Dillon argues that these activists were among the first to offer, in sometimes more and sometimes less nuanced form, theoretical accounts of the links between free market fundamentalism, sexism, incarceration, the ongoing legacy of slavery, and the rhetoric of “law and order” that is now resurgent among the partisans of Trump. Those accounts in turn enabled these political actors to render less invisible the ways in which an emerging neoliberal regime depends on and, arguably, requires racialized mass incarceration. Finally, from these multiple “texts,” Dillon teases out a vision of “fugitive freedom” that, to repeat a quotation from the introduction to this Special Issue, we should seriously entertain if we are to “intensify the multiple ways we do LGBTQIA politics in the academy and the street.”

Our sixth and final review concerns Vanessa Panfil’s The Gang’s All Queer: The Lives of Gay Gang Members (2017). Panfil represents her work as a challenge to two commonly held assumptions in criminological research: first, that male gang members are exclusively heterosexual, and second, that gang membership is well understood as a way of affirming a stereotypically heterosexual and specifically masculine identity. To accomplish this end, Panfil offers an ethnographic investigation of the experiences of 53 gay gang-affiliated men, mostly of color, in Columbus, Ohio. Her findings challenge more familiar accounts of gay identities, especially those that represent gay men as what she calls “effeminate pacifists” (4) defined by their status as targets of bias crimes, homophobic bullying, and/or intimate partner violence. Via their gang affiliation and often their participation in violence and/or crime, Panfil’s subjects defy the caricature of victimhood. But, at the same time, they challenge dominant representations of racist heteronomativity, especially those grounded in the gender identity of white men in positions of power. In sum, these gang members effectively queer our familiar view of hypermasculinity as the hyperbolic performance of heterosexual identity. In so doing, they offer striking examples of how gender resistance is sometimes enacted in ways that neither conventional academic scholarship nor received cultural mythology know how to interpret.
Taken together, like the articles in this Special Issue, these six books complicate any monolithic representation of contemporary LGBTQIA politics, whether within the academy or beyond the walls that, too often, are thought to segregate it from what lies without. As this very acronym intimates, the question of who and what is involved in participating in gender-oriented movement politics today is challenging and difficult. No matter what fractures and fissures this acronym may signify, however, let us not forget that the very possibility of LGBTQIA politics is existentially threatened by those who would render its advocates marginalized, invisible, and, with increasing frequency, targets of harassment, abuse, and violence. Each of these six books reminds us in its own way that the negotiation of difference within this movement is as essential as its mobilization of collective power.

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Marching Dykes, Liberated Sluts, and Concerned Mothers: Women Transforming Public Space by Elizabeth Currans. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017. 248 pp. $95.00 (hardcover), $27.95 (paperback), $25.16 (electronic).

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In this engaging analysis of public protests by women-led organizations, Elizabeth Currans offers a rich analysis of what it means to “hold public
space” (3), a key feature of political protest. The range of types of protest that she examines — from Sistahs Steppin’ in Pride in Oakland to Women in Black in London and New York, to the 2004 March for Women’s Lives in Washington, DC — provide much contextual detail to the variety of meanings that participants and organizers attribute to women-led public protest.

What is meant by “women” or, where relevant, “mothers” in these protests? These definitions varied among the events, and Currans discusses this well in her analysis of a Take Back the Night event in the first chapter. Who is permitted to participate in Take Back the Night events has frequently been a central question in the organization of these events. A strength of the book is that Currans examines the multifaceted nature of these questions and shows the different ways the participants she interviewed see this question of identity and inclusion. These questions are part of the analysis of each event; Currans accepts the definitions of her respondents, even as she raises questions in her analysis about other possible viewpoints on identity and inclusion.

Currans uses a “complex interdisciplinary and intersectional approach” (12): she observed and video recorded most of the protests that she chronicles, and she interviewed 100 participants. The rich empirical work provides the basis for a clear and textured analysis of the diversity of events. The book divides them into three sections according to the general theme of the protest: sexuality, war, and citizenship. All of the events took place in the United States, the United Kingdom, or Canada, and most occurred in 2004 and 2005, although the book also discusses the 2011 SlutWalks.

Among the salutary features of the book are the deep contextual detail in the discussion of each protest and the way that Currans presents these details. She draws themes from each event using the voices of her respondents, who often have conflicting experiences of and responses to the way space is held in each event. For example, in her discussion of the March for Women’s Lives, Currans contrasts the experiences of a white heterosexual couple from Minneapolis with the experiences of an African American lesbian woman from Atlanta to show how the meaning of the bodies present in the space and the context of the different groups involved was experienced differently by different participants. Currans emphasizes the importance of holding space together as central to the meaning of protest while suggesting that these different experiences reflect different interests, goals, and issue salience for different individuals and groups who are part of larger movements.
such as reproductive rights and reproductive justice movements. Her analysis of this event in particular also draws on the history of how the event developed and the negotiations between the different groups involved in organizing the march. In doing so, she shows how the white-dominated national organizations tried to be inclusive and the ways these efforts fell short. Her analysis of the organization Sister Song, and how it viewed participation in the event, is useful for evaluating what large national events such as the March for Women’s Lives can and cannot accomplish.

This book is an example of empirically informed use of affect theory and feminist theory. I especially appreciated the way Currans analyzes the nuances of power within and between organizations in several instances, such as the March for Women’s Lives, and brings intersectionality to bear on all of her cases.

In her concluding chapter, Currans suggests that protests are “utopic”: they aim for a better, imagined future. She suggests, based on her research, that the way protests do this is by accomplishing three “affective purposes”: setting boundaries (e.g., who is part of the protest and who is not), setting the context for negotiations over the direction a social movement should take, and making it possible for movement participants to be present together across their differences.

This analysis is sound. The book is very interesting, and I certainly recommend reading it. Yet I still found myself asking, what do protests do? What do they accomplish for social movements, beyond “holding space” together for a set period of time? Perhaps the change is the protest itself, and the other work of social movements is more like the slow boring of hard boards. But this question — what does protest do, what does it accomplish — seems very pressing at the present political moment. Perhaps this is the wrong question, though; perhaps holding space and bringing people together across differences are all we can ask of political protest.

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Even though minority groups demonstrate distinctive social and political behavior, socially constructed identities and the cultures they produce are not homogeneous. For example, despite a shared experience with sexual discrimination, not all sexual minorities share the same understanding of what it means to be a sexual minority nor how that identity is or is not integrated into other areas of one’s life. Is sexuality “life-defining,” the critical component to one’s self-understanding around which one constructs social networks, political beliefs, even family (224)? Is it “ancillary,” a single tile in the mosaic of one’s definition of self — not unimportant, but easily incorporated into the broader picture (224)? Or is sexuality mutable, contingent upon factors such as time and place? Japonica Brown-Saracino’s *How Places Make Us* investigates these questions and poses potential explanations for identity and cultural variation by focusing on the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women. In the process, Brown-Saracino raises important questions about the continuity of sexual minority culture and community as sexual minorities continue to assimilate (or resist assimilation) into the broader American culture.

*How Places Make Us* contributes to a growing body of intersectional literature that highlights the political and cultural heterogeneity inherent within socially constructed identity communities by describing how one’s place of residence affects one’s definition and perception of identity. Based on participant observation, interviews, and surveys of LBQ-identified respondents, as well as analyses of media and census data, this comparative ethnography provides a true “intracategorical” perspective on LBQ identity — challenging the notion of static identity categories while recognizing their importance for social scientific research focusing on minority identity (McCall 2005). Brown-Saracino suggests that sexual identity and sexual identity cultures are “locally produced, rather than emerging from broad subcultures or communities that span place” (268). The author asserts the interaction of three mechanisms: perceptions of acceptance and
numeracy ("abundance"), stories people tell about their communities ("place narratives"), and perception of local population traits ("socioscape"). These explain how similarly situated populations in four small cities in the United States — Ithaca, New York; San Luis Obispo, California; Portland, Maine; and Greenfield, Massachusetts — both enforce and transgress categories of being known as lesbian, bisexual, and queer.

Queer studies of identity have long critiqued essentialist arguments, noting that identity is mutable. Yet empirical analyses such as How Places Make Us attempt to determine under what conditions identity finds expression and to provide critical insight into how identities are marginalized, suppressed, or celebrated. Brown-Saracino describes a spectrum of sexual identity cultures and concomitant views on “identity politics and integrationist approaches to sexual identity” (224). The spectrum ranges from sexual identity as “life-defining,” characterized by the prevalence of LBQ identification and strong lesbian cultural institutions (illustrated by San Luis Obispo), to sexual identity as “ancillary,” characterized by diffuse identities and weak LBQ (postidentity politics) culture (illustrated by Ithaca). For example, cities where LBQ people see themselves as outsiders, regularly experience discrimination, have few or no “out” elected officials, and have defined areas of habitation are likely to produce a culture established on identity politics. So important is place to the definition of identity (and so mutable is sexual identity) that Brown-Saracino asserts that even migrants who once held competing perceptions will eventually adopt the dominant identity and culture of their new hometown.

The spectrum and findings in How Places Make Us are constructed from observations of mostly white, middle to upper-middle class, cisgender women. Although observing participants largely homogeneous in racial and class identity is illustrative of the way places shape identity culture variation, it risks overlooking the development of alternative cultures based on intersecting and/or multiply marginalized identities. The experiences of gay men and transgender people may be markedly different, for example. Brown-Saracino’s thesis that place shapes identity is well defended; however, any discussion of identity politics must also entail a discussion of identity privilege. Identity politics is determined by those who most fit the prototypical definition of the identity category. This is alluded to in the author’s recounting of an encounter between a study participant and a woman perceived to be of a lower social class outside of a bar in San Luis Obispo. The participant, at first inside the
bar, notices Brown-Saracino outside talking with a woman who the author describes as “an auto mechanic” with “a few missing teeth,” indicative to the author of poverty (95). The participant reacts by exiting the bar and discouraging Brown-Saracino from continuing the conversation (intimating that poor lesbian women are not included in San Luis Obispo residents’ conception of lesbian identity). Similar disputes over identity boundaries arise between “butch” and “femme” identified residents of Portland. Even in a postidentity-politics culture, racial, economic, and social privilege defines how people experience sexual identity and culture. Indeed, the author notes that some residents of color in Ithaca say “their belonging is more tenuous than that of white women” (55).

Brown-Saracino does recognize these limitations and offers justifications that make this ethnography a strong example of qualitative intersectional research. Furthermore, the research design highlights the importance of studying social and political phenomena at the local (i.e., city) level and in rural communities, which are so often overlooked by LGBQ studies. (As an aside, I highly recommend reading the methodological appendix for a down-to-earth account of how researchers must be adaptable in their methodological approaches.)

Finally, while the lessons of How Places Make Us are applicable to the study of marginalized identities other than LBQ women, the book raises important questions about the continuity of sexual identity and culture in a world where attitudes toward sexual minorities are steadily improving. If low perception of acceptance and numeracy are crucial to the formation of identity-based cultural institutions, what will happen to those institutions when sexual identity is no longer unacceptable and more people “come out”? The evidence from Ithaca and Greenville presented by Brown-Saracino suggests that a postidentity-politics culture will develop. What, then, does this portend for the future of sexual minority and gender identity politics? Unfortunately, some research suggests that assimilation contributes to social movement stagnation (Olsen 2013). Yet integration is built upon privilege not shared by all sexual and gender minorities. Intersectional scholarship such as Japonica Brown-Saracino’s is still required to explicate the multiple and competing ways identity influences social and political phenomena.

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Amy Adamczyk’s book, *Cross-National Opinion About Homosexuality: Examining Attitudes Across the Globe*, is a sweeping attempt to explain the key factors in the global variation of attitudes toward homosexuality. Few studies have given a book-length treatment to exploring change in attitudes on a global scale, and the mixed-method approach with which Adamczyk tackles this ambitious project is welcome and inspiring. These methods include, for example, quantitative analyses of World Values Survey data, qualitative interviews in key case studies, and content analyses of newspapers. The breadth of the case studies is especially important: it sheds light on the mechanisms behind the correlations to which Adamczyk gives the most weight in her quantitative analysis.

The book’s core findings suggest that attitudinal differences across states are best explained by cross-national variation in the importance given to religion and the type of dominant religion. Within national contexts where religion is given more importance, acceptance of homosexuality is lower. Furthermore, some dominant religions (e.g., Protestant and Muslim) are correlated with a lower acceptance of homosexuality than others. Adamczyk shows that lower levels of religious importance (influenced by the type of dominant religion), alongside two further factors — the strength of democratic institutions and higher levels of
economic development in the national context — have a positive relationship with the acceptance of homosexuality. The theoretical arguments underpinning these findings are presented in part 1 of the book, before part 2 introduces three chapters of country case studies (grouped by dominant religion) and part 3 shifts our attention to views on homosexuality in East Asia. The way the three key factors (religion, democracy, and economic development) interact across cases is a strong part of the argument; for example, weaker levels of religious importance might play out differently in the acceptance of homosexuality in a country, depending on its strength of democracy. In sum, the central message of Adamczyk’s book is that “tolerance for homosexuality tends to be reduced by overall levels of religious importance, affected by the dominant religion, and boosted by economic development and democracy” (199). The crisp way in which Adamczyk builds her argument is exemplary, given the challenging endeavor of carrying such an argument across such varied contexts and in a global perspective.

While Adamczyk offers us a great service by highlighting a succinct set of characteristics to explain cross-national variation in attitudes, some of the nuance and politics behind the diffusion of these contentious identities and norms is left outside the scope of the study. This will require readers to supplement their understanding of the issue with work in other fields, including studies that delve deeper into alternative explanations for attitudinal change. For example, while the discussion in the book includes some welcome nuance about the influence of religious denomination, a core component of the argument still places heavy weight on the difference between broad categories of denomination. I have some minor reservations about this aspect of the argument. The finding that Jewish, Catholic, and Orthodox countries are more progressive than Protestant and Muslim countries might play out differently depending on how we understand denomination (for example, the differences between mainline and evangelical Protestantism). Many homophobic states and societies (both politically and culturally) are predominantly Catholic and Orthodox; and both of these Churches have also worked actively to block the acceptance of homosexuality around the globe (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). By contrast, leading nations on issues of homosexuality (both before and after the Homophile movement), were heavily Protestant. From my perspective, the book falls short of providing a compelling answer for any reasons (including biblical interpretation) behind these denominational distinctions.
Some political scientists have placed less emphasis on denomination, arguing that the politicization of religion in the national identity and state is the most compelling avenue for understanding the varied effects of denomination on rights and attitudes related to sexuality and gender (Ayoub 2014; Htun and Weldon 2018). It might explain why the Catholic Church in Poland (seen as a liberal and democratizing force against war-time occupiers and Soviet influence) has had a stronger voice in opposing LGBT acceptance in Poland than its Spanish counterpart (which in democratic Spain has a smaller political role than it did under Franco) (Ayoub 2014). Further, some parts of the book also suggest that changed attitudes to LGBT rights have an influence on policy in that domain, but this relationship is complex and varied across the type of policy (see Abou-Chadi and Finnigan, n.d.) and region (Ayoub 2016). The reverse relationship can also be true, and this we can observe in the rapid upswing in attitudes towards gays and lesbians after same-sex marriage was introduced in countries like Spain and the United States (Bishin et al. 2016).

Other perspectives also emphasize the transnational currents that interact with the domestic conditions that Adamczyk privileges. Changed global norms around homosexuality help explain why the factors leading to acceptance are different across time. Indeed, in recent decades, all sorts of societies — Catholic and Protestant, rich and poor, stronger and weaker democracies — have moved forward on LGBT rights with impressive speed (Ayoub 2016; Kollman 2013). This is no coincidence in light of the long history of transnational organizing by social movements and the effect of transnational norms on social change. Adamczyk acknowledges these explanations, but their importance is diluted in her analysis. Finally, reading the book alongside critical feminist and queer theorists will add nuance to the complexity of what the social construct of homosexual identity means (including its Western tinge) and how this varies across societies, and how associating certain state and/or religious groups as being pro- and anti-gay comes with some serious risks for the project of queer liberation (cf. Richter-Montpetit 2018).

These quibbles, which revolve around the need for the reader to embed the book in a broader literature, should not detract from the value of Adamczyk’s ambitious and far-reaching study. Her mixed-methods approach and breadth of case studies, as well as her original and stimulating treatment of materials, make for an important and timely work that contributes to the scholarly community. In particular, the book informs scholars in the field of sociology, with a focus on public
opinion, the sociology of religion, and sexuality studies. It contributes to a new understanding of familiar material by treating it in an original and stimulating manner for a broader audience of scholars. Furthermore, it is easily readable and digestible for undergraduate and nonspecialist audiences. It builds on older studies by providing a novel and accessible take on existing knowledge in a cross-national perspective.

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REFERENCES


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Pathways of Desire is in many ways a state-of-the-art book on the intersection of sexuality and migration. While migration studies have long been dominated by narratives of economic opportunity and kinship
ties, in recent years a growing research literature has asked how sexuality enters into motivations to migrate and affects the experiences of migrants in new countries. This comprehensive study of 77 Mexican men who migrated to the San Diego area provides many of the answers to this question by inquiring into their premigration circumstances in Mexico, the variable pathways into the United States, and their experiences in finding a way in a new culture where they come to be viewed as members of a racialized minority. A particular strength of this study is the addition of interviews of 36 US-born Latinos and 34 non-Latinos in recent sexual or romantic relations with migrants to help shed light on the experiences of Mexican gay migrants.

The result is a careful and even-handed treatment of the multiple pathways of migration that eschews simple explanations. Though many migrants characterize their own motivations in terms of the search for sexual freedom, Carrillo puzzles over this discourse when there are no “lack of options to be gay in Mexico” (38). Legal reform has greatly improved the legal status of LGBT people, and many of the gay scenes desired in the United States have already emerged in major Mexican cities. While recognizing the fraught politics of Mexican migration and the subordination of many Latinos in the US class system, Carrillo also wants to avoid having the experiences of migrants swallowed by a narrative of victimhood, and the book shows their agency in navigating multiple barriers, expectations, and environments. It is a book that also asks quite rightly not only how sexualities in the global South are impacted by globalization but also how they affect sexual cultures of the North.

Much depends on one’s starting point as a potential migrant. Social class, region, and family conservatism have profound implications for perceptions of home environment and for what migration may have to offer. Middle-class men with money and education often have options that include readily available visas to travel, while others endure major hardships only to become undocumented laborers in the United States. Some families of origin provide support; others harassment. A particularly strong part of this study examines the role of kin in facilitating migration (an old theme in migration studies) but then sometimes in suffocating the migrant’s interest in finding a boyfriend in the United States. Moreover, and to its credit, Carrillo’s inquiry also examines the role of gay social networks that proved highly variable in providing connections (mostly unrecognized in migration studies).

Once over the border, this study is particularly good in documenting how social environment influences sexual subjectivity. Carrillo identifies
three kinds of Mexican sexual schemas that shaped migrants’ early understandings of relationships between men ranging from the gendered *activo/pasivo* schema, to gay identities, to “sex with male friends or relatives” (258). For some, the adjustment to San Diego was relatively straightforward, while others learned a certain sexual biculturalism, navigating the “two sexual worlds in Mexico and the United States according to what they understand to be the rules of the game in each location” (176) like the Dominicans interviewed by Carlos Decena in his book *Tacit Subjects*. California, with its large local Latino population, allowed some men to rely on specifically Latino or Mexican gay social niches where familiar cultural referents remain alive and well. Two chapters also try to make sense of white American and Mexican perceptions of each other, where Mexicans often perceive Americans to be cold, unromantic, and individualistic but also sexually liberal, experimental, and direct in their expression of desire. At the same time, Mexicans are often perceived as “passionate,” a designation that could be embraced as a cultural virtue and empowering, or alternatively as the imposition of a form of sexual racism, the latter view apparently held much more by US-born Latinos.

Finally, this book also considers the intersection of HIV with sexual migration. As Latino men who have sex with men have somewhat higher rates of HIV in the United States, HIV-negative migrants enter new sexual environments where HIV may be a present risk. For migrants who are already HIV positive, the promise of reliable treatment in the United States may be a factor in deciding to migrate.

The study from which this book arises has already been followed by some major historical developments that doubtless affect the migratory process. It precedes the legalization of same-sex marriage that opened a (narrow) avenue to citizenship that was previously denied LGBT noncitizens in relationships with Americans, and it precedes the Trump presidency that has greatly raised the stakes against Mexican migrants and likely blemishes the image of the United States in the eyes of would-be migrants. The migrants in this study had also not yet felt the full impact of the smartphone revolution, which now facilitates moment-to-moment transnational contact with social networks. Nevertheless, for any migration studies that seek to explore these issues further, *Pathways of Desire* will be essential reading as a model for researching migration and sexualities.

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This book is a tremendous surprise. I picked it up thinking that it was going to focus upon LGBTQAI prisoners, a relatively recent concern in policy debates and activism. Instead, Stephen Dillon’s *Fugitive Life* is a broad meditation on the nature of unfreedom and resistance. While reading it, I kept thinking of Henry David Thoreau’s observation in *Civil Disobedience* about the delusions of prisons: “[A]s I stood considering the walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick, the door of wood and iron, a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones, to be locked up” (Thoreau 2003). Prisons simultaneously display both the reach and limits of state power. *Fugitive Life* is about the state’s attempt to destroy, dehumanize, and silence the bodies it has deemed disposable, as well as the opportunities for revelation and resistance that come from being relegated to the periphery of society.

Dillon’s book takes as inspiration “the communiqués, literature, memoirs, prison writing, and poetry of underground and imprisoned activists in the 1970s United States to provide an analysis of the centrality of gender and sexuality to a new mode of racialized state power called the neoliberal carceral state” (143). The era that produced the writings that Dillon is working from seems fresh in comparison to our own. The prison, state power on behalf of white heteropatriarchy, and neoliberal ideology seem so naturalized and inevitable in 2018 that it is difficult to see them anew. In these writings, the outrage seems more vibrant because the authors could grasp alternative orders more clearly.
year anniversary of the Summer of 1968 has been an opportunity for depressing reflection on how much potential we have lost, and the proliferation of indignities and submission to them. *Fugitive Life* provides a journey back to where the present began.

*Fugitive Life* is at its strongest when it rescues this historical material and helps us see it as an incisive critique of our present. It is difficult to say that this book is really about prisons; it is rather about the margins of power in which prisons are located. Prisons are filled with people who have been culturally, politically, historically, and economically subordinated. Dillon links the prison with the underground as spaces on the margins where alternative epistemologies thrive: “Fugitive knowledges emerged to see and name that which normative ways of knowing could not” (12).

Dillon is too perceptive to see fugitive spaces and fugitive knowledge as truly apart from dominant forms of knowing and being. His analysis focuses upon the dialectics between power and powerlessness: “Thinking of queerness as a form of relational difference produced by racial violence helps us to reconceptualize how the state and capital operate, and also opens up new possibilities for thinking about life, survival, and freedom” (15–16). The carceral state “queers” both its inmates as well as the brown and black populations that serve as their most likely recruiting grounds as distinct from the rest of the population. Dillon’s addition of the underground as another marginalized space related to the prison contributes a new dimension to his analysis. Interestingly, those who need to go underground must pose as completely normative. Dillon recounts how, in Susan Choi’s novel *American Woman*, the main character, an Asian woman and leftist guerrilla, hides in plain sight by pretending to be a maid: “In fact she becomes invisible within the visibility of her racialization — to be visible as an Asian maid is to vanish” (77). Going underground means truly understanding and being able to manipulate the values and norms that are generally unspoken.

The point of the book is to see the edges of power as frameworks of potential opposition even while acknowledging that there is a dialectical relationship between power and resistance. In this way, it is in conversation with recent titles of political theory such as James Martel’s *The Misinterpellated Subject* and Neil Roberts’s *Freedom as Marronage*, which explore the complexities of freedom and unfreedom. Dillon explores how some leftist movements that seek to subvert state power frequently adopt the authoritarian frameworks they mean to oppose.
Because of the fragile distinctions between subverting power structures and building them, the possibilities of fugitive life frequently become almost ethereal. At one point, he explains the paradox facing a character going underground: “If Jenny could see where fugitivity leads she would already be captured. One must continually take flight from what is already coming — from the past that captures the now, the future that is already here, and the everyday of the present that is already possessed” (83). At other times it appears that the underground might not even really exist at all. Dillon describes it as a “space that exists only through the fabrications required for someone to disappear into the openness of the world” (75). It seems that fugitive freedom is constructed by the desire for alternatives, and its lack of solid form: “Where neoliberal freedom deadened and captured the possibilities of thought, being and living, fugitive freedom ran toward unknown and unthought variations of life itself” (69). In other words, the construction of our world still allows for possibilities, but these possibilities become muted if they are elaborated.

The third chapter, “Possessed by Death,” is perhaps the strongest in the book, because it remains focused on black feminist accounts of the black female body in slavery, the prison, and the marketplace, illuminating significant continuities through the past five centuries. Slavery is presented here as, above all, the grounds of a racialized order of global capitalism that persists today: “The body and soul of the slave were socially and biologically killed and brought back to life through a possession of the racial powers of the market. Alive or dead, born or unborn, slaves were money” (109). The narratives Dillon works from in this chapter provide startling similarities in the realms of unfreedom created by market logics across the ages. Discipline of unruly slaves was curbed only by the imperative to not destroy the inherent value of the slave’s body. A woman who led a slave rebellion was sentenced to death, but the hanging occurred after she gave birth to her child — another body that could be bought and sold: “The market fused chattel and blackness together at the level of discourse, skin, and ontology, ensuring the mark of commodification held stronger than iron and steel” (111). The chapter is convincing in demonstrating the pervasiveness of market bondage and the impossibilities of escape. This is the chapter that holds the strongest focus upon the intersectionality of gender and race, producing an analysis so devastating that the strong spirit of subversion in the rest of the book fades to the background.
This is an excellent book for our times, an era provoking fresh outrage over children in cages and the brutal treatment of bodies fleeing violence by states that claim to honor human rights. It is a time to bathe in the spirit of many of the authors Dillon presents. *Fugitive Life* is a compelling reminder of the logics of the carceral state as they have been unfolding over centuries, and the inevitable — if frequently intangible — logics of resistance that also result.

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**REFERENCES**


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*The Gang’s All Queer* is a welcome addition to scholarship on the lives of queer citizens, especially because the subjects — gang- and crime-involved young men, largely African American — are marginalized and dismissed not only in society, but also in academic inquiries. Vanessa Panfil successfully challenges and provides nuance to what we think we know about urban gay men. Her approach responds to two assumptions: that “male gang members and active offenders are exclusively heterosexual” and that “gang membership and violence are ways to construct stereotypical masculine and heterosexual identities only, typically at the expense of women/girls, gay men, and folks who don’t seem to follow society’s gender ‘rules’” (4). To a great extent, the book debunks these assumptions, with one exception: gang membership and violence
construct homosexual identities, but still at the expense of women and effeminate gay men. The book is replete with gay gang members policing and patrolling themselves and each other for being too “faggy.”

Panfil’s methods — in-depth interviews and ethnography — are integral to analyzing subjects’ identity formation and strategies of resistance. Panfil interviews 53 gang- and crime-involved men in or near Columbus, Ohio, ranging in age from 18 to 28. Most participants are men of color: 77% Black or African American, 2% Latino, 9% biracial, and 11% White. More than three-quarters have been arrested, and more than half have been incarcerated (12). Because some participants had been involved in more than one gang in their lifetimes, 38 different gangs are represented in the sample (13).

The book is organized into three parts: “Understanding Gay Identity,” “Gay Gangsters and Their Gangs,” and “Strategies for Resistance.” Part 1 documents familiar cultural factors that cause citizens at early ages to conceal queerness: homophobia, misogyny, heteronormativity, and religiosity (e.g., Christianity). One gang member notes: “Before I knew what it was, I knew how to hide it” (26). Gay gang members utilize tools (also familiar) to conceal sexualities, including using girls as “cover-ups” or “beards.” Despite negative externalities that inform identity formation, all participants encountered welcoming or accepting reactions from at least some of the people in their lives (30).

Panfil develops three gang types: predominantly straight, gay, or hybrid. Part 2 explores how gay gang members navigate sexual identities depending upon gang type. Notably, gay gangs organize around shared sexual experiences, unlike straight or hybrid gangs that organize around a particular geography (i.e., neighborhood). Rather than engaging in activities rooted in territoriality, the activities of gay gangs revolve around becoming “known” and developing “respect” not only among other gangs but also within gay circles. Also, members of gay gangs tend to be involved in financial crimes (e.g., intentionally cashing fraudulent checks) and sex work more than gay men who are members of hybrid or straight gangs (84). Another notable difference is that participants view gay gangs as safe spaces for sexual identity disclosure and coping with gay-related stresses. Regardless of the type of gang affiliation, most members expressed concerns for passing as “real men,” with performances of masculinity being a common tool to achieve this end.

Part 3 discusses strategies gay gang members use to resist harassment and stereotypes. Panfil claims that the study is about gay gang members’ paths to empowerment (17). Empowerment, she argues, stems from the ability to
respond to and resist victimization, but more conceptual clarity around empowerment and more evidence to support this claim would be helpful. In the introduction, the author suggests that resilience and strength among LGBTQ people nudges us closer to viewing LGBTQ persons as fully realized citizens who can say, as she does, “We CAN be gang members and we CAN commit crimes!” (9, emphasis in original). We might infer that empowerment means performing hypermasculinity in sexually pluralistic publics and performing queer sexualities (as well as femininity) in quasi-private spaces, such as gay clubs or gay gang members’ own homes. These performances suggest a form of agency, inasmuch as gang members form close relationships with one another in ways that allow them to express sexualities openly, but it is not evident how they set aside victimization. Many participants cite joining gangs for safety and self-defense (both physical and reputational) or because they sought alternative familial relationships when traditional families failed them. Gay gang members commonly use violence to resist anti-gay harassment and illicit economic activity to resist “deadbeat” stereotyping, tools that other scholars note are responses to failed social structures and institutions, namely law enforcement and schools. Participants may have had little or no choice but to join gangs. Agency, then, may be only systemic powerlessness and vulnerability veiled in brute masculinity and lawlessness.

Notwithstanding issues of queer agency and empowerment, this study shows that queers indeed are omnipresent, even in gangs and criminal activity. We are accustomed to scholarly analyses aimed at advancing citizenship rights by showing that queers are model citizens; however, Panfil’s queers-are-like-everyone-else analysis shows gay gang members engaging in some of society’s most deplorable activities—mugging, larceny, violent beatings, drug dealing, car thefts, shootings, and tax fraud. Reasons to fight, as participants note, include “disrespect” in the form of sexual unfaithfulness, gossip, or asking about someone’s serostatus.

At times, Panfil seems to be an apologist for these gang members, downplaying violent and criminal behaviors in favor of emphasizing intimate and friendly relationships. To wit, some of the gangs’ illicit activities are characterized as forms of economic entrepreneurship. In fairness, it may be that I, as a gay cisman, am inclined to give a pass to these men’s violent and criminal behaviors simply because they are gay. But this study unsettles inclinations to associate gay with good. It forces us to acknowledge, for example, that a victimized gay youth who has been physically and sexually abused by family members and who forms
alternative familial relationships with gang members should not be excused for violent and criminal activity any more than a heterosexual youth with similar life experiences. The bitter pill for me to swallow is this: we can put lipstick on a thug, but he is still a thug.

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