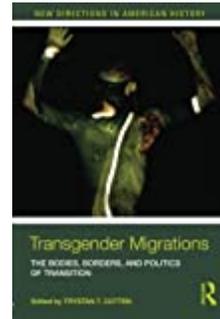




Trystan T. Cotten, ed. *Transgender Migrations: The Bodies, Borders, and Politics of Transition*. New York: Routledge, 2012. viii + 198 pp. \$125.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-88845-5; \$32.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-415-88846-2; ISBN 978-0-203-80826-9.



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Duchesne on Cotten

Trans studies began to emerge from feminist studies and queer theory in the 1990s as a way to examine trans people's realities as well as their place in the world. Since then, specialized conferences, publications, and university courses have helped trans studies become a field of its own. Trystan T. Cotton's edited volume, *Transgender Migrations: The Bodies, Borders, and Politics of Transition*, speaks to trans studies's maturation. The book sets out to demonstrate the generative power that the notion of migration can have for thinking about trans people, issues, and aesthetics. In this, his book is successful as it brings together a collection of quality essays from various disciplines which take the notion of migration in multiple directions, from movement past political borders and within cities, to metaphorical travel narratives and the crossing of identity categories.

The book is divided into four thematic sections. The first deals with what we might call a traditional notion of migration, that is, contexts where people move across political boundaries. The second looks at urban movements, the third, individual stories of migration, and the

last section presents theoretical challenges. Organizing the chapters into these themes was certainly a difficult task as most chapters could be placed into more than one section. To the editor's credit, the overall structure creates coherency needed to guide the reader along.

Jin Haritaworn's chapter "Colorful Bodies in the Multikulti Metropolis: Vitality, Victimology and Transgressive Citizenship in Berlin" opens the first section. The author argues that Berlin's acceptance of queers has in part been dependent on the portrayal of Turkish migrants as homophobic. The author analyzes a violent irruption at a drag festival. Although various versions of the event were reported, the public narrative easily accepted that homophobic Turkish migrants had attacked a group of lesbians. Making links between research, media, and the public sphere, the author shows how assumptions about migrants's homophobia pushed Berliners to rally behind queers. Furthermore, the author argues that the gay, queer, and trans voices that became heard following these events were homonormative and that they failed to take into account the violence that trans people

of color face.

The theme of migrating past political borders is also present in Vek Lewis's chapter, "Forging Moral Geographies: Law, Sexual Minorities and Internal Tensions in Northern Mexico Border Towns." Here, Lewis examines revisions made to the Police and Good Governance Code of Tecate, Baja California, Mexico, in 2002. Under the revised code, "men dressing as women" (quoted, p. 32) in public are an infraction of morality. The author challenges the reader to go beyond a quick and easy analysis of the law in terms of homophobia and machismo culture. He places the revisions made to the law in the larger legal and cultural contexts of Tecate. In doing this, he demonstrates that the relationship between laws and morals, between different levels of government, as well as the response to HIV/AIDS, security discourses, and the vectors of migrations that pass through the city all played a part in the revisions.

The second section of the book focuses on different forms of urban movement. Like Haritaworn and Lewis, Lucas Crawford pushes beyond a unidirectional gender analysis of trans issues in his chapter, "Transgender Movement(s) and Beating the Straight Flush: Building an Art of Trans Washrooms." Most would agree that washrooms are highly gendered spaces that cause many problems for some trans people. But as the author points out, the gendered nature of washrooms goes far beyond the separation of men and women's facilities. For this reason, gender-neutral washrooms would be an incomplete solution. Crawford suggests that we think about ways to trans washrooms. In order to set the context, the author traces the history of washrooms, highlighting the ways that they manage bodies by grouping various acts of hygiene into one private room. Indeed, washrooms are sites of intense gender grooming. The author then highlights some creative twists on washrooms as well as artist representations of washrooms in order to offer food for thought on how we might trans washrooms.

Urban movement is also a key theme in Quinn Miller's "Queer Exterior: Transgender Aesthetics in Early Gay and Lesbian Advertising." He investigates the transgender erotics found on facades of buildings that housed gay and lesbian bars in the United States. Using advertisements found in directories from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Miller unfolds a subtle semiotic code that informed those in the know about the people (genders) and activities (S/M, for example) inside the establishment as well as the surrounding neighborhood. By detailing the complex semiotic web that made semi-

public the purpose of the bar, the author wishes to complicate the notion of being "closeted."

The section closes with Eva Hayward's "Spider-woman: Notes on Transpositions." Hayward takes us on a journey through San Francisco and transition. The author reflects on "the sensuous transactions between body and environment" (p. 92), what she calls transpositions. This reflection engages with multiple elements of her environment. She examines her material surroundings, such as Louise Bourgeois's *Crouching Spider* sculpture and a live spider. Hayward also reflects on what enters her body (hormones) and the scholars who have inspired her, from Susan Stryker to Walter Benjamin. Through these transpositions, the author poses a series of questions about the boundaries between human and non-human, self and surrounding.

The following section of the book examines multiple forms of migration within individual lives. It begins with C. Riley Snorton's "Passing for White, Passing for Man: Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man* as Transgender Narrative." The chapter examines Johnson's novel about an unnamed man and passing. Snorton notes that although commentators have discussed the "passing for white" theme, the protagonist's longing for femininity has yet to be underlined. He argues that even though the protagonist becomes a gendered male, his narrative is full of trans potential. Thus, the protagonist negotiates both his racial identity and his gendered identity.

Don Romesburg's "Longevity and Limits in Rae Bourbon's *Life in Motion*" looks at the multiple mobilities of Rae Bourbon, a stage performer and screen actor. Rae moved between sexualities, sexes, genders, races, classes, and nations, both in life and as a performer. Despite his multiple transgressions, Rae was able to keep performing for sixty years. Romesburg argues that Rae's ability to narrate his life can be understood as a transgender cosmopolitan citizenship and that it was with the help of queer kinship ties that Rae was able to move beyond so many borders.

The last section of the collection offers critiques of trans and queer theory. In "The Persistence of Transgender Travel Narratives" Aren Z. Aizura examines the role of the travel narrative in trans studies. He argues that the "journey out and return home narrative" makes transitions intelligible (p. 142). By removing an individual from the public domain or by having them travel to a different geographical location, we remove the indeterminacy of genders during transition. The author points to

Christine Jorgerson's story of leaving the United States and traveling to Denmark to undergo surgeries as the beginning of this type of narrative. It borrows the notion of going on a trip and coming back transformed from Euro-American travel discourses. We can also make a parallel to the narratives that position social mobility as the key to a successful reinvention of self. Jorgerson left the United States by ship but returned by plane as a celebrity.

In the last chapter, "TRANS/SCRIPTIONS: Homing Desires, (Trans)sexual Citizenship and Racialized Bodies," Nael Bhanji puts into question "the imagined community" of transsexual belonging (p. 157). Using both diasporic theories and his own experiences as an "East Indian/Arab immigrant in Canada who has spent most of his life in Kenya" (p. 158), the author underlines the unspoken whiteness in stories of journey and home found in trans studies, as well as the inability of these stories to consider the bodies that "have no choice but to inhabit the borderlands of non-recognition" (p. 171). He also challenges conventional notions of Canadian multiculturalism that fail to substantially include difference or to recognize the differences amongst those deemed to be "different." In the end, this form of multiculturalism reinforces whiteness as the norm.

Overall, the book is a success. The chapters that make it up present a nuanced analysis. Its authors do sound theoretical and empirical work. One should also underline that issues related to race and class are treated with real substance, which has not always been the case within trans studies (as the authors summarized above point out in their chapters). Furthermore, the authors draw on many of the theories and methodologies present in trans studies, such as historical analysis, literary criticism, performance, discourse analysis, aesthetics, and genealogies. The book is thus a useful introduction to trans studies and a welcome addition to the field. Despite this general success, one does have to note that a few important themes are absent. Migrant trans women are not discussed. Trans women from Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East are present in many major cities throughout North America and Europe. The absence of their realities within a collection on migration is a major oversight. The important migratory patterns of trans people moving towards large cities in order to find services and acceptance are also missing. It is unfortunate that topics of such importance to the daily lives of many trans people got lost in the editor's and author's attempts to think about trans people and migration.

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