

Book Review: The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism edited by David Paternotte and Manon Tremblay

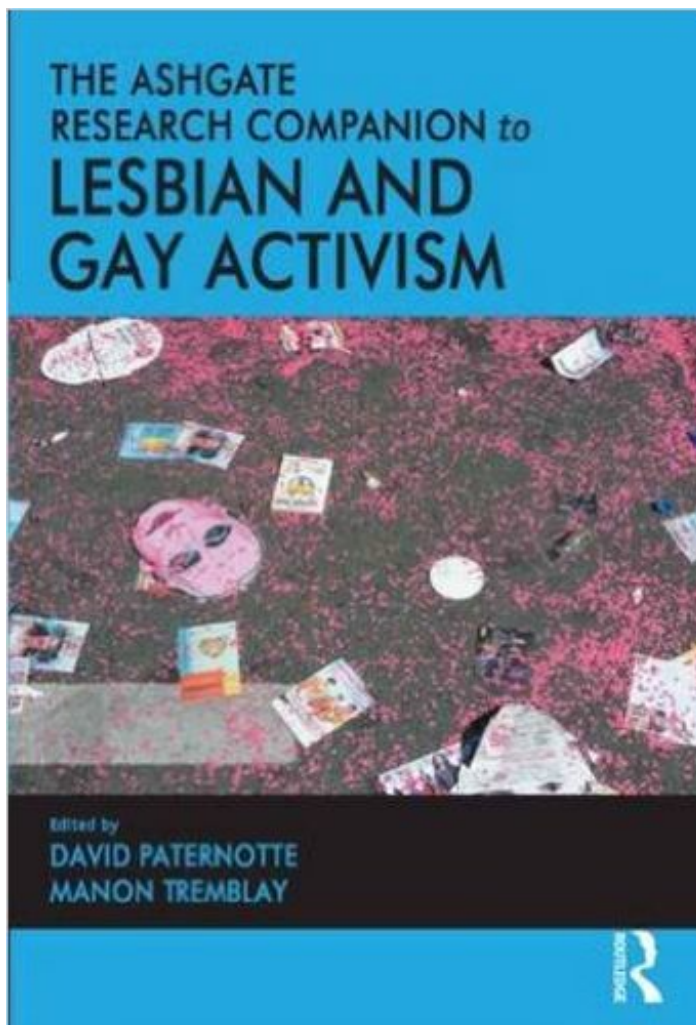
Edited by David Paternotte and Manon Tremblay, The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism provides 22 chapters that seek to give a comprehensive overview of the claims, strategies and mobilisations of lesbian and gay activism across a number of different countries. Although this is a solid introductory volume that offers important and insightful perspectives on the field, M. Bob Kao nonetheless finds that the scope of the project is hindered by its largely Western focus.

The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism . David Paternotte and Manon Tremblay (eds). Ashgate. 2015.

According to the publisher, 'The *Ashgate Research Companions* are designed to offer scholars and graduate students a comprehensive and authoritative state-of-the-art review of current research in a particular area.' *The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism* makes strides in this direction, but does not fully deliver on this lofty promise of comprehensiveness. Edited by sociologist David Paternotte and political scientist Manon Tremblay, both of whom collaborated with Carol Johnson of the University of Adelaide in 2011 to edit *The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State: Comparative Insights into a Transformed Relationship*, this 22-chapter volume provides a solid introduction to, and insightful perspectives on not the overall field, but rather a particular aspect and viewpoint of lesbian and gay activism.

The collection is broken down into four sections. Part One, 'Lesbian and Gay Activism Through Time', looks at the early developments of the movement for historical context. Part Two, 'Identity and Its Discontents', examines how lesbian and gay identities form and inform activism. Part Three, 'Social Movement Environment', focuses on the external environment in which lesbian and gay activists work and to which they have to respond. Finally, Part Four, 'Claims and Debates', surveys some of the substantive rights and freedoms for which lesbian and gay activists have advocated. Each section has either five or six chapters that each offers densely-packed information and analyses that convey the complexities of the issues, along with a solid list of references that are helpful to any researcher looking for a place to start.

Many contributions offer meaningful and enlightening comparative analyses. Susan Gluck Mezey's examination of



court cases compares the different strategies and developments of same-sex marriage litigation in Canada, South Africa and the United States that result from diverse judicial histories. Lynda Johnston and Gordon Waitt's chapter on the spatial politics of gay pride parades and festivals provides case studies from Aotearoa, New Zealand, Australia and Scotland to answer the question of how these events 'queer streets', the subjective feelings of the participants in these festivities and the ways in which they 'create geographies of belonging' (116). Janneke van der Ros and Joz Motmans's analysis of trans activism and its relationships with lesbian and gay organisations compares the situation in Belgium and Norway, concluding that although processes have been disparate due to different organisational landscapes, mainstream lesbian and gay groups have been accepting and inclusive of trans issues in both nations due to an alignment of interests.



Image Credit: LGBT and human rights activists protesting in İstanbul, Turkey ([Turkish Flame](#))

As a whole, however, this companion is overwhelmingly focused on the Western world, hence it is not comprehensive. The editors acknowledge this shortcoming when they admit in the introduction that the collection lacks content on Asia. For example, Asian countries are briefly discussed in the sections on Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism's views on LGBT rights; there is passing mention of public and policy debates on same-sex relationships and unions in Nepal, India, Thailand, Taiwan and Vietnam; and two short paragraphs are devoted to the AIDS movements in Vietnam, China and Singapore (as well as Zambia). The treatments of Latin America and Africa are similar, albeit slightly better covered. This underrepresentation is understandable because much of the scholarly work being produced on lesbian and gay activism in and on Asian countries is in its native language. Nonetheless, their absence belies the overambitious title of the volume.

Likewise, the lack of diversity within the Western world is clear. Though an entire chapter is devoted to people of colour in LGBT movements in the United States and the Netherlands, this raises the issue of why they are relegated to a special section – the only one that references key figures such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith – and not interwoven in the analyses of other chapters.

Despite these criticisms – which are of the final product and not an indictment of the editors given the well-known difficulties of assembling an edited volume – this is a useful and important guide for researchers on Western lesbian and gay activism. While it may still be beneficial for others, whether for the theoretical frameworks, debates and controversies introduced or for the comparative analyses, the fact that large chunks of the field of lesbian and gay

activism are missing is regrettable given the purported scope of the project. Hopefully the next edition will rectify this, but for now, readers can fill the gap themselves by supplementing the collection with works by the likes of Wan Yanhai, Lynette Chua and Naisargi Dave, scholars who are cited in the companion, but deserve much more attention.

M. Bob Kao is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Commercial Law Studies, Queen Mary, University of London. He was a public interest lawyer in California and has taught American law in Taiwan and China. He tweets [@attorneycow](#). [Read more reviews by M. Bob Kao](#).

Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.

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