

Phil Hubbard, *Cities and Sexualities*
(Routledge, New York: 2012), 254 pp.

Hubbard's book is a new and important addition to the Routledge series, *Critical Introductions to Urbanism and the City*. As such, its aim is both to explore "the role of the city in shaping our sexual lives" and to describe how the actions of urban designers, planners and governors produce particular types of "cities in which some sexual proclivities and tastes are normalized and others excluded" (p. xv). As the author notes, unlike many works in the field of sexuality and urbanism/ geography, this book does not seek to privilege a specific set of sexual relations or identity positions, but rather takes a broad overview of human sexualities. Thus, Hubbard moves beyond questions of identity to consider questions of practice; rather than discussing the binaries of straight/gay identity, he offers a wider overview of the ways that the city shapes our sexual and intimate lives.

The book's introduction offers a comprehensive literature review on the important connection between cities and sexuality since the onset of mass urbanization in the nineteenth century. The author relates this context to some contemporary urban theories (such as the Marxist urbanism of Harvey or Soja), which say little about sexuality. The second chapter, "The Moral Geographies of Sex," shows how the city has acted as a key marketplace for commercial sex, rarely without limits, with the state and law seeking to impose geographical limitations on the selling of sex. Chapter 3, entitled "Domesticating Sex," explores the sexualization of the home, dealing with the myth of the home as a sexually moral and ordered space. In Chapter 4 ("Public Sex"), the analysis turns to the sexual life of public space, which though strongly ordered by notions of public decency, appears to offer diverse moments and spaces for sexual experimentation. The fifth chapter, "On the Town: Pleasure and Leisure in the Nocturnal City," surveys the commercial spaces of nightlife and leisure, and identifies an important association between sexuality and the emergence of the leisure society. The next chapter, "Consuming Sex: Pornographies and Adult Entertainment," describes the rise of adult entertainment and the erotic as an element of escapism from the everyday routine. Chapter 7, "World Cities of Sex," describes the ultimate difficulty of distinguishing between spaces of leisure, pleasure and business, highlighting the centrality of sex within city economies and considering the business of sex from a global perspective.

It is important to note the vast theoretical background that the author uses as a basis for his arguments. The book is grounded in social science literature that explores the social construction of sex, and it explains in a bright and clear language concepts such as "identity," "heteronormativity" and "sexual behavior." Using theories of geography, sociology, gender studies and culture studies, and presenting many detailed case

studies from cities around the world, Hubbard shows how the history of urban areas has changed and sexuality has become more and more explicit within them, while also explaining the distinction between gender and sexuality. This distinction is followed by an examination of the concept of sexuality (e.g., applying the theories of Foucault, Butler, Rich and others), noting that unlike sex itself, sexuality is a cultural production that appropriates the human body and its physiological capacities, connecting it to particular ideas about sex and gender.

The book takes us beyond straight/gay binaries into a journey to different cities, cultures, societies and economic contexts. Notwithstanding the many case studies that help to elaborate the notions and arguments, the book is “limited to large, Western cities” (p. 206). While the centrality of Western urban areas and types of sexuality within them is problematic, it also opens up a broad field that was previously unknown, allowing the author not only to speak about sexuality, but also to expand his analysis to new meanings of intimacy, love and lust, and to relate them to their commercialization in the neo-liberal, capitalist city of the West (especially in the chapter dealing with world cities). But even here, in the limited Western context, Hubbard shows that not all cities are equally open to sexual diversity, and even in the urban West, the sexuality normalized in the city remains restricted. The main question that remains unanswered is the role of race, racism and power relations that are constructed through this category. One way to take this question forward, and incorporate the category of race in future studies of cities and sexuality, would be to use Hubbard’s research as a springboard from which to examine post-colonial cities in non-Western urban areas, focusing on the power relations produced within these cities in relation to sexuality.

While some chapters—for example, the one on the sex industry—include a broad survey of the most up-to-date research in the field, and give geographical meaning to notions such as pornography and web sex, the book also raises some important questions and areas that remain to be studied. In this context, Hubbard offers new concepts, such as “erotic cities,” claiming that some cities need to be considered as such, i.e., de facto centers of sex, whose sexual economies are integral to their global reach and influence. He highlights the role of sexuality in global cities, elaborating on how the rise of the Internet and virtual sex work does little to challenge the idea that the city is the paradigmatic site of sexual encounter.

Another interesting argument that the book has reinforced and clarified has to do with the scale of the state. The state, claims Hubbard, promotes other forms of sexuality that are thought to be beneficial to the social and economic functioning of the city, whether through the promotion of the “gay village” as consumer space, the licensing of lap-dancing clubs or the sponsorship of family housing. This argument, for example, is highly relevant to the city of Tel Aviv, where the municipality supports

specific types of “deviant” sexualities (by funding the LGBT center and the pride parade, or allowing gay couples to have equal benefits). This global context lacks a discussion of the notion of activism and the ways in which it might create and construct social change on the basis of sexuality. The book does include a discussion of the role of pride parades, nightlife and the home, but not enough on the role of social centers, queer radical activism and non-heteronormative groups.

To conclude, this book interrogates diverse spaces and modalities of urban life, showing that sexuality matters in urban studies, and at the same time calls us to think critically about the possibilities for creating more sexually liberal and egalitarian cities. It does this by drawing on a diverse range of empirical sources, case studies and beautiful visual materials in order to explore particular spaces of sex within contemporary Western cities. By doing so, it shows “that sexuality matters in city life not just because it is a question of personal choice that matters to the individual, but because it is deeply implicated in the ways that cities *work* as sites of social and economic reproduction” (p. 209). Therefore, the book is perfect for scholars and college students alike. Indeed, it can serve very well as a textbook, as the case studies and visual materials are extremely helpful for readers unfamiliar with the field. This book thus makes a significant contribution to the fields of urban sociology and anthropology, gender studies, cultural studies, urban planning and geography, and it constitutes an important addition to the renowned Routledge series.

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