

## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Deborah Stevenson**, *The City*. Malden: Polity Press, 2013, 203 pp. \$24.95 paper (978-0-7456-4890-3)

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**T**he *City* provides a review of core concepts in urban studies and urban sociology. Assessing a wide range of literatures and disciplines, Stevenson offers a critical exegesis of major works and schools of thought that comprise urban studies. Her position is that theories of the city are more than abstract ideas. As Stevenson puts it, “just as concepts, theories and methods shape academic and professional perspectives on the city, they also influence the character and experience of urbanism” (p. 1). The author defines urban studies as a multidisciplinary research area that borrows theoretical and methodological tools from across the social sciences and the humanities. As Stevenson notes, the city is made up of abstract, material, and experiential dimensions that overlap but that are not reducible to one another.

Stevenson organizes the book into a thematic analysis of the theoretical city, the material city, the everyday city, the dark city, the emotional city, the global city, and the imagined city. In the first chapter, she examines conceptualizations of the city ranging from those of the original Chicago School to the analyses of American and French Marxists. Stevenson critiques the biological and concentric zone models deployed by the Chicago School, then assesses the lack of focus on state agencies in early urban studies. She explains the differences between Manuel Castells’ theorization of consumption and the urban, and David Harvey’s subsequent analyses of cities as sites of crisis and capital accumulation. Harvey’s advance is in viewing real estate investment as a primary circuit of capital, whereby urbanization becomes one of the key elements of capital accumulation. Stevenson then explores Henri Lefebvre’s rhythm analysis, which offers a unique temporal and spatial approach for understanding urban experience. Stevenson suggests that all theoretical positions offer key tools for examining the multiple layers of the city, and that theoretical and methodological integration is constantly required in urban studies.

Stevenson then moves on to examine class, inequality, and production in cities. She argues that capitalist production was a major force initiating and intensifying urbanization, but the same transformation also produced new sites of inequality (such as the deprived areas of 19th cen-

ture Manchester that Frederick Engels noted in his comments on the English working class). Stevenson examines how shifts in social and economic policy post-WWII enabled conditions for the emergence of neoliberalism and the marketization of government agencies. The ramifications of neoliberalism for cities were considerable. No longer could local governments focus simply on basic service provision. They had to become entrepreneurial and attract capital investment. Entrepreneurial boosterism by local governments has had huge material impacts on the make-up of cities, insofar as whole neighbourhoods have been leveled in favour of business districts that displace urban dwellers into peripheral spaces. Entrepreneurial strategies are “explicitly designed to move disadvantaged residents out of areas marked for redevelopment and gentrification” (p. 46). The results are polarizing class divisions and urban segregation.

*The City* then transitions into a discussion of public spaces and suburbs. Though downtown public spaces are often portrayed as diverse while suburbs are depicted as dismal, Stevenson argues that both are complex and varied. Everyday life in the suburbs is not as predictable as one might expect. Similarly, city centres may not always be mixing pots for cosmopolitanism. The author also examines issues of policing the night-time economies of cities, and the marginalization of certain social groups that results. This chapter could have focused more on the diverse range of agencies involved in policing cities. It is followed by an investigation of emotions and cities, secularization of cities, and the meaning of monuments and built spaces.

In the final two substantive chapters, Stevenson considers literature on global cities and urban branding. Debates about global cities call into question the idea that cities are self-contained units. Instead, contemporary cities are sprawling urban areas without any clear-cut centre or boundary. The largest cities have become destinations for capital and migration, leading some to argue that global cities such as London and New York have more influence than many federal governments or nation-states. The chapter on branding and cities explores how local governments pursue entrepreneurial strategies to attract people and capital. Stevenson cites the example of Bilbao, a relatively small postindustrial city in northeast Spain that became a big draw for tourists, artists, and entrepreneurs after the 1997 opening of a Guggenheim Museum and other enterprises that repositioned the city as a destination. The brief conclusion to *The City* notes that sustainability and technology will be crucial issues for cities and urban studies in the future.

*The City* is a part of Polity's Key Concepts series. It is always difficult to make novel theoretical, methodological, and empirical contri-

butions in such an overview. However, Stevenson manages to do so by drawing from her research on policing and night-time economies as well as on cultural planning and branding in Australian cities.

One drawback is that the two futures of urban studies that Stevenson mentions at the end of the book are already mainstream in the geography and sociology of cities. For instance, Erik Swyngedouw, Roger Keil, and other members of the so-called Toronto school of urban studies have focused on ecology and the nature of cities for almost three decades. They have made contributions in other domains such as urban governance and economics too that are not highlighted in *The City*. Likewise, technology has figured prominently in recent applications of actor-network theory to conceptualize cities as assemblages. This conceptual framework suggests that cities are not a single entity but rather are socio-technical networks where technology and architecture shape the material and experiential dimensions of the urban. These two topics should have received more attention in additional chapters. Nevertheless, *The City* will interest sociologists, geographers, anthropologists, and political scientists who do research on cities, towns, and social change.

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