

Book Review

Men and Masculinities

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Cenk Özbay. 2017. *Queering Sexualities in Turkey: Gay Men, Male Prostitutes and the City*. London and New York: I.B Tauris. 208 pp. \$103.50 (cloth). ISBN: 978-1784533175.

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Cenk Ozbay discusses the relations between sexualities, class, and urban space in *Queering Sexualities in Istanbul: Gay Men, Male Prostitutes and the City*. This qualitative, ethnographic study focuses on male prostitution in Istanbul. Through deep interviews with rent boys and their customers, Ozbay concentrates on the connections between homosexuality, masculinity, class, and urban space. Furthermore, it also focuses on queer spaces, subjects, possibilities, and incongruities. This book involves rent boys, their customers, and social networks of these two groups of men. Rent boys identify as heterosexual but are part of queer sex work in Istanbul. Their customers are middle-aged, upper-middle-class gay men. Ozbay studied their relationships with customers and connections with other agents, such as their families or friends.

Rent boys usually reside in slum areas (*varoş*) of Istanbul. The encounters between gay men and rent boys involve interactions between different classes, social statuses, and sexualities. Ozbay documents the dynamics between gay men and straight male prostitutes to reconsider masculinity around the concepts of class, gender, and sexuality. The book explains how rent boys stretch, change, and destabilize “heterosexual” and “gay” categories.

Ozbay examines how rent boys actively shape and destruct hegemonic masculinity, identify as heterosexuals, and distinguish themselves from middle-class gays through a process Ozbay calls “exaggerated masculinity.” Exaggerated masculinity refers to the presentation of a neoliberal, commercial self—a performance that also helps them keep their heterosexual identities intact. Ozbay describes exaggerated masculinity as learned, imitated, calculated, and socially regulated enactments of masculinity.

Queering Sexualities in Turkey documents how the conflicted identities of rent boys in Istanbul are shaped and how they achieve stability. Rent boy appears in between the *varoş* identity and the local reflection of the global gay culture: A rent

boy neither becomes gay nor remains *varoş*. These men navigate the complicated identity challenge of maintaining a heterosexual masculinity that having sex with other men threatens. Interestingly, Ozbay notes that lower-class rent boys do not have access to “gay” identities because “homosexual” is a class position from which they are excluded. In Turkey, homosexuality refers to globalized, modern gayness with transnational cultural capital. And rent boys animate a dynamic process of cultural hybridization and theatrical displays of exaggerated masculinity as a response to this double marginalization.

Within this complex terrain, rent boys develop various tactics to find clients and maintain their (hetero)masculine identities. For example, rent boys must always be in the “active” position during sexual relationships with clients because “passivity” threatens their hetero-masculinity. The men in Ozbay’s study also prefer unprotected sex, framing it as evidence of masculine “bravery.” Sexual stigma, however, does emerge in their discourses too. One shield the men in Ozbay’s study rely on concerns their talk about women partners or fiancées underlining their heterosexuality and their framing sex with men as merely financial. They also take the attention off their clients and differentiate themselves from their clients with hetero-masculine styles of dress. Similarly, they seek to underline their masculinity when eating, drinking, and dancing. For instance, many drink alcohol and use drugs as signs of maturity and masculinity. These tactics also help them find clients, all the while maintaining their heterosexual masculinity.

Rent boys constitute a queer subjectivity because they break the absolute duality between homosexuality and heterosexuality. They persistently define themselves as “normal” or heterosexual. Although they have sex with men, they do not adopt gay identities. In this case, they destabilize and stretch heteronormativity. Additionally, they do not follow the logic imposed by heteronormativity. They are outside of heteronormativity because they engage in activities that confound heteronormative modes of life. Hence, this research provides a resource for researchers in various disciplines interested in queer studies, sexuality, gender, and masculinity.

In Ozbay’s study, space, class, and sexualities mutually and continuously affect each other; they cannot be considered independently from one another. Ozbay’s study is intersectional in its consideration of space, sexuality, masculinity, and class. *Queering Sexualities in Turkey* is recommended reading for those interested in queer, sexuality, gender, and urban studies. Ozbay provides a strong methodological example of how research in this vein ought to be conducted. The book is a fascinating and important illustration of the unnoticed connections between sexuality, class, city, and neoliberalism.