

Drew A. Thompson
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
USA

Gendering Urban Space in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa

Martina Rieker and Kamran Asdar Ali; London and New York; Palgrave Macmillan; 2008; 239 pages; £42.50; ISBN: 9781403975232.

The bankruptcy of financial institutions and corporations, unstable market prices for petroleum, and decreased foreign trade have all indicated that world economies from the United States to Germany to Japan entered and have remained in recession since last year. Resulting in decreases in government social services and increases in unemployment, these economic occurrences impacted people's daily lives as evident from mass population migration, upsurges in social protests and crime, and even xenophobic riots. Not only are governments searching for ways to sustain their authority but also governed populations are rethinking government's place within their lives as they independently devise solutions to the everyday challenges they face. Differentiations between 'state' and 'citizen', 'law' and 'human right,' 'First' and 'Third' worlds are influx.

Academic scholars are grappling to develop analytical terminologies, theoretical frameworks, and innovative methodologies that explain and address these social, political, and economic changes. Unfortunately, current analyses have concentrated on the societies of the G-20, failing to look past the merits of government market bailouts and ways to enhance populations' quality of life through consumer spending. Absent within scholarship are discussions about how the unemployment of household members, especially men, reshapes family organization and divisions of labour, or how popular responses to government-initiated reforms are not representative of ingratitude but instead the consequence of histories of colonization and racial discrimination. Written before the ongoing financial crisis, the authors included in the edited volume *Gendering Urban Space in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa* by Martina Rieker and Karman Asdar Ali locate conversations on globalization and political economy in the Global South and shift the focus of academic discourses away from the structural to the everyday, to the private and public lives of men and women who inhabit the very economic systems that dominate existing studies (p.2). As a result, this text offers scholars, particularly those rooted in the social sciences and humanities, new modes of interpretation to identify the historical origins and causes of the world's recent socio-economic and political situations. Furthermore, the book assists academics in locating their and their research's functions within the changing physical landscapes that they both occupy and study.

Gendering Urban Space is the result of conversations associated with the Sher Comparative Urban Landscape Network (<http://www.shehr.org/>), a project that interrogates the conceptualization and deployment of the category "city" within modernist discourses so as to better understand populations' daily practices within changing urban environments. The text's central question is: How do men and women in racially-segregated and economically-deprived regions in the Global South interact with each other and navigate the physical areas they inhabit (p.2)? To answer this concern, the writers use the term "Global South," referring to "South Asia, North Africa, South Africa, the Saudi peninsula, and the Gulf region," to highlight and consider the commonalities in culture and shared histories of colonialism, independence movements, and globalization between populations in these locations (p.2-3). These authors interpret the "city" as presenting men and women both with *opportunities* (i.e., technology, education, employment, and enhanced social status and quality of life) and *drawbacks* (i.e., crime, poverty, ethnic conflict, and unsanitary living conditions) (p.3). However, the authors also recognise that men and women sometimes access the benefits of urban life differently and that the urban experience's disadvantages have varying impacts on these population sectors.

Authors cover a range of topics, including prostitution in colonial French Morocco and British Yemen (Chapters One and Two) and immigrant life in South African townships and the Paris *banlieues* (Chapters Four, Five, and Six) in addition to middle-class experiences in Pakistan (Chapter Seven). To answer the book's central concern, scholars deploy varied methodologies, including ethnographic research and textual readings of colonial medical reports and popular women's magazines. The editors group the chapters chronologically, from the colonial era to the present. The first section, "The Gendered City," considers how colonial European laws and traditional Islamic practices separated men from women and Europeans from colonised populations, while also exploring how women

interpreted and responded to the policies and traditions they were the subject of. The second section, "Other Men (and Women) and the City," discusses the contemporary politics of how immigrant populations in former colonies and Metropoles reconfigure, navigate, and sometimes reinforce racialised stereotypes and class divisions. Such activities by immigrant groups in France and South Africa result in physical spaces of privilege and disadvantage and new social hierarchies according to religion, race, and even gender (p.11).

The text's most compelling chapters (Chapters Four, Five, and Six) are those where the authors insert themselves within local discussions and reflect on their own interactions and observations based on their positionality as researchers and community members. This methodology not only produces rich analyses but also reveals that the violence that dominates the Parisian *banlieues* is interpreted by its perpetrators as "social banditry," the reclaiming of physical spaces and welfare services that are 'rightfully' theirs. In Thomas Blom Hansen's chapter on South Africa, we learn that the Indian community's stereotyping and fears of blacks is linked to apartheid and is currently impeding state reforms of integration and land distribution.

This work has two main weaknesses, first its geographic definition of "Global South," which only refers to the Middle East, South Asia, and North and Southern Africa, and second, its treatment of gender. The authors presuppose that male and female roles in the Global South are pre-determined and static. There appears in the authors' conceptualizations of gender no analytical space to interrogate how men and women acquire identities and roles of the opposite sex. By extending their definition of gender to include individual understandings of sexuality, the authors would have highlighted the ways in which women engage in prostitution not only for economic reasons but also to maintain community ties and traditions. Another glaring absence in this book is the lack of studies on Central and South America, which was the site of experimentation for World Bank reforms, the U.S. drug war, and now is home to the world's most robust and mineral rich economies, specifically Brazil and Venezuela. Regardless of this, this well-written text is a critical starting point for future scholarship on urban life in the Global South, as it illustrates the limitations of development programs and the ways disadvantaged communities understand and interact with the environments they inhabit.