



Feminisms for our time! Urban inequalities and contestations in the age of global change

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Issue: [Feminisms for our time!](#)

Syeda Jenifa Zahan , Carina Listerborn

In the violent authoritarian and anti-democratic times of today, feminist and queer issues and movements have increasingly become targets for anti-gender movements and chauvinism. Austerity politics have led to even further marginalisations of already stigmatised and marginalised groups, not the least queer communities and single parents, while up to ten per cent of the female population globally are trapped in a cycle of extreme poverty (UN Women 2023).

Within this wider globalised context, in this special issue we bring together feminist experiences and voices that are often marginalised in contemporary urban theorising. Cities are central to many of the crises we face today, shaped by globalised aspirations and localised realities of inequalities, as well as by the ongoing promise of modernist capitalist development. Feminist urban theory has been central to how we understand and know 'the' urban and many of these crises that are thrown at us.

We, the editors, have both been engaged in research and activism that centralises intersectional inequalities, including and beyond gender, in different parts of the world with overlapping interests. Occupying two geographies of the world broadly defined, Jenifa in the Global South and Carina in the Global North, we have collectively engaged in research that focuses on gendered violence, public spaces, collective resistance, housing crises, and ongoing urban governance programmes like smart cities that deepen urban inequalities instead of ameliorating them. In this trajectory, our research has been deeply guided by feminist theories, methodologies, and ethics. However, we often struggle with the limitations of dominant (mostly Western) modes of feminist theorising of the urban, which elide and invisibilise issues and concerns that affect the global majority in embodied and localised manners. Yet, instead of doing away with feminist theories, we are "holding onto *feminist politics of/for social and spatial justice*" (Askins 2018:1284) by attending to situated and pluralities of experiences, power relations, and resistances that move beyond Western dominance and its erasures.

We thus started with two questions that framed our call for contributions to the special issue: (a) How do we theorise the contemporary moment in our (her)story using feminist theories as lens? and (b) What forms of rethinking and undoing do we need to make feminism work for a just urban world in the time of multiple crises? By centralising the contemporary moment in our (her)story, our aim was/is to offer new ways of *theorising* and *doing* feminisms, in plural, that push boundaries of feminist urban theorisations. We hope we have kept this promise as we bring together different geographical and embodied experiences and topics to identify our current collective struggles and put forward theoretical ambitions for feminist thinking that new political situations require.

In doing so, we recognise the necessity of recentring of our thinking and theorisations to the needs of those historically marginalised and invisibilised. Such recentring, we contend, is also necessary to think through what feminism means, offers, and can reconsider in terms of approaches, practices, and politics in urban worlds (re)defined by unprecedented global yet localised turmoil, including but not limited to the retrenchment of colonial legacies and (neo)colonialisms, genocides and wars, housing crises, climate change, gendered, racial and capitalist violences of many forms, and the variety of

resistances and responses to these.

'Feminisms for our times' is thus also a provocation to think beyond what has been apparent to us. Yet we do not ask for a temporal fixity in our thinking and theorising. Instead, we invite everyone to think of 'our times' as drawing on the past, present, and future, not in linearity but in their complexity and messiness. We often witness the past intruding on our present, or more precisely, the resurgence of the past that many of us thought we dealt with only to witness the return of, say, anti-gender, anti-feminist politics (see for instance Pető and Blidon in this issue). The intermingling of the past, present, and future defines 'our times' and forces us to think of the future in ways that take on the learnings of the past with the experiences of the present in imagining the future we envision. That is what we want the readers to think about when we say 'our times' – as a mode of inhabiting the world in the present moment that connects the past and the future as well. Any fragmentation of the timelines is precisely what is being weaponized to limit how we understand our experiences of the world, our cities, and our lives.

'For our times' is also an invitation to engage with the multiple crises the world is going through and their local and global consequences. In particular, we bring attention to the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the Palestinian cause, and all the wars being waged in the name of world order, 'justice', and 'democracy' with the West's continued support. Gaza and Palestine have become symptomatic of the contemporary world order and what is wrong with it. It is our litmus test! We, as the editors, take this special issue as an opportunity to not only make a statement of our position and full solidarity with the Palestinian cause, but also to appeal to those in power who are allowing this onslaught on humanity and who have the capacity to end it, to act and be held accountable. The moment is now!

We thus dedicate this special issue to Gaza. And as the tiniest signifier of this commitment, we use the cover illustration of the issue, made by IUR's resident artist David Peter Kerr, to commemorate and celebrate Gaza. The illustration shows David's interpretation of the articles. Although we do not want to prejudge individual subjective interpretations of the image, we note the celebration of the Palestinian struggle – one of the most brutal attacks on humanity in modern times. For generations to come, we will have to deal with the scars of the genocide. And for generations to come, people will be characterized by authoritarian regimes that teach hatred and annihilation instead of love, care, solidarity, and respect. In this time of White male Western supremacy, there is a need for feminist thinkers and activists to reinvent the idea of equality for all and aim for radical justice. This special issue is a small contribution to fill that need.

The contributions

This special issue hosts a variety of contributions with compelling and grounded research and personal experiences of engaging with feminist politics, activism, and everyday priorities. The contributions thus provide insights into some of the issues that gendered communities face in contemporary cities, as well as how many of us inhabit these cities in very personal yet political ways. Focusing on issues such as gendered access to housing,

migration, queer inclusion, personal experiences of engaging with feminist politics, and practices of collectivisation, the special issue acts as a space where interdisciplinary work is presented in a manner that is accessible both in writing style and as open access. Geographically, these contributions, summarised below, focus on Africa, Asia, and Europe, and on cities like Istanbul, Delhi, Dehradun, Nairobi, and Addis Ababa.

Conducting research that involves engaging with unequal power relations needs a strong awareness. In the reflective piece “Straddling and resisting the scholar–community action boundaries”, Sinéad D’Silva shares her experiences of combining engagement in social justice related community work as an activist with being a scholar within academia in the Global South and the Global North. The conflictual or ambivalent experiences have made her aware of core values, learnt from generations of women and communities. She highlights the importance of being caring, resilient and daring in the personal reflection, drawing on both private and professional experiences.

Marianne Blidon shows the consequences of anti-gender politics in her article “Reclaiming the City. Feminist and Queer Resistance to ‘Anti-gender’ Mobilisations”. In a French setting, she turns not only to the acts of violence that anti-gender regimes instil, but also points at spaces where feminist and queer resistance emerges, adapts, and flourishes. In a rich empirical study, she examines how ‘anti-gender’ mobilisations reshape urban inequalities and how feminist and queer movements challenge them through everyday acts of resistance, solidarity, and creative reimagining. The urban scale is an important fertile ground for these movements in the sense of concentrating infrastructures, media, and activism.

Resistance, urban marginality, and how to conduct research with empathetic allyship are covered in the article by Annapia Debarry and Valentine Opanga, “Urban Invisibles: Feminist perspectives on marginalisation and resistance in Nairobi and Addis Ababa through the lens of embodied research practices”. They elaborate on the concept of ‘dirty research’ as a tool to do research in solidarity around violent processes of urban development and relocation of the ‘urban invisibles’ in Nairobi and Addis Ababa. The authors focus on the embodied and political challenges of researching urban marginalities, analysing the mechanics that render marginalised communities invisible and how these communities resist and adapt to exclusionary practices through “collective strategies for survival and empowerment”.

Politics are also acted out in the home, and in relation to the right to dwell. In two pieces, the act of claiming a safe space to stay is discussed. Dikchha Tiwari and Uttam Kumar Roy focus on the socioeconomic and emotional costs borne by female students living in rental accommodations in Dehradun, India, in their article “Beyond Affordability: The Gendered Challenges of Student Housing”. Their engagement with the intersections of age, gender, and housing and safety concerns in the city pushes the conversation on affordable housing into considering the gendered ‘safety premium’ that women have to pay due to their gender.

Housing is also the focal point of the article by Maya Borean, “Beyond the shelter, one finds care’: Queer kinship and communality in Dutch squats”, which brings in experiences

from the squatting movement in the Netherlands. She analyses the role of squats as spaces and the socialities of queer care practices and politics. Maya's work, located at the intersection of personal and research engagements, highlights how often contested spaces like squats, which are increasingly unwelcomed in the national context of Netherlands, create queer urban spaces of care, collectivity, and support. Both texts highlight the role of care and the act of community building, as well as issues of exclusion, surveillance, and economic and social threats.

As a conclusion, Pallavi Narayan engages "The Flâneuse in Turkish and Indian Fiction: Urban Inequality and Female Migrants" with a feminist re-reading of the urban through exploring the figure of the *flâneuse* in the context of Turkish and Indian fiction. Through a literary analysis of the gendered lived experience of migration struggles and women's aspirations of city life, she brings together perspectives of local historical depth, evolving modernity, and persistent inequalities. Constraints of life and the strength to build a life from scratch are the conditions for women in many parts of the world, and this piece shows the importance of being contextually sensitive as a feminist scholar and highlighting the spatial relations that construct the global power imbalances of our times.

Conclusion

The articles collectively bring attention to the many experiences, subjectivities, power relations and (under)privileges that shape gendered and queer experiences of cities. The contributions also point to the many troubles of engaging with feminist research and praxis, the personal and the political intersecting intimately through embodiments and emotions. In emphasising the inequalities of experiences, structures, and power, the contributors exemplify their commitments to feminist theorising, rooted in the socio-spatial contexts they inhabit. In many ways, this is the essence of feminist theorising, where the micro, personal, and political contexts not only reflect what urgently needs attending to but also their deep roots in globalised structures and processes of inequalities, from colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy to new modes of extractions.

References

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Authors



Syeda Jenifa Zahan

Researcher » DIST, Politecnico di Torino, Italy

Syeda Jenifa Zahan is a feminist and postcolonial urban studies scholar whose work focuses on intersectional relations of power, practices and politics of urban dwelling and structural violence of urbanisation in the Global South. Since the award of her PhD from the National University of Singapore in 2020, Jenifa has undertaken a unique intellectual practice that contributes to theory building, grassroots organizing and to the development of innovative research methodologies. Jenifa's research draws on longitudinal, community engaged and creative ethnographies of urban processes and structures as well as everyday life and embodied knowledge, focusing mostly on Indian cities. Jenifa is currently a Researcher at DIST, Politecnico di Torino, Italy.



Carina Listerborn

Professor » Malmö University

Carina Listerborn is a Professor in Urban Planning at Malmö University and the Director of the research center Institute for Urban Research (IUR). Her research on intersectional spatial experiences, urban and housing justice and planning practices is grounded in methodologies about the everyday. Her research publications cover racism in public spaces, urban planning strategies, intersectional perspectives on safety discourses, housing inequalities and smart cities.