

Gender & Development

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: Volume 32, Issue 1: Gender and public space

Gender & Development (G&D) is a unique journal, offering a forum for the sharing of experiences and analysis between feminist activists, scholars, and women leaders across the globe working in research, policy, and practice. The March 2024 Issue of G&D will focus on gender and public space.

The Context

Recent scholarship on gender and public space in the 'global South'

The meaning and purpose of public space continues to be discussed across the disciplines of geography, urban studies, and gender studies. The topic of gendered access to public space has been widely discussed in both academic and activist contexts in this century, with a significant body of global academic and policy research on the relationship of public space with gender, class, caste, and disability (Harikrishnan 2022; Vankar 2020; Kirmani 2020; Datta 2020; Phadke 2020; Bahreldin 2020; Reyes et al 2022; Gorringer 2016; Rotenberg and Nooruddin 2022). In relation to gender, some of the ways in which public space discussions have been framed include women's safety (Nasser & Hassan 2022; Roy et al 2021; Navarrete-Hernandez, Vetro & Concha 2021; UN Women, Asia and the Pacific n.d.), access (Siwach 2020, Sadeghi & Jangjoo, 2022), right to the city (Beebeejaun 2017; Phadke 2013), and access to basic public services such as safe, accessible and affordable public transportation and sanitation (Madariaga and Zucchini 2019; Sandow et al (2014); Shah 2020; Moreira et al 2021). Public spaces are also vital for the economic, social and political survival of many vulnerable groups including informal workers (such as vendors, sex workers, street performers), human rights workers and those who are without shelter. More recently, academic and activist engagement with public spaces has expanded to include the lens of fun, risk, pleasure, and their gendered implications (Kirmani 2020 and Phadke 2020). The integration of digital technologies in the making and governance of urban spaces in the last two decades have also transformed citizens' conceptualisation and engagement with public space, particularly in terms of how political protests and social movements are organised, conducted and coordinated (Languillon-Aussel 2021). Overall, public space continues to be approached from a range of theoretical and disciplinary lenses and approaches.

Engaging with public spaces in cities, urban peripheries, small towns, and rural spaces

Public space is considered integral to the making of cities, with much research and discussion on the subject focussing overwhelmingly on city centres. Nonetheless, there is growing interest in the meaning and purpose of public spaces in sub-urban and peri-urban areas as well in the context of increasing rural-urban migration, digitalisation, rising political discontent and protests, and the circulation of increasing images of public culture in urban and rural areas. For instance, Soszyński et al. (2022), Veitch (2013), Zhao et al. (2022), Fries-Briggs (2022) and activist interventions like Khabar Lahariya (UNESCO 2016) have added to the understanding of rural public spaces and their relationship/engagement with marginalised groups, while also pushing for critical engagement with the significant heterogeneity in the historic constructions and associations of the "rural" across the global South.

Public spaces and protests

The recent curtailment of democratic freedoms coupled with rising neo-liberalisation, have severely hampered access to public space particularly by marginalised groups (including migrants and refugees, racial and ethnic minority groups, LGBTQI persons, and people living with disability), and their basic rights such as the right to free movement and peaceful assembly have faced serious restrictions. These restrictions and clampdowns amplified during and after the pandemic and associated lockdowns, and were met with powerful resistances and push back by marginalised groups. A few examples include the Black Lives Matter movement that reached its peak in the US and UK in 2020 (Cheung 2020); the farmers' protests against exclusive agrarian policies in India in 2020-21 (Frontline 2022); the removal of colonial symbols and/or installing anti-colonial (Nyamjoh 2016, Mbuyisa and Mndebele 2021), anti-racist (Ndelu, Dlakavu & Boswell 2017), anti-Brahmanical (Sagar 2019, Garalytė 2020) symbols across countries; and the ShutItAllDown protests across Namibian towns and cities to protest sexual gender based violence in October 2020 (Ossenbrink 2020). These powerful collective protests and resistances have brought the issue of urban public space once more to the centre of academic, activist, and policy discourse (Luger and Lees 2022) and to the larger discourse of gender and development.

Feminist decolonial engagement with public space

Given the diverse ways in which public space has been understood and conceptualised, it is necessary to contextualise what public space means, how it is configured and what meanings it invokes across political cultures and geographies, particularly in the so-called 'global South'. Thus, a "decolonizing and decentering of spatial theory, an envisioning of what the beginnings of a decolonized theory of global urban public space might look like", needs exploration (Luger and Lees 2022, 798). The protests organised by ethnically and racially marginalised communities are in effect powerful decolonial articulations that seek to challenge historic injustices stemming from colonialism, slavery and racism that are symbolised in monuments, statues and other figures and embedded in public spaces (Counterview 2020). The decolonization of public space, is thus an epistemological question, that has direct implications for urban public policy, planning and ideas around the 'right to the city' (Cassián Yde 2019).

Key objectives and themes of the Issue:

Objective:

This Issue invites diverse and interesting perspectives to contribute to the body of scholarship and practice on gender and public space. We seek to address the question of gender and public space in a range of contexts and geographies (like urban, rural, small towns, digital spaces, health and humanitarian crises) as well as from multi-disciplinary approaches. We invite scholars, activists, designers, policy makers, planners and artists to share their latest research and best practices to understand how inclusive, equitable, and participatory public spaces and infrastructures could be collectively conceptualised, designed and claimed.

Key themes and questions

1. In what ways do socio-economically marginalised women, sexually marginalised persons, Black people, Indigenous people, Dalits, people living with disabilities and elderly populations experience, relate to, perceive, reclaim and/or reconceptualise public spaces in cities as well as rural areas and small towns?
 - How do their experiences shape access, mobility, and political and economic participation in public spaces?
 - What forms of exclusions, discriminations, violence are experienced by vulnerable groups in difference spaces?

- What strategies (including peaceful protests, mobilisations, political action, and artistic expressions) are people using to resist violence and discrimination, and strengthen their presence?
2. How are neoliberal policies and related processes such as privatisation, restrictions in mobility, and infringement of civil liberties impacting vulnerable groups' relationship with public space?
 3. In what ways are digital and technological transformations shaping human behaviour in relation to public spaces? What implications does this present for women and other marginalised groups?
 - How have digital technologies impacted political protests and social movements and their organising in both physical and digital spaces, and in urban areas and beyond?
 - What is the potential of digital activism around gender and public spaces in enabling local, national, and transnational solidarities and engagements?
 - How and in what ways does the use of digital technologies in urban space management shape individual and collective behaviour in public spaces?
 - How do surveillance technologies map, control and restrict the movement of bodies, particularly marginalised bodies?
 4. What does a feminist decolonial understanding of public space and its related facets such as planning, design, infrastructures, protests, activism, research, and theorisation look like?
 - How are public spaces understood and engaged with in rural areas, small towns and peri urban spaces, as well as digital spaces particularly in the global South and how do these relate to or depart from mainstream 'north centric' urban discourse?
 - In what ways has public spaces been utilised by anti-colonial, anti-racist, anti-caste movements to fight for social justice and civic rights?
 - What is the relationship and interdependencies between online and offline activism, which may often culminate in street activism?
 - What innovative research/methodological approaches (such as collective mapping practices) are being deployed to understand public spaces, which depart from dominant narratives of violence, safety and individual responsibility and steer towards strengthening of individual and collective agency?
 5. How do humanitarian emergencies, health crises, outbreak of conflict and war, etc. impact public spaces and services and those who rely on these for their daily economic, social, and political survival?
 - What are the intersectional implications of the above?
 - How can some of these challenges be mitigated?
 - How do the dynamics between care work, emergency services and "essential services" play out in these challenging contexts?
 6. What are best practices and policies put forward by urban planners, designers, scholars, development practitioners, and humanitarian workers, to work towards inclusive, participatory, and socially just public spaces?
 7. Any other related topics.

Guest Editors for the March 2024 Issue

This Issue will be guest edited by Iromi Perera, Dr. Nazanin Shahrokni, Dr. Pumla Gqola, Dr. Shilpa Phadke and Dr. Sofia Zaragocin Carvajal.

Submissions

Please send your abstract of 250 words with details about your research and preliminary findings in an email attachment to genderanddevelopment.south@gmail.com with the subject line **'Abstract/Proposal submission for March 2024 issue'** by **11 May 2023**. Please include your name, contact details as well as organisational affiliation, if relevant. We will contact you by June 2023 if we would like you to develop your abstract into a full article/essay/photo essay/illustrations.

Guidelines for content:

- Full research article should be no more than 7,000 words including references and excluding abstract and annexures. The annexures can include photographs, maps, images, graphs, etc. Multi-media content can be embedded within the article and should be kept below 500MB file size. Guidelines for contributors can be found here.
- Shorter essays should be 4000 words, and these can include photographs, maps, images, graphs. Multi-media content should be kept below 500MB file size.
- Photo essay and illustrations can be uploaded on Flickr or any other image sharing platforms and then shared with the editorial team.
- All content must be original and authors are responsible for obtaining necessary consent and permission for the use of any third-party material.

For more information on the journal, visit: www.genderanddevelopment.org

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