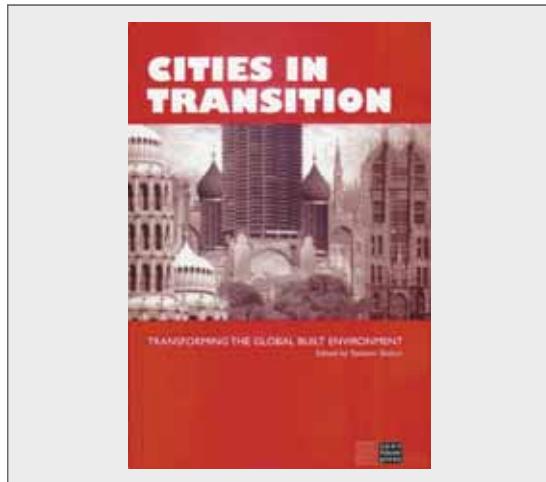


CITIES IN TRANSITION: TRANSFORMING THE GLOBAL BUILT ENVIRONMENT

By: *Tasleem Shakur (editor)*

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In 1963, Constantinos Doxiades wrote his excellent piece titled "Architecture in Transition" in which he referred to the transformations architecture and human settlements were witnessing while critically offering some form of cross cultural comparisons of project cases in both developed and developing contexts. Seven years later, Ernes Erber introduced his arguments to the planning community

by assembling a collection of research and position papers under one theme titled "Urban Planning in Transition," an amalgam that was responsive to the demands placed in the urban planning profession by socio-economic systems and the local politics involved. In 2005, Tasleem Shakur shines on the global community of architects, planners, and decision makers, and introduces a marvelous collection of essays that reflect the spirit and mandates of the present era. In the view of the reviewers, the work of Tasleem Shakur complements the triad started by Doxiades and Erber.

To account for the influences of globalization on architecture, planning and the built environment, Shakur's *Cities in Transition: Transforming the Global Built Environment*, published by Open House Press in 2005, adds greatly to the literature on architecture and planning in the developing world. This book is particularly aimed at both undergraduate and post-graduate students pursuing their studies in the fields of urban geography; architecture and town planning; social and cultural geography; and urban planning and design. As well, academics, practitioners, and decision

makers are important targeted readers of this timely contribution.

Examining recent literature on the impacts of globalization one tends to see two opposing views of its impacts on the global built environment, negative and positive. The positive view looks at globalization in terms of increasing transnational movement of capital, goods, and people, closer ties between countries via new communication technologies, while a growing awareness of risks and dangers that threaten the world as whole takes place. The negative view adopts the position that globalization is simply representing a cultural invasion or a symbolic rape, or at best an economically driven process whereby economics, politics, and culture of one country penetrate other countries. The beauty of this book lies in the fact that it maintains a balanced view where "global," "sustainable," "north-south" terms are seen in an objective manner, with an implicit meaning that pertains to the rapid turnover of ideas, images, patterns, and objects of consumption.

The title of this book, *Cities in Transition: Transforming the Global Built Environment* incites a new form of curiosity and interest in the continuing changes in the built environment. It implies that there is in fact a sort of revolution occurring within the global built environment causing some major alterations and adjustments to many cities across the globe. Consequently, the title sums up how the book captures snapshots of the ever-transforming built environment in developing and developed cities in countries including: Oman, Kuwait, China, Britain, Mexico, Algeria, Egypt, Cuba, India, South Africa, Pakistan,

Turkey, and the Netherlands.

Reviewed earlier by a considerable number of eminent scholars including reviews in the *Global Built Environment Review*, this book, *Cities in Transition: Transforming the Global Built Environment*, has been developed with an expectation to instigate debates on the development of global architecture, planning, and the built environment in cities of the developing world that have gone through and continue to go through major changes. The introduction briefly hints at the major emerging changes occurring in different parts of the world in the 21st century, as discussed in the subsequent chapters. Following the preface and the introduction, the book is divided into five thematic parts: cultural identity in transition; transforming participation and community; redefining the design institution interface; contested space and the new world order; and from multiple to multicultural built environment. The chapters, divided amongst the five thematic parts, in this book are based on explorations and research of academics of various national backgrounds in the fields of architecture and planning. In fifteen case studies, each academic discusses his/her viewpoint on the effect of globalization on architecture and planning in a particular city or region.

The opening section of this book, titled *Cultural Identity in Transition*, emphasizes that some form of distinct change is indeed taking place. The three papers by Souymen Bandyopadhyay, Omar Khattab, and Noha Nasser somehow advocate Amos Rapoport's stance on how architecture has theoretically become more culturally sensitive, though

not necessarily in practical terms. Souymen Bandyopadhyay's *Problematic Aspects of Synthesis and Interpretation in the Study of Traditional Omani Built Environment*, argues that long term field research is key to developing a proper historical understanding of the built environment, more specifically arguing for a more holistic impact of Islamic culture. Similarly, Omar Khattab's *Reconstruction of Traditional Architecture: A Design Education tool*, explores how changes in housing style and the function of the buildings mirrors the changing culture of Kuwait City. To bring this section to a close, Noha Nasser's *South Asian Ethnoscapes: The Changing Landscapes of British Cities* scrutinizes the relationship between the culture of British cities and that of South Asian cities.

The preceding section tells us much about cultural identity as manifested in a dynamic built environment. Notably, identity cannot be fabricated or pre-fabricated; it is a process, not simply a found object and not a self conscious process. It is a human need and a necessity and in Castell's words "*...a process of construction of meaning on the basis of giving priority to a set of cultural attributes over other sources of meaning...*" (Castells, 1997). It also conveys the message that the permanence of specific aspects of the built environment is a constituent of cultural identity.

After carefully surveying the transforming cultural identity worldwide, the book proceeds by examining the Transforming Participation and Community. The first of three papers in this section written by Karen Leeming, titled *Sustainable Urban Development: A Case Study of the Eldonians in Liverpool*, uses the successful urban development model to capture a social,

economic, political, and historical scene of a society that has taken nearly two decades to transform from a dormant to a flourishing one. Furthermore, Pedro Moctezuma-Barragan's *Participatory Planning under the Mexican Volcanoes* argues that community based participatory planning significantly affects social action research. Heading towards the Middle East, Magda Silbey-Behloul's *Informal Transformations of Formal Housing Estates in Algiers and Cairo* identifies the similarities in the transformation of the nature of public housing in line with the socio-economic needs of Algiers and Cairo.

Resulting from participatory community planning, the relationships between the design process and the institutional frameworks must be noted. Through her paper, *Ecological Design in Cuba: Theory and Practice*, Dania Gonzalez Couret accentuates the crucial integration of economic sustainability in the planning process to avoid having sustainable development being merely driven by politics. To add to this, Peer Smet's *Indian Housing Finance Alliances and the Urban Poor*, promotes the housing of the poor mainly with the help of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs). Using 1990s North West England as another example, Michael Clark's *Why not Take a Cybernetic Approach to Sustainable Development?* evidently illustrates the aspects of cybernetics in relation to political mechanism as well as the environment as a whole.

One should note that the preceding sections mark the dramatic transformations in the roles architects, planners, as well as decision makers should (and need to) play. These transformative

roles can be seen in terms of moving from the egoism attitude to facilitation and from the pragmatism attitude to technical assistance and advocacy. As well, they highlight the way in which we approach the planning and design of built environment is transforming from quantifiable attributes to dialectic relationships between people and the built environments, and the socio-political system in which both exist.

In the fourth section of this book, three papers coming from the Western/Developing world, expose that the politicization, as an effect of globalization, of the developing world's built environment has not been sufficiently covered by the literature. Starting with the south-most tip in Africa, Erik Bähre's *Housing for the Urban Poor in Cape Town: A Post Apartheid Dream or Nightmare?* addresses the equalities and inequalities involved in the delivery of housing in South Africa. Going further North into the Asian Continent, Arif Hassan's *The Changing Nature of the Informal Sector in Karachi Due to Global Restructuring and Liberalization* provides an overview of the urban informal sector of Karachi, while highlighting the effects of the New World Order, considering the policies of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Moving towards Eastern Europe, Hülya Turgut's *Culture Space and Squatter Settlement in Istanbul* examines the negative effects of globalization on potential design solutions while simultaneously discussing the environment of the squatter settlements and the socio-cultural aspect of the family in relation to the emerging urbanization of Turkey.

The fifth and final section of this book is titled,

From Multiple to Multicultural Built Environment. It focuses on issues of racism, ethnography, diaspora and multiculturalism as part of the global built environment. Ian Jackson's *Oldham: Separate Development* reviews the sustainable development in the racially divided Oldham. Also covering a European city is Karen Leeming and Tasleem Shakur's *Emerging Problems of Urban Regeneration in a Multiple Deprived Area of Bijlmermeer (Amsterdam)*. This paper examines how the urban restructuring approach in the Netherlands affects the residents of Bijlmermeer, a town on the outskirts of Amsterdam. Finally, to close the final section, Erica Liu's *The Architectural Fairyland of China (1984 onward)* points out that the "copycat" approach to architecture is causing many problems, and thereby recommends solutions to such problems.

This is not all; going along the line of other writings (Teymur, 1996 and Salama, 1999) the book offers insights to politicians, decision makers, and city officials on how cities encompass fragments that represent symbiosis of urban, natural, cultural, and economic processes. With their physical, social, cultural, historical, economic, and institutional presence, cities produce and reproduce much of what today counts as politics, knowledge, and culture. Cities and cases presented and discussed in this volume have another additional dimension that can be called *permanence*, since they reflect the past, present and future of the intersection between place, society, culture, and technology, how they acquire meaning over time.

This is a collective and powerful voice and a must read volume as it goes far beyond the Anglo-American discourse and attempts to

explore dialectic relationships between the built environment, local communities, global trends, and the political systems within which they are created. *Cities in Transition* evidently reveals the many aspects of transformations cities are witnessing today. However, while the book is very rich in scope, issues discussed, and conclusions drawn, it was hoped that the book accommodates more voices from other parts of the world, perhaps a second volume should follow.

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