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Book Review: *Women and the City, Women in the City: A Gendered Perspective on Ottoman Urban History*

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Women and the City, Women in the City: A Gendered Perspective on Ottoman Urban History
**Nazan Maksudya, 2014. Berghahn Books: New York. 1-195 pages. Illustrations,
Photographs, Appendix to some chapters included. \$85, hardcover.**

Reviewed by:
Deniz Zeynep Leuenberger¹

Women and the City, Women in the City is set of edited articles exploring gender and women's contributions to social change, space, and discourse in urban Ottoman environments. The chapters are rooted in theory and historical research which provide descriptive support for the perspectives they explore. Each chapter is also storytelling, illuminating theory with narratives that open the region and the period to the reader. Historical artifacts and memoirs provide a rich account of the gendered experience throughout the work. The seven individual articles are preceded with an introduction that provides an analysis of the relationship between space, time, and urban social change based on theories of gender.

The work describes how the city served as an emancipator of women, a space of autonomy beyond that which the rural and suburban life could provide. The themes, while set in different cities, are tied together by their emphasis on the impact of urban living on the experiences of women inside and outside of the home. They explore the relationships between women and between men and women in the home and in the community. The edited volume is especially interesting because it provides snapshots of a society in transition and change for women, for families, and for communities. These changes result in intended and unintended consequences for women's ability to traverse economic and social conditions of this era.

The authors provide an account of how women navigated complex social norms and legal limitations in order to expand their place in society. The book, in its introductory chapter by the editor, describes how freedoms are negotiated and individual and collaborative change is fostered, regardless of the real and perceived threats of violence and of legal barriers such as women's inability to own real property (pp. 3-5). It highlights the "profoundly gendered" structure of relationships, transactions, and communications in the urban environment, while still providing increased opportunities for economic access for women through formal and informal social constructions (p. 7). These opportunities include the ability to work in home based labor and the expansion of the role of education for women in higher income families, bringing women into the public sphere. This description aligns with the works of authors like Jenny White, who researches women's labor and home based business in Turkey and like Sally Helgesen, who explores the role of web-like communication in female-led professional settings. The transition from work in the home to compensated work through a network of women in business together, is an important theme explored in the works. There is a suggestion that the structure of living in the urban community provides a scaffold on which women in the era can expand their economic and family influence.

In addition to urban space, the book supports urban time as the catalyst for and the protector of social change for women in the Ottoman era. The use of time and scheduling in work and in

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home settings is equated with modernity and professionalism in the city by author Nazan Maksudyan. The management of time for leisure and work becomes another negotiated area of the gendered Ottoman city experience. Illustrations and stories provide evidence of the cultural emphasis on time and on being on time in the disciplined new city life. The urban environment provides the economic opportunity for middle classes and upper classes to emerge, with women's roles changing from caring labor provider in the household, to that of manager of the household. Humorous accounts demonstrating perceived differences in the management of leisure time between men and women highlight the cultural setting in which change and transition take place.

The chapters are also rich with examples providing the historical struggle for power and self-determination by women in the urban setting. They provide examples including anti-veiling policies, notions of beauty and exoticism informed by exposure to "western" societies, prostitution as survival for victims of war, and women's festivals which stretch the traditional roles of women. Each of the narratives describes the impact of segregation and of desegregation of men and women, where in motherhood, work, and marriage are transformed and the roles are redefined. In upper class families, for instance, the addition of servants to the household pushed wealthier women to pursue additional education to educate their own children and to elevate the social and economic status of the family. In times of war, social constructions tied to morality and public behavior are challenged. When survival is at stake for an Armenian woman in one of chapters, her entry into sex work creates dissonance for both men and women in the community. In another case, women left at home when male members of the community are at war adopt public behavior at celebrations that extends their reach from their own households to their community.

Another example by author Sevgi Adak on anti-veiling policies states that while providing additional access to the city, the new policies also provided additional barriers. As veiled women were denied public services, social change inverted the acceptability of non-veiling with veiling. In both cases, policies barred individual decision making by women as to their dress and religious practice in public settings. Veiling continues to be an important cultural and religious issue in the Middle East and across the world, with women being prohibited from wearing and not wearing hijab by national laws.

The discussion of the conflict of "western" and in the "oriental" views of Ottoman women by Nora Lafi also provides an informative historical perspective. The struggle between "modernization" and longer standing cultural values is full of tension, leading to interpretations of Ottoman as both exotic and as "new Parisians" or Europeans. This narrative informs the current clash in the region as to the appropriate level of influence of the "west" on culture, economics, and religion.

Women and the City and Women in the City is a book which is a valuable exploration of historical gendered perspectives in the Ottoman urban settings, not only because it is a rich history, but because it informs theory tied to women's labor and women's caring labor as a whole. The book provides rare cultural evidence about the time period and provides careful theoretical review tied to gender, work, and women. The volume is an informative and nuanced work with carefully selected articles that would be of value in research and teaching tied to feminism, gender and work, caring labor, and the history of urban environments.