

Book Review: Gender and Global Justice by Alison M. Jaggar

*Alison Jaggar aims to bring gender to the centre of philosophical debates about global justice with this recent collection of essays. Chapters cover geographies of gender and migration, taxation and global justice, and sexual violence in an international context, amongst other issues central to our understanding of what justice means today. Although **Gender and Global Justice** is not altogether timely, the book still forms a compelling resource for those interested in global issues, in social and political philosophy, and in feminist theory, given the breadth of conceptual work it contains, writes **Clara Fischer**.*



Gender and Global Justice. Alison M. Jaggar (ed.). Polity Press. December 2013.

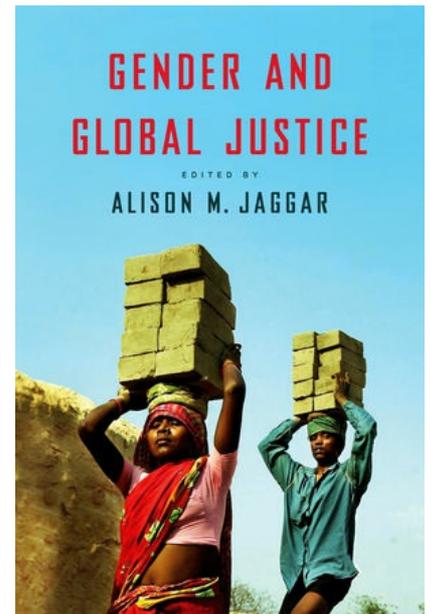
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Being perhaps best known for her classic 1983 text, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Alison Jaggar has, over the decades, consolidated her position as one of the most preeminent philosophers working in social, moral, and political thought in a feminist vein. Her latest edited volume, *Gender and Global Justice*, continues this project of critical feminist theorising by reinscribing gender in philosophical discourses on justice in the wider context of phenomena and events that transcend national borders.

For Jaggar, a too-narrow focus on topics deemed to be of particular interest to women, such as “female seclusion” or “genital cutting”, masks the fact that “all of the issues addressed by global justice theorists have gendered dimensions.” Accordingly, “philosophical work in global gender justice addresses the gendered dimension of war, human rights, global governance, political freedom, nationalism, migration, indebtedness, poverty, climate change and more” (p. 9). *Gender and Global Justice* reflects this all-encompassing approach to philosophical work on global justice, and cogently makes the case for a gendered reading of issues as diverse as migrant care work, reform of global taxation arrangements, poverty, sexual violence, and transnational collectivities.

The book opens with a chapter that acts as “a prologue to a theory of global gender justice”, the purpose of which is to prompt the “right questions” to avoid faulty or misleading thinking about “transnational gendered disparities” (p. 34). Jaggar outlines the inadequacy of some philosophical responses to women’s political under-representation, exploitation in both paid and unpaid labour, and subjection to harassment and sexual violence, and convincingly argues that transnational gendered disparities should not be ignored, should not be treated instrumentally or as naturally occurring, nor should they be blamed on non-Western cultures or on the victims themselves (pp. 20-22). Instead, so Jaggar maintains, transnational gendered disparities are best understood in terms of the concept of “transnational cycles of gendered vulnerability” (p. 24).

Taking her cue from work by Susan Moller Okin and Iris Young, which, in Okin’s case, situated “gender-structured marriage” within “a cycle of power relations and decisions” that reinforced existing inequalities between women and men (ibid.), Jaggar focuses particularly on the cyclical nature of gender inequalities in domestic work and sex work. Jaggar does a good job of highlighting the gendered vulnerabilities faced by women in the globalised industries of domestic work and sex work, noting the non-uniformity of women’s experiences, while drawing out the dangers and exploitative practices of industries that frequently disadvantage women. By conceptualising global gender inequalities in terms of transnational cycles of gendered vulnerabilities, Jaggar successfully focuses the discussion on “the ways in which these disparities are systematically and predictably maintained and intensified by gendered global institutions” (p. 33). I look forward to seeing this fleshed out in a comprehensive theory of global



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gender justice.



Climate witnesses from Cambodia. Credit: Oxfam International CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Abigail Gosselin's chapter, "Global Gender Injustice and Mental Disorders," examines the impact socio-economic injustice and hermeneutical injustice have on "women's self-development and self-determination" (p. 102). Specifically, Gosselin assesses the relationship between these two types of injustice in a global context and the increased prevalence of mental disorders via an analysis of postpartum depression and eating disorders. Gosselin convincingly argues that socio-economic injustice, maintained and exacerbated through privatisation, austerity programmes, the stripping of public services, increased workloads, and isolation, are particularly gendered, and are causally linked to high levels of postpartum depression, with stress being the "most significant non-biological risk factor" involved (p. 105). Eating disorders, which are informed by "oppressive global beauty norms" (p. 112), "potentially harmful and exploitative local cultural gender norms" (ibid.), negative reinforcing of "the connection between female agency and the body" (p. 113), and the spread of Western cultural responses and meanings attached to eating disorders (p. 114), are understood, by Gosselin, within a framework of gendered, hermeneutical injustice.

Drawing on Miranda Fricker's work in social epistemology, Gosselin identifies "structures that perpetuate cultural narratives and conceptual frameworks that narrowly constrain how certain groups of people understand their own experiences" (p. 111) as epistemically unjust, and finds such structures attendant in "constraining norms of femininity" (p. 115) that are connected to the global prevalence of eating disorders among women. Gosselin's topic and approach are novel, with mental disability and distress being largely absent from philosophical explorations of global justice. Importantly, she makes the point that a medical framework lacking in social and political analysis runs the risk of misunderstanding mental disorders, or worse, benefits certain actors, such as pharmaceutical companies, by obscuring important causal factors that must be viewed within a holistic framework of human experience (116).

Overall, I found this book informative, and a useful tool for thinking about global issues through a feminist lens. One major drawback of the volume, however, is its elision of the international financial crisis. Many of the global gendered injustices highlighted throughout its chapters would have benefitted from a discussion of how, and whether, the economic crisis – identified by many commentators as perhaps the most devastating global event

since the Great Depression – has exacerbated gender disparities. The dismantling of public services, the austerity drive, undermining of workers' rights, unemployment, poverty – issues that have already been raised by Jaggar and Gosselin – arguably have an increased resonance now owing to policies adopted by governments since 2008.

While this elision might be attributable to delays in getting the volume published, it is a shame that the book did not seize the opportunity to feed into the wider debate on global gender justice in light of the economic, social, and political events of the last six years. With that said, although *Gender and Global Justice* is not altogether timely, the book still forms a compelling resource for those interested in global issues, in social and political philosophy, and in feminist theory, given the breadth of conceptual work it contains.

Clara Fischer is a Newton International Fellow at the Gender Institute, [London School of Economics and Political Science](#). She is a feminist philosopher with a particular interest in feminist-pragmatism, theories of democracy, and embodiment and shame. Her monograph, *Gendered Readings of Change: A Feminist-Pragmatist Approach*, was published in 2014 by Palgrave MacMillan. [Read more reviews by Clara](#).

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