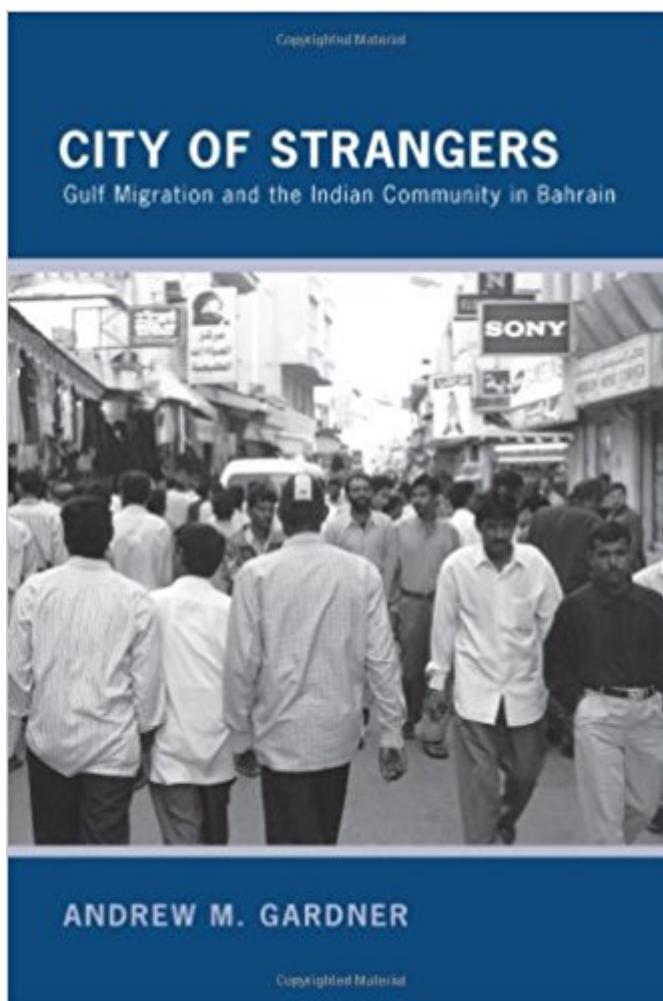


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# City Of Strangers: Gulf Migration And The Indian Community In Bahrain



## **Synopsis**

In *City of Strangers*, Andrew M. Gardner explores the everyday experiences of workers from India who have migrated to the Kingdom of Bahrain. Like all the petroleum-rich states of the Persian Gulf, Bahrain hosts an extraordinarily large population of transmigrant laborers. Guest workers, who make up nearly half of the country's population, have long labored under a sponsorship system, the kafala, that organizes the flow of migrants from South Asia to the Gulf states and contractually links each laborer to a specific citizen or institution. In order to remain in Bahrain, the worker is almost entirely dependent on his sponsor's goodwill. The nature of this relationship, Gardner contends, often leads to exploitation and sometimes violence. Through extensive observation and interviews Gardner focuses on three groups in Bahrain: the unskilled Indian laborers who make up the most substantial portion of the foreign workforce on the island; the country's entrepreneurial and professional Indian middle class; and Bahraini state and citizenry. He contends that the social segregation and structural violence produced by Bahrain's kafala system result from a strategic arrangement by which the state insulates citizens from the global and neoliberal flows that, paradoxically, are central to the nation's intended path to the future. *City of Strangers* contributes significantly to our understanding of politics and society among the states of the Arabian Peninsula and of the migrant labor phenomenon that is an increasingly important aspect of globalization.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"Andrew Gardner's *City of Strangers* is a breath of fresh air. Not only does the book take on an

ill-explored subject, but it does so with sharp insight, unyielding clarity, and all the richness that one expects from good ethnographic writing. . . . Gardner explores in depth the multiple dimensions of the Indian community itself and the ways in which different sections of this community position themselves vis-Ã -vis Bahraini politics and civil society. What results is a more textured picture of the Indian community in Bahrain, one not reduced to a helpless pawn in a broader game of neoliberalism, but that actively participates in fashioning its own identities. . . . The clarity with which Gardner presents his argument, coupled with the bookâ ™s conciseness, makes it an excellent addition to reading lists for any course on the Middle East or migration studies at any level."

•Fahad Ahmad Bishara, Review of Middle East Studies (Fall 2011)"Andrew M. Gardner expertly combines in-depth ethnography with theoretical sophistication in this important look at the complex linkages between labor, migration, globalization, and the structural violence that accompanies the new world economic order. Gardner follows the labyrinthine paths of migrant workers in the Gulf, drawing on powerful qualitative data to complicate existing assumptions about the lives of skilled and unskilled workers in the Middle East's fastest growing region. Beautifully written and compelling, the book sheds light on a population and area of the world that remains understudied despite its rapid emergence onto the global market."

•Pardis Mahdavi, Pomona College, author of *Passionate Uprisings*"Amid the dizzying array of changes taking place across the Persian Gulf, Andrew M. Gardner sheds light on the pervasive but little-studied phenomenon of labor migration. With an anthropologist's fine eye for detail, he chronicles the structural violence that migrant workers experience in Bahrain. By mapping the machinery that produces this violence, and how it shapes the experiences of Bahrainâ ™s transnational proletariat, Gardner has produced an extremely effective and useful analysis of labor migration both in Bahrain and elsewhere in the region. *City of Strangers* is a must-read for anyone interested in the serious study of the Persian Gulf in general and its small sheikdoms in particular."

•Mehran Kamrava, Georgetown University"All over the world there is a great trade in people. Men and women move to rich countries for the dangerous, dirty, and demeaning jobs we don't want. They seek work abroad for exactly the same reasons we would if we filled their shoes: to feed their children, to seek opportunity, to escape oppression. But on arrival they find new oppression as second-class citizens suffering under laws reminiscent of the worst of Jim Crow. Andrew M. Gardner lifts the lid on their lives and the many ways that they adapt and resist, as well as the ways they are beaten down. This is the best of inquiry, engaged but clear-headed, analytical yet ready to make clear the injustices suffered."

•Kevin Bales, president of Free the Slaves, author of *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, and coeditor of *To Plead Our Own Cause*"*City of Strangers* presents new information about the forces that bear on

expatriate workers in Bahrain; Andrew M. Gardner's material on social organizations and newspapers is intriguing. Gardnerâ™s ethnography is compellingly written, and he compares his findings and analysis to other relevant work on the Gulf and on structural violence."â•Karen Leonard, University of California Irvine

I read this book a while ago, and so can't remember all the details. This is a good book on a very important matter. However, I remember feeling that Andrew Gardner's assessment of inter-ethnic/nationality relations in the middle east is very typical of a westerner's views about race relations among non-western people. It's disappointing when one is left wondering if such views arise from rosy ideas stemming from an unquestioning belief in the official propaganda about multiculturalism in the West. The reasons for Andrew's conclusions about inter-nationality relations in the middle east are far more complex and require a book in itself. Precisely because all the examples Andrew mentions in his analysis are not uncommon experiences in the allegedly more tolerant and liberal societies. But the book is quite good. Hopefully this is only a beginning by the author, as the subject requires more extensive work. For those who are aware of this huge problem Gardner's book is really a gem, because the author has done decent field work, and raises some important questions. I wish the book, in this digital age where images are not really hard to generate, had better photos showing the plight of the people labouring in the "Gulf". I wish I could say more about this book, but since my memory isn't all that good I can only say buy it or read it, if you've had anything to do with the regimes of the "Gulf".

I thought this book was very boring. I was required to read this book and it was very hard to get through it.

It gives the history of Bahrain from the perspective of foreign labor concerns. Its very well put together with current issues as well. It gives a great perspective of current conflicts between foreign workers in Bahrain and how they are treated. Very good book.

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