

FEMALE MOBILITY:
WOMEN TRAVERSING GENDERED PUBLIC SPACES IN URBAN KARACHI

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Abstract

In an attempt to explore the inter-play of class and gender that dictates female mobility, this is a qualitative case-study centered on the experiences of a working-class woman who travels via public transport and on-foot as well as two upper-middle class women who mostly travel in private and semi-private motorized vehicles. Combined with participant observations, a semi-structured interview and informal conversations, it is based on an ethnographic investigation that was conducted from October to December 2019 in Karachi, Pakistan. This study employs a comparative analysis through an intersectional lens of class and gender that is used to explore how women navigate the gendered public spaces in the city of Karachi i.e. what opportunities are curtailed for working-class females as opposed to upper- middle-class females due to their differing mobility patterns; how does being a female affect the access and the safety, resilience, and perception of danger that one has towards public transport; and, how does the architecture and structure of public transportation reaffirms patriarchy within society. The paper also studies the way class binaries are built into the material realities of the city, and how public transportation is used as a means to maintains those boundaries.

Keywords: *Women, Mobility, Gender, Class, Working-Women, Upper-Middle Class, Karachi, Urban, Public Spaces, Harrasment, Transport.*

Introduction

Female mobility within the city of Karachi remains an arduous task, no matter what mode of public transportation is used. Despite being the only port city of Pakistan that generates 15% of the country's GDP and 32% of the industrial base, the condition of public transport in Karachi has severely deteriorated over time (Hasan & Raza, 2015). With a population of over 23 million people, Karachi consists of only 4.5% of the total vehicles fleet and caters to around 42% of passengers demand (Ahmed, 2019). Every year, quite a significant number of private vehicles are added to the roads of Karachi, "but the number of public transport registered buses has declined from 22,313 in 2011 to 12,399 in 2014, of which 9,527 are operative" (Hasan & Raza, 2015, p.5). Transport-related problems such as traffic congestion, broken pavements, harassment in public spaces, rising fuel prices and fares, and inadequate public modes of transportation altogether contribute to the unpleasant and laborious travel experiences of Karachi.

Although the inability to access public transport may be felt by a wide cross-section of the population, substantial scholarship suggests that the impact on women is most severe because of poverty and perceptions owing to gender norms that hinder female mobility at large (Hassan & Raza, 2015; Adeel, 2017). Gender, at the intersect of class, interacts fundamentally with public transport systems and thus makes travel patterns and mobility behavior "one of the most clearly gendered aspects of life" (Allen, 2018, p.10).

According to the World Bank statistic of 2018, females make 48.54% of the total population in Pakistan. Even though women constitute nearly half of our population, they remain significantly immobile and are reported to make minimal daily trips (Adeel, 2017). Their mobility patterns continue to be severely impacted than men "due to their special mobility needs in the conservative sociocultural settings of the state", which are made worse by poorly-designed public spaces and lack of

security (Adeel, Anthony & Zhang, 2013). Despite this, the scholarship on the lived experiences of gendered-mobility in Pakistan, specifically in Karachi, remains scarce.

In this research, mobility as a concept is not confined to the physical traveling of people within a certain geography. Instead, we believe that mobility patterns are socially and variably produced within space and time, and have visible effects on women's empowerment, identity, and safety, and access to public spaces. Therefore this qualitative case study explores how gender, at the intersex of class, impacts women's mobility in the gendered spaces of urban Karachi, and how that results in the differing mobility behavior and patterns. It attempts to explore the following: what opportunities are curtailed for working-class females as opposed to upper-middle-class females due to their differing mobility patterns; how does being a female affect the access and the safety, resilience, and perception of danger that one has towards public transport; and, how does the architecture and structure of public transportation reaffirm patriarchy within society. The paper also studies the way class binaries are built into the material realities of the city, and how public transportation is used as a means to maintain those boundaries.

Literature Review

Adeel (2017) in his study, *Gender inequality in mobility and mode choice in Pakistan*, reveals that 95% of women, from low-income backgrounds in Pakistan, rely on non-motorized trips for their daily mobility. Since they do not have a stable source of income, women cannot afford automobiles, and hence have to rely on public transport or on-foot for most of their travel (Adeel, Anthony, Zhang, 2013). Thus, income becomes a key factor in determining access to transport.

Due to lack of proper footpaths, discontinuous sidewalks, and poorly

designed public spaces, women also face major issues whilst traveling (Allen, 2018).

Mobility does “not merely refers to the mobile individual,” but also the kind of interaction and connection one has with public spaces and people in their surroundings, thus making the larger socio-cultural context a very important aspect in determining one’s mobility behavior (Adeel, 2017, p.2). Gender is a socially constructed phenomenon, whereby gender norms and social mores inadvertently come to define one’s mobility pattern; feminists have long explored how women’s stereotypical association with domesticity determines the purpose, the length, the time, the route, the destination and the mode of choice of their traveling (Hanson, 2010; Adeel, Anthony & Zhang, 2013; Ali, 2011). Women fear incidents of catcalling, glaring, physical abuse and thus the movement of women in urban cities is deeply impacted by occurrences of public harassment and local surveillance (Adeel, 2017; Ali, 2010)

Ali (2010) in his study, *Voicing Difference Gender and Civic Engagement among Karachi’s Poor*, elaborates on how Pakistani women, especially from the working-class, are regarded as family honor, and therefore any unnecessary interaction – sexual or non-sexual- with male strangers in public spaces can result in the loss of social honor. Thus, men maneuver public spaces with greater ease and liberty than women because women’s interaction with routes and spaces is “constrained by moral discussions about their sexuality” and societal conformity (Ali, 2010, p.317). Nevertheless, Ali (2010) also suggests how, despite their social and sexual vulnerability, working-class women come to negotiate and counter-act such occurrences of harassment with confidence and resilience.

Furthermore, Uteng (2012) argues that the architecture of public transportation in developing countries is designed in a way that reinforces patriarchy and class binaries. His study highlights that

traveling and movement involves bodies via gendered contextualized spaces, which is that traveling and movement involves bodies via gendered contextualized spaces, which is mediated through transport technology that is also often acutely gendered (Uteng, 2012). Hence, traveling does not occur through neutral physical spaces. This is supported by Winner (1980) in *Do Artifacts have Politics?* who explains that the design of technology comes with an inherent bias and is laden with political and power asymmetries aimed for maintaining a certain social order and effect. He describes how the design of the over-bridges of park ways of Long Island in New York were designed in a that the public buses bringing “poor people and blacks, who normally used public transit” were kept out of the Jones Beach that was dominated by the white upper-class (Winner, 1980, p.124). Hence, the modern material culture should not be solely judged for its efficiency or otherwise, but for “the ways in which they can embody specific forms of power and authority”. (Winner, 1980, p.121)

This is why Hanson (2010) proposes that women’s voices should be included in the planning process and policy framework, as they are crucial in designing an effective, intersectional urban transport infrastructure.

Methodology

In order to explore human attitude towards female urban mobility, this study makes use of an ethnographic research conducted from October to December 2019, in Karachi, Pakistan. Participant observations are widely used for capturing human perceptions, as they allow us to transcend the role of an observer by actively engaging with the lived reality of the participant (Malinowski, 1992). Therefore, combined with informal conversations and observations on the streets of Karachi, the chief strength of participant observation in our research was to contextualize what people said in terms of what they actually did. Our personal experiences as engaged researchers served as a valid source of experiential data, which helped us interpret the views and actions of others.

Through purposive sampling, a female participant from a lower working-class background was identified, who worked as a maid in Gulistan-e-Johar, Karachi, Pakistan. She was chosen because she belongs to a low-income group and travels on-foot and via public vehicles – widely used modes of transportation by working class – that are the focus of our research. A semi-structured, narrative interview of the participant was also taken on October 27, 2019, at her house. Alongside this, we held numerous conversations with her during our multiple visits to her house, her relative's house, and the places she goes to. The approach of using mixed methods of data collection (participant observation, semi-structured interview, on-ground conversations) on the same phenomenon, known as triangulation, was employed to increase the validity of our findings and to avoid any possible biases that may have arose from the use of a single method (Salkind, 2010). Triangulating our data helped us obtain a more evidence-based and comprehensive picture on women's mobility behaviors.

The contents of the interview and our informal on-field conversations with the participant were transcribed verbatim, and, in order to avoid losing the essence and meaning of the spoken native language in the process of transliteration, they were not translated from Urdu to English (Regmi, Naidoo, & Pilkington (2010).

Before accompanying the participant on-ground, informal meet-ups were also done to build a better rapport and mutual trust, so that she felt comfortable in letting us travel with her. Bearing in mind the ethical considerations, the participant's informed consent was audio-recorded, and she also consented to be identified by name.

Participants' Profile

Azra Parveen is a 37-year-old maid who lives in the *katchi abadi* (informal settlements) of Gulistan-e-Johar, Block 7, Karachi, Pakistan,

and offers domestic services like cleaning, mopping, laundry and cooking among other things to multiple households in Gulistan-e-Johar, Block 7. She has two sons and two daughters; three of them go to school while one daughter is married. Her average monthly income is PKR.15-18,000. Azra's husband does not have a stable source of income, as he rarely works, though he sometimes drives a rented rickshaw. This makes Azra the sole breadwinner for five family members including herself. Azra travels on-foot or sometimes in a *qingqi* (motorcycle with six-seater carriages attached) to and from her work. She uses buses only when she has to go to far-off places.

For this study, we as two, upper-middle class women travelled using public transport in order to conduct participant observations, which served as a first-hand experience. It also allowed us to compare our mobility experiences against Azra's, which helped us obtain insights about the differing patterns in female mobility across social class. Since our own experiences are a part of this study, below is a brief profile of both the researchers.

Hiba Shoaib is a twenty-one-year-old undergraduate student at Habib University. She is a full-time student and apart from internships, does not work. From her university to home in Gulistan-e-Johar, she usually travels in her father's car, or by using a rickshaw.

Zara Imran is a twenty-year-old undergraduate student at Habib University. She is also a full-time student and apart from internships, does not work. From her university to home in North-Nazimabad, she travels by carpooling with a friend, or by using semi-private Careem or Uber.

Findings

Gender-Norms Affect Mobility Patterns and Opportunities

“Mein bahar kam karti hun. Mein sabzi khareedti hun.

Kabhi kabar, mein apni beti ko school se leti hun, or kubhi apni poti ko doctor k pas lekar jati hun.” (Azra, 2019; interview)

(I go outside for work. I do grocery. Sometimes, I pick my daughter from school and other times I take my granddaughter to the doctor).

Azra’s statement above reveals how most of her movement outside her home is directed by the need to look after her house and her family members. Whether it was to accommodate her household grocery, children’s school-hours or their sick days, the trips that Azra made were related to her domestic chores. This supports the idea that women in Pakistani society are largely relegated to the status of care-givers, whereby strict gender roles dictate much of female mobility patterns and thus contribute “to the persistence of gender inequalities” within our society (Allen, 2018, p.11) Female mobility patterns are primarily rooted in the stereotypical gender roles that they are expected to conform to, which altogether impacts their route, mode of raveling, purpose, time, etc. Throughout our conversations with Azra, she never spoke about any trips she took for leisure or self-care, thereby reflecting the view that when a female goes outside, it largely must be for the benefit of her household. This is supported by Hanson (2010), who discusses how perceived gendered ideologies between men and women define their daily mobility patterns and interactions with the public. Women and femininity are equated with shorter movements, household trips and private spaces (as indicated in Azra’s statement), whereas men and masculinity are equated with public spaces, expansive movement, and longer business trips (Hanson, 2010).

“Betey k pass bike hai. Miyan k pas rickshaw. Woh jub or jahan chahein chale jate hain. Mera beta mujhe kam par chor nahi sakta kyonke woh school chala jata hai.” (Azra, 2019; interview)

(My son has a bike. My husband has a rickshaw. They go outside wherever and whenever they want to. My son cannot drop me to my work because he has to leave for his school).



Figure 1: Qingqis in Karachi. Photo by, Fahim Siddiqi (2014)



Figure 2: Asra walking on-foot towards her house. Photo by, Hiba Shohaib

The male members of Azra's family own personal automobiles and use it for their own benefit, while the female members are left with the option of non-motorized modes. This illustrates that the ownership of automobiles is highly gendered; within a larger context, women mostly do not own automobiles, which is why their main mode of traveling is on foot or via public transportation (Uteng, 2012). Thus, women make

a higher percentage of trips on foot and also travel on slower modes of transportation like *qinqgis*.

The fact that women are unable to access efficient transport sources to the city, in turn, adversely impacts their employment opportunities. Consequently, they tend to restrict their search for jobs closer to their home, unless they have their own personal cars, as Azra further stated:

“Mein roz chaar gharon mein jaati hun, sub ek dosre se qareeb hain aagey peechey gallion mein tou sahoorat rehti hai.”

(I go to four houses every day. All of them are close to each other in different lanes, so it is convenient for me)

This demonstrates that women tend to seek employment opportunities not far from their own area even if they have to compromise on their salary package. Their lower degree of participation in the labor market is reflected in their limited travel patterns, which explains why women find it increasingly difficult to fight poverty and income inequality (Asian Development Bank, 2015). Hanson (2010) views mobility as a means of empowering people and an access to opportunity. For him, there lies a strong connection between women’s ability to get to places (offices, parks, hospitals) and their economic independence and livelihood. In third-world countries, including Pakistan in the context of this case study, women’s inability to travel long distances has significantly curtailed their economic opportunities in comparison to their male counterparts.

“Ab meine apni beti ko government school mein karadia hai kyonk private school buhat dur tha. Ab osko kon roz chorey or ley school se. Mujhe hamesha uski parwa rehti thi. Iss government school mein parhai itni achi nahi liken kamaskum yeh qareeb tou hai ghar se, or saasta bhi.”
(Azra, 2019; interview)

(Now, I have shifted my daughter to a government school because the private school was very far away from my house. Who would drop and pick her from

school every day? I was always concerned for her safety. The curriculum in the government school is not so good, but at least it is close to my house and cheap too).

This statement further shows how educational opportunities for young girls, especially from rural areas, become limited when schools are far away from homes. Azra was forced to shift her daughter from a private to a government school, despite the poor education quality, due to a lack of physical access to the school. This is consistent to what Uteng (2012) explains how the unavailability of cheap mode transportation is one of the “important contributing factors to girl’s low educational achievement” (p.22); according to the 2010 statistic, “for every 10 boys enrolled in primary school, only 8 girls are enrolled” in Pakistan (Asian Development Bank, 2015).

In addition to this, Azra was also concerned about sending her daughter to the school because of the dangers associated with girls traveling alone to far-off and isolated places. This is why, girls tend to have poor educational achievements because parents prefer to withdraw their daughters from school if they have to walk alone in public spaces that are perceived as unsafe (Adeel, 2017). Here, it should be noted how Azra’s concern about her daughter’s safety is in stark contrast to the mobility patterns of Azra’s son, who not only owns a bike of his own, but also enjoys the liberty of traveling to places far from home.

Poorly Designed Public Spaces

Azra further stated:

“Koi sahi chalne ka footpath nahi hai. Barishon mein kitni baar khadon mein girjati hun, pata nahi chalta gutter kahan se behraha hai. Ooper se bijli ki taar pani mein girjae tou current lagskta hai. Islie mein apni beti ko zada door nahi jane deti.” (Azra, 2019; interview)

(There are no proper footpaths. In rainy days, I have fallen into ditches a lot of the time. I can never know from where the sewage line is flowing. On top of that, if the electric wire falls into the water, then one can get electrocuted as well. This is why I don't send my daughter to far-off locations).

Azra's worry for her daughter and her safety is amplified because they travel on foot and a lack of proper footpaths, drainage, or sewage system makes their travel increasingly difficult. Azra mentions that when it rains, there is a danger of getting electrocuted as wires fall down in the un-concealed potholes and ditches. We see here how the condition of the roads and footpaths are extremely unfriendly to women who are travelling throughout the city on foot. Even During our visits to her house and her workplace, we observed a lack of street-lights, proper and separate walk-ways; we had to maneuver our way alongside rickshaws and bike riders that moved on the same lanes as us, and sometimes, they used to closely pass by us in such a high speed that it would give us shudders. Side-walks were also often filled with parked cars, cycles and motorbikes, all of which made it increasingly difficult for us to walk on-foot.



Figure 3: No proper walkways; rickshaws and bike-riders moving on the same lanes as us. Photo by, Hiba Shoaib (2019)

Moreover, women, especially if they were chauffeuring kids and/or the elderly or had grocery bags, were often seen standing and waiting at the edge of the wide, signal-free lanes that were continuously inundated with heavy traffic. Sometimes, we had to wait for about 10 to 15 minutes for the traffic to slow down just so we could cross the road safely. The pedestrian over-head bridges were either inadequate or not properly located. Whereas the men standing beside us would quickly cross the roads whilst running, uncaring of anything else because they were mostly lone travelers.

A study conducted by CIVITAS (2016), *Smart choices for cities, Gender equality and mobility: Mind the gap!*, similarly explains how poorly designed public spaces such as inadequate crossing-nodes, narrow pavements, “too many car parking bays along inner roads” (p.31), lack of streetlights, all contribute in an unpleasant travel experience, especially for women as they make up a larger portion of the walking population (Adeel, 2017). Hassan and Raza (2015) explain how people in Karachi often find alternative arrangements like “like cutting the barrier in the middle of the road so as to squeeze through or to jump over” but women find this difficult to do so (p.33) This illustrates how the infrastructure of the city reinforces that women must make shorter and minimal trips outside of the house for the sake of their safety.

Safety Concerns in Public Spaces

Upon asking Azra if you had ever experienced any instance of harassment, she replied:

“Badtamaeez tou har jagah hote hain. Dou teen dafa tou aisa hoa k admion ne gari roki, aur poocha, aao chalna hai?” (Azra, 2019; interview)

(Shameless people are everywhere. A couple of times,

drivers stopped their cars in front of me, and asked: do you want to come along?)

We faced a similar incident whilst waiting for a *qinngi* at the Askari Park stop. A man on a motorbike stopped in front of us and stared at us uncomfortably for a couple seconds. Then without uttering a single word, he pointed towards the back of his empty motorbike seat in an attempt to offer us a lift. We immediately stepped back and turned our face away from him, choosing to act as if we never noticed him.

This is reflective of how women traversing public spaces are not safe from harassment, regardless of the transportation mode (Allen, 2018). Lack of proper and sheltered bus stops makes the waiting even worse.

We often took the bus from Habib University (Gulistan-e-Johar) to NIPA (Gulshan-e-Iqbal), and while we would wait for the bus to arrive, we would be leered at and catcalled by men passing us. Other women standing near us, waiting for buses or rikshaws would undergo similar harassment, and would huddle silently in a corner or would keep moving around which is consistent to what Ali (2010) explains that “women may be subject to harassment in narrow alleys...long waits at the bus stops of the unpredictable public transport system” (p.315).

Once while we were taking a bus back from Saddar to Gulistan-e-Johar, we had to wait for twenty minutes, and in that time, we kept walking around the area, as standing in one position made us feel more vulnerable.

Another time when we accompanied Azra to one of her workplaces, we noticed a group of men sitting at a distance, and Azra instantly switched to a longer and more inconvenient route. Very cavalierly, she told us that this is something she had to do, which demonstrates that women’s safety in public spaces is greatly influenced by the “unknown” people on a daily basis (Ali, 2010, p.316).

It shows how, most times, women, out of fear are compelled to take longer and more difficult routes just to avoid possible instances of harassment.

In addition, this also reflects how public spaces are greatly dominated by “*ghair* (unrelated) men” (Adeel, 2017, p.3). Adeel (2017) elaborates that, within the context of South-Asian communities, women’s “unwanted interactions with men” may even lead to a “loss of honor” (Adeel, 2017, p.3). This indeed stands true to the culture and mentality of Pakistan, whereby female mobility is often associated with family’s social code of honor (Adeel, 2017; Ali, 2011). This is one of the reasons why “veiling” becomes so important for women as it is linked with respectability and is also believed for providing a sense of safety to them (Adeel, 2017, p.3). This is why, every time we would travel in public spaces (on-foot or on a public vehicle), we would ensure taking a black *chaadar* (a big shawl) covering us from head to toe. Despite the fact that we do not take *chaadars* in our normal lives, and that handling the *chaadar*, which would often slip, while boarding and moving made our trips increasingly difficult, but we continued taking them under the assumption that a *chaadar* would help deter unwanted stares from us. Hassan and Raza (2015) similarly describe how it is “common for women to wear the hijab or cover their heads while travelling and to remove them once they are in their work place” (p.33).

However, as Uteng (2012) notes, the proximity to these *ghair* men, “veiled or unveiled” does not matter (p.11); women still fear instances of heckling and constant staring at a distance from men whereas, in crowded spaces, women are afraid of being pinched and physically molested. This was true in our case because taking a *chaddar* did not help deter the usual male gaze from us.

Furthermore, women are hesitant to be outside in the dark and prefer being accompanied by a male member of their family just to ensure their own safety. This was brought to our notice when, one time, we



Figure 4: One of the researchers wearing a black chaadar as she walks on-foot in a public space in Gulistan-e-Johar. Photo by, Hiba Shoaib (2019)

were supposed to walk with Azra to her relative's house and the sun was about to set. She called her son very anxiously and said: "*aaj daer hogae hai, andhera hone wala hai, tum ajao jaldi.*" (Today, it has gotten late, it is about to get dark. Come fast) He came to pick her up just so he could walk with her and, by extension, us.

Similarly, when one of us have to take a rickshaw back to our house after taking evening classes, we choose to take a longer route because the usual route from the university does not have street lights. We only take the usual shorter route in the morning, or when we are being picked by our father. Otherwise, we deliberately opt for a longer one that although costs us a higher fare, but the dark hours after sunset, make us feel more vulnerable.

Firstly, these acts reveal how women's mobility patterns are directed according to the time of the day. That is to say, in the day-light hours women feel safer about their mobility whereas "travelling out of daylight hours are considered risky" (Allen, 2018, p.16). Secondly, it also serves as a reinforcement for notions of masculinity and femininity; a man is considered to be brave and strong, Azra's son's simple presence, despite his young age, is a source of protection for the women travelling with him. On the other hand, a woman being alone on the street in the dark is seen, but also is vulnerable. Being accompanied by men makes it much safer for women walking on the streets, as Adeel (2017) also states, having a male "escort" becomes important for women for walking trips (p.3). At the same time, it, yet again, solidifies the belief that women require the protection of men every time they have to step outside of the house, and are thus better off staying in-doors (Adeel, 2017).

We also noticed how acts of harassment affect working-class and upper-middle-class women differently. When Azra narrated to us how often she got solicited by cars, we noticed her casual and nonchalant tone as if these instances were just another mundane occurrence and "*roz marrah ki batein.*" (An everyday occurrence).

In contrast, one time, when we were harassed on the bus as a man poked us from behind, we were paralyzed from fear. We stood silent and helpless, and could not confront the perpetrator. At another instance, when we were waiting for a rickshaw at the NIPA bus stop, we realized that we were being followed by a man who constantly kept on staring and was moving towards us. Panicked and scared, we immediately boarded the bus in front of us, just so we could be in a crowd, even though that bus would not take us to our intended destination. We chose to alter our route out of concern for our safety, despite it being more inconvenient for us.

"Tumhara haal tou mein aisa kardun, khudi joote maro. gireban se pakrun, dou teen thapar lagaun." (Azra, 2019;

interview)
 (I'd beat you up myself; grab you by the collar and slap you twice).

At another instance we were sitting in a *qinqi*, with a girl beside us, whose dressing made it apparent that she belonged to a low-income household, and saw her confront the man sitting in front of her: “*Boorey mia, ab kara tou hashar dekhna*” (Old man, if you do it again, just see what I do to you). We were surprised to see how she was able to take charge of this situation and was able to scold a man who constantly kept staring her.

From this example, we can see this idea of resilience; resilience that is bred out of necessity and hardship. Women from the lower-working class have no choice but to get out of the house and earn even if they get followed around by men. Dwelling on these instances would provide them with nothing, so they choose not to, think about them or report them. Ali (2012) in his study, *Women, Work and Public Spaces: Conflict and Coexistence in Karachi's Poor Neighborhoods*, also highlights how working-class tend to “counter and contest” (p.592) their social vulnerability and economic uncertainty as an everyday practice. Although working-women also relay their fear, discomfort and vulnerability in connection to public spaces, they still “seem very confident about their public lives” and are ready to “..answer back and scold those who made lewd comments...” (Ali, 2010, p.318). Ali (2012) further writes,

“Poor women brave urban public transport systems without the social protections that class bestows on elite women” (p.596).

As upper-middle class women we are not used to travelling in public modes of transportation or on-foot because our socio-economic status bestows us with enough privilege and money to use semi private transport services like Uber, Careem or Airlift. We tend to save

ourselves from instances of possible harassment that occur in public spaces and public transport almost on a daily basis. When such instances, however, do occur, we find it difficult to take charge or to counteract since we are so unused to them. During the early days of our fieldwork, we were sitting in a bus once and a man kept poking us. We never confronted him, just kept squirming out of his way and our first thought was that we had to stop taking the bus now. This reflects how our thoughts and attitudes are based on the social protection and economic security afforded to us by our class. Since upper-middle class women rarely have to worry about meeting their ends financially, they seek more expensive, semi-private alternatives that, to an extent, guarantee a relative amount of safety. Adeel (2017) further states that the share of walking-trips among women significantly decreases “in the top income quintile households, that reflects an increased automobile reliance among women from the higher income households” (p.11). This shows that working- women, who struggle with making ends meet have no other option but to travel on-foot or/and cheap, also unsafe, public vehicles like buses and *qingqis*. Therefore, working-class women “need to negotiate” with such unpleasant experiences “on a daily basis” so much so that they tend to adopt a rather nonchalant, “confident” and a resilient attitude towards such ‘mundane’ occurrences of harassment (Ali, 2011, p.596).

Class Dictates Mobility Attitudes

As researchers, we tried our best to fit in within our surroundings but our socio-economic status was always apparent in the way we spoke and stood on public transport. This difference in attitude between classes was made more evident by others’ behavior towards us. For example, the bus conductor always spoke to us at a volume level lower than his normal one, and most times would not even return the change owed to us and neither did we ever haggle for money. However, this one time, after waiting for a few minutes (assuming that the conductor would return us owed money himself) we deliberately asked for the cash back, and he gently replied: “*jee baji bs aap he ko khula derha tha*” (Yes, sister. I was just actually giving you the change)

This is in contrast to Azra's statement who told us,:

“Ek baar conductor ne mujhe mere Rs.5 wapis nahi diye. Meine osse kaha k tum zada kiraya maang raheo, yeh rate nahi hai. Pehle tou who gussa hoa or badtameezi ki liken phir osne mere baqaya paisay wapis kardie kyonk mein lare jarhi thi” (Azra, 2019; interview)

(One time, the bus conductor did not return Rs.5 to me. I told him that you are charging me more than the actual fare. At first, he got angry and was being rude, but then he gave me the money because I would not stop arguing)

This shows the unspoken rules of commuting with people from different classes. Our strong financial standing was apparent to the conductor. He knew a mere Rs.10 or Rs.20 would not make a difference in our lives and that we would not make a scene. However, according to Azra's statement, and even in his behavior with other working-class women, we observed that he always spoke a little more harsh and loud. Even in Hassan and Raza's (2015) study, one of their interviewees from a low-income background explained how she has “sleepless night thinking of the haggling she will have to do with the bus conductor the next morning so as to retrieve the extra money” (p.33). This indicates how a person from a particular class tends to behave differently, adopts various tactics, and embodies an altered body language in order to communicate with people from a different class on public transport.

Gender Bias and Class Binaries within the Architecture of the Transport System

In a standard-sized bus, there are twenty-four seats and only six of them are in the women's section in the front of the bus, which is segregated by a metal cage. The fact that women have been allotted a tiny space reflects a gendered belief that women do not make long business trips and thus, do not require a lot of seats. The infinitesimal allotment of seats for women also reinforces that women should stay indoors unless

seats for women also reinforces that women should stay indoors unless absolutely necessary since there is no place for them outside. The metal cage reinforces the gender roles between men and women as the segregation is reflective of how society thinks men are the breadwinners whereas women make small and insignificant trips outside of the house. The construction of the bus validates and reinforces the patriarchal nature of our society, where the transport system actively discourages women to step outside of the house. This is just one example of how women are victims of systemic patriarchy.



Figure 5: Women's small section in front segregated by a metal cage from men's bigger section at the back. Photo by, Saiyna Bashir (2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/world/asia/pakistan-coronavirus-tablighi-jamaat.html>

On public buses, the steps are steep and the support bars are very high as Azra mentioned: “*Meri height choti hai. Mera hath ooper dandey tak nahi puhanchta. Meri liye buhat mushkil hojata hai. Buhat dhake parte hain.*” (I have a shorter height. My hand cannot reach the bar of the bus. It gets very difficult for me. People push me all the time). During our bus rides, the bus would often come to a stop with a lurch and all women passengers who were standing had to hold onto the bars very tightly to avoid falling. For women, this is hard as it demands physical

strength and height to reach out to grab the support bars.

Apart from this, there are a plethora of issues that are specifically faced by women on bus rides. For instance, it was also observed that bus rides especially become difficult for women who have small kids because they have to make sure their children get on the bus as well while the bus drivers won't slow down (Hassan & Raza, 2015). Additionally, women's clothing can also become an impediment as Azra said, "*Ek baar bus mein charhte hoe mera dupatta paun mein phansgya tha or mein girte girte bachgae.*" (One time while climbing onto the bus, my scarf got stuck in my foot and I almost fell). Given that women are mostly wearing shalwar kameez, dupattas, veils, etc., their clothing becomes an extra hassle. In contrast, men usually don't face such problems since they are often lone travelers, and the architecture of the bus, with its high bars and assigned seats do not put them at a disadvantage. Even when bus seats are full, men can sit on the roof of the bus, whereas women are squashed into a tiny place with all their kids.



Figure 6: A usual sight of a public bus in Karachi. Photography by, ARY (2019). Retrieved from: <https://arynews.tv/en/karachi-transport-ittehad-withdraw-strike-call/>

At first glance as well, the public bus is a masculine space, it is dominated by men sitting inside or on top of it, men standing, and

hanging to its doors. These observations and experiences are in accordance with Uteng's (2012) study that examines the "built environment" of the city (p.12). He elaborates on how physical infrastructure is a manifestation of patriarchy, which is mediated by technology that, in turn, tends to embellish the existing power-asymmetries in the production and control of time and space between men and women (Uteng, 2012). The transport infrastructure is not only embedded with gender bias but also reproduces and maintains class binaries, creating boundaries within the material realities of the city. The fact that public buses barely go to Shakra-e-Faisal and areas in Defence (the commercial and rich parts of Karachi) is a direct reflection of how material boundaries are maintained through the transport system itself; by limiting the buses that go there, the inequality in our society is automatically maintained (Winner, 1980).

Azra told us, "*4-5 saal se mein Defence nahi gai. Zaroorat he nahi or jana bhe asan nahi.*" (It has been 4-5 years since I have been to Defence. It is not needed and neither is it easy to go there). It was truly astonishing to learn that working-class women have such limited access to this city as compared to upper-middle-class women like us. We have no problem commuting to places like Defence, since we use travel services like Uber and Careem, despite how expensive travelling to Defence or Clifton can be from our residences. Most of the times when we travel to Defence or Clifton it is for leisure purposes; to meet up with friends, for shopping or to dine at restaurants and cafes.

This makes us realize how a lot of the recreational spots that Karachi has are also located in the area that is commonly known as 'the other side of the bridge.' To name a few: Seaview, Hawks Bay, the massive Benazir Bhutto Park, and Port Qasim Park are all in Defence or Clifton. These areas are supposed to be accessible to the public, they are meant to be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of their class. But, are they really 'public places' when a large part of the population is unable to visit

these places at all? Azra's statements shows us how class and gender both restrict her mobility and the access she has to the city. While it is difficult for working-class men to these areas as well, it is not as difficult as women from the same class. Men are not burdened with the responsibilities of the household, some (like Azra's son and husband) have access to motorized vehicles, and, they do not fear for their safety, as women do while they are out.

Winner (1980) in *Do Artifacts Have Politics?* explores how city planning, architecture and technologies of public spaces "embody a systematic social inequality, a way of engineering relationships among people that, after a time, becomes just another part of the landscape" (p.124). He discusses how physical arrangements are inherently embedded with modern politics that they automatically restrict the movement of "racial minorities and low-income groups" to specific areas (Winner, 1980, p.124).

In light of Winner's study, we must pay attention to how the transport system discriminates, specifically against working class women. Firstly, the public transport system of the city itself creates and maintains class boundaries limiting the number of poor people in the rich, swanky areas of the city; buses that incorporate these areas in their routes are rare. Secondly, she is a woman, her travelling is restricted by the role she inhabits as the caregiver of the house. Thirdly, public transport, needless to say, is already a huge inconvenience to women even if they are making short trips to nearby places. With so much hassle, it is no wonder that Azra thinks she has no need to go to a part of the city that to her feels like another city altogether.

Conclusion

Our research demonstrates that mobility of women in Karachi is restricted both by class and gender. The lived experiences of women

enable us to fully understand the nature and consequences of these restrictions, through which opportunities like employment and education for women are largely curtailed. It further reflects how women have to navigate the patriarchal architecture of the public transport busses, male-dominated public spaces, countless instances of public harassment, and the restrictions imposed rooted in strict gender roles and cultural norms of Pakistan.

Furthermore, our research indicates how female mobility varies across class as well. Owing to differences in economic and social protection bestowed to women of upper-middle class against working women, mobility patterns and response to instances of harassment in public spaces consequently differ. Working-class women, out of poverty and limited income, are forced to use cheap and unsafe transportation modes, and thus their encounter with unpleasant occurrences, almost on a daily-basis, mold them to be stronger and more resilient in comparison to upper-middle class women who are provided a relative amount of safety because of their class. In addition, our findings also show how the transport system itself maintains class binaries that are built within the material realities of the city. The man-made technical arrangements serve as forms of order, such that the movement and access of women from low-income groups is discouraged towards rich neighborhoods, commercial and posh parts of the city. Thus, reflecting how the physical infrastructure of the transport system, within a socio-political context, is inherently bias and marginalizes working-women over upper-middle class women.

Although a case study focused on three participants and therefore the findings cannot be generalized, but the kind of in-depth information and evidence-based experiences that were obtained via a mixed method approach, it can be used to suggest intersectional and gender-sensitive policies for designing more inclusive urban public transport systems in Karachi. Our findings have also been corroborated by numerous secondary sources that make them consistently reliable. Therefore, this

study enhances the existing scholarship on issues regarding women's mobility in urban spaces. More importantly, our study provides a context-specific example relevant to developing nations, and thus provides avenues for further research in Pakistan, such as how does a person's class affect the feeling of belonging one has to the city; how do women feel about a city, when they do not have access to large parts of it? It highlights the importance of incorporating women's needs, hailing from both lower and upper socio-economic backgrounds, in the planning and policy process of urban planning.

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