GENDER PERFORMATIVITY IN URBAN PUBLIC SPACES- CASE OF FORT RAILWAY STATION, COLOMBO

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Abstract

This paper explores the way spaces are gendered, by qualitatively analyzing public spaces under a feminist perspective. It looks at spatial attributes and everyday actions to understand the subjectivity and reality of spaces.

The term "gendered spaces" is used when power dynamics of gender are reflected in a space. This could be perceived as a result of defining gender roles associated with public-private spatial divisions. The railways were pioneering urban interventions that contributed to blurring these strict boundaries of space. Women, the seemingly disadvantaged group, found empowerment through the increased accessibility, but were yet subjected to discrimination and inequal opportunity. This phenomenon is reflected in the historical evolution of Colombo Fort railway station.

Under this background, physical and social attributes of spaces within and around Colombo Fort railway station are assessed under Gender Performativity theory, through activity mapping, interviews, surveys and videographic observations. Furthermore, spaces were understood through tactical responses; everyday practices of regular users, which were categorized as "activity" and "signs".

The findings of the case study showed that women navigated through the public space with comparatively less freedom and higher caution even in the absence of physical obstructions. A higher percentage of men identified their occupancy at the station as partially recreational, while women's occupancy was determined by the need for safety, privacy or functional needs.

The performative nature of gender becomes evident in the study; the conditional access granted for women as well as their own actions signified their subordinate position, while men expressed authority in space when the social order was challenged. However, instead of merely being victimized; women sought empowerment within the patriarchal structure itself, rather than directly challenging or disrupting the system. These gendered responses to spatial attributes contribute continuously through time in reshaping and restructuring of social structures and gender norms.

Keywords: Gendered space, Performativity, Spatial attributes, Railway station, Public space

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Introduction

Throughout history, the struggle for space has been a source of motivation for human evolution. Especially access to public space has been a sign of privilege and power, while it has been used as a tool for oppression and discrimination of social groups.

Despite living in the 21st century, idealized gender roles still determine the way different bodies are allowed to occupy public spaces; It is evident through the numerous studies that show a statistical gender discrimination. This demonstrates how men and women have different experiences within the same physical space. Gendered differences do not occur as a result of an innate factor, but as a result of the socially constituted nature of space as well as gender. Gender stereotypes and norms govern the behaviour of spaces as well as its users, while the actions and reactions of users result in restructuring of gender relations.

This phenomenon is explored within the chosen case study: Fort railway station, Colombo. The theoretical background necessary to conceptualize "Space" and "Gender" is established through the understanding of Lefebvre (1991) and Butler (2011), while creating a basis to analyze gendered differences through spatial attributes and everyday tactics. The study necessarily takes a multi-disciplinary approach to understand the complexity of gendered spaces. Data collected through multiple modes are thematically analyzed to identify generic and specific experiences that signify how the public space is gendered and how gendered relations are produces and reinforces within an architectural space.

The study takes a binary perspective on gender due to limited literature within the Sri Lankan context. However, the study conceptualizes the railway station as a public space and limits itself to a single case study, as the intention was primarily to understand the way gendered relations take place within a public space, rather than generalizing the behaviour of the railway station building typology.

The paper aims to achieve the following:

- Understand the relationship of gender with space, and its influence on spatial behaviour.
- Understand the impact of spatial attributes that contribute to the gender-specific experiences of passengers.
- Understanding the validity of theoretically complex social relations in reality within the local context
- Creating a basis for future architectural interventions and discourse to ensure a gender inclusive design approach.
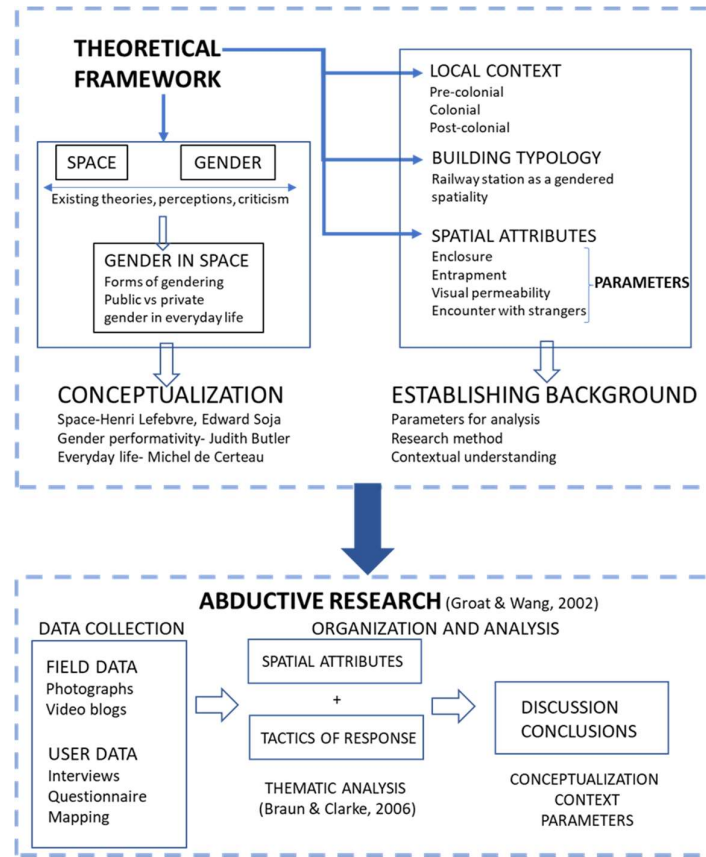
Figure 3: Research methodology
Source: Author

Literature Review

Space

The early understanding of space as a neutral and consistent layer that underlies all social phenomena has shifted to conceptualizing as a mutually constitutive, dialectical relationship between social structure and change [1]. This study takes Lefebvre's (1991) idea of space.
In summary:

1. Each society produces its own space.
2. space consisting of three layers; "perceived, lived and conceived"
3. Production of space is not a linear process; hence it is shifting and heterogenous,
4. Social "actors" not only interact with each other, but also restructure the very social definitions that govern them while simultaneously redefining space through repetitive actions, and
5. The invisibility and falsehood of the observable portion of space must be acknowledged.

Perceiving space beyond its physicality is of utmost importance in understanding the interplay of gender and space; social relations cannot be explained within the limitations of physical space.

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[1] Ranade, 2007

De Certeau (1984) discusses the ways in which the common man deviates from the spatial usage assumed by authorities in power. The ways of navigating through public space could be discussed under two categories;

1. Strategies; meaning complying precisely to the expected patterns of movement by authorities and designers,
2. Tactics; which are deviating acts of tactical resistance against the forms of control practiced in a space.

These tactics are not acts of opposition, rather, they are means of operation within the oppressive system which deviates from the strategies. In any space, such deviations can be identified and even expected in its usage. The invisible layer of interaction; the social space can be understood through the tactics and strategies practiced within a physical space. This approach to understanding the reality of space further distances itself from the oppressor-oppressed paradigm[2] and allows to examine the reality of space.

Gender and Gender performativity

Fundamentally, sex refers to biological difference between bodies, while gender refers to the social, cultural and historical meanings ascribed to different sexual identities by societies[3]. Butler (2011) argues that gender is performative; the social acceptance for heterosexuality throughout history has allowed to establish the ways of being "man" or "woman" that are unique to each society, and is hence adapted by individuals under the assumption that one must repeat that accepted performance. This adaptation is done through the ritualistic regular practice of assigned gender roles, which have often been constructed through generations and have become normalized and expected from each individual based on their biological sex.

Gender has often been dismissed as a secondary parameter of social and subjective constitution by most scholars in comparison to class inequality and racial factors. However, gendered discrimination is inseperably integrated within other socio-political power operations[4]. Therefore, it can be understood that gender is, in fact, a primary axis for investigating social differentiation.

Gendered spaces

Spaces are gendered due to the dominating presence of one gender, demarcation of a spatial separation, associating genders with different spaces based on socially and culturally constructed norms, or assumed relationships with biological aspects and language (order versus mess, rigid versus soft etc.). A space can be gendered through physical occupation and representations[5]

A fundamental argument in discussing the gendering of spaces is the public-private dichotomy; Women were associated with 'nature' due to their reproductive roles and were assumed to be naturally equipped to maintain household responsibilities, while men were associated with 'culture' and were financially rewarded and valued in the public sphere[6]. The predominantly masculine domain in the public sphere and the absence of women, resulted in the production of

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[2] Wrede,2015
[3] Rendell et al., 1999
[4] Pollock,1996
[5] Rendell et al.,1999
[6] McDowell, 1999

public space exclusively in favor of the white heterosexual man. The masculine experience was considered as the norm, which caused the extreme polarization of genders In this public sphere.

Although statistically, women's mobility and opportunities to occupy the public sphere has undeniably increased in the 21st century[7], the gendered nature of public space is not merely an obvious physical barricade of exclusion, but is deep rooted, subtle and disguised; which requires an in-depth investigation beyond mere visual observation.

Analyzing gendered spaces

Spatial attributes that contribute to differential experiences of public spaces based on gender were identified; these were physical as well as social. These are applicable to studying railway stations as public spaces. The primary spatial attributes were identified by Burgess (1998) are as follows:

1. Enclosure

   Enclosure refers to a surrounded or 'framed' space through physical elements. This quality could be created by buildings, walls, trees or other vertical elements. According to Burgess (1998), the compromised permeability, minimalized possibilities to escape and the difficulty to orient oneself contributes to the undesirability of enclosed spaces. It may also act as hiding places for undesired strangers and cause a sense of isolation.

2. Entrapment

   Areas that created a sense of "being trapped" were seen as areas for gendered usage. This may occur in vast, deserted spaces as well as narrow congested spaces; having no clear means of escape encourages undesirable activities to take place within the public space. Therefore, according to literature, entrapment may occur physically as well as visually.

3. Visual permeability

   The clarity of sightlines, lighting levels and the ability to practice effective surveillance was an important spatial attribute that determined gendered experiences. Visual permeability creates a sense of control over a user's surrounding. Ineffective surveillance of surroundings can be a cause of anxiety, as it signifies that there's a possibility to encounter hidden figures in shadows and other potential dangers.

4. Encounter with strangers

   The term "stranger" is used to describe individuals that show Abusive behaviour or ignites a sense of disgust or fear within a public space. Verbal abuse and the invasion of personal space is a common and repetitive encounter for women in public spaces. Negative and traumatic encounters with strangers act as a reminder of the vulnerability, therefore greatly affects the spatial experience.

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[7]

History of gender relations in Sri Lankan public spaces

The transformations of gender and space in Sri Lanka can be studied in par with major political shifts the society has undergone, as gender and political structures are rarely mutually exclusive[8]. During the pre-colonial era, Evidence points out that women held a prominent position within the public sphere during the early settlements of 5th -1st century A.D. Gender roles had varied greatly based on caste and urban-rural division; Rural women and men shared labour in both agricultural activities and child-rearing, whereas royal women were confined to private spaces with children and infants while men engaged in the political arena[9].

During the Portuguese era, the Fort was preserved as a "white male Christian city" and was barricaded to refrain women from entering. Following the Portuguese era, Dutch women indigenized and socialized with local women and created a social among themselves within a short period of time. Preceding Dutch occupancy, the British women were granted more freedom to socialize and travel[10]. This aided the transformation of Colombo from an exclusively male space to a city with ample female occupation[11].

Following the independence from European rulers, the nation's position on ideal gender roles after independence was "women, as the bearers of `tradition' and national culture, and men as the protectors of the faith, nation and its property"[12]. A significant rise of women was seen in the public sphere, especially in Colombo, further continuing the "feminizing of the city" under European authority. Mobility opportunities further increased under the open economy in 1972. Another major shift occurred during and after the Sri Lankan Civil war, as women were assigned the responsibilities of housework and paid labor to sustain families.

Despite the increased representation, catcalling and stares are common experiences of women using the streets after dusk in Pettah[13]. This masculine power dominance claimed by passing judgement and shaming women is an indicator of the common mentality among the society; i.e. women do not belong in public spaces; especially during certain times.

Railway stations as gendered spaces: Significance of building typology

The railway station can generally be identified as a place that disrupted the presumptions of associating men and women with the public and private spheres respectively. At the inception of railways, its urban setting was seen as a place for multiplicity and exploration of oneself, hence was perceived as "dangerous" for young rural women who commute[14]. Authorities intervened to maintain social order through control and surveillance; Spatial segregation was practiced and women were confined into designated spaces within buildings. This showed ambivalent results; while young women were protected from potential threats, it further encouraged the gendered disparity in the right to space, and constructed 'othered spaces' occupied by women.

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[8] Perera,1999
[9] Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies,2020
[10] Mills, 1999
[11] Perera,2002
[12] Chatterjee, 1989; Hyndman & De Alwis,2004
[13] Herath, 2018
[14] Bieri & Gerodetti,2007

In the contemporary context, the separation of women's compartments in trains; often symbolized by the color pink; is known to be a frequent method of weaponizing against women[15]. The absence of such 'feminine' colours in boardrooms and offices is a signifier that such colours are considered 'powerless' within the public sphere.

However, the emergence of railway stations increased mobility opportunities for women to engage in economic activities. Railway stations were places where women could legitimize their purpose within the public sphere (in Mumbai); a strategy essential for women's survival within the public sphere in a culture with strong gender stereotypes[16]. The impact of hegemonic gender roles could be seen in travel patterns of women, who often commute primarily for "domestic" tasks[17].

The railway station, as a typology, is significant in the gender discourse, as it is a place where sexual identities are contested, and the division of public-private spaces is challenged. The gendered experience of railway stations could be understood through analyzing the differential accessibility of space in terms of mobility and perception of safety and security.

Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature, therefore is conducted under an abductive approach[18]. Based on the theoretical framework of Henri Lefebvre, Judith Butler and Michel De Certeau, the case study is conceptualized as a social space where gender performativity can be explored through spatial attributes and everyday actions and interactions with and within a built environment.

Case study selection

The case study was selected based on the following historical and sociological considerations:

1. Railway stations, as a typology aided to disrupt the public-private dichotomy, which makes it a relevant public space for the study of gendering.
2. Considering the Sri Lankan context, the fort railway station can be identified as arguably the most prominent mobility space that transformed Colombo Fort from a white male city to a more "feminized" space during the Colonial and Post-colonial eras.
3. It is currently the central node of all infrastructure networks of the country (Asian Development Bank, 2019) and is therefore the busiest station in the country that caters to a greater diversity of population. The static and dynamic behaviour within the space can be thoroughly explored with a greater number of participants in the study.
4. The railway station was initially intended as a transit point for male workers within the British Period. The changes within the physical elements of the architectural space over time in response to the changing gender perceptions can be explored.

The study is limited to a single case study, as the intention was primarily to understand the way gendered relations take place within a public space, rather than generalizing the behaviour of transport terminals.

Data collection and sampling

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[15] Junaita, 2021
[16] Phadke et al., 2011
[17] Law,1999
[18] Groat & Wang, 2002

A pilot study is conducted to identify specific locations and scenarios that signify a gendered experience within the Fort railway station and its immediate surrounding, through an online survey using maps and photographs of different spaces. Participants were asked to choose the spaces according to the order of familiarity, ease of mobility, sense of safety and preference in occupying (aspects of the gendered experience, derived from the literature review). semi-structured and open-ended questions were also asked from regular users of the railway station during the pilot study phase.

Table 1 : Sample selection-pilot study

Data collection method	No. of participants	Selection criteria		
		Familiarity	Age	Gender
Questionnaire 1- pilot study	10	frequent users (daily commuter) or regular users (weekly/monthly traveler)	20-45	male-5 female-5
One-on-one interview	12	frequent users (daily commuter) or regular users (weekly/monthly traveler)	20-45	male-5 female-7
Questionnaire 2- spatial attributes	42	frequent users (daily commuter) regular users (weekly/monthly traveler) occasional visitors (2-3 times per year)	20-45	male-18 female-24

Following the pilot study, qualitative data is collected through several data collection methods.

1. **One-on-one interviews** were conducted via video conferencing facilities among voluntary participants to get an insightful account of their spatial experiences.

2. **Mapping studies** that were incorporated to the interview process; marking people in spaces and mapping each participants pathway were conducted.

3. **A questionnaire** was conducted among users, including the participants of the interviews, by giving them the option to rate their experiences.

4. **A photographic survey** of the identified "gendered spaces" to further explore supportive data to the other data collection methods and analysis.

5. Studying **short documentaries/travel video blogs**

Table 2 : interview data

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Travel frequency	Duration
A	Man	40	Accountant, private sector	weekly	1hr 2 min
B	Woman	21	Student	weekly	1 hr 10 min
C	Man	26	Designer, private sector	2-3 per month	48 min
D	Man	25	Student	weekly	40 min

E	Woman	24	Student	2-3 per month	50 min
F	Woman	36	draughtsman, private sector	daily	48 min
G	Man	33	Bank worker	daily	50 min
H	Woman	29	Teacher, public sector	2-3 per month	1hr 5 min
I	Woman	20	Student	daily	40 min
J	Woman	25	Student	weekly	48 min
K	Man	24	Student	weekly	54 min
L	Woman	32	Housewife	2-3 per month	42 min

As the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, on-site observations were avoided due to the health regulations and unprecedented deviations in social behaviour which didn't represent the typical behavior of the space. Users that are familiar with the Colombo fort railway station space within the age category of 20-45 were selected as the user category for the study. The study focused on the perception of students and working population, as the primary user group of the selected case study.

Mode of Analysis

The interview data was extracted under a Thematic Analysis[19] to identify similarities, patterns and deviations in data. The thematic analysis is conducted under 6 stages. The user's experiences were identified through individual accounts to identify the multiplicity of ways used in navigating the selected case study, rather than generalizing observations to the two categories of "man" and "woman".
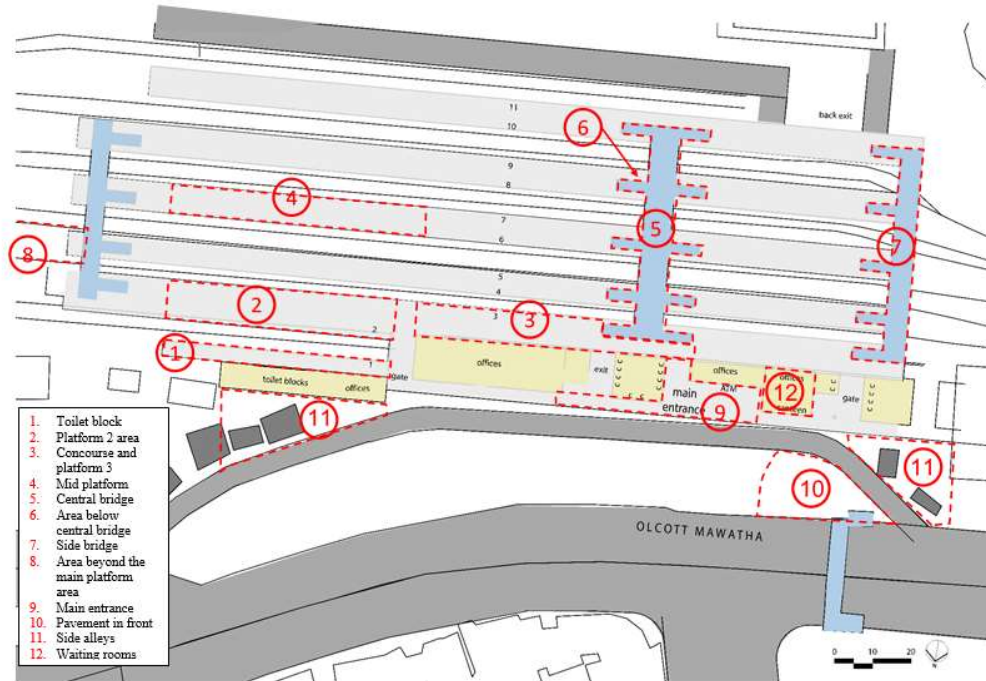
Findings

Spatial attributes

Based on the spaced identified through the preliminary survey and interviews, the following spaced were selected and rated based on level of enclosure, entrapment, visual permeability and encounter with strangers they experience in each space.

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[19] Braun & Clarke, 2006

Figure 4: Selected spaces of the Fort Railway station.
Source: Author

Based on standard deviation, the following ranges were defined to assess the approximate level of risk perception.

Table 3: Defining ranges for assessing gendered spatial attributes of selected spaces

Range	Enclosure	Entrapment	Visual Permeability	Encounter with strangers
Low range	0-35.8	0-42.8	0-40.9	0-51
Medium range	35.9-75	42.9-83	41-78.3	51.1-77.2
High range	75.1-100	83-100	78.4-100	77.3-100
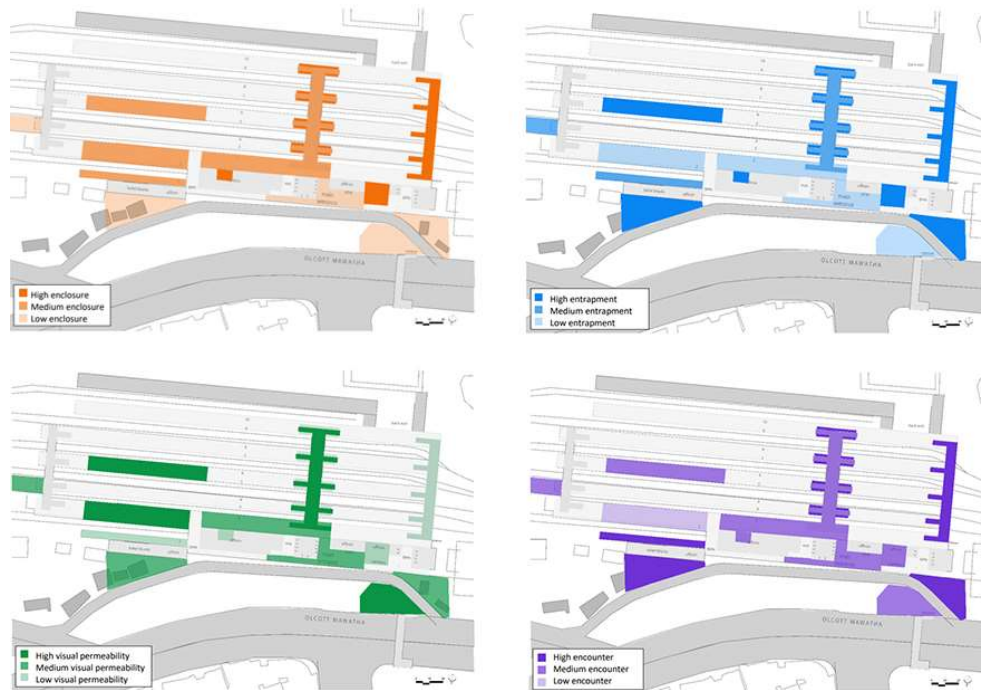
Figure. 5: Level of enclosure, entrapment, visual permeability and encounter with strangers mapped on layout of Fort railway station, Colombo.
Source: Author

Enclosure:

Highly enclosed areas were used with higher levels of reluctance, especially by participant women. These spaces were described as "confined", "dark", and "frightening" due to the inadequate paths of escape, the feeling of isolation, inability to orient oneself due to visual blockage and the potential for hidden figures behind shadows. However, when considering the railway station as one entity within the outer city, the concept of an 'enclosure' was seen as a safe space that provided protection from potential dangers of the city, especially at night.

Entrapment:

Higher levels of Entrapment were experienced in the alleyways adjoining the small shops along the edge of the railway station. The functioning of the shops attracts many commuters during the day, however, the narrow pathways, which do not have a clear sightline are avoided by women. entrapment could be identified in the mid-platforms; where there was "no way out", despite being spacious. Deserted, exposed spaces cause a sense of vulnerability[20].

Visual Permeability:

Level of Visual Permeability differentiated the way the two bridges functioned: The central bridge was preferred due to its clear sightline and surveillance, while the side bridge was perceived as unsafe due to its compromised visibility. Participants noted that Less visually permeable spaces were often occupied by figures that threaten the accessibility and safety of the railway station.

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[20] Valentine,1990

While visually permeable spaces ensured passive security, overly exposed spaces encouraged voyeuristic behaviour.

I have seen young boys making fun When there's some woman in the further platform, boys would talk about it and look from this edge. (K, man)

Therefore controlling space by demarcating the masculine territory by reminding unaccompanied women of their sense of vulnerability and unbelonging could be noticed.

Encounter with strangers:

Areas that showed high levels of Enclosure, entrapment and less visual permeability were identified as potential places for undesired encounters with strangers in the railway station. Within these spaces, strangers tended to act with aggression, verbal abuse and were invasive of personal space. according to participants, these figures were often middle-aged men. Through such actions, the masculine dominance of space is expressed as a way of claiming ownership to public space, especially during the night.

Strangers within the railway station were twofold; as "good" and "bad" strangers. Certain figures were labeled as trusted and dignified, such as the railway staff, male office commuters. Among the undesired categories were beggars and individuals described as "strange" or "creepy"; a judgement based on attire.

Tactics of response

The tactics of response can be divided into two segments as "Signs"; relating to observations, symbols and judgement, and "Activity"; altered behaviour as reactions to the observations and perception of space. these actions and signs were often overlapping, as an individual's reaction is a combination of several tactics.
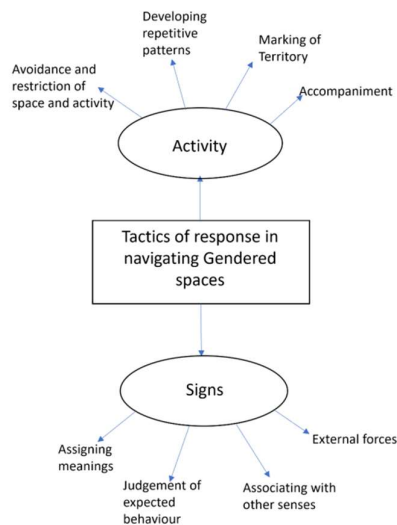
Figure 6: Thematic network for tactics of response.
Source: Author

Activity

Avoidance and Restriction of space and activity :

Through the assessment based on spatial attributes, users found alternative routes or spaces to occupy. An alternative path was developed beyond the demarcated platform areas to cross between platforms; this path is more commonly used by participants than the existing bridge to cross the platforms (Fig.5).

Figure 7: Users create alternative routes to navigate through spaces.
Source: Google images

According to the participants, women often restricted their activity during their time of occupancy to avoid risk.

> *"I will be waiting in the sitting areas in the platform, minding my own business.*
> *I like staying in one place than walking through crowds. It's somewhat uncomfortable. I feel insecure and I don't like it" (B, female)*

The participant expressed their limited mobility and subordinate position within the railway station, with their reluctance to explore. The way women occupy space: i.e. the way they stand, sit and move, often reflects this notion of self-governance.

Developing repetitive patterns

Through the repetitive use, participants identified preferred spaces for occupancy. they also develop routines based situational factors, such as when a train is late, or they arrive early, to avoid crowds, or to move faster. When exploring the paths taken by men and women when using the railway station, women had shown a significant reluctance in exploring new routes (Fig 6).
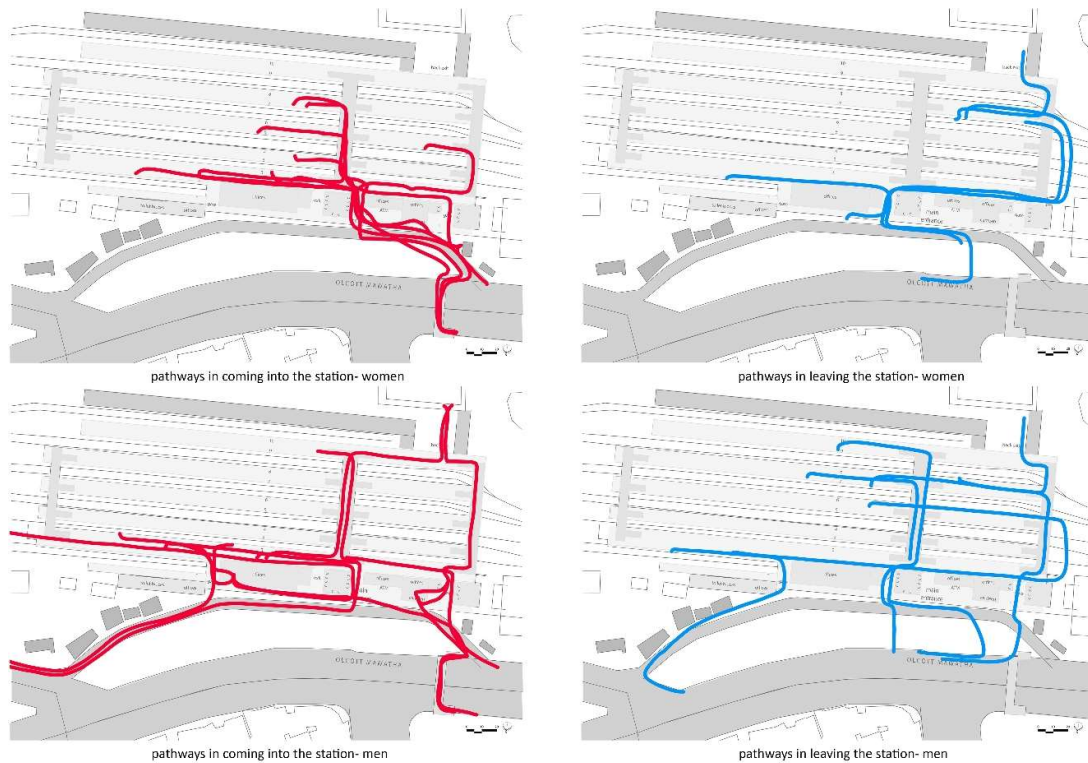
Figure 8: Mapped pathways of navigation.
Source: Author

The reasons for developing patterns are ambivalent; several men noted recreational purposes while several women were more concerned about their level of comfort in terms of privacy, crowd density and surveillance. Therefore this difference in exploration could be identified as a demonstration of purpose within the railway station.

Marking of territory

Demarcating a territory to signify displeasure in one's behavior, or to create a safe zone within the uncomfortable setting was identifiable. One participant noted that people use objects such as luggage as a "defense wall" to create a physical barrier to mark their territory, while communicating their need for solitude. This can be noted as a formation of a private space within the public sphere.

On the alleyways adjoining the railway station, shop owners and workers define their territory through their presence. Commuters who only enter that area for a specific need are thereby discouraged to occupy such a space without reason. the same can be noted about the area near the toilet blocks which was identified with a strong masculine dominance through smoking and loitering. Through such performative acts of demarcating the territory, the space becomes gendered.

Accompaniment

Being accompanied by others was a tactic that altered the behaviour of a gendered space. Primarily, two types of accompaniments could be identified;.

<u>Active accompaniment</u>

Being accompanied by known persons; a group, a family member or a friend was a common practice. It was identified that when women were traveling, such active accompaniment was prescribed.

> *"At first because I was unfamiliar to the environment, I had to travel with my father. Then I travelled with a friend. Eventually I travelled alone." (B, Female)*

This was not a relatable experience for the men who participated in the study. The need for the presence of a guardian when occupying public space can be seen as a form of controlling young women's sexuality[21]. Especially within certain Tamil communities active accompaniment was a significant factor.

> *"In Tamil groups, girls would never go and get the tickets. We usually send the boys to get them. (E, female)*

This practice was not questioned, rather was considered convenient. men have been assigned the task of ensuring safety for female travelers. Cultural values reiterate gendered power dynamics, which are performed in the public sphere.

<u>Passive accompaniment</u>

Lone travelers identified the presence of others as a factor that encouraged them to occupy public spaces. Even among unknowing figures, a reassurance was built among each other, in some cases, participants would build a stronger connection by approaching strangers and building trust through conversation. In the identified spaces that show high potential for risk, passive accompaniment can provide a sense of comfort to passengers. Especially during the night, when the public sphere is perceived as unsafe, most users gather within the same space with no direct communication or agreement. Safety is ensured through co-presence.

Signs

Assigning meanings

The spatial parameters considered as signs for ensuring safe navigation within the fort railway station. The figures present in certain spaces; preferred and disliked, their attire the density of people in each space were seen as signs of habitable or unhabitable space.

As discussed, participants identified railway station workers, male commuters (office workers of the vicinity) as "good strangers", while beggars, some food truck owners were judged as "bad strangers". Presence of women was also identified as a sign of security. all users agreed that the absence of a mixed gender usage signified that one must be more cautious and vigilant.

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[21] Bieri & Gerodetti, 2007

Judgement of expected behaviour of men and women

All participants had some perception regarding women's presence in different spaces. "*I think women would not like to stay there*" (E, female, 31y), *"there's no purpose there for women to stay here"* (A, male, 34y), *"I haven't felt a different, but maybe a girl feels like there's no security here at night"* (C, male, 40y). This could be identified as a sign of limited freedom of women within public spaces.

> *"The women usually stand closer to the edge of the third platform, as I remember… They try to blend with the other people. I think." (A,Male)*

Women's preference to be hidden and unnoticed within the public sphere, as identified by the participant is a sign of subordination practiced by women and implied by society.

> *"The strongest group of people in pettah are the men who are office workers around Colombo…They tend to shout and argue if anything happens" (A, Male)*

The assumption of masculine gender roles can be identified through this statement. The participant identifies the dominant social group, and recognizes their agency and authority to control undesired activity within the public sphere.

Associating with other senses

Apart from visual signs, users associated other sensory observations with gender dominant behaviour.

> *"This is the only area in my mental image where there are no families and females. The male dominant area starts with the smell of urine, there are workers, smokers and people with shabby clothes in here" (G, male)*

It signifies that only certain individuals, along with their generally undesired behaviour, are permitted within that area; to be able to occupy this space, the individual must performatively express their "masculinity". It is a sign of privilege; as only male smokers would find it comfortable to inhabit such a space.

External factors

Time-day/night

The time of the day plays a significant role in the behaviour of the railway station (Figures 27-31). It determines the level of lighting, exposure and surveillance.

> *"there are weird people in this area! After 10… like prostitutes, thieves, lots of suspicious looking people, very "psycho" looking people. I don't mind moving around there but it doesn't feel secure like in the morning." (C, male)*

The presence of undesired figures is associated with the time; the same physical space could be desired or undesired based on the time of the day.

> *"I don't like walking around too much. Depends on the time. If its getting really late, if I have to urgently going to my hometown, I will be thinking of other options like bus." (J, female)*

The usage of the term "too late" signifies that the participant had a threshold of when it is suitable and unsuitable to be in the public space, and showed no desire to go beyond that time limitation. Therefore, participants use daytime and nighttime as signs of their conditional access to public spaces.

<u>Schedule of activity</u>

The train schedules have a significant impact on participants behaviour. Spaces that may be considered safe during a busy time, were identified as the most threating in a setting with a lesser crowd. Despite being well-lit and visible, the railway station acted as a gendered space during the afternoon, when it is occupied by people loitering and less commuters.

> *"The station is an entirely different place during the afternoon. There is calmness and lazy at about 12. I feel like that time is very unsafe. Only purposeless people are there during that time." (A, male)*

<u>Activity outside</u>

During the time shops were functioning in the daytime, the area was considered male dominant, nevertheless, it was considered "non-threatening" by all participants, in comparison to the scenario after the shops were closed. Therefore, the closure of shops signifies that the space is no longer safe for occupancy, as its purpose has been removed. This provides the opportunity for masculine domination by "undesired figures" during the nighttime, to express their agency within the public sphere and to challenge threats to social order, such as women loitering.

Findings

Through the empirical study of the Fort railway station Colombo as a public space, the patterns of spatial usage and experience was observed. Based on the spatial attributes for risk assessment in gendered public spaces, defined by Burgess (1998), a clear gendering of several spaces could be identified through the study, while several other spaces were chosen as more gender inclusive. In general, it was identified that **men and women do not experience space in the same way**.

A combination of physical and social attributes of space contributed towards the gendered usage, while in return the behavioral patterns practiced by men and women area reshaped spatial and socio-cultural parameters that governed the fort railway station. hence, the spatial attributes and tactics of response ("Activity" and "Signs") **were mutually constitutive** and had ambivalent consequences in making and breaking socially constructed gender roles and power relations.

The contested nature of the public sphere was well highlighted through the analysis. A strong characteristic highlighted through the tactics of response was the fact **that women seek**

empowerment within the oppressive patriarchal structure that governs the public sphere, rather than directly challenging it.

Evidently, traditional gender roles do not function in the same way in the current context of the public space. As seen through the tactics of response, women are not passive recipients of injustice, therefore the victimization of women in public space through either physical elements or social relations alone does not explain the true behaviour of spaces. This **resistance or reaction does not imply a destruction of patriarchy, but that it reshapes itself in the changing times**. Through performative behaviour of both genders, the ways in which these social structures are reiterated and redefined within a public space were evident from this case study.

Conclusion

Gendering of space can be understood as a complex and often contradicting notion that alters the behaviour of an architectural space. However, gendered spaces are produced not only through the physical architectural design, but also its usage. Physical space, which is often given importance in architectural and other studies, are only the materialized fragment of a complex spatiality. The invisible layer of social space provides evidence of the everyday actions that make or break gender norms.

Gendered differences do not occur as a result of an innate factor, but as a result of the socially constituted nature of space as well as gender. Gender stereotypes and norms govern the behaviour of spaces as well as its users, while the actions and reactions of users result in restructuring of gender relations. As suggested through Butler's theory on performativity (1999), everyday actions of men and women according to the society's interpretation of gender norms caused repetitive reiteration through bodily performances. This mutually constitutive nature was evident through the understanding of gendered modes of production of the Fort railway station, its spatial attributes that suggested its gendered nature and level of risk, and the tactics of navigation practiced by its users.

The case study reflected the contested nature of public spaces; the modes in which gendered power structures are challenged, as well as redefined by both men and women. Women's occupancy within the public sphere itself is an example of the changing nature of societal gender norms through time. However, it was evident through the case study that this accessibility to public space is conditional. While women are being regulated within public spaces, they also gain the opportunity to break gender norms. An interesting factor was the realization that women seek empowerment within the patriarchal structure itself in a subtle manner, rather than aspiring to destruct it.

Architecture is a subject that must be understood in context, as Rendell et al. (1999) states; the context being its social, economic, political and cultural modes of production. Architects, as professionals engaged in creating spaces, must aspire to understand the subjectivity of space, which is often disregarded in the nature of the practice. This study aims to highlight the importance of understanding the behaviour of space in multiple perspectives, that are often disregarded as secondary factors. This itself reflects the gendered nature of the discipline. Only through multiple perspectives of understanding space can the profession truly seek to create all-inclusive cities and spaces.

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