

**It's Her Fault: gendered mobility, space and risk University of
Karachi**

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Introduction:

This paper is an ethnographic investigation of the mobility of young women and their perceptual measurements of risk in the gendered landscape in the University of Karachi. We posit that the women face with variegated forms of immobility and determine their subjectivity and agency vis-à-vis the landscapes of fear that they navigate. Our primary subjects are 25 female students within five different departments of the university. Our data has also been derived from interviews with 25 male students, 10 professors and 15 members of the staff. We posit that fears of risk are temporally and spatially determined and that women's mental maps of risk are transposed on to real spaces, all of which are determined by gendered subjectivities. These cognitive cartographic practices create, as we discovered, "invisible prisons". Women's narratives of risk negotiation revealed that existent safety structures provide conditional protection based on conformism towards norms of sexual virtue, and are predicated upon the restriction of women's access to public space. The University of Karachi is spread over 1,279 acres with process of segregation and self-appropriation and this comes from the consensus about gender roles, i.e. shared and naturalized beliefs about human bodies. Individuals and groups appropriate its landscape and subscribe onto it a gender order, one marked by masculine domination and the hyper-visibility of the male. The inclusion of women into public spaces and universities has led to changing social dynamics of space wherein a fraught landscape is produced with conditional access allocated to women (Valentine, 1989).

Spatial contestations between informal patriarchal safety structures and a formal, central authority create a fraught landscape where women must rely upon male companionship and protectionism in order to gain conditional access to space. Normative methods of self-policing and regulation arise, built along patriarchal conventions, and lead to the creation of avoidance strategies and coping mechanisms as methods to gain access to space. Through the testimonies, we found that variegated levels of agential practices exist as subjects formulate their own meanings onto the terrain. Through our investigation of gendered negotiations of spatial risk, we discovered that notions of security are impossible to disentangle from those concerning

vulnerability and fear. We propose that the debilitating institutional structures for security exacerbate students' insecurity, and in particular women's insecurity. The decentralization of authority from the University of Karachi administration towards substructures of security providers like the ranger forces and student political organizations have been perceived as the cause for heightened anxiety while navigating the contested terrain of the university.

Chapter 1: Gendered space negotiation

The production of gendered public space is evident within the movements of women in KU's spaces. (Shilpa Ranade, cite properly) There are space based rules regarding dress codes, companionship choice and transport. Women in KU produce narratives and coping/ avoidance strategies in a landscape with high perceived risk, negotiating fear of violence in their daily routine (Gaarder, 2004) Strategies to stay away from possible violence include companionship choices, group travel, limited movement, secure modes of transport, and male escorts. Girls travelling alone are discouraged and one-on-one male female interaction transgresses gendered divisions. To prevent harassment, students often wear abayas, hijabs, burqas and generally restrict their movement to within their own department because of perceptual risks involved in navigating the landscape of the university. There is a gendered risk because of space- divisions and hierarchies of public sphere wherein gendered subjects have conditional access to limited spaces. This inhibited use and occupation of public space therefore becomes a spatial expression of patriarchy (Phadke, 2007)

Isolated areas and places that serve as male enclaves are a source of fear for most women navigating the KU landscape. Neelum and Sufi canteens are considered to be risky for girls since they are located in isolated areas. "Girls should go with their male friends if they want to go there, the areas are undeveloped and isolated, with wild bushes. There are mostly boys there, as well, if we go alone, then they will comment on our appearance or leer at us. Often boys over there will lick their lower lips at me, there. We usually stay near the Pharmacy department because of this. It's just us, there's no reason to fear."

Group travel is a coping strategy to navigate through the KU landscape. It is a form of social interaction and is an agential practice to navigate through an insecure landscape. Travelling alone appeared to be a risky behavior that was discouraged by informants. Certain places were seen to be more threatening than others in KU. The degree of unease/ insecurity varies throughout different times of the day. The fear of sexual attack influences all aspects of women's life and

causes what Ferraro calls a shadow effect. (Ferraro 1996) The shadow effect leads to the avoidance of threatening or places considered as male enclaves. The girls are restricted to their own departments and open grounds become places of harassment. Mobility is thus restricted due to the fear of rape and other forms of harassment. (Leiber 2007)

Oscar Newman, emphasize “the culture of a place” when analyzing social phenomena, particularly how each place affects the behavior of individuals differently. (Dunkel-Graglia, 2013) According to feminist geographers, public and private spheres are generally defined as “feminine” or “masculine” spaces. Henceforth, when a place becomes labeled as masculine it tends to normalize all “masculine behaviors” within this space, such as sexual harassment and physical and verbal violence towards women, and forces women to adapt to the situation. Public transportation is the gateway to urban public life, which has long been considered a man’s place. Taking into consideration the gendered nature of the public/private divide, as well as the high levels of violence against women that occur within this space, the public spaces in KU are considered to have a hyper-masculinized culture. (Dunkel-Graglia, 2013)’ This normalizes masculine behavior, making the violence against women a “woman’s problem.”

Victims of sexual harassment then receive criticism as public blame is directed towards them for transgressing socially constructed boundaries, going into territories, quite literally as well as navigating a certain symbolic terrain, which is dangerous and inappropriate for a woman of respectable repute to enter into. Sexual harassment done to a woman (done for fun, done to “transgressors”, is men’s way of drawing lines) and harassment of couples are both forms of social control, so neither oversteps the boundaries laid down by social norms. Gendered rules of behavior are to be followed or the burden of responsibility falls onto the victim instead of the perpetrators (Madriz, 1997) Victims of sexual harassment are either dismissive of it, or are silent about it due to certain notions of honor and chastity that might be at stake if one is to seek redress. Thus there are several layers of protection at work here in KU- from the religious to the traditional/cultural to the social to the legal; these are all related in creating and perpetuating patriarchal narratives of women’s bodies.

Accessing public space may lead to a risk to reputation, and of physical assault. There is also the risk of being blamed for your own assault, and the risk of women not engaging with public

spaces therefore perpetuating the cycle of fear and normalizing/ naturalizing women's exclusion from public arenas (Phadke, 2007) Leila Raza, of the NSF and a student in the literature department, staged a street play on sexual harassment. She spoke to us about how she wanted to highlight the victim-blaming and moralistic discourses the victims of harassment are subjected to. Her play was meant to elucidate the attitudes of bystanders. The play is based on her own experiences with harassment where two individuals threatened her with rape because of her political affiliation.

Our informants Raffia Mehmood and Yamna Shabbir, both second semester students in the Mathematics department, reported that there have been numerous instances of cyber harassment associated with a food street called *Prem Gali*. They spoke about a facebook group "*KU All Confessions*" wherein posts about women's clothing and appearances, often accompanied by lewd remarks like "*Nice piece*" appear when those women visit the food street. Women within the area then are under continuous scrutiny, have their photos taken and are met with constant stares. There is a sense of unease experienced within the area, and hence women are not able to access it unless they travel in large groups of 10-15 people. The space being linked to the virtual sphere highlights the variegated forms of harassment women face in 2017. Patriarchal codes are reformulated into the virtual sphere and serve as newer forms of social control, extending the male panoptic gaze that restricts behavior and movement in physical space.

Traditional forms of social control are enacted through gendered forms of policing in departments, as well. These are "strategies" that enact a "social contract to keep women quite literally in place" (Koskela, 1997) Mahnoor Mohsin says that in the Islamic History department especially, the classes are segregated based on gender and a dress code of abayas and hijab is enforced as an informal policy that serves to enact a form of social control built on the logic of traditional patriarchy. It leads to a system of surveillance and policing wherein interactions, movements and choice of dress are restricted. Different departments have different policies, however, and not all have a dress code, but some do enforce the rule of segregation in classes.

Fear regarding sexual harassment is compounded due to the notion of *Izzat*/ honor and the risk of losing this. Community/ family honor is attached to the female body and this is related to access

or navigation in/ or performance of gender subjectivities in public spaces. The students themselves regulate sexual behavior, and a sense of patriarchal benevolence is present in systems of social control that paradoxically serve to protect and victimize women, at the same time.

Arib Hussain a Micro-biology student states “Women are representatives of family, and their community, they should stay within certain limits so they do not have any problems. That’s what we try and tell our female colleagues.” The idea of “our women” and community extends into the paternalistic logic of protectionism that the departments, rangers and political parties deploy. Those who conform to standards of respectability are accepted into these three distinct folds of protection, however, this protection is not extended to those who do not fulfill arbitrary conditions within moralistic patriarchal discourses espoused, and are therefore more vulnerable. Gendered safeties are linked to manufacturing of respectability which is linked to future marital status and material well-being. As Phadke proposes Safety within this discourse is a notion linked to surveillance or protectionism within paternalistic logic. Relation to women’s chastity or sexual virtue can only provide conditional protection and not the right to public space (Phadke, 2007) in the terrain of the university, there are very strict gendered divisions, and cross-gender interactions are monitored severely, with girls’ interactions with boys being considered as signs of the girl’s promiscuity.

Bakhtanoor, 3rd year Geography department, says, “In my first year, a rumor spread about me having a physical relationship with Sarosh Alam due to my friendship with him. I had interacted with him on a picnic, as a friend, and I was ostracized for it in the coming weeks. I raised the matter in front of my department heads, but they advised me to ignore it.” Bakhtanoor was then verbally harassed, leading to her seeking assistance from the rangers. “The very next day after I complained, rangers showed up in the department and left with Sarosh and Taimoor. I did not know what they did with them but since then the rumors have stopped and the matter has simply faded away with time.”

Chapter 2: Navigating the space

It is well documented that women often face sexual harassment and physical violence during their daily commutes. (Dunkel-Graglia, 2013) We emphasize here on how the transport within the university has made females more vulnerable to sexual harassment and physical violence. The issue of transport is connected to the question of the students' mobility and reifies the heteronormative subjectivities and their conditional access to space.

The transport supervisor told us that there were in total 35 buses reserved for the purpose of transporting the students within the campus, but only 28 were in an active state. The other 7 were waiting to be repaired and the lack of funds was a major obstacle in this process. Hence, the large chunk of female population that made use of these buses to ease their journey had to be squeezed in somehow for all the students to be able to use them. The risks which were attached to this facility were such that it made the women prone to sexual harassment and physical violence at all times.

Aisha Rizvi, 1st year student of the geology department: "The conductor touches our bodies when the bus is fully crowded and when we complain they throw our bags out and order us to step out the bus and go on our own."

The students are often forced to modify travel behavior, routes and even switch between modes of transport. (Dunkel-Graglia, 2013) The form of transport with the least risks was considered to be a private car. Walking within groups, hitching rides, rickshaws were considered to be secure if coping strategies were adopted. KU's own transport facility, public buses and walking alone were considered high risk modes of transport.

With regards to modes of transportation, boys are perceived to be more mobile because they can travel on motorbikes. As Hira Safeer claims, girls are forced to take public transport then, because other modes of private conveyance are not affordable. She says "We can't walk across the university, because it's hot most of the times and boys on bikes, in cars and those walking around us tend to stare. But that is not that big of an issue, it happens everywhere."

Hitching rides from people in private cars moving around the campus, to travel to and from various departments, is a practice that rose out of the decline of the point service. This practice was largely perceived to be dangerous and undesirable because of the increased vulnerability of female students whilst travelling with strangers, which pose a potential threat and is considered taking a risk to one's reputation and body (as the two are interlinked in the middle class social imagination) and is seen as a transgression of gender norms. These gender norms dictate female behavior in the public sphere and regulate it, and assert that risks such as these, interacting with strange males, suggest a looseness of character, on a certain level, for these women and pose a great danger for them as well.

“The first thing you should do before you get into the car you have stopped with the purpose of taking a ‘lift’ is to look at its windows. They must not be tinted,” a female student explained regarding how a woman should behave in order to keep safe. “If you are wearing jeans or a short shirt without any stroll, make sure to keep an abaya in your bag so that you can wear it on your way back home.” Here, we see how violence and harassment against women is considered “normal,” “inherent,” and “unchangeable.” Women, therefore, are responsible for recognizing the situation and modifying their behavior accordingly. Women in KU avoided places they considered as threatening, the limited social boundaries that they created to protect themselves from harm, limits their claim on different spaces because as Gardner says “Women are much more likely than men to develop avoidance strategies with regard to public spaces” (Dunckel-Graglia, 2013, p. 92) This is due to the perceived risks of being exposed to violence in those spaces.

There have been many instances where men have followed women while they were walking to Maskan Gate from their respective departments, because they were either traveling alone or in a relatively small group, and because this is one of the areas where the security layers, either traditional/ social or legal diminishes. Ayesha Hassan, 3rd year, of the Psychology department, was followed from the Neepa Bridge, from the Silver Jubilee gate several times. Her harasser was from the Economics department who stalked her as she walked to university. Her coping strategies consisted of ignoring the harasser, wearing an abaya, and then ultimately changing her

route to university, which stopped the incidents from occurring. Another group of girls were followed from the Maskan gate but a group of rangers stopped their harasser and reported him to the headquarters

Though KU students generally tended to assert that they felt secure whilst travelling through the university, they did point out certain temporal and spatial constrictions, and therefore showed us that there isn't unlimited or unconditional access to all places, and that the basis of exclusion is upon gender. Out of our 25 female subjects, only one was enrolled in the evening program at Karachi University. Upon inquiry, it came to light that there are added risks involved in navigating the landscape of the university at night wherein the departments and the campus itself are sparsely populated. A sense of fear and vulnerability arises in dark, isolated areas especially where women are fewer in number. The lack of transport facilities at night (rickshaws, buses etc) also discourage women from taking evening classes because they may necessitate walking through the campus at night. The rangers monitoring activities are different at night. During the day, rangers patrol the entire campus, with mobiles monitoring the open spaces as well, however at night, patrolling activities cease and clusters of rangers are instead positioned near departments. Women are then in a state of constant vigilance during the day, and hyper vigilance at night.

Javeria Hanif, a 4th year from the Chemistry department, said that "I feel safer within the department where rangers are around, and because I have my own car I can take evenings. Girls usually don't take evening because their parents don't feel it safe, but my parents feel it's okay so long as I have a male driver with me waiting outside the department. We can't wait outside the department even when classes are over; the streetlights are off in most places. Sometimes there are boys hanging out in the deserted areas, so our professors also warn us to stay within the department, that we should be mature and responsible."

As we can see from case, some spaces- at some times- are associated with male violence and violation. This is due to the shadow of effect of fear in women and these fears than act as reminder to women that walking alone in public places after a certain hour, they are transgressing gender norms (Gaarder, 2004) Perception and experience of time and space is thus gendered and there is avoidance of perceived "dangerous places at dangerous times",

understanding of women's spatial configurations thus requires knowledge of their temporally determined geographies of fear (Valentine, 1989)

Reliance on male companionship/ escorts to deter this spatially constructed threat of violence restricts use of space especially and allows men to appropriate it and uphold their claim to it. The students' mental cartographic practices at night lead to them restricting their movements to their specific departments, constructing in effect invisible prisons (Madriz, 1997). Unease or insecurity is associated with navigating the spaces beyond these prisons. Transgressing the boundaries of these prisons would also be perceived as risky transgressions of gendered norms and an invitation to the male violence associated with the spaces beyond the prisons.

This is illustrated in a International Relations student Farmanullah's claim that "it is very dangerous to be traveling alone in quiet places within the university or when it is dark, and women here know that it is dangerous, so if they get hurt, it's their fault. You wouldn't wear a miniskirt at 2AM down a dark alley, would you?"

Chapter 3: Security Structures

Along with gender based violence, girls' insecurity is exacerbated by political clashes and the lack of central safety structures to prevent physical violence. We studied the security structures in KU and found that the administration's established security structures and programs are marked by various levels of inefficiency and thus instead of providing adequate safety measures, they exacerbate student's insecurity and perceptions of risk, and in particular women's insecurity. This is due to the fact that there has been a gradual decentralization of authority from the KU administration towards substructures of security providers, and different chains of command being established. There is the patriarchal safety structure, informal and built along the lines of traditional social and cultural beliefs, wherein women can look forward to male companionship and protectionism in face of danger from male students in general. We would argue that the structure of KU has a sort of structural violence embedded into it, wherein there is no sufficient redress for women who get harassed, and a cycle of insecurity is perpetuated through lax policies on sexual harassment and verbal abuse which perpetuates and reifies gender norms that limit women's access to the university at large.

Ansar Rizvi, a student advisor, says, "We protect the girls studying here like our sisters. We access the complaint of sexual harassment carefully. We give a verbal warning, or otherwise discipline them, with the power of *laathi*" The presence of rangers helps to decrease the amount of riots / violent clashes and minimize conflict and political activity and because of the presence of Ranger forces for the past 18 years, conflict has minimized. Rangers have stayed in KU since 1990 for the purpose of controlling political clashes and have begun providing informal forms of security to women. Aimen, 1st year student in Pharmacy department said, "Rangers patrol at regular intervals and we can see them passing by roads. If no one, rangers are there". However, to a large extent, the forces, that form a security structure, fail to decrease sexual harassment or provide adequate security for women navigating this terrain. Rangers do have a strong presence in KU and respond to individual incidents of harassment, but by not ensuring a structure for safety of women and freedom of mobility, they are also providing an inadequate security structure.

There are no formal structures in place for the students to report harassment cases; however there is a sexual harassment committee for the professors.¹ The students are expected to engage in a circular, futile process where they are expected to inform the student councilor, then the department chair, then the KU counselor, who forwards the case to the Vice chancellor who then sends it back to the department for review. Self-regulation emerges in the picture of safety in KU as the primary form of regulatory mechanism to avoid harassment. Anum Abidi's interview highlighted that internalized patriarchal beliefs tend to shape perceptions of movement and behavior. "I leave right after class. I tend to keep to myself, because we can't talk freely with boys. Boys are usually well-mannered; it is girls who invite unwarranted attention because they act freely."

Girls are often found in heterogeneous groups because they believe that boys in their group would protect them in case of any unfortunate event. If any sudden political riot took place in the KU, boys of their classes would ensure the safety of their girls class mate by locking them inside the class rooms. However, if any girl experiences any sort of risk from any boy, and she reports to IJT, the party boys would give her protection. Students affiliated with the JUI party because of their religious ethical codes often come to the aid of women who are sexually harassed and engage in conflict with the perpetrators. So the religious elements in KU's confines also provide a security structure. However, Jamaat-u-Islami conducts its own forms of policing within the libraries where a dress code of hijab is enforced and male and female interaction is not allowed. Non-compliance with these rules results in severe penalization. As Anum Abidi has reported the "distance" between male and female students "has to be visible to the people around, so you are saved from the illegitimate rumors and violence from JUI members."

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¹ Every university has the capacity to form a sexual harassment committee in case any of the employees reports a harassment case under the Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010. In the light of this act only, KU formed the sexual harassment of Professor Gulnaz Haider.

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There are also available in KU different security structures of the departments themselves, which work to protect women from sexual harassment, however each department varies in terms of making an effort to ensure protection and redress. There are different dynamics at work in departments. With weak a central structure, the responsibility of providing security transfers to each individual department which also proves itself inefficient. In the course of our research, faculty offices were seen locked, and even no teacher patrolling in order to monitor students activities. They heavily rely on the students to come and report to them if they are facing any problems and so many cases go unreported. One of the primary reasons, with regard to women security concerns is that male teachers are themselves the perpetrator of sexual harassment. Male teachers would follow you, stare at you, and call on your cell numbers etc.

Where there are a larger proportion of women, as in the departments of Psychology and Women’s Studies, women tend to feel more secure and where risk is perceived to be low. The International Relations department is “famously” a controversial site, because of the amount of sexual harassment cases lodged here, the perpetrators being teachers, mostly, which shows that there are quite evidently very weak (if at all) barriers against sexual harassment. Within the pharmacy department, guards or babas are present to regulate student behavior and enact gendered forms of social control, to restrict sexual activity as well as harassment. When classes end, students are forced to descend onto the courtyard as the classes are locked. Girls are encouraged to remain within the department until it is time to return home. The roofs are always locked and the “babas go on rounds and separate boys and girls sitting together.”

Conclusion:

Within the context of Karachi University, we saw women's narratives of risk negotiation and coping strategies that conditional access and protection based on conformism towards norms of sexual virtue and gender conformism. We see the restriction of women's access to spaces in the university due to the perceptual spatial risks involved. We argue here that policing strategies and avoidance limit women's mobility in the terrain of KU. We also argue that the subjects' vulnerability is espoused as the authoritative gaze of informal patriarchal structures and the formal central authorities is inscribed on to the landscape. We consider gendered negotiations of spatial in order to initiate a conversation about gendered navigation of urban spaces at large.

Women all over Karachi have constructed mental maps of the city according to certain gender subjectivities, which hold that as members of a particular gender they will never have limitless access to the city at large, and that their behavior or access is going to be regulated. They often just travel from private spaces to other private spaces, and are not as visible as they ought to be in the public sphere and to a large extent are still made to be confined or are self-confined to a large extent because these subjectivities they internalize. We hope that through greater considerations of these subjectivities that discursive and policy shifts can occur in order for inclusive urban landscapes to be imagined and constructed.

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