

## **Gender, everyday life and the making of the cityscape**

Panel Proposed by Mahuya Bandyopadhyay for the Sixth Critical Studies Conference on *Refugees, Migrants, Violence and the Transformation of Cities*.

The thematic of gender and the city has largely been dominated by the discourses of the right to the city from a gendered perspective, of exclusions, the invisibilisation of women, and paradoxically their increasing visibility through incidents of violence and brutality against them and finally, the urgent need and call for safe public spaces in cities. The papers in this panel will address similar concerns without being trapped in the frameworks of these dominant discourses.

How do migrants' experiences and negotiations in city spaces and in the neighbourhoods where they make their homes, shape city spaces? Gender, the process of migration and the complex identities of the migrant and the urban spaces represent constitutive subjectivities. The panel will explore these subject positions with a focus on the gendered dimensions of the continuous negotiated process of place making in the city. The papers deal with narratives of migrant women as they negotiate everyday lives in the city. Where narratives of young women born and raised in the city are used, the influence of their family migration histories and the signposting of the neighbourhood as largely constitutive of migrants, are clearly discernible.

These narratives of lives in the neighbourhood and the making of city spaces and citizens' negotiations with them are at once deeply intimate and private, and public. How do individual, collective and cultural ways of being in the city, of using different spaces, of making homes, working and travelling through the city evoke a sense of the public space of the city? In what ways is this space constraining and what sorts of resistances and negotiations does it enfold? As the papers are all based on fieldwork in Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata, the panel seeks to build a comparative perspective on gender and the making of new city spaces.

### **About the Papers**

#### **Water Encounters: The Everyday Politics of Migrants in a New/becoming city**

*Lalitha Kamath and Radhika Raj*

While the new peripheral city of Vasai Virar dreams of competing with Mumbai and other metropolises in its worlding aspirations, electoral politics, processes of city building and state making revolve centrally around promises of access to water. Political posters assure 24-hour water supply, large dam projects are the centre-piece of election manifestos and yet the materialisation of

these promises is uncertain. Particularly in the remote, interior chawls being built on what were earlier paddy fields, the ordinary, everyday act of getting water remains a contested and violent domain. The realm of water, its promissory nature, concrete materialisation, and struggles over everyday access are thus deeply political acts that are also highly gendered. One reading of this is that men of power shape public life and city futures through promises of providing the water that is crucial for the city's expansion while poor, 'migrant' women struggle with the everyday, homely and private, chore of accessing water.

We argue, however, for a more nuanced interpretation of this gendered, public-private binary construction. We see women's water encounters as the site of their challenge to the (deliberate absence of the) state, where they demand the right to water and mark their claim to inhabit the city. This is also the realm where the socio-spatial politics of 'local' versus 'migrant', '*marathi manoos*' versus '*bhaiyya*', and municipal versus village are played out. Through their everyday act of collecting water, and the embodied consequences of control and suffering intrinsic to this struggle, women are agents of quiet politics and builders of everyday social infrastructure that is key to nurturing viable places in this city that is yet to become (Simone).

The paper is based on fieldwork in an informal settlement in Vasai Virar, Makarandnagar, inhabited by people who have been evicted from Mumbai, but originally hail from eastern UP and Bihar. It has been built by local Patil landowners on their farmland in response to the demand for labour from the small-scale industries nearby. The paper draws on narratives of 'migrant' women and the water anxiety that orders their days and lives. The paper also reflects on politics and power in the *basti* within the context of city-wide party and infrastructural politics, to examine how women negotiate the freedoms and constraints of their new home in the city and what this says of them as political agents in their intimate and public life.

### ***Jed-o-jehad* of Everyday: Two Cases of Negotiating Space Making by Migrant Women**

*Maggie Paul and Yogita Naruka*

Migrant identity in city spaces is infused with expressions of constant mobility, relocation and resettlement. The living conditions of migrant families are embedded with emotions of vulnerability, fear and anxiety. These emotions take centre stage especially in the lives of migrant women since the restrictive social environment intensifies the precariousness and adds to their everyday struggles. The vulnerabilities are spread across the dimensions of claiming housing spaces, building a home, finding livelihood and opportunities for education, searching for avenues of leisure and finally, maintaining intimate relationships. Migrant women however, constantly negotiate their way around these vulnerabilities and evolve context specific 'tactics' to make certain claims. This paper explores the everyday negotiations in terms of making claims for housing space

from ethnographic material drawn from two field sites namely, *Bainganwadi* and *Bawana resettlement colony* located in Mumbai and Delhi respectively. These are highlighted as one of the primary tactics for negotiating the ‘fear’ and ‘vulnerability’ associated with their ‘migrant’ identity in the city. While sharing this common thread, however, the two cases emphasize differential means used to lay these claims, depending on personal and environmental context as well as their specific status as migrants. Therefore the paper aims to present a diversified view of everyday negotiations and underscore the multiplicity in understanding the same in reference to migration and women in scholarly work. The remaining part of the abstract explains the two case studies in brief.

*Bainganwadi* is an informal housing community located at the edge of a suburban ward in Mumbai characterized as an ever expanding home to migrant population from across the country. The case study focuses on recent migrant women within the dynamic and ever shifting borders of this space, as opposed to the more settled part of the community. It highlights the complex political subjectivities and citizenship practices of these predominantly Muslim migrant women by delineating the religious sensibilities and networks that assist and enable them to shape themselves as political agents in claiming spaces for settlement. It therefore explores the links between memory, migration, religion and politics in their everyday practices, embedded within the context of ever-present threats of demolitions and political violence.

*Bawana resettlement colony* is another field site discussed in this paper. Located at the margins of Delhi, it was an outcome of the major urban restructuring that Delhi witnessed in the year 2003 to prepare itself to host the international commonwealth games in 2010. This case study draws from the narratives of women and adolescent girls from the community and centres on their everyday struggles associated with making claims for the housing spaces. The narratives capture the fear and anxieties embedded in the lives of women as they are in the process of settling themselves in the new habitat. Their everyday negotiations to cope with these anxieties and struggles, hence, inform us about the complex relationship that the ‘migrant women’ from share with city spaces.

### ***Paabandi, Izzet, Galat Saubat: Negotiating Public Lives and Intimate Relationships in a Working-Class Muslim Neighbourhood***

*Mahuya Bandyopadhyay*

This paper is based on fieldwork in a largely Muslim working-class *basti* close to Kolkata, India. The century old *basti* came up in the early 1900s to fuel the rise in demand for labour in the then flourishing jute mills of Calcutta. The jute mills were largely served by migrant labour from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The paper draws on narratives of young women, who were born and grew up in this neighbourhood and are not only aware of their migration histories; but also articulate how connections to a hometown and *biraadari* (kindred) complicate their relationship to the city and

shape the processes of making city spaces. The numerous discussions with them reflect on global flows in relation to issues of choice and freedom in intimate relationships, desires with regard to education, careers and lives of choice and their entanglements with local structural and cultural aspects of everyday life in the *basti*. The paper will reflect on politics in the neighbourhood, the experience of narrow avenues for education, work and employment, the familial and community based constraints on women's lives, mobility and choices, and the opening up of institutional spaces that enable different sorts of negotiations of constraints. How do the young women negotiate their freedoms and their constraints?

Fieldwork was conducted around the time that West Bengal was poised for a historic political turn around, after more than thirty years of Left rule. Party politics and its implications for the choices and lives of these young women serves as another anchor for the discussion here. People's lives in the *basti* must, therefore, be narrated in the context of the public critique of high-handed governance and the concomitant discourse on the need for change and democratic decision-making. The connections between these may not be hard to locate. How these connections translate into everyday life in the *basti*, impinging on the decisions people, especially young women, make with regard to their lives, is crucial for this paper. Through this, I hope to demonstrate how global contexts and local histories intersect, are accepted and/or resisted in the intimate and public lives that these young women are attempting to script for themselves.

### **About the Contributors**

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