



A Small-scale Study on Gender-based Violence in Public Transport in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Accentuated by a study done by the United Nation's Population Fund which revealed that 90% of Sri Lankan women have experienced harassment in buses and trains this study is situated in Sri Lanka, where street harassment is rampant. In this regard, this small-scale research is conducted to uncover a glimpse of gender-based violence in public transport from the perspective of targets and to destigmatize the view that the onus of responsibility of preventing gender-based violence in public transport lies with the targets rather than the perpetrators. This is a critical discourse analysis of interviews and narratives of targets of gender-based violence in public transport in Sri Lanka, in which theoretical viewpoints of Catherine Riessman (2008), Theo van Leeuwen (2008), and Michael Bamberg and A.Georgakopoulou (2008) would be employed as the framework of analysis. It is further attempted to explore the dominant discourses and master narratives that are thus associated. In this respect, this research unravels as a small-scale study that employs a sample size of five interviewees who self-identified as victim-survivors of gender-based violence in public transport. The main findings of this study underline that the agency of the research participants was considerably at risk at the very moment that they entered a mode of transport. It was also argued that regaining targets' agency from an incident of gender-based violence in public transport is an interdiscursive practice, which occurs as an amalgamation of varying discourses under a patriarchal master narrative. This study concludes with an emphasis on the rampancy of gender-based violence in public transport as stated at the onset, highlighting the influence of the patriarchal power structures that pervade.

KEYWORDS: Gender-based violence, public transport, critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis, agency

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INTRODUCTION

“How do you have a conversation with somebody and expect their husband to play with themselves in front of you? Right? How do you have that conversation?” (Angela, personal communication, 22-08-2019)

Angela, who was one of the participants in this research, asked these questions at her interview to which there was no answer. Although she complained to the police about her harasser, she did not pursue her complaint because her harasser was a breadwinner of a family with a wife who had no income and three children. This paper is based on a small-scale study that was done as partial fulfilment of the Master of Arts degree in English Language Studies at the University of Malaya, Malaysia in 2019.

In 2015, a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report stated that 90% of Sri Lankan women experience sexual harassment in buses and trains. This report also stated that 82% have been in the presence of sexual harassment being inflicted to someone else. Another noteworthy finding is that out of the 90% of women who were harassed, only 4% had made a complaint to the police. How this harassment takes place can include a variety of practices including, groping, indecent exposure, rubbing genitals against another’s body which is known as ‘jacking’ in informal contexts, and improper seating etiquette.

THE STUDY

A few pointers that can be understood from the current state of gender-based violence in public transport (GVPT) can be listed as follows: Firstly, sexual violence in buses and trains is rampant and justice against the perpetrators through police is sought after rarely. The social norms surrounding gender-based violence in public transport focus on the targets for having the onus of responsibility of preventing such violence (Butt and Sekaram, 2019).

From a linguistic perspective, disclosing accounts of the victim’s/ survivor’s experiences of GVPT is seen as catering to their ‘justice needs’ whereby they are given ‘voice’ to ‘express their experiences in a meaningful way’ (Fileborn, 2016, p.1484). Further, it is seen as a trivialised issue (Kissling, 1991; Vera-Gray, 2016), which further silences the victims and strengthens the perpetrators. These observations thus construct the research problem for this study which addresses the need for linguistics-related research on gender-based violence in public transport whereby the accounts of victims are explored.

Therefore, the overarching objective of this study is to delve into the master narratives that are associated with gender-based violence in public transport in

Sri Lanka. It was also deemed necessary that one hears the perspective of the target as a form of resistance to the view that the target should be accountable for preventing the violence that is perpetrated against them.

It was also an attempt to expand the discussion on gender-based violence in public transport to incidents that could occur in tuk-tuks, taxis that are hailed through e-hailing apps, and while being a pedestrian. The two research questions that are posed for this purpose are: 'How do the targets of gender-based violence in public transport identify themselves and the perpetrators through accounts of their experiences?' and 'What social realities can be deciphered through these accounts?'

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Theo Van Leeuwen argues that "all texts, all representations of the world and what is going on in it however abstract, should be interpreted as representations of social practices" (ibid, p. 5). He discusses numerous elements of social practices such as participants, actions, performance modes, times, locations and resources which would be recontextualised in texts. Van Leeuwen (2008) thus argues that the social practices are recontextualised in texts, conveying that the exact social practice would not be apparent in the text. He posits that the 'actual' social practice would undergo various transformations such as substitutions, deletions, rearrangements, additions, repetitions, reactions, purposes, legitimations and evaluations (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

Narrative Analysis

A view that is similar to Van Leeuwen's (2008) position on discourse as a recontextualised social practice is put forward by Catherine Riessman (2008). Discussing narrative analysis and the narratives that are unearthed through various sources, Riessman argues that the accounts that are analysed in narrative analyses are a reconstruction. Firstly, the speaker/ writer reconstructs the accounts from their memory. Secondly, they are left open for the interpretation of the investigator, which is another form of reconstruction of the account. Even though this does not directly convey a relationship between the narrative and society, it puts forth a characteristic about its relationship with the individual who narrates.

This study employs the narrative practice approach put forth by Bamberg (2015) as the analytical approach of this study. He states six standpoints from which the narrative practice approach could be viewed. They (Bamberg, 2015, pp. 3-4)

constitute the assumptions that narratives are fragments of larger interactive activities, that narratives often resemble texts, that “stories/ narratives typically consist of references to a world of actors, places and events which are references to something that happened typically as having taken place in the past and consisting of more than one event”, that this world could be about the narrator or someone else in which the narration follows a particular structure, that these are narrated for a certain purpose, and that these narratives reveal aspects of who they are.

The discourse of gender-based violence in public transport

Kissling (1991, p. 454) has discussed how GVPT (in her study, street harassment) is a manifestation of how men confine women to private spaces and ‘scare them away’ from public spaces which are perceived to be owned by men. She thus states that the intimidating and sexual nature of street harassment may remind women of the consequences of trespassing into those male spaces (ibid). These arguments suggest that GVPT acts as a method that reinforces the binary gender expressions of masculinity and femininity and widens the cleavage between them. It also posits that GVPT strives to keep women in ‘their place’ without trespassing on the supposedly male space.

Davis (1994) observes the street as a gendered space. She argues that GVPT is a part of a larger process of exercising patriarchal control over women. She states that as a result, GVPT transforms the streets into a space where the gender hierarchy is perpetuated (Davis, 1994). In defining GVPT (street harassment according to Davis), she argues that there are a few lenses through which we can view GVPT; “normatively”, through identifying the acts that can be considered gender-based violence in public transport, “the locale” focusing on the relationship between the harasser and the target, and “systemically”, where one looks at it as “an element of a larger system of sexual terrorism” (ibid, p. 138). This study is focused specifically on observing GVPT through “the locale” and “systemically” (ibid).

Interestingly, many of the views on GVPT seem to presume that women are the targets and that men are the perpetrators. This renders a silence in respect to non-binary and gender-fluid persons. An argument for using the women/ men binary to discuss GVPT is found in Boyle (2019) who states that the commonality in women being abused is not always the male abuser but misogyny. Although this view takes away the ‘male’ perpetrator from the presumptions it is still silent regarding male and non-binary targets. Discussing the same issue, Turchik, Hebenstreit and Judson (2016, p.140) maintain that the underrepresentation of

targets whose gender is not female leads to a lack of acknowledgement of them being targets of sexual assault. This study takes a similar position: while acknowledging that women are targeted quite rampantly in GVPT, it does not discard the possibility of men being targets.

Referring to GVPT in the intersections, Davis (1994, p.134) discusses GVPT and calls it “the harm that has no name” connecting it to the experiences of African American women. Fogg-Davis (2006) has investigated how GVPT takes place in America, especially in the case of African American lesbians. Despite the acknowledgement that African American women are doubly marginalized due to their gender and race, it is argued that African American men use GVPT for the same purpose that was highlighted above; to control women. Fogg-Davis (2006, p. 64) thus argues that “we can acknowledge that black men’s relationship to patriarchy is complicated by race and still be critical of individual black men who use street harassment to monitor, intimidate and control black women”.

The relevant literature also points out that this phenomenon of GVPT is called ‘eve teasing’ in India which shares similar cultural values with Sri Lanka. Introduced as a “culture-specific” (Nieder, Muck, Kartner, 2019, p. 3) Indian English term, ‘eve teasing’ has also been criticized as a euphemistic way of referring to GVPT which trivializes it and shifts the blame to the targets (ibid). In the above research which probes into the coping strategies of selected young Indian women in the face of GVPT “restrictions on mobility, clothing, sexuality and education” (ibid, p.9) are highlighted as the most frequent coping strategies. The restrictions on mobility as stated point to one of the main preoccupations in this study which is the agency of the targets.

In the research on GVPT that is done in respect of the context in India, a significant group is underlined as being instrumental in determining the agency of the female targets: their families (Nieder, Muck, Kartner, 2019; Dhillon, Bakaya, 2014; Talboys et al, 2017). These studies show the way the families of the female targets have imposed restrictions on their mobility to prevent them from being subjected to GVPT; imposing restrictions as such may suggest a victim-blaming mentality and a frantic need to protect the women from the perpetrators of GVPT.

RESEARCH METHODS

Primary Data

Ten narratives were obtained from five self-defined targets of gender-based violence in buses, tuk tuks, trains, and in roads while being pedestrians as the primary data of the research. The interviews were semi-structured, and facilitated

in a way that would aid the research participants to construct narratives on the research topic. However, there was a direction of concerns such as the particulars of incidents of GVPT, their responses, their views on the role of law and police and the ways that they acted against GVPT as bystanders.

The only criteria for selecting participants for the interviews was that they self-identified as targets of gender-based violence in public transport. The reason for this approach of identifying participants was the fluid nature of the ways that GVPT could occur and the understanding that it could occur irrespective of demographic differences. The relevant literature revealed that GVPT cannot be objectively defined and that the definitions should depend on how the targets perceive it (Hutson, Krueger, 2018, p.4).

However, out of the five participants, two identified as lesbians and the other three were heterosexual. One participant described their gender as non-binary while the other four participants identified as cisgender (female). They were in the age range of 25 years to 34 years.

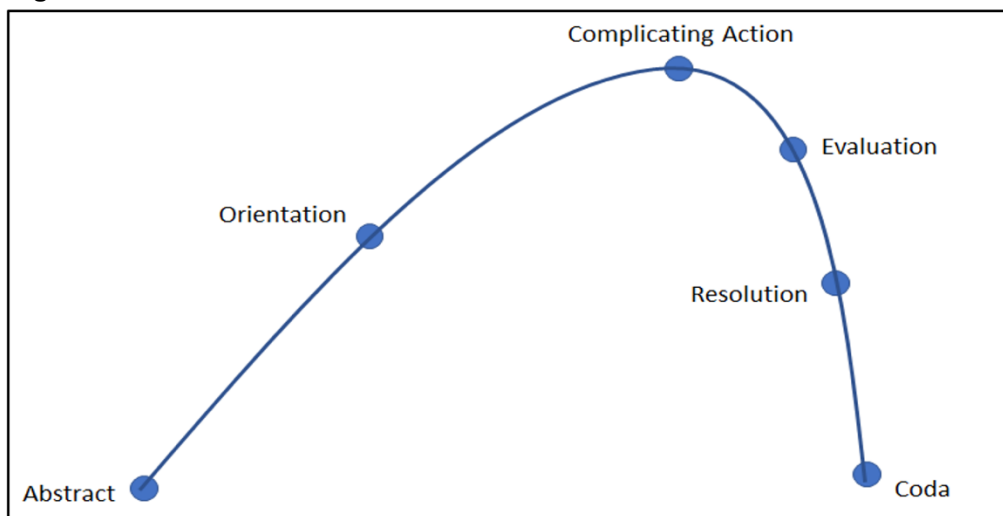
Method of Analysis

This analysis is a critical discourse analysis using a narrative analysis approach. In this regard, Theo Van Leeuwen's (2008) views on discourse as a recontextualized social practice alongside the views of Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2005) regarding narrative analysis would be incorporated. The interviews are considered a discursual interaction between the investigator and the participants. It is thus acknowledged that the subjectivity of the investigator would have a role to play in the process of conducting the interviews.

The data analysis is carried out in a few steps. Firstly, the corpus consisting of the interviews with the five participants was processed through Wmatrix4 concordance software to obtain the negative words, emotions and roles, and keyness of the groups. The results of WMatrix4 processing are intended to be the basis of the findings of the narrative analysis.

Secondly, two harassment stories from each target would be arranged according to the structure of Labov and Waletzky (Mishler, 1991, p.77-78). A model of this is provided below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Labov's model of narrative



Source: Labov and Waletzky (Mishler, 1991, p.77-78)

As some participants narrated numerous experiences related to GVPT, only two accounts would be considered for further analysis. Furthermore, the purpose of arranging the accounts according to the narrative structure of Labov is for the better understanding of the development of the event.

Once the accounts are arranged as thus, the data is analyzed using the social actor analysis introduced by Van Leeuwen (2008). Although the social actor model supplies numerous ways through which social actors could be represented, for this research, 'activation', 'passivation', 'dissociation', 'identification', and 'backgrounding' (ibid) vis-à-vis the positioning levels posited by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) are taken into account.

The main reason for using this approach from the words of Riessman (2008, p. 13) is, that a good narrative analysis prompts the reader to think beyond the surface of a text, and there is a move towards a broader commentary. As the research objectives convey, the discussion is developed into a broader social critique of the gender relations in Sri Lanka that is reflected in GVPT. As the researcher, I position myself as coming from a background where GVPT is part of daily life and being a victim of it is normalized and trivialized. Hence, the agency of the victim or survivor would be the focus in this small-scale study.

The specific reasons for using the concept of "positioning" are two-fold: The Wmatrix4 results point to a difference in subject positioning between females and males and it identifies them as two distinct groups. Furthermore, the research

questions that mark the difference between the targets of GVPT call for an approach that discusses positioning.

Ethical Concerns

Many of the participants identified to be in a grey area of being a victim and a survivor of GVPT. As the research probes into personal and emotionally taxing experiences that they underwent i.e. their experience of being harassed in public transport, this qualifies to be considered ‘sensitive research’ (Dickson-Swift, James, Liamputtong, 2008, p.3). Therefore, varying measures were taken so that discussing their experiences related to harassment would not have a negative effect on the mental health of the participants. The interviews were done in safe environments whereby the participants felt comfortable to discuss their experiences. Safety protocols were followed, and it was emphasized that they are able to stop the interview and/or withdraw themselves from being a participant at any given time, without having to give prior notice. After the interview was completed, the participants were followed up regarding their state of mental health after discussing their experiences.

DATA ANALYSIS

Preliminary Analysis

The four interviews that were done with the targets were processed through WMatrix4 (see below). The results of WMatrix4 processing on roles and keyness in comparison with the British National Corpus Written Sample would serve as the basis for the analysis.

Figure 1: Frequency of roles according to WMatrix4

Word	Frequency	Relative Frequency	
bystanders	3	0.02	Concordance
teachers	3	0.02	Concordance
ubers	2	0.01	Concordance
trousers	2	0.01	Concordance
passengers	2	0.01	Concordance
mirrors	2	0.01	Concordance
lawyers	2	0.01	Concordance
bus_drivers	2	0.01	Concordance
bus_conductors	2	0.01	Concordance
stickers	1	0.01	Concordance
survivors	1	0.01	Concordance
hoppers	1	0.01	Concordance
outsiders	1	0.01	Concordance
neighbors	1	0.01	Concordance
answers	1	0.01	Concordance

Source: Developed by Author

Figure 2: Frequency of keyness according to WMatrix4

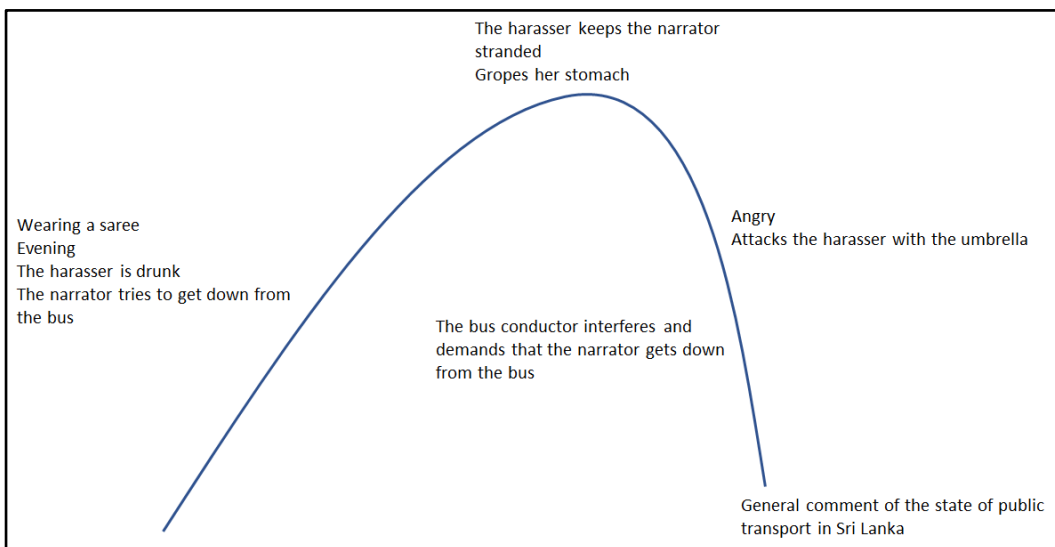
	Item	O1	%1	O2	%2	LL	LogRatio	
1	List1 Concordance M3	179	1.16	2115	0.22 +	302.12	2.43	Vehicles and transport on land
2	List1 Concordance Z99	296	1.92	5684	0.58 +	289.38	1.73	Unmatched
3	List1 Concordance S2.1	100	0.65	875	0.09 +	216.53	2.87	People: Female
4	List1 Concordance A2.1+	135	0.88	2031	0.21 +	178.53	2.08	Change
5	List1 Concordance X3.3	30	0.19	69	0.01 +	130.93	4.79	Sensory: Touch
6	List1 Concordance S2.2	110	0.71	1829	0.19 +	129.55	1.94	People: Male
7	List1 Concordance S2	137	0.89	2728	0.28 +	127.26	1.68	People
8	List1 Concordance E3-	74	0.48	959	0.10 +	114.38	2.30	Violent/Angry
9	List1 Concordance N3.6	20	0.13	67	0.01 +	75.10	4.25	Measurement: Area
10	List1 Concordance B5	86	0.56	2080	0.21 +	58.63	1.40	Clothes and personal belongings
11	List1 Concordance B1	121	0.79	3703	0.38 +	50.73	1.06	Anatomy and physiology
12	List1 Concordance G2.2-	29	0.19	338	0.03 +	49.56	2.45	Unethical
13	List1 Concordance G2.1	67	0.43	1639	0.17 +	44.76	1.38	Law and order

Source: Developed by Author

Secondary Analysis

4.2.1. Narrative Analysis 1 (Gangulali - Interview 1 - Narrative No. 1)

Figure 3: Narrative 1 by Gangulali according to the narrative analysis model



Source: Developed by Author

The incident described in the narrative takes place on a bus, whereby the narrator is groped while trying to get down from the bus.

The way the agency of the narrator is threatened through the invasion of her personal space is shown via her choice of verbs. The narrative reads, 'When I try to get down from the bus this man is keeping me stranded where I am and does

not let me get down' (Gangulali, personal communication, 17-08-2019). Here, the narrator uses two expressions to convey her immobility; she is 'kept stranded' by the harasser and he does not 'let' her get down from the bus. Further, the clause 'I try' semantically points to a limitation of agency and an attempt to resist.

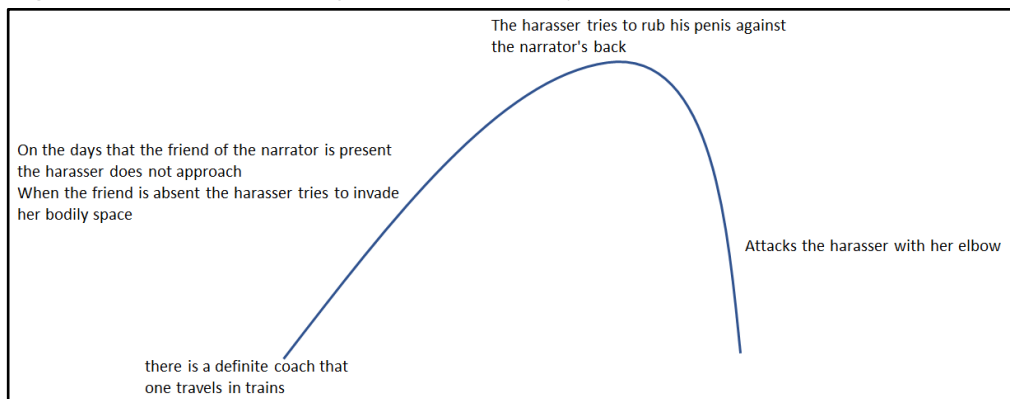
The narrative reads, 'Suddenly, this man put his hand through my saree and squeezed my belly' (Gangulali, personal communication, 17-08-2019). The repetitive use of the possessive pronoun 'my' in two instances within the sentence, as 'my saree' and 'my belly' suggests the awareness of the bodily space and in-turn, the invasion of it. The activation (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p.33) of 'this man' and the passivation (ibid) of the narrator further accentuates this point.

However, the narrator gains her agency back when she 'pushes' the harasser away. Her action of hitting the harasser with her umbrella thus can be considered an act of resistance against the harassment.

This regaining of her agency is threatened again when the conductor demands her to get off the bus - siding with the harasser. In the evaluation (Figure 4), the narrator poses the question of how her choice of wardrobe resulted in her being harassed; this instance shows the perspective of the conductor who compelled the narrator to stop resisting the harasser. It reads, "conductor assumed that this is what happens when you expose your belly" (Gangulali, personal communication, 17-08-2019). The narrator's rather specific involvement with the choice of her wardrobe (I'm wearing a saree) may showcase her prior knowledge about this perspective.

4.2.2. Narrative Analysis 2 (Gangulali - Interview 1 - Narrative No. 2)

Figure 4: Narrative 2 according to the narrative analysis model



Source: Developed by Author

This narrative discusses an incident where the harasser tries to rub his genitals against the target's back (See Figure 5). The target attacks the harasser to resist the harassment.

The narrator situates the in-groups and out-groups within the trains in Sri Lanka and the specific culture that is built in trains. The abstract of the narrative (See Figure 4) talks about the culture that is built amongst the passengers. The narrative thus reads, "there are cliques in trains; there is a specific coach for each clique that they typically travel everyday" (Gangulali, personal communication, 17-08-2019). Accordingly, each clique that travels together in the train constitute the in-groups whereas the rest of the passengers' become members of the out-group.

The narrator 'usually' travels with a 'friend' who is identified relationally to her as 'my friend' with the possessive pronoun 'my'. Interestingly, in the same way that she described the bystander in Narrative 1, she identifies the friend alongside his gender: male.

The narrative reads "I have observed this man before in another place, but when my friend is absent, he stands near me" (Gangulali, personal communication, 17-08-2019). The narrator builds the narrative between the harasser and herself with the friend although absent, in a way that suggests a triangular formation. The rest of the passengers are 'suppressed' (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p.29).

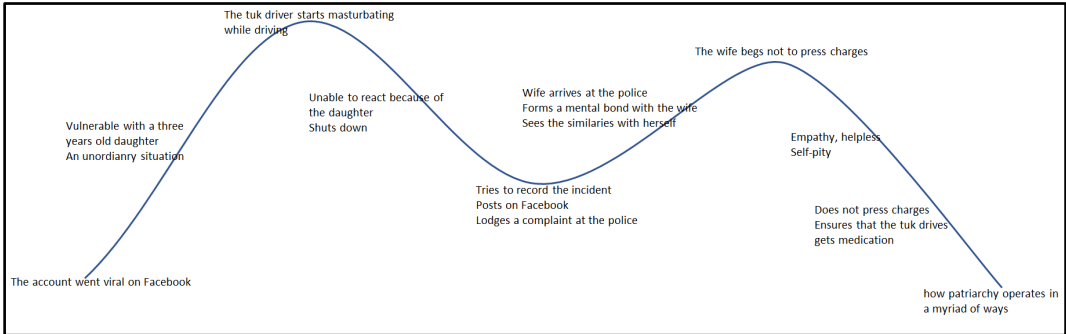
Considering the crucial part that this 'male friend' of the narrator plays in the narrative, an observation could be made regarding the narrator's agency. Although the narrator has prior knowledge of GVPT to decipher the harasser's intentions, her agency to travel freely on the train depends on the presence of her friend. The harasser stalks her but is hesitant to invade her bodily space when the friend is present.

In the complicating action, she regains her agency by attacking him from her elbow. In this instance, the agency that she had effortlessly in the presence of her friend, is lost and reclaimed effortfully.

It should also be noted that she identifies the genitalia of the harasser as a 'gadget'. According to Oxford Learners' Dictionaries (2019), a gadget is "a small tool or device that does something useful". It is also said that 'you sometimes refer to something as a gadget when you are suggesting that it is complicated and unnecessary' (Collins Cobuild Dictionary, 2019). Thereby, the narrator's description of the genitalia of the harasser to resemble a 'device' may resonate with the notion that the harasser utilizes his 'gadget' to control the space that the

narrator occupies and to constrict her agency. Rather symbolically, his genitalia become the device through which his rather invisible control over her is exercised.

Figure 5: Narrative 1 by Angela according to the narrative analysis model



Source: Developed by Author

4.2.3. Narrative Analysis 3 (Angela - Interview 2 - Narrative 1)

This narrative differs from the other narratives because it contains two complicating actions (see Figure 6). Aligning with the other narratives, the complicating action of the first half is the harassment: The target is harassed when she is taking her daughter to the preschool. When she attempts to press charges against the perpetrator, the perpetrator’s wife interferes which leads to the target underreporting the incident. Thereby, its resolution is complicated again when the expected resolution is hindered by the introduction of the harasser’s wife to the narrative.

This narrative contains two micro-narratives of sexual harassment within the narrative. One is when the narrator reveals her experience to the teacher of her daughter’s Montessori. The other is when she comes home and reveals her experience to her maid. Both social actors, the teacher and the maid are classified alongside their gender with the narrator’s use of feminine pronouns such as ‘she’ and ‘her’. In this instance the narrator utilizes overdetermination to associate herself with the teacher and the maid; although they played different social roles, all three of them are equally potential targets of sexual harassment.

The target’s effort to make it seem as if she is recording the harasser shows her agency to be in a blurred space because she is in a vulnerable place with her daughter next to her. However, the fact that she made a conscious effort to see if the harasser has an erection marks the point that she regains her agency; it can be observed that the narrator activates herself after the instance that she looks to

see if the harasser has an erection. The resolution of the first half of the narrative begins afterwards when the narrator takes a photograph of the license plate.

The resolution of the first complicating action takes several turns: as the action unfolds, the narrator attempts to video record the harassment (see Figure 6). She is looking 'specifically' to see if the harasser has an erection also adds to the resolution as it supports regaining the narrator's agency. Furthermore, she involves the social media discourse into the narrative by posting about her experience on Facebook.

The narrator is given a 'unique space' in the social media discourse to resist these norms and accentuate her agency. The narrative reads as follows: '...I write back to them saying I know what you said, this is my experience, you don't necessarily have to believe me, but this is what happened' (Angela, personal communication, 22-08-2019). The clauses such as, 'I write' and 'I know what you said' refer to mental processes and activates the narrator. The commentators of her Facebook posts are beneficiaries in this context and their identity is suppressed. As stated, these semantic and lexical choices activate the narrator as the main force and emphasize her agency.

In the resolution the narrator also makes an entry at the police at which point the second complicating action takes place. New social actors are introduced to the narrative at this instance: the woman police officer and the wife of the harasser.

The wife of the harasser is kept anonymous and initially identified concerning the harasser. However, the fact that she is relationally identified with the harasser is blurred when the narrator identifies her alongside herself: Firstly, she states that they smiled at each other conveying a positive connection. She also states that the wife made a positive impression further identifying her with her age. Also, the fact that the wife's children are of the same age as the narrator's is brought in. The narrator then identifies the wife with the action of crying because of the same incident: her being harassed. The narrator considers the wife to be in the same group as her, and an indirect victim of the harassment that was caused to the narrator. The gender of the narrator and the wife of the harasser are brought in to linguistically mark that they are associated together while the harasser is being dissociated. The use of identification can be deciphered in this context which supports categorizing the wife of the harasser and the target into one group.

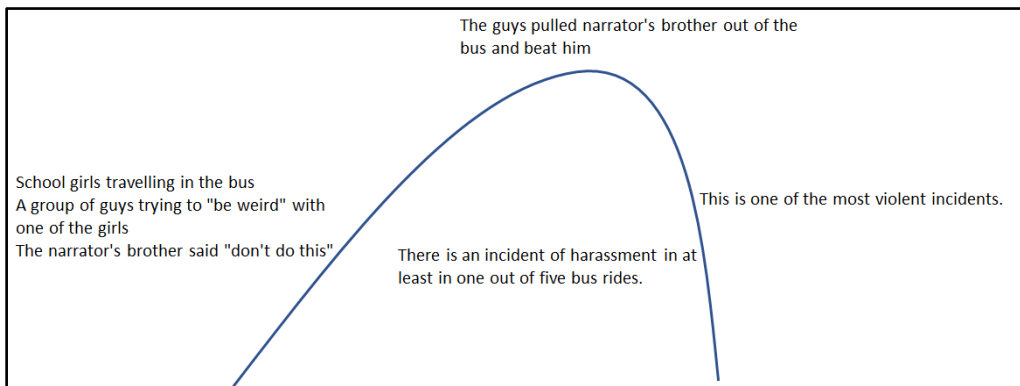
Regardless of the observation that the wife of the harasser is identified alongside the narrator, she is anonymized. Therefore, her identity is backgrounded in the

narrative, and we are compelled to refer to her as the ‘harasser’s wife’. This could be considered a symbol of her inferior role in comparison to the harasser.

A point that should be noted in this regard is that the wife, with whom the narrator identifies, is attempting to stop a resolution to the first complicating action from taking place. Nevertheless, the narrator can see through the socioeconomic discourse in the wife’s plight, which urges her to associate herself with the wife. In this case, the harasser can maintain his agency which is exercised through his wife. The economic discourse here, whereby the wife of the harasser is not employed (thus financially dependent on the harasser) becomes a force that supports the harasser in gaining and maintaining his agency. Simultaneously, this leads to the loss of the agency of the wife.

4.2.4 Narrative Analysis 4 (Angela - Interview 2 - Narrative 2)

Figure 6: Narrative 2 by Angela according to the narrative analysis model



Source: Developed by Author

Diverting from the other narrative that are analyzed; the target of this narrative is a male. Interestingly, he acts as a bystander against an incident of GVPT (Figure 7). The target who is a bystander to an incident of GVPT interferes and gets assaulted by the harassers.

The narrator classifies all the social actors alongside their gender. Accordingly, the social actors in the narrative are the narrator’s brother who is identified in relation to her, “a bunch of school girls” and “a bunch of guys” (Angela, personal communication, 22-08-2019). The orientation (Figure 7) portrays an attempt of GVPT against girls by the said ‘bunch of guys’ as the reason that compelled the brother to speak up. In this depiction, the girls and the guys who attempted the GVPT are dissociated in a way that they are situated as opposites. The brother

whose gender as a male is conveyed through the noun (i.e. my brother) that is used to identify him, and he situates himself with the girls to resist the GVPT that is done against one of them. He is then forced to bear the consequences of his decision, as he is assaulted for standing up against GVPT.

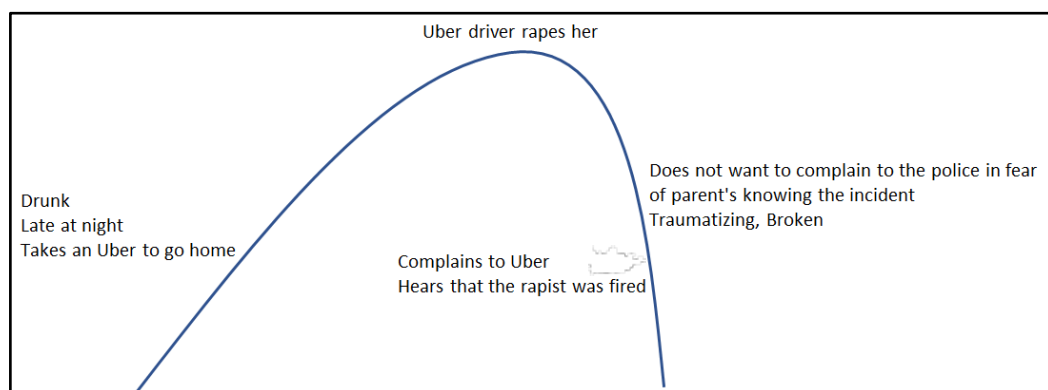
The narrative reads that the brother of the narrator was beaten up like a ‘human punching bag’, conveying that he was being treated as an object by the harassers.

The rest of the bystanders apart from the narrator are also radically excluded (suppressed) in the narrative. The narrator does not intervene, and her gender is ‘female’. This would coincide with the observation that the agency of the women is minimal in comparison to the men. The fact that the narrator behaves as a passive agent in this situation may further convey the extent to which the discourse of GVPT is ‘gendered’ (Sunderland, 2004, p. 21) to benefit men and to passivize the women.

4.2.5 Narrative Analysis 5 (Keen - Interview 3 - Narrative 1)

This account constitutes clearly defined in-groups and out-groups which have significant roles to play in the resolution (See Figure 8) of the narrative. As showcased in Figure 8 the target who is drunk and unable to consent is raped by a car driver obtained through an e-hailing app. The target does not want to complain to the police in fear of requiring telling her parents about the incident. Repetitively, the narrator refers to the target as “a dear friend of ours” (Keen, Personal communication, 24-08-2019) in the orientation which conveys the classification of her in the in-group as the narrator.

Figure 7: Narrative 1 by Keen according to the narrative analysis model



Source: Developed by Author

When the narrator persuades the target to lodge a complaint at the police, the out-group can be inferred. Although she had been raped (objectivated), which clearly amounts to severe psychological trauma, she does not want to report the crime that was done to her because “she will lose her freedom” (Keen, Personal communication, 24-08-2019) if her parents knew. This is an instance whereby the cultural discourse intersects with the resistance of GVPT and thus suggesting the possibility of perpetuating a woman’s disadvantaged subjection to the larger cultural norms.

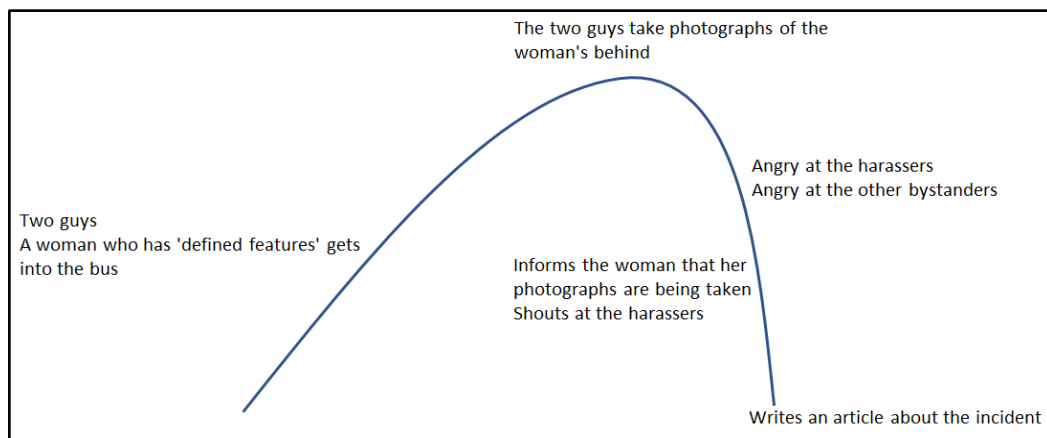
The target’s concern about whether she will lose her freedom if she opens to her parents about the rape unveils another side to my ongoing discussion on the target’s agency. The target’s agency is already restricted because of the relationship she has with her parents (a submissive role to her parents). In this context, she is given two options regarding the preservation of her agency: to resist the rapist and open about her experience, which according to the narrative, would result in restricting her freedom to spend time with her friends, or to conceal the fact that she was raped and preserve her agency. In this situation, the parents become a part of the out-group which contributes to her oppression. What the above-stated options of the target suggest is that the agency regarding one incident would also unfortunately mean the lack of agency regarding the other.

A few discourses intersect in resulting in this threatening of the target’s agency: the discourse on complaining to the police, the cultural discourse related to the interrelationship between the target and her parents and the patriarchal social discourse of Sri Lanka in general. The narrator makes a general commentary on gender relations in Sri Lanka which supports my position of the latter, which reads, ‘this country is where they won’t trust the woman’s words, they want to ask some man’ (Keen, Personal communication, 24-08-2019).

4.2.6. Narrative Analysis 6 (Keen - Interview 3 - Narrative 2)

This narrative depicts the harassment of a woman from the perspective of a bystander. The type of harassment that the narrator describes diverts from the types of harassment that were discussed in the previous narratives: in this narrative, the harassers take pictures of the victim’s/ survivor’s behind without her consent, invading her privacy and thus threatening her agency.

Figure 8: Narrative 2 by Keen according to the narrative analysis model



Source: Developed by Author

The detail that the target has “defined features” (Keen, Personal communication, 24-08-2019) is provided in the orientation (Figure 9) of the narrative, thus associating it with the complicating action. The interview with the narrator who is a masculine-presenting non-binary person, revealed that they were not being sexually targeted once they have begun to present more masculine. This reference to the body of the target who has a traditionally feminine body, coupled with the above detail from the narrator implies that it is the feminine expression that is being targeted by the harassers.

The social actors that are activated in the narrative i.e., the target and the harassers are identified through their gender. The narrator refers to the victim as “this lady” (Keen, Personal communication, 24-08-2019) whereas the harassers are identified through the noun phrases “two guys” and “these men” indicating their gender.

As stated earlier, this narrative showcases a bystander intervention; simultaneously, the narrator evaluates (Figure 9) the response of the rest of the bystanders. Line 8 reads, “I was so angry, my blood started boiling, like I was so angry, when I saw that no one said anything I mean it’s a flash, who wouldn’t see that” (Keen, Personal communication, 24-08-2019). Significantly, this is a reaction to the lack of intervention by the rest of the bystanders rather than to the harassment. Thereby, the narrator associates the fact that the flash of the phone camera could be seen with the fact that the rest of the bystanders did not speak out implying that the harassment was done in front of numerous people who did not try to intervene. While the narrator associates herself with the target,

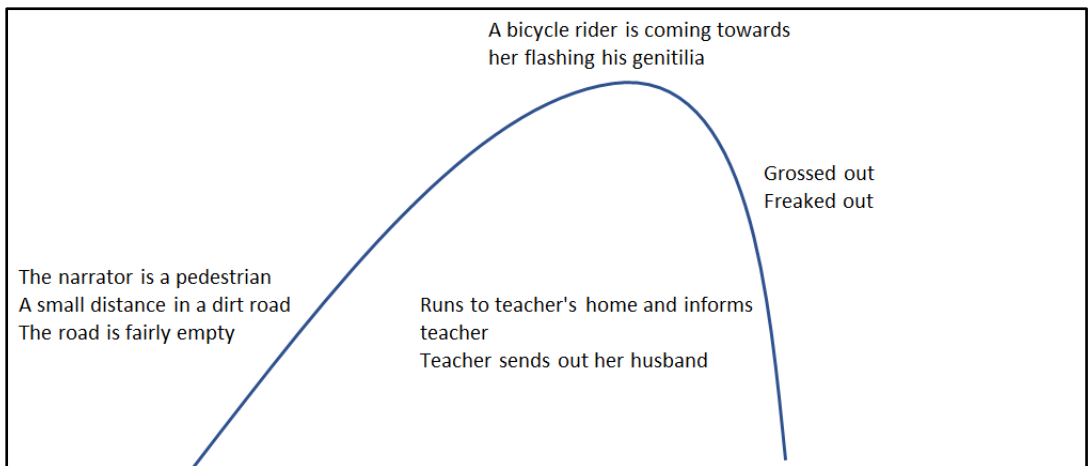
activating her role as an intervening bystander, the rest of the bystanders remain passivized.

The target did not know that her privacy was being violated until the narrator intervened, at which point she resisted the harassers. The target was able to gain the agency that she lost because of the bystander’s intervention. She was able to resist the harassment that was being done to her and the intervention of the narrator may have acted as a reinforcement. In this instance, the significance of bystander intervention is highlighted as it caters to the target regaining her agency.

4.2.7. Narrative Analysis 7 (Ruby - Interview 3 - Narrative 1)

Diverting from the other narratives which took place in vehicles, this narrative (See Figure 10) takes place when the narrator was a pedestrian. When she walks to her class on a dirt road, a bicycle rider flashes his genitals to her.

Figure 9: Narrative 1 by Ruby according to the narrative analysis model



Source: Developed by Author

The narrator’s use of negative emotions and actions in the evaluation of the narrative betrays the loss of agency after the complicating action i.e., the harassment. The verb phrases in the orientation read as “I got down”, “I walked past”, “I wanted to”, and “I looked ahead” (Ruby, Personal communication, 24-08-2019) in which the agency of the narrator is clearly shown.

However, in the evaluation, the verb phrases read as ‘I was so grossed out’, ‘I was so freaked out’ and ‘I couldn’t understand’ (Ruby, Personal communication,

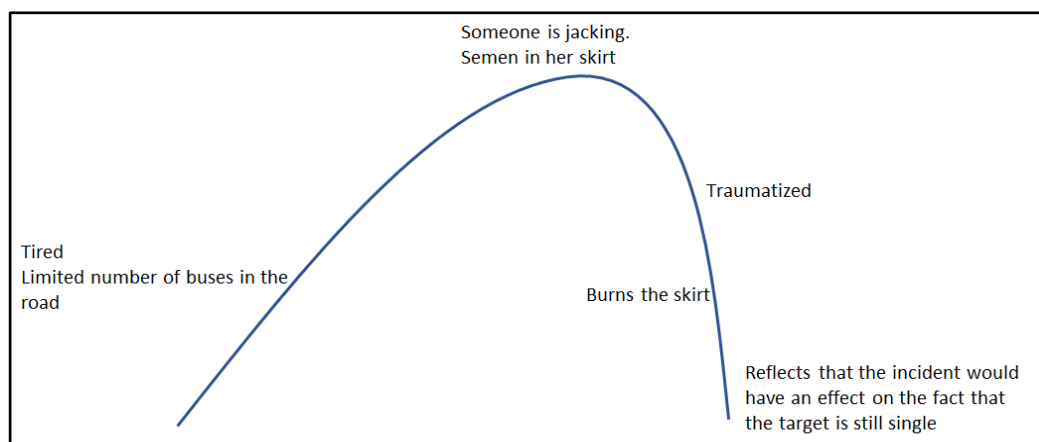
24-08-2019) which are all negative emotions that convey the threat to her agency. The narrator who was walking along the dirt road is compelled to run to the teacher's house because of the complicating action.

There is no statement relating to complaining to an authority regarding the harasser. It is made clear that the harassment took place on a rather domesticated road, which means that the rest of the students are also vulnerable to such harassment. Taking an action that goes beyond sending the teacher's husband to check if the harasser is still there, is suppressed in the narrative. Many narratives that were discussed thus far, do not contain the element whereby the target attempts to make a complaint to the relevant authorities. This would be indicative of the distrust in the police and the lack of agency of the target.

It should also be pointed out that it was the husband of the teacher who was sent out to look for the harasser. The husband being a male, and the harasser also being identified as a male thus constitute the in-group and the out-group respectively. What is interesting here is that a man is employed to regain the agency that the target lost through an action of another man. From this gendered identification and the play on agency in the narrative, it can be deciphered that the agency of the narrator is at the hands of these male social actors in this context.

4.2.9. Narrative Analysis 8 (Ruby - Interview 3 - Narrative 2)

Figure 10: Narrative 2 by Ruby according to the narrative analysis model



Source: Developed by Author

The orientation plays a vital part in determining the agency of the target at the time of harassment: the narrative reads that “They don't have a lot of buses in that road actually so after work she has to catch that bus” (Ruby, Personal communication, 24-08-2019) clearly indicating that the access to public transport is limited to the target. As a result, the bus is packed, which restricts her bodily agency. I observe that due to the discourse regarding the access to public transport the target's physical agency is limited even before she got harassed. This is combined with her being harassed because the harasser takes advantage of the fact that she cannot move (defend herself) in a jam-packed bus. Thereby, in this narrative, the target's agency is threatened from two sources: firstly, the economic discourse of the country that hinders her access to safe and spacious public transport, and secondly, the harasser who utilizes the first factor to harass her.

As the complicating action unravels, the narrative reads, “When she went home and took off her clothes, she saw semen, [at the] back of her skirt” (Ruby, Personal communication, 24-08-2019), clearly indicating that this someone should typically be a male. Van Leeuwen (2010, p. 46-47) categorizes this identification as “somatization” whereby “a reference to a part of [their] body” is made to impersonalize the social actor. This manner of impersonalization is a commentary on the nature of harassment that takes place in public transport as the target and the harasser are unknown to each other. The only way that the target can decipher the identity of the harasser is through his body parts. This nature, i.e., the non-specificity has allowed the harasser to continue to conceal himself from his crime.

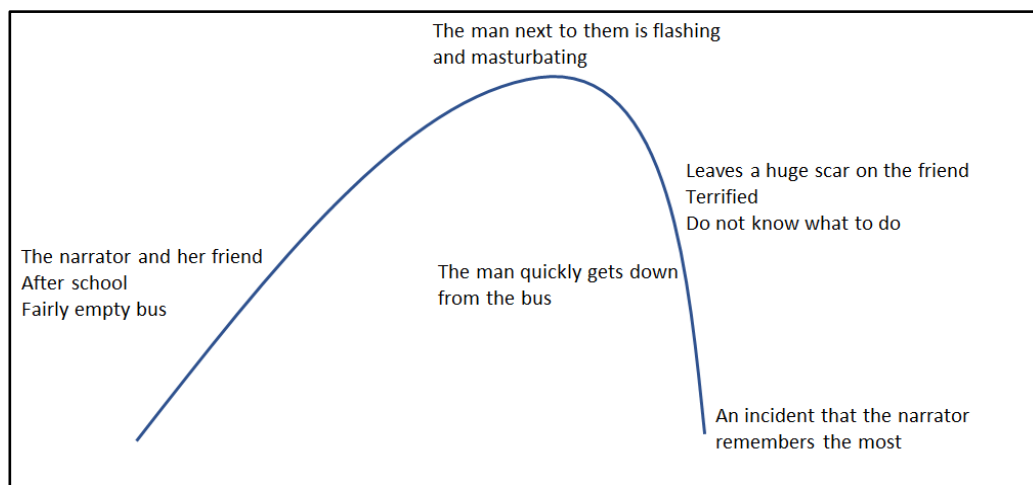
An interesting observation one could make in this regard is that the act of rubbing one's genitals against the other's back is called ‘jacking’ which is derived from the Sinhalese term /jæk gahanawa:/. In Sinhalese, the term ‘jack’ is a direct borrowing from English which refers to the device that is used to lift motor vehicles. In a rather metaphorical sense, the jack thus becomes the phallus whereas the vehicle/ heavy object that is being lifted becomes the woman that is being harassed. Similar to the case of ‘gadget’ (See Narrative Analysis 2) the phallus is compared to a device and is thus objectivized.

The expressions such as ‘gadget’ and ‘jack’ convey the meaning ‘device’ which is the active force of a process. In this regard, the beneficiary is the social actor on whom the gadget is pressed against and/ or being jacked. These expressions that have been ingrained into the Sri Lankan lingo showcase the passivation of the target.

4.2.9. Narrative Analysis 9 (Vihangaa - Interview 4 - Narrative 1)

The significance of this narrative is that it is about two targets: the narrator and her friend who are two students going home after school. Although the narrator is unclear about their exact ages at the time of harassment it can be logically deciphered that they could be around 18 years of age or younger. In the narrative, (Figure 12) when the targets are travelling in the bus, the man who sits next to them is flashing his genitals and masturbating.

Figure 11: Narrative 1 by Vihangaa according to the narrative analysis model



The narrator depicts the loss of the friend’s agency through her physical action of covering her face when the harasser is flashing and masturbating next to them.

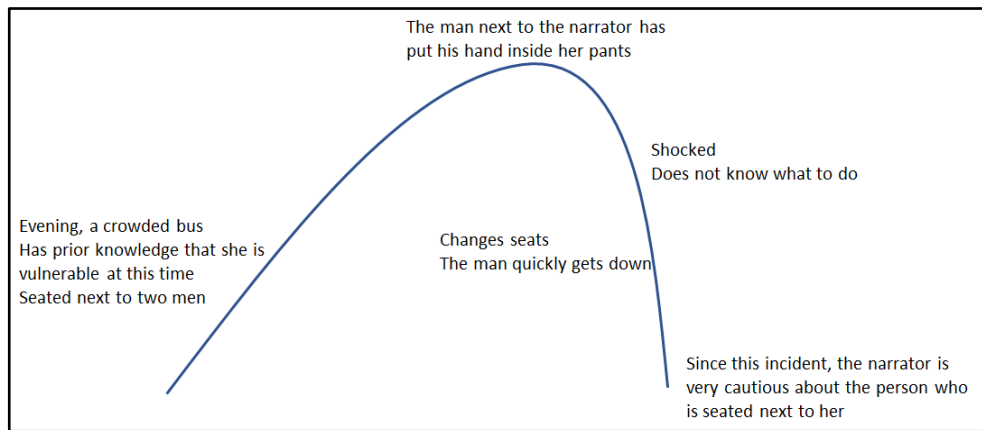
It can be argued that the narrator retains her agency, which could be deciphered from the way she evaluates the complicating action. Line 12 reads, “We were terrified, we were in school uniform, we didn’t know what to do, we had no-one to talk to...” (Vihangaa, Personal communication, 25-08-2019): while this utterance contains negative emotions (i.e. “terrified”) it also provides us with an evaluation of the state that the narrator and her friend wherein as a collective. Their physical agency has been threatened, being stranded in the corner of the seat of the bus; however, this narrator’s evaluation and her repetitive use of the agent in the above utterance betray a retaining of her emotional agency even though she is being harassed. This observation is voiced out by the narrator in line 13, which reads “I think more than it affected me, it left a huge scar on my friend because I’m

guessing that was the first time, she experienced something like that...” (Vihangaa, Personal communication, 25-08-2019). In addition to the view that this line proves my previous position, it also points to the prior knowledge of the narrator and that it has led to desensitization of one’s harassment.

4.2.10. Narrative Analysis 10 (Vihangaa - Interview 4 - Narrative 2)

This narrative deals with the way ‘space’ acts as a liberation from the harasser as well as an avenue of getaway for the harasser. In the narrative, the target falls asleep in the bus, and wakes up to see that the passenger who sits next to her has put his hand in her pants (See Figure 13).

Figure 12: Narrative 2 by Vihangaa according to the narrative analysis model



Source: Developed by Author

Further, as it has been noted in the Narrative Analysis 3, the incident in this narrative is an instance whereby the narrator slightly diverts from her usual routine. The narrator gets into the bus on a Friday evening which is unusual, because she usually avoids the ‘long distance bus’ during that hour because of her prior knowledge that the bus could be crowded and “things” could happen. Here the crowded has again been identified as the social space where GVPT takes place. As discussed in the analysis of the previous narrative, there is an implication that crowded buses back the harassers as they hinder the ability of the targets to move and defend themselves. The narrator seems to be aware of this as she usually avoids “crowded” buses. This is suggested by the narrator’s association of the crowded buses with the possibility of ‘things happening’.

It should be noted that the narrator states that she ‘didn’t have any other option but to get onto the bus (in which she got harassed). Here, her agency had already been compromised when she got on the bus. This is not necessarily the economic

discourse coming into play to threaten her agency as in the previous narrative, but also a particular culture of harassment that is built as a result of this discourse. This position can be taken because the narrator does not indicate a scarcity of buses in the previous narrative. She simply states that the buses are crowded during a given period which backs the harassers.

The realization of the narrator about her loss of agency can be seen when the narrator goes from, “I realized” to “I don’t know how it happened, I don’t know how he did that...” (Vihangaa, Personal communication, 25-08-2019). As the narrator wakes up and realizes that she is being harassed, the harasser also becomes “terrified” and stops the harassment.

In the above instance where the narrator seems to be regaining her agency, she is still unable to act in the way she wants to act. The narrative reads that she “stared...” (Vihangaa, Personal communication, 25-08-2019) at the harasser and she “wanted to slap him” but simultaneously, the narrator evaluates that “a part of her” did not do that. This can be connected to Narrative 3 whereby the narrator makes a similar observation that she was not able to act in the ‘expected’ way.

Thereby, the resolution of the narrative is the narrator switching places with a bystander i.e., changing her physical space. In the same way that changing of physical space helps the narrator, it aids the harasser to get away from being held accountable as he also gets down from the bus.

DISCUSSION AND FINAL REMARKS

The agency of the target

With the aid of WMatrix4 and by manually analyzing ten narratives of GVPT, three groups of people can be singled out: the targets, the bystanders, and the harassers. Furthermore, a constant engagement with the targets’ agency can be identified.

A significant factor that stands out in the analysis is that the agency of the target is already under threat when they take public transport. The orientation section of all the narratives concerns the targets’ prior knowledge and various safety precautions taken against potential harassment.

The male bystanders in the narrative could be divided into two categories: the male bystanders who are identified with the target and the male bystanders who are not identified with the target. The latter is backgrounded in the narratives. In all the narratives, female bystanders are radically excluded. While arguing this, it can be highlighted that the male bystanders who are identified by the targets with

themselves have a key role to play in determining whether the agency of the targets who are women is threatened or preserved.

What the above observations in the narratives convey is the dependency of the female users of public transport on their male counterparts to ensure that their agency is not invaded. The key point here is that the male is identified relationally. Interestingly, while a man who is unknown to the targets harasses them in public transport, another man who is known to them comes to the rescue. The women, whether they are being harassed or rescued, are at the receiving end, thus passivized.

Vera-Gray (2017, p. 73) develops on the existing literature that “women as a group are perceived as open persons in public spaces” a view that could be applied to the plight of the targets. In this context, all the harassers are not known to the targets; the only commonality between the targets and the harassers was the fact that they happened to physically be in the same mode of transport at the same time. The fact that the male harassers harass female targets who are unknown to them, and who they only saw during a brief period, clearly emphasizes the above view. The consideration of women thus, indicates that they lack agency in public transport.

In addition, the orientations of the narratives also pointed out that the targets note the crowdedness of the buses. In the ninth narrative, the narrator identifies that the bus is rather empty whereas in the tenth narrative and the eighth narrative, the targets note that the bus is rather crowded. The assumption that is upheld in the tenth narrative that less crowded buses are safer is debunked in the ninth narrative which was narrated by the same target. These myths about the crowdedness of the bus and the very fact that the targets were harassed irrespective of the crowdedness of the public transport show their vulnerability and the frantic want to hold on to their bodily agency.

The Involvement of the Dominant Discourses and Master Narratives

It is possible to consider counteracting GVPT an interdiscursive practice. The evaluation and the resolution of the narratives concern the instances whereby the target tries to regain her bodily agency by physically resisting the harasser or attempts to regain her agency metaphorically by seeking justice against the harassment. However, several factors hinder their ability to regain their agency.

Commenting on the incorporation of social media discourse as a means of resisting GVPT, B. Fileborn (2016, p. 1485) develops that there could be spaces where the targets “contest dominant social, cultural and legal narratives of sexual

violence” but that is open to debate. The target in the third narrative sought agency and justice by posting the story on Facebook; however, she was responded with a counter-narrative which is similar to the retort of the bus conductor in the first narrative. The target’s attempt to turn the negative social media comments into a site of conversation may suggest the lack of space in Sri Lanka to hold a conversation on GVPT. Especially, in the third narrative, the target frames ‘Colombo’ as the space where conversations about GVPT are taking place. It leads to the question of the exclusion of the rest of the country which requires further scrutiny.

Thus far, the interferences of ‘men’ in determining the agency of women were discussed. Interestingly, this interference of the male is not restricted to a literal man but the patriarchal figure who is the breadwinner of the family. When one investigates the dominant socio-economic discourse concerning the woman’s access to childcare without compromising her ability to work and be financially independent, the underlying patriarchal master narrative is clear. A point that was made earlier is shown in this context, which says that “the basic common character underlying women’s experience of abuse is not always a male perpetrator, but rather the broader social meaning of the abuse that women are targeted because they are women” (Boyle, 2019. p. 23).

In essence, the findings of this research suggest a clear segregation of the female and male groups in Sri Lankan society. They also emphasize a strong need to ensure women’s safety and to take necessary legal measures to apprehend the harassers. As noted, an unavoidable characteristic of GVPT is the anonymity of the harasser which hinders the ability to locate them once they have escaped. This nature coupled with patriarchal practices which are apparent signals for the necessity for the empowerment of passengers of public transport against harassment.

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