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# HER CITY & STORIES

January - November 2020







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**Disclaimer:**

*The views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the Friedrich Nauman Foundation for Freedom (FNF). The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of the Playground - center for transdisciplinarity, design and innovation at Habib University, Karachi.*

// TEAM //

**THE TEAM****Hira Zuberi**

*Associate Director, The Playground at HU  
Architect, Researcher, Design Strategist*

Hira's current research is at the intersection of systems thinking, strategic foresight and urbanism. Through transdisciplinary methods of design research she is exploring new models of urban innovation and design practices for the Global South. Hira holds a Masters in Architecture from Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia and postgraduate in Speculative Urbanism from Strelka Institute.

**Bushra Saleem**

*Architect, Researcher, Illustrator*

Bushra wants to use her architecture education to conduct research, document experiences and come up with sustainable solutions. Bushra's practice revolves around the works of theorists like Certeau, Lefebvre, Chatterjee, Phadke, Jacobs and Harvey. As a student I have been studying their works and helping it inform my own understanding of rights to the city and what it has to offer.

**Aala Siddiqi**

*Designer and Researcher*

Aala is a Design Researcher at the playground, Habib University. She is interested in exploring gendered experiences of mobility, urban planning, and design management. Along with Her City, Her Stories, she is also working on developing an Atlas documenting the struggles female commuters face in Karachi. Aala believes that design research can play a major role in making cities more inclusive and easier to navigate in the future.



## Anita Zehra

*Communication & Design, Habib University*

Anita's research interests lie in the fields of literature, speculation, and imagined realities. Besides a playground researcher, she is also a designer and a film enthusiast. Often, she can be found illustrating zines or interacting with new art mediums. Anita is keen on learning more about the impact mobility has on us and is interested in documenting raw data and stories.



## Rida Zahid Khan

*Computer Science, Habib University*

Rida, as a little girl, was exposed to Karachi's public buses because that was the only way to commute for a middle-class family, way before they had options like Careem and Uber. Rida hopes for us to be able to exist in a space that is safe for women to travel alone in. Even though the launch of ride-hailing apps has aided the accessibility to a relatively safer mode of transportation for women, there are still countless women whose mobility is limited due to our dilapidating public buses.



## Hiba Shoaib

*Social Development & Policy, Habib University*

Hiba is currently pursuing a degree in Social Development and Policy from Habib University. As a woman in Karachi who frequently travels via rickshaws and public buses, she comes with her experiences and understands the challenges women face on their daily travel journeys. She has never felt safe while navigating the streets of her own city.

// HIGHLIGHT //

## 01 ABSTRACT

Her City, Her Stories is part of the design research program launched in 2019 at the playground: Transdisciplinary Design & Innovation Lab, at Habib University. This is a student led project that uses a range of design research methodologies, including human centered design to explore and document women's real-life experiences with mobility in Karachi. Human-centered design is a mindset that overlays design thinking to ensure that

solutions are sustainable and beneficial for the people they are intended to serve. The research participants of this study were women within the age bracket of 16 - 30 years, from various socio-economic backgrounds, who usually travelled independently around the city. This was a comprehensive research which examined the various different transport modes available to women in the city, to better understand the relationship between the two. Comparative studies were also conducted to see how the issues faced by women in Karachi fare against issues faced by women in other South Asian cities. Finally, using the insights gained from these, the study explored different ways of imagining and speculating about possible interventions and recommendations for a brighter future of the city, centered around the themes of gender and mobility in the context of Karachi, Pakistan.



*The research participants of this study were women within the age bracket of 16-30*

// HIGHLIGHT //

## 02 INTRODUCTION

One of the defining features of modern urban centres is the ease with which its inhabitants can travel in it and how its citizens rate it in terms of mobility and accessibility. With the rapid urbanization and growth of megacities that has defined the 21st century, mobility and transport networks have become one of the primary indicators of the quality of life of cities. In the context of Karachi, it is one of the 34 megacities of the world with a population of approximately 16 million people and it is also ranked as having the worst public transport system globally (Wangi, 2020). The lack of reliable modes of travel translates into the lack of accessibility and mobility of the city's more marginalized citizens, especially women, which was one of the main questions this research explored.

This research was led by a transdisciplinary group of students and practitioners coming from the disciplines of social development and policy, communication and design, computer science, architecture and urban design. The collaborative nature of the project allowed the team to cover various tangible and intangible barriers such as societal norms, safety & security concerns, and limited modes of transport, that hinder women while they try to navigate their city. The link between lack of mobility and mental and physical health of citizens, as well as their access to educational and employment opportunities was also examined.

One of the primary aims of this research was to create a safe space for women where

they could voice and share the issues they face, validate their concerns and were given a chance to dream of better futures. All the insights and information collected from this research allowed the team to formulate a set of recommendations which could be useful for designing Karachi's future urban policies through a gender-sensitive lens.



**Karachi is ranked as having the worst public transport system globally (Wangi, 2020).**



*The book 'Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets' (2011), by Shilpa Phadke, was central to this research.*

// HIGHLIGHT //

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**03**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**



### ***Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets - Book by Shilpa Phadke, 2011***

One of the texts most central to this research because of its contextual and cultural relevance to Karachi was 'Why Loiter? Radical possibilities for gendered dissent' (2009) by Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade. Conducted in Mumbai, another South Asian city similar to Karachi, this research drew upon similar notions of politics of respectability and visibility for women in public space, and the strategies they are forced to depend upon to get some access. The article states, "Women have conditional access to public space" (Phadke, 2011, p. 32) which is granted based upon their privilege of class, religion, ethnicity, and "demonstrable" respectability.

In the case of demonstrable respectability, what this requires of women is that they adjust different aspects of their being, like clothing, accessories, body language, and time of travelling to legitimize their appearance in public space. These complex strategies which involve using symbolic markers which establish their link to familial structures and masculine protection or legitimate purposes such as education and employment force women to go through a series of mental gymnastics to justify their occupation of public space (Phadke, 2011, p. 34). This part of the text in-particular informed the methodology for this research for mapping encounters of women in Karachi and the kind of symbols and trends that should be recorded.

What this also establishes is that women need to have a legitimate purpose to be in public, and loitering or aimless occupation of public space is not that. The writers of "Why Loiter?" however maintain that the use of public space just for the sake of pleasure is a basic human right which allows citizens to have a better and more inclusive relationship with their city. In addition to that, they claim that aimless loitering disrupts hierarchies, challenges the discourse created around good/bad women and legitimate/ illegitimate occupants, and rejects the sacrifice of access to public space in the name of "security".

What particularly stands out about "Why Loiter?" is how it framed these issues of gendered mobility and access. By choosing to frame their argument in terms of women's 'quest for pleasure' instead of 'struggle against violence'

they shifted the focus from protection to a demand for the basic human right of the right to the city. Often this demand for "loitering" in public space is considered frivolous, unrealistic or unimportant. However, the writers argue that this quest for pleasure is deeply connected to the struggle against violence as it establishes that women have the right to visibility and occupation of public space without being subjected to any kind of violence. This point resonated with the research participants in particular as they felt that their demands for safely existing and enjoying themselves in public spaces were also often invalidated and considered non-serious, even though they were indicative of the overall inaccessible and unsafe environment of public spaces that had been created for women.

### ***Eyes on the Street: The Life of Jane Jacobs - Book by Robert Kanigel, 2017***

Another major inspiration for Her City, Her Stories was Jane Jacob's (2017) extensive work on cities and public spaces. Jane Jacob's resistance against the trend of urban renewal with its top down approach and her insistence on small, intimate, and accessible public spaces was particularly relevant to Karachi given its recently launched mega projects. Instead of accessible and communal spaces, high rise luxury projects are being promoted.

Jane Jacobs believed in building cities not from an urban planner's imagination but from real life and peoples lived realities. Similarly, in this research project through listening circles, the team of Her City and Her Stories hoped to gather these everyday experiences of women and use them to create an accurate representation of the city. Jacobs introduced a new way of imagining cities, one which did not focus on large scale development projects but one that valued the complexity and potential of communal ties and close knit societies. One central idea that emerged from this was that of "eyes on the street" in which she argued that women reported feeling safer in busy spaces as eyes guaranteed a certain level of safety that otherwise did not exist. This was in contradiction to government efforts of removing street hawkers and small neighborhood businesses to make spaces safer, and building cities for motor vehicles rather than pedestrians. Jacobs believed that people in cities were interconnected by their shared experiences, and this diversity and variety of experiences and narratives was what made them preferred spaces of living.





# 04 RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

**1**

What words would you use to describe your mobility in Karachi?

Copy the green ticks (✔) below and place them over all the words in the bingo which apply to your experience of mobility in Karachi.

If any other words come to your mind which have not been mentioned in the bingo, please add them to the empty boxes by double clicking on the pink sticky notes.

Extra Sticky notes!

### How would you describe your mobility in Karachi?

✔ Successful	Comfortable	Restricted	Liberating
✔ Unsafe	Exciting	Not just a matter of safety	Unaffordable
Convenient	Not just a matter of safety	Anxiety inducing	Reliable
Unhealthy	Exciting	Not just a matter of safety	✔ Time Consuming

**2**

What does your preferred future of Karachi look like?

Add any dreams, wishes or visions you may have for the future of mobility in Karachi, especially in terms of improvement in gender equality, environment, and transport and infrastructure of the city.

The fourth division is for any other improvements you may wish to see in the city which have not been covered by the other categories.

Dream big, and add anything and everything to these sticky notes!

*The focus was to examine and document the problems women encounter when trying to navigate their city, Karachi*

// STATISTICS //

## 04 RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

In order to ensure that a thorough and a comprehensive study was conducted, a transdisciplinary design research approach was followed including various mapping methods to explore the relationship between women and their mobility in the city. In the wake of Covid-19, all design research activities for this project were conducted virtually. Due to limitations of access to the internet, the study posed limitations in terms of demographics and reach to a wider audience.

The virtual design-research methodologies used are as follows:

### (i) Surveys

The first step of this research was conducting an online survey with over a 100 females based in Karachi consisting mainly of students and professionals. Women were asked questions about their purpose of commute, their preferred mode of transport and their experience of navigating the city. Furthermore, the survey also had questions around harassment, how safe or unsafe women feel while travelling alone, and monthly expenditures, etc. They were also asked to share their experiences with mobility in their own neighborhood through which data was gathered on different areas of Karachi which was later analyzed in detail.



socio-economic backgrounds, who were students and working professionals using different modes of transport between the ages of 16-30, came together to share and validate their experiences. The focus was to examine and document the problems women encounter when trying to navigate the city and the various ways in which they use public spaces to their advantage. This was achieved through discussions and multiple mapping exercises. The discussions were recorded and transcribed and later analyzed in detail through coding and affinity mapping. The exercises that were conducted during these listening circles are as follows:

**(ii-a) Encounter Mapping**

Gender based mobility defines who can travel where, to which institution, with whom and for how long. Restrictions on women are based on many factors, physical appearance and clothing being one of them. Thus, the way a woman appears to be or should appear in order to legitimise her presence in the public sphere opens up the discourses of visibility politics. How bodies are used as tools and places of reinforcing existing structures of power and the way they need bodies to perform and continuously aid the production of gender.

**(ii) Listening Circles**

The second step in the research was to start empathizing with women. To start this process, three volumes of listening circles for women were hosted, centered around the theme of mobility. Each volume consisted of multiple listening circle sessions conducted virtually over zoom with upto twelve participants in each.

Community and behenchara (sisterhood) is a key aspect for resisting isolation, and through the listening circles the team was able to conduct a healthy dialogue about women in Karachi and their relationship to their city. Different women from different

Encounter mapping as a method is based on the assumption that all women make various (similar or dissimilar) negotiations in order to navigate the city. These negotiations are often gestures or tools that make being in the (bahir) outdoor public sphere legitimate, acceptable and respectable for them. Visual representation to collect data on these specific ways in which women adapt to the city are best captured through participatory methods than just discussions. This mapping method entails the anxieties attached to one’s physical appearance in the public sphere or during commuting, routes etc. It also covers how these anxieties are catered to using various


tools of visibility (what they wear, the routes they take, the mode of transport they prefer, who they take with them etc.)

i. Initially, the participants were requested to draw concentric circles and draw a small figure in the middle of these circles, that represents them. They made this as detailed or brief as they liked. This midpoint drawn by them reflects the primary everyday departure point. For most people, it is their homes. Each circle is reflective of the distance from their home.

ii. Then, the participants were asked to add markers/points on these circles, depicting places they visit regularly if not daily. For example, grocery stores, school, office, university, stationary shops, friends' homes, places to hang out, malls and parks etc. They gave numbers to these points and listed them down next to the diagram with the names of the places.


iii. Next, the participants drew lines from the home point to all the other points. They used dashed lines for points they walk to and straight uninterrupted lines for vehicles. They also added different symbols along these lines to represent who accompanied them, the type of transport they used, precautions taken by them (such as wearing or removing certain pieces of clothing, e.g. chaadars or dupattas, based on location, experience, stories etc.) and how comfortable their experience was.

**This mapping method entails the anxieties attached to one's physical appearance in the public sphere or during commuting, routes**





 moustache to show if they are accompanied by a man (this includes usual caretakers like fathers, brothers, husbands, uncles etc, even a personal/family driver can count)

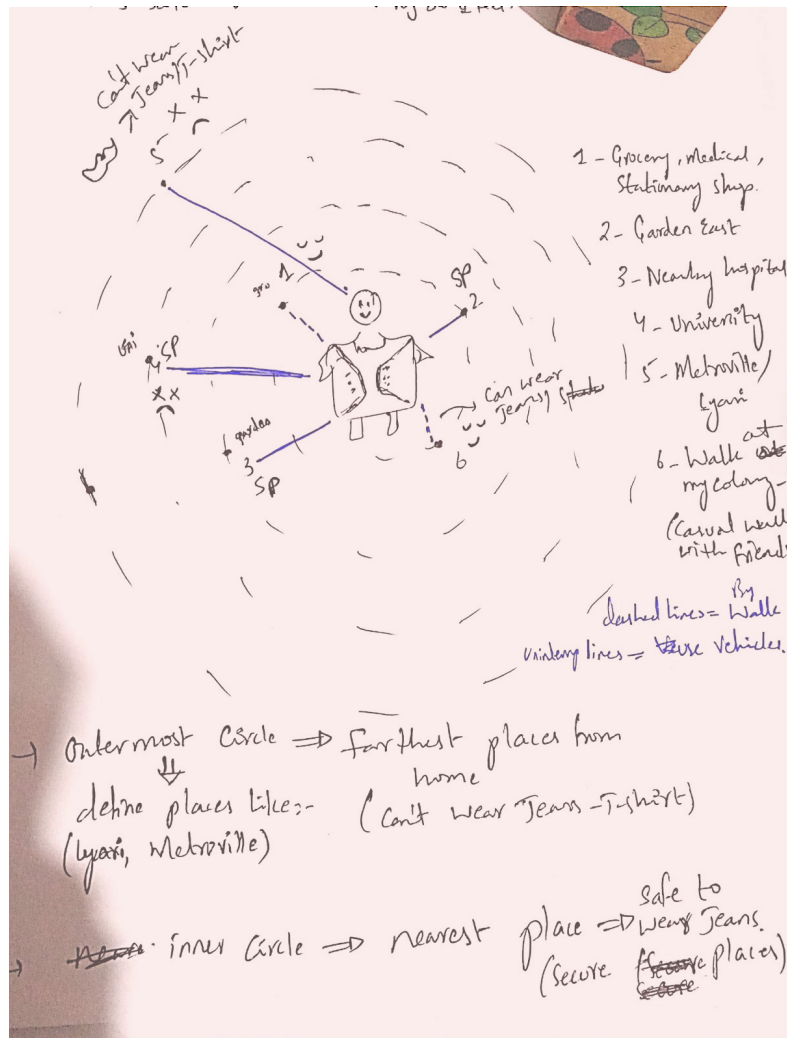
- (P) private transport
- (SP) semi private transport (careems, rickshaws, vans, etc)
- (PB) public transport

 uncomfortable, unpleasant, anxiety ridden experience

 comfortable, pleasant, no difficulties

Precautions taken/ Tools of Visibility (wearing or removing these based on location, experience, stories etc)

-  Jewellery etc
-  lipstick
-  chaadar
-  abaya/ burqa , and other things like 'appropriate' c clothing, jeans, short shirts, kameez shalwar





Click on this link to read about women's experiences presented in the form of a heat map: [https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1rC89BvoLOtaYwbW2nlRVL\\_z8BKXsLpr-&usp=sharing](https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1rC89BvoLOtaYwbW2nlRVL_z8BKXsLpr-&usp=sharing)

## (ii-b) Experience Mapping

In order to get a better understanding of issues of women's mobility through a spatial lens, experience mapping was conducted where the participants mapped their emotions and stories that were felt at the exact locations of Karachi. The intent of this mapping exercise was to create a catalog of heat maps of safe and unsafe zones.

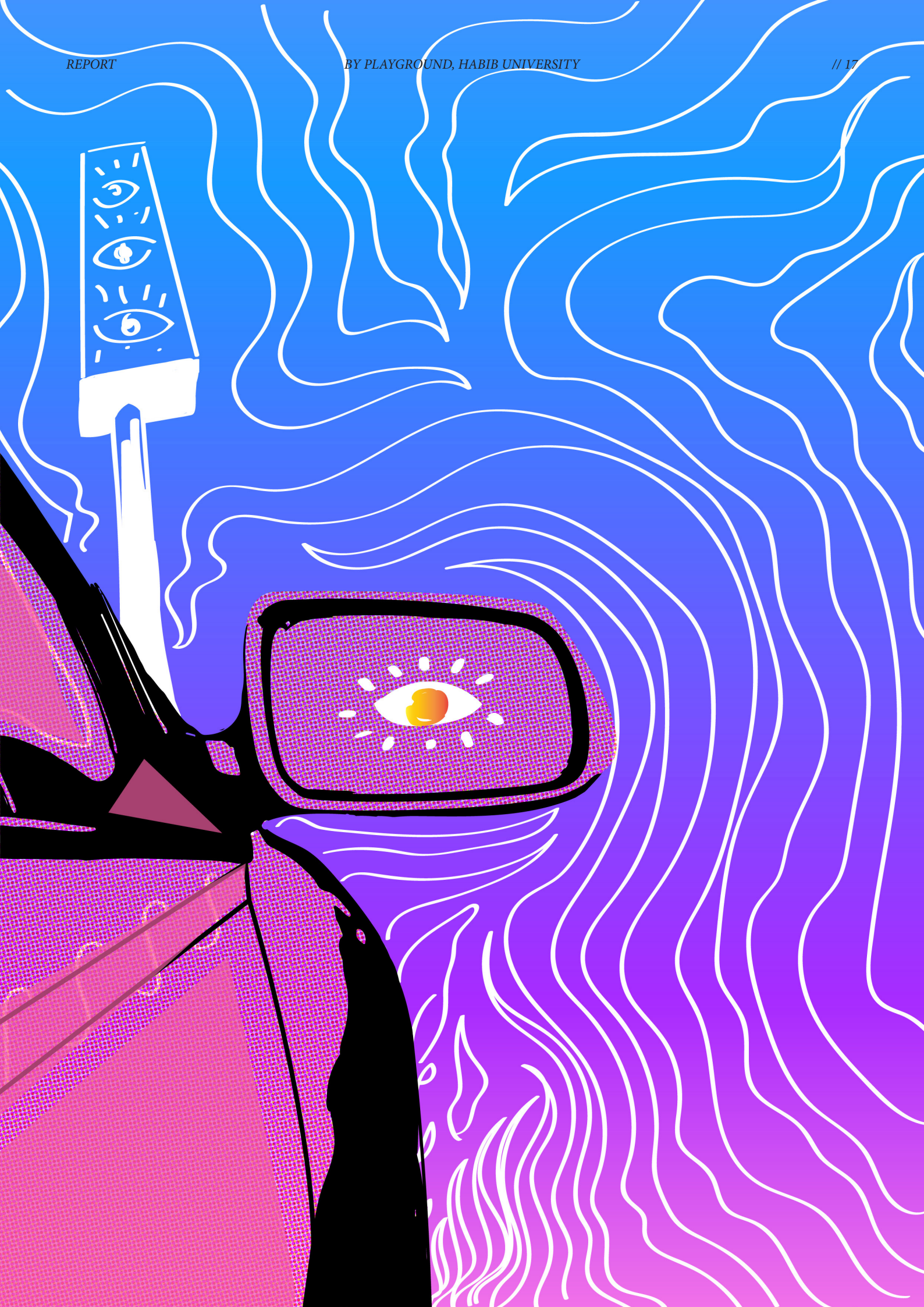
This exercise was conducted on *Google My Maps*. The participants gathered in listening circles and virtually marked locations where they feel or have felt unsafe, relatively safe or safe in Karachi. After marking the location on the map of Karachi, they also shared their story/experience with a particular marker named after the emotion that the experience triggered.

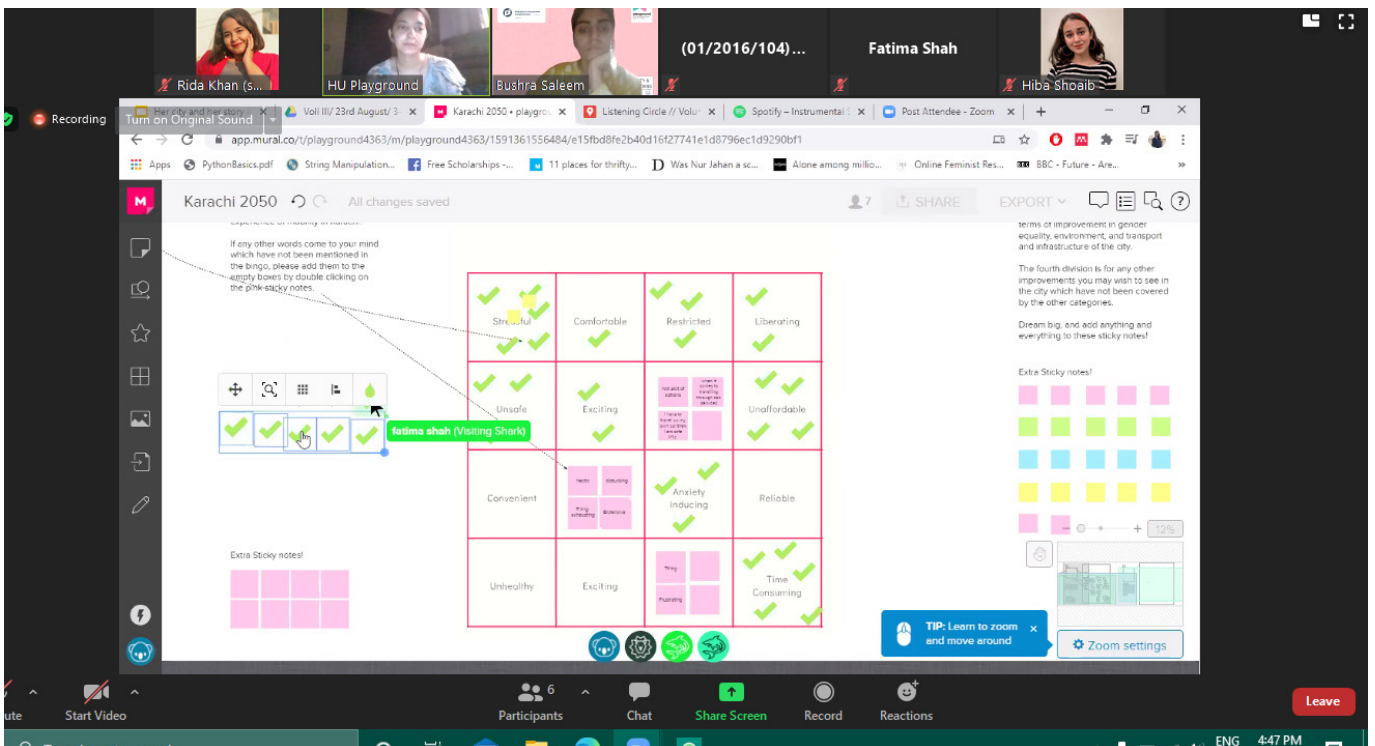
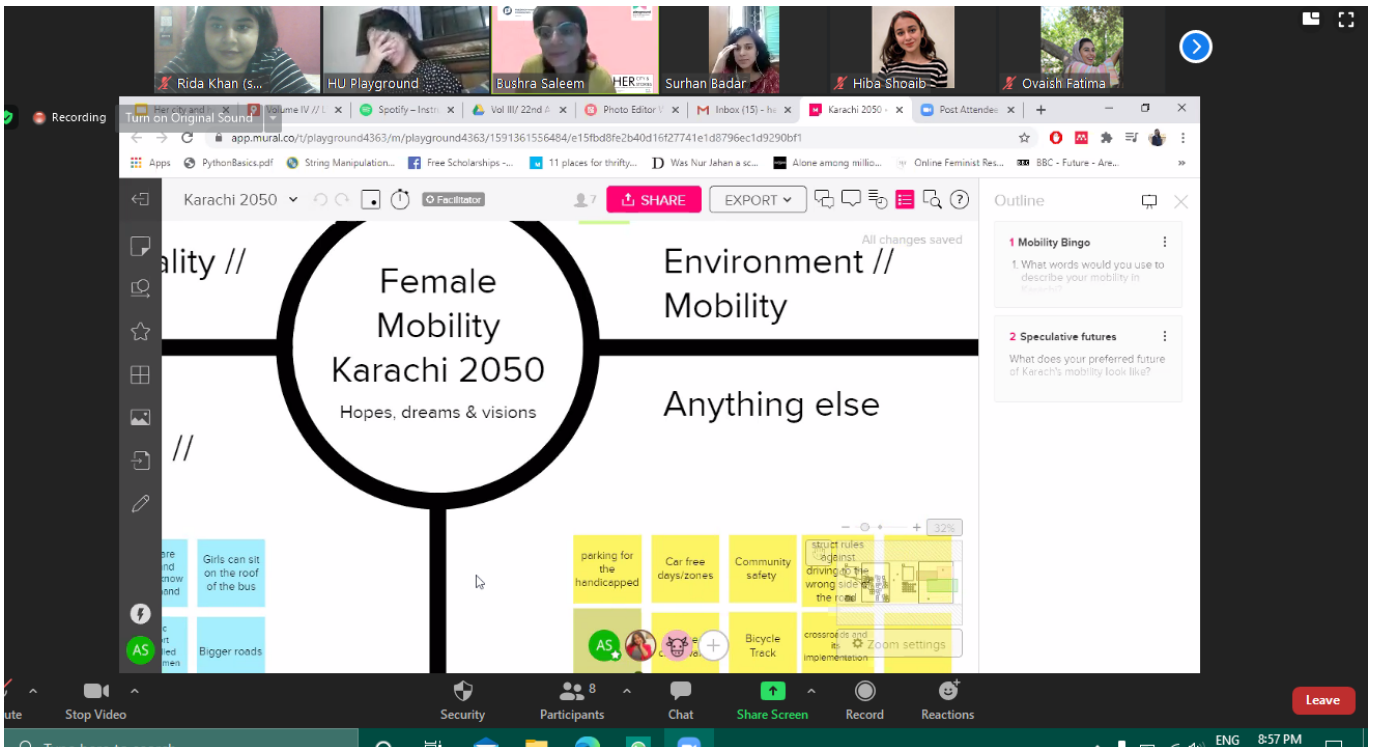
*Participants gathered in listening circles and virtually marked locations where they feel or have felt unsafe, relatively safe or safe.*

	name	description
1	uncomfortable	Walking anywhere around the university is an unsafe experience for me and I would certainly not do it if I was not accompanied with friends or colleagues. There are generally just leering men all around, always staring and gawking, some even brazenly catcalling. It's just an uncomfortable experience overall.
2	scared	encounter alot of beggars here who follow you till you give them money or tell them off.. i feel really bad but its scary here. also men in their rickshaw sit and stare as we walk by. Always have to carry a dupatta!!
3	edgy	easier and quicker route to reaching Subway. here i walk faster than usual, regardless of being with my male friends of a large group of friends, I'm on edge when I'm here.
4	unpleasant	This walk to Sikandarabad is a very unsafe one but it's a walk that we have to frequently take owing to our primary healthcare centre being there. The roads are unmade and filthy but the general demeanour of people is more nonchalant than on the main roads
5	uncomfortable	Feel unsafe walking to the petrol pump which is a SWVL stop. Road is full of big trucks.
6	uncomfortable	come here a lot for biryani or haleem! great food! I've accidentally walked into these food places without a dupatta or wear jeans and a shirt and it has made me feel extremely uncomfortable.
7	anxious	I once had an accident at this point. Uneven road, open manhole, and it gives an impression of a jungle if u see it for the first time . No guard.
8	scared	Got cornered by a car just a few days back as I was walking to a friend's house with my mask on and with a chaddar. Numerous catcalls during the times when I used to walk to my tuition centres.

*The intent of this mapping exercise was to create a catalog of experiences and emotions felt by women while commuting*





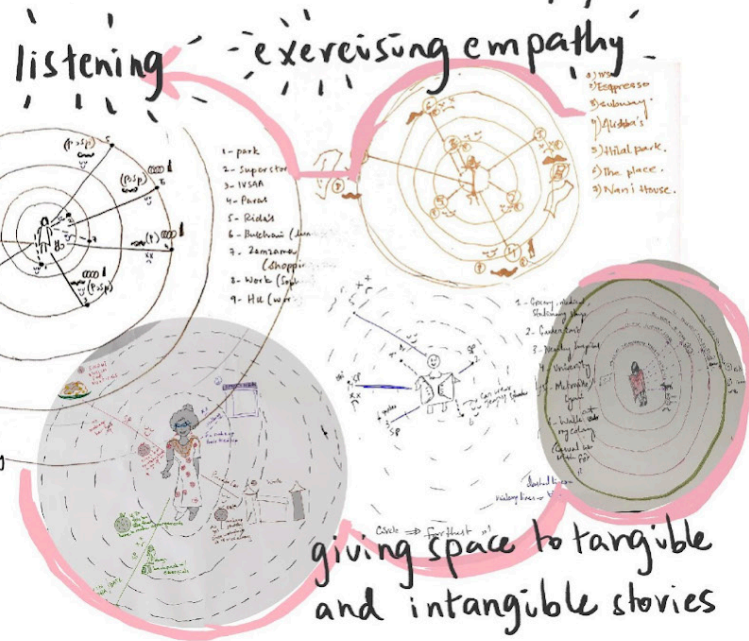
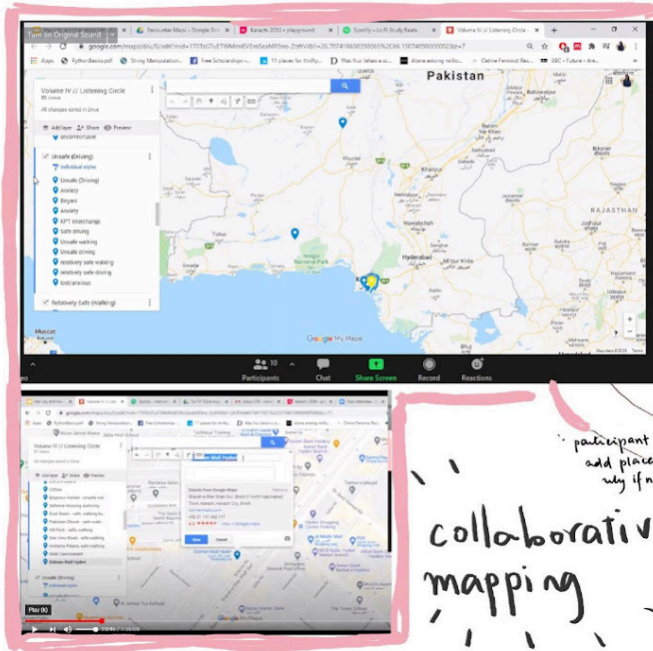


improvement in the transport facilities, infrastructure and the environment of the city was also part of the speculation



THROUGH MAPPING METHODS THAT USE GOOGLE MAPS DIRECTLY

BUT ALSO ENCOUNTER MAPS THAT FOCUS ON HUMANS DATA AND ITS VISUAL REPRESENTATION



collaborative mapping

participant add places they why if not daily

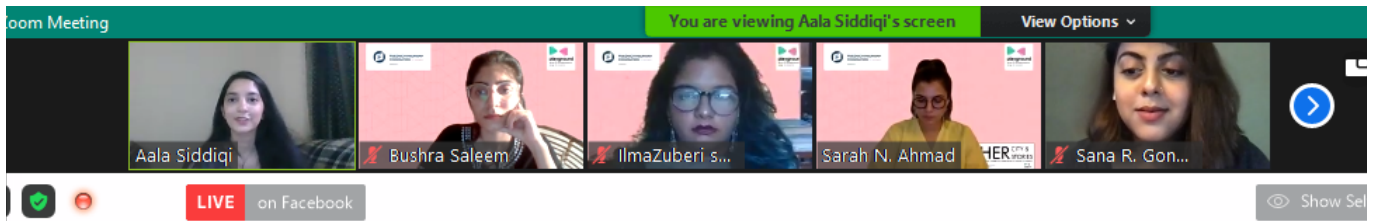
FOCUS

Safety

use of open sp

feelings

What is your ideal and preferred future of Karachi's mobility in 2050.?



### 2) Experience/Emotion Mapping

#### Objective:

In order to get exact locations of the areas in the city that are tied to your experiences you are accumulating hot spots in the city to generate heat maps of safe and unsafe zones in the spaces that you occupy. In order to achieve that we would like you to mark the places that you visit, and the kind of experiences you associate with them.

#### (A) Mode of transport:

1. Vehicle/Driving
2. Walking

#### (B) Experience points:

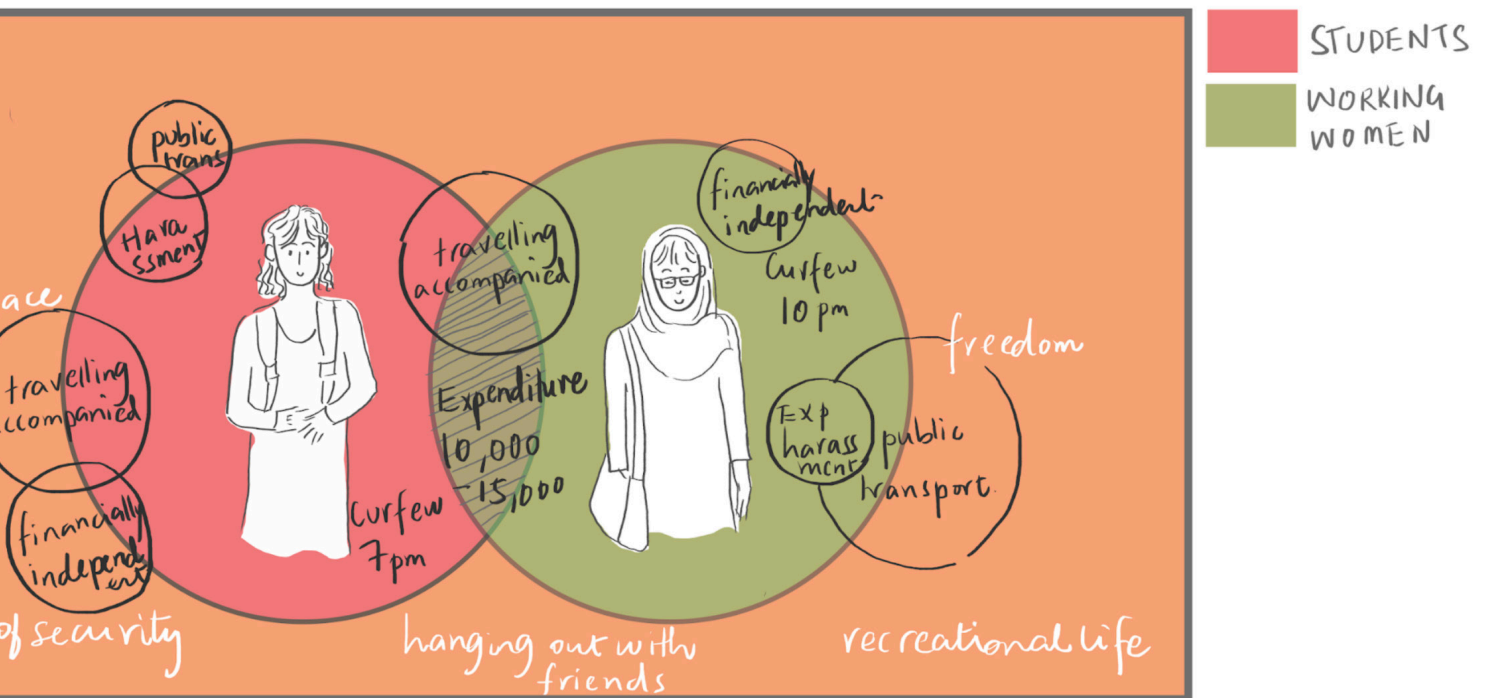
In the map, using the legend below add multiple EXPERIENCE MARKERS in locations where you feel or have felt unsafe, relatively safe or safe. Once you mark your experience points, in the description of each share your story/experience of why you have marked a particular marker.

- Unsafe
- Relatively safe
- Safe

#### Step by step instructions:

1. From the bar on the left side of the map select a layer (e.g. unsafe walking, unsafe driving).
2. Next, in the search bar, find the location you want to mark.
3. Once the location appears on the map choose the option "+ Add a marker".
4. Add a marker at the exact location you wish to choose
5. Using the edit option, rename the location based on the emotion (i.e. anger, joy, excitement) that describes your experience there.
6. Add a story/experience to explain why you have added this location in this particular layer (e.g. unsafe walking).
7. Click save and repeat the process to add location markers for all the layers in the map.

## GROUP USERS : WORKING WOMEN, UNIVERSITY STUDENTS,



### (iii) Expert Panel and Interview

Two sessions were conducted with experts to understand their points of view on the topic of women's mobility in Karachi. The first one included Sana N. Ahmad (Founder & Managing Director Urban Innovation), Ilma Zuberi (photographer, social activist and organizing member of Aurat March) and Sana R. Gondal (Service & Experience Designer), whereas the second session included Abeera Kamran (graphic designer), Shahana Rajani (educator, artist and curator) along with Zahra Malkani (artist, researcher and professor). These in-depth discussions covered various aspects including the role of mapping and media practices in the exploration of urban complexities. Forms of exclusion and inclusion of women within the city were covered in these conversations along with how creative methods of research and mapping can be used to become a method of expression of women's experience in the city.



SHAHANA RAJANI  
educator, artist, curator

ABEERA KAMRAN  
graphic designer and

#Hercityherstories

#Hercityherstories

### Forms of exclusion and restriction

**“Understanding Karachi's past geographies of exclusion and displacement offers insight into the contemporary restructuring of the city” - Shahana Rajani and Anam Soomro.**

**How do these forms of exclusion and restriction affect research and researchers.**

In-depth discussions covered various aspects including the role of mapping and media practices in the exploration of urban complexities



A KAMRAN  
front-end web developer  
herstories

ZAHRA MALKANI  
artist, researcher, professor  
#Hercityherstories

Exhausted  
collaborat  
by Shahar  
Malkani a  
Abeera Kamr...  
based in Karachi, Pakistan.  
It is a series of publications  
exploring image, text and the city.  
Each volume of Exhausted  
Geographies mobilises a crucial,  
cross-disciplinary political  
imaginary to rethink current  
representations of Karachi and  
includes a wide range of topics  
that provide new insights into  
the social, spatial and discursive  
fabric of the city.



### Exploring new ways of seeing and imagining cities

“Exhaustion from representations of and discourses around a city whose histories and geographies have collapsed into clichés”

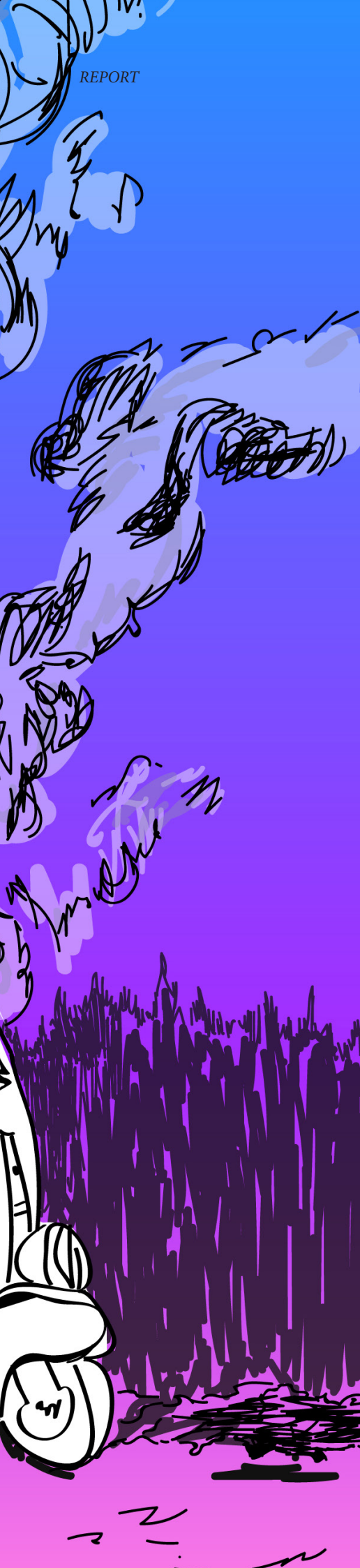
“Visualizing this data may then help us towards envisioning the hidden geography of disappearance, may give us some access to those sites that remain impenetrable to public knowledge if only to trace their boundaries, to see the city in its negative space, for what is not there or not known. In this sense the map can be read as a ghost geography.”

Seeing the Missing: Four Landscapes,  
Zahra Malkani









# 05 FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

# Harassment

## Types of harassment



While harassment overlaps with a lot of other themes, I feel like it deserves an entire section/theme of its own given how central it is to any discussion around mobility in Karachi's context (also observed in the listening circles)



Now ones, need to map those on here

People in Lahore make you feel uncomfortable. 2  
Sense of safety is not steady- always in a flux Changes depending on surroundings and experiences, even within one mode of transport

### Summary

- General Society / societal norms
- General remarks about society
- Mindsets & conditioning
- Covering oneself/ policing

# General society / Societal norms:

## General remarks about society

Society where victim blaming is a norm  
Reason for uneducated advice done to the victim along with blame (victim's fault)  
Deep rooted traditions and beliefs (related to patriarchy)

## Mindsets & conditioning



## Covering oneself/ policing



## Parents

// AVERAGE //

# 05 FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

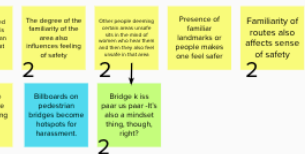
The approach to understanding and analysing the data collected in the multiple focus groups was to identify the overlapping and unique patterns in the mobility of different women. This included students, students who were working part-time and working women, belonging to the middle and upper middle class. These categories were further divided into factors like the mode of the transport used by them, the guardian they travel with and how far they travel from home to understand the difficulties and negotiations women have to make in order to navigate within the city.

These focus groups were conducted in the form of listening circles, where mapping was used as a primary tool to document

mobility of women and emotions and feelings associated with it, like anxiety, fear and safety. The biggest advantage of conducting these listening circles was that an intimate space for the participants was created. This intimate space was necessary in order to create a humane platform of sharing, where research and data collection is not a one sided transaction but an exchange of listening, speaking, empathy and healing. This exchange was not just limited to discourse between the research team and the participants, it was also between the participants themselves.

One cannot ignore the possibility that the Her City and Her Stories team, consisting of only women, made the listening circles safe and perhaps more holistic. People are often

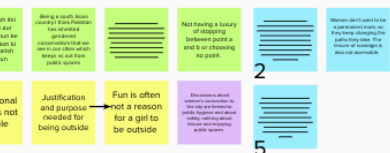
Time & time:



Foundings/Environment



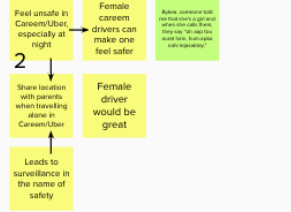
Public Spaces



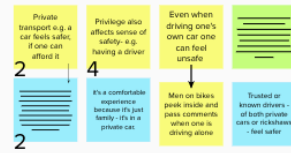
Working

Mode of transport and its affordability:

Careem/Uber/Ride-hailing



Private Car + Driver



Public Transport



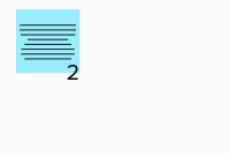
Van

Accessibility

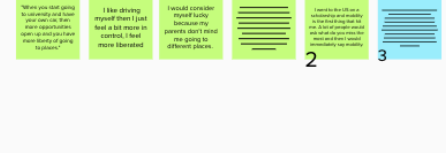
Policy & infrastructure



Lack of law and order



Independence and empowerment



"Mobility really isn't just going and coming back. It is about how you interact with other people, how you feel inside and how you feel about yourself. This really impacts your confidence."

skeptical and unsure about sharing private information but within the setting of these circles it was easier for the Her City and Her Stories team to gain valuable insight into the lives of the research participants.

Some of the main themes that emerged from this research are:

### **(i) Mode of Transport**

In a capitalist patriarchal society, women and all other genders are at a disadvantage because of factors like affordability and accessibility. Within the different classes, the modes of transport vary between public, semi public and private. This is also closely tied to three variables that are, where, when and how far their destination is from their home.

#### **(i-a) Affordability**

The biggest factor that affects the freedom or independence of a woman is if she is earning on her own. This gives her some freedom to be able to move through the city, as finance and money are one of the key things that patriarchs of the household often use to keep women dependent. While Karachi is a modern city where women are gaining financial independence, getting access to higher education has made them more mobile. This independence also comes from the economic downfall of Karachi in the early 2000s that increased the need for women to work along with the men of the house (Adeel, Yeh & Zhang, 2017). In fact, in many families, women are the primary breadwinners of the house. The listening circles, however, were specific to middle and upper middle class.

As shown in Fig 1, up to 29.2% of women in the focus groups were employed (n=33), which directly affected their use of semi public transport as they were able to afford ride hailing services Careem, Uber etc. depending on where they were going. For example, in going to a place that is far from home, the use of semi public transport was preferred by women.

63.7% of the participants were students (n=72) where almost half of them were also

interning or working in their respective fields. The idea of semi private transport may seem affordable for them, but it is still unsustainable for those students who are financing their own education, or working women who have to spend upto 1/3rds of their monthly income on transport which restricts mobility and also proves to be very discouraging.

Some participants shared their experience of saving-up to afford their own car in the past two to three years. This was possible earlier but with the increasing inflation, the idea of buying or affording a car for those belonging to the middle or even the upper middle classes is next to impossible. Catering to the fuel bills and the maintenance of the vehicles is an unthinkable expense and investment for most of the young women who participated in the listening circles.

A huge majority of the participants reported that their monthly work-related transport expenses ranges from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 10,000. For the age group within the circles, i.e. between 18 - 25, the same type of navigation is in contrast with those of young men, as women's navigation is much more limited. This directly affects the mental and physical well-being of women thereby affecting their relationship with the city they call home.

### Occupation



Fig. 1

"I have never drove alone, because the driver is always there...If, God Forbid, something happens, my mom thinks he would be able to save me...You have to be accompanied by a man at all times to feel safe."

Here, one must also consider the systemic lack of job opportunities for women of all classes. Women belonging to the lower middle class are mostly house cleaners, teachers in small schools, or work at beauty parlours. The more educated ones are given opportunities in fields like medicine, teaching etc (Adeel, Yeh & Zhang, 2017). Even though most of the student population of the city is that of women, the number of women allowed to work or preferred by their workplaces is shockingly low. Workplaces are also inconsiderate of the other labour women have to commit to i.e. of their families and other tasks, including but not limited to domestic chores. This narrows down job opportunities for one literal half of the population of the city.

*In a capitalist patriarchal society, women and all other genders are at a disadvantage because of factors like affordability and accessibility.*

### Monthly Transport Expenditure

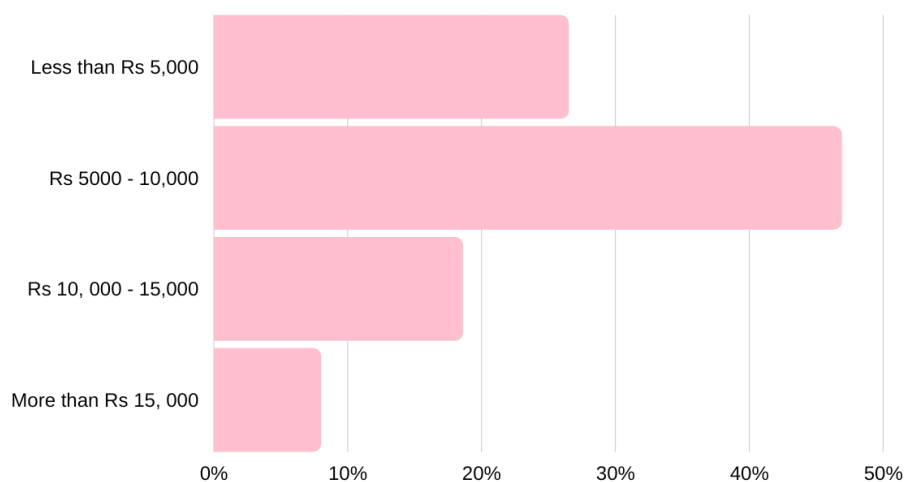


Fig. 2

**Equally unsafe**

Going deeper into the categories the participants have been divided into, what needs to be addressed is also how the experience of the city is not in isolation from groups of classes, religion etc (Holmes, 2009). It is when these overlaps within the classes occur that women realise that all of them have been violated in one way or the other. This further challenges our notions of what can be deemed safe or unsafe, as every class has different experiences within the private and public realms. In the essay *Why Loiter* (2011), aspects of safety, respectability and class are raised, to address the concerns that the woman who is outside is not a 'good' woman therefore, she is more vulnerable to the normalised predatory male behaviour. But when research shows how women who don't need to earn to support their families are equally unsafe, the boundaries of what is safe and what is unsafe are blurred, as the existence and navigation of women in the city becomes not that of going from one place to another but of moving through the geography of fear and frustration.

**Surveilled by their own families**

Despite all the financial challenges brought forth by the use of semi private cars, women still use them to avoid surveillance. Most of them prefer travelling without a male guardian (father, brother etc.) to demand agency and autonomy over where they go which is not possible if they carpool with the men of the house.

The financial toll and anxiety it takes to travel is far too much for women to take recreational trips within the city to be alone or to hangout with friends and colleagues.

As seen in Fig 3, up to 46% of the participants are regular Careem/Uber users (n=52). While this mode of transport is preferred over public transport by women who can barely afford it, it does not mean that semi private transport is deemed safer or fraught without anxieties of unsafety. Throughout the circles, there were always a couple of women who would willingly share experiences of the behaviour of the cab drivers that would feel very invasive. Some even spoke about the design of the car comparing it to a rickshaw, in terms of the possibility to jump out of the vehicle if something unexpected or dangerous happens. This utter mistrust, and rightfully so, often defines the patterns of navigation women follow from one generation to the other.

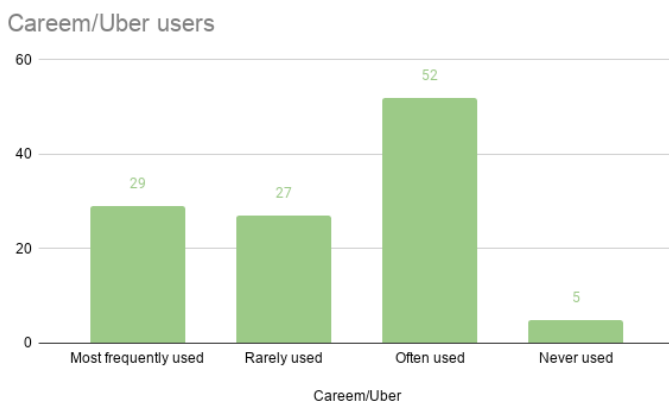


Fig. 3

"It is not at all safe to travel in public transport but of course I have to and have no other option because I have to earn myself. Otherwise, I would never prefer using public transport!"



"women feel there is a possibility to jump out of the vehicle if something unexpected or dangerous happens".

### (i-b) Accessibility

While there are constant overlaps in how affordability is parallel to accessibility, and how both are highly dependent on class and gender, the idea of this section is to critique the ways in which the physical infrastructure and lack of policies affect accessibility. To understand accessibility or what affects it, one must know that accessibility or its lack thereof can be defined by what excludes a certain category of people from a mainstream entity. What makes transport inaccessible for women is both systemic and infrastructural.

For example, most of the participants living on the 'other' side of the bridge i.e. Nazimabad, Gulshan, University Road etc., have to travel to Saddar, II Chundrigar Rd., Clifton and DHA for education, work and leisure purposes. This commute often covers a distance of upto 10-15 km which is unviable for many women to afford or access. Here rises the question of having policy and infrastructure interventions that provide subsidized travelling rates and modes for people travelling from one end of the city to the other depending on how regular they are.

*"Many layers of barriers to mobility. Such as weather, infrastructure, policies, privilege, gender."*

### **Inclusive Transport Infrastructure and Public Spaces**

Our spaces are designed in a way that they largely benefit a specific gender (men), and the needs of their abled-bodies. Over the period of time, women of Karachi have learnt to live with poorly built products and spaces that do not serve them. While there isn't any law that discourages women from accessing public spaces, there is particularly no law that defends their right to freely exist in a public space either. Our city infrastructure is built in a way that it maintains class and gender binaries, and the design inherently discourages women from accessing public spaces (Hayden, 1980). The needs of women and of other vulnerable groups such as the transgender community are rarely taken into consideration while building spaces for the 'general public'.

For women to sit at chai dhaabas, go on walks late at night, jog and run freely and comfortably without being stared at, play sports on the streets (past the age of puberty), sit in the parks freely or smoke in the neighborhood just as any man would do without being dictated about gender roles and conformity, were some of the key points that were highlighted by the research participants

in the listening circles where everyone sat together to envision an ideal version of the city of Karachi in future.







#### Female drivers for semi private transport

There is a need for semi private transport companies to indulge in this discourse to better understand as to how this long and tedious commute can be made safer and accessible. One of the participants mentioned that having a female driver always made the journey easier for her in Careem or carpooling in a Careem with friends and colleagues.

#### Female users of bikes

Another factor that arose while going deeper into the research was that a more affordable means of digital motorbike-hailing through Bykea was discriminatory towards female customers. Women are often rejected rides when the rider sees that the customer is a woman. This cancels out yet another affordable travelling method for women, who are even willing to travel with a man on a bike.

*“Not having a luxury of stopping between point a and b is very frustrating”.*

#### Identifiable bus stops

Public transport becomes inaccessible because of the lack of structure in terms of reliable timings and designated arrival and departure points. More often than not, it is not easy to even identify where a bus stop is, this sort of vagueness challenges the notions of visibility and how the gendered bodies have to move through.

#### Walking without harassment

For example, if someone has to take two buses to get somewhere, they will have to walk three times. From their home to the bus stop, get dropped at another bus-stop, walk to another bus-stop where the second bus arrives, get on the bus, get dropped and walk to the destination. Walking, which is the cheapest and most accessible form of travelling, is unsafe and hazardous for women, as they are harassed and cat-called. In a city like Karachi where violence is always around the corner, women are also increasingly scared of getting mugged.



## (ii) Familiarity and Ownership of the Public Space

Many parts of Karachi function as enclaves, and through the rapid urbanisation of the city, based on 'modernisation', the areas are often divided into not just basic zones like industrial, commercial and residential; but also based on classes, the aesthetics of which must adhere to how the city should be viewed and experienced. While this makes neighbourhoods somewhat safer for women, in terms of similar classes, livelihoods and lifestyles, it alienates people from the larger context of the city (Hayden, 1980). And thus, any area outside of their regular use, e.g. workplaces or parks become distant, unavailable and exclusive.

While there is no simple solution to this understanding or reality of the urban sphere, in all its conflicts and disparities, it raises important points of discourse and serious challenges one must consider when designing cities and who they are being designed for.

*Women's experience of their city is not just what they want, but it consists largely of what others want from them.*

The social life of neighbourhoods is what makes them successful and this success also lies in the creation of mixed neighbourhoods where residential, commercial and utility areas can come together to aim for a more equitable city.

For example, the suburban environment of Defence Housing Authority (DHA) makes it highly unsafe and unfriendly for pedestrians. If communities can come together around the nexus of unity and sharing, not only will everyone be aware of the realities of all realms but also share the benefits and advantages that each may provide, in terms of how the women access spaces.

### Social surveillance

Social surveillance, especially in the spirit of what one may refer to as a mohalla (neighbourhood), the sense of community is

such that, the person outside is known, visible and being seen, through balconies, through shops, and other people walking the same paths. This brings a sense of security and if not ownership, a sense of belonging in the least.

One may ask and try to address questions of ownership, and how that can be a factor which can directly affect the experience of mobility for women and all other genders. It is very apparent, by the infrastructure, that the city's laws, and policies fail to recognize women. While normalizing education and earning one's own livelihood for women is the least a city like Karachi can do to provide equal rights to its female inhabitants.

During the listening circles, many women spoke about walking in the areas around their universities and workplaces. Most of them often felt alienated in those spaces, which once again suggests that going from the home to the vehicle was not daunting enough that going from vehicle to university/work, an additional source of anxiety and fear. There have been multiple accounts of getting catcalled, harassed and mugged in these areas.

*"A lot of it has to do with respectability as well. If you are with a man, then it is more legitimate and it is okay to be outside, and so that's more of a respectable woman. However, if you're alone or with a group of friends then you deserve to be stared at according to society."*

*"Often, to avoid getting victim blaming women want to have men and drivers accompanying them."*

### **Maintaining anonymity**

Women are known for constantly changing their patterns, routes and paths which was also underlined by a participant in the following words, "as a woman, one needs to constantly shift their skin when they move around". More often than not, they end up walking more or travelling more than they need to in order to maintain their anonymity. This anonymity is an important factor for women to shroud themselves in, as any regular existence and schedules that are consistent, often puts them at a risk, where people, and potential predators know which woman in the area will take which route and at what time. This leads us to inquire circulation very deeply and assess what can be done in order to give women the privilege and luxury to have a consistent route of ease but also one that is safe.

During the circles, something that often took the women by surprise was the idea of sitting in a park or a pavement, or lying under a tree and how difficult that could be. Since women have been upheld to voyeurism, their experience of the city is not just what they want, but it consists largely of what others want and expect from them.

*"Being a south Asian country I think Pakistan has inherited gendered conservatism that we see in our cities which keeps us out from public spaces."*

### **(iii) Insights from the Panel Discussions with Experts**

For an expert opinion on researching within the city, especially on issues related to women, two online design dialogue were held on the topic of women's mobility. The conversations initially covered the projects done by the artists under the theme of Exhausted Geographies. The researchers mentioned how they had used a wide variety of research methods and even came up with their own methods of research and inquiry in order to "break open what is difficult to break open- the city". This is a very important learning that was also applied in the Her City Her Stories project. The aspect of accessibility of a research project in terms of its medium, affordability and language was also covered. The artists mentioned how they explored the usage of various languages and various mediums to be able to overcome (to an extent) the accessibility of their research and projects to people of various classes and backgrounds within the city. The used "multiplicity of styles and methods for accessibility and inclusion". At the same time, they acknowledged that complex ideas often need complex language to be conveyed. They also mentioned how they put equal focus on the image and the word during their research, which was also a strategy used in Her City and Her Stories where verbal and/or written narratives were combined with the drawn narratives (experience maps and encounter maps) in order to have various mediums for the research participants and the researchers to convey their thoughts and ideas.

They also covered their own experiences as female artists and researchers trying to conduct various types of projects related to the city and all the various kinds of hindrances, harassment and difficulties that they faced. Some were from the general situation where

women are not accepted as part of the outdoor space while some limitations were because of the "increased securitization and surveillance" within the city in the past one decade. There was also a comparison of how male researchers can often have an increased access for their projects due to their casual camaraderie and brotherhood with other males who inhabit most of the public space within the city.

A lengthy part of the conversation was also spent on the relationship of women in the city with the outside and the inside (*andar and baahir*) and the various factors that are involved that either enable or disable women's mobility. Women are often perceived as not belonging in the public sphere and spaces of the city at all, but the researchers also commented on how these walls of hostility and exclusion are porous. This was also related to how the city is perceived and what is taught and learnt about the city that shapes how the city becomes for anyone, and whether we perpetuate existing norms or try to change things. This emphasis of pedagogy of the city and the experiences of various genders within the city was also very relevant to the Her City and Her Stories because one of the aims of this report is to increase awareness about the relationship between gender, mobility and the urban design of the city.

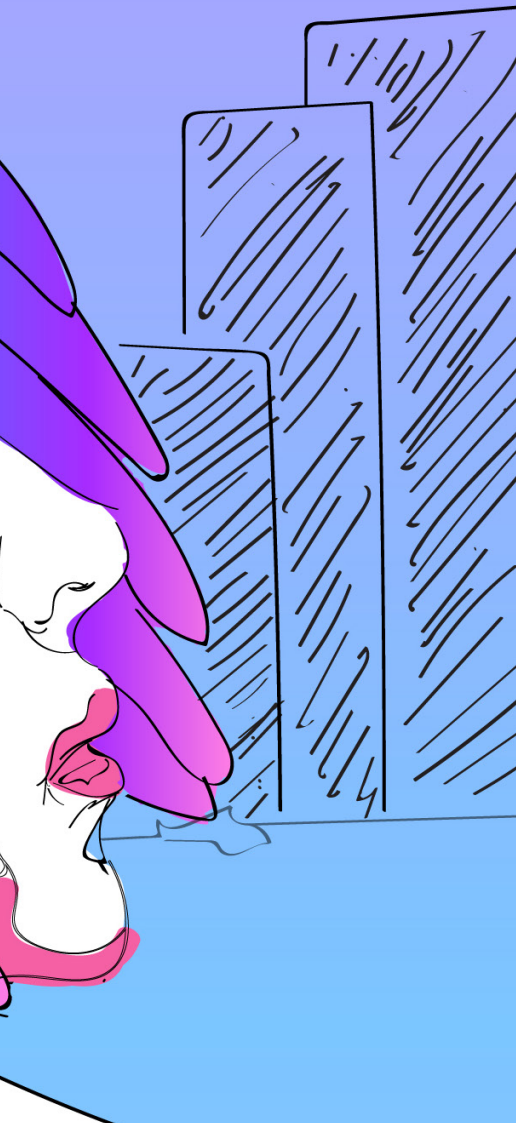
Some strategies that were mentioned to counter all the limitations that can be seen in terms of mobility of women in the city are about feeling more powerful in numbers (women coming together with other women to do projects), and seeing precarity as a promise.

The connection of women, mobility and the

city with the other problems in the city like urban flooding or land grabbing (Gadaap and Bharia Town) were also deliberated upon. The researchers emphasized on the point that the city should be seen as an ecological breathing entity in order to cater to it properly rather than seeing it just as a concrete jungle.







## 06 RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

// AVERAGE //

## 06 RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

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*“Men will try their best to touch you somehow, and because the space is too crowded and busy, you won't even realize that they are touching you.”*

The categories and design elements which were deemed necessary during our research are mentioned and explained below.

### (i) Environment

In order to ensure a socio-economic balance and to provide a healthy lifestyle for the city inhabitants, we need to adopt eco-friendly strategies and establish sustainable mechanisms. All women stressed how Karachi's poorly built environment induces anxiety and limits their mobility patterns because it is ill-equipped to deal with as simple things as rain.

Abidance by traffic rules: There should be proper traffic rules and an announcement system for public buses at the stops. The location of the stops should be such that they are safe and accessible for women.

#### Recreational spaces

Recreational spaces like parks, public libraries, community centers are integral elements of a city. In Karachi, most of these places, unfortunately, are concentrated in the rich and commercial areas such as DHA and, although meant for the general public, they are not easily accessible by low-income

groups. Therefore, the location of these places should be such that they are distributed equitably within the city and can thus be enjoyed by all population groups.

#### Pavement width

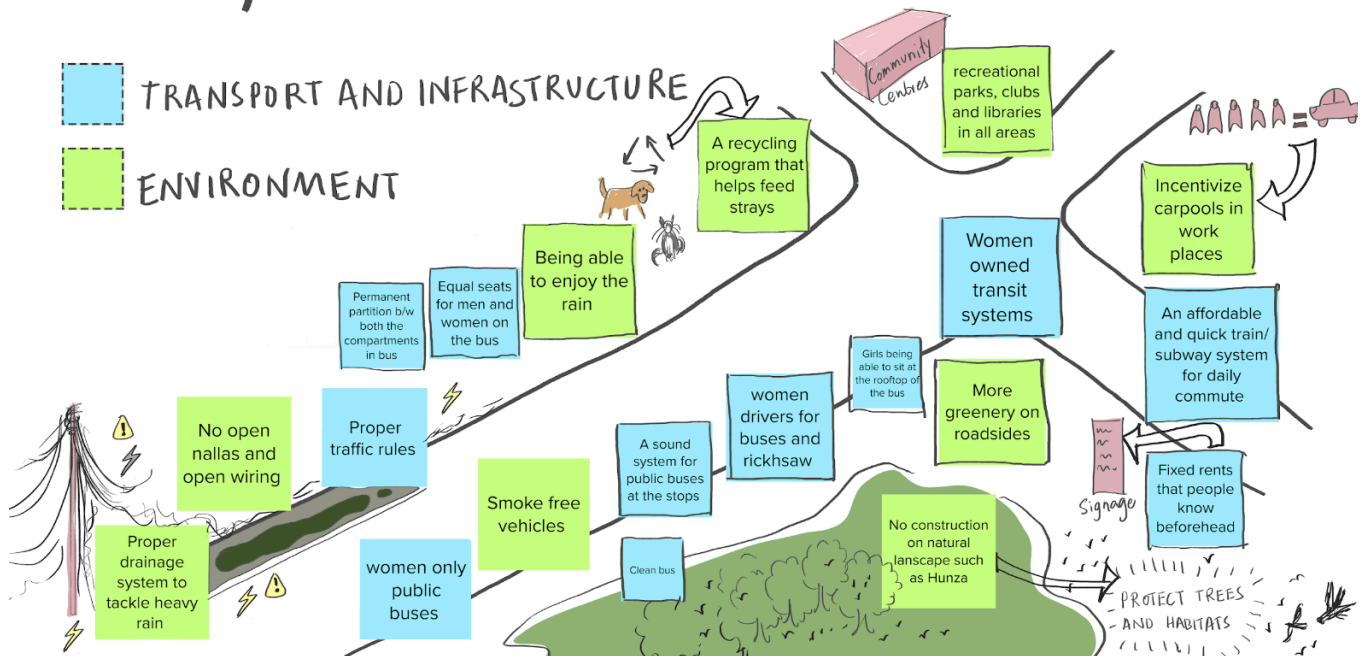
While most of the aforementioned design options are those of stopping between walks or other commutes, pavement width is something that directly caters to the needs of the pedestrian while they are walking. In the study of the proxemic theory by Edward T. Hall, it was emphasized that the proximity or distances that different people of different cultures feel comfortable in are determined by various variables like religion, culture, gender, class etc.

The proximity or radius or social distances within people are divided into:

- i. Intimate space
- ii. Personal space
- iii. Social space
- iv. Public space



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These differ a lot and should be used as one of the primary considerations in the design of urban spaces. When walking through the landscape of Karachi, men and women prefer to keep distance for obvious reasons, like women often tend to walk apart from the crowd to avoid getting harassed.

In comparison, seeing men holding hands and women holding hands is not a rare sight, this proves that intimate space is a bigger group of people, e.g. 2-5 women travelling together in a form of a huddle provides a sense of oneness and therefore security to women. This affects their understanding of the social space around them. While a single woman will be conscious of how close other strangers are to her, a group of women are going to be less wary of mobbing through narrow spaces. Women tend to move in huddles, even with women that they do not know. In such a situation, bodies act as moving points of security. Bodies and their presence become markers and symbols of safety, refuge and freedom.

## Greenery

There is a need for more greenspaces alongside public benches and between roads to enhance the quality of urban living and to improve the air quality of the city too.

## Benches

Another important tool are benches which can be used as small recluses, places of rest and calm. For women who are usually carrying groceries, kids, their school bags etc. when walking long distances, it is highly beneficial to have benches to make mobility a lot more comfortable. The rest of the city doesn't open itself up to women the way it does to men. E.g. One may see men occupy parked bikes, storefronts, pavements but because the notion of the respectable woman is always at play, women do not find it easy to access the convenience of these urban elements. There is no guarantee however, that women will even use these benches. However, if they are added to the circulation paths of

any neighbourhood where the movement patterns have been studied, such urban elements can be successful. Sometimes laying out this access and these elements can result in opening up the possibility of occupation of the public space through bodies in ways that were not even a part of the imagination of women, in terms of how they view the city and their own presence within the city.

#### **Roads and drainage**

There is a need for a proper drainage and disposal system in Karachi alongside wider roads and paved walkways.

#### **Incentivize car-pools**

By launching carpool incentive programs, people, especially students and professionals, should be encouraged to carpool and rideshare. Since most women do not own motorized vehicles and thus rely on walking or using expensive modes of transport like Careem, incentivizing carpool programs will increasingly facilitate their mobility. In addition to being economically reasonable, a culture of carpooling will also help reduce carbon emissions.

*“Many layers of barriers to mobility. Such as weather, infrastructure, policies, privilege, gender.”*

## **(ii) Safety and Security**

Safety and protection of citizens is one of the key elements of a smart city. Inhabitants of Karachi, especially women, continue to fear threats in the form of street crimes, police harassment, groping and tenure insecurity. The same was delineated by women in the listening circles; they expressed how these factors, in addition to inducing widespread fear among them, have made it increasingly difficult to carry out their day-to-day activities.

Following are the key points that were emphasized by women participants:

#### **Tenure and land security**

Traditionally, a woman's relationship with a man defines her ability to find tenancy and housing agreements. Ergo, women, especially, students, single, and independent working women, find it increasingly difficult to find safe housing. This calls for the establishment of companies and organizations to facilitate women in finding affordable housing and provide them security without discriminating against single women at the time of housing registration.

#### **Helpline service**

There is an urgent need to institute a 24/7 operational helpline service that can serve as a mechanism for women to formally register complaints and communicate their concerns to the relevant authority.

#### **Accountability of the police force**

There needs to be a proper check on the police force itself, with significant changes in the ways police men are trained and equipped because, as various women noted, they do not experience a sense of security from them and in fact fear harassment when reaching out to

them. The police force needs to be questioned on delayed procedures, underreporting, lack of investigation and sheer ignorance. In fact, there should be more women employees in the security departments to ensure better female representation in the police force.

**Security cameras**

A robust monitoring system needs to be installed with functioning security cameras in both public and isolated areas to monitor cases of harassment, gang violence, and street crimes.

**Safe-sheltered walking spaces**

While walking isn't gender specific, the infrastructure is often such that makes women feel unsafe just walking on the streets. Walking spaces, e.g. the sidewalks should be broader that helps them navigate through the city easily and comfortably. The sidewalks and streets need to be well-lit at night with proper working street-lights. The sidewalks should also have shade to protect pedestrians from the heat during the day.

**Inclusive public restrooms at bus stops**

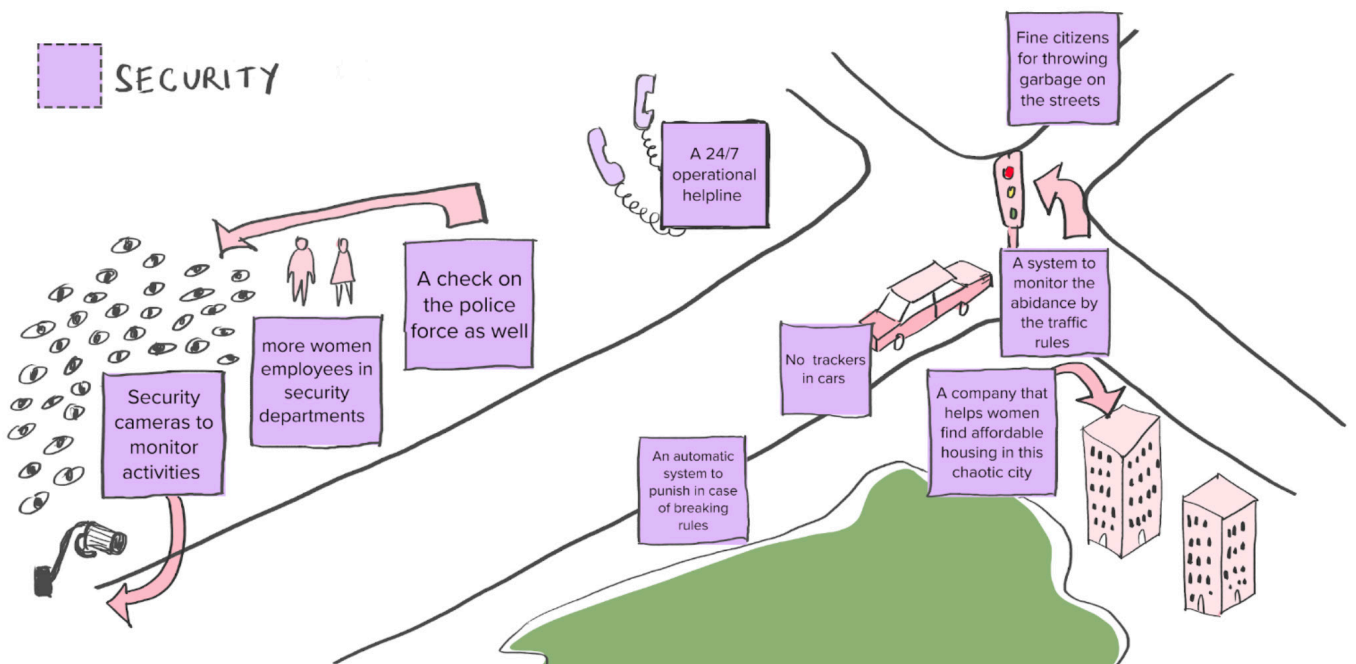
While men can also use washrooms at the mosques if they need to go, there is no non-commercial facility for women to use or access these 'public' washrooms even in times of need. Hence, there should be clean hygienic toilets in all public spaces for women as well as for children and the disabled.

**Disability inclusive design (e.g. ramps)**

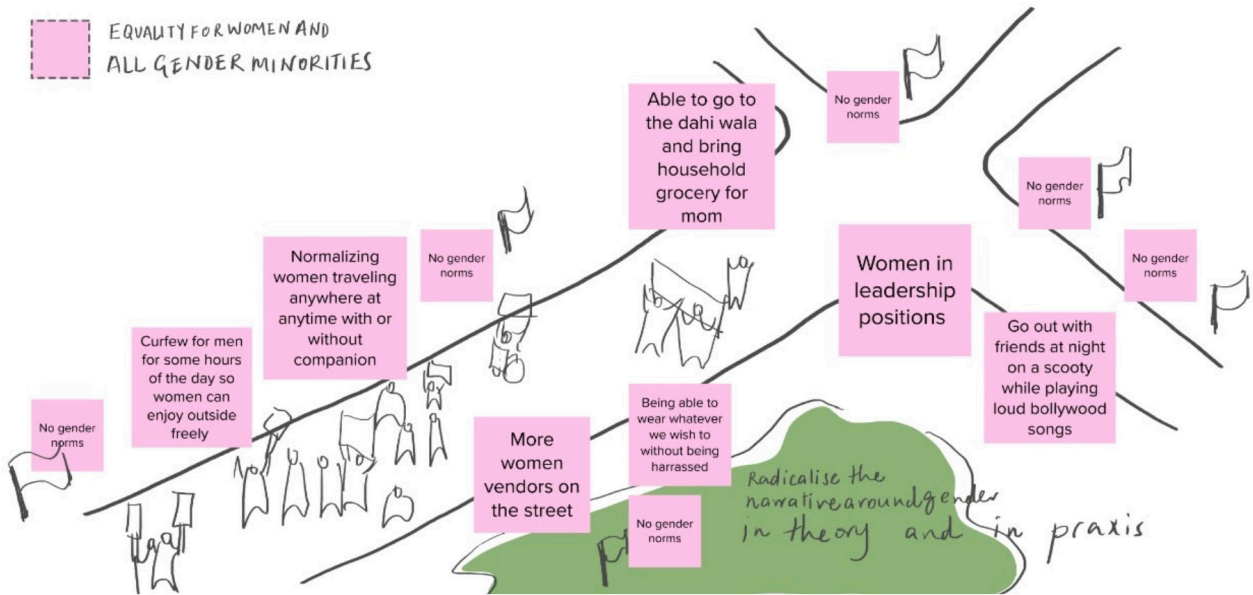
The physical infrastructure of the city is not sympathetic towards the needs of the differently-abled citizens and the elderly. In order for it to become inclusive and accessible, there should be ramps, lower sidewalks and parking for the handicapped people who wish to navigate the city on their own. The transport infrastructure (e.g. bus doors, height of bus stops, etc.) should also be such that someone in a wheelchair or crutches is also able to use public transport.

*there should be more women employees in the security departments to ensure better female representation in the police force.*

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"anxiety that comes with the need to perform makes waiting for buses"

## Bicycle tracks

Cycling is one of the most sustainable ways of mobility and is also healthy for the users. Unfortunately, the current city infrastructure does not allow the use of bicycles on the roads or the sidewalks. There is a need for tracks that may allow the cyclists to safely and comfortably navigate the city.

## Mass-transit system

There should be an affordable, quick and a clean train/ subway system for daily commuting that has fixed fares displayed for people through signage.

## Women drivers

There should be women owned transit systems where women are allowed to drive buses and rickshaws. This will not only provide women employment opportunities, but also a safe mode to travel in.

## The design of the bus

There should be equal seats for women and men on the bus, and a permanent partition should be in place between the two compartments therein. If they wish to, women should also be able to sit on top of the bus as well in case of no space inside the bus.

## Signage

A system of display and signage is required with relevant transport information boards such as the timings and routes of buses, parking displays, and other various message signs to help people navigate the city easily and conveniently.

In her essay called *The Way She Moves*, Shilpa Phadke talks about moving from point A to B on foot, and social behaviours that women perform in order to negotiate with the city and the gaze that comes with it. She mentions

how women often manipulate or manufacture a reason to be outdoors. This is often done by giving a reason to her existence on the street by standing next to a shop, a school, a park etc if they are waiting for someone etc.

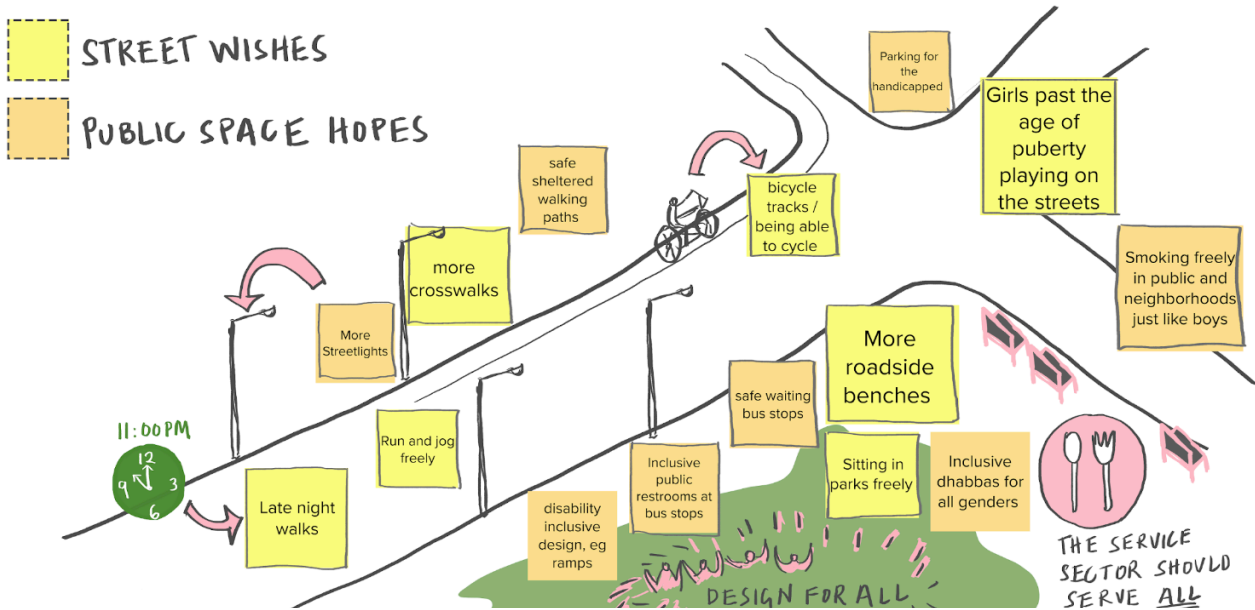
This behaviour and the anxiety that comes with the need to perform makes waiting for buses a rather taxing task. Karachi lacks the basic infrastructure of labelling its daily public commute. In comparison, a digital ride-hailing company Careem has labels of Careem pickup points which automatically give that sense of purpose. If buses, rickshaws and other public transport facilities were to have the signage it would increase the comfort but also make the access a lot easier. Often, for people who are not just new to the city but new to travelling alone are made to deal with very alienating public features in order to travel within the city. The bus timings are also usually irregular, and the regular timings are also passed around through word of mouth.

Having signage in multiple local languages, including visuals and braille will make it a lot more accessible for the population of Karachi, especially the disadvantaged minorities.

### **Street lamps**

According to international standards the distance between street lamps is measured through the lighting radius of the lamp which is directly affected by the height of the lamp and also power of the light. This ensures that there are no dark spaces on the streets at night which is the primary need for women in public spaces past sunset hours to feel safe. Visibility is a tricky path but more often than not it is better to be seen to rely on social surveillance than not be seen at all.

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There should be women owned transit systems where women are allowed to drive buses and rickshaws.

### (iii) Public Health

One of the most ignored and also most important urban elements are those of public hygiene. In ignoring the need for public toilets, women are highly reduced from the street and the urban network.

Women are often taking care of children of all ages and not having toilets available makes their journey far more difficult than it has to be.

They also have other biological needs, i.e. menstruation, which is often a subject of exhaustion and shame. Instead of having a city that takes care of them, women are made to limit their mobility because there are no toilets in the way and that makes it very difficult and daunting for them to travel long distances. A major overlap of health and hygiene concerns with the patriarchal conditions we are living in does not really help women accessing any kind of transport.

Women are majorly excluded when they are pregnant. While pregnancy itself is not easy, and comes with various risks during travelling, not having a public toilet can cause a lot of distress for women bearing a child in case of needing to relieve themselves, or bleeding, all of which require a private space to take care of themselves and their baby.

## CONCLUSION

The main focus of this research has been about collecting and documenting stories of women who, on a daily basis, experience a plethora of mobility challenges that eventually limits their ability to maneuver the city and access opportunities the same way a man does in this country. Our study has shown that in Pakistan, there are various aspects that influence gender-related mobility behavior; this ranges from the socio-cultural context to public space design to affordability, safety and, accessibility.

The socio-cultural environment of Pakistan tends to control female mobility through permission, veiling, gender norms and roles. The ability to access the city is further determined by the availability of the street furniture and the way public spaces are designed, and whether they seem to offer safety and security to women. This, for example includes, but is not limited to, the unsheltered bus stops in Karachi that are typically dominated by crowds of men, which makes it increasingly difficult for women to access the bus stations, especially at night due to no to minimal street lights.

To improve mobility of women broad scale, long term efforts will be needed from key stakeholders at all levels. The main intent of this group has been to not just document conflicts but also to analyse them in a way that can be fruitful and simpler to achieve in terms of providing a toolkit or guide comprising insights for future designers and policy makers.

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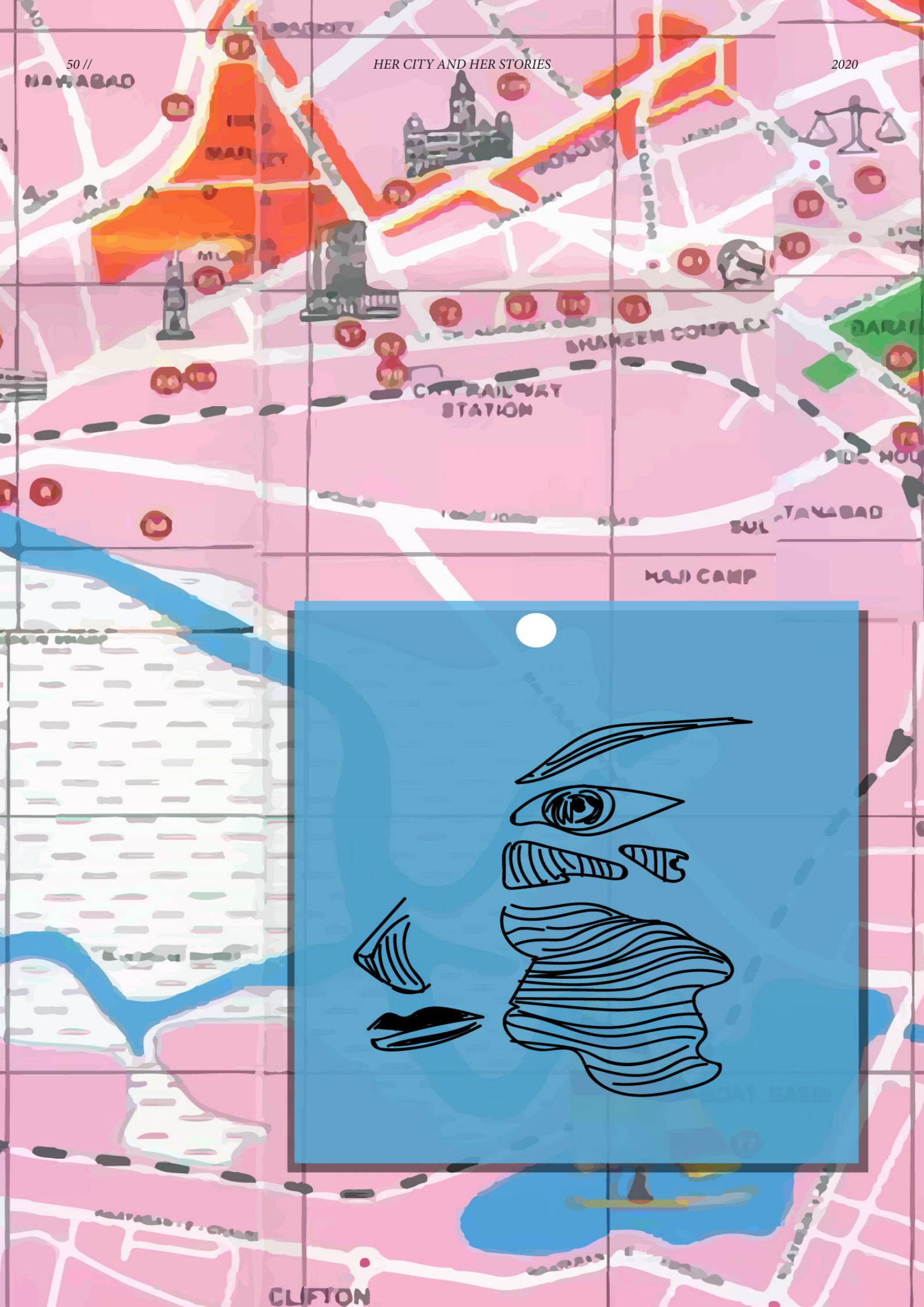
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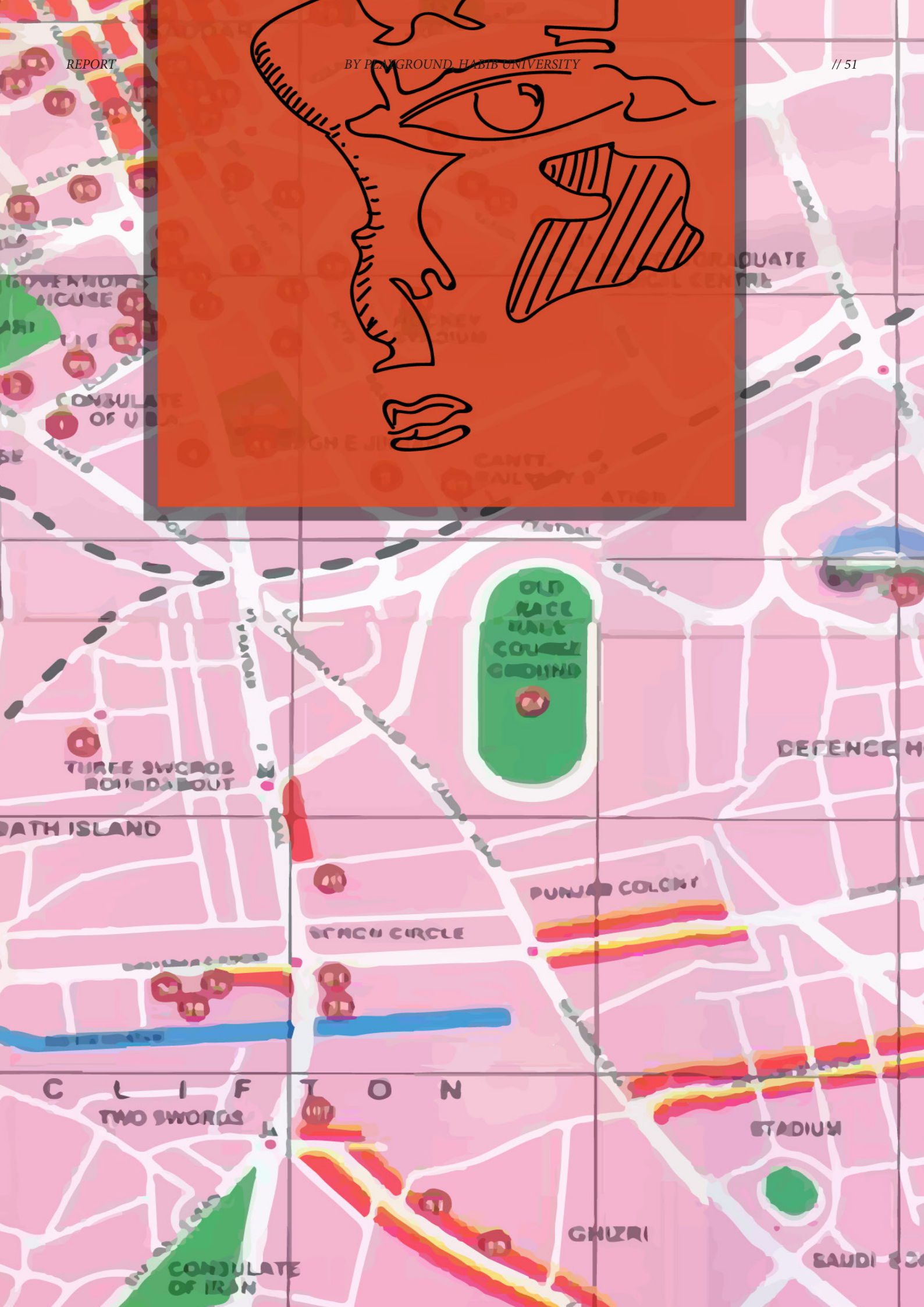
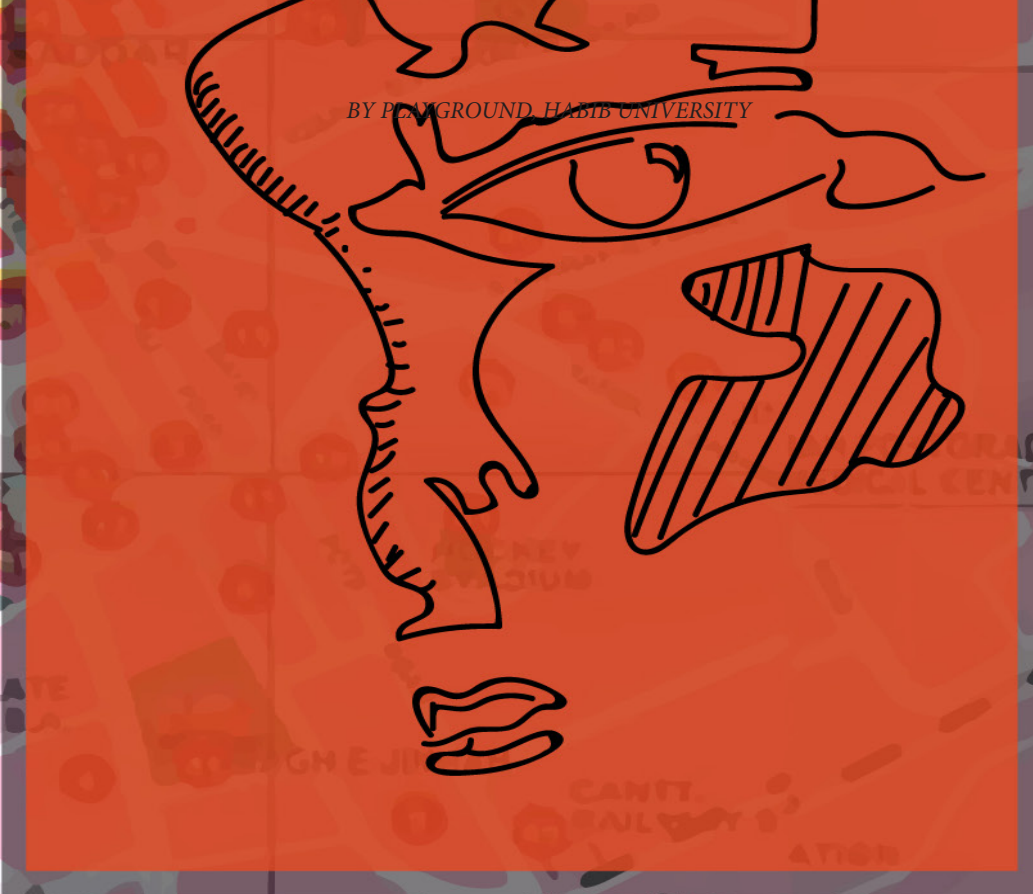
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