



45 SURVEILLANCE, CIRCUMSCRIBER OF WOMEN'S SPATIAL EXPERIENCE: THE CASE OF SLUM DWELLERS OF CALCUTTA, INDIA.

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Introduction

The confinement of women to the domestic (private) arena and the location of political and economic power in the public sphere has been a major theme of western feminist research and theory (Sharistanian, 1989). The distinction between private and public spheres was used to explain and account for the relative position of men and women in psychological, social, economic, and political aspects of life (Chodrow, 1974, 1978; Ortner, 1974; Keohane, Rosaldo, & Gelpi, 1982; Sanday, 1974). Subsequent research revealed that the private-public sphere model over-generalized the experience of some (mostly white middle-class western) women to all women and in the process denied the varied experiences of different groups of women (Bloch, 1978; Bourguignon, 1980; Kelly, 1984; Kurain & Ghosh, 1981; Lewis, 1977; Sudarkasa, 1976).

The private-public sphere model has been used extensively to understand the position of women in Indian society¹. Much of such research focuses on the economic status of women, and the impact of development efforts on women's lives. Rather than modifying the private-public sphere model to reflect the experiences of different groups of women in India, I argue that the notion of surveillance is a more suitable construct for explaining women's experiences in India. Based on the life-stories of 63 women, this paper explores the role played by surveillance in shaping women's spatial experience and their lives.

This paper is organized into four sections. In the first section I discuss the methodology used for this study. The second section assesses the applicability of the private-public sphere model to account for the experiences of the women of this study, while the third section presents specific observed patterns of behavior that can be explained by the notion of surveillance. The fourth section consists of a discussion of the different characteristics of surveillance as observed in this study, and concludes with some questions that warrant examination.

Methodology

I used a qualitative case study approach to collect data from women living in four adjacent slums (Dehiserampur Road, Auddy Bagan, Darapara, and Topsia-Shibtala) and one squatter settlement (Azad Mohalla) in East Calcutta. Of these five locations, Azad Mohalla, Darapara, and Topsia-Shibtala were the three major study sites². Since this research was designed as a naturalistic study, the initial boundaries of the study developed from the phenomenon being investigated. During my first field trip (summer, 1994) I visited and spoke

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to several researchers, planners, activists, government officials, and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in development activity in the slums of Calcutta. Through these contacts, I visited many slums and spoke to several women slum dwellers. This greatly improved my understanding of the lives of women slum dwellers. The data for this study was collected during my second field trip (January – July, 1995). I was introduced to the slum dwellers at the five sites by officials from two NGOs that have been working in this part of Calcutta for over 15 years. After the initial introduction I used a chain sampling strategy to interview 63 women from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances. A semi-structured interview format was used to collect information about: 1) basic demographic data of respondent and household; 2) particulars about other family members; 3) particulars of physical features of home environment; 4) respondent's daily activity schedule, and information pertaining to 5) income earning activities; 6) division of labor; 7) women's position in the family; and 8) spatial issues. In addition, I conducted repeated ethnographic interviews with 11 of the 63 interviewed women. Observation (casual, systematic, and participant) of women's activities and field notes were the other data collection techniques. Content analysis of interview data and field notes utilizing the method of unitizing and categorizing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was the major data analysis technique.

The Private-Public Sphere Debate and the Experience of Women Slum Dwellers in Calcutta

In this section I briefly summarize the salient features of the private-public sphere debate and then assess its ability to account for the experience of the women of this study.

The Private-Public Sphere Debate

In 1974 Rosaldo posited that “an opposition between ‘domestic’ and ‘public’ provides the basis of a structural framework necessary to identify and explore the place of male and female in psychological, cultural, social, and economic aspects of human life”. Following this assertion, a significant proportion of feminist research and scholarship explored the ramifications of the private-public divide in women's lives. However, subsequent research indicates that in spite of being able to account for women's conditions in a variety of circumstances, this formulation universalized the experience of some women, and in the process homogenized the category ‘women’ (Sharistanian, 1989). Critics of the private-public dichotomy model point to the inter-connections between the private and public spheres (Ackelsberg, 1988; Bookman & Morgan, 1988; Pateman, 1989; Phillips, 1991), and illustrate the inadequacy of the private-public separation model to explain non-western situations (Mies, 1982; Mohanty, 1997; Sharma, 1990).

Responding to this criticism, Lofland (1989) proposed a three-way private-parochial-public characterization of space. In Lofland's conceptualization, the private realm is characterized by “ties of intimacy among primary group members who are located within households and personal networks,” the parochial realm is characterized by “a sense of commonality among acquaintances and neighbors who are involved in interpersonal networks that are located within ‘communities’”, while the public realm are those “non-private sectors or areas in which individuals in co-presence tend to be strangers or only categorically known to one another” (like salesman and customer).

Another important refinement of the private-public characterization of space is the notion of multiple publics. Fraser (1992) points out that the public sphere as conceptualized by Habermas implicitly assumes the existence of an unitary public sphere, in which status differentials are bracketed (or set aside momentarily) by people of different status when they participate in it. But since in reality the dominant class usually develops the rules of communication and discourse, status differentials cannot be effectively disregarded and the single public sphere model ultimately works to the disadvantage of subordinated groups. More importantly, the single public sphere model does not provide subordinated groups with a space in which they can meet and organize without being under the supervisory gaze of the dominant group. Instead, subordinated groups find it to their advantage to create and make use of alternate publics, or subaltern counterpublics (Fraser, 1992). Subaltern counterpublics refer to multiple parallel and differentially empowered discursive arenas where members of subordinated groups engage in dialogue amongst themselves and formulate alternative interpretations of their identities and needs. The notion of multiple publics in a class-stratified society like India is particularly pertinent when examining the lives of women from low-income groups, since they are disadvantaged by their class as well as gender affiliation.

Critique of Private-Parochial-Public Characterization of Space

The private-parochial-public (P-P-P) conceptualization of space is useful in explaining some of the observed patterns of behavior of the women of this study. Even though the majority of interviewed women use a range of settings in the parochial domain and some women frequent settings in the public realm, women's activities tend to center around the private (domestic) sphere³. In addition, women face increasing opposition to use settings located away from their home environments. The differentiation of the parochial domain from the public sphere is useful in pointing out that women use settings in the parochial domain frequently with limited opposition from family members. Thus the P-P-P characterization, by differentiating the three domains, is able to account for the home-centered nature of women's lives and the opposition women face when they want to use settings away from their home environments.

The life-stories of the women of this study illustrate that women's use of settings in the parochial and public domain is shaped by their domestic roles. Women enter the parochial and public sphere as sacrificing mothers and dutiful wives, identities that are formed in the private realm. Furthermore, women find it difficult to use settings in the parochial and public domain due to their domestic responsibilities. In response to such constraints women use private settings for wage work, and use the same setting for reproductive and productive activities at different points of time. Thus the private (domestic) and public spheres are not mutually exclusive (Ackelsberg, 1988; Pateman, 1989; Phillips, 1991) as implicitly assumed by the P-P-P model. Since in the P-P-P conceptualization the private sphere is synonymous with domestic activities (consumption), and the public with wage work (production), women's wage work in the private sphere is not recognized. By focusing on the separation of the private and public spheres, this model perpetuates the male-centric view of women as homemakers and men as breadwinners.

The range of settings used by women varies with stage-in-family-life-cycle, household structure, household size, and economic necessity. Young unmarried women, and married women in child-bearing years are subject to greatest spatial confinement, married women with several children face fewer restrictions, while widows and abandoned women face the least restrictions. Women with young children living in nuclear families find it difficult to use settings located away from their homes due to childcare responsibilities. Women living in extended families are usually subject to strict spatial control. On the other hand, women living near their mothers can count on them for support with household work and childcare. Consequently they often have time to engage in wage work in settings outside their homes. Extreme economic distress legitimizes women to leave their homes and engage in wage work in the parochial and/or public domain. However, once the crisis subsides women are expected to retreat to their home environments. Thus women's use of settings is determined by a variety of factors that changes across time. The P-P-P characterization is unable to account for these complex variations in women's experiences.

In spite of regular use of settings in the parochial and sometimes public domain, women identify the "home" as women's setting and the "outside" with men's settings. This is indicative of the existence of a rift between ideology and reality. The conventional P-P-P characterization of space stresses the existence of this ideological separation between private and public worlds, and by stressing this differentiation, the private-parochial-public conceptualization of space helps to perpetuate the separation of the spheres rather than bridge it.

Implicit in the P-P-P conceptualization of space is the notion that power is equally distributed in all public settings. It perpetuates the notion that once women gain entry into public settings they obtain access to power and resources in society. In contrast, this study illustrates that public settings frequented by the women of this study (like market places, roadside shops, and hospitals) are not the repositories of important information

or power/resources. Such settings differ greatly from public settings of government institutions, financial organizations, and educational facilities. By assuming that all public settings are endowed with equal power, this characterization is unable to account for the differentially empowered publics that exist in society. Thus this conceptualization promotes the false idea that once women begin to use some public settings, they will have access to the resources/power available to other groups in society. In fact by failing to acknowledge the existence of differentially empowered publics, the P-P-P characterization helps to further subordinate minority/marginal groups in society.

Similarly, private and parochial domains are not universal categories. The private domain of the women of this study consists of a single room, while that of women of middle and high income groups would be much larger. In addition, the resources available in the private domain would differ greatly across socio-economic classes, by virtue of social links, access to information through public media (television, newspapers), and information technology (computer, internet). In the same way, parochial domains of distinct groups may differ in their geographical location, physical size, and available power/resources. This indicates that the private, parochial, and public domains are dynamic categories that need to be identified and defined for different groups at a certain point in time under specific circumstances. Thus the private, parochial, and public categorization of space is useful for analyzing women's lives only when it is contextually embedded in the specific historic circumstances of the group in question.

The above discussion reveals that even though the private-parochial-public conceptualization is useful in carving out the parochial realm between the private and public spheres and illustrating that the parochial domain is an arena of intense activity, it cannot account for the many complex and dynamic ways in which different forces interact to shape women's use of settings. Ultimately the private-parochial-public characterization of space represents and helps to perpetuate a male-centric world-view of society. In fact the notion of surveillance, rather than the P-P-P characterization of space better explains many observed patterns of behavior.

Surveillance

From the age that girls attain puberty to the time that they get married and continuing on till they become mothers of several children, women's behavior and spatial movement is strictly regulated. Looking closely, one discerns that the confinement of women to their homes and the strong tendency of enclosing women into sex-segregated settings are connected to the desire of keeping women under constant surveillance. Young girls are closely monitored by parents, while young married women are under the close scrutiny of their spouses and in-laws. At Topsia-Shibtala, Farah Nissan went so far as to say she and her daughters engage in home-based petty piece rated work since it keeps her daughters busy at home while at the same time allows her to keep an eye on them. Since her daughters

are young, Farah Nissan does not want to leave them at home unsupervised. This monitoring extends to neighbors, ensuring that in their homes and in settings located in the settlement and immediate neighborhood women are under constant observation. This aspect of life prompts Farah Begum (of Azad Mohalla) to remark: *"You know what happens over here—whatever you are eating—people watch; what you are wearing—they watch and then talk about it."* Thus it seems that women are constantly under the watchful eyes of others, be it their fathers, mothers, spouses or even neighbors. It is important to point out that women are subject to the supervisory gaze of men as well as women.

In the next few pages I use the concept of surveillance to explain the spatial experiences of the women of this study. Specifically, I describe four observed patterns of behavior and then explain the particular phenomenon in terms of the concept of surveillance.

The Parochial Domain as a Domain of Intense Activity

Phenomenon

Almost all interviewed women (89%) engage in a variety of productive and reproductive activities in the parochial realm of their settlement and immediate neighborhood. Other than cooking, a variety of regular reproductive activities involve use of settings located in the settlement (fetching water, washing dishes and clothes) and immediate neighborhood (grocery shopping/marketing). The majority of women engage in home-based productive work (44%), closely followed by those engaging in wage work requiring use of settings in the parochial (34%) and public realms (32%) respectively⁴. About half (54%) of the women who engage in work in the public domain are widows and women who have been abandoned by their spouses. The rest are married women with three or more children. In addition, the husbands of two of these women are sick and cannot engage in regular work (Ainab Bibi of Darapara, and Farida Khatun of Azad Mohalla).

Furthermore when the working women were asked about their job preference, 47.5% of the women reported that they would like to engage in home-based work, while another 22.5% reported that any question related to their preference for wage work is irrelevant since the only kind of productive activities they would be allowed to engage in are home-based jobs. Many of the women engaging in wage work in the public domain report that they engage in selling activity as a last resort, and would gladly begin some other job with comparable pay in their home environments. Additionally all the women who work as unpaid labor in household enterprise help with those activities which are situated at home or in the settlement, leaving other activities that require use of settings in the public domain to the men. This suggests that women face considerable opposition to engaging in wage work outside their homes and the opposition is most intense when such

work involves use of settings in the public domain instead of the parochial domain.

Explanation

When women engage in home-based productive work there is little or no chance of improper behavior on their part as unrelated men are very unlikely to visit them at home, especially when who visits whom is common knowledge in the densely populated slums. Settings used by women for reproductive work in the parochial domain consists of settings like the neighborhood market and grocery store, water tap or tube-well in the settlement, and the adjoining courtyard or area in front of their door step. Settings used for productive work in the parochial realm include the houses of families in the neighborhood, neighborhood grocery store, courtyard, roadside stall, neighborhood market, and neighborhood factory. With the exception of the domestic service workers who work in the houses of families in the neighborhood, all other settings in the parochial domain used by women are such that they are under constant observation by known people. In other words, when women engage in activities in the parochial domain they are under the watchful eyes of neighbors/acquaintances who have the potential of reporting any improper activities that the women might engage in. This serves as a check against the occurrence of any improper male-female interaction.

The women who engage in selling and manufacturing activity have to frequent settings located in the public realm for buying the products that they sell. Such settings extend from different markets in relatively distant parts of the city (like Seladah, Mechua, Burrabazaar) to fairgrounds located outside the city and suburbs of Calcutta (like Baraipur and Arambagh). Markets and fairgrounds are public settings where the women are strangers to other users of the settings or only categorically known to one another. In such a setting women are not subject to the watchful gaze of neighbors, and hence there is a greater possibility of the occurrence of improper behavior on their part. Given the vigilant nature of the parochial environment, and the absence of social control (exerted by watchful neighbors, relatives, acquaintances present in the parochial domain) in the public domain; women do not face as strong an opposition to engaging in work in the parochial realm as settings in the public domain⁵.

Strong Spousal Objection to Wife's Domestic Service Work

Phenomenon

Even though domestic service work is located in the parochial realm (immediate neighborhood), there is strong opposition from spouses when their wives want to engage in domestic service work. Ainab Bibi's (of Darapara) husband would not allow her to engage in domestic service work even though he allowed her to start a retail sari business from her home which requires her to visit a market in a distant part of the city

(Burabazaar) once every 15 days or so. Aliya Begum (of Topsia-Shibatala) engages in home-based petty piece rated work since her husband has threatened to leave her if she engages in any kind of work outside her home. He is even more resistant to the idea of her engaging in domestic service work. Amina Begum (of Azad Mohalla) does not earn any money since her husband will not allow her to engage in domestic service work and that is the only type of work readily available in her neighborhood. Amina said that her husband would allow her to engage in work that was deemed respectable even outside the home but not domestic service work. However she could not explain what she meant by "respectable." It is also significant that 4 of the 5 women who are victims of domestic abuse engage in domestic service work against the wishes of their husbands. The evidence seems to suggest that even though domestic service work is located in the parochial realm women face strong opposition to engage in this kind of productive activity.

Explanation

One reason for the low preference for domestic service jobs is that such jobs are menial, subject to the idiosyncrasies of the employer, and impure⁶ as per Hindu conceptualization of purity. In this instance, since the women are predominantly Muslim, Hindu conceptualizations do not have any bearing. Additionally, since men are not particularly concerned when their wives engage in menial and low paid home based work, this factor alone cannot account for their disapproval to domestic service work. Neither can the opposition to domestic service work be fully accounted for by the locational aspect of settings used for domestic service since women do not face such opposition when they engage in a wide variety of other activities in the parochial domain. A probable explanation has to do with surveillance.

In domestic service jobs women have to work in the homes of their employers. So even though the women are working in the parochial realm, it is in an enclosed space with no scope of surveillance from outside the employer's house. This increases the possibility of improper behavior. Additionally, even though the employer's house is located in the parochial domain for the employee, it is the private realm of the employer. This points out that singular characterization of space as private, parochial, or public, is problematic. Especially in light of a long history of sexual exploitation of women of lower class by men of the higher classes (Lessinger, 1989), men do not want their wives to engage in domestic service work. Thus spatial containment in settings with no scope of surveillance is deemed to be potentially dangerous for women.

Women Engage in Activities in the Public Domain Collectively

Phenomenon

The data from this study indicates that women face opposition to the use of settings for reproductive and especially

productive activities located in the public domain. Selling and manufacturing activities require women to visit settings located in the public domain. Such activities are even more suspect as it involves some amount of interaction with men. An analysis of women's use of settings in the public domain reveals that women often use such settings collectively, in pairs or larger groups. When women need to visit the hospital for their children, they usually take along a sister, mother, or (female) neighbor. Tasks like buying clothes for children for the holidays are often taken over by fathers, or women go to stores accompanied by their children and/or spouses. Similarly when pursuing productive activities in the public domain, women try to do so collectively. For example, Nilufer and Bilkish Begum (of Azad Mohalla) collectively go to the Assembly of God Church soup kitchen daily to get lunch, and Nahid Banu (of Darapara) goes with a group of women from the settlement to sell the toys that she makes in various fairgrounds located in different neighborhoods of Calcutta and even outside the city.

Explanation

Since settings in the public domain are mostly occupied by unknown people, such settings do not afford surveillance and consequently problematizes women's engagement in productive activities in public settings. In order to circumvent this particular problem, women have developed a system of mutual surveillance by collectively engaging in work. Unlike the parochial realm, settings in the public domain do not contain acquaintances/neighbors who can vouch for women's action. In response to this situation women engage in activities in public settings collectively and in doing so watch over one another and build social accountability for each other's actions. By engaging in activities collectively, women can testify for each other's behavior and at the same time thwart the advances of potential harassers. This is an example of a case where women have used the phenomena of surveillance to their advantage to engage in activities in public settings. This phenomenon has been reported by Lessinger (1989) and coined as "social chaperonage."

Women's Use of Busy Versus Relatively Quiet Public Settings

Phenomenon

All the women (except Akhtari Bibi) involved in selling ventures have to visit different markets to buy the products that they sell. However, the time-consuming selling part of the venture is always situated in the settlement or immediate neighborhood (that is the parochial domain). Additionally, a significant proportion (54%) of the women who engage in productive activities in the public domain are those who are either widows or abandoned by their spouses (legitimizing condition). Even with the presence of such legitimizing factors, some differences were observed in their use of settings in the public domain. Nahid Banu, a 37 or 38 year old widow, visits different markets to buy the products needed for her toy manufacturing and selling venture. She sells the toys in

different parts of the city and even settings located outside the city with a group of women from the settlement. However she does not sell the toys door-to-door in different neighborhoods. Similarly Sabina Bibi is not allowed (by her husband) to sell the toy drums that she makes in different neighborhoods. As a result she is limited to making the toy drums during the Muslim holiday season when due to greater demand, wholesale buyers are ready to come to her home and buy the toys. Curiously, Sabina does not face opposition from her husband in engaging in selling fruits and home-made snacks in the settlement. She takes the train to a suburb of Calcutta (public domain) to buy the fruits at a good rate and then sells them from a basket on the roadside in front of her home.

Explanation

Why do the women face stiffer opposition to engaging in activities in some settings and not others, even when both are situated in the public domain? A difference between the settings described above has to do with the degree of publicness and the number of people in such settings. Markets are busy places teeming with people, while neighborhoods in different parts of the city are relatively quiet and the streets may even be deserted sometimes. Even though a distant neighborhood may be part of the public realm for the women in question, they form part of the parochial realm for the people of that particular neighborhood. This is another example of the ambiguity of the characteristics of a setting with reference to different user groups.

Again a probable explanation may have to do with the phenomena of surveillance. Markets are truly public spaces filled with permanent shops, make shift stalls and full of people. Even though the people in the markets are strangers to the women, by their very presence they thwart improper male-female interaction. In a society in which improper interaction between women and unrelated men is taboo, such behavior is not condoned in public spaces like markets. On the other hand, if women were to visit different neighborhoods to sell their products door-to-door, the streets in such neighborhoods may be deserted and once in someone's house there is the added possibility of improper male-female interaction and sexual harassment. Thus truly public spaces are deemed safer for women in comparison to those places that are relatively secluded, even if they are located in the public domain.

This also supports the existence of multiple publics in society. It indicates that different public settings differ not only in terms of the amount of power and resources (Fraser, 1992), but also according to the number and type of people in such settings. The ease by which women can gain entry into public settings is related to the type and amount of people inhabiting such settings. Crowded public settings are preferred over sparsely inhabited public settings due to reduced scope of surveillance and social control associated with the latter. Similarly the presence of known others makes it easier for women to use public settings, again by increasing accountability through social policing.

Discussion

The earlier section illustrates the omnipresent nature of surveillance. Women are either confined to the private domain of their homes, or subject to the watchful eye of neighbors and acquaintances in their settlements and immediate neighborhoods (parochial domain). Even though the public realm provides the possibility for anonymity, the existing social structure does not allow women to visit settings in the public domain without any justifiable reason and reduces their chances of achieving spatial mobility. Furthermore, women are socialized to feel uncomfortable and out of place in the public realm making it even more difficult for women to enjoy spatial freedom and independence. Thus women are subject to varying degrees of surveillance by men and women constantly.

However there are no absolute rules forbidding women to use settings located in the parochial or public realm. The boundary delineating the settings accessible to women changes with the specifics of their circumstances. For instance in times of dire need (legitimizing condition) women can go out into the public domain and even engage in work that involves some interaction with men (like selling activity). However when the economic situation improves, the requirement of male-female interaction avoidance asserts itself and women have to change their behavior accordingly. Surveillance ensures that women conform to the socially mandated acceptable behavior with reference to their stage-in-family-life-cycle and their specific circumstances. Since the rules governing women's appropriate behavior are not absolute, they seem less rigid and overbearing and consequently much more difficult to challenge and attack. By being flexible, surveillance wins the support of the very people it oppresses.

This brings us to the disciplinary nature of surveillance observed in this study. Women who live within the confines of their home environment and do not express any desire to achieve independent spatial mobility are rewarded by being considered as model women upholding the prestige of their families, while those who do venture or attempt to venture out of their home environments without justifiable reasons are severely punished. In this study, the punitive measures associated with disregarding the dictates of spatial restrictions varied from incurring the anger of husbands, threat of being abandoned by spouse, to domestic abuse and social stigmatization. Furthermore, those women who go out of their homes in their capacity as sacrificing mothers do not gain in status, but bear the shame of exposing their family's poverty. Even then, they are not spared from surveillance. However I observed that surveillance does not safeguard women against intra-family conflicts like domestic abuse. This suggests that surveillance over women is motivated not by the benevolent desire to protect women but rather to control their freedom of behavior and movement and maintain the patriarchal power structures of society.

Through surveillance, conformity to existing social norms is

noted and rewarded, while non-conformity is punished. Since the forces of surveillance are not exerted by a formal external agency like the police but by family members, relatives and acquaintances, the roots of surveillance are integrated within society. The very people who are disciplined by surveillance also watch others in their efforts to discipline them. The notion of surveillance is so closely integrated into the socialization process that it is considered natural/normal. This guarantees constant and continuous surveillance.

The different elements of surveillance, namely, its omnipresent nature, its flexibility, the simplicity of structures needed for its enforcement, and its disciplinary characteristics all echo the attributes of the Panopticon⁷ (Foucault, 1977). Existing socio-cultural mores ensure that women are spatially confined to their home environments and/or sex segregated settings. In addition, women who venture out of their homes for legitimized activities are under continuous surveillance. Like the Panopticon, this serves two purposes: 1) all information about women is known, while at the same time 2) women do not have access to information about men (the group in power). Thus very much like the prisoner in his/her cell, women as a group are isolated and denied access to power⁸, and at the same time they are under constant surveillance preventing them from organizing themselves against the existing power structure of society. Even though many of the elements of surveillance observed in the study echo the characteristics of the Panopticon it differed from this formulation in other ways. The type and amount of surveillance women were subject to varied according to stage-in-family-life-cycle, family history, and economic need. Furthermore, the nature of surveillance possible in different settings were linked to the attributes of and the number and type of people in such settings. Thus further research is necessary to identify and then analyze the different dimensions of surveillance as experienced by women in Calcutta, India.

Even though women face severe spatial restrictions, the seeds of overcoming the barriers posed by the existing social system may also lie within the city. The fact that women have invented ways of using surveillance to their advantage (like collectively engaging in activities in the public domain) to make use of opportunities in the city is an indicator of their ingenuity. The city by its vastness, congregation of different types of people (race, class, and ethnicity to name a few), and various opportunities give women the power to circumscribe the disciplinary gaze of patriarchal social structures (Wilson, 1991, 1995). This opportunity that the city holds for women has not gone unnoticed. It has prompted men to portray the city as a potentially dangerous place for respectable women. Urbanization has been held responsible for loosening the morals of modern society and blamed for the breakdown of the traditional belief system. The ideology of the dangerous is evoked to justify the need to protect women by enclosing them in their homes and other gender segregated environments. However, even though the city provides new opportunities for the sexual exploitation of women and for voyeurism, the opportunities that it affords women should not be underestimated. How can women take advantage of the different opportunities available in the city? How can

policy makers and development agencies help women to gain a fair share of the opportunities of the cities? These are important questions that need to be pursued.

Notes

- ¹ One branch of this type of research focuses on socio-cultural mores that confine women to their homes and in doing so intensifies the separation between the public and private spheres (Agarwal, 1989; Beteille, 1975; Jain & Banerjee, 1985; Kalpagam, 1986; Lessinger, 1989; Nanda, 1976; Standing, 1985 & 1991); while another branch examines the different ramifications of the sexual division of labor, the phenomenon of the reserve army of labor, and other economic consequences that are linked to the private-public sphere debate (Anker & Hein, 1986; Banerjee, 1982, 1985a/b, 1991; Bardhan, 1987)). I should point out that this list is not comprehensive, rather it is representative of the large amount of literature on women in India.
- ² I interviewed 18 women at Azad Mohalla, 14 women at Darapara, and 22 women at Topsia-Shibtala. At the insistence of the NGO through which I had established contact, I interviewed 4 women at Auddy Bagan, and 6 women at Dehiserampur Road.
- ³ For this study the home is considered as the private domain, settings in the courtyard, settlement and immediate neighborhood as the parochial domain, while settings at the city level and beyond comprises the public realm.
- ⁴ The three categories do not add up to 100% since of the 41 women engaging in productive work, 4 engage in two jobs simultaneously.
- ⁵ However I should point out that even those women (of this study) who do use settings in the parochial domain do so out of necessity. Judging from the response of the women to the query 'whether they would continue to work if their economic circumstances improved,' it is likely that most of them would retreat to their homes when they do not need to worry about basic survival.
- ⁶ This refers to the washing of soiled dishes and clothes of unrelated people.
- ⁷ The Panopticon consists of an annular building with a central tower. The tower is pierced by windows that open into the inner side of the ring. The peripheral annular building is divided into cells which extends through the entire width of the ring. Each cell has two windows, one on the inside corresponding to the window of the tower, and another on allowing light to come in. A supervisor in the central tower can watch the prisoner who is like a black figure against the light of the window.

⁸ Throughout history it has been the privilege of the dominant class to scrutinize and be informed about the actions of the lower class. However since women belong to different classes, the class differences amongst women should not be underestimated. Nonetheless, women of each class are subordinate to the men of that class and subject to the disciplinary gaze of men of that specific class.

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