

## SISTERS ON SLIPPERY WHEELS: WOMEN TAXI DRIVERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Through case studies of men and women taxi drivers in Durban based on ethnographic interviews, this article reveals unequal power relations between women and men in the taxi industry, discrimination in employment practices, and sexual harassment of women taxi drivers and commuters. Furthermore, the article points out strategies which women taxi drivers used to counteract the unequal power relations in the taxi industry.

### Introduction

Over the past 20 years the lives of African women and men in South African cities have been differentially affected by the revolutionary growth of the minibus taxi service. There are three popular modes of urban public transport in South Africa: buses, minibus taxis, and trains. The minibus taxi operation occupies an important place in the new urban transport market, as taxis have the single largest share of the African commuting market, sky rocketing from virtually a zero share some twenty years ago. According to a national survey conducted in 1993, Africans in urban areas of South Africa travelled by taxis (46 per cent), followed by bus (20 per cent) and train (13 per cent) (van der Reis, 1993).

As the majority of the users of public transport in South Africa are African, and mainly women (Khosa, 1990; 1994), and because the most popular form of public transport amongst African commuters is the minibus taxi, a gendered focus was hence directed towards the taxi industry. In general, literature on the history of the taxi industry in South Africa has failed to examine gender relations in the taxi service (Khosa, 1990; 1992; 1994). The main emphasis of this article therefore is on gender relations: the unequal relations of power between women and men in the taxi industry and how these relations are being contested and challenged. African women and men have been involved in the taxi industry at

three levels: as taxi owners, as commuters and as employed drivers.

The article is structured into four main sections. The introduction sets out the context while section two outlines the research methodology; section three provides a backdrop to understanding gender differences in public transport for commuting in developing countries, including South Africa; with the fourth examining gender relations in the taxi industry through ethnographic studies of women taxi drivers.

Evidence suggests that the experiences of women and men in the taxi industry are different and this may largely be because of the gender roles ascribed to men and women. However, gender relations are subject to contestation, negotiation and compromise. This paper highlights how women taxi drivers challenged established gender roles and did what women are not supposed to do in society. They did so, however, not to fight themselves into a male domain; according to those interviewed, theirs was a choice of last resort.

Case studies and in-depth interviews were used in this study. The focus of the interviews was on documenting experiences, struggles, victories and survival strategies of men and women in the taxi industry. The in-depth interview methodology was chosen as it allows the researcher access to rich but complex accounts of the oppression, humiliation, resistance and struggles of women and men in society. Through the eyes of histories, one can tease out gender relations which inhibit women's empowerment and highlight those strategies which challenge this marginalisation. Life experiences and personal relationships are of political and social importance.

In-depth interviews were conducted in Durban with three women taxi drivers, two men taxi drivers, two men rank managers, two women sellers (on taxi ranks) and four taxi commuters (two men and two women). The length of the interviews varied from two to six hours. Whereas some of the interviews took place in the taxi ranks, others were carried out at the homes of taxi drivers. Ethnographic work was carried out during the months of July, August and September 1995, and translation took place between September and November. All the respondents were African.

## **Gender and Transport Commuting**

Transport is an essential element in everyday life, particularly in women's lives (Chapman, 1987). It determines access to a wide range of essential resources and activities, such as employment, health care, education and child care. However, most planning and development decisions in the transport arena are made by men with little or no regard paid to women's needs (Turner and Fouracre, 1995; Hanson and Pratt, 1995).

Throughout the world, gender differences in travel patterns, behaviour and modal choice, expose men and women to different accident risks. There are also other negative factors that accrue disproportionately to women, children and the elderly from the risk of accidents. Apart from the problems of overloading (and its attendant hazards of sexual harassment or so-called 'eve teasing'), women and the aged and the infirm suffer more seriously from the poor design of vehicles and the way in which they are driven. Market traders, often women, in some areas of the world, including South Africa, have particular problems as to the type of vehicle which they can access because of the bulky nature of the commodities they may be transporting (Cull, 1995; Turner and Fouracre, 1995).

Turner and Fouracre (1995) identify the following conclusions based on their survey of transport in developing countries. Firstly, women do not have the same job opportunities in the transport sector as men. Secondly, transport tends to be less user-friendly to women and there are more adverse impacts of transport on women than on men. Thirdly, there is a low participation of women in the transport sector as a direct result of the nature of the transport system. Fourth, transport is generally unfriendly towards women and transport projects have not usually worked through project appraisal to determine how they would impact on the interests of the different users of the transport system (Turner and Fouracre, 1995).

Within the context of South Africa, African townships are located far from places of work and some commuters have to leave their homes at dawn, only to return home after dusk. This pattern has exposed commuters, especially women, to crime and, also (sexual) harassment at bus and taxi ranks and in the vehicles, especially in the evening.

Although women are by and large the majority of taxi commuters (Khosa, 1994), one female taxi commuter indicated during interviews that:

Some taxi drivers have no respect for women. If male drivers want to speak to you, they don't ask nicely, but either sway your arms or call you names. I feel that they should have respect for the public they work for.

In general, the experiences of female commuters are different from those of male commuters. Women generally face harassment of one form or another by both male drivers and male passengers. These may range from verbal comments to unwelcome gestures or even assault. Although neither of the women commuters interviewed in this study had been physically assaulted, they both confirmed harassment (especially of a sexual nature) at bus and taxi ranks, and in other public transport vehicles. Women passengers are generally reluctant to use taxis early in the morning or late at night, fearing assault and possibly rape,

unless it is specially hired transport. Although both male and female passengers agree that overcrowding is a problem in the taxi industry, men commuters generally feel more confident travelling at any time by taxis.

The main difference between men and women commuters is that although both are exposed to the dangers of overcrowding and speeding, women commuters have to experience additional problems of sexual harassment. Also, women are more often than men, engaged in part-time and shift work and thus experience transport and safety difficulties as they have to commute outside of peak times.

### **Sisters on Slippery Wheels - women taxi drivers**

Evidence gathered in Gauteng in 1990 suggested that some ten per cent of taxi drivers and owners were women. However, in 1994 in Durban the situation was slightly different with an estimated seven per cent of taxi drivers being women. This section focuses on taxi drivers and seeks to explore a number of critical issues about gender relations in the taxi industry. How did women and men enter the taxi industry? What struggles and setbacks did they encounter? What strategies did they employ to challenge hostility and repression within the transport sector? The case studies provide a window through which we can understand how gender relations have been reconstructed and contested in the taxi industry.

### **Case A - Thula: profit is thicker than blood**

This is a case of a woman who spent six years in the taxi industry. Although now retired from the industry and owning her own business, her story is indicative of gender relations in the taxi industry and of the different ways in which men and women taxi drivers are affected by the industry. Thula is a 52 year-old woman born in Umzinto. She was forced to give up school when she became pregnant in Standard 8. She stayed with her parents, looking after her child for two years before leaving for Durban where she stayed with her brother. In Thula's words: 'Life was difficult because I wasn't working then and my mother expected me to send her money to support the child'. Later Thula was employed as a 'shop assistant' and her job entailed collecting stock that had been delivered, packing it on the shelves, cleaning the shelves and windows, and making tea for the shop-owner and his wife. Nevertheless, as Thula recalls, her job was not clearly defined. Finishing early meant Thula would be sent to the house of her employer to do housework and cooking.

Thula worked as a shop assistant for six years until she married in 1975. With massive forced removals taking place in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s,

Thula's family was one of the victims of forced removals in 1979, and were resettled to section Z in Umlazi. In order to supplement family income, Thula started a tuck-shop service and also took driving lessons. As sometimes the bakery or milk suppliers did not deliver stock, tuck-shop owners had to collect the stock from distributors in town. This was a frustrating experience before she could drive.

When Thula passed her driver's test in 1982, she started using her husband's vehicle for her tuck-shop business. However, when the marriage broke up in 1984, Thula lost her business and her husband even won the custody of the children. Thula went to live with her brother who was now operating three taxis. She was unemployed for a year, but later found a job in a retirement complex to drive the elderly to and from a local hospital. The job was demanding and not well-paying and Thula was still dependent on her brother. Thula's husband did not pay any maintenance as he claimed he was supporting the children. Thula started looking for another job but: 'it was very hard to find a job as a driver if you were female. Upon failing in my job-hunting, I decided to give the taxi industry a try'. Thula's brother encouraged her to try driving taxis.

My brother advised me to join the taxi industry, but I was scared because I was a woman and no woman drives a taxi. He said I could start off by driving locally where there are no traffic policemen and I could get a public service certificate later.

Thula started as a taxi driver in 1988 and still has vivid memories of the first time she drove taxis:

I was very scared but my brother would go with me and made me familiar with the route, other drivers and dealing with passengers. It wasn't easy because both (male) passengers and drivers wanted to take advantage of me because I was female. Passengers would refuse to pay until I intervened. Sometimes a person would walk out without paying and I would have to shout at him to pay.

Thula was also scared to go out very early in the morning, as other drivers were starting at 4 am and coming back very late. This meant that Thula was losing out as there were many passengers in the morning and evening. Life was difficult in the taxi rank. As Thula reflected:

Life was hard in the rank because I was the only female driver and I had to mix with all these men. I found their conversation settled around women, criticising them, and I could not say anything because I was the only female driver around.

The situation improved temporarily when she found a boyfriend, a man who

was also driving her brother's taxi. Her boyfriend would come and collect Thula early in the morning and that meant that Thula could now get the early morning and late evening taxi loads. Yet this did not make Thula feel safe in the taxi in the morning, especially as most passengers at that time are men. The two things that scared Thula the most in her career in the taxi industry was rape and hijacking.

I usually had my helper with me, but sometimes this did not help. At one time at K Section [Umlazi] we were stopped by four men who wanted a special [taxi service] to hospital. They claimed that their relative had been shot and they were rushing him to the nearest hospital. I was warned by my helper who said 'iphakethe'. Upon looking at the men's jackets, I noticed that their pockets were very bulgy and the men looked suspicious. I told the men that I was going to town and would come back to take their relative to hospital, and I took another route out and did not go back to them.

Being a taxi driver taught Thula many skills as drivers deal with all types of people. However, there were some male drivers who were supportive and offered assistance on several occasions. Whereas some passengers were sympathetic, others were rude and unfriendly. As Thula revealed during the interview:

For example, a man says 'Today I'll be late at work because I'm in a taxi driven by a woman. She is driving very slowly. I don't know who told her that taxi driving is her place'.

Sometimes you feel annoyed because you know if you speed up, you are going to have an accident, but you must always control your temper.

Things became difficult from 1990 with the escalation of political and taxi-related violence; more policemen and traffic cops were on the road searching taxis and drivers. This meant that Thula could 'no longer drive without the public service certificate and it also meant that I had to have a licensed firearm to protect myself against hijackers'.

Being unmarried was an advantage as her punishing work schedule did not allow her free time. Thula would get up at 3.15 am and she would leave the house by 4 am, when her boyfriend came to fetch her. Although Thula worked for her brother, she argues that her salary was peanuts. In general, taxi drivers are exploited by their employers. In spite of all the difficulties in the taxi industry, Thula was able to use the money she was paid to build a four-roomed house at N section in Umlazi where she now lives with her daughter. She retired from the taxi business after six years and she now has a shop in Umlazi where she employs

five assistants. Thula occasionally drives her bother's taxi when his drivers are off sick. Thula's son is also a taxi driver in Umlazi. She would like to invest in the taxi business and be a taxi owner in the future.

### **Case B - Dududu: 'swallow a stone and drive on'**

Dududu is a 37 year-old woman taxi driver. As with Thula, Dududu was also forced to give up school when she was in Standard seven. Dududu received her driver's licence in 1981 and was later promoted to be a company driver. She married one of the company's supervisors in 1984.

When the company had financial problems in 1990, Dududu (as with other women) was one of the first to be retrenched, although some workers (mostly men), including Dududu's husband, were transferred to other factories. She stayed at home for the next three years raising children before becoming a taxi driver in 1993. She indicates that financial difficulties at home made her seek employment to supplement family income.

I started driving taxis in November 1993. When I started I thought it was the most relaxed job because I could come home when there were no passengers on the road. When I started [driving] my route was from Amaoti to Verulam, I had time to pop in at home which is not far from Amaoti.

Dududu works a 15-hour day leaving home at 5 am in the morning (with her husband to the taxi owner's home). In the evenings Dududu gets home around 8 pm. In general, her first taxi load is often full by 5.45 am.

As with other women drivers, Dududu finds some passengers (especially men) often difficult to deal with as she is a woman: 'some passengers think I'm too soft. They expect a taxi driver to be rude and rough on the road'. As with other female taxi drivers, insecurity in the taxi industry worries Dududu:

I think that the taxi industry is a very expensive business to run. This is because one is not making money all the time. Sometimes you have to wait in the rank and it takes an hour before the taxi is full. And when it is full you make between R28 and R36 per taxi load. Because our route is not busy, I make about eight trips per day.

Adapting to the world of taxi driving as a female taxi driver is stressful.

At the rank you sit with men only, and if men are alone together, they speak vulgar language which you have to get used to. Some men undermine you and they don't think you are as good and as competent as themselves. They always find fault with what you are doing. People do not want to accept that

women are as capable as men. They treat you like a child as if you don't know what you are doing, for example, they say things like 'careful sister, don't make an accident.'

Dududu does not have enough time to spend with her family. Although she is off duty on Sundays, Dududu does not get adequate rest as she is obliged 'to see that everything at home is running smoothly and help the helper to prepare for the next day'. As there is no job security, Dududu would like to get employment elsewhere, preferably at the Durban Transport driving buses: 'at least there are benefits and defined working hours'.

In contrast to the other two women taxi drivers interviewed, Dududu is married, with two children. Her husband is a supervisor in a local clothing factory. As indicated earlier, she does not have time with her husband. By the time she gets home, she is tired and often her husband is asleep. Moreover, when she arrives home she is often too tired for 'family' talk. Dududu feels that her children are growing 'motherless' as she leaves very early in the morning before they wake up, and comes back very late in the evening when they are sleeping. Sharing of house chores within the family is unequal. For example, when the family helper is absent, it is Dududu who takes a day off to look after the children. Dududu is faced with the challenge of balancing being a 'mother', 'wife', 'lover' and 'worker'.

Apart from limited time she has with her family, Dududu finds driving a taxi to be a risky venture:

Driving a taxi is not a safe thing. The rate of taxi hijacking is very high and you don't know if the passengers you are transporting are going to hijack you. You always fear that they might be carrying dangerous weapons, making your life unsafe. Although the taxi I'm driving has 'safes' behind me, it is not bullet proof. So far I've never been the victim of hijacking.

In general, younger male drivers tend to be rude, impatient and disobey traffic legislation:

I do not know how many times I have been called a 'sfebe', by male drivers who are a lot younger than myself. You just have to 'swallow a stone', pretend you didn't hear and continue with what you are doing.

What concerns her the most is the long working hours, appalling wages, unpaid overtime, and lack of pension, and maternity leave for women taxi drivers. As Dududu indicated during the interview: 'being a taxi driver is different from all other workers, you cannot say that you are employed because you do not enjoy all the rights that other employees enjoy'. As an employed driver with no

employment benefits, Dududu contends that the government should pass legislation recognising taxi drivers as workers.

### **Case C - Vumani: 'traditional healer and taxi driver'**

Vumani is a 43 year-old woman driver whose case differs in some respects from the two other women taxi drivers. When Vumani's mother fell ill (and could no longer work), she was forced to leave school at standard 6 and at the age of 16 was working as a domestic servant. Vumani recalls how difficult life was at the time: 'Being the eldest at home, I had to support my mother and my three younger brothers. My mother died when I was 20 years and at that time I was staying at my employer's place'. In order to ensure that she got a 'right marriage partner', Vumani joined a local church in Umlazi:

I liked this religion because if a man wants to marry you, he does not come directly to you, he goes via the church officials and in that way the marriage is blessed. I liked it also because of the good way the youth from that church behaved.

When her employer emigrated in 1978, Vumani lost both her job and her home. A woman friend from church offered her temporary accommodation. As Vumani could not get a job, she joined her host in selling Tupperware throughout Durban. By this time her views about marriage changed and she 'refused many marriage proposals' as she did not want to get married as her younger brothers still depended on her.

I felt that if I got married, I would have to forget about my own family and become part of the man's family, and should my brothers have problems, I could not help them if my husband did not give me permission. I felt that the only way I could be sure that I would help them was not to get married because I wouldn't need anybody's permission.

Vumani soon acquired a driving licence. However, things changed dramatically when her host's sister came to live with them. Vumani's host allegedly paid more attention to her sister and neglected Vumani who had 'to do all the housework and cook'. The host and her sister would pass on house chores to Vumani. At the time, selling Tupperware was no longer a lucrative business. Vumani then decided to move out and joined an informal settlement in Umlazi.

It was at the informal settlement where Vumani met a man she had known from church and who also had the same surname as her's. This man, who owned taxis used to call her 'sister'. Although the taxi owner, her 'brother', was sympathetic about her unemployment, he could not help her initially. When the financial situation deteriorated, Vumani went to her 'brother' about driving one of his taxis.

Early in 1988 when one of my 'brother's' drivers was shot dead, he said maybe we could try and see how things go. I drove one of his taxis that go from Kwamyandu to Q section. At first it was very difficult to adjust from being a 'Christian' to being a 'taxi driver'. I was used to speaking humbly and I found that taxi drivers speak anyhow. At first I was scared because Kwamyandu is next to section T Hostel [men's hostel] which is sometimes violent. I used to wake up at 4 am in the morning and wait for one driver to come and pick me up at 5 am and then go to collect the taxi from my bother's house.

As with Thula, Dududu, and other women taxi drivers, the treatment Vumani gets from her male counterparts is the same. Some male taxi drivers complained that a woman was taking their job. Others claimed that a woman could never make it as a taxi driver. At the taxi rank, passengers were also surprised to see a woman driving a taxi. Sometimes Vumani would hear them discussing among themselves saying 'this woman has big guts'.

Vumani has a sense of pride in her job, especially when she transport school pupils.

I liked it the most when I was transporting school kids because they saw me as an inspiration. They would look at me admiringly while I was driving and they all wanted to sit next to me.

As with Dududu and Thula, Vumani did not find life at the taxi rank easy. Male hostel dwellers near the taxi rank accused other men taxi drivers of being 'iziyoyoyo', for having accepted a woman driver in their taxi association. As there was a woman among them, it was claimed that their 'muthi' would fail to work. It took Vumani a long period of time before she could get used to other male drivers.

As with the other drivers, both men and women, Vumani has a fifteen-hour working day. With long and arduous hours, Vumani decided to employ a domestic servant to assist her at home. She makes about 12 trips a day: 'I cannot say I am happy because I work long hours and get paid peanuts'. The high rate of unemployment makes changing jobs difficult for taxi drivers. In the words of Vumani: 'I will hang on until maybe a miracle happens'. The relationship between Vumani and her 'brother' is not always amicable. She points out that taxi drivers are 'greedy and demand that drivers bring back a lot of money. In order to make this money, drivers have to overcrowd or else get sacked'.

Vumani's life was dramatically changed when she became sick in 1991. She suffered from migraine headaches and blackouts. Vumani's brother sent her to

a traditional 'prophet' who confirmed that the ancestors wanted Vumani to become an Isangoma. Vumani trained in 'prophecy', and in healing skills for nine months. However, Vumani could not afford to buy a cow called 'Inkomo yokuphuma' after finishing her training. Certain rituals are performed at the end of the training to thank ancestors and ask for blessings. Vumani revealed that:

If you don't have money to buy the cow, you can either stay on at your trainer's home until your family raises the money, or ask your trainer to talk to the ancestors and ask them to let you go and work and raise the money and the rituals will be performed afterwards.

Vumani chose the latter and returned to the taxi industry in early-1992 where she saved enough money to buy the cow. The graduation ceremony took place in September 1992 and Vumani became a career Isangoma. Vumani now has two sources of income: as an Isangoma and as a woman taxi driver.

I thought of leaving the taxi industry, but my 'brother' said he would allow me time off during non-peak-hours, and I would go and attend to my 'patients' if I have any. Being an Isangoma supplements my income, but not to a large extent because sometimes you don't have patients and, at other times you have more than you expected.

Vumani works as a taxi driver from 5 am to 9 am and as Isangoma from 9 am to 2 pm. She returns to the taxi industry in the afternoon until the evening. She takes Sundays off from driving taxis to concentrate on her patients or to attend Isangoma parties and rituals. Her domestic helper attends to patients when Vumani is not at home. Life has become completely different for her and has now completely ruled out marriage.

I don't think there's any room for marriage in my life. Firstly I'm busy on the road and don't have time for a man. Secondly, I am an Isangoma and my ancestors will not let me get married.

During our interviews with her at her home, there were several patients waiting for consultations. Vumani now lives in a four-bedroom house, nicely built in an informal settlement. Outside the main house, Vumani has two rooms which she uses as a consulting area.

The richness of this case study, as with the previous two, reveals a number of vital issues about gender relations in the taxi industry. From the age of 16 Vumani had to work in order to support her younger brothers. Vumani even refused several marriage proposals to concentrate on supporting her younger brothers and sisters. As a taxi driver, she saw herself as an inspiration and role model to the school pupils when she drove them to and from school. Vumani, as with other

women taxi drivers, penetrated the world of men, overcoming great odds, but at a great personal price.

When faced with a potentially damaging illness, Vumani transformed it into an income-generating activity. However, Vumani also relied on the support of friends, and especially her brother, who was supportive and acted as an anchor during times of difficulties. As a woman taxi driver, Vumani, as with other women taxi drivers, was initially faced with predictable sexual harassment from both male drivers and male passengers. As a woman taxi driver and Isangoma, Vumani has become an enigma for passengers. For Vumani had to negotiate, adapt, and transform gender relations in order to survive in a male-dominated taxi industry.

### **Case D - Gwaza: 'from bus driver to taxi driver'**

The case of Gwaza, a 43 year-old male taxi driver who started driving Durban Transport buses in 1977, differs from the three women taxi drivers discussed earlier. After securing a bank loan, Gwaza resigned from his position at the bus company to start his own taxi business in 1990.

Although he was in the transport sector for over twenty years, learning the ropes of the new trade was 'tough and difficult'. Gwaza advises that taxi drivers should first get training before they enter the taxi industry as this would minimise their hardships. Traffic cops used to harass him and expected bribes. As secretary of a local taxi association, he is aware of numerous taxi hi-jackings in the townships. Gwaza, as with other taxi drivers, is sometimes scared to drive late at night or very early in the morning. Working hours in the taxi industry are long. Gwaza's day starts at 4 am and ends at 9 pm in the evening. Although he is not married, Gwaza has four children from four different women.

Gwaza is both a driver and taxi owner: 'As taxi owner, I'm happy because I'm self employed. No one to follow me around'. Gwaza admits that drivers are paid poor wages. Although Gwaza claims that there is consultation between the local civic association and the taxi association when fares are increased, sometimes taxi commuters are not adequately consulted. Communities would often attack taxis or boycott them. However, Gwaza claims that, in most cases, taxi drivers would carry on with their business until commuters 'get used to the new fare'.

Male taxi drivers who also own taxis have more choices than women taxi drivers. For example, Gwaza's position as a taxi association official, taxi owner and driver gives him more flexibility in terms of how to organise his working life. As a single person, he is also relieved of family responsibilities. Although he has two children they stay with their mothers.

In contrast to women drivers interviewed, Gwaza chose to enter the industry

of his own volition. Having worked as a bus driver for over twenty years, he entered into the taxi industry with a wealth of expertise in the transport sector. As an owner and also official of a taxi association, Gwaza wields greater power within the taxi industry and at the taxi rank. Gwaza acts as both an operator and manager, and gate keeper.

### **Case E: Khuluma: 'from retrenchment to taxi driving'**

Khuluma is 32 year-old male taxi driver with standard ten, an educational qualification which those women taxi drivers interviewed were not able to attain. Khuluma's first job was a receptionist and was later promoted to wage clerk. When the contractor finished its assignment two years later, Khuluma was also retrenched. He left Durban for Johannesburg hoping to find employment. After a few years in Johannesburg he was dismissed from a food company for participating in union activities.

As he could not get another job in Johannesburg, he decided to return to Durban. A friend, who was a taxi driver, encouraged him to consider driving taxis. Through contacts Khuluma was able to get a job as a taxi driver. As with other men and women taxi drivers, Khuluma works for over 15 hours a day, starting from 5 am to 8.30 pm. As he indicated during the interview:

If you get a ticket from the traffic cops [inspectors] and you pay it out of the owner's money, you might find that the owner says it was your mistake and refuses to pay for the ticket and deduct it from your salary.

Khuluma is single and lives with his parents at home and he supports his younger brother who attends school at a local technical college. Although Khuluma is not married, he has two children from different women. The children live with their mothers. The experiences of Khuluma in the taxi industry are not unique, those men and women taxi drivers interviewed indicated similar frustration with the taxi industry. Khuluma articulates this clearly:

Life is not a bed of roses in the taxi industry. You have everybody against you. Firstly, the taxi owner is always suspicious that you are stealing his money and there is no trust between the two of you. Sometimes he follows you around on the road or at the rank to see if you are not up to any tricks. Secondly, passengers always have the perception that taxi drivers are rude. I am not saying they are not, but not all of them are rude and in most cases passengers cause drivers to be rude.

Although Khuluma is underpaid, he sometimes makes more than the owner

expects, in which case he keeps the difference.

I think that the only reason taxi drivers are staying on in the industry is that sometimes there is a *ôvetkoekö* [bonus payment]; if you make more than the owner has demanded, then you keep some of the money for yourself. In that way even if you are not well-paid, you feel consoled.

Khuluma's case reveals the changing economic and political climate in South Africa. Lack of employment security is a recurrent theme for a large number of Africans in South Africa. His dismissal after participating in union activities also demonstrates the hostile industrial environment which most workers encountered in the 1970s and 1980s. Khuluma's entry into the taxi industry was through contacts, which confirms the power of networks within the taxi industry. His case, as with several others, indicate that the working conditions in the taxi industry are far from ideal. However, his experiences in the taxi industry are still far better than that of women taxi drivers.

### Comparing Women and Men Taxi Drivers

The histories of men and women taxi drivers weave together the changing social, economic and political processes that govern capital accumulation in the taxi industry. Elsewhere, it has been demonstrated that, however noble the virtues of entrepreneurship, petty commodity traders often show a tendency towards the hyper-exploitation of those who work with, or for them (Bromley, 1985:vi). The case studies offered important insights in terms of gender employer-employee relationships, and the different experiences which men and women taxi drivers experience in the taxi industry. Although both women and men taxi drivers are generally underpaid, wages for women are lower. The reasons for entering the taxi industry are similar for both men and women drivers -they either were retrenched or could not find an alternative employment. This theme further confirms that the majority of those in the informal sector are there by force of economic circumstance than by choice.

The following observations are evident in several taxi ranks. Firstly, in taxi ranks, taxis have stickers for identification. This is to ensure that no 'outsider' can ply for trade on that rank or route. In general, there are taxi washers, rank managers and queue marshalls, and women sellers in all the taxi ranks. Although the atmosphere at most ranks is often vibrant, noisy and lively, there are gender roles and expectations which govern the activities of different actors, women and men drivers and owners, rank managers and women traders.

Most taxi drivers interviewed (men and women) were unmarried or had relationships which suffered from long working hours. Of the three women

drivers interviewed, only one was married. As indicated in the case of Dududu, married taxi drivers are also 'expected' by their partners to be responsible for household chores. As for male taxi drivers, they generally tend to have affairs with women and have children with different women, as indicated in the case studies of Khuluma and Gwaza.

Throughout the interviews, both men and women taxi drivers complained about a lack of time to spend with their families or loved ones. For example, one female driver regretted that her children are more familiar with the domestic servant than with her. For women drivers driving a taxi is a daunting task. They are faced with a delicate balancing act as mothers, housewives, lovers, and also as workers. It is more stressful for women taxi drivers who are married. This is a microcosm of society: the unequal power relations between men and women, in the family, society and at taxi ranks. Access to power and the use of it in the taxi industry differs significantly between women and men taxi drivers.

Both women and men drivers spend an average of 15 hours either in the taxi or at the rank and hardly any time with their loved ones. However, women taxi drivers are generally exposed to more danger, especially but not only, during dusk and at dawn. Safety is an important concern which the majority of women drivers have to contend with, and they have to take extra precautions to protect themselves against rape, hijacking and being robbed.

Those women taxi drivers who have made inroads into the taxi industry, have had to pay a great personal price. Conflicting roles arise and it appears that only a few women taxi drivers can survive in the hostile male-dominated world of taxi driving.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As outlined at the beginning of this article, there is little documented information on women's needs and experience of public transport in South Africa. Transport planning in South Africa, as elsewhere, has tended to emphasise transport models focused on peak hour traffic demands and this is not disaggregated along gender lines. Relatively little has been done to investigate the impact of gendered social roles on individual travel behaviour in urban areas. These roles do, however, lead to gender variations in transport patterns. These variations may be broadly attributed to: the sexual division of labour which results in gender variations in daily activities; the spatial organisation of cities and the extent to which this reinforces these gender variations in activities; and the social definition of transport resources and their allocation according to gender.

Gender differentiations are a major cause of unequal accessibility, whilst time,

money, the capacity, skill and general ability to use a transport mode, the ability to move about freely and safely in a space, are other important transport resources which are unequally distributed according to gender. In addition various ideological and physical constraints on women limit their use of public transport.

The gender focus in this article proved useful in exploring different in-use and access of public transport between women and men. The experiences of women and men in the taxi industry are different and this may be largely because of the gender roles ascribed to men and women. However unequal power relations are also subject to contestation, negotiation and compromise. Men's harassment may be seen as an action to protect male dominance and to maintain an existing gender domination.

There is a need for more light to be shed on the current gender situations in public transport and further research on reforming existing repressive and restrictive gender relations. Overcoming gender biases could aid in overcoming many of the negative perceptions expressed, especially about the taxi industry. Evidence provided in this article highlights how women taxi drivers challenged established gender marginalisation and did 'what women are not supposed to do in society'. However, they did so not out of interest to fight themselves into a male domain; they all describe their choice as the last resort.

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