

City Freedoms, Urban Fears: Gendered Visibilities and City Mobilities

Eda Yazici, Michael Keith, Susannah Cramer-Greenbaum, Steve Pile, John Solomos, Karim Murji

13th April 2023, British Sociological Association Conference, Cities Mobilities
Place and Space

Outline

- What is the Open City project?
- Seeking refuge, seeking asylum
- Race(ing) bikes: race, gender and migration in cycling
- Everyday mobility in the city
- The film
- Findings

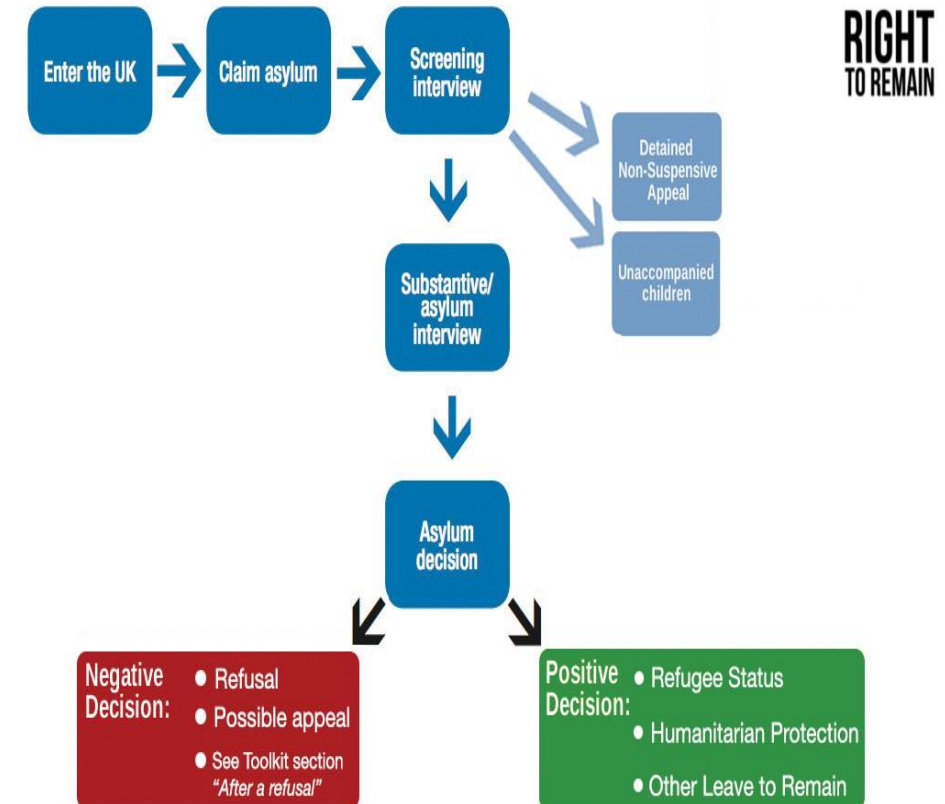
What is the Open City project?

- The Open City is an ESRC funded collaboration between the universities of Warwick, Oxford, West London and the Open University
- It asks:
 - “What makes a city open?” it does this by exploring:
 - Histories of welcoming in London
 - Residential churn and everyday mobilities
 - Neighbourliness and connections to ‘elsewhere’ on London housing estates
 - Claims to the city by campaigning organisations and policy responses to welcoming others



Seeking refuge, seeking asylum

- Applying for asylum is a non-linear process that can take many years, repeat applications and repeat dispersals
- Adults who have applied for asylum and considered to be destitute receive £40.85 per week (2022) and usually shared dispersal accommodation run by private contractors (S95 support). People seeking asylum have no right to work
- Adults accommodated in 'hotels' or Initial Accommodation Centres receive no financial support and full board meals (S98 support) while their application for S95 support is being considered or if no dispersal accommodation is available
- Asylum support is only expected to meet "essential needs". Transport and communication are not considered essential needs
- Dispersal accommodation is on a no-choice basis usually to peripheral areas in "low-cost" post-industrial towns and cities
- In London, outer ring boroughs are more likely to have S95 dispersal accommodation



Race(ing) bikes: class, race, gender and cycling in the city

- Cycling has an image problem!
 - MAMILS
- 'Good' white middle class cyclists
- 'Bad' migrant people of colour cycle couriers
- 'Good' environmentalists
- 'Bad' drivers
- 'Good' fit bodies
- 'Bad' fat bodies





Cycling in the city

- Cycling infrastructure in London is arterial
- Cycle infrastructure is treated as value neutral
- Bike racks most often on main roads
- Women more likely to make shorter, encumbered journeys (Lam, 2018)



Emancipate and educate?

- Lots of initiatives to teach minority women how to cycle
- Often framed in terms of 'overcoming' cultural barriers
- Or framed in terms of 'western' body norms
- Cycling for some a necessity?



Research Questions

- What are the gendered dynamics of everyday mobility for new migrants in the city?
- What are the mobility implications of living on asylum support in the city?

Methods

- Participant observation at Pedal Power cycle training sessions
- Arts workshops with 9 participants
- Interviews with 9 Pedal Power women and staff members at The Bike Project

THE DRESS
THAT MAKES
THE INVISIBLE
CYCLIST
VISIBLE

“I feel like I’m a queen”

“I sweat, I feel good in
myself”

“My bike is my friend, it’s
like my support animal”

“Pedal Power now is my
life”



Findings

- Some Pedal Power women have gone onto become The Bike Project trustees, cycling instructors, mechanics, or compete in triathlons
- Many women hope to use their bikes for everyday mobility e.g. grocery shopping but most don't
- For many, it's the physical object of the bike and the TBP community that's most important
- Bikes most often used for leisure activities in the park, especially for those with children
- Buses are the most widely used form of transport and only after careful accounting
- Tube and train networks are too expensive



“I just couldn't believe, wow, they would give me a bike? Without paying? And they would give my kid a bike too?”

“No place to put it in the flat or outside, there is not garage, no covered bike place. Also the stairs are a problem, the lift is never working and the bike is hard to fit, my son is not always there to carry bike down the stairs. There is no bike parking, and people might steal bike. So the bike is on the sofa.”

“They give you everything, the helmet, the jacket, the lock and key, the water bottle, even the carrier for groceries. It was a bit like renovating or decorating your home. It's very important for asylum seekers, to own it, to have a sense of ownership, to say 'This is mine.'”



Findings

- The fifteen minute city
- Knowing fragments as a woman and a migrant
- Having somewhere secure at 'home' to lock or keep a bike
- Repeat moves in the asylum system– only 2 bags of possessions and leaving bikes behind
- Peripherality of asylum accommodation: cost implications
- Peripherality of asylum accommodation: temporalities



Full Film



The full 23-minute film along with more info about the project is available to view at this link:

<https://opencitywarwick.co.uk/home-2/collaborations/cycling-visibilityes/>

Thank you !

opencity@warwick.ac.uk

www.opencitywarwick.co.uk

14th April 2023