

Social Stratification in the choice and use of Public Bus Transport among Travellers from Eastern Province to Lusaka- Zambia and vice versa

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Abstract: Social stratification categorizes society into social classes. The choice to use either a luxury Public Bus Transport or an ordinary lower-class Public Bus Transport is purely individual. But social analysis traces the choice to the social class to which an individual belongs. The objective of this study was to explore views and opinions over choice of Public Bus Transport of travellers from Eastern Province to Lusaka-Zambia. The Study was conducted between June 2019 and November, 2020. Data collection was done through observation and a single-interview-per-participant. A total of 26 participants participated in the study. Participants were sourced from luxury Public Buses and ordinary lower-class buses travelling to Lusaka from Eastern Province and vice versa. The study found that travellers who chose and used luxury Public Buses cited efficiency, comfort, safety, reliability, and convenience as qualitative factors behind their choice. Travellers riding ordinary lower-class public buses cited an atmosphere for kinship relationships that prevailed in lower-class buses, cost negotiability, flexibility of drivers to stop anywhere, anytime when a traveller submitted a request and that lower-class public buses provided a sense of freedom and liberty for individual's self-expression. So long social stratification exists; the upper class will continue to enjoy privileges of comfort, safety, convenience of transportation for sound health and general well-being, self-fulfilment and cost-effectiveness. The lower class on the other hand, unless, they make bold and defying decisions, their choice of Public Bus Transport shall linger around unreliable, congested, second-class Public buses with poor ventilation, uncomfortable seats hence they risk poor health, injuries, costly travel expenses due to unnecessary bus delays and increased stress.

Key words: stratification, travellers, choice, society

I. INTRODUCTION

Transport is of inestimable value to society. It plays a critical role in various social circles. Transport enables people to interact and share ideas. Transport itself as a whole is value-neutral. It exists purely for the purpose for which it is made (Daňková & Dostál, 2011). Transport shutdown disrupts social interaction with people, and places around which social and economic life revolves (Kulash, 2000). Transport scholars argue that in society, travel behaviours of choosing and using Public Bus Transport (PBT), represents a certain status in the social hierarchy (Dostál & Adamec, 2011). This social hierarchy is defined by society. Societies rank their members into categories that are higher or lower, superior or

inferior, prestigious or insignificant (Davis & Moore, 1945; Shankar-Rao, 2006).

These groupings cluster around variables such as race, belief, ethnic belonging, economic, political power or social standing (Orhan, 2016). Social segmentation of society gives rise to a 'multi-layered' structure referred to as social stratification in Sociology. Stratification relates to ranking or grading of individuals and groups into a hierarchical layer (Ogunbameru, 2020). Sociologist Pitirim Sorokin gave an elaborate definition of stratification: 'The concept of social stratification refers to a certain population's differentiation into classes which are hierarchically overlapping. The essence and fundamentals of stratification lie in uneven distribution of the rights and privileges, duties and responsibilities, social values and deprivations, social power and influence among the members of the society.'

Stratification permeates all social life. It affects how choices are made daily. Societal groupings nail unequal dynamics in the choice of aspirations. Sociological literature on individual choices suggests that dominant groups are more likely to avoid those they consider as a lower social class (Bonnilla-Silva 1996). Low in-come groups on the other hand, exhibit sub-optimal choices and behaviours characterized by a preferential focus on the present as opposed to the future (Sheehy-Skeffington & Rea, 2017). With variant social groups, come variant social travel behaviours. These travel behaviours are related to choice and use of Public Bus Transport. Choices serve to define, express, and reify the distinct individual (Markus & Schwartz, 2010). But choices also serve as a transcript representing the social class to which individuals belong.

An interesting case in point is that of travellers to and from Eastern province of Zambia. Eastern Province has a land mass of 51, 476km². It is one of the ten (10) provinces in Zambia. It has fourteen (14) districts namely Chipata, Lundazi, Mambwe, Petauke, Chadiza, Nyimba, Katete, Sinda, Vubwi and the six (6) newly created districts namely; Lusangazi, Kasenengwa, Chipangali, Chansefu and Lumezi. Individuals and groups travelling from Eastern Province to Lusaka or from Lusaka to Eastern Province exhibit a peculiar stratified form of travel choice behaviour in which, from a sustained

observation, newer, cleaner and convenient time-bound Public Buses with intact comfortable seats are dominated by modest-looking individuals each with a smart phone on one hand, and on the other, a stylish travelling bag or a body pack. Old buses with worn out seats, on observation, either on arrival at the station in Lusaka or elsewhere back from Lusaka to Eastern Province, disgorge travellers clad in humble unlaundered raiment with or without an ordinary phone. Travellers to Lusaka using these ordinary Public Bus transport carry odd-sized-looking luggage: usually a heavy sack, live animals and chickens etc. This study set out to enter, 'into the travellers' stream of consciousness and experiences' (Seidman 2006:9 in Schultz 1967) through a study interview and observation in order to understand how social classes are reproduced among travellers in the choice and use of Public Bus Transport.

Theory

This study was guided by the sociological theory of functionalism. The functionalist perspective originated from the works of Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Parsons and Merton (Mooney, Knox and Schacht, 2007). The two basic premises of functionalism are society's interdependent parts and their function for social stability and social order (Delaney, 2015). Transport is one of the fundamental pillars in society performing the function of transporting people and goods from one place to the other (Daňková & Dostál, 2011). Transport is designed to meet the needs of various social classes. Different social classes have unique social transport needs. When these transport social needs are met, people feel satisfied and their satisfaction eventually gets translated into social equilibrium in society.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used a cross-sectional study design with a qualitative descriptive approach. It was conducted between June 2019 and November, 2020. Using observation and a single-interview-per-participant, this study collected data from travellers on their way either from Lusaka to Eastern Province or from Eastern Province to Lusaka. Green and Thorogood (2004) prescribe 20 participants for interview-based study for the generation of rich qualitative data and a range of perspectives. Creswell (1998) suggested a range of 20-30 respondents to be sufficient for an interview-study. This study used 26 participants to achieve 26 interviews. To ensure credibility and dependability, the study used an admixture of males and females of varying age ranges and occupations to "obtain the broadest range of information and perspectives on the subject of study" (Kuzel, 1992:37). A total of 8 trips were made during the study.

Details of the trips were- 4 trips from Chipata the headquarters of Eastern province to Lusaka and 4 trips from Lusaka to Chipata. To evade biasness, the researcher undertook 4 trips using luxury Public buses and 4 trips using ordinary Public buses. The researcher rode 2 trips to Lusaka from Chipata and 2 trips from Lusaka to Chipata using a luxury Public Bus transport and the same number of trips

using ordinary Public Bus Transport. Each ride took not less than nine hours. The researcher rode during rainy season, after harvest and during planting time.

The ride was also made during day time and night time too. Luxury Public bus rides took off immediately while ordinary Public Bus rides could delay overnight forcing the researcher to spend a night in the bus like any other traveller. At night, a peaceful sleep could not be achieved due to uncomfortable seats, irritating odour emanating from accumulated dirt from the unwashed seats. What was even more disturbing were incessant insect bites to our faces. Elderly travellers identified the stubborn crawling insects that kept biting and drawing blood from our faces as bedbugs! The lower-class buses were infested with bed bugs!

To ensure the study was well represented in terms of gender, age and occupation, the researcher could follow potential respondents to their seats after some travellers dropped off leaving seats vacant. It was not easy to share a seat with some travellers in luxury Public Buses. They were space conscious. They worked hard to protect their space. Markers of resistance for space occupation included occupying the seat located along the passage leaving the seat by the window vacant, putting a bag or a bottle of cold mineral water on the vacated seat. It was sharply different with ordinary Public Buses. The moment a seat fell vacant, the remaining traveller would, upon enquiry, welcome the researcher to sit on the empty seat without a fuss. The age range of participants was between 18years to 69years. Participants were given a comprehensive explanation on the purpose of the study, consent, and audio recording. Each interview lasted 50minutes.

After obtaining consent from the participants, the researcher could proceed to collect demographic data. The responses were written down in a note book and audio taped using a phone. The responses were translated into English and later typed and stored as a Microsoft word document copy.

III. RESULTS

Question. Explain to me why you chose this bus and not any other for your journey today

The purpose of this question was to gain a deeper understanding into reasons why participants chose and used the Public Bus Transport they were travelling in. Participants gave a wide range of interesting responses. Their responses were summarized into two polar opposite duelling theme-camps. The responses were usually augmented as a lumped thread. Emphasis laid at the end of some responses gave prominence to a particular emerging theme. Participants from luxury Public buses cited thematic responses surrounding efficiency, comfort, convenience, reliability, safety and discipline as reasons for their choice and use of the luxury Public Bus Transportation. Participants riding ordinary lower-class Public Bus Transportation on the other hand intimated the sense of kinship, price negotiability, flexibility on the part

of bus driver to stop anywhere, freedom and liberty as reasons for the choice and use of ordinary Public Bus Transport.

Efficiency

Participants valued reaching their destinations on time, honouring appointments timely and cost-effectiveness. One participant from the luxury Public Bus Transport narrated the following: *This bus takes passengers to the right destination right on time. That's why I chose this bus. It will make me reach Lusaka in time to meet those I have an appointment with today at 14hrs* (Male participant- Luxury Public bus).

A female participant who introduced herself as an entrepreneur and was travelling from Eastern Province to Lusaka cited efficiency with subsequent cost-effectiveness as the reason for the choice and use of the luxury bus. She remarked passionately about the luxury bus.

I use this bus always when going to purchase merchandize for my shop. It's very efficient. You reach Lusaka before the shops close. Quickly you procure your merchandize and board another bus going back to the Eastern Province. So the bus helps business people like me to save money (Female Participant, Luxury Public Bus Transport).

Comfort and convenience

Participants prized clean and neat environment, cosy chairs for passengers to sink in and enjoy the ride. They also cherished availability of facilities such as presence of phone charging system to meet their immediate needs. A female participant from one of the luxury Public Bus Transportation reported:

I chose this bus because it is clean, the seats are comfortable and if you want to charge your phone it's a matter of plugging in the charger from above. Very convenient. It's not like other buses that are dirty inside, seats are hard and stained because someone vomited or peed or pooped on the seats and no one bothered to clean up the mess. The seats are worn out and the bus just smells filthiness (Female participant, Luxury Public Bus Transport).

Reliability

Nearly all participants adored a bus that posed no threat of breakdowns on the way. A remarkable answer came from one old woman travelling from Lusaka to Chipata- Eastern Province: *My son who paid for my journey told me that when you board this kind of a bus, you have an assurance that you cannot spend a night on the way because of possible breakdown because the bus is reliable* (Female participant, Luxury Bus Transport)

Safety and discipline

Participants who emphasized safety or discipline reported that they had chosen luxury buses because they felt protected from risks of injury as there were no exposed metal parts, nails, wires, smoking engine, and that the bus they were travelling in looked new and not a wreck. Participants who advanced the

factor of discipline explained that luxury buses were managed by disciplined drivers and conductors who only stopped at gazetted stations spending very minimal times while serving all customers with respect and dignity.

One young woman in her early twenties reported that whenever she was travelling to or from her college, she always used a bus that assured safety above all other factors. *I chose this bus because of safety. If you look around, there are no metallic protrusions, the bus is not smoking, the sound is not frightening and the tyres look new so I feel safe* (Female participant, Luxury Bus Transport).

On the factor of discipline, another young female participant on her way from Lusaka to Chipata reported: *The driver and his crew for this bus are disciplined and respectful to customers. They keep time. When they say five minutes break they mean it. This is the bus to board when you are connecting routes because you cannot miss the other bus taking you to the final destination* (Male participant, Luxury Public Bus Transport).

From observation, the four Luxury Public Bus Transportation used for this study were all clean, neat, and orderly. Every traveller's ticket bore a seat number. Travellers were entertained with songs, comedy and movies throughout their journey. Travellers who preferred their own entertainment plugged in earphones into their ears to listen to the music or watch movies using their smart phones. No luggage was allowed in the passage as such travellers moved freely without any form of hindrance. Generally, the buses were quiet and if voices were heard then they were non-disturbing.

Responses from participants using ordinary Public Bus Transport

Sense of kinship

Participants cited the feeling of 'we-ness', 'brotherhood' and 'sisterhood' translating into the 'sense of belonging' as the factor for choosing and using ordinary Public Bus Transport. One of the middle aged male explained.

For me I choose lower-class buses whenever I am travelling to and from Lusaka. These buses are the best if you want to experience that sense of belonging. You are at liberty to share stories with your neighbour and other travellers. You feel part of the community in motion. As a passenger you feel that sense of we-ness here (Male participant, Ordinary Public Bus Transport).

Another participant, in a separate interview hailed the sense of kinship in the following words:

Each time I board this kind of a bus, I feel all of us are at the same level. Everyone pockets their social status. Each one feels free to share a plate of food and a bottle of water with their neighbour or neighbours. Your neighbour is predictable. They are ready to assist you hold the baby as you change soiled nappies (Female Participant, Ordinary Bus).

Price negotiability and flexibility

Some participants explained that they chose to use ordinary Public Bus Transport because drivers and their crew would bend and accept a lower fare and that they demonstrated flexibility to stop the bus anywhere anytime at the passenger's request.

The female participant who was accompanied by three children said: *I chose this bus because the people in-charge are flexible. They allow a traveller to use their bus at three-quarters of the gazetted bus fare. I negotiated with them over the three children I am with. It's difficult to negotiate with luxury buses and you know it* (Female participant, Ordinary Bus Transportation).

The other female respondent explained during the interview. *I prefer to use lower-class buses because I always move with my two children. Whenever the child wants to urinate, as a parent you simply drag the child in front and the bus stops anywhere, anytime* (Female participant, Ordinary Public Bus Transport).

Freedom and liberty

Over the attribute of freedom and liberty one male participant narrated the following.

A bus should give the traveller a sense of freedom. The environment should allow travellers to feel free. See I am shirtless and no one has censured me. I cannot do what I have done if I was travelling in a luxury bus. My fellow travellers could have censured me savagely. I feel free here. I can turn to my left to my right I know I will speak with someone in local language. The atmosphere characterized by earphones, social media, internet and a foreign language is simply hostile to me. It alienates people sharing a seat. So for me better here. I feel liberated (Male participant, Ordinary Public Bus Transport).

A female respondent had an opposing view than the rest of the participants. During the interview she spoke candidly. *It is not in me to board ordinary buses. I found myself boarding this bus because it was the only one available. The driver and the conductor insisted that the bus was starting off today. They cheated me. After noting that the bus has fewer travellers, they have cancelled today's trip forcing everyone to sleep in the bus* (Female participant, Ordinary Public Bus).

An old male participant simply said; *I cannot use any other bus apart from this one because this bus, though old, smoking and dirty, it will leave me right at the door step of my home in the village. Luxury buses never reach my home town* (Male participant, Ordinary Bus).

From the observation, the four Ordinary Public Bus Transportation used for the study looked old with worn out paint and ugly dents. Some seats were torn, stained with irremovable stuff or resisted adjustment due to system overuse. Traveller's tickets bore no seat numbers. Travellers entertained themselves by sharing stories loudly. I saw one

bottle of mineral water being shared among three travellers- each drinking from the same bottle. I also saw one traveller sharing one sausage among four travellers with unwashed hands. Sausage recipients looked unconcerned about infection.

Luggage formed mountains in the passage. Travellers dropping off along the way had difficulties navigating their way out. Generally, the buses were noisy, bumpy and could stop anywhere anytime.

IV. DISCUSSION

Public Bus Transportation provides a recess from the demanding cares of life giving a chance for various peoples to congregate (Anderson, 2011). But Public Bus Transportation is also a social mirror reflecting the existing social strata in society. Different social classes emerge as travellers choose and use Public Bus Transportation. In Zambia, one social class usually dominates a particular Public Bus Transportation.

Individuals of various social classes are guided by unique broad range of attributes characterizing their social strata. These attributes 'are critically important in determining the attractiveness of Public Bus Transport' (Wardman 2014:6). As individuals are attracted to choose and use a particular Public Bus Transport their social transport needs are met. To a greater extent, therefore, the transport function aids in maintaining social order in society thereby preventing conflict.

The objective of this qualitative study was to explore travellers' views, opinions and perceptions over the reasons they had for choosing the Public bus Transport they were riding in. The study used the single-interview per-participant approach. This study found that travellers who chose and used luxury Public Bus Transport did so for efficiency, comfort, orderliness, reliability, safety, discipline and convenience. The findings tally with those of other studies.

An early extensive study by Paine, Nash, Hille and Brunner (1969), found that travellers suggested time, cost, convenience, comfort, safety and attitudinal terms as factors they consider when choosing a Public Bus Transportation. Another early qualitative study by Stopher et al., (1974) found that travellers suggested that the attractiveness of Public Bus Transport fell into four generic elements; safety, cost, comfort and convenience. These qualitative factors are highly valued by the upper class in developing nations because for this social class, 'the perceived comfort, convenience, reliability and safety of travel conditions has significant direct and indirect impacts on the travellers' health, wealth and happiness'(Litman, 2017:2).

The study also found that travellers who chose and used ordinary lower-class Public Bus Transportation were guided by qualities namely: sense of kinship, cost negotiability, flexibility of the driver and his crew to stop anywhere anytime at the request of the traveller and to experience freedom and

liberty which they claimed they could not have in a luxury Public Bus Transportation because of the toxic individualistic attitude of the upper class passengers. The findings of this study are similar to the findings of the study by Sociologist Gwendolyn Purifoye (2014). In her study titled: *Moving Social Spaces: Public Transportation, Material Differences, and the Power of Mobile Communities in Chicago* Purifoye (2014) found that travellers from 'neighbourhoods and communities bounded by low income in Chicago- America chose and used Public Transportation with a view to forming stress ameliorating 'kinetic kinships' characterized by active spontaneous relationships developed while travelling'(Purifoye, 2014:26). In this study, travellers cited the feeling of liberation as a qualitative factor behind their choice of a lower-class Public Bus Transport. One male participant explained that lower-class Public Buses set an atmosphere where travellers felt free and liberated to stand, speak loudly, and to laugh unreservedly. He complained that for him, a luxury bus was a semi prison that chipped away his freedom to express himself, soul, body and spirit because of the controlling behavioural tendencies of some educated travellers.

I feel confined, isolated and colonized when I use a luxury bus because travellers of luxury buses are free to interact with phones and computers than with fellow human beings. When you are in a luxury bus, be ready to share with a stranger completely immersed in their own world. You may not greet or speak to each other the entire journey of nine to ten hours. You feel threatened by the non verbal controlling behaviour. Ultimately, you say their bus and not our bus (Male participant, Ordinary Bus).

Findings of this study correlates with the findings of a study by Purifoye (2014) in which males masculinised space in

Public Transportation producing some form of gender stratification. Unlike her findings that are related to race and gender, this study found that travellers from the so called upper social class whether male or female exhibited masculinity controlling behavioural tendencies towards travellers of the lower- class making them feel as though they were under social bondage.

V. CONCLUSION

Social stratification categorizes society into social classes. Decision-making of individuals and groups from various social strata follow a certain pattern that manifests into choices they make for a luxury Public Bus Transport or for an ordinary lower-class Public Bus Transport. Social analysis traces the influence of that choice to a greater extent from the social class to which an individual belongs. So long social stratification exists, the upper class are likely to continue to enjoy privileges of transport-related comfort, safety, convenience for their own well being and unmissed wealth-generation appointments and opportunities. The lower class on the other hand, unless, they make bold and defying decisions, they too will have their choices linger around unreliable, congested second-class Public buses with poor ventilation, uncomfortable seats coupled with disturbing nightly bed bug bites for poor health, not to mention costly travel expenses due to vehicle breakdowns, and travelling at awkward times.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends awareness campaigns on equality and human rights for community empowerment. Government, through its various agencies and regulatory bodies to conduct regular inspection of all functional Public Bus Transportation to ensure adherence to hygiene, comfort and safety standards.

Table1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Variables	Luxury Public Buses		Ordinary Public Buses	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Gender	6(23.1%)	6(23.1%)	6(23.1%)	8(30.7%)
Age(in Years)	18-25	2(7.7%)	18-25	2(7.7%)
	26-33	3(11.5%)	26-33	2(7.7%)
	34-41	2(7.7%)	34-41	3(11.5%)
	42-49	2(7.7%)	42-49	3(11.5%)
	50-58	1(3.8%)	50-58	2(7.7%)
	59-66	1(3.8%)	59-66	1(3.8%)
	67-74	1(3.8%)	67-74	1(3.8%)
Education levels	Senior secondary not completed	1(3.8%)	Senior secondary not completed	8(30.7%)
	Senior secondary completed	3(11.5%)	Senior secondary completed	5(19.2%)
	College not yet completed	3(11.5%)	College not yet completed	1(3.8%)
	College completed	2(7.7%)	College completed	0
	University not Completed	0	University not Completed	0

	University Completed	3(11.5%)	University Completed	0
Occupation	Civil Servant	4(15.4%)	Civil Servant	0
	Lecturer Private University	1(3.8%)	Lecturer Private University	0
	Student	3(11.5%)	Student	0
	NGO	1(3.8%)	NGO	0
	Business man/woman	3(11.5%)	Business man/woman	3(11.5%)
	Subsistence farmer	0	Subsistence farmer	11(42.3%)
	Luxury Public Buses		Ordinary Public Buses	
Number of travellers accompanying participant	Travelling in company of 3 children	0	Travelling in company of 3 children	1(3.8%)
	Travelling in company of 2 children	0	Travelling in company of 2 children	2(7.7%)
	Travelling in company of 1 child	0	Travelling in company of 1 child	2(7.7%)
	Travelling alone	12(46.1%)	Travelling alone	8(30.7%)
Type of luggage carried	Lap top bag	3(11.5%)	Lap top bag	0
	Travelling bag	7(26.9%)	Travelling bag	1(3.8%)
	Body pack	1(3.8%)	Body pack	0
	Brief case	1(3.8%)	Brief case	0
	Sack bag	0	Sack bag	4(15.4%)
	Sack of maize/mealie meal	0	Sack of maize/mealie meal	4(15.4%)
	Live animals or birds	0	Live animals or birds	2(7.7%)
	Bicycle	0	Bicycle	1(3.8%)
	Matress	0	Matress	2(7.7%)

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

JT was responsible for the study conception and design, data collection, and analysis. PM edited the manuscript.

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