

Beyond fare evasion: The everyday moralities of non-payment and underpayment on public transport

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In attempting to understand and prevent fare evasion, existing research and policy have often categorised fare evaders based on passenger ‘types’ or profiles. However, such categorisations of ‘malicious’ or ‘virtuous’ behaviours rely on underlying moral claims which often go unexamined. In this paper, we study how different actors construct such moral claims as part of everyday interactions. We demonstrate that the everyday moralities of not or under-paying are diverse, locally occasioned, and emotionally charged. Drawing on social media and video data from Chile and the UK, we closely examine different interactions between passengers, bystanders, transport workers, and transport operators. We highlight the diverse resources that actors draw upon to construct moral claims around fare evasion, including the mobilisation of alternative moral categories; attempts to produce exceptions to formal rules; and the foregrounding of moral emotions. The paper engages with an interdisciplinary body of work which reassesses existing policies and societal responses to fare evasion, while also contributing to a nascent literature on everyday morality and mobilities.

Keywords: Public transport; fare evasion; morality; social media; video analysis; Chile; UK.

1. Introduction

Transport operators are frequently involved in the management of passenger behaviours (see, for instance, Suquet 2010; Schimkowsky 2021). The behaviours they seek to curtail range from fairly minor transgressions, such as loud conversations, to serious offences such as sexual harassment. Fare evasion occupies a particular position within the long list of such ‘deviant’ passenger behaviours, not least due to its financial and operational implications. Beyond practical impacts, however, the consequences of fare evasion are often cast in moral terms. For example, a passenger might ask a ticket inspector to make an exception when a railcard was forgotten at home with no malintent; or a transport provider might argue that evading the fare amounts to doing wrong by those passengers who do pay. In this paper, we trace the production of diverse moral claims around fare evasion and enforcement. Through a close empirical examination of the moral claims produced as part of situated everyday interactions, we demonstrate how such moral claims complicate the notion of fare evasion as a cohesive and invariably unjustifiable practice. We argue that, as part of the production of multiple and complex moral relations within the domain of everyday mobility, the claims around not paying

or under-paying for transport services can be seen as diverse, locally occasioned, and emotionally charged. As we show below, one key consequence of this is the often onerous expectation placed upon transport workers to engage in moral-emotional labour.

Most existing literature tends to categorise fare evaders in terms of types or profiles (Suquet 2010) or evaluate the effectiveness of technological solutions for fare enforcement (Brakewood and Kocur 2011). However, recent studies have highlighted how rigid categories such as honest/malevolent can dehumanise, result in disproportionate penalties, and perpetuate injustice against some of the most marginalised members of society (Carter and Johnson, 2021; Delbosc and Currie 2019; Johnson and Patterson, 2022). At the same time, transport operators worldwide have taken an increasingly punitive stance on fare evasion, citing concerns over revenues and financial viability (Barabino, Lai, and Olivo 2020). Despite this, non- and underpayment remain widespread (Clarke, Contre, and Petrossian 2010).

Drawing on mixed qualitative data from Chile and the UK, the present paper examines the ways in which moral claims around fare evasion are set out, in order to theorise what is at stake in such interactions. While some research has convincingly argued that there are circumstances in which fare evasion may be considered morally permissible (e.g. poverty, emergencies, or technological failure; see, for instance, Perrotta 2017), there is a need to better understand how passengers, transport workers, and by-standers themselves produce moral claims regarding what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable. In tracing the production of everyday moralities of fare evasion, our work connects to a nascent literature on everyday moralities and mobility, and to a broader discussion on how transport systems conceptualise and attempt to govern the behaviour of their users (Ureta 2015; Woolgar and Neyland 2013).

The next two sections summarise relevant work on fare evasion from a range of disciplines and introduce literature on the local production of moralities, respectively. The following section discusses the research locations and the methods of data collection and analysis on which this paper draws. The main body of the paper is organised into four themes: the production and contestation of binary moral categories; the production of alternative moral categories; the role of technology and its limits; and the moral-emotional labour of fare

enforcement. In the concluding remarks, we summarise the discussion and offer thoughts about its implications for research and practice.

2. Transport research on fare evasion

Existing scholarly literature on fare evasion has predominantly focused on three themes. Longer established approaches from transport geography and planning have focused on (1) the effectiveness of the physical features of transport systems such as ticket gates in reducing fare evasion, (2) profiling public transport users who fare evade, typically in terms of their demographics or motivations, or critiquing profiling-based approaches (see Delbosc and Currie [2019]; Barabino, Lai, and Olivo [2020] for comprehensive reviews of these first two themes). A more recent and interdisciplinary strand of literature focuses on (3) the practices, politics, and experiences of transport users who engage in fare evasion, seeking to problematise the realist stance adopted in earlier work, and showing fare evasion as a survival strategy and/or an act of resistance. This section expands on earlier reviews by attending to the third theme, which is essential for situating our own approach. In doing so, we trace how fare evasion is increasingly being rethought from a broader social science perspective, particularly through a mobilities lens.

Studies in the first category, focusing on the ways in which different technologies may discourage or enable fare evasion, are ubiquitous. Technologies can include physical barriers such as turnstiles, but also different types of tickets, inspection approaches, and information campaigns (Clarke, Contre, and Petrossian 2010). Thus, in a study of the New York City subway, Weidner (1996) found small reductions in fare evasion resulting from the installation of high-wheel turnstiles. Relatedly, Brakewood and Kocur (2011) discussed the impact of contactless card ticketing on fare payment. This body of work is often pragmatic in its approach, seeking to identify strategies for increasing fare compliance. However, the strategies which have been implemented seeking to discourage fare evasion have often proved problematic. Typical ‘solutions’ – including securitised ticket gates, digitalisation of ticketing, surveillance, and heightened fines and prosecution rates – have proven costly for operators

while having only limited success in reducing fare evasion. Relatedly, they have often eroded the quality and accessibility of public transport journeys (Molotch and McClain 2012; Muñoz 2020). As a result, certain measures, such as removing single fares and physically restricting entrances and exits, have antagonised or excluded paying and non-paying passengers alike (Arnold 2022; Weidner 1996).

The second approach is concerned with linking particular profiles to a propensity and motivation to fare evade (Laboratorio de Innovación Pública 2018; McClain 2019; Porath and Galilea 2020). Thus, in a research on Île-de-France, Suquet (2010) found that ticket inspectors classified fare evaders into six categories depending on their motivation, including ‘gamblers’ and ‘ideological opponents’. In Italy, Bucciol, Landini, and Piovesan (2013) identified gender, age, and migration status as predictors of fare evasion. A review by Barabino, Lai, and Olivo (2020) identified a link between fare evasion and a range of criminal behaviours. As part of this second body of work, authors have also distinguished between occasional and frequent evaders. Bijleveld (2007) found that 8% of fare evaders in the Netherlands were responsible for 50% of non-payments or underpayments. A further distinction has been established between deliberate and accidental fare evasion, as well as between ‘degrees’ of fare evasion, such as paying an off-peak fare instead of a peak one (Delbosc and Currie 2016).

However, such approaches can reproduce the stigmatisation of social groups and identities, subsuming individual circumstances into homogenised categories (Delbosc and Currie 2019; Plyushteva 2016). This is significant because vulnerability, social exclusion, and poor health are found to be prevalent among passengers who do not pay the expected fare. Delbosc and Currie (2019, citing Beke 2004) noted that 82% of frequent fare evaders on Dutch railways suffered from at least one form of drug and alcohol misuse, mental illness, or homelessness. In the US context, Carter and Johnson (2021) and Johnson and Patterson (2022) have examined the role of race and neighbourhood characteristics, such as gentrification, in fare enforcement. While critiques of profiling as a fare enforcement strategy demonstrate how it can perpetuate injustice, they do not necessarily scrutinise the moral claims which underlie such arrangements, nor their situated reproduction and contestation.

While the third strand of scholarship does not necessarily tackle the question of morality, it provides important insights into transport users' perspectives and experiences of non- and underpayment. Research by Perrotta (2017), Kemmer (2020), and Strauli and Koblowski (2022) challenge hegemonic accounts of fare evasion by carefully examining the situated and subjective experiences of those who engage in it. For instance, Perrotta (2017) discusses the anxiety and desperation felt by those living on very low incomes who underpay on New York City buses, as well as the tacit agreement among many bus drivers that 'whatever they put in is sufficient' (research participant quoted in Perrotta, 2017:242). Relatedly, Kemmer (2020) examines how the materiality of Rio de Janeiro trams shapes the experience of 'freeriding,' with riding together on the tram footboard creating a sense of community in the Santa Teresa neighbourhood. While both of these accounts are imbued with politics in more or less explicit ways, further studies including Strauli and Koblowski (2022) writing on Brussels have directly tackled the construction of political subjectivities in fare evasion. Likewise, Garcés (2019) and Cortez López et al. (2021) trace fare evasion on Santiago's public transport system to a wider political mobilisation against unaffordable living costs and deepening inequalities. By attending to the emotions, affects, politics, and solidarities of fare evasion, these studies seek to re-humanise hegemonic accounts of not paying or underpaying. By adopting the perspective of the transport user, they suggest an alternative narrative that complicates the figure of 'the fare evader,' makes visible the social and political context of everyday practices of fare evasion and interrogates the possibility of their legitimacy. Although they may not do so explicitly, many studies in the third group take a moral position with regards to fare evasion, demonstrating how specific circumstances demand that it is re-categorised from wrong/unjustified/volitional into right/justified/unavoidable. This approach emphasises the importance of grounding fare payment and non-payment in everyday transport contexts and echoes a growing interdisciplinary body of work on the local production of morality, which we review in the following section.

3. The local emergence of moralities

Whilst '[m]orality is socially defined by being principled, and principles are often conceptualised as unmovable and invariant' (Robles and Castor 2019, 117), the everyday production of moralities involves continuous renegotiation of principles and (im)moral subjects through shifting and locally-relevant arrangements. To examine these processes, we adopt an ethnomethodological approach (Garfinkel 1967). From this perspective, the moral quality of a practice is not based on universal and delocalised principles which define it as inherently 'right' or 'wrong'. Rather, the moral properties of practices are constituents of the practices as these are performed, whereby moral judgements emerge locally through participants' and by-standers' subjectivities, accounts, and claims (Jayyusi 1991). This differs from resolving the morality of a practice 'by using a rule or a standard obtained outside actual settings within which such properties are recognized, used, produced, and talked about by setting's members' (Garfinkel 1967, 33). In this respect, research on everyday moralities differs from, for instance, criminological studies of the neutralisation of guilt by individuals involved in deviant behaviours (see Harris, 2022), since it does not presuppose either deviance or virtuousness.

Attending to the everyday production of moralities foregrounds the highly involved and on-going labour of establishing the moral quality of mundane practices. This is routinely achieved through judgements and claims that, on one hand, orientate to the morally relevant aspects of the practice in question and, on the other, express the importance of how these claims are received and responded to by others. Moralities, rather than abstract in nature, 'are matters of practical and ongoing relevance for members in the conduct of their everyday life' (Jayyusi 1991, 235). As a result, there can be much at stake, even when seemingly mundane actions are considered. In relation to fare evasion, this necessitates close analysis of *how* actors (passengers, transport workers, by-standers, or decision-makers) engage in morally accounting for non- and underpayment, rather than focusing solely on the justifiability of the actions themselves.

Studies on the local organisation of morality have approached the subject by drawing on Goffman's (1974) frame analysis (Robles and Castor 2019) or by examining the situated categories that constitute a sense of obligation and accountability (Ablitt and Smith 2019; Smith 2017). These studies analyse membership categorisation (Housley and Fitzgerald 2002), which refers to people's methodical practices for describing the world and making sense of it during particular interactions. People routinely engage in categorisation practices in the production of identities, culture, and importantly, morality (Stokoe 2012). From this perspective, everyday definitions of right or wrong, as well as the moral underpinnings of rights and obligations, are organised by the categorisation work of everyday life. As situated things,

categories do not reflect pre-discursive entities that are 'out there somewhere' and which members use to make sense of what is happening. Rather, what constitutes a category, and the predicates (i.e., expectable features, characteristics, behaviours, states of mind etc.) that accompany categories, are locally produced and are designed to 'do' social actions (Clifton 2009, 3).

By tracing the production and contestation of moral categories in fare evasion, we contribute to a nascent literature on the morality of everyday mobilities. A key contribution by Nuhrat (2020) examines how Istanbul drivers narrate and justify their own rule-breaking in moral terms, engaging in self-reflection and the evaluation of the behaviour of others. Drawing on anthropological work on moral systems (see overview in Zigon and Throop [2014]), Nuhrat goes beyond binary categories of right/wrong to frame mobility as a social setting in which complex and shifting moral relations are produced. Another relevant contribution by Smith (2017) utilises membership categorisation analysis to examine how disputes between car drivers and cyclists are organised around seeing and accounting for an 'incorrect' use of road space. Smith notes how the local assembly of categories (e.g. 'cyclist', 'driver') can be tied to spatial categories (e.g. 'cycle lane', 'road') *in situ* to define the 'proper' use of road space and to outline category-bound rights and obligations. Smith's account is a compelling example of moving beyond an analysis of morally charged interactions reliant on universal and self-

sufficient standards, to consider the local composition of moralities in and through ordinary interactions.

4. Research methods and context

Data collection and analysis

This paper draws on two research projects concerned with the everyday practices of accessing transport services (including bus, subway, and train) in Santiago, Chile, and Bristol, UK. In this sense, neither project was framed specifically around studying fare evasion; non- and underpayment were instead approached as examples of practices in which passengers engage when accessing public transport. In the case of the Bristol project, data collection was expanded to UK-wide social media posts in order to explore narratives around transport affordability. This social media data was brought in conversation with video data from Santiago's public transport system (Transantiago), with data analysed specifically as instances of *interactions* focusing on fare evasion. Thus, we use social media and video data to examine encounters between actors who draw on interactional resources in order to accomplish a range of outcomes around non- and underpayment (to morally justify it, prevent it, frame certain outcomes as unfair etc.). While our video data depicts naturally occurring interactions, the social media data are ex-post accounts of events. Both collections of data are useful to approach moral claims as 'interactional achievements' (Schegloff 1986, 117) which are 'arrived at out of a welter of possibilities for preemptive moves or claims, rather than a mechanical or automatic playings out of pre-scripted routines'.

The video data from Santiago was gathered in January 2018, where over 70 instances of passengers boarding a Transantiago bus were registered with a video camera installed inside the vehicle. From that corpus of video data, we identified all cases where participants of the interaction were observably disagreeing around the payment of a fare or attempting to produce arrangements that differed from conventional fare payment. These cases were then analysed

following the principles of ethnomethodology applied to video (Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 2010, see Muñoz 2021 for further details on this type of analysis) as well as Membership Categorisation Analysis (Housley and Fitzgerald 2002), which are analytical frameworks that concentrate on describing people's common-sense methods of interpreting and describing the world.

The UK social media data was collected in the period November 2021 – July 2022 on the platform Twitter, and covered posts from January 2016 to April 2022. A temporary 'researcher' account was created, and specific keywords and hashtags [1] were used for manual searches, e.g. 'train ticket', 'ticket inspector', 'railcard', 'fare evasion', among others. The search results were manually scanned for posts corresponding to three general themes derived from the literature review: moral judgements of passengers and transport workers in relation to fares; discussions of exceptions to rules; and expression of emotions about the morality of fare payment, evasion, and enforcement. This resulted in a corpus of 466 tweets. All authors independently conducted inductive coding of social media data, before these codes were combined with codes on methods of moral claim-making derived from the Santiago video data. This coding framework was then used as the basis of a round of deductive coding of social media data. The results were inductively organised into the four overarching themes presented below. It should be pointed out that social media posts are carefully crafted narratives which reflect users' awareness that their comments are publicly accessible (Marwick and boyd 2010) and may be responded to. However, the accuracy and/or authenticity with which offline actions are presented online is not a major limitation for our discussion, since our focus is on how categorisation work is performed, and not on whether it is supported by observable actions. Both research projects underwent institutional research ethics approval, and the visual material and quotations included in the paper have been anonymised.

This paper analyses *how* moral claims around non- and underpayment are produced by participants of the interaction. Our aim is neither to survey and represent all possible trends and passenger discourses around fare evasion, nor to find causal links between trends and

demographic variables, but to demonstrate the complex methods through which the morality of a given course of action is examined and contested on site by those involved.

Case context

In the Chilean context, fare evasion has become a major concern for the financial and political stability of Transantiago. According to Guarda et al. (2016), evasion rates in 2007 ranged between 12% and 16%, and by 2012 it had reached 27%. Estimates from recent years indicate that fare evasion in Transantiago was above the global average (Porath and Galilea 2020) and was possibly the highest in the world (Delbosc and Currie 2019). Within this context, during the first half of 2017, a new turnstile model (the ‘butterfly’ style) was installed in several buses of the system. While the butterfly turnstile significantly complicates boarding for many types of passenger bodies, its impact on fare evasion has been ambivalent at best, as we demonstrate below (Muñoz 2020).

In the UK context, fare evasion is frequently the subject of public attention, whether through public information campaigns, highly publicised cases of repeat offenders, and even a television series following the daily lives of ticket inspectors (Booth 2014; Channel 5 2019). Operators have estimated that fare evasion on the railway network costs £240 million annually in lost revenue (Department for Transport 2022). By contrast, frequent calls for the reform of fare policies have emphasised not only the unaffordability of ticket prices, but also the complicated and opaque nature of fare structures (Haylen 2019). There is broad agreement that transport fares (and in many cases, passes which enable discounted travel, such as railcards) are exceedingly complex, leading to poor understanding among transport users of distinctions such as peak- and off-peak fares, regulated and unregulated fares, and so on (Haylen 2019). These critiques help contextualize some of the interactions discussed below.

5. The everyday moralities of the fare

Binary moral claims and their problematisation

So, this morning I used Apple Pay on a very short bus journey (as I have many times before). Ticket inspectors got on the bus and checked tickets and apparently my Apple Pay hadn't gone through. Offered to pay the fare but... 1/3

They wouldn't let me and asked for my name and address. Bus driver confirmed I had used my phone to pay. I asked what authority they had to ask for my details and they just said "Greater London Authority"....told them I was a lawyer and wanted to know the precise...2/3

Law they relied on. They couldn't. 3 of them just kept saying I had to give details. "What if I don't?" I asked. They said I had to get off the bus. I had reached my destination so got off. Didn't pay (even tho I wanted to!).

*@tfl [Transport for London] **does this seem right to you?***

(Twitter user, 2:15PM, 16 October 2019; emphasis added)

The above narrative composed of three consecutive social media posts illustrates the complex, situation-specific, and occasionally comical negotiations of 'right' and 'wrong' when the expected fare has not been paid. In this account, the categories of right and wrong are qualified by the journey itself (very short; frequently undertaken); the discrepancies between intentions and outcomes modulated by the capriciousness of technology ('apparently... hadn't gone through; didn't pay even tho[ugh] I wanted to'); and the authority of the different actors, as well as their ability and willingness to articulate its source. However, such complexity is not generally reflected in public campaigns targeting fare evasion. Instead, using morally charged language and images, transport operators tend to portray the payment of the fare as a straightforward choice between right and wrong. A selection of examples from cities worldwide is presented in Figure 1. These communications, often taking the form of posters or vehicle vinyl wraps, aim to compel users to purchase a fare by conveying the moral gravity of not doing so, the harmful nature of the consequences, and the (moral) differences between paying and non-paying transport users. References to criminal behaviours – e.g., stealing, theft (see Fig.

1a, b) – and the notion of fairness, are common. This is further illustrated in the following social media post by Transport for London:

*Fare evasion costs us more than £116m every year, which is why we take this issue so seriously [emoji] All #FareDodgers are cheating the transport network out of vital reinvestment, which **isn't fair on paying passengers** [emoji]. (Transport for London, 28 October 2019; emphasis added).*

Here, passengers who pay the correct fare are portrayed as indirect custodians of public transport, since their contributions are reinvested by the operator to everyone's benefit. In this quote, it is this group that is shown to be the victim of fare evasion; they are the ones being treated unfairly by passengers who have not paid, counter to any temptation to portray fare evasion as a 'victimless crime.' This is mirrored in a poster used by Transantiago (Fig. 1c), which takes a clear position on the morality of fare evasion, stressing that having little money is no justification for it. In the poster, a man wearing a shirt and tie declares that he 'earns minimum wage but gets to the end of the month with a clear conscience.' Here, passengers living on a modest income are invited to make a set of moral choices presented as interrelated: to prioritise having a clear conscience over money concerns; to dress in ways conventionally seen as smart, clean, and presentable; and to pay the expected transport fare. Alongside public communications aimed at evoking a sense of pride are strategies which rely on shaming 'offenders'. An example of this is Transantiago's attempt to prevent fare evasion by installing red lights that would turn on, along with a loud beeping sound, in response to people attempting to use a card with no remaining credit. The public categorising of certain users as fare-evaders through a 'shaming device' is another example of a moral binary between paying users and 'wicked evaders' being reinforced (Ureta 2015, 134; see also Linnemann and Wall, 2013).

However, some operators' efforts to produce the category of the moral, fare-paying passenger go further, including questioning whether a fare evading passenger can be deemed a passenger at all. This is evident in a public communications campaign by Metlink, a public transport operator in Victoria, Australia (Fig. 1d). In its imagery, passengers who do not pay

are being ‘erased’ or ‘rubbed out’ from public transport spaces and told they ‘shouldn’t be here.’ In this framing, what produces a passenger is not one’s presence on public transport, but the morally charged act of paying the expected fare. These examples illustrate how becoming a passenger often involves being subjected to specific categorisation devices in the public communications of transport operators (for an account of category-use by airports, see Hernandez Bueno 2021). The next sections examine how this definition of what constitutes a passenger is frequently contested, for example through the mobilisation of alternative categories.

[Figure 1 near here]

Figure 1. Examples of transport operators’ communication campaigns targeting fare evasion. Clockwise from top left: a. Greater Richmond Transport Authority. B. Scotrail. C. Transantiago. D. Metlink.

Producing passengers and transport workers using alternative moral categories

Categorising passengers has been a prevalent approach both in measuring and preventing fare evasion. Identifying ‘types of fare evader’ (see for example Delbosc and Currie 2016; Suquet 2010) as a research approach exemplifies how categories are used to operationalise this phenomenon. However, categories are routinely used by other actors—including passengers, by-standers, and transport workers—when making sense of, and dealing with, non- and underpayment. In other words, while fare evasion is generally articulated through the category of the ‘passenger’ with its associated rights and obligations (Stokoe 2012), users may comply with, resist, or expand such categorisations by means of producing relevant categories of their own. Social media posts show how people use categories to position themselves (and others) as individuals with particular moral characteristics, complicating the categories utilised by transport systems:

[O]n my way to a friend's wedding, have lost my wallet and am relying on the kindness of various ticket inspectors to accept my tickets from oxford to leeds w/o railcard. Pray 4 me
(Twitter user, 12:51PM, 17 August 2019)

Here, a breach of payment rules is framed as morally acceptable by describing the user as a forgetful (not 'bad' or 'dishonest') person who is attending an important occasion. The fact that the wedding is mentioned should be read as it being relevant to understand the rest of the story. This is an example of how a user can resist formal categorisations of fare evasion by self-categorising as something else in their account, proposing alternative categories as relevant to understanding their predicament. Within the 'ordinary' framing of being a person with no wallet but with reason for urgent travel, appealing to the inspectors' kindness is morally viable (though unlikely, hence the 'pray 4 me' part). This and the following example show how not only certain kinds of passenger moralities can be enacted according to circumstances, but those of transport workers, too:

[U]p at 4.30am to complete a shift as a preregistration pharmacist and forgets her ticket, showed confirmation email "jobsworth conductor" [2] charged her £80.50 . A journey she would have used the day before if @Virgin_TrainsEC provided a service. Dedicated #NHS workers (Twitter user, 7.15PM, 29 December 2017)

The user in this narration also forgets a crucial item (her ticket). Rather than as fare evader, the post categorises the user as an essential healthcare worker who gets up very early in the morning. The 'jobsworth conductor' rejects the confirmation email from the purchase as an acceptable substitute for the ticket. It is worth noticing how a careful use of categories and labels allows to situate the user, an essential worker, in moral opposition to the conductor who is also an essential worker, but whose relevant qualities in this account are tied to their refusal towards the passenger.

In the transcript presented in Figure 2, a Transantiago user attempts to negotiate not paying the fare and produces alternative categories to morally situate the driver's refusal to let her on the bus. This excerpt from our video data shows a user (P1) who had previously

attempted to board the bus through the rear doors (not shown in transcript). As the driver keeps the rear doors closed, P1 enters the vehicle through the front and attempts to pay the fare. In panel 1 she taps her card against the reader. A red light and a strong beeping sound announce that the card has no remaining credit. ‘There you go’, says P1, as she turns to the driver and shrugs (panel 2). In panel 3 she approaches the driver and attempts to negotiate with them. P1 pleads her case by suggesting that the driver lets her in through the rear doors - even though she had attempted that already – and then points out that another person managed to get in without paying, implying that the driver’s enforcing of rules is not consistent. Panel 4 shows the driver closing the doors and starting the vehicle as a response. Having refused to step off the bus but still not admitted by the driver, P1 is physically ‘stuck’ in between the doors and the bus’s turnstile. She leans against the bus front and emits a moral judgement against the driver: ‘such ill will’ [*mala voluntad*], ‘you shouldn’t treat older people like this’.

[Figure 2 near here]

Figure 2. Transcript of a passenger-driver interaction. A passenger is denied access past the turnstile.

P1’s saying situates the driver in a morally questionable position— claiming they have done something that should not be done—while simultaneously marking ‘older person’ as the interaction’s relevant category. By tacitly claiming membership of it, P1 resists other categories that may be implicitly relevant to the situation, such as ‘fare evader’.

Other research has examined how alternative moral formulations are predicated on rationalities that exist alongside the rationality of formal institutions. In examining the case of energy infrastructure in Kibera (Nairobi) Guma, Monstadt, and Schramm (2022) observed how some forms of non-payment— instead of being described as disobedience or ‘deviant behaviour’ as they failed to comply with regulations—could be situated within *local* rationalities that existed in conflict with the rationality of the utility provider. It is within

these alternative forms of sense-making that a transport user may not only attempt to justify fare evasion, but also revert moral judgement against other actors.

In the case examined, the driver is described as having ‘ill will’—a categorisation that does not pertain to Transantiago’s rules, but rather to what are presented as more general, everyday rules of kindness and deference towards older people. Similarly, across our social media data, the ‘jobsworth’ ticket inspector category is frequently bound to the specific action of upholding formal rules over what is presented as mundane behaviour expectations.

Technology limitations and producing moralities through exceptions

Studies on fare evasion have analysed the impact of technological change on increasing fare compliance (Brakewood and Kocur 2011). As transport operators introduce new payment systems (e.g. smartcards and mobile payments including Apple Pay and Google Pay), passengers and transport workers become entangled in complex disputes about what constitutes fare evasion. In some interactions, the inherent limitations of technology lead to passengers claiming to have been unfairly categorised as fare evaders. In other cases, passengers use instances of technological ‘disruption’ (i.e., technology producing outcomes that disrupt the routine ways in which payment is expected to go) as a resource for producing exceptions to the system’s formal rules. Under those specific circumstances, instances of non-payment are argued by passengers to be legitimate or acceptable, resulting in conflicting rationales. Often, passengers describe actions which fall outside formal rules as common-sense ways of addressing the technical mishaps inherent in the transport system:

Was travelling through a black spot of mobile coverage, the railcard app has to be connected to the internet to show your pass. I had a screenshot taken that day. Straight up argued with the person because there was literally no way for me to show them my pass. (Twitter user, 3.57PM, 10 October 2021)

In this case, the screenshot was taken as proof of having the card. This sort of evidence would be available even without an internet connection. The passenger presents this as a viable tactic

of dealing with the lack of mobile coverage. The transport worker's reluctance to validate this adjustment is met with the passenger's frustration and warrants an argument. Arguing is accounted for on the basis of the unfairness of being asked to do something that cannot be done due to technological constraints.

Technological disruption may lead to instances that, from the passengers' perspective, constitute unfair categorisation as fare evaders. The following example shows how conflicting interpretations of what constitutes infringement arise out of technological ambiguity:

In October I was cautioned by someone on @GWRHelp [Great Western Railway] because they won't let me load my railcard on my phone as we were in a tunnel and I had no signal. Week before Christmas they're now trying to take me to court and charge £108.10 and there's no way to contest it. (1/2)

I'm essentially being persecuted by @GWRHelp for 'not having a railcard', when in actual fact I just wasn't able to load it at that given moment. If the member of staff had come back to me it would have been fine. Would appreciate a response you jobsworths. (2/2) (Twitter user, 4:43PM, 15 December, 2021)

In this instance, lack of mobile coverage led to a passenger being categorised as 'not having a railcard' and thus being prosecuted. The passenger frames this categorisation as unfair by showing how simple it would have been to avoid ('If the member of staff had come back to me it would have been fine') and by arguing that it was the lack of signal that impeded them from showing their card. With 'no way to contest [being taken to court]', the passenger indicates that they had no chance to account for their own rationale and perspective on the events. Thus, from the passenger's point of view, the categorisation is not only mistaken, but unfair. It is at this point that the passenger reverses the moral accountability of what happened to, in turn, judge the transport worker. Transport staff are described as 'jobsworths' due to having failed to adjust their rules to the circumstantial events that were so central in the passenger's perspective (i.e., having no signal).

Adjusting the formal rules of the transport system to locally emergent circumstances is often at the centre of users' concerns. Both our social media and video data show how, during the users' interactions with representatives of the transport operator, passengers seek to formulate functional alternatives to the systems' formal rules, particularly when the production of an exception seems justified. The following account illustrates how an exception is morally appraised:

Shoutout to the bus driver who let me on for free this morning when my Apple Pay wouldn't pick up the card reader. You're an angel. (Twitter user, 8:12AM, 20 November, 2020)

Here, the driver is an 'angel' because they allowed an exception in response to technological disruption. Thus, producing exceptions to the rule is sometimes accomplished by referring to the factual impossibility of following through with passenger obligations. Pointing to technological disruptions can potentially free passengers from moral judgement and instigate a temporary alternative that could exist outside the system's norms (see also Plyushteva, 2023). A member of staff who allows an exception can then be regarded in morally positive terms. Conversely, transport workers who fail to adjust to the local circumstances and continue to evaluate the situation according to formal rules are sometimes held as morally accountable (see also the discussion of 'jobsworth inspectors' in the previous section).

While attempts to produce exceptions can be based on matters of mere convenience, failure to produce an exception is argued by some passengers to be unjustifiable due to a person's vulnerability:

I was not allowed on a bus the other day after being 50p short and my Apple Pay being declined (due to his machine not my not having the money) and was told to get off. I then was assaulted near canal street whilst trying to book an Uber. Men don't want to be waved down to help. (Twitter user, 9:10AM, 2 October, 2021)

This post connects failure to produce an exception to aspects of gendered vulnerability. In the tweet, the transport system is treated as accountable for the technical mishap as it was 'his [the

worker's] machine' that led to non-payment. Similarly, being '50p short' can be seen as more than narrative precision, underscoring the small amount missing from the full fare. The implication made by the passenger is that there are three compounding reasons for an exception to be made: the machine is the staff member's responsibility; the shortage is slight; and (as highlighted in a subsequent post), the events happened at 2am.

Figure 3 shows how an exception to ordinary rules of payment can be successfully produced by a passenger on the basis of technological disruption. A user (P2) gets on the bus and approaches the driver while other passengers continue through the turnstile. In panel 1, she holds her card up in a sign of display. The gesture of showing the card seems to topicalise the coming conversation in a recognisable way for the driver, who immediately says 'I'm not taking anyone'. P2 cuts off the driver and explains that the nature of the problem is technological—there is no electricity in the area. In panel 2 she gives further detail about the power cut, implying that she has tried more than one place to top up her card. This may be heard as being unable to pay despite wanting to do so. She then produces a request: 'Could you give me a ride, gentleman?'. Though the driver had anticipated and denied such a request, the account of technological disruption seems to reframe the request as a more acceptable one.

P2 closes her appeal by addressing the driver with the label 'gentleman'. Categorising the driver as a gentleman may be heard as a prompt for him to act accordingly (Stokoe 2012). Similarly, the plain and straightforward phrasing of the request reinforces the sense of honesty that the passenger is building her request upon, contrasting with forms of fare evasion rendered 'malevolent' as a result of an attempt to deceive. The sequence ends with both participants agreeing on an alternative way for P2 (now recognised as passenger) to remain on the bus.

This case shows how a transport user draws on embodied, verbal, and material resources to position themselves as an 'honest' type of fare evader—one that is admissible as a passenger not only on the account of technological disruption, but also on the basis of honesty and transparent behaviour.

[Figure 3 near here]

Figure 3. Transcript of a passenger-driver interaction. An exception is successfully produced.

The moral-emotional labour of fares

Moral emotions such as contempt, anger at the actions of others, shame (see discussion above on the role of shaming as a fare enforcement strategy; see also Rose, 2000), guilt, embarrassment, gratitude, and awe have been studied extensively (notably in moral psychology, see, for instance, Haidt 2003). However, the situated labour involved in how they are produced and experienced, is less well understood (although see Ahmed 2014, on the links between emotion and judgement). We use the concept of moral-emotional labour to account for transport workers' responsibilities, which involve the often arduous emotional work of producing, sorting, and reconciling the competing moral claims around non- and underpayment. Moral-emotional labour builds on the notion of emotional labour as performed by workers in customer-facing roles but focuses specifically on the situated performance and management of moral emotions (Hochschild, 1983; Parish and Montsion 2018). In relation to fare evasion specifically, we outline three cases within which moral emotions become both resources to be mobilised, and emotional drains on the actors performing and managing them. In the first case, transport operators may rely on moral emotions such as shame, guilt, embarrassment, or pride, to prevent or penalise fare evasion, as examined in the first empirical section. A further example is detailed in the following social media post:

*@LNER [London North Eastern Railway] on the 1728 to kx and the ticket inspector has made some poor lady **feel awful** as her railcard had expired. Absolutely correct to challenge and correct but to make the lady feel **thoroughly embarrassed** is **poor**. #powertrip* (Twitter user, 5:53PM, 10 December 2021; emphasis added)

Here, the witness begins by clarifying their own position as an upstanding moral subject. They state their view on travelling with an expired railcard (*'Absolutely correct to challenge'*) but proceed to question the appropriateness of the ticket inspector's actions: as a result of the inspector's drawing on moral emotions as a fare enforcement resource, a 'poor lady' has been

made to feel ‘thoroughly embarrassed.’ By exceeding what the author of the post considers appropriate strategies of fare enforcement, the ticket inspector is moved from the category of being ‘absolutely correct,’ to someone on a ‘powertrip’ who should be publicly called out for reprehensible behaviour.

Thus, the above account also highlights the second type of interaction in which moral emotions play a significant role. These are instances where passengers and on-lookers detail their own moral-emotion response in order to ‘speak back’ to fare enforcement policies and practices. In the social media post addressed at London North Eastern Railway, the author does not question the transport operator’s authority to enforce fares; however, they demonstrate that how the authority is used in practice is not a straightforward question and using it inappropriately can be so ‘poor’ as to undermine its very acceptability. The use of moral emotions to demonstrate that the enforcers of fares are themselves being morally scrutinised is further articulated in the following account, drawing on a notion of ‘emotional intelligence’:

*This behaviour **disgusts** me. Today walking home, I encounter a lady around 50, **upset**, 10pm, cold, with an Oyster card in hand. Bus drivers refusing her cause her card was in minus. I gave her my last £4.05p. I on UC [universal credit], single full- time parent. No **emotional intelligence** these people.* (Twitter user, 11:44PM, 14 January 2022; emphasis added)

The judgement passed by this social media user is based on the perceived absence of emotional intelligence, or attunement, displayed by the ticket inspector (see Doucet 2008; Holmes 2010, on the work of emotional attunement). This author comments in strong moral-emotional terms on the choice made by the bus driver (‘This behaviour disgusts me’), giving their assessment further clout through articulating their own moral subjectivity (choosing to behave in righteous ways in the face of their own hardship, a framing which both echoes and problematises the Transantiago poster discussed in the first empirical section). In the process, two claims are made: first, the notion that it is the payment of the ‘correct’ fare that makes someone an ‘acceptable’ passenger, is rendered problematic; and second, that transport workers have a moral obligation to apply this problematic notion in selective and locally relevant ways,

drawing on emotional attunement. In this view, transport workers failing to do so can have dramatic consequences, as demonstrated in the account of the person refused boarding who was later assaulted (see previous section). Thus, passengers and witnesses often rely on a ‘weighing’ of the real and potential consequences of enforcement as a strategy for demonstrating that the seriousness of the ‘offence’ does not justify the severity of the impact on the ‘offender’:

*Hi @thetrainline my son is autistic, his 16-17 railcard was bought on my Trainline account, I shared a screen shot of his railcard and he's been using this no problem for months. Today @LNER ticket person told him off said he must have the railcard on his own Trainline app...
...I don't know how to share the railcard with him from my app to his app. He was **very upset and really confused**. It's taken a lot to persuade him to travel alone on the train in the first place, it'd be a real **shame if this knocks his confidence**. Can you help? #AutismAwareness*
(Twitter user, 5:49PM, 30 November 2021; emphasis added)

In this parent's account, emotions (both the son's and the parent's own) play a key role in demonstrating the consequences of ‘disproportionate’ enforcement. By describing the interaction in some detail, the author argues that the ‘infraction’ in question is minor, if not dubious: the fare was paid and the railcard was in date, but the process through which this was confirmed did not meet stringent standards. The parent presents the problem as one of awareness (through the hashtag #AutismAwareness), framing the question as ‘Can you help?’ In other words, they do not demand a specific type of remedy or policy change; instead, they invite the transport operator to reflect on a complex issue which tests the limits of rigid approaches to fare enforcement.

While in this case it is the transport operator as an organisation that is called upon to consider a more nuanced and sensitive approach, our data demonstrate that passengers and witnesses often place such expectations upon the transport workers they encounter as part of everyday journeys. For instance, the reference to ‘gentleman’ in Figure 3 can be understood as a reference to the professional pride associated with the driver's job. The passenger invites the

driver to think of themselves not simply as an enforcer, but as someone who can assess the situation independently and resolve it with grace. However, in the context of managerial pressures, technological change, and increased scrutiny (notably through online social media platforms), it can be argued that the expectation of moral-emotional attunement places a significant and often inordinate burden on transport staff charged with the work of fares. Transport workers are expected to produce timely and finely calibrated emotional responses, and thus to reconcile the top-down moral categories of fare evasion with the everyday ambiguities around non- and underpayment. Since in practice fare enforcement can be complex and uncertain, staff are faced with the need to continuously weigh the imperative of the ‘correct’ fare, against passengers’ safety (as in the case of a woman stranded away from home late at night), well-being, or dignity (as in the case of a neurodivergent young person being harshly told off). The moral-emotional labour such negotiations entail, can be onerous and exasperating.

Thus, the practical work of enforcing fares can profoundly affect both passengers and staff. The frequent contemptuous references to ‘jobsworth ticket inspectors’ in our social media data invite reflection on the extent to which the moralisation of fares places a set of expectations on transport staff which can be impossible to fully meet in practice. We argue that the institutional tools provided to transport workers tasked with enforcing fares make a claim to universality and intelligibility, yet often prove inadequate in resolving the entangled moral categories of everyday mobility. In the concluding section, we further discuss the implications of this for the policies and practices of transport operators.

6. Conclusion

In the official discourse of transport authorities and operators, fare evasion is often presented as a deviant behaviour which breaks not only laws, but also moral norms. As a result, transport users who do not pay or underpay can be cast as undeserving of transport operators’ commitments to ‘real’ passengers, such as striving to provide a good quality of service, treating passengers courteously, providing up-to-date information, and so on. To complicate binary

notions of deserving and undeserving passengers, we have approached the morality of fare evasion as an *interactional achievement*. We have examined how arguments such as being an older person or having no internet connection are routinely used as resources to set out alternatives to the full payment of the fare. More than being factors which explain or predict fare evasion, users' identities and justifications are constitutive elements (Jayyusi 1991) of *how* they justify non- and underpayment practices in moral terms. Drawing on the Chilean and UK contexts, the paper examined the everyday moralities of fare evasion through transport operators' moral claims, the production of alternative categories, the role of technology, and the role of moral-emotional labour.

The discussion demonstrated that while transport operators in Chile and the UK have framed fare evasion as morally reprehensible, passengers who do not pay or pay less, and various other stakeholders, resist the characterisation of the fare evader as one who rejects moral norms. Not only are passengers and on-lookers already concerned with morality; they draw on a range of resources to produce alternative moral accounts within specific and situated everyday interactions. In light of these, we suggest that, first, the morality of fare evasion entails a diverse and locally occasioned set of practices; second, the experiences of not paying or underpaying come with intricate negotiations of arguments, material arrangements, and positionalities, which exert an emotional toll on all involved; and third, despite often being rendered as problematic passengers, or even non-passengers, people who fare evade often make strong moral claims on the providers of transport services.

This presents a set of challenges for those seeking to design and enforce fare policies. One reason is that passengers routinely assess the morality of fare evasion and enforcement by drawing on categories that transport systems may not consider formally relevant to fare compliance (e.g., being older, disabled, an essential worker etc.). Thus, the intense moral dimension of fare evasion is ever shifting, yielding inconsistent outcomes which cannot be standardised solely by external inputs such as higher fines and barriers. Our analysis suggests that even with changing technologies, fare enforcement cannot be unproblematically predicated on delocalised and fixed notions of 'right', 'wrong', 'honest', 'dishonest', 'acceptable' or

‘unacceptable’. Understood as an interactional achievement, the moral quality of fare evasion is contested—and only occasionally agreed upon—by the participants of the interaction. Thus, the locally occasioned moralities of non- and underpayment underpin a sense of distributed responsibility, where moral claims around such practices are the result of interactions between all actors involved. This perspective puts emphasis on the question of how transport services interact with their users and, crucially, the ways in which they seek to govern their behaviour.

Everyday understandings of the ways in which the moralities of non- and underpayment are accomplished, perceived, and contested should be considered in the planning and implementation of fare policies. The ambiguous and contested nature of fare moralities raise broader questions around the responsibilities different actors involved in fare transactions (are assumed to) have towards each other. The ways in which these interactions are resolved in practice can leave parties demoralised, frustrated, emotionally exhausted, and in some cases, vulnerable. These considerations should be taken into account when transport operators and other decision-makers evaluate the merits of different fare systems (for example, honour-based versus gate-based systems). Furthermore, these insights can reinvigorate decision-makers’ consideration of fare-free public transport as a policy choice (Kębłowski 2020). To date, the feasibility of fare-free public transport has been appraised mostly from the perspective of operators’ reliance on fare revenue for financial sustainability. Arguably, the morally charged dilemmas which arise as part of fare enforcement, and the moral-emotional labour placed on transport workers as a result of their complexities, should similarly be taken into consideration when contemplating a wider range of possible approaches to fares.

Notes

[1] Hashtag: The addition of the ‘#’ sign in front of keywords (e.g., ‘#oystercard’) is a convention developed by users to categorise subjects.

[2] Jobsworth: Informal, derogatory term used to describe an official who draws on (a typically small amount of) authority to uphold petty rules, or as an excuse for not being helpful.

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