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Conceptualizing mobile subjectivities: the case of women's driving practices in contemporary Delhi

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Abstract

The paper concentrates on the processes shaping women's subjectivities in today's Delhi, in particular on the role of mobility. The result of 11 months of fieldwork on women's driving practices in India's capital city, the research addresses questions concerned with the relationship between, on the one hand, women's subjectivities - their inner life processes and affective states (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007) - and, on the other, power, highlighting in particular the significance of patriarchal and class modes of relation in the so called neoliberal city. Concentrating on the experiences of four groups of women from different social and ethnic backgrounds (taxi drivers, members of a ladies-only motorbike club, university students and upper class professionals), the paper builds theoretically on Kathy Ferguson's (1993) feminist conceptualisation of mobile subjectivities. Ferguson calls for an understanding of women's subjectivities that stresses ambiguity, messiness, multiplicity, temporality and irony. In the context of my own research, choosing to speak of mobile subjectivities implies two paths: one, to conceive of them, in line with Ferguson, as contextual, relational, and open-ended vis-a-vis power. Two, to build on Ferguson to highlight the potential of actual physical mobility as a lens to investigate gender and to capture ethnographically self-contradictory processes of self-positioning and identity re-evaluation. The paper argues that driving practices and the construction of women's subjectivities are intertwined in mutually transformative processes that can provide insights on women's intimate negotiations with power and its declinations around modernity/tradition, contesting models of womanhood, class inequality, and ethno-religious affiliations.

Introduction

On a pleasingly breezy July afternoon, I was sitting in an organic open air café in Gurgaon, recently renamed Gurugram, one of Delhi's booming satellite cities. Opposite me was Kimmy, a 32-year old account director for a prestigious advertising firm. She had glossy dark hair, an articulated sense of humour and an easiness about herself that could not go unnoticed. As she sipped her drink, she told me briskly: "*You see*, *even girls in short skirts get forced into arranged marriages, and conservative-minded women do modern things like driving*".

Only twenty years ago, Gurgaon was a small village on the outskirts of Delhi, mostly semi-barren land dedicated to farming and herding. Now, in the midst of its raging highways and pop-up bars, it was the setting for a conversation between an Italian researcher and a career oriented executive working for a worldwide multinational. Something had changed, something that Kimmy was trying to make sense of and explain to me with her sentence. Her words alluded to a society where women can inhabit both 'traditional' and 'modern' spaces, and of two cultural models that, whilst seemingly in opposition, both participate in the shaping of women's lives with alternating and compatible fortunes.

This research investigates how compatible contradictions, such as described by Kimmy, are experienced and negotiated by women in their daily mobility choices. Mobility and driving practices enable and bring to the fore,women's processes of self-positioning, and of identity re-evaluation that speak directly to how these apparent contradictions unravel in the urban, neoliberal, and postcolonial setting. In Delhi, local configurations of power manifest through notions of modernity/tradition, competing models of womanhood, class/caste inequality, and the role of ethno-religious affiliations. These configurations are intimately connected with the shaping of women's subjectivities, whilst also consequently influencing and being influenced by women's mobility choices.

To explore the workings of power around women's driving practices, I employ and develop the notion of mobile subjectivities as originally formulated by Kathy Ferguson (1993). Ferguson breaks away from previous feminist traditions to call for a conception of women's subjectivities that stresses ambiguity, messiness, multiplicity, temporality, and locality without dismissing the global. Contradictions that may arise, Ferguson

claims, are reconciled through irony, which allows women to navigate safely the shifting sands of multiple ideologies, affective affiliations, and local and global demands alike. The acceptance of contradiction becomes the ally that allows to see subjectivities as relational, contextual and open-ended, and, I add, mobile subjectivities can be the theoretical tool through which the role of physical mobility can be investigated ethnographically in women's relationship with power.

The research explores these questions by looking at the experiences of four groups of women driving independent means of transportation: taxi drivers, members of a women's only motorcycle club, upper-class unmarried professionals who drive cars on their work commute, and university students who ride scooters on campus. The four groups were chosen to vary the economic and socio-cultural background of research participants, as well as the means of transport that they use. Driving a taxi, a bike, a private car, or a scooter leads to very different ways to experience the city and mobility.

The paper sets off by looking at subjectivities as an analytical tool and in relation to theories of personhood and individuality. It then describes in more depth Ferguson's work, to the outline my theoretical framework in relation to mobility. Methodological considerations are then followed by ethnographic insights into the workings of mobile subjectivities.

Before Mobile Subjectivities

Subjectivities have been gaining traction as a theoretical tool in the social sciences for their capacity to shed light on the relationship between, on the one hand, power relations and the social production of meaning, and, on the other, on the inner life and affectivity of social actors (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007). By attending to processes of subjectification, that is to say those processes that produce the social and cultural subject through power relations, we can achieve an appreciation of vulnerability and personal motivations (Blackman 2011; Wardle 1999), moral responsibility (Pandian 2010), the impact of medical conditions (Qureshi 2013), and cognition and choice-making (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007). Holland and Leander (2004), when talking of subjectivity, speak of the "microproduction of the self", referring to how individuals draw from different cultural resources to construct open-ended forms of identity that change through time and space and that recast wider socio-cultural processes, at times challenging them, and at times reproducing them. Attending to the microproduction of the self, they clam, can help us recognise possibilities of agency in the face of power, as

well as the subjective and affective consequences of such agency. I embrace these perspectives as they build into my own understanding of what avenues of research subjectivities can open up.

Theoretically speaking, subjectivities are closely related to processes of identity formation and conceptions of personhood. When here I speak of identity and identity formation, I refer to the verbal configurations that we have about our subjectivities and sense of self, and the affective and emotional identification that we have with such conceptions. In other words, while subjectivity to talk about one's sense of self and decision-making processes in the face of power, identity signifies the way individuals speak about themselves in their roles as social actors, i.e. university student, woman, taxi driver, single/married, and so on.

Personhood, on the other hand, is a term that speaks of what it means to be a person in a particular society. In the Indian context, debates have sparked on whether it is better to speak of individuals or dividuals, given the centrality of relatedness in the cultures of the subcontinent (Chaudary 2008, Smith 2012). But before exploring the concept further, a brief overview of the uses of the word "dividual" in the social sciences might be useful. Deleuze (1992) coined it in reference to what he called "societies of control", which he opposed to Foucault's "disciplinary societies". In the society of control, the corporation has replaced the factory. Modulation, transformation, instability, shifty meritocracy, and relationality are the key guiding principles that render the individual a "dismantable" unit made up of data, positionings, samples, masses, and achievements. For Deleuze, societies of control arose in conjunction with high-paced technological advancements and neoliberalism, and personal choice is but a mere illusion constructed by the inflation of multiple possibilities, and subjects are valued for their partiality rather than totality.

In the Indian context, the anthropological debate around the "dividual" has taken a different form. Hailing from Dumont's (1980) comparison between a Western and an Indian self, where the former is egalitarian and the latter hierarchical, many anthropologists, including Margaret Strathern (1989) devised the Western/modern persona (the individual) as autonomous, centered, free, monadic and solid. The dividual, instead was the oriental other, characterised by traditional, family relations and entrapped in unequal social modes of relation. The individual is egocentric, whilst the dividual is socio-centric. Criticism of this orientalising and simplistic vision has been rife in anthropology (see Smith 2012 for an overview), in particular in terms of

understanding the modernity project as multiple and non-linear, and to question the validity of the tradition/modernity binary. It is now considered “common anthropological wisdom” (Englund and Leach, 2000: 229) that everyone is both a dividual and an individual.

In fact, the dividual, if we leave behind outdated dichotomies, can be a useful analytical chategory. Already, Deleuze used it to speak about neoliberalism, transcending its characterization of traditionalism, and arguing for the supremacy of relationality, contextualisation and partiality of the subject vis-a-vis power. Additionally, this view of the subject has encouraged anthropological research in South Asia to consider seriously the role of emotion, body, relatedness and objects in shaping people’s subjectivities and self-identity, which have influenced the analysis of ethnographic material in this work.

Outside South Asia, similar approaches have led to the development of theories that argue for a multiplicity of the self, like dialogical self theory. Here, the self is understood as an activity that occurs through an engagement with others, and whose “dynamic process of self-evolution is constructed as constantly changing, and sensitive to context and company” (Chaudary 2008: 13). At the centre of this theory resides the idea that self and culture are not fixed, but rather a multiplicity of positions amongst which dialogical relationships are established (Hermans 2001). The self is both continuous and discontinuous, produced by many internal voice in their engagement with people, cultures, places, ideologies and so forth. These voices can contradict each other insofar as they represent different positionings of the self. The I shifts between positions “creating dynamic fields of self-negotiations, self-contradictions, and self-integrations [that] result in a great variety of meaning” (Hermans 2001: 252).

This approach has been deemed useful to think about the subject in the postmodern and globalised world, where citizens are exposed to, and involved with, multiple cultural models, in particular the reconcilable dichotomy of global/local (Van Meijl 2008: 178). The self as an array of voices that, imagined as a heterogenous society, talk to each other to construct a coherent narrative of the self (Zabinski 2008). This process of reunification is unending and unattainable, and individuals commit to it with variable dedication, some not striving for it at all, but simply inhabiting it (Van Meijl 2008), always the result of the encounter between the individual/dividual on one hand, and locally embedded relations of power on the other.

Ethnographical research has increasingly embraced similar viewpoints, including what is called positionality, that is to say how agents position themselves and reevaluate their identities through processes of subjectification. Here I think of positionality and self-positioning as an activity of production of identity that results from the multivoiced process of subjectivity formation, following Lee (2014). Lee, when researching suicide amongst women in rural China, coins the term "gendered subjectivities", in order to explore the psychological processes and inner experiences driving women to the irreversability of suicide. Lee looks at how positionality within the family, gender relations, and broader social processes interact to construct women's subjectivities. Gender is central because it is at the core of family positionality (being a wife, a sister, a daughter…), as well as of the ways individuals relate to multiple ideological systems in a country undergoing large social change. The term "gendered subjectivities" is useful because it can yield to discussions over "individual psychological processes and their relation to behavior, a set of experiences that cannot be reduced to a shared group interpretation". It also "enables us to examine how individual differences in cognition, affect and action are also products of complex social and cultural formations" (Lee 2014: 28).

In Lee's analysis the subject is interpreted in both her individuality and her dividuality, in her personal experience and emotion, and in her relationality. The attempt to bring all parts of the self together can in some cases be impossible, and women choose suicide. This is in line with what I have just discussed about dialogical self theory: not all subjects experience the unattainable process of self-unification in the same way, and the multiplicity of positioning in the wake of unequal gender and economic relations can lead to terrible tragedies. But not exclusively, as suicides are still exceptions. Lee employs subjectivities to research inequality, violence and social suffering, and others have done the same (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007). In this work, however, the accent is not on overt hardship, but rather on the everyday negotiations and adjustments. The central themes I engage with are in line, and draw from dialogical self theory and Lee, and, more generally from ethnographic approaches to subjectivities as highlighted at that start of the section. Power relations, inequality, multiplicity, multivoicedness, and individuality/dividuality are explored through the lens of mobile subjectivity to highlight mechanisms of reconciliation of the self in the everyday, subdued, discreet and productive processes of subjectification that can strengthen and/or challenge broader phenomena such as patriarchy, class/caste, neoliberalism, or understandings of modernity/tradition. To do so, I turn towards mobile subjectivities as

originally conceived by Kathy Ferguson (1993). The union of her theorization of female subjectivities, together with the anthropological and dialogical perspective, constitute the theoretical framework of this work.

Mobile Subjectivities

In her 1993 book, *The Man Question - Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory,* Kathy Ferguson conceived mobile subjectivities in the context of political feminism. Her analysis departs from questioning the outreach and the validity of embracing a single strand of feminism. Embarking on a metatheoretical quest, she provides an overview of what she calls the genealogical and the interpretative stances on gender. She defines the genealogical perspective as "the deconstruction of gender [that] entails stepping back from the opposition of male and female in order to loosen the hold of gender on life and meaning" (Ferguson, 1993: 4). Whilst instead, interpretative feminism is constituted by "efforts to give perspective to voice women's perspective(s) […], listen to women in their own terms, and sometimes go on to recruit women's perspective(s) to provide direction for political change (Ferguson, 1993: 4). Interpretative feminism, Ferguson states, attempts to construct a "women's perspective" whilst respecting differences amongst women (and men), but it struggles in this endeavour, since difference always is subdued to its political project. The deconstructive project, instead, wants to erase gender to embrace difference and the multiplicity of sexuality and meaning, but it fails to achieve anything politically.

When it comes to understanding subjectivity, the two approaches are also inevitably unaligned. Interpretivism embraces a more phenomenological view, where the subject's discovery and interaction with the outside, and with power, produces processes of subjectification that can be understood only by listening to the subject's account of her interpretation. Genealogy problematises the subject, stating that the subject and processes of subjectification are unreliable because they are themselves the outcome of "disciplinary practices of modernity" (Ferguson 1993: 14). Genealogy prefers to ask how the subject operates in specific discourses like modernity.

These epistemological and ontological distinctions, Ferguson claims, can be overcome and made fruitful through the rhetorical and political aid of irony. Ferguson draws from Donna Haraway, for whom irony "is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible

things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humour and serious play” (Haraway, 1985: 8). The themes of incompleteness and incompatibility return, together with the idea that there is a tension and a tendency towards a whole that is unreachable. Yet, this unattainability can highlight the grey areas where irony can be most useful. It allows one to inhabit a situation that “resists resolution […] without pretending that resolution has come” (Ferguson 1993: 30). Irony accepts the incompatibility of theory and ideology by encouraging ambiguity and self-contradiction. Irony allows different approaches to be validated and kept in a continuous and productive dialogue that drives nothing out.

Ferguson applies this very logic to processes of subjectification and identity reevaluation by speaking of mobile subjectivities. In her view, subjectivities are mobile in the sense that their political relationship with, and action towards, power does not have and cannot find a single trajectory valid for all. Even for one individual it can vary through space and time. Mobile subjectivities change, adapt, and long to account for a variety of perspectives. They are “ambiguous, messy, and multiple, unstable but persevering. They are ironic, attentive to the manyness of things. They respect the local, tend towards the specific, but without eliminating the cosmopolitan” (Ferguson 1993: 154). When the subject is thematized as mobile, self-positioning and subjectification relate to power though moving trajectories of “proximity and distance, restlessness and rootedness, separation and connection.” It is as if configurations of power such as gender relations, class/caste, and the pulls of modernity and tradition were like poles towards which women’s ideas, experiences, affective states, emotions, aspirations, actions, choices, or personal relationships tended, and are attracted to in a swinging motion that has to take into account the attraction of all poles. None can be fully reached, and none can be fully ignored. Provisional identities and senses of self are thus produced. They participate in the daily working of power that mark gender, class, caste, and sexuality. Through these engagements, negotiations, strategies, adaptations, and passive or active choosing, the individual/dividual takes part in the structuring of social reality, and the micropolitics of the everyday can take the centre stage of the analysis with full expression of their contradiction.

The coordinates within which mobile subjectivities exist and shift are determined by space and time. Calàs, Ou and Smircich (2013) stress this when applying Ferguson’s mobile subjectivities to the study of transnational actors. Comparing intersectionality and mobile subjectivities, they argue that the latter reserves more opportunities to capture personal experiences of subjectification in a transnational world. While

intersectionality may account for multiple forms of identity, it fails to show how they can take alternative shape when space and time change. Whilst thinking of subjectivities as relationally constituted is a common understanding in the social sciences, as we have already seen, time and space are relegated to "contingencies making those relations meaningful" (Calàs, Ou and Smircich 2013: 715), rather than elements that can in themselves prompt change. Mobile subjectivities provide a way to think about agency without having to rely on a stable locations of identity, or of consistency of place for the production of social change.

While Calàs, Ou and Smircich are interested in the shifting subjectivity of transnational individuals, my focus is on locality and everyday negotiations. Ferguson stresses repeatedly how mobile subjectivities are in profound connection with the local, which to her is "a fragmented set of possibilities that can be articulated into a momentary politics of time and place. In the shifting temporal and spatial possibilities offered by specific locales, mobile subjectivities find the resources for de-articulating and re-articulating themselves" (Ferguson 1993: 163). Affording to the local the same significance as Ferguson, I see the global as a series of flows constituted in a disjunctive order that proceed through "obstacles, bumps and potholes" (Appadurai 2013: 65), and that, in their engagement with local subjectivities, play an active role in manufacturing them and, alongside them, local meaning.

Employing Ferguson to think about subjectivity and processes of subjectification means to search for, and to embrace incompleteness, (self)irony, multiplicity, contextuality and relationality. Mobile subjectivities account for the multitude of ways in which the global and the local interact, and for the role of the individual/dividual in the production of social reality. Relation with power is not envisaged as top-down, nor actors are interesting merely in their capacity for empowerment or victimhood. Subjects can inhabit both spaces with the steady hand of irony on the steering wheel, and the same can be said about any binary driving cultural discourses and ideologies. Mobile subjectivities allow Kimmy's conservative-minded women to drive, and her girls in short skirts to have arranged marriages. While binaries such as tradition/modernity might be significant in people's lives as analytical categories to think about oneself and the world, the way people inhabit them through compatible contradictions can pave the route towards their dismissal, which will however, as Ferguson teaches us, inevitably remain incomplete. The phenomenological and political space of interpretivism, made up of women's voices denouncing binaries and inequalities, can marry the genealogical (and possibly more ideological) stance that refuses binaries altogether. Overall, mobile

subjectivities help us navigate the complexity of reality and the complexity of the subject. They make us embrace speficity without refusing generalizations in their unstoppable quest for openness.

Mobility in Mobile Subjectivities

As I have already mentioned, the scope of this work is the investigation of driving and riding practices amongst young women in contemporary Delhi. The focus is on everyday mobility choices, negotiations, experiences, and the related emotional sphere that can shed light on women's processes of subjectification. The interest in mobility derives from the complex relationship between women and urban space that has for long informed feminist geography. Researchers have analysed how cities' designs, configurations and organization replicate and reinforce unequal gender relations that see the home as the realm of the woman, and public space (the reign of men) connected to ideas of violence, risk, fear, and danger (Weseley and Gaarder 2005, Koskela 1997). At the same time, mobility and the urban can afford professional and educational possibilities and forms of anonymity (Wilson 1990). In the nuanced spaces that exist between these two possibilities, women's city life and use of public space acquire their everyday significance (Bondi and Rose 2003).

Mobility emerges as the outcome of a set of choices that are shaped deeply by broader power relations and that speak of immobility (Adey 2006), friction (Cresswell 2012), and dissonance (Butcher 2011). Mobility is entrenched with transformative significance and the possibility of social change and dynamism (D'Andrea, Ciolfi and Gray 2006), but also of stagnation (Law 1999) and socio-economic inequality (Timothy 2001, Gogia 2006). Mobility is liminality, it is inhabiting the in-between, it can lead to new, unknown scenarios, and force engagement with otherness. It tastes of Van Gennep's liminal phase, and smells of Agamben's state of exception. It can prompt the subject into novel contexts where her frame of reference needs to adjust, and can highlight boundaries and divisions. This multitude of possibilities renders it a privileged lens through which to examine individual choice and expressions of dividuality, in light of the productive role of the subject in the micropolitics that construct social reality.

In the Delhi context, mobility is at the centre of relations of power that converge on gender and class/caste. The city has been deemed India's rape capital, having been the site for some horrific episodes of sexual violence in the recent past. A combination of

causes have been highlighted by social scientists and commentators: a persistence of gender inequality in Indian society over time that took roots under colonialism (Chatterjee 1989); a governmental failure to address the problem (Lodhia 2015); a patriarchal social system that desensitises towards women's pain and that produced ideas of hypermasculinity and manliness across class and caste (Bass 2016, 2017); the relinquishment a socialist-based economy, and the advent of consumerism-based citizenship (Atluri 2013); the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, which advocates for a hierarchical and patriarchal structure of home and society (Jawayardena and de Alwis 1996, Srivastava 2001, Sen 2007); the rapid transformation of the city - think of Gurgaon - into a neoliberal hub that excludes, or strives to exclude, the lower classes/castes (Baviskar 2011, Ghertner 2011, Schindler 2014). With young urban women enjoying, however limited, new social freedoms and opportunities, exiting the house and entering the job market, male identities underwent a crisis that ruptured gender relations, precipitating violence (Doron and Broom 2013).

New models of (urban) womanhood were carved out of these broader social processes, playing themselves out on women's bodies through the imposition of foreign, Western models of beauty and femininity (Thapan 2009), and sense of duty and respectability (Belliappa 2013). While feeling the pressure to be honourable wife and mother, women are also encouraged to pursue autonomy and independence through work and career. In the neoliberal and economically unequal metropolis, women's relationship with public space is mediated by the contradictory and complementary social roles they are assigned, and they assign, to themselves. Women have had to learn to negotiate their public behaviour and their presence in public space, as if this did not belong to them, and access to it was not to be given for granted, but it should instead come with the proper precautions (Phadke, Khan and Ranade 2011; Phadke 2013, Brosius 2016), in a climate that stresses the responsibility of the individual and encourages self-policing.

Mobility, with its attention towards the negotiation of inequality and the significance of structures of power in the microsocial (Manderschield 2013), can provide insights into how women position themselves in relation to social change, patriarchy, class/caste divisions, religious fundamentalism, and the local/global dichotomy. Attending to their subjectivities in movement grants new explorations of how they integrate contradictory frameworks of reference in their daily choices, routines and practices, and how these choices, routines and practices produce the social reality that women imagine in a productive and mutually transformative relationship. Mobility has a

way of bringing things to the fore.

Mobile subjectivities, that is to say subjectivities in motion, are looked at through the theorization of Ferguson's mobile subjectivities. They are investigated in their multiplicity, their contradictions, their incompleteness, and their essential quality of being in-the-making. Contextuality and relationality are highlighted, and irony becomes the glue that keeps everything together. In the ethnographic excerpts that are about to follow, self-irony might not be explicit. Some research participants manifested it more than others, but in every case, the coexisting of what may seem as apparent contradictions to the researcher's eye, were inhabited by the participants in a mobile fashion: addressing the significance of context and relations.

Methodology

Fieldwork lasted 11 months and was conducted between March 2015 and February 2016, involving 52 research participants divided in four different groups: university students who rode scooters; taxi drivers; members of a ladies-only biking club; and upper-class professionals from South Delhi who drive their own car. This division worked on the field as a way to find research participants (the so called snow-ball effect), as well as to ensure variety in terms of socio-cultural backgrounds, since the women I encountered came from dissimilar walks of life. They also drove different means of transportation: commercial vehicles, motorbikes, cars and scooters. Each vehicle comes with a different set of practices, affects and modes of relation to traffic and the road. Age amongst the research participants ranger from 21 to 36, with the exception of the leader of the motorbike club who was over 50. The majority of the women were unmarried (all but two), and two were divorced with children. They hailed from different castes and ethnic groups, with the taxi drivers and the South Delhi professionals sitting at opposite ends of the economical ladder. Religiously speaking, I encountered self-proclaimed atheists, especially amongst the university students, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and two women who had converted from Hinduism to Christianity.

The groups are not fixed categories. They are contextual and relational constructs that provided the women with (more or less) temporary subjectivities and identities that could be explored through interviews and go-alongs. These mobile subjectivities that I afforded them allowed to explore how class, caste, religious background, and

profession impact mobility differently. At the same time, commonalities about being a woman moving independently around the city could be explored, which may transcend class and caste.

Methods involved primarily interviews, together with participant observation, and go-alongs that were also structured as interviews on the move. Interviews are the result of negotiations between interviewer and interviewee, in which meaning and subjectivity are constructed on both sides (Rapley 2001). The interview is in itself a context in which mobile subjectivities come to the surface. Different aspects of one's self and one's sense of idenity can appear through contradictions, reconfigurations of opinions, and reflection on topics one had never dwelled on before (Aveling, Gillespie and Cornish 2015). Hartman (2015) speaks of 'strong multiplicity' to address this fluidity of thought and processes of identity reevaluation. Attending to mobile subjectivities methodologically means to be mindful of dynamism of thought, of the possibility of a chorus of different voices that self-integrate, of irony, and to pay heed to the structures of power that make themselves manifest.

Methodologically speaking, I distance myself from Ferguson when she suggests that mobile subjectivities can integrate both the genealogical and the interpretative. I analysed the data through an interpretative perspective, favouring women's interpretation of the social reality they inhabit and produce, starting from a phenomenological point of view that took seriously multi-voiceness and that can elucidate us on the role of mobility in processes of subjectification. Genealogy disappears through the weaving of how this research makes gender. All research participants self-identified as women. When I selected them and they agreed to take part to the research, they did so as women. The research sets off from an interest in the gender divide and patriarchal gender relations in urban North India. Research participants were asked about their experiences as individuals/dividuals, but also as women, since female subjectivities are at the core of the research question, and were not necessarily encouraged to remove themselves from the category of "women", but rather to reflect on what gender meant to them. For a work that counts amongst its objectives that of dismantling oppressive and reductive binaries, this research might involuntarily build into the strengthening of the oldest binary of all. I suppose it is a compatible contradiction that as a social scientist I will have to accept ironically.

Encountering Mobile Subjectivities

In what follows, I provide three ethnographic examples where research participants' subjectivities were reconfigured through an engagement with dominating relations of power. In the first example we encounter a challenging subjectivity produced contextually and relationally. In the second case, the research participant's thought process highlights how she performs a learnt subjectivity in relation to traffic. In the third instance, we see how the combination of gender relations, social class (and ethnicity) can yield to mobile understandings of the self and one's possibilities.

Redefining gender roles

As already suggested, in Delhi, women's presence in the workforce and in public space is often questioned and seen as questionable. This is particularly true for the poorer strata of society. Amongst my research participants were a number of taxi drivers. All women engaged in this profession in Delhi are from a low class background and have entered this line of work through the help of an NGO, Azad Foundation. Some of them have found employment with Azad's partner for profit organisation Sakha. I joined one of them, Gayatri, on one of her night shifts to pick up clients at the airport. Whilst we waited, it was around 1.30 am, a man stroke up conversation. He was a personal driver, waiting for his employer. Bypassing me, he started talking to Gayatri to enquire about what she was doing there at that hour, and what company she worked for (Sakha employees wear a uniform). She replied that he could call Sakha if he wanted to learn more. In previous interviews she had mentioned how often this happens: men inquiring, asking, starting what she felt were inappropriate interactions. We had only been standing at the gate for ten minutes when the man had approached us. He became increasingly more aggressive in his statements: women should not drive, women are not drivers. And certainly not taxi drivers, that is a man's job, and not at night. Her reaction, she told to me later, was a rehearsed one, as it was not the first time something similar had happened to her. She did not lose her temper in front of the man's unappealing tone. She replied that that was his opinion and that that was her job, period. She kept smiling and giggling with me throughout the conversation, switching from Hindi to English, but, whenever she would turn to him ,her smile solidified in, what seemed to me, contempt.

Gayatri was using public space for the wrong reasons, doing a man's job, and at the wrong time of the day, in the deep of the night. This subversion of socially acceptable

rules might have given the stranger the confidence and the right to bother us, to interrupt our conversation and question her. However, the way she handled him and did not let him intimidate her, spoke of a challenge of social hierarchy and unequal gender relations, but also of how women gain confidence according to the space they are in. After the encounter was over, she told me that the busy airport, my presence and her colleagues', gave her the confidence to dismiss the man. Had she been alone somewhere else, she would have handled it differently.

Whilst contesting models of womanhood that would prevent her access to economic independence, and her use of public space, in her home life Gayatri told me how she adheres to gender roles that see her doing large chunks of household work, like taking care of meals and cleaning. She told me that she has had many fights with her father and her brother regarding her job as a taxi driver - they accused her of being spoiled or of lying about what she was doing - but she never contested having to perform her household duties as unmarried daughter. Her *feminist self* gains turf and recedes, negotiating her self-positioning according to social demands and personal aspirations.

Riding and adaptation

Amongst my informants there was a general understanding that performing a certain type of confident and aggressive femininity would earn you more respect and hence more security whilst driving or riding, especially in a city one is not too familiar with. Some of the women I interviewed were university students and had only moved to Delhi a few years before for their postgraduate studies, and did not necessarily know the city very well. Thus, they often spoke of how the process of acquiring confidence of learning how to ride their scooters in Delhi, was one that moved away from the securities of university campus towards the uncertainty of the metropolis outside, but that also forced them to rethink of themselves and the way they projected their riding personas.

When I interviewed Amrita, a PhD student, she talked with much anxiety about riding outside campus and how she slowly learned how to build her confidence in order to gain more turf and be more autonomous in Delhi. Every time she had to learn something new that had to do with the scooter (having it serviced, having it fixed, getting gas, going off campus, driving when tipsy) she looked for her friends' support to accompany her. As she grew more confident on how to manage such problems, she

became more autonomous. This proved most complicated the first time she had to drive on her own to Chanakyapuri, a neighbourhood about 6 kms north of the JNU campus:

A: *First day I went alone, I usually used to take someone with me, cos I was not used on Delhi streets, I was fine, I don't know what this man was doing behind me, on a four wheeler, he kept honking, you know in Delhi, without any reason, I was like ok fine, keep honking, I'm not doing anything wrong, I'm on the road, in my lane... [...], it made me nervous, what is happening? I mean we are on the road, and he touched the scooty, the scooter with his car, you can imagine the first time I was alone on the street and somebody brushes by, and even a slight brushing of a car, a four wheeler would just disbalance, but I kept going straight, but I started sweating, I didn't know what I was doing wrong, the main reason is that they get to know that this girl is not confident enough, and the way I was driving, seriously, I do not like to honk, because it's very common to honk, the day I was honking for no reason, ah ah ah get out of my way, fuck off, they are like... I thought this was the way of life! You have to show aggression, I have my cousin doing it. She used to ride from East Delhi to South Delhi to her college on a scooty, and she said I give you a lift [...] and she said I just don't like this kind of driving, but that's the only way you can survive, that's what I realized. She used to go on the highways with that little scooty pep, and go pep, pep, pep, like this, constantly, what is she doing?? But she was safe, because then they realize that this girl is aggressive, she is not gonna take any you know, harassment, or any shit or whatever.*

In this monologue, Amrita adapts her sense of self and subjectivity to traffic, which she perceives as ruled by patriarchal aggression. A not so confident individual who feels more comfortable to be guided through new challenges by friends and family, Amrita had to forcefully rethink her sense of self when alone on the road. She followed her cousin's example, and, when driving, she now embodies a new confident persona. She also had to adjust her vision of the world, what she calls *"the way of life"*, and her subjectivity in a reality where you have to fight for your security, space, and right to urban mobility.

Class, Gender (and Race)

In September 2015, I set off with Kimmy, another research participants, Sarah, a 30-year-old wedding designer and single more, and a couple of male friends to Rajasthan for a weekend in a fort-turned-resort. We were travelling in Sarah's car and she was the

one driving. We picked up Kimmy in Gurgaon, and as soon as she boarded the car, she voiced her disapproval of Sarah's attire, who was wearing shorts and a sleeveless top. Kimmy was herself wearing a dress, but had put something on top of it for the car journey. It was not out of traditionalism that Kimmy thought Sarah was not properly dressed. She argued that her revealing clothes were inappropriate for the outskirts of Delhi and a Rajasthani highway, and that she would receive unwarranted attention. In her relationship with Sarah, Kimmy was the modern and yet responsible one who has a more sensible understanding of the complexity of things. Sarah shrugged Kimmy's comments off, made a joke about it and carried on driving. However, when we stopped at a toll gate, vendors surrounded the car and stared inside. "I do not care if they look", Sarah said proudly.

This anecdote highlights two different attitudes towards Indian society amongst women of a certain social class. Kimmy, in this context, and in line with our interviews, thought it best to wear something in the car to hide her cleavage. She did it for herself, and for everyone else in the car. She was not happy about it, but compromising with covering herself up, while on holiday, was a necessary evil. On the opposite side of the spectrum we find Sarah, who claimed not to care about the vendors' stares. Secure in her SUV with her friends, her elite status reflected in the expensive sunglasses she was wearing, she was shielded and protected from the aggressive male gaze of the lower classes. Through her clothing, she stated her determination to not be influenced by repressive cultural norms, but it was only her upper-class privilege that allowed her to do so. This became even more apparent hours later, when we decided to use the pool at the fort.

As we were about to enter the water, Sarah refused to wear her bikini because of a group of middle-aged men swimming next to me. Kimmy was also put off by their presence, and I stared at the two them with some amusement from the coolness of the pool. They told me they felt uncomfortable because those unknown men were going to stare and judge. Judge what, I asked? Judge us for wearing bikinis! Their bodies and attire had again turned into the site of expression of patriarchal modes of relation. I was protected by my fair skin, my privilege to expose my body to unknown men was undimmed thanks to racial inequality. Kimmy and Sarah instead found themselves trapped in the dimension of respectability. Whilst in the car, Sarah had not been bothered. Her social class, and the physical enclave that the car provided, protected her. At the fort, men who could afford to stay at the same resort as her, who clearly belonged to the same social class as her, threatened her. Against them and their

judgemental gaze, she had no defences, and she could not just dismiss them the way she had dismissed the vendors. With these men she was on equal grounds, economically and socially speaking. But gender trumped class (and race trumped gender) and she decided not to get in the pool altogether.

Conclusions

The three examples present contradictions that were not perceived or expressed as such by research participants. Gayatri made herself a herald of female empowerment, but told me without any discomfort that household work was her responsibility. Amrita felt insecure and worried, but had no choice to adapt to the circumstances, no matter how unnatural they felt to her. Sarah claimed disregard for being turned into a sexual object by street vendors while in the safe space of her moving vehicle, but had no courage to undress in front of men from her social class. The women in these stories present subjectivities and senses of self that are contradictory, produced by local power relations and that reinforce or work to counteract these power relations. They take part in producing the reality around them - Amrita creates herself aggression in traffic, and Gayatri works for a more equal society - they inhabit dichotomies, if not with irony, without making them question their sense of self. It is this structured messiness of being made of adaptation, self-renewal and conservative that I choose to refer to as mobile subjectivities, and mobility, forcing engagement with forces, attitudes, situations and people that research participants would not encounter in other way, and that removes them from the reality they are more used to inhabit, creates perspectives from which to explore them.

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