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'Sir, it was my right of way!'

**Examining cultural change and the contested entitlements of
automobility**

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Abstract

This qualitative study uses a frame of entitlements to explore how automobility reflects the complex tensions of cultural change, including shifting privileges within gendered and classed social relations. Through documenting the mobility of a cohort of middle-class women in Delhi, three regimes of entitlement are identified within the city's 'landscape[s] of power' (Bagheri 2017): the car and its impact on the built environment; the constraints of gendered expectations; and middle class entitlement within a neo-liberal city. The findings highlight the capacity of competing entitlements to structure and contest cultural change, as well as the importance of contextualising mobility theory.

Key Words: automobility, gender, Delhi, cultural change, entitlement, urban studies

'Sir, it was my right of way!'

Examining cultural change and the contested entitlements of automobility

Introduction

When visiting Delhi I stay with friends in a compact upper middle class 'colony' (neighbourhood). Their house faces a major road that has seen a substantial increase in the volume of traffic over 20 years with concomitant problems of noise and pollution. Within the colony, the bungalowsⁱ are almost gone, replaced by five story mansion blocks with car parks in the void space underneath. The cars in the neighbourhood are now not only Indian (e.g. Tata), or locally made 'foreign' brands (e.g. Maruti Suzuki), they also increasingly include luxury models and SUVs. The rhythms of the colony are marked by the rhythms of automobility. In the morning there is congestion on the back road as parents and drivers drop children at the private pre-school. During the day there is congestion in the service lane as drivers, families and patients queue for the private hospital. Along residential streets, drivers wait outside houses, on charpoys, in their cars or cleaning them. In the evening, a crowd of cars gathers outside the neighbourhood social club. Gated checkpoints have been installed in the side streets and service lane to prevent 'rat-running' at peak times, and to monitor who is coming and going at night. The main road, an expanding six to eight lanes, roars throughout the day, becoming worse after 11pm when the truck curfew is lifted and larger goods vehicles can come into the city, around it, and out the other side. A barrier placed in the middle to demarcate traffic flow has made crossing this road even more difficult for pedestrians, mostly lower income workers and domestic staff traversing to and from the market on the other side. Metro construction exacerbated congestion and changed entry routes into the opposite colony. Traffic lights were installed to enable a crossing point but were largely ignored until a traffic warden was eventually stationed there. There is now also a footbridge but in the wrong location for easy access to the market. My friend would drive if she needed to get to the other side (a three minute walk), necessitating a detour of 10-20 minutes, depending on traffic, to be able to make the u-turn. Most days she would also drive five minutes to the main road on the other side of the colony to pick up her daughter returning from work, who preferred to

avoid walking through the neighbourhood in her professional dress, and thus also avoid what she felt as the uncomfortable gaze of other residents in the street.

This vignette encapsulates many of the concerns surrounding automobility within the context of globalisation and cultural change in Delhi. The car is an aspirational commodity and the geography of the city has shifted to accommodate it. From the 1990s, as the Indian economy rapidly opened outwards, automobility has become embedded in everyday life for increasing numbers of people. Freund and Martin (2007) make the case that this is a global phenomenon, but the context of Delhi raises particular issues for our understanding of automobility, including the need to decentre knowledge production (Schwanen 2017; Kwan and Schwanen 2016; Cresswell 2014, 2010; de Koning 2009; Cristaldi 2005; Law 1999). With its entanglement of experiential, social and technical elements, automobility is a culturally embedded process, requiring us to take account of local inflections and to think through the specific 'landscapes of power' (Bagheri 2017, 7) in which it occurs. As I argue in this paper, this set of power relations becomes visible in the claiming of entitlements, that is, a right to the city, including its roads and pavements, but it is also evident that cultural context impacts on the distribution of these privileges.

This contextualisation of automobility requires a lens sensitive to the complexities that can arise from competing entitlements, the relationship between mobility and immobility, and the jagged, unequal processes of cultural change. To this end, I use a gendered analysis. Tran and Schlyter (2010) note a need for more attention to gender in transport planning and research, which has in the past, according to Binnie et. al. (2007, 170), posited 'a universal subject without considering the kinds of banal, everyday restrictions placed upon the mobilities of women' (see also Preston & McLafferty 2016). Not all 'individuals have choices' (Lyons & Chatterjee 2008, 196), or at least the same choices, when it comes to commuting and travel time, for example. It is recognised there are gendered patterns of mobility, differences in access and, as I argue here, a sense of entitlement to resources, different embodied experiences of mobility, and different meanings given to various mobility practices entangled with subjectivity (Chiellini n.d.; Bagheri 2017; Kent 2015; de Koning 2009; Law 1999). Quantitative studies have reported significant and enduring gender differences, including purpose, distance, and mode of travel (Preston & McLafferty 2016; Cristaldi 2005; Hamilton & Jenkins 2000; Law 1999). For example, Lyons and Chatterjee (2008), in the UK, found men travelled further and faster, and that women were more likely to be engaged in chain

mobility including shopping and school runs. Women tend to travel less, work closer to home and take public transport more, although the gender gap in mileage is closing (see do Carmo et al.'s 2017 Lisbon study; Preston & McLafferty's 2016 USA study; Tran & Schlyter's 2010 Hanoi study; Cristaldi's 2005 Italian study; and Hamilton & Jenkins 2000 for similar findings). Such differences have been attributed to social variables and different 'territorial systems', including inequalities in household work, access to labour markets, and fear of violence resulting in women travelling less after dark (Cristaldi 2005, 269; Law 1999).

However, in a cultural analysis of Delhi, some of these gendered markers of automobility must be rethought, for example, the argument that women engage more in shopping trips is inflected by class. For middle class householdsⁱⁱ in which women are more likely to drive, it is domestic staff who tend to shop locally, or groceries are delivered (local delivery services are now joined by global brands such as Amazon). Unlike the trends noted above, professional women in Delhi may now be commuting longer distances because of the spatial reorganisation of the city: working in new industries, media and business process outsourcing (BPO), for example, in the satellite cities of NOIDA and Gurugram (Gurgaon).ⁱⁱⁱ It can be difficult for women in Delhi to relocate closer to these workplaces if they prefer to stay in the family home until married, in addition to a reluctance on the part of some landlords to rent to single women (Bernroider 2018). This counters, for example, Cristaldi's (2005) findings in the Italian context that it is mostly women without educational qualifications that live with their families and rely on others to drive them. In Delhi, the better educated the more likely a woman is to drive, but she may also still live with family and often rely on others to drive her (e.g. chauffeurs or taxi drivers, discussed further below).

It could be argued that this increased mobility has released some women from 'spatial entrapment' (Cristaldi 2005), as movement around Delhi is connected to processes of cultural change, the circulation of ideas about women's right to the city and neo-liberal discourse that attributes mobility with emancipatory power (rightly critiqued by Bagheri 2017; see also Parikh 2018). However, as Phadke et al. (2011) argue, access to public space can be conditional on the enactment of normative purpose (e.g. consuming, mothering, etc), as the mobility of women meets the restraint of extant cultural norms, gendered expectations and forms of moral governance that can restrict mobility (Butcher 2018). In addition, if driving is an act of turbulence (Cresswell 2014) that allows some women to challenge or negotiate

patriarchy, this mobility is positioned within a wider context of classed inequality. As noted above, in Delhi it is more likely to be women in higher socio-economic categories that drive.

This analysis of gendered and classed practices of automobility captures the necessity for contextualization, as well as illustrating the complexities of cultural change and the need to analyse the intersections at which inequalities are contested within the city's 'landscapes of power'. Such landscapes are decidedly uneven and operationalise a series of competing entitlements (gender and class for the purposes of this study), demarcating 'a right' to particular privileges in the city: from easier access to public space, to owning resources such as a car. Naturalised, habitual, multiple and overlapping, entitlement claims are embedded within stable beliefs, durable structures and meanings that makes sense of social worlds ordered into stratified hierarchies and entrenched in cultural hegemony (Jiang et al 2017). As expressions of subjectivity centred on notions of belonging and exclusion (Russell 2014), with both material (e.g. livelihood) and non-material outcomes (e.g. security, comfort), entitlement claims also reflect hierarchies of judgment (Skey 2014), and pragmatic forms of justification (Churcher 2018) for the perceived 'specialness' of those who make them and the belief that others should meet their needs (Frey and Snow 2005; Whitman 2013).

As part of everyday claims making, narratives of entitlement complicate the understanding of automobility, and in their contestation illuminate wider processes of cultural change linked to Giddens's notion of 'ontological security', that is, a sense of confidence in the continuity of self and surroundings (Skey 2014). Under conditions of cultural change ontological security begins to break down, as expressed in violations of entitlement. For example, as illustrated in this study, mobile encounters on the road can shift the relationship between elite and subaltern, generating a sense of threat or opportunity in the undoing of privilege (Durrheim et al 2011), and highlighting the potential role of automobility in a politics of redistribution within landscapes of power.

I explored these connections between cultural change, automobility and the shifting entitlements of gender and class through a qualitative study (2014-16), working with a cohort of 15 middle class, professional women (40-60+ years old) as part of a wider ethnographic study of the city over 20 years. The choice to work with middle class women was made in light of prevalent debates that Indian cities are being remade in the image of the middle class (Ghertner 2014; Anjaria 2009). In addition, as the middle classes are more likely to own cars, it appears imperative to understand their choices in order to contemplate developing

programmes for more sustainable forms of mobility. In this research, I documented these women's use of private cars as well as taxis and auto rickshaws (known as 'autos') for work, leisure, and shopping journeys, to understand factors that impact on their decisions to drive or not, their experience of driving, and shifting relationships with others in the city as mediated by automobility. Through interviews, go-alongs, and mobility diaries it was possible to discern a series of entitlements to the road set within a milieu of cultural change and shifting landscapes of power:

First, the entitlements of the car within a neo-liberal city that privileges a particular infrastructure and built environment, generating points of 'liberation' and exclusion for drivers and pedestrians;

Second, the constraints of gendered expectations, privileging the reproduction of particular forms of immobility for women;

and lastly, shifting middle class entitlements, highlighting complicated interpersonal relationships of dependency with working class drivers, and at times their own negative experiences of cultural change in the negotiation of new rights of way on Delhi's roads.

Representing contestations of place and social power, these entitlements encapsulated and structured the tensions of culture change played out through the experiences, relationships and practices of automobility. There are concomitant expressions of how the city and its roads should be ordered, ideals of independence and autonomy, and women's right to the city and its roads, that I will elaborate in the following sections.

The entitlements of the car

So ... our lives, our architecture, our designs, revolve around the car. [...] But I have seen in [this colony] the number of cars, the increase in the number of cars. And that's when you ask yourself, there is no parking space. There's nowhere to walk, but they keep buying cars (Gauri).

Delhi appears locked into an interdependent relationship between car use and urban planning, reproducing socio-spatial inequalities and forms of exclusion within a landscape of power dominated by a neo-liberal model of economic globalisation (see do Carmo et al. 2017; Tran & Schlyter 2010; Freund & Martin 2007). Embedded within the city's socio-material structure (Freund & Martin 2007), cars appear entitled to pavements, to communal space, to

former gardens, to intervene in the daily life of residents like Gauri. India's economic deregulation, beginning in earnest in the 1990s, has seen car sales rise an average 14% a year between 2003 and 2010 (Lutz 2015, 596). Symbolic of modernity, aspiration, and individualism, the car industry targets an affluent middle class to realise consumerist desires for social and spatial mobility, comfort and convenience, incorporating elements of freedom and ideology, that is, the right to drive, in their discourse (do Carmo et al. 2017; Schwanen 2017; Doughty & Murray 2016; Hansen 2016; Kent 2015; Lutz 2015; Nielsen & Wilhite 2015; Kent 2015; Lutz 2015; Tran & Schlyter 2010; Lyon & Chatterjee 2008; Freund & Martin 2007). According to Amrute (2015, 349), it is 'the mobile infrastructure of the private vehicle that underwrites economic liberalization in India', supported by Doughty and Murray's (2016) argument that mobility is part of the governing capacity of neo-liberalism, entrenched in its discourse of 'free movement'.

However, embedding automobility in everyday life has resulted in the replication of 'car troubles' (Freund & Martin 2007), such as chronic congestion, high levels of pollution, and increasing demands for associated infrastructure (see do Carmo et al. 2017; Doughty & Murray 2016; Hansen 2016; Lutz 2015; Lyon & Chatterjee 2008; Freund & Martin 2007). Immobility is often the experience of Delhi's car commuters and it is common to end conversations with 'depending on traffic' and 'if I can find a [car] park'. As with other cities (see, e.g. Tran & Schlyter 2010), non-motorized transport that used to be prevalent, for example, the bicycle, is now marginalized.^{iv}

Automobility may provide flexibility and convenience but can also restructure social networks, inhibit social cohesion through degrading communal spaces, and create barriers for public transport and pedestrians (Lutz 2015; Freund & Martin 2007). In Delhi, the unequal distribution and asymmetrical relationships of automobility in a city that is already segregated at many levels, exacerbates the 'stratifying force' of an individual's capacity to move themselves or others (Do Carmo et al. (2017, 31; Kwan & Schwanen 2016), actively marginalising those who cannot or do not wish to drive (Bagheri 2017; Binnie et al. 2007; Adey 2006).

However, despite the inequalities inherent in the car's entitlement to Delhi's infrastructure, for women increased automobility enabled degrees of freedom and security, with some noting that driving was 'liberating' (Lakshmi) and a 'huge advantage' (Anisa). Feelings of empowerment came with freedom of movement as the car fulfilled a variety of needs

(Bagheri 2017; Jirón et al. 2016; Amrute 2015; Lyons & Chatterjee 2008). While widely used for commuting to work or chores, or as a means to be efficient in managing the demands of living in Delhi, cars could also elicit moments of enjoyment, with ‘music on full blast’, visiting friends and ‘dear relatives’ (Parvati), a means of defeating social isolation in a city of sprawling suburbs. During their journeys, ‘beauty’ is noticed even if interspersed with complaints about ‘mess’ and lack of ‘order’: Delhi at night, for example, ‘with the lights and stuff’ and the roadside flower shops, ‘I just totally love them’ (Esha). For some women, when coupled with a driver, the car could become a mobile office (Esha). It was also a necessity for Madhurai because of her disability; she was ‘completely dependent on taxi guys’. The entitlement afforded the car could also shift relations within Delhi’s gendered landscape of power. Yasmeen, for example, had a ‘high status job’ that came ‘with a nice car’, meaning that her position as a divorced woman with outspoken political views could be overlooked by neighbours who wanted her and her status to join the Residents’ Welfare Association (RWA). A sense of independence emerges as part of this assemblage of affects and materialities enfolded into automobility (Binnie et al. 2007), as Draupadi, who began driving in the early 1990s, explained:

Also, of course, it made me... gave me a huge sense of freedom. [...] I could stop on the way and pick up groceries, I could pick up my daughter, drop in and see somebody. It just made that part of it much easier. Otherwise, when I was in buses and I was in autos I would have to think several times before I detoured.

Autorickshaws (‘autos’) were still widely used for shorter journeys by some and occasionally, in suburban areas, a cycle rickshaw, but none of the women now used buses. There was widespread consensus that the old Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) buses were atrocious: over-crowded and unsafe due to speeding and harassment of women. They were often referred to as ‘those killer blue lines’ (Saba). Even though public transport is much improved, including the buses, these experiences at times are engrained and potentially a reason why these women now prefer to drive.

So the school bus used to drop me but I had to come back catching the DTC bus, and it really was, like, the most unpleasant experiences I’ve ever had in my life because... today I don’t take public transport. Like, I have taken the Metro (rail network) once in a while but that’s about it right (Esha).

With a greater presence of women on the roads associated with new work and leisure habits (e.g. ‘people eating out more’, Nandini), it could be argued that the car is linked to the ‘opening up’ of the city into a perceived ‘cosmopolitan’, global, space. With the advent of the transnational BPO industry, Delhi is now a 24 hour city (Srivastava 2014) , with day and night shift call centre workers travelling across it.^v In the past, Nandini recalled, if she was out late ‘either you stayed the night or someone dropped you home’. She now drives herself or uses one of the new radio cabs (e.g. Meru) or app companies (e.g. Uber, Ola). It is perhaps the introduction of these services in the 2010s that revolutionised mobility for middle class women in Delhi who can afford to use them. While security concerns were still articulated (discussed below), Nandini, like several women, noted that ‘the younger generation’ in particular, are more mobile and no longer feeling they need a male companion for safety.

I think Delhi has opened up and become far more cosmopolitan than it was when I was younger. [...] Yes, so my nieces for instance go out until 3am in the morning, all girls. [...] Sometimes they have their own driver and if they can’t find their own driver they say ‘why don’t we take a radio cab’, and they go for a Meru or a ... Easycab and they come home. But in a group. They won’t come alone but a few girls together ... at least two girls together. But it’s no longer... necessary for them to have boys around them (Nandini).

However, despite the experiences of convenience and ‘liberation’, the entitlements of the car could also create journeys that were fraught and bad tempered. There was tension, stress, and anxiety due to congestion, diversions, the constant negotiation with other road users, and accidents that left some women ‘traumatised’ (discussed below). While Kent (2015, 732) argues that ‘the car becomes routinised and subsumed into the background of practical experience’, in Delhi, mundane activities were coordinated according to unreliability and expected disruption. Jaya was anxious for our interview to end. ‘If I go now I will reach home in say 40 minutes. If I go in peak hour I will reach home around two hours’ (we both laugh). Nandini leaves work at 6pm and it takes one and three quarter hours to reach her home 12 kilometres away. Draupadi at times restricted her mobility because ‘the traffic puts you off going long distances. (...) So, it’s just not as simple anymore’. Rage for some of the women was never far from the surface.

Yeah, you know I always keep telling Hana that ... because she is very ... gets very abusive sometimes when she's driving and I keep saying, 'Be very careful because there's a lot of road rage, so do try and keep your temper down' (Anisa).

Familiar routes may ease 'cognitive spend' (Lyons & Chatterjee 2008), and increase feelings of security, but even routine activity, for example, Gauri's regular journey to the physiotherapist for treatment, could be different each day, inflected by disjunction in traffic flows.

4 August 2014: Traffic not too bad today. On previous occasions, slow-moving traffic has been due to obstructions on the road ... a bus that has broken down, barricades erected by the cops.....

6 August 2014: Visit to the physio. Drove myself. Tried a different route on the way back in the hope of avoiding rush-hour traffic but it was equally bad.

10 August 2014: Took me over an hour to get to Shanti Niketan, which normally does not take more than 15-20 minutes (Sunday mornings, 10 minutes).

Having practiced for decades, driving in Delhi traffic was easy for Draupadi: 'I can handle it, I have no problems'. However, the entitlement of the car to Delhi's roads generated fear for others. Esha has a history of trauma following an accident in which she was attacked by a crowd of men who gathered around her car after a collision with a motorbike. She now employs a full time driver.

I don't feel safe being in a car in Delhi. I mean, it's like a nightmare, man, and that's why I don't look, because I get really scared. [...] Yeah, I used to sit in the front and it started scaring me so much that I, basically, was driving my driver mad, you know, doing back seat driving and saying, 'Keep, like, a 20 yard distance'. And he was just like, 'I can't function like this'. So then I started sitting at the back, and where I really, like, I just try and face it out [...] I can't handle the Delhi traffic, I can't handle the pressure of driving. (...) Delhi, you know, it's like being in that bumper car zone, you know, people are cutting in to you, nobody follows rules. You know, if you get out and tell somebody 'why you're doing this', you know, they'll say, 'Your father doesn't own the road. Do you know who I am?' you know, so I'm like, 'Forget it, man, I can't deal with all of that'. So I drive occasionally on a Sunday or

something if I have to go to the parlour or, you know, like, [locally], where parking is not a problem and all of that, but generally I totally avoid driving in Delhi.

Even if not owning a car, it is impossible to escape the impact of its privilege, as noise, pollution and traffic infrastructure divides the city materially and stratifies it socially, for example, limiting pedestrian access. Freund and Martin (2001) note how some are more prone to injury and feelings of disempowerment and insecurity in 'car hegemonic' spaces, while Sheller (2007, 191) considers the impact of the 'violence of luxury' and the potential production of 'second class mobilities', as evident in Saba's narrative below. Without a car, her use of the roads can be, in her words, 'traumatic', particularly after an accident in which she injured her ankle in a pothole and narrowly avoided being hit by a car after she fell.

I mean just in terms of numbers there are a lot more people with cars. People who walk aren't entitled, you know? (...) I ... the traffic screaming down there ... I shivered. I felt it was a traumatic moment. (...) it's always going to be traumatic for me, always. [...] there are too many cars, it's the whole car thing, you know the SUVs are coming and this whole ... this disgusting thing has to stop. It's a class and lifestyle thing which ... you know people like me are so fringe, on the fringe of the fringe, what can I say? You can just get out of the way and luckily I did (Saba).

Later in her mobility diary Saba notes the incident again and is reminded by the marks in the city infrastructure (the refilled pothole) of the marks on her body and her inferiority to the car.

Nandini used to walk in the 1980s and 1990s (not having a car until she was 42), avoiding the difficult negotiations with auto drivers who, in a rare inversion, had a moment of power over middle class commuters until more competition was introduced with the Metro rail network in the 2000s. Walking is still something she likes to do, as does Gauri (although with constraints as discussed further below). Some of the new development areas, such as Dwarka, where Jaya lives, are designed in a way to enable walking within the blocks (each with its own retail section and amenities such as banks). However, several women, including Saba, above, made it clear that in general pedestrians are not entitled to Delhi's roads, even within colonies, which is of particular concern for aging bodies.

(...) when you're younger you don't mind the fact that the pavement is not very much, now I mind all that, as you grow older you mind all that (Nandini).

Reflecting on the limits of her power, Gauri joined her neighbourhood's Traffic Committee to try to influence local plans, such as introducing fines for those who park on the pavement. To date, little had been achieved and her frustration was compounded by an apparent lack of will by 'very influential people' and those not affected. As building works went on around us, we talked about the impact the car was having on her neighbourhood.^{vi}

They're building everything for cars; they're building flyovers, right? The pavements ... cars are parked on the pavements, I mean our own colony ... it is a nightmare. (...) And so that's why I've [joined the committee] because I feel I have a right, I think the quality of life here by the way is abysmal, I mean really abysmal. I want to be able to walk from my house to the club, I don't want to have to get in the car. All my friends take the car. [...] Yes, there's a woman who goes swimming, she's in the house opposite, she will drive from there to the Club [three minutes]. [...] As a pedestrian you have absolutely no rights and I certainly don't think anything will change in my lifetime (Gauri).

Complicating this tendency to exclude, however, was the capacity of the car to provide a protective armature, facilitating privacy and security with specific gendered connotations, that is, avoiding the male gaze. For Madhurai the gaze of others in public transport could be uncomfortable when associated with judgement or sexualisation.

I take only taxi and then autos. I don't use public transport. I don't feel comfortable in that cramped buses and the kind of, er, look I have to face every day.

In so doing, the car functions to enable a negative sense of freedom, that is, allowing women to move through the city by avoiding the discomfort and insecurity of not only public transport, but also spaces of encounter. This ability to extend the private sphere into the public is inevitably inflected by class (see, e.g., Casas & Delmelle 2014, discussed below). Therefore, supporting Phadke et al.'s (2011) argument noted earlier, in a city in which women are perceived to be less entitled to be present in public space, the entitlement to mobility appears conditional and within limits, as Lakshmi notes.

So that has been I think, given the freedom, the mobility which earlier was not there. So on one hand you see that, that kind of positive shift. But on the other hand, the safety [concerns] still continue. Like I drive, I drive on my own, so I don't drive beyond, uh beyond a point.

The constraints of gendered expectations

The limitations noted by Lakshmi illustrate a social context within Delhi's landscape of power that has privileged men's mobility and access to public space. This context underpins descriptions of the city as 'difficult' for women (Bernroider 2018; Butcher 2018; Amrute 2015). While several in this study noted positive changes, such as increased mobility, no longer being an oddity to be a woman driving alone in Delhi, and that added security has come with having more women on the road, simultaneously there is the stickiness of extant cultural norms. Women still circumscribe geographies of avoidance and possibility, with spatial and temporal constraints generated in patriarchal social relations, moral governance, and concerns about safety. The car has been used to facilitate harassment and widely reported incidents of sexual violence (Parikh 2018; Amrute 2015).

The moment I moved to Delhi, my parents started monitoring me. It was like a joke in my family that I have ... I would get the monitoring calls, 9pm monitoring call, 9am monitoring call, whether I'm okay, I'm doing fine, you know (Madhurai).

As a result, there is constant strategising and decision making in the effort to plan journeys: when and where to drive or take another form of transport; when to use a driver or drive themselves; when to use a radio cab or a familiar local stand^{vii}; when to lock doors; when to dress up or down; when to 'rethink' their route. For Madhurai,

it depends on the distance and the duration, the timing. If I'm there for a couple of hours then I take Easy Cab. If it is late night then I prefer my own office guy. [...] Yeah, I don't go out much of South Delhi, but also I avoid the ring roads, you know (...). I don't like to because the kind of traffic, the kind of craziness that people drive, at night especially.

Isolated and unlit routes, 'secluded places', the night, or at least, 'not too late' 'sort of after midnight' (Gauri), are all avoided. Parvati avoids driving at night by organising a more complicated series of lifts from friends in her neighbourhood.

Hardly ever have I driven back after eight o'clock at night unless it's like really (...) I mean, why put those stupid thoughts in your head and feel insecure and everything? So it is stupid. My driver had to wait for me when I came back just now.

Secure destinations and routes are enclosed by familiarity and the presence of others, which results in substantially less travel outside the radius of wealthier south Delhi where these women primarily live and work. Rather than mobility then resulting in ‘expanding, variegated relationships between people and places’, as Binnie et al. (2007, 165) suggest, there is a contracting to the known. Esha notes her zone of familiarity is ‘two square kilometres’. For Parvati, ‘everything’s within a ten kilometre radius mostly. Beyond that I’m not going’. In south Delhi there are no places Draupadi wouldn’t go ‘within limits’, which entails at times locking doors and ‘stick[ing] to the main roads’. Jaya adds the need to know ‘exactly where the place is and where the parking is available easily (laughs), you know I can’t do the very tricky parking’. Dress and time dictate Aditi’s and Gauri’s mode of transport. Aditi lives with her family in a farmhouse on the outskirts of the city, doesn’t own a car and is reliant on taxis.

If I’m wearing ... if I’m dressed like sexily, then I minimise the ... like after 10pm ... time that I’m exposing myself. I’m not walking down the street in that; I’m getting into an auto or getting into a cab (Aditi).

I know that ... for example, if I’m ... let’s say if I’m dressed up ... dressed up means if I’m going to a wedding or something which means you have jewellery on, (...) I would probably take a taxi rather than drive on my own simply because I feel safer if there’s a man driving the cab (Gauri).

Familiarity as an armature extends to not only knowing the routes but also the driver. Generally familiar ‘cab guys’ are used, connected to their office, known companies or a local stand. For example, Aditi’s work as a journalist can require her to travel around the city to unfamiliar areas at night:

I’ll have a cab guy who I have worked with for a long time and then that cab guy and I are kind of like a team. So that’s then ... that I feel is my protective armour is the cab guy. So I go everywhere ... like often I’m out like in the boondocks at three or four in the morning exploring something on my own. But then the cab guy is there.

Similarly, Kavita insists that her niece uses ‘the taxi driver from [their neighbourhood] that we know. He’s like a family friend, right’. Other drivers are ‘anonymous’ and while that may be okay when she is with a group of friends, Kavita is clear that for her niece on her own the

risk is too high. Several women reinforced these discourses of insecurity, intervening in the interaction between nieces/daughters and anonymous men, including drivers, in the interstitial space between home and club or party. In particular, this included instructions for ‘some amount of toning down’ of dress, or to wear ‘a cover’ that can then be removed at their destination. Being ‘single’ increased insecurity for Lakshmi, who felt ‘a bit nervous about driving alone after say 10, 10.30 at night. I avoid it’. Instead she will hire a taxi or ‘rethink my route’ to use ‘more crowded, more well-lit roads’.

The Nirbhaya case (2012)^{viii} in particular, mentioned by several women, and a general sense of failing law and order (Madhurai) and crime being ‘on the rise’ (Draupadi), impacted on their mobility, their relationship with the city and unknown ‘others’ (see Amrute 2015).

There was a different perspective however from Jaya, who didn’t feel she has had difficulties, and notes the tendency for Delhi crime to be sensationalised.

But frankly speaking I’ve been moving and I’m living here all alone and I’m moving all alone most of the time and I’ve never had such difficulty. But again, you are moving among a certain class, in a certain group of people.

As Jaya notes, the importance of being in a crowd for a sense of security is premised on this being the right sort of ‘familiar’ crowd. As the next section examines, the negotiation of automobility in a patriarchal space is complicated by the entitlements of their class and the impact of this on their relationship with, and judgments of, other drivers on the road, and the drivers in their cars and taxis.

The entitlements of the ‘middle class’

The contestation of entitlement as marked out by class is evident in Delhi in two forms of interaction: first, on the road, between ‘old’ standards and the ‘new’ money that has come with economic deregulation and the growth of the middle classes; and second, the relationship in cars or taxis between female passengers and drivers, invariably ‘lower class’ men. As Amrute (2015) argues, socially mobile women in India are now reliant on these men for spatial mobility, and their interactions illustrated anxieties emerging within fracturing social lines; where there is uncertainty about how these new relationships should work. Some of the women made links between driving cultures and the ‘brash’ Delhi created by neo-liberal globalization, signaling the arrival of a new set of relations.

I think that the character of Delhi has definitely changed. When I was younger, it used to be a much more polite, a much more gentele city. In some ways it still is but there's a whole new brash ... I think it's also that there's been just suddenly such an influx of ... I can't say really Western influence but sort of... more trying to keep up with the Joneses in a very superficial way (Hana).

There is a tinge of nostalgia to Hana's recollections of being able to 'hitchhike' in the 1970s, feeling that it 'wasn't dangerous' because there were so few cars. 'So you know that anybody who had them were by and large decent people'. This desire for a more 'gentile' time was also expressed by Nandini who recalled in the past how taxi drivers would be required to wait to take her home (a practice still prevalent for some). In this case, there is a privileging of 'supposedly "cosmopolitan" forms of mobility', the right of women to move around the city, founded on assumptions of others immobility (Binnie et al. 2007, 170). However, this assumption is itself complicated as noted in the previous section, by the entitlements that men have to public space in Delhi, including the economically marginalized; to be able to loiter in public, for example, which women of any class could not do without suspicion (see Phadke et al. 2011).^{ix}

Power is implicated in this production of immobility, that is, waiting time, but there is also a sense in several narratives that, as with gender, class privileges are now being challenged, although in this instance not always to their advantage, as Gauri notes with frustration. It is no longer clear who has right of way, that is, who is entitled.

I just want one car to stop and give me right of way when it is my right of way. It has never happened. [...] Yeah I mean the other day when I was going to the Sports Complex and it was my right of way and I was driving and the car coming from the opposite direction obviously tried to beat me at whatever he was trying to do, so we came nose to nose stopped and then I rolled down my window and I told him – all I said – in English because he looked like an educated person, I said, "Sir it was my right of way". He said, "What is a right? You think a right is everything? Did you not see me coming?" That was the answer! [...] But it's also something else because people don't follow the rules (Gauri).

Gauri is now doubly defeated as she has also lost her sense of entitlement to walk in her neighbourhood (noted earlier), quashed by the entitlement of car owners. Similarly, Esha

described earlier her sense of loss to others' claims to the road ('Your father doesn't own the road. Do you know who I am?'), contributing to her decision to give up driving.

Discomfort at such changes in on-road relations was often expressed in the form of judgments about others' 'uncivil' behaviour (Jiang et al 2017); embedding a sense of entitlement in the distinction of appropriate knowledge and skill, that the 'uneducated', those who don't know how to drive properly, that 'don't follow the rules' and that bring 'mess' to Delhi's roads, do not possess. Draupadi, Esha, Gauri, Anisa and Hana all complain about poor driving skills, and Parvati's mobility diary illustrates a losing battle against rule breakers.

03 August: [I] try to leave on time daily so I can get back home before it gets dark, and i lose my shirt at inconsiderate drivers not using the low beam specially on two way streets. Always have a road block a few minutes before my home in the side lane of M block market GK1, where DAILY, people drive into a one way street, pretending they did not know as there was no signage. So one just sighs and stays cool headed.

NOT TO FORGET, i miss my usual parking slot in the building i stay ... long saga that one.

Driving is now a mass project and social lines are blurred as lower socio-economic classes take to the roads in cheaper cars, while the newly wealthy, who may not carry other markers of class capital such as English as a first language, can now afford to drive more expensive models. Therefore, the symbolic representation of class markers has shifted. Parvati and Gauri recognise this new social formation that has come with globalisation as the 'nouveau riche'. Noting their congestion of roads during shopping trips for religious holidays (mobility diary, 07 August 2014), Parvati also subtly critiques their conspicuous consumption.

In these contestations of space, there were attempts to extend the private, 'our place', into the public as part of imposing a sense of order on the city (a similar strategy seen in extending security from the private to the public sphere noted above), but the question must be asked as to whose image this order is modeled on.

Well that's why I rage! If you had seen our car six months ago you would sort of think, "My god, do these people even know how to drive?" It was bashed out of

shape. Nothing to do with our driving! (...) ... that we have to negotiate, I mean I'm like a haradin, a screeching haradin, "This is our place!" to every single driver (Hana).

While class distinction appears, narratively at least, in possessing the right driving skills and knowing the proper rules, it is also maintained in being able to employ a driver to mitigate the demands of Delhi's roads. Several women had drivers for work or attached to the household, but in the encapsulated space of the car classed and gendered conventions were not forgotten. While a destination may be reached 'as a shared accomplishment' (Laurier et al. 2008, 6), there was a clear set of power relations at play, related to not only knowing how to drive properly but also the rules of interaction between working class men and middle class women. Given high profile cases of sexual violence by drivers against female passengers, Amrute (2015) links ontological security to physical security and class conflict (also illustrating the limitations of the car as a protective technology for women's safety and middle class pleasures, de Koning 2009). However, I would not go as far as Amrute (2015) in drawing a link between economic liberalisation and violence against women as a result of this shifting relationship between working class men and middle class women, ignoring as it does the violence of middle class men. As Phadke et al. (2011) have argued, the construction of middle class women's vulnerability and working class men's threat has contributed to both their exclusions from public spaces.

However, in similar findings to Amrute's (2015, 346), the 'strict bar placed between driver and passenger' was observed in the mobility of the women in this study. Perceived infractions of this boundary resulted in discomfort and, at times, disgust. There is no idle chat with the driver, but instructions and requests or demands in Hindi. There is chiding if they get it wrong. During a ride-along, Kavita argued with our auto driver because he did not like her smoking. In this instance it is Kavita who has breached the convention but she does it deliberately. On the other hand, she will call the new help line to report any auto driver for infringements of the rules. Esha always asks first if it's okay for her to smoke but gets annoyed when a driver then asks for a cigarette; this is too forward. Aditi will sometimes cross social lines completely and talk about sex with drivers, but then also expresses disgust at the request from one taxi driver to smoke the end of *her* cigarette.

Following on from the Nirbhaya case, there has been a spate of gender sensitisation projects to 'educate' auto and taxi drivers, to respect appropriate, classed boundaries, as well as 'Safe

City' programmes including improving street lighting.^x But as seen in other studies (e.g. de Koning 2009), and in the narratives of these women in counselling their nieces and daughters to be cautious (noted above), there is a reinforcement of gendered norms about what is permissible or not in the semi-public space of the car or taxi. It is not private in the sense of being a space of domesticity, therefore, the female passenger is still cautioned to be on guard from unwanted male attention.

Conversely, the driver can be made invisible. On go-alongs we speak in English assuming that the drivers won't understand our conversation. Esha describes her weekly shopping, a journey that takes her 'a good half a day' visiting specialty stores across south Delhi. Throughout she used the personal pronoun, 'I', yet it is her driver who is moving her. Despite being aware of inequalities in the city and their position of privilege, it was still possible for the labour of others to be effaced in their narratives. This extended to interactions with difference in the city as a whole. The economic capacity of these women for car ownership, drivers or the use of taxis had the potential to limit contact with others as Draupadi explains.

I think that what has happened in the city, which is, in my view, very tragic, is that when we were younger because we took public transport and buses (...). We rubbed shoulders with all kinds of people in the city. People who were new to the city, people who were different ... you know, all kinds of people. And I think what has happened, increasingly, is that my security, and the security of a lot of women I know, lies in the fact that you never have to meet anyone you don't want to anymore, virtually. Because you're in a car going from point to point. You're going with purpose, so you know what you're headed for. And, you know, you'll take the occasional auto, you'll take the occasional bus or the occasional Metro but you... in a sense, you have limited your interaction with the city. So, you're interacting only with one face of the city.

Referring back to Freund and Martin's (2007) argument that automobility can splinter social cohesion, the entitlement of the car in Delhi's landscape of power, overlain with gendered and classed expectations, has also disrupted assemblages of interaction. Without pavements, or proper lighting, with too many cars not 'following the rules', with pollution and potholes, and insecurity because of patriarchal entitlements to public space, as well as the insecurity of ambiguity as boundaries shift under conditions of cultural change, there is a sense of these

women's withdrawal from some aspects of city life at the same time as the possibilities of spatial mobility are increasing.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to illustrate the importance of cultural context in decentring mobility theory and policy by highlighting the specific landscapes of power in which automobility occurs, and in which it is possible to see the reproduction and contestation of regimes of classed and gendered entitlement that reflect uneven processes of cultural change. Delhi's residential and employment geographies, its social and economic context, contain underlying cultural scripts operating within a 'landscape of power' (Bagheri 2017) that impacts on the desire, capacity and experience of owning, driving and riding in a car. Points of stratification and asymmetric social relations within automobility are illustrated in claims of entitlement, that is, 'a right of way' in the city; to its roads, public spaces, pavements, as well as feelings of security.

Economic and urban redevelopment in Delhi has privileged the car, related infrastructures and practices in which unequal gender and classed relations are embedded. Valourising aspiration and independence, the car dominates everyday life, even for those who do not drive. It brought an experience of 'freedom' and convenience for some women, enabling greater access to, and presence in, public spaces and leisure activities. However, it also brought a raft of 'car troubles' including impacts on social cohesion through disruptions to public space and public life (Freund & Martin 2007). Therefore, while the car enables new possibilities for autonomy within the context of a city 'opening up' to global flows, it does so 'within limits'. If the car is meant to fulfil 'a yearning to move unimpeded' (Kent 2015, 735), Delhi does not allow this effortless quality. The driver, particularly if a woman, is often on guard. As a result, the increased physical mobility for some women sits in contrast to the obduracy of social context, historical traumas, fear of crime and unpleasant memories of public transport which impact on their (im)mobility choices, creating a disjunction between a desire for mobility (social and physical) and the constraints of immobile expectations as classed and gendered entitlements persist.

Entangled in these findings is the question of ontological security as a shift in cultural frames of reference is reflected in the increasing presence of women in public spaces such as roads. Under wider conditions of cultural change, the problematic mobility of problematic,

autonomous, women, makes blurry the cultural borders between elite and subaltern, who is permissible in public space (de Koning 2009), and unsettling the question of who is entitled to 'the right of way'. The findings from this study also highlight Amrute's (2015) argument that the car has an explicit role in the elaboration of new middle class cultures and resulting class conflicts.

The contestation of entitlement is never more evident than in the relationship between passenger and driver: 'modern', upwardly mobile women, increasingly visible, and working or lower middle class male drivers who they employ or encounter on the roads. These at times fractious relationships illustrated the contested landscapes of power from which entitlements emerge, as well as the tensions within shifting social relations resulting from processes of cultural change in Delhi. In particular, the role of automobility in reshaping the relationship between drivers and women would be an important area for future research.

The findings also highlight the complexity of automobility in both replicating entitlements (the privilege indicated in car ownership, in not having to take public transport unless they want to, minimising time in public space, and being able to pay someone to drive and to wait for them), and generating points at which entitlements could be challenged. In the process of circulation, social and spatial boundaries could be contested through random, fractured, accidental encounters, or through the deliberate claiming of space (e.g. 'our parking space'). Change could be managed by asserting particular forms of knowledge, such as knowing how to drive properly, maintaining distinction by framing the self within a 'modern', cosmopolitan subjectivity (de Koning 2009). Discomfort could also be contained by judgments that demarcated distinctions of civil/uncivil behaviours and normative expectations of privilege (e.g. 'it's my right of way') even if these were weaker in reality as positions of privilege shift. This raises the complications of competing entitlements. There is claim and counterclaim as these women argued for the possibility to access Delhi, utilising at times a position of middle class entitlement but lacking gendered privileges. Their engagement with the city via automobility, mediated by their entitlements or lack of them, highlights the juxtapositions and complexities of processes of cultural change visible in the negotiations and modifications that these women make to reshaping Delhi, as pedestrians, commuters and drivers.

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ⁱ Generally one or two stories, colonial style architecture.

ⁱⁱ The category of 'middle class' is heterogenous and defined in different ways in the Delhi context. The women in this study are all tertiary educated with white collar professions, living in wealthier neighbourhoods.

ⁱⁱⁱ There is very little base-line data on gender and mobility in Delhi and this is an area of much needed research.

^{iv} Attempts to introduce cycle hire schemes have been unsuccessful with cycle paths often used as overflow lanes for traffic.

^v Companies in the BPO sector provide transport for workers, particularly women working the night shift. See Parekh (2018) for more detail.

^{vi} Gauri notes that the Delhi planning authority estimate 2-4 cars per household when houses are extended.

^{vii} Wealthier colonies tend to have at least one permanent taxi stand, therefore drivers become familiar to residents.

^{viii} Jyoti Singh Pandey, or Nirbhaya as she was known in Indian media, was a young women raped and murdered in December 2012 while returning home from the cinema with a male companion. Her death sparked nation-wide campaigns to address violence against women.

^{ix} There is ongoing campaigning to gain unconditional access to public space for women in India, including new forms of protest driven by a generation of young, urban middle class activists (Bernroider 2018).

^x See, for example, [Safetipin](#) and the [Manas Foundation](#); <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-rickshaw-drivers-take-message-of-respect-for-women-to-delhi-s-streets-2034571>]