Week 4: Reconciling the two approaches

I am curious about how Fanon has gathered his data. He talks about the Europeans’ dreams about raping Algerian women for example… is he assuming or does he have a valid data about it?

Before reading the ethnographies about mobility I was not convinced that the piece by Fanon related to the study of space because I was assuming the space to be static. Here is what I had thought before: “I liked the analysis of the veiling practices of Algerian women during the French colonization period, and I think that this piece is very relevant to the studies of resistance and agency. I am not sure though how we can analyze it in terms of space. The veiling practices are related to the political circumstances and the Algerians’ response consecutively in each phase; for example the need for not provoking any doubts among the colonialists pushed the Algerian women participating in the revolution to unveil; or contrarily the suspicion of every woman with a package in hand led the women revolutionaries to start using the *haik* again in order to hide the packages and go unnoticed. Here, I see rather the analysis of the relationship between politics and bodily, cultural practices. The spaces used by the women do not change, nor is it the spatial restrictions that push the women to modify their bodily practices. The relation with space might exist, but only indirectly, when we consider that the European rule was constrained to the European city and thus it was that space which pushed the women to navigate unveiled, but the mere fact that in the same space later on the revolutionary women preferred navigating veiled shows that it is not the space per se that has an influence or is influenced by the bodily practices. It is true however, that the same statement I made above shows that the notion of space should be analyzed in terms of politics and people’s practices.”

But when I was reminded of the notion of mobility by the ethnographies about “phatic labor” and motortaxis, I suddenly realized that Fanon’s text shows how the bodily, cultural and political practices relate to the mobility of the women. The removal of the veil in the European city created the emergence of “that young girl, unveiled only yesterday, who walks with sure steps down the streets of the European city teeming with policemen, parachutists, militiamen. She no longer slinks along the walls as she tended to do before the Revolution. Constantly called upon to efface herself before a member of the dominant society, the Algerian woman avoided the middle of the sidewalk which in all countries in the world belongs rightfully to those who command” (Fanon). Hence, we see how incorporating the analysis of mobility within that of space opens new horizons for understanding the relationship between political, cultural and individual practices.

# This piece reminded me of an article I read recently, “Cover Story: The head scarf, modern Turkey, and me” written by Elif Batuman. The author is a Turkish woman, born and grown up in the USA, she tells about how she changed her opinion about veiling when she went to Turkey and experienced the discomfort of everyday life as an unveiled woman, and the comfort, the changing attitudes towards her when she was veiled. She shows how veiling changed her possibilities for public transport, walking in the streets, interaction with people, and the feeling of safety in public places. I found that this piece is an excellent example of the reconciliation of the phenomenological approach and the political-economic approach about the space. Her movement in the space depended on her choice of covering her head or not on the one hand (and when, where, how to cover it), and the traditional, political circumstances and constraints on the other (she also heavily discusses the different politics of the Turkish governing bodies, and the historical changes).

# Similar to Fanon’s text, Elyachar’s shows the importance of studying a dynamic notion instead of a static one. Instead of seeing the politics of empowerment as targeting women, she saw them as targeting the social channels that some women operate. This change of focus changed the whole perspective about the empowerment. It showed how these channels, although not profit based themselves, have important roles in shaping the infrastructure for profit based economy.

# I was convinced, hence, that the study of space, or any phenomenon, cannot be limited to fixed entities, but should also always analyze the mobility of people, goods, or networks. And I think that looking at mobility opens more space to see agencies, different possibilities people have, and a stronger potential for change.