Rosie Carter
Space, Place, Power
Reading Response: Week 4

Lefebvre’s critique of everyday life argues that it is the site of all life, where fragmented processes, structures and practices play out together; the intersection of "illusion and truth, power and helplessness; the intersection of the sector man controls and the sector he does not control" (40). Everyday life is made up of small, individual, “humble” events which are at the same time part of “an infinitely complex social event” (2008:57). Lefebvre attempts to de-alienates the worker from production, by drawing attention to everyday life; “The critique of everyday life analyses 'life', as it is, without making an obscure entity of it; it studies the negative and positive elements which confront one another; it studies the new conflicts and the new contradictions in what is new, knowing that the new is (more or less) everywhere . . . Thus it knows that the new man must resolve his own contradictions in order to develop as a man.”  (2008: 66).

Fanon’s 'Algeria Unveiled' uses the specific context of Algerian women’s role in revolutionary action in the national liberation struggle, to exemplify the body’s role in navigating urban space and how political practices could be mediated through this. In conditions of combat, Algerian women traverse colonial spaces with “new attitudes, to new modes of action, to new ways. The Algerian women in Fanon’s account use the veil as a symbolic tool, one which is at once oppressive and confining, whilst defiant and concealing. The body is thus used as a technology for resistance, negotiating national liberation from a corporeal scale, through which a new consciousness is mapped out.

Sopranzetti and Elyachar both draw upon the notion of “phatic labour”, through accounts of motorcycle taxis in Thailand, and who women in microfinance projects produces communication channels in Cairo. These “produce communicative channels that can transmit not only language but also all kinds of semiotic meaning and economic value” (Elyachar 2010: 453) but are often excluded from the benefits arising from these channels. The Motorcycle taxi drivers of Bangkok transport commodities, lifestyles and ideas between interconnected but different temporal spaces of the urban and rural environments. Both accounts reflect on the rhythms of global capital flows, and provide accounts of how these rhythms are operated and modulated by “phatic labourers”.

In all three cases, Fanon, Sopranzetti and Elyachar, the consciousness of political-economic inequality aroused in phatic labourers and in the Algerian women, morphed into political struggle, which accumulates in a transformation of everyday life. All three cases also contained accounts of mobility, which creates channels, connections on which political economy is shaped, but these mobilities are “constantly challenged by their own fragilities, the same fragility I showed in Bangkok’s urban configuration and in the drivers’ movements across the city.” (Sopranzetti, 2013:88). I am interested in how everyday life is remade by those who do not face the same level of fragility; how does one remap everyday life in the same way if one is not resisting these forms of hegemonic power?

References Cited

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