Economy and Society

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/reso20

Waiting and the gendered boundaries of work among India's poor

Lucy Dubochet

To cite this article: Lucy Dubochet (07 Mar 2024): Waiting and the gendered boundaries of work among India's poor, Economy and Society, DOI: 10.1080/03085147.2024.2315725

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2024.2315725

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 07 Mar 2024.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 33

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=reso20

Economy and Society
https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2024.2315725

Waiting and the gendered boundaries of work among India's poor

Lucy Dubochet

Abstract

Poor people in India routinely have to wait for short-term employment, basic services and subsidized goods. Based on fieldwork in Delhi, this paper describes how this waiting blends into an environment where men are underemployed and women try to make ends meet by engaging in contentious public activities. While negotiating destabilized gender roles, the latter downplay their wait for services and describe much of their paid and unpaid work as 'mere' waiting and just 'passing time'. In complex responses, they sometimes internalize the relations of power that keep them waiting, while subverting them on other occasions. Exploring what these women hide or minimize brings to light a host of activities that question our understanding of the boundaries of labour, idleness and the broader work of social reproduction.

Keywords: waiting; time; work; labour; gender; India.

Lucy Dubochet, Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy, Graduate Institute of International Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland; Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland; Department of Geography, University of Lausanne, Vaud, Switzerland. E-mail: lucy.dubochet@graduateinstitute.ch

Copyright © 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Introduction

Amidst the darkness of the small windowless room where she lives with her family of four, Sarah Bano bends towards the light that enters through the open door.[1] She is sticking beads of shimmery plastic on a piece of pink velvet, and barely looks up to greet me. But when I ask her what she is doing, she replies 'nothing'. Earlier, she answered 'no' to a survey question about whether she engages in paid labour. Now, she explains that she would do 'proper work' and sell cosmetic products in the nearby market if her husband let her do so. He also wants her to stop her embellishing work, but the family is in desperate need of money. So, despite their frequent conflicts, Sarah keeps working on the ornamented fabric she then sells to a contractor.

She was not the only one to downplay her paid work in the two poor neighbourhoods of Delhi where I conducted research. Others described it as merely waiting, or 'timepass' in the common Indian English expression and its Hindi equivalents *samay gujāranā* (passing time) and *samay kātanā (*spending time). They also consistently understated the extent of their waiting for free drinking water, subsidized food, etc. The long and unpredictable hours they spent at home waiting for a signal that supplies had arrived were simply absent from their accounts. So, too, was much of what they did during that wait – as I found when combining a survey about how residents spend their time, with in-depth ethnographic interviews and observations of their daily lives. Initially, I had meant the survey to support the ethnographic evidence, but soon the first apparent contradictions emerged between what my respondents said and what I saw them doing; what they said in one setting or in another. Eventually, a broader pattern came to light, in which women especially downplayed their waiting for basic services, while also describing much of their work as little more than 'just waiting'.

How, then, should we understand this pattern, and what implications does it have for the reality of labour, work and idleness among Delhi's poor? In what follows, I show that people's discounting and minimizing sometimes reflects their internalization of the gendered constraints that limit what they can do with their time. On other occasions, it may reflect their tactical adherence to these constraints. In an environment where male underemployment destabilizes the region's starkly gendered role distribution amidst frequent religious and caste-related tensions, it gives women the space to go about earning their household's subsistence or negotiating with service providers.

These findings make at least two broad contributions to discussions about the reality of work in India and beyond. Methodologically, first, they are significant in the wake of India's first ever complete time-use survey (NSSO, 2019–2020).[2] Part of a wider trend across countries of the Global South, the new evidence responds to long-standing criticism that the historical focus on productive labour ignores many forms of work done by women (Antonopoulos & Hirway, 2009; Deshpande & Kabeer, 2021; Franck & Olsson, 2014; Jain, 1996), while also failing to capture pervasive underemployment among the informal workforce

(Charmes & Hirway, 2006 ; Hirway, 2012). The hope is that the new time-use surveys will overcome these shortfalls. However, my findings suggest that, while a valuable addition, they, too, are likely to downplay the dimensions they are meant to expose.

This methodological point ties into substantial questions about the gendered nature of work and idleness among Delhi's poor. It draws attention to long and under-reported hours during which the wait for essential services blends into home-based labour and domestic work. In this portrayal, the state plays the ambivalent role it often has in the lives of India's poor (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005; Gupta, 2012): a provider of goods that supplement otherwise unviable wages, its delayed and unpredictable supplies also cast a long shadow of constraints over the mostly female crowds who wait. Hours of waiting and home-based work, thus, expose the twofold hierarchy of power that has residents (male and female) waiting for providers, and women waiting for in-kind goods while men go out and look for scarce income.

Those same hours, however, also see women organizing their waiting, or negotiating among each other and with providers. As they do, they invest in societal institutions that keep them from fighting with each other, maintain checks on providers, and play an important role in local democratic life. What they do while they wait or claim to be doing 'nothing', thus casts light on a series of essential and contentious activities that straddle work and politics.

My attempt to interpret these practices connects two distinct scholarly discussions. In anthropology and related disciplines, it builds on a renewed attention to waiting as a two-sided condition, born out of limited resources and power (Auyero, 2012; Bourdieu, 2000 [1997], p. 228; Khosravi, 2017, p. 81), but which can also be a space of relative freedom and creativity (Janeja & Bandak, 2018; Jeffrey, 2010a). In showing how essential this active side of waiting is for people's subsistence and their ability to function as a community, I make the link with feminist writings critical of how we think of the demarcation between 'labour', 'idleness' or the broader work of reproducing life and societies (Fraser, 2022, p. 20). I, too, find that the 'boundary' between them involves untold relations of dependence and exploitation, and I argue that these relations hide in plain sight during such moments where people are waiting, or claim to be doing nothing.

Waiting and the contested boundaries of work

The definition of labour and work has long been a focus of debates. In the 1970s, feminist writers were already arguing that the emphasis on productive labour, and on that portion of a population's time that can be commodified, ignores the contribution of unpaid domestic work (Dalla Costa, 1975; Fortunati, 1995; Frederici, 1975; Mies, 2014). In the years since, the argument has broadened to encompass activities straddling domestic work and the voluntary time devoted to friends and neighbours, community associations, environmental

conservation and politics (Bakker, 2007; Bhattacharya & Vogel, 2017; Ferguson, 2020; Fraser, 2022; Katz, 2001; Mezzadri & Majumder, 2020). Without these involvements, it is argued, life and society would not be preserved and economies would cease to function. Their exclusion, thus, ignores an essential contribution, while also misrepresenting these activities as removed from societal inequalities, when they are, on the contrary, defined by them and involved in their reproduction (Bhattacharya & Vogel, 2017; Papanek, 1979).

Scholars rooted in economies defined by labour informality and reliance on subsistence activities have raised other concerns. A narrow focus on productive labour, they observe, obscures the complicated reality of work in these environments. It tends to misrepresent precarious part-time jobs as either full employment or unemployment (Floro & Komatsu, 2011). In ways that connect with the feminist argument above, it also fails to capture the contribution of subsistence work, which is often done by women (Antonopoulos & Hirway, 2009; Jain, 1996). Even their paid work can go unreported because it is contentious or seen as secondary to the male breadwinner's income (Deshpande & Kabeer, 2021; Franck & Olsson, 2014; Li, 2023).

Critical writers have long argued that these omissions are an intrinsic part of capitalist accumulation (Bhattacharya & Vogel, 2017; Fraser, 2022). They keep production costs low by eschewing the price of flexibility and social reproduction, sometimes even by failing to remunerate actual labour time. The result, they point out, is a profoundly unstable situation where wages are pushed below the minimum level required for the survival and reproduction of a population. It is a situation that would not sustain itself without the state's dual role – as a provider of goods and subsidies that supplement otherwise unviable wages, and as a force disciplining people into availability. If, therefore, there is a 'boundary' between labour and the many other involvements required for life and societies to endure, it is a problematic shifting one, straddled by relations of dependence and exploitation, and by the struggles that emerge around these relations (Fraser, 2022, p. 25).

The history of labour force statistics features a series of attempts to come to terms with this complicated reality – one that also illustrates how the critical discussion above moved from a radical fringe to the mainstream. In the mid-1980s, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) standard definition expanded beyond its then narrow focus on remunerated activities to include all involvements in the production of goods or services, although not unpaid services consumed inside the household. Over the following years, demands to take these unpaid services into account became mainstream: by 1995, some 189 countries had committed to 'make visible the full extent of the work of women and all their contributions to the national economy' as part of the United Nations Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995, section 68.1).

Finally, in 2013, the ILO followed suit and replaced its focus on labour with a broader definition of work, divided into distinct activities, among which were employment, own-use production including services consumed inside the household, unpaid trainee work, and volunteering (ICLS, 2013). This reform was the clearest break yet with the dichotomy of labour understood as economic

activity, versus everything else defined as economic inactivity. It also improved on a series of older attempts to capture underemployment, thus acting on the two major points of contention above.

While a landmark in the history of labour statistics, these changes do not solve all the challenges involved in measuring casual part-time jobs or the underreporting of women's work. As a result, researchers and policymakers have sought complementary insights from time-use surveys. Once largely confined to countries of the Global North, these have spread across Africa, Asia and Latin America since the Beijing Declaration. A new geography of evidence is emerging as a result – one that is no longer limited to rich and formalized economies. This expansion is taking place, even as casual part-time employment is spreading in countries of the North. The new geography, therefore, is also one where regions that were once scarcely charted now foreshadow features in other regions that have been mapped out for longer.

India is emblematic of this new geography. Here, decades of rapid economic growth have generated limited employment, even as agricultural livelihoods became less dominant. Low unemployment figures, therefore, hide a profound crisis of opportunities, expressed by men's growing reliance on irregular, short-term employment (Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2015; Kannan & Raveendran, 2009). The lack of adequate jobs is also likely to be among the factors behind the much commented-on trend in women's labour force participation which, after dropping for several decades, is now among the lowest in the world (at its lowest, it was less than 25 per cent for women between 15 and 59 years, against 75 per cent for men, NSSO, 2017–2018).[3] Critical arguments about wages being too low and irregular to survive without additional subsistence work and state subsidies resonate strongly in this context (Shah & Lerche, 2020), as does the emphasis on women's unpaid work and labour (Deshpande & Kabeer, 2021).

The recent time use survey (NSSO, 2019–2020), along with its pilot (NSSO, 1998) and smaller precursory studies of the kind, has and will continue to provide evidence about these long hours of unremunerated work (Hirway & Jose, 2011; Jain, 1996; Srija & Vijay, 2020; Zaidi *et al.*, 2017) as well as declining hours of paid work (Li, 2023). However, these statistics also raise methodological challenges, not least among them, the notorious unreliability of our memory.

Yet, attempts to analyse the ensuing biases are scant, despite the vast technical literature on the subject (Krueger, 2009; TFTUS, 2013). Rare existing claims and counterclaims about whether the measurement understates how busy people are, remain conjectures, as their authors acknowledge (Goodin *et al.*, 2005; Schor, 1991). They also exemplify the focus on time scarcity typical of the discussion about the harried labourers and consumers in rich and formalized economies (Hochschild, 2000; Hochschild & Machung, 2003; Linder, 1971). What, though, of situations where income-generating opportunities are scarce and irregular? What of the many moments that do not fit this temporality of haste and productivity?

This makes the link with studies on waiting in anthropology and related disciplines. Unlike above, where the condition tends to be conflated with the

drudgery of unpaid chores or unemployment, it features here as, perhaps, the most pervasive expression of lacking opportunities. Across many parts of the world, young people are caught in 'waithood', unable to secure the jobs they need to move into a home of their own and have a family (Honwana, 2012; Inhorn & Smith-Hefner, 2021; Singerman, 2007). Even in countries like India, where unemployment is officially low, young men extend their studies endlessly rather than accepting demeaning jobs (Jeffrey, 2010a; Jeffrey & Young, 2012). They speak of 'doing timepass' to convey their feeling of being stuck in a situation that seems to offer ever-dwindling prospects of autonomy.

Less has been written on people too poor to afford such tactics of postponement, but their waiting is present across ethnographic accounts of their precarious work (Breman, 1996, pp. 46, 100; Gooptu, 2013). It also features prominently in depictions of their interactions with the state. As they seek to secure the subsidies and goods that supplement their insufficient wages, delayed and unpredictable procedures expose the unequal distribution of resources and power that force them to wait, while other people can impose the wait. A frequent recourse of corruption (Khosravi, 2017, p. 80), these delays and unpredictability define a form of governance where poor people are made to experience the 'effects of dependency and subordination' (Auyero, 2012, p. 8). 'Making people wait, delaying without totally destroying hope', thus, is part of the 'work of domination' (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997], p. 228), and the state a site of this work, even as it provides the subsidies and goods that provide a lifeline to this underemployed labour force.

Waiting, however, can also be a space of relative freedom and creativity (Janeja & Bandak, 2018, p. 3; Jeffrey, 2010a). When people reach out to power-brokers or organize among themselves, this can result in new political practices and communities (Carswell *et al.*, 2019). In ways that further blur the above boundary between economic activity and inactivity, waiting is not solely the condition of the jobless, but also that of middlemen who trade political influence (Jeffrey, 2010a), real estate (Harms, 2013), and sex, drugs and crime (Campbell, 2021). Waiting thus appears as a 'Janus-faced' condition (Jeffrey, 2010b, p. 477) – imposed on people with limited resources and power in ways that often deprive them of further opportunities, yet also a space where those same people can create new possibilities and sometimes even quietly challenge or subvert the relations of power that keep them waiting.

Like the discussion on labour above, the one on waiting, here, has a particular geography: it features unemployed people on the periphery of ever more connected and fast-paced centres of trade and production (Harvey, 1985), migrants held on the margins of nation states (Bayart, 2007; Haas, 2017), psychiatric inpatients (Pinto, 2013) and prisoners (Foster, 2019). Yet, just like the geography of time-based evidence above, this one, too, is starting to crumble, and new publications are emerging from within its centres about moments that cannot be fitted within their temporality (Baraitser, 2017; Hage, 2009; Janeja & Bandak, 2018). They feature moments of waiting and suspended

time, many of them centred around the bearing of and caring for children, the sick and dying people, thus connecting the literature on waiting here, with the above critique of how the understanding of labour obscures broader stakes around the reproduction of life and society.

Waiting and work on Delhi's margins

My discussion of these moments of waiting and reported 'lost time' draws on research in the two low-income neighbourhoods of Sunder Nagri and Madanpur Khadar. Starting in 2015, I conducted a survey covering basic socio-economic and time-use information of 210 individuals and their 952 household members.[4] Over the following 18 months and in several shorter visits since, I performed in-depth ethnographic interviews with 60 residents. Those, in turn, blended into informal conversations and observations at service points, street corners and other sites of waiting.

Sunder Nagri and Madanpur Khadar are resettlement colonies built to accommodate people evicted from slums in central parts of the city. Their initial populations of 80,000 and 100,000 grew by an additional 40,000 to 50,000 each, as new slums developed in and around the sites. Both are in India's National Capital Territory, but far from its centre, on what was once agricultural land bordering the poorer state of Uttar Pradesh. Madanpur Khadar, where the last resettlements occurred in the early years of this century, is still surrounded by fields and waste-segregation sites. All but children remember their previous homes near the economic centre of Nehru Place. 'Everything used to be nearby; here, there is nothing but a wilderness', they say. In contrast, the city has closed in on Sunder Nagri, which was established in the 1970s. But here, too, and in ways that echo testimonies in other resettlement colonies (Tarlo, 2003), seniors recall the hostile wilderness that they were relocated to.

Many men lost their work in the move and the remoteness of their new homes compromised the search for alternatives. In my survey, just 21 per cent of working-age men (15–59-year-olds), reported being regularly employed, compared to 40 per cent across Delhi (NSSO, 2012b).[5] Twelve per cent said they were unemployed, compared to 4 per cent across the city. Among the others, underemployment was pervasive.

In Sunder Nagri, two traditional weaver communities, the Hindu Kolis and the Muslim Ansaris, dominated the otherwise diverse group of residents. A few elderly men still worked with their handlooms, but most others had transitioned into tailoring jobs when power looms took over. Initially, they had joined nearby manufacturing workshops, but these were shut down in the late 1990s, after court orders banned such industries from operating in residential areas. Most men who remained in the trade worked from home. Previously regular wage labourers, they were now paid on a piece-rate basis. While a few had moved up the production chain and subcontracted work to neighbours,

most had not. Often, their wives helped with assignments for which their combined pay was scarcer and more irregular than the one previously earned by men alone, according to their reports. Their work was also profoundly exposed to shocks: by 2022, many families had had to take on debt or sell essential assets because demand all but stopped during the COVID epidemic and had yet to return to its pre-pandemic levels.

Underemployment was just as widespread in Madanpur Khadar, where residents earned their livelihoods from a variety of low-skilled construction and service jobs: there were daily-wage labourers on building sites, retailers, pest controllers, chauffeurs and drivers of different rickshaws propelled by liquefied gas, electricity, or muscle and sweat. As in Sunder Nagri, some people now rented out vehicles and other commodities. The best connected became middlemen, often doubling as political intermediaries and real estate dealers. As in Sunder Nagri, however, these stories remained rare, especially after the pandemic, when some people who used to own vehicles and other commodities had had to sell them.

For many residents, waiting took up much of their life and work. The daily labourers waited at hiring sites, often only to leave empty-handed after a few hours. Retailers and middlemen waited for clients. Tailors could spend weeks waiting for assignments, then work 14-hour-long shifts when demand spiked. Waiting, in sum, was part of a localized economy defined by an overall paucity of resources and stark internal inequalities. A myriad of microscopic processes of accumulation and exploitation contested with each other, as neighbours subcontracted scarce work to other neighbours, rented material, or dealt with disputed goods. A few people benefited, but most spoke of being stuck or sliding down the economic ladder.

The economic consequences of this situation were evident in women's discussions. They spoke of lacking food, clothes and schoolbooks for their children. Many also said they wanted to work, although their doing so remained contentious in a region where practices of gender segregation remain influential. These sensitivities notwithstanding, 32 per cent of my female respondents aged 15 to 59 said they were involved in paid work, versus 13 per cent across Delhi (NSSO, 2012b). Mostly, they did home-based sewing or embellishing piecework. Others tended a shop on their windowsills or, more rarely, responded to demands for housekeeping personnel from nearby middle-class settlements.

None of these jobs were well paid, but in a context where men struggled to find work, they were both essential to many households and highly contentious. They positioned women's time at the centre of a tense negotiation about whether to work, and what work to opt for – the lower paid but more acceptable home-based work, or the slightly better paid but controversial alternatives that involved leaving the neighbourhood to work in someone else's house.

These negotiations took place amidst a wider destabilization of the gender coordinates of everyday life. Without a job or a separate place to work, men either had to hang around in public spaces or retreat into homes associated

with female domesticity. Some complained that they could not focus on work, others of having nowhere to go. Meanwhile, women worried about unknown men roaming around. They would also alert me to the fact that their husbands could come back any time, or asked to speak outside the home, for fear that their spouse would return and disapprove of them talking to me.

Decisions around work were also shaped by the two neighbourhoods' religious and caste profiles. Sunder Nagri was unusual in that only one-third of residents belonged to India's Hindu majority; the rest were Muslim and this proportion was growing because people from this minority were regrouping in response to widespread discrimination (Gayer & Jaffrelot, 2012). This organic recomposition, combined with the dominance of the two weaver communities, has resulted in a tight-knit neighbourhood, where overt tensions tend to be associated with the outside world. Such ties remained, despite growing strains as India's political environment became more hostile towards Muslims in the years since my first visit. Madanpur Khadar, in contrast, was two-thirds Hindu, one-third Muslim, and no one community dominated among the wide range of castes represented. The different groups lived in the uneasy proximity created by patterns of resettlement not yet reshaped by people informally moving in and out. From my very first visit, tensions were palpable in interactions between neighbours, none so much as those between Hindus and Muslims.

As is common in India, these features of identity were closely linked to economic conditions. Muslim men in my survey were less likely to earn a regular wage (20 per cent) than their Hindu counterparts (31 per cent). Many of the former were manufacturing workers affected by the spread of power looms and workshop closures. Hindus, in contrast, dominated the small group of mostly upper and intermediate caste residents who had found stable private sector jobs. Among the Scheduled Castes, there were also several low-level government officers who had benefitted from positive discrimination. Monthly income levels reflected these disparities, with Muslim households earning less on average (12,200 INR) than Hindu households (17,700 INR), and the lower castes among the latter earning less than their peers.

Unlike these differences, which echo nationwide disparities, women's labour force participation stood out. In a region where it is lower among Muslims overall, it stood at 39 per cent in this community compared to 25 per cent among Hindus. Indian women's involvement in paid work is often defined by economic compulsion (Hirway, 2012). These local differences in participation are therefore not surprising in a neighbourhood where Muslims are poorer overall. Nevertheless, they break with the widely held image of Muslim women as 'passive, cloistered and oppressed' (Jeffery & Qureshi, 2022, p. 1), and instead features them negotiating multiple societal fault lines in order to make ends meet (Ansari & Chambers, 2022; Bhardwaj Datta, 2021). The same applies to lower caste women, who were also more likely to be involved in paid work than upper castes, although this holds more widely across India. It speaks to an environment in which economic compulsion

destabilizes gendered roles, and where this destabilization affects sensitive religious and caste identities.

Downplaying paid work

One woman who tried to negotiate these tensions was Sarah Bano, who said 'no' when asked whether she worked, while her fingers continued to glue beads onto a piece of garment. Over the course of several encounters, she would confide that her husband had been without work for the past seven months. 'Every day, he sits at the crossing, and hopes to find someone who will rent him a rickshaw. Just recently, a friend finally agreed, but only for a couple of weeks, while he is in the village'.

He had not studied enough, she complained, was now paying the price for it, and made her stay at home to make sure the children did not do the same. He also wanted her to stop the embellishing work, which he would describe to me as 'useless' and a threat to their relationship with neighbours, which was precarious enough since they were the only Muslim family around. Sarah agreed with this last point, but the money she made was their only stable income. She, therefore, continued to work and had also started doing some of the tasks she used to subcontract to other women in the lane.

The information she imparted over these encounters was typical of the pattern of downplaying analysed in this paper. Only over a series of meetings did I come to realize that the work she initially described as 'nothing' and which her husband called 'useless' had been the family's main income for months. Her account about the amount of money she got from subcontracting work was also much lower than her neighbours' claim. According to her, she took a cut of Rs 5 on each Rs 30 piece. According to them, she paid just Rs 5 for each Rs 30 piece.

What the truth is, I do not know, but the underlying tensions were clear. Neighbours resented the fact that Sarah kept more work for herself and accused her of withholding their pay. With her husband too, the conflict had become so violent that Sarah had considered lodging a formal complaint with the police. She gave up, 'because how would I live?' Nor could the family afford to move out of the lane. Forced to put up within these constraints, minimizing the value of her labour was a means to smooth the edges.

Sarah was not alone in downplaying her work. Reena Koli, who ran a small shop on her doorstep, called it a way of 'passing time'. Her income, she added, 'only covered the small things, like food and water' – commodities, that is, which typically represent a large part of a poor household's expenditure. She, too, would later reveal that she had been the family's sole earner in the past. Her husband, Suresh, who like Reena belonged to Sunder Nagri's Hindu weaver community, had trained as a locksmith, yet had struggled to find work as a young man. With a family to provide for, he followed a recruiter who promised him a job and found himself locked up, his phone, money and

papers confiscated, while he was made to work relentlessly. 'It was so scary', Reena recalled, 'I would call, and call, but he never answered. I thought he was dead'.

Back at home and underemployed again after he finally escaped, he still resisted Reena's attempts to make some money of her own. 'I felt too ashamed', he said when I met him decades later. Despite his opposition, she managed to scrape enough money together to join a savings group organized by a local NGO: 'I hid [when I attended meetings], knowing that he would beat me if he got to know', she recalled. When the same NGO offered her training as a caregiver, she asked its older male director to convince Suresh, who over time came to accept, first the savings group, then her training, and finally her work with a better off patient. For a few years, he remained unemployed, while she earned the family's money. Conflicts between them had ended by the time he finally found a job and she had had to give up hers after a traffic accident left her disabled.

Still, she downplayed her past contributions, and her present one in the shop. What had once been a necessity to avoid conflicts now seemed to have become a way of sparing her husband's sensitivities when she spoke about his past unemployment. In terms of her lesser-paying present work, it appeared to reflect her disregard and echoed how many women and men alike spoke of such involvements across the neighbourhood.

Reena's trajectory was common in that women often gained more freedom as they grew older, partly as a result of their quiet opposition to objections, partly because these objections relaxed as they aged. Identity also played a part. The woman who convinced Reena to join the saving group was a Koli, like her. Home-based embellishing or sewing assignments also moved through networks in which caste and religion played a role. Muslims, especially, dominated the subcontracting chain across both neighbourhoods, along with Kolis in Sunder Nagri. The higher rate of labour force participation among women from these two communities, therefore, reflects not only the weight of economic compulsion, but also the social reality of production chains.

This reality meant that Muslim women often subcontracted assignments to their Hindu neighbours. The function resulted in limited empowerment, but also exposed them to suspicion, as Sarah's situation above illustrates. Three widows in Madanpur Khadar's Muslim minority provide a further example. In ways that, again, highlight the stigma associated with women's labour, they emphasized the shame of their initial months of widowhood, when they were forced to 'go out and beg for work'. As the years went by and more work came their way, they started to subcontract some to their Hindu neighbours. On two separate instances, the latter introduced them to me as someone they went to when in need of help. Having said so, however, one of these groups of neighbours went on to complain about how men from a nearby Muslim quarter roamed around. 'See this wall? It separates India from Pakistan', one woman said, gesturing broadly towards the other cluster. 'No Muslims on this side, one or two, that's it'.

While they spoke, the Muslim widow remained quiet and soon excused herself. As for other women, her silence was a means to avoid conflicts while negotiating multiple tensions of gender, religion and survival.

This pattern of elision and minimizing calls for one more observation that makes the link with the methodological considerations above. While I might have seen Sarah and Reena working just when they claimed to be doing nothing, many others would have done so at a different time, without my noticing. The labour force participation figures quoted previously are therefore likely to be underestimated as is common for such statistics. In the examples above, women sometimes downplayed their involvement; on other occasions, they seemed to internalize a common perception that their work was less valuable. Sarah's husband considered her work 'useless'; others did not include their wives' pay when asked about their family's income. When women spoke of 'doing nothing' or hid their labour, their tactical omissions were often hard to tell apart from their internalization of the lesser value of their labour – but the pattern of downplaying applied either way. This echoes other researchers' findings about how women negotiate patriarchal power from within, without opposing it outright (Dyson & Jeffrey, 2022).

Untold waiting and its hidden work

The pattern of downplaying also applied to people's waiting for the basic services and subsidies they relied on to complement their scarce income: they also had to wait to get the documents they needed to avail themselves of these services. At the hospital, a common joke was that anyone – however young or healthy – who joined the queue would be dead before reaching the front. Older people waited for their pension every three months. More routinely, even, people waited for the monthly ration of subsidized food, and, in parts of Madanpur Khadar, where houses were not connected to the municipal water supply, they also waited for the daily tanker truck that brought their drinking water.

The vehicle was meant to arrive at 10 am, but it usually came later, sometimes as late as 3 pm. Until the horn announced its arrival, people could not leave the lane they lived in. They had to pay attention, because it only sounded twice; once it did, they had to rush because the demand for water often exceeded the supply. Having filled up their containers, they returned for a second, sometimes a third time. The back and forth took around 35 min, according to my observations at different water points, a fraction of the time people spent waiting in their lanes, ready to drop everything when the horn blew.

The same unpredictability characterized the monthly deliveries of subsidized rice, wheat, pulses and other non-perishable food. In theory, people could have accomplished the task throughout the month and without much waiting. But the official distributors only opened when deliveries arrived, and even then,

only for a couple of days for each category of recipient – households above the poverty line who receive less food, those below the line who receive slightly more, and the poorest who receive the most. These dates, while more regular than in the past, still varied by a few days. Opening hours, too, were short and unpredictable, and corruption in the delivery chain meant that there was rarely enough food for everyone. So it was that one member of every household remained available around the date of delivery, ready to rush to the shop when word came that their rations had arrived. For fear of supplies running out, they came as early as dawn, when supplies were expected.

Occasionally, respondents would exaggerate these waiting times, sometimes ironically as in the joke about hospital queues, sometimes angrily or in desperation. The usual tendency, however, was the opposite. Asked about water chores, respondents who depended on tanker trucks provided a figure that was close to the 35 min I arrived at, when timing their actual queuing at several different water points. This was 10 min more than the official figures for people who depended on non-domestic water sources across Delhi (NSSO, 2012a). While this difference can be explained by localized variations in the pace of delivery, the comparison with my observation points to a more fundamental problem: the half hour people spent queuing at the tanker truck was just a fraction of the time they spent waiting for it to arrive, sometimes as late as 3 pm. Until then, they could not leave the lane, but although this temporal constraint stretched over much of their day, they did not mention it, even when I probed about the time they spent waiting while doing something else (India's time-use survey also allows the entry of secondary activities). The constraint was too much part of their daily routine for them to recognize it as part of getting water.

This downplaying included other dimensions. On average, my respondents' estimates of the number of people queuing for water were lower than my observations (23 versus 40). Six out of 10 respondents who relied on the tanker truck also claimed that their daily wait for drinking water had no impact on their other activities, although I routinely saw them interrupting their work when the horn blew. For the monthly wait for food, five out of 10 claimed it had no impact, although the wait in front of the shop often took up much of a day.

The pattern of downplaying was reflected in a comment by one woman who was waiting in front of a subsidized food shop in Madanpur Khadar. At 3 pm, the shop was still closed, and many of the dozens of people sitting around had spent hours waiting. Some of them complained to me, but when I asked whether they knew where they should go if they wanted to raise the issue with an official, or just to solve a problem with their ration card, only one man who lived outside the neighbourhood knew. 'We ask him', said a woman pointing at the shopkeeper's closed shutter. 'What does it matter whether we wait here or there? We just hang around anyway', another added after a silence. Both the time she spent waiting at the shop and the chores she had left to join the queue became, in her response, just a matter of 'hanging around'.

The answer reflects her dependence on the shopkeeper, who cut the ration of anyone who complained, so the man who lived outside the neighbourhood said. Within the broader pattern of downplaying, it also took on a more pernicious meaning. As the woman's wait at the shop combined with the daily wait for water, documents, or other services, it did not matter as much anymore whether she 'wait[ed] here or there'. Unable to leave the lane or make plans for much of the day, her time was emptied of its potential.

That the person making this comment was a woman was not by chance. Two thirds of the people waiting at the shop and behind the tanker truck were women. It was not that fetching water or buying food were women's chores, unlike cooking or taking care of children. If anything, households which followed a strictly gendered role division considered them too heavy and publicly exposed for that. Nevertheless, if someone had to remain in the lane to get food or water, it was usually the women. Even when men struggled to find work, they left to wait at hiring sites or, as women often put it, 'hang around'. Having men stay back, while women left for work was associated with too much shame, as seen in Suresh's testimony in the previous section. Nor did the delayed and unpredictable deliveries allow both to leave the lane in search of work.

In theory, households could buy non-subsidized food and pay to have water delivered to their doorstep. But the monthly premium of about Rs 450 for each represented about 3 per cent of the average income for households. No one felt that they could afford to buy non-subsidized food, and only about half of the families who lived in areas serviced by the tanker trucks paid the premium for water. In a setting where female wages were low and socially contentious, the extra cost added weight to the preconception that women's paid work was not worth the trouble.

The comment about 'waiting here or there' and the broader pattern of downplaying it connected to, thus appear at least partly founded in women's internalization of the relations of power that had residents in general waiting for providers, and female residents in particular waiting for in-kind goods while men went out to look for income. This double hierarchy, combined with people's principled understanding that food and water chores were everyone's responsibility, might also explain why men were less uniform in their downplaying. Although they, too, did not mention the broader temporal cost of unpredictability, more of them reported being routinely involved in getting drinking water (62 per cent) and subsidized food (38 per cent) than matched the gendered profile of people in the queue. I also did not hear them minimizing their paid work in the same way as women, although this might be partly linked to the fact that, as a woman myself, my interactions with men were more formal and limited.

In this situation, the state played the ambivalent role often described in the literature about its interactions with India's poor (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005; Gupta, 2012). While a lifeline for residents, its delayed and unpredictable services also undermined the ability to seek better opportunities of the mostly female crowds who waited. This halting delivery routinely cemented a

gender hierarchy that other state programmes were trying to equalize, through vocational training for women, equal education, and more. They did so as part of a longer history that had increased these residents' dependence on these services, by forcefully removing them from their livelihoods during resettlement, or by closing down the manufacturing workshops in their new neighbourhoods. The long and unpredictable wait for services thus became a routinized expression of how the 'very scene of care' was also one where 'violence' and dispossession was enacted (Gupta, 2012, p. 24).

Not all scenes of waiting were as oppressive as the ones discussed so far, however. In Sunder Nagri, where there had been a history of mobilization against corruption, delays were generally shorter and more predictable. When they became too long, residents sometimes complained to officials at the nearby district office. Mostly, they went as a group. 'We used to go alone, and they would just humiliate us, but then we learned', Reena said when I bumped into her and a group of neighbours who were complaining to their local elected representative about a blocked drain.

Queues also looked different in Sunder Nagri, because people here left their bags on the ground to mark their place, while they sat in the shade. This system, which requires some trust and the ability to discipline cheaters, is common in India and it makes a major difference in a region where temperatures can reach highs of 40 degrees Celsius in the summer. But it was not applied in Madanpur Khadar, where people queued in person or waited in the nearby shade until the shopkeeper arrived and then rushed to be among the first served. Arbitrary delays and scarcity pit people against each other and can undermine the trust required for collective action (Corbridge, 2004; Schaffer & Huang, 1975). The contrast between the two forms of queuing thus also appears to reflect how, as these constraints ease off, new possibilities emerge.

Even in Madanpur Khadar, the scenes of waiting for food deliveries contrasted with that for drinking water. At many delivery points, three or four women formed what was known as a committee. The group made sure no one jumped the queue, called the driver when he was late, or reported excessive delays to a well-connected resident, whose contacts had been instrumental in getting the tanker trucks to deliver water to the neighbourhood. Most of these women were among the poorest in their respective block. They told vivid stories of how they used to walk across the neighbourhood in search of safe water before meeting their well-connected neighbour. The daily hours they devoted to the committees had given them some ascendence over their neighbours, albeit one that was coloured by suspicions that they were benefitting from their role. Often, the same women also gained a meagre additional income from subcontracting work to these neighbours. For both their paid labour and their role in the water committee, what had started as a necessity became a source of contested authority.

Whether on the water committees, or when they set up surrogate queues and complained together, these women invested in societal infrastructures that prevented fights, allowed them to wait in more comfort, and challenge corruption

in the delivery line. Local political workers, although mostly men themselves, were aware of this capital. They worked with women on all matters of daily life, one assistant to the local elected representative said. Only women routinely attended their meetings, another man claimed. Women's time, thus, was an essential connection between residents and the otherwise male cadres of local political parties. Women's waiting had, in fact, founded a quiet daily politics – born at that basic level where politics blends into the work of social reproduction, understood in the broad terms of recent feminist literature not merely as unpaid domestic work, but as a wider involvement in the networks, associations and organizations needed for a functioning society.

Like much of women's labour and waiting, that work was never mentioned when I asked people about whether they had attempted to do anything about shortfalls in service delivery or knew anyone else who had. Most people said no, and the few who did mention such actions spoke of formal complaints to local officials, overwhelmingly made by men. In this representation, which echoes that of another researcher in Delhi (Harriss, 2005), women's daily efforts to organize their waiting, and their arguments and calls with providers all disappeared.

Conclusion

From this final omission to the underreporting of the long hours women spend waiting and working, my exploration suggests that there is a coherence to this pattern of downplaying. It is rooted in the constraints that limit what people can do with their time in an environment defined by a scarcity of income-generating jobs and dependence on unreliable basic services. In this environment, where male underemployment destabilizes gendered role distributions and feeds tensions of caste and religion, it reflects women's sometimes tactical, sometimes internalized, responses to the constraints that define their lives.

The findings, I argue, make several contributions to debates about the nature of work. Methodologically, first, they suggest that the time-use survey is likely to underreport the dimensions it is meant to expose. In particular, the long shadow of unpredictability is absent from people's accounts, despite its profound impact on their ability to seek better-paying work or renegotiate unequal gender relations. This remains the case even when probing for simultaneous activities, as allowed in the time-use survey. For researchers and policymakers, the findings highlight the need to seek better ways of measuring and addressing the temporal burden of unpredictability. More substantially, the discrepancies I found when contrasting survey findings and ethnographic evidence may be shaped by the particular environment in which I conducted my research. But the argument that our reporting of time is influenced by what we can do with that time is likely to apply more broadly, as are the social hierarchies of power that underpin this power.

The reality of what people do while they wait or claim to be doing nothing also casts light on a series of essential and contentious activities straddling work and politics. It reveals the hidden labour of women who take on precarious

piecework or complement their household's insufficient earnings with subsidized goods from the state. Their waiting and work reflect the stark constraints around their actions. But it also has them investing in networks and associations that minimize conflicts, help them maintain a check on providers and play an important role in their neighbourhoods' political life. As often noted in recent ethnographic works, waiting is a two-sided condition: one born out of domination, but that can also be a space of action, resilience and, sometimes, opportunities (Carswell *et al*., 2019; Janeja & Bandak, 2018; Jeffrey, 2010a).

By showing how essential this active side of waiting is to the economy and politics of these poor neighbourhoods, my interpretation makes the link with feminist criticisms of such notions as 'productive labour', 'economic inactivity' and their demarcation from the broader work of reproducing life and society (Fraser, 2022, p. 25). The same moments that my respondents describe as unproductive waiting or which they fail to mention altogether are those where women's unaccounted paid and unpaid work blurs into a form of politics that evolves at that very basic level where politics is about a group's ability to function around the scarce resources required for its survival.

Notes

1 All research interlocutors' names are changed.

2 It follows a pilot survey and smaller precursory studies, but for details, see the discussion on p. 8.

3 Out of 187 countries included in the World Bank database (2023), India is twelfth from the bottom. I remain purposefully vague when quoting these figures, because their fluctuation is notorious, and my aim is not to add to scholarly discussions on the matter. For details, see Hirway (2012) and Ragarajan *et al.* (2011); for the connection between this downward trend and lack of opportunities, see Chandrasekhar and Ghosh (2015) and Kannan and Raveendran (2009); for other factors, including longer school attendance, reduced rural poverty, and norms adverse to women's work, see Dubey *et al.* (2017), Kannan and Raveendran (2012), Kapsos *et al*. (2014), and Mehrotra and Parida (2017).

4 Given the survey's limited purpose of supporting the ethnographic fieldwork, I relied on aerial maps to randomly select lanes. In each lane, I covered every fourth household and interviewed their male and female working-age head. Respondents roughly represented the neighbourhoods' religious and caste demographics described at the end of this section.

5 Delhi-wide figures draw on the latest available official data at the time of the survey.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Anu Rani, Tarini Mahajan and Himalaya Ahuja for their assistance with research; Santosh Kumar Singh and Arjun Claire for the support; Barbara Harriss-White and participants in the workshop 'Capital in Contemporary South Asia', at

Oxford University, for their insightful comments on earlier versions of the argument; as well as anonymous referees at Economy and Society. A special thanks to Susanne Redgrave for copyediting the manuscript.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Swiss National Science Foundation, Grant n. P2SKP1_191387

Ethical approval statement

All interlocutors gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The research protocol was approved by the ethics committee of the London School of Economy and Political Science.

ORCID

Lucy Dubochet http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4736-8083

References

Ansari, A. & Chambers, T. (2022). Gendering the everyday state: Muslim women, claim-making & brokerage in India. *Contemporary South Asia*, *30*(1), 72–86.

Antonopoulos, R. & Hirway, I. (Eds.). (2009). *Unpaid work and the economy: Gender, time use and poverty in developing countries*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Auyero, J. (2012). *Patients of the state: The politics of waiting in Argentina*. Duke University Press.

Bakker, I. (2007). Social reproduction and the constitution of a gendered political economy. *New Political Economy*, *12*(4), 541–556.

Baraitser, L. (2017). *Enduring time*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Bayart, J.-F. (2007). *Global subjects: A political critique of globalization* (A. Brown, Trans.). Polity.

Bhardwaj Datta, A. (2021). Nation and its 'other' women: Muslim subjectivity and gendered agency in Delhi. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, *44*(2), 380–397.

Bhattacharya, T. & Vogel, L. (Eds.). (2017). *Social reproduction theory: Remapping class, recentring oppression*. Pluto Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2000 [1997]). *Pascalian meditations*. Stanford University Press.

Breman, J. (1996). *Footloose labour: Working in India's informal economy*. Cambridge University Press.

Campbell, H. (2021). *Downtown Juárez: Underworlds of violence and abuse*. University of Texas Press.

Carswell, G., Chambers, T. & De Neve, G. (2019). Waiting for the state: Gender, citizenship and everyday encounters with bureaucracy in India.

Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, *37*(4), 597–616.
Chandrasekhar, C. P. & Ghosh, J. (2015). *Growth, employment patterns, and inequality in Asia: A case study of India* (Asia–Pacific Working Paper Series). International Labour Office. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—asia/—ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_334063.pdf.
Charmes, J. & Hirway, I. (2006). *Estimating and understanding informal employment through time use studies*. Center for Development Alternatives.
Corbridge, S. (2004). Waiting in line, or the moral and material geography of queue-jumping. In R. Lee & D. M. Smith (Eds.), *Geographies and moralities* (pp. 183–198). Blackwell.
Corbridge, S., Williams, G., Srivastava, M. & Véron, R. (2005). *Seeing the state: governance and governmentality in India*. Cambridge University Press.
Dalla Costa, M. (1975). *The power of women and the subversion of the community*. Falling Wall Press Ltd.
Deshpande, A. & Kabeer, N. (2021). *Norms that matter: Exploring the distribution of women's work between income generation, expenditure-saving, and unpaid domestic responsibilities in India* (WIDER Working Paper, Vol. 2021). UNU-WIDER. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2021/070-2.
Dubey, A., Olsen, W. & Sen, K. (2017). The decline in the labour force participation of rural women in India: Taking a long-run view. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, *60*(4), 589–612.
Dyson, J. & Jeffrey, C. (2022). Reformist agency: Young women, gender, and change in India. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *28*(4), 1234–1251.
Ferguson, S. J. (2020). *Women and work: Feminism, labour, and social reproduction*. Pluto Press.
Floro, M. S. & Komatsu, H. (2011). Gender and work in South Africa: What can time-use data reveal? *Feminist Economics*, *17*(4), 33–66.
Fortunati, L. (1995). *The arcane of reproduction: Housework, prostitution, labor and capital*. Autonomedia.
Foster, R. (2019). 'Doing the wait': An exploration into the waiting experiences of prisoners' families. *Time & Society*, *28*(2), 459–477.
Fourth World Conference on Women. (1995). *Beijing declaration and platform for action*. United Nations. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf.
Franck, A. K. & Olsson, J. (2014). Missing women? The under-recording and under-reporting of women's work in Malaysia. *International Labour Review*, *153*(2), 209–221.
Fraser, N. (2022). *Cannibal capitalism: How our system is devouring democracy, care, and the planet and what we can do about it*. Verso Books.
Frederici, S. (1975). *Wages against housework*. Power of Women Collective & The Falling Wall Press.
Gayer, L. & Jaffrelot, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Muslims in Indian cities: Trajectories of marginalization*. Hurst.
Goodin, R. E., Rice, J. M., Bittman, M. & Saunders, P. (2005). The time-pressure illusion: Discretionary time vs. free time. *Social Indicators Research*, *73*(1), 43–70.
Gooptu, N. (2013). Servile sentinels of the city: Private security guards, organized informality, and labour in interactive services in globalized India. *International Review of Social History*, *58*(01), 9–38.
Gupta, A. (2012). *Red tape: Bureaucracy, structural violence, and poverty in India*. Duke University Press.
Haas, B. M. (2017). Citizens-in-waiting, deportees-in-waiting: Power, temporality, and suffering in the US asylum system. *Ethos*, *45*(1), 75–97.
Hage, G. (Ed.). (2009). *Waiting*. Melbourne University Publishing.
Harms, E. (2013). Eviction time in the new Saigon: Temporalities of displacement in the rubble of development. *Cultural Anthropology*, *28*(2), 344–368.

Harriss, J. (2005). Political participation, representation and urban poor: Findings from research in Delhi. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *40*(11), 1041–1051.
Harvey, D. (1985). *Money, time, space, and the city*. Granta.
Hirway, I. (2012). Missing labour force: An explanation. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *47*(37), 168–187.
Hirway, I. & Jose, S. (2011). Understanding women's work using time-use statistics: The case of India. *Feminist Economics*, *17*(4), 67–92.
Hochschild, A. (2000). *The time bind: When work becomes home and home becomes work*. Holt.
Hochschild, A. & Machung, A. (2003). *The second shift*. Penguin Books.
Honwana, A. M. (2012). *The time of youth: Work, social change, and politics in Africa*. Lynne Rienner.
International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS). (2013). *Statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization* (19th Conference). International Labour Office.
Inhorn, M. C. & Smith-Hefner, N. J. (Eds.). (2021). *Waithood: Gender, education, and global delays in marriage and childbearing*. Berghahn.
Jain, D. (1996). Valuing work time as a measure. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *31* (43), 46–57.
Janeja, M. K. & Bandak, A. (Eds.). (2018). *Ethnographies of waiting: Doubt, hope and uncertainty*. Routledge.
Jeffery, P. & Qureshi, K. (2022). Muslim woman/Muslim women: Lived experiences beyond religion and gender in South Asia and its diasporas. *Contemporary South Asia*, *30*(1), 1–15.
Jeffrey, C. (2010a). *Timepass: Youth, class, and the politics of waiting in India*. Stanford University Press.
Jeffrey, C. (2010b). Timepass: Youth, class, and time among unemployed young men in India. *American Ethnologist*, *37*(3), 465–481.
Jeffrey, C. & Young, S. (2012). Waiting for change: Youth, caste and politics in India. *Economy and Society*, *41*(4), 638–661.
Kannan, K. P. & Raveendran, G. (2009). Growth sans employment: A quarter century of jobless growth in India's organized manufacturing. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *44*(10), 80–91.
Kannan, K. P. & Raveendran, G. (2012). Counting and profiling the missing labour force. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *47*(6), 77–80.
Kapsos, S., Silberman, A. & Bourmpoula, E. (2014). *Why is female labour force participation declining so sharply in India?* (pp. 1–51). International Labour Office. Retrieved from http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—dgreports/—inst/documents/publication/wcms_250977.pdf.
Katz, C. (2001). Vagabond capitalism and the necessity of social reproduction. *Antipode*, *33*(4), 709–728.
Khosravi, S. (2017). *Precarious lives: Waiting and hope in Iran*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
Krueger, A. B. (Ed.). (2009). *Measuring the subjective wellbeing of nations: National accounts of time use and wellbeing*. University of Chicago Press.
Li, N. (2023). Women's work in India: Evidence from changes in time use between 1998 and 2019. *World Development*, *161*, 1–10.
Linder, S. B. (1971). *The harried leisure class*. Columbia University Press.
Mehrotra, S. & Parida, J. K. (2017). Why is the labour force participation of women declining in India? *World Development*, *98*, 360–380.
Mezzadri, A. & Majumder, S. (2020). Towards a feminist political economy of time: Labour circulation, social reproduction & the 'afterlife' of cheap labour. *Review of International Political Economy*, *29*(6), 1–24.
Mies, M. (2014). *Patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale: Women in the international division of labour*. Zed Books.
National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). (1998). *Pilot time use survey*. Government of India.
National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). (2012a). *Drinking water, sanitation, hygiene and housing condition in India*. Government of India.

National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). (2012b). *India: Employment and unemployment, July 2011-June 2012, 68th Round*. Government of India.
National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). (2017–2018). *Periodic labour force participation survey*. Government of India.
National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). (2019–2020). *Time use survey*. Government of India.
Papanek, H. (1979). Family status production: The 'work' and 'non-work' of women. *Signs*, *4*(4), 775–781.
Pinto, S. (2013). Movement in time: Choreographies of confinement in an impatient ward. In S. Trnka, C. Dureau & J. Park (Eds.), *Senses of citizenships: Embodying political life* (pp. 79–98). Routledge.
Rangarajan, C., Kaul, P. I. & Seema. (2011). Where is the missing labour force? *Economic and Political Weekly*, *46*(39), 68–72.
Schaffer, B. & Huang, W.-H. (1975). Distribution and the theory of access. *Development and Change*, *6*(2), 13–36.
Schor, J. (1991). *The overworked American: The unexpected decline of leisure*. Basic Books.
Shah, A. & Lerche, J. (2020). Migration and the invisible economies of care: Production, social reproduction and seasonal migrant labour in India. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *45*(4), 719–734.
Singerman, D. (2007). The economic imperatives of marriage: Emerging practices and identities among youth in the Middle East. *Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper No. 6*. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1087433.
Srija, A. & Vijay, S. S. (2020). Female labour force participation in India: Insights through time use survey. *Review of Market Integration*, *12*(3), 159–199.
Tarlo, E. (2003). *Unsettling memories: Narratives of the emergency in Delhi*. Hurst.
Task Force on Time Use Survey (TFTUS). (2013). *Guidelines for harmonizing time-use surveys*. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Retrieved from http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/bur/2013/12-Add.1_TimeUseSurvey_Guidelines_UNECE.pdf.
World Bank. (2023). Labour force participation rate, female. Retrieved from http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?end = 2014&locations = IN&start = 1990&view = chart.
Zaidi, M., Chigateri, S., Chopra, D. & Roelen, K. (2017). '*My work never ends': Women's experiences of balancing unpaid care work and paid work through WEE programming in India* (IDS Working Paper 494). Institute of Development Studies. Retrieved from https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/13203/Wp494_Online.pdf?sequence = 1288.

Lucy Dubochet is a Research Associate at the Graduate Institute's Hirschman Centre on Democracy and Associate Lecturer at the University of Bern and Lausanne, Switzerland. Her work's primary focus is on time and everyday politics in low-income neighbourhoods of Delhi, broadening into questions of citizenship and overlapping vulnerabilities of gender, religion, and regional belonging.