LIFE IN THE INDIAN CITY: A CASE STUDY ON FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS IN UPSCALE RETAIL SECTORS IN DELHI

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ABSTRACT
The city intensifies the complexity of ‘social’ with that of the ‘material’. The 'urban' experience is a sum of various complexities, differences and strangeness yet how all these multiplicities get accommodated in one unitary frame through this ‘global city’ dream. Through the twin ideas of ‘disjunctive inclusions’ and ‘exclusive connections’, the cosmopolis of Delhi opens up spaces to young female immigrants from Manipuri and Nagaland in forms of upscale retail ventures; a part of a larger network of global trade. These ‘manufactured’ spaces serve primarily two objectives; provides an opportunity for generation of an income for these ‘marginalised’ community which is the bedrock for the ‘inclusion’ into the city life, and on the other hand, by the ‘exclusive’ nature of their services, the highly ‘sexualised’, ‘orientalised’ roles they are made to play which packages their ‘ethnicity’ as an ‘exotica’. These spaces realise the aspirations of these women for money yet the ‘urban’ experience fragments the idea of a ‘national identity’ through discrimination on lines of ‘ethnicity’. The relations of production and cognitive framing of people and things gives rise to a space where ‘ethnicity’ is intertwined in the articulations of its form, peculiarities and contours. Through a rationalised view of the instrumentality of the ‘ethnic’ body and its labour in the market via logic of ‘productive sacrifice’, these bodies are represented as ‘exotically saleable’. It is a complex mix of co-dependency premised on a kind of ‘duality’ where ‘ethnicity’ becomes the constitutive dimension of the city’s modernity becoming a weapon of assertion and resistance yet a divisive wall between its inhabitants. This division manifested itself in urban designs, planning, zoning, appropriations of utility, distribution of wealth and power. This ethnographic work studies the lived realities of these women through their ‘voice’ and the ways in which they negotiate with their differences in urban spaces to integrate into the urban whole.

Keywords: cosmopolis of Delhi, North-east India, female migrant workers, urban space, ethnicity, exotica, national identity, differences
1. Introduction
The idea of the city of Delhi as a metropolis is linked to a certain dream of the “global city” and since the watershed year of 1991, a dominant logic of capitalist rationalisation has marked that dream. A certain imagination donated by the West had set the tone for the way production relations progressed and the social sphere was rationalised; functionality of ‘labour’ was calculated and abstracted becoming central to the idea of production.

This instrumentality of labour is demonstrated by the processes production, circulation and reproduction of capital, the constant circulation of goods in the chains of buying and selling. The ways of consumption affects the sensory foundations of mental life plays a role in subject formation.

The city opened up its spaces to experiences of displacement and substitution through creation of opportunities in the labour force to a unique kind of commodity to satisfy a particular kind of consumer base. It gave way to a kind of commercialism which combined technology, capital and culture through contradictions, intersections and worked in spite and in fact through a constant principle of inevitable incommensurability.

Adopting Mbembe’s words to capture this growing trend of superfluity, which is premised on being an aesthetics which can hypnotise, overexcite and paralyse the senses, referring to the dialectics of indispensability and extendibility of both labour, people and things, over writing any quantifiable representation of use or exchange value” it set a topography of paradoxes into urban designs. The diversity and the history of India came together to form a regime of labour-industry-capital, which could package in different forms of “Indianess” to the world and simultaneously bring the world back home. Interaction was mediated by the politics of the “business” of the city. In this process, with the backdrop of an ethos of commerce and consumerism, there rose a new reproduction of the ways relations and links were seen, forged and even addressed, across neighbourhoods, ethnicities and regional origins.

In this essay I would develop this idea of the ‘urban’ experience which is a sum of various complexities, differences and strangeness yet how all these multiplicities get accommodated in one unitary frame.

2. Disjunctives Inclusions and Exclusive Connections – Marketing the Margins
The proposition of this essay would centre on the twin ideas of “disjunctive inclusions” and “exclusive connections” where the cosmopolis of Delhi opens up spaces to young female migrants from Manipuri and Nagaland in form of orientalised upscale retail ventures, like spa, restaurants and global chains. These “manufactured” spaces serve primarily two objectives; provides an opportunity for generation of an income for these “marginalised” community which is the bedrock for the

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1 Radical change of economic policy in India with opening up trade, and economic networks with the world at large. There was an aim to make the economy “market-oriented” and expand the role of “private” and “foreign” investment. It was a result of debt from the IMF to survive the Economic Crisis of India in 1991 with a depletion of foreign reserves.

2 Aesthetics of Superfluity by Achilles Mbembe, 2004

3 Aesthetics of Superfluity by Achilles Mbembe, 2004
“inclusion” into the city life, and on the other hand, by the “exclusive” nature of their services, the highly “sexualised”, “orientalised” roles they are made to play which essentially packages their “ethnicity” as an “exotica” consolidating and fragment differences at the same time. It consolidates through realisation of aspirations of the women for money, and the “urban” city life being a “marginalised” community at the same time it fragments the idea of a “national identity” by segregation on lines of “ethnicity” and “race”. The “race” idea works its way through the very perpetuation of its flourishing economy. The relations of production and cognitive framing of people, things and relationships gives rise to a space where race is intertwined in the articulations of its form, peculiarities and contours. Through a rationalised view of the instrumentality of the “ethnic” body and its labour in the market via a logic of “productive sacrifice” (Mbembe, 2004), where these bodies were embodied as “exotically saleable”, racism wasn’t only a biological differentiation but also redefined the relationship of people and things. It shows a contradiction into how the “ethnic” identity was valued but yet devalued at the same time in the racket of racial bigotry. It was a complex mix of co-dependency premised on a kind of duality where race becomes the constitutive dimension of the city’s modernity. It became a weapon of assertion and resistance yet a divisive wall between its inhabitants which manifested in its urban designs, planning, zoning, orientations, spatiality and appropriations of utility, distribution of wealth and power. The denial of a shared origin results in a dual nation or an “India against itself” (Baruah, 2012) or is it? Does globalisation and economic flows manage to erase differences in a way to achieve egalitarianism? Do the lines of division blur in catering the needs of the consumers? Are market processes the answer to “xenophobia”? Does this “superfluous consumption of aesthetics” manage to dilute the hysterics of “local” crowds at invasive “encroachment” of spaces by the inflating “crowds” from the peripheries in the name of cosmopolitanism?

3. Revisiting the Hinterland-Heartland debate

The contemporary Indian metropolis of Delhi is experiencing a rapid spurt of migrants from frontier regions of Manipur and Nagaland in search of coveted opportunities of employment that have opened up with the nation and its citizens fast embracing the ethos of free, liberal trade bringing in a rapid circulation of desires built out of experiences of consumerism. Though the underlying reasons for outmigration mainly find their roots in the perpetual state of conflict that the region has become synonymous with, yet one has to account for the changing aspirations of the people who take the step out of their “homeland”. There is a prominent shift in the perception of the “north-east” immigrant in the capital which shows in the shift of the kind of engagement between these “denizens” with the “citizens” (the section of salaried/business class elites and upper middle class consumer base who can enjoy frequent vacations to exotic locations and upscale retail luxuries at home).

The “engagements” are the dialectics of distance, cynicism yet at the same time proximity and dependency, a mix of necessity and opportunity driven by desires and passions of the consumer.

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4 The principle that one has to give up, “forgo” something to “earn” something else, which is perceived to be “better”, here in terms of economic value.

5 Title of the book by Sanjib Baruah where he discusses the insurgency related to the ULFA and the disjunctive relationship of the state with its peripheral parts of Assam in Northeast India.
aspiring for ‘world-classiness’ or an ‘east-Asian’ experience if one can say so. The disjunctive inclusions finds its ground on exclusive connections where the fear of the past and the allure of the present finds the “north-east” immigrant woman motivated by the generous profits advertised by these outlets at the same time she works with the sense of alienation and “de-personalisation” from her customers who brand her and her services as “exotic”, quite ironically therein lying its demand. Space as a medium is opening up to engage in dialectics of resistance and inclusion by creating a fertile terrain of accommodating multiplicities and transforming the “lived” space marked by a certain co-habitation of differences and similarities. The city spaces open up to a cater to the demands of a burgeoning middle class of consumers with a new, debatably upgraded version of retail which bears little resemblance to retail as we know it in the period before 1990s. The language deployed by this reactive medium that space becomes is to express, communicate, assert, claim or negotiate.

Racism as an experience of the “marginalised” and “minority” gets interwoven with a variety of other urban experiences and takes a new form, a new sort of asserting itself, a new way to claim and negotiate with and within the larger national space. For instance, there are stories of Naga masseurs working in suburban South Delhi often collaborating with a “friend” from Cameroon from Khirki Extension to open a new tattoo parlour in Greater Kailash. The coming together of “differences” of the marginalised, consolidation to form a “resistant” whole and how it all glues in to form the picture of “marketing the margins” is the way resistance works out in the micro processes of everyday life in the city.

In the mixing of identities, there follows the mixing of spaces and thus the creation of new transformed ‘lived’ place built on recombination and simultaneity; one being that of the workplace of the retail sector, the space where the transactions of services, the consumption of a certain kind of aesthetics in the form of the services through the sexualised cultured ethnic body of the waitress/salesgirl/masseur and the politics of gratification play out. There forms a ‘lived’ space based on the synergetic association of the two parties, each with their own needs and values. The form that this new kind of inter-subjectivity takes in the facade of cosmopolitanism is deeply problematic; for the solidification of the racial identity that it comes as a side effect.

Racial profiling in the city become everyday living realities for these women and it becomes interesting when this “ethnicity" repackages itself as “aesthetics” and open up city spaces for these communities via supply of orientalised luxury services in upscale retail ventures. The arrays of actors breathe life into this space by celebrating it via excessive consumption. This space sells these “services” making profits. Space becomes the medium through which these marginalised communities challenge, transform and negotiate their “differences” and find their way into the city. Desires lent fluidity to the economic processes which translates into the fluidity of the spaces that feed back into the cycle and solidify this system; we see the ways in which national space is claimed by marginalised migrant communities.

These communities are crowded out, priced out and cultured out of city spaces and as a result these work spaces become means of that resistance, an attempt to inclusion into the city life thus forming

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6 Louis Wirth’s essay titled “Urbanism as a Way of Life”, 1938
a networked, mobile, flexible and agile system of attack and defence. But one needs to understand the category of “differences” here is not only spatial but conceptual tied to ideas of ethnicity, culture and territory which translates into a subculture which sells. The resistance is about reorganisation of connections, relations and how they collectively permit the inclusion of a marginalised community into the capital and how it bridges the gap between the heartland and the hinterland by the flows of economic and commercial supplies that cater to a burgeoning consumer base aspiring for world class products and experiences. The “East Asian” experience and the demand for aesthetics is the way through. Through a tactical manoeuvre of adaption, mimesis\(^7\) and awareness of the growing trends, retail venture capitalists capture these communities to fulfil the aspirations of an “oriental experience” and at the same time these women find their perfect entry point into the “mainstream”.

These transformations of spaces transform the inter-relations between people, between subjectivities, between collectives which tap into a new attitude, bring with it a tension in this matrix of multiplicities. These immigrants female workers aren’t only passive recipients of a racially colored articulation of perceptions where they are simply labelled in epithets “chinki” or harassed on the streets by men as “chowmein”, they also become prey to a certain violence which stems from a sense of denial; crowding out of city spaces and job opportunities by the burgeoning immigrant community gives rise to a politics of competition and resentment within the “natives” at the “others”.

The community has to enact multiple identities which are complex and multi-layered. Parochialism and ethnic tensions from the frontier evokes scepticism in the immigrant from the north-east which translates into a pan-northeast solidarity which is actually absent back home. This solidarity characterises the community whose boundaries stretch to communities from Ladakh, Nepal, Tibet or even Africa, capitalising on the “marginalisation” that all of them face as a collective thus giving a new thrust to the resistance and the economic inclusion through it. South Delhi restaurants have cashed in on this collective sense of solidarity to serve multiple cuisines under the umbrella of “from the hills” ranging from Thukpa\(^8\), Dimsum\(^9\), Masor Tenga\(^10\) to Pork Chill (Nagaland). Hence it is interesting to see how they use this “cosmopolitanism” to challenge stereotypes and at the same time find a sense of solidarity.

We can also see how the nature of the hinterland determines the relation to its heartland. The Northeast India is a quintessential borderland which houses a diversity of ethnic groups, majority of them being “tribes” further marked, legitimised and protected (through a plethora of reservations under subcategories) by the constitutional mechanisms of the country (the Sixth Schedule), sharing its borders with almost five countries further making the boundaries porous for circulation of material and ideational transactions. The demographics of the place is equally interesting where the population is fragmented into multiple stocks built through a history of inflows and outflows, linguistically, religiously, ethnically and culturally. It is no surprise that within the northeast in it, the identity of who is a true “Manipuri”, “Naga” or “Assamese” is highly debatable.

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\(^7\) Imitation, and re-creation usually applied in art, re-representation rather than copying
\(^8\) A Tibetan noodle soup
\(^9\) A Cantonese steamed or fried dumpling
\(^10\) A traditional Assamese curry of tamarind and fish
Maybe for the lack of a concrete identity that could be asserted, fought for, fought with, made it easier for external influences (be it the Christian missionaries, colonial leaders or right wing government) to percolate into the region and make it so malleable. Due to the inflows from adjacent areas and precipitating influences shaping the region’s culture, northeast India soon became the “anti-thesis” to north India in terms of imagination of the social world. **While one became caste ridden, predatory, the other became egalitarian, collective, civilised.** The popular perception of the state being exploitative, dysfunctional, illegitimate, corrupt fuelled the alienation more so, where the communities always felt coerced into forming the national collective; something that was always alien to them, a sense of detachment, mistrust and fear always lingered in the hearts and minds of these people. It was a double edged sword where the “hegemonic” communities would either act/frame/patronise according to the framed narrative of the person from the “northeast” or advocates casted them in homogenous groups in romantic ways as “people from the blue hills”.

The forms of cross codifications set up a *discourse of differences* where “the language to resist from” became “the language to resist with”. The “*mimesis*” (Mbembe, 2004) adopted by the community to cater to a mainstream consumer aspiring for an “east-Asian” aesthetical experience found itself in an *interplay of desires* which gave cosmopolitanism a new look of being *liberating and redemptive* through a certain accommodation of difference, a sort of “*marginalised*” difference. The portrayal of the “tribal”, “Chinese-looking”\(^\text{11}\), English speaking Manipur/Naga woman reproduced and often misrepresented through numerous outlets, from legal documents to tourism advertisements, was colored with certain aesthetics of “exotica” and re-imagined to be *suitable to suit a certain need for a pan-Asian experience of luxury and privilege.*

It is a deep seated anger of being *denied and deprived* and *neglected* mixed with a sense of looming fear of *uncertainty* and impending doom has driven these communities to step out of the region in search of outlets to find answers and means of survival. It’s an act of *desperation* born out of *crisis, to survive and to realise their aspirations*. The *counterattacks through militarisation* by the state have done its bit in eroding that *sense of belonging, cohesiveness* to a *common national identity*.

Johnson Soibam, from Imphal, currently a student of Delhi University speaks on the need to understand the complexity of the reasons behind why Manipuri girls migrate to the city – “*Women are not necessarily forced but one has to look at the conditions which push them to make a choice to come out of the region. Since the last decade so many youth have died for two main reasons - unemployment and the drug problem. To become an ASI, along with qualification you need money. People pay 20-40 lakhs to get a job in the police service. What about the rest of the youth?*"

*Often, students, to find meaning in their lives, resort to drugs. The Army does a parallel business of it; many kids take ‘heroin’ which has a huge role to play in the lives here. Prescribed drugs like N 10 and SP given to pregnant women in quantifiable measures get abused for a ‘high’. It is important to look at multiple perspectives.*

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\(^{11}\) Due to shared ancestry and being grafted from Mon-Khmer, Tibeto-Burmese, Indo-Chinese migratory races, many tribes from the region have physical resemblances with certain communities of China, Indonesia, and Tibet.
The idea of 'home' is blurred now. When I come to the dept I feel more at 'home' than at the place I live. I feel more at 'home' in north Delhi where I live than south. I feel more at home with the dept as a collective too. There are many levels at which you feel that sense of belonging. Simply equating belonging to the whole urban city is not the case.”

On the different note we can see a change of urban logic which gets translated into a change of rationality in urban spatial planning. The “Global City” aspiration which is fast feeding on urban planners privileges appropriation of space for profits and makes new exclusions (like slums evictions as threats to sanitised space) and at the same time new inclusions where certain other suitable groups can play their roles better.

4. Activating the ‘voice’ of the migrant

Racism characterises the urban living experience for an immigrant. Their visibility lies in their “ethnic” physicality and the difference gets packaged as “exotic” which on the flip side is also marginalised as “racism”. “Neutralising” accents, “locational masking”, English being their lingua franca are some advantages that the orientalised, migrant Manipuri/Naga female in highly sexualised roles in these upscale retail sectors have which makes them “perfect for the job”. Women who have left their children and families behind are well suited to work shifts timed to serve Australian, European, and North American business hours in call centres thus making the Northeast migrants desirable as a ‘flexible’ and well-qualified workforce for the industry. Global brand retail chains work on the saleability of their image as a “global” product thus making it desirable to capitalise on the “east-Asian” imagery juxtaposed upon the ‘north-east’ immigrant woman thus projecting an image that caters to sensibilities and aspirations of a “world class” citizen. “I can wear my dress comfortably as it is a part of the job. Hindi is difficult. They hired me because I am comfortable with English” Nyangimei from Kohima states.

Quite often the construction of the narrative of self-segregation that is played out by the city media as a justification on these communities being alienated from the “mainstream” doesn’t account for the gross vilification of these immigrants and their lifestyles as the “other”. But over the course of time one can see how they aren’t simply the “victims” now but have actively engaged in inclusions in creating their own spaces and networks and assertion in an attempt to assert their identity as an “Indian” though unconsciously it still remains an act born out of needs to survive the “everyday”.

The politics behind this consumption of aesthetics is the backbone of the form that gets shaped: “exoticization” of the “ethnic” woman who incidentally falls in the category of a marginalised minority. This exoticization detonates political consciousness about this “fetishization” of this “exotica” which is commodified and consumed showing the reorganisation of the human sensorium (Masco, 2007) under a cosmopolitan, consumerist urban life.

There follows a logic of reciprocal dependency which opens up spaces such as these upscale retail sectors to these communities who have been excluded from the national economic discourse for

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12 “fetish” is an object eliciting immense love, devotion, respect, reverence or awe regarded as an embodiment of magical powers.
decades, but at the same time this logic follows inclusion without a re-stratification of a certain *prevailing hierarchy in the city and its citizens*. The *reciprocal dependency* does entail an *inbuilt segregation* between the “consumer” and the “commodity” where there is a close interweaving between both these bodies; in the restaurant with the waitress, the manager in the global chain outlet or the masseur in the spa.

On a broader level we also observe how the “*racial microphysics*” (Mbembe, 2004) transformed to multiple forms in *which transgression, co-dependancy, intersections and overlapping* operated all at once and in that *very blurring of the boundaries* there was a form of ‘resistance’; the resistance to exist, to exist with and in spite of one’s ethnic identity.

It also illustrates the change of imagination in the way one saw national space as it *de-territorialised, disassembled and formed new spaces to accommodate these communities*. The nature of these new spaces and the production of these spaces had a unique nature to it. Any discourse constitutive of the urban experience has a *way to map spaces*. Similarly in this case, *territorial segmentation* wasn’t a state sanctioned inscription of power on the landscapes yet was a market driven phenomenon of demand and supply. The inflating demographics of the community crave out enclaves in areas of *Vijaynagar* (North Delhi) and *Humanyunpur* where the *ghetto-ization* of communities in a cosmopolitan city is emblematic of this ‘resistance’ from contact. It is interesting how this resistance operates in these communities *insulating* themselves from the rest of city and creating their own “north-east” mini world (housing a range of regional eating outlets, traditional tattoo studios, karaoke dens and pirated CD shops imported from the region) to which these women working in their services of the global retail chains “go home to”. The income generated from these ventures becomes the capital, the lifeblood of sustaining these small “mini-worlds” and at the same time its residents become the “*raw-material*” to keep the larger upper middle class consumer base satisfied.

Mshaumi, from Kohima, elaborates on her experiences, “*The idea of ‘home’ is complex. We do celebrate our own culture and want to integrate into the city. I think a co-mingling between different communities is the solution. But we do have strong communitarian bonds where we celebrate our home and culture.*”

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E-Proceeding of the International Conference on Social Science Research, ICSSR 2015
Organized by [http://WorldConferences.net](http://WorldConferences.net)
Fig. 1. A poster celebrating diversity, through depiction of various tribal communities of Arunachala Pradesh, co-existing in the area; clicked by the author. Bamboo Hut Restuarnt in North Delhi
Fig. 2. A charcoal painting of a Naga ritual on the walls of a restaurant, named ‘Bamboo Hut’ in Mukherjee, North Delhi. The restaurant is run as a parallel business by a migrant family from the region.

Delhi becomes the cosmopolitan where the civic sphere is constituted by and through cultural institutions and societies ensuring efficient division of labour through distinct spatialisation yet at the same time it becomes an ethnic city for its system of formal segregation (African community in Khirki Extension, Afghans in Malviya Nagar/Malviya Nagar-4) even though it is not state sanctioned, but is definitely state facilitated, maintained, encouraged for reasons of conveniences, surveillance and reasons. But at the same time this trajectory where racism is embedded in cosmopolitanism becomes that space that urban form which destabilises the conventional commodity form and synthesizes individuality, freedom and capital needs to package “ethnicity itself as a commodity”. The ‘blasé’ attitude (Simmel), the matter-of-fact attitude emerges from a phantasmagoric overstimulation and enervation of the senses thus numbing them to distinguish between things.

However, the system of manipulation-alienation-grafting of disparate images to an incommensurable matrix to fulfil the “global city” dream can’t hide the ugly head of racial crime and violence that raises its head once every blue moon in corners of this “polyglot” (Mbembe, 2004). There is a similar counter-resistance from the city at large that manifest in the form of ghettoization; these spaces in their desperate attempt to consolidate these alien racial forms and segregate it from the rest. In this way, the same city that facilitates change ends up resisting it.

But in this varied permutations and configurations, the city never achieves its larger goal of synthesis, of coherence, totalisation, for the “urban” experience is characterised by dissonances and fragmentations that coalesce together to not form an uniform totality but an infinite, dynamic whole with its varied discontinuities, provisionality, fugitiveness and superfluousness (Mbembe, 2004). This built “symbolic” totality (Mbembe, 2004) gives the “urban” form its unique quality where time, space and identities are juxtaposed in a complex mosaic to resist any domination.

5. Reconceptualising the Urban Experience: Negotiating Differences
In popular representations of the community in media discourses, the ‘voice’ of the migrant woman from the North-east India is often silenced. The ethnic gendered subject being a passive recipient to urban experiences of violence and discrimination isn’t a given but a constructed idea through various discourses and each new event of violence just ends up in the reification of this construct – the mute, docile victim. Robert Sennet had famously said in his ethnographic work ‘Flesh and Stone’ (1994: 26) “… aspects of urban experience difference, complexity, strangeness – afford resistance to domination”. These words illustrate the complex ways in which ‘differences’ in the urban space needs to be reconceptualised as being relational, with the larger heterogeneity of the masses. This conclusion then fairly illustrates the manner in which fixed categories are often appropriated for sensationalised news-making in constructing the ‘north-eastern’ as the pivotal target of all marginalisation. This is not to discount the experiences of exclusion that this community does encounter in the face of a ‘lived’ urban reality but a deeper look into their everyday also helps us to
engage into the multiple ways in which they do negotiate with these patterns of exclusion with tactical counter-strategies aimed at integration into the urban whole.

A useful point of departure from dominant paradigms of study would be substitute old modes of inquiry and thus old models. I propose a replacement of the positivist model of ‘economy’ to one of ‘ecology, and a simultaneously an incorporation of the notion of ‘intangibles’ into this understanding. The intangibles entail knowledge, organisation and management along with the standard markers of ‘capital’, namely land and labour. The idea of ‘ecology’ opens up to looking at the material as a part of the social rather than divorced from it – processes of interaction in relation to the larger environment as one acts on the other into a mutual transformation. The procedures of production, consumption and distribution are unpacked into these fluid processes of circulation.

Through ethnographic documentation of narratives in the voice of these women, one can chart their lived realities in the urban space. Though the power of narratives lies in the voice explicating its own experiences, a functionalist approach to studying society always carries the danger of not locating the present in a larger framework of dominant political agendas that are often shaped by distinctive trajectories of social history. The planning of a city links itself to a larger question of conceptualisation of the parameters that mark the ‘urbane’ nature of a space. Theories on Space in Urban Studies need to be approached as ‘tools’ rather than ‘moulds’ to stuff field observations or compensate for the lack of it. The field data is best studied for its contingencies and complexities, where theories often fail.

‘Differences’ within the heterogeneous mass living in the city, needs to be unpack and not relegated into a framework that essentially entails a sense of antagonism or gets tied to a larger idea of alterity as a division. An urban space driven by a capitalist logic feeding a consumer aspiring for a ‘world-class’ experience; upscale retail sectors often encapsulate young women from Nagaland, Manipur into orientalised and often sexualised roles due to a perceived similarity between them and the ‘East Asian’ woman (again a generalisation). As social scientists, reflexivity is a virtue but the consumer feeding off the economy, or dare I say, ecology is measuring his pockets of utility. Contrary to popular argument which simplistically proposes or rather accuses the commoditisation of the woman’s body to feed a burgeoning capitalistic economy; the actual lived realities are more complex. The ideas of consent and choice are not neat categories of agency, force, power or even gender roles, and it wouldn’t be enough to attack it from the angle of the fertile conditions that make such choices inevitable. Narratives have shown these women to have a fair degree of autonomy when attributing the reasons of their movement to pursue their aspirations of the city. Ethnography needs to enhance its own modes of inquiry like narratives and semiotics to translate these realities into sociological discourses better.

As a fact of conclusion, ‘resistance’ over ‘domination’ needs to be rethought as the dominant antagonistic narrative that configures differences in the urban city. I would propose a change of perspective with a change of terminology – Negotiating of Differences, where through exclusive connections and disjunctive inclusions13 (adopting the terminology from Achille Mbembe, 2006),

13 These manufactured spaces serve primarily two objectives; provides an opportunity for generation of an income for these “marginalised” community which is the bedrock for the inclusion into the city life, and on the other hand, by the “exclusive” nature of their services, the highly sexualised, orientalised roles they are made to
differences co-exist in them being selectively co-opted into a maze, albeit with contradictions, into the collage of the ‘global city’ dream.

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play which essentially packages their ethnicity as an “exotica” is what consolidates the and fragments at the same time. It consolidates through realisation of aspirations of the women for money, and the “urban” city life being a “marginalised” community at the same time it fragments the idea of a “national identity” by segregation on lines of “ethnicity” and “race”.