



‘Thick time’: Experiments with feminist urban futures in community podcasts

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops the concept of ‘thick time’ through podcast experiments that foreground feminist voice, speech and aurality. Drawing upon William Kentridge’s notion of ‘thick time’, this paper draws upon gendered experiences of struggles that are accumulated over generations, reinforced through technologies of timekeeping and time-management, leading to a state of permanent crisis. In particular, it focusses on gendered time through thick descriptions marked by fragmentation and simultaneity and heavy with the struggles of the past, present and future. Using experimentation as a method of examining thick time, I document how the temporalities of an intimate domesticity under crisis unfolds in parallel with the public crisis of a pandemic. Experimentation emerges in podcast training workshops with young women living in resettlement colonies in Delhi’s urban peripheries, leading to a series of four podcasts co-produced remotely during the COVID19 lockdown. These podcasts are marked by fragments of speech, poetry, and music by those who are unable to speak to the state or to their families directly. They suggest how entangling the body (as voice, accent and language) with thick descriptions of time is possible through the unwinding, slowing down, rewinding and enriching the experience and significance of time in their lives. The podcasts are marked by repetition, futurity, in-betweenness and remarkability, and the paper suggests that podcasts as experiments in value-laden thick descriptions of time can reveal pathways to feminist urban futures.

1. Introduction

In recent years, geographers have focussed increasing attention on temporalities and time as metaphors for power, elaborating on time as subjective and spatial (Chien and Woodworth, 2018; Datta, 2020c; Kitchin, 2019; Mitchell, 2020). In this framing, time is reconceptualised not only through a linear modernity, but also through multiple and diverse spatio-temporalities of past, present and future which challenge clock time as absolute and objective. This nascent ‘temporal turn’ in geography, has moved from earlier studies of time-geographies (Harvey, 1990; Thrift and Pred, 1981) and time-use surveys to unpacking the social nature of time as – timewatch (Adam, 1995), timepass (Jeffrey, 2010), timescapes (Kitchin, 2019), and gendered time (Datta, 2020c) among others. Time, as understood by geographers now is not only bounded by the clock, but also connected across multiple spaces and scales by resurfacing the burdens of historic inequalities and constraints across different social groups.

In this paper, I draw upon the South African artist William Kentridge’s concept of ‘thick time’ as the temporality of postcolonial

fragmentation and simultaneity, to explore how a postcolonial time unfolding during the COVID-19 crisis is experienced among young millennial women left in the margins of a digital age. Although Kentridge’s work has largely focussed on ‘the archive, machines, propaganda, time, inscription (and palimpsestic re-inscription), utopian longings and their disappointment, the afterlife of revolution, modernity’s discontents’ (van der Vlies, 2017: np) and may appear unrelated to the struggles of millennial women in Delhi, Kentridge’s notion of postcolonial time of fragmentation and simultaneity is particularly poignant in understanding how the COVID-19 pandemic crisis unfolds through an extended generational crisis within intimate spaces of the home. Kentridge’s collaboration with the historian of science Peter Galison, rejects any notion of clock time as a scientific measure noting that ‘time becomes an illusion ... Refusal of time: time as nothing but a crude approximation of an obsolete science’ (Kentridge and Galison, 2011: 36) Kentridge’s creative work on ‘thick time’ connects the times of past, present and future to what he describes as a ‘black hole’ – the space where everything disappears. Kentridge presents ‘Thick time’ as a thickening of space with temporal crises accumulated over generations,

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reinforced through the technologies of timekeeping, time-management and their resultant time-burdens. For Kentridge, thick time comes into being by unwinding, by slowing down and rewinding itself, in short by capturing and materialising postcolonial and subjective experiences of time. Kentridge thus presents thick time as a refusal to conform to the colonising effects of time – he presents postcoloniality as a wish to unwind time, undo the damage done by colonial time and present a longing to reverse time itself for marginal and indigenous communities.

The work of Kentridge is pertinent here, since it enables us to rethink earlier work on time which has mainly focussed on speed, presenting a binary between a linear notion of modernity against a cyclical version of indigenous time (Barak, 2013; Goodspeed, 2015; Kwan, 2002; Lynch, 1972; Thrift and Pred, 1981; Virilio, 2006). As Bear notes ‘dominant time-maps assembled in technologies of imagination reduce time to a medium for the short-term generation of capital and the evaluation of worth’ (Bear, 2016: 490). Barak further notes that the monumental time of state sponsored technology not only ignores subaltern subjective time, but it also occludes the use of technology itself by subaltern citizens. For Barak, the ‘political and cultural constructions [of time] informed the ways in which actual speeds were experienced in the street.’ (Barak, 2013: 150)

In the digital age, contemporary developments around technology and communications systems indicate what Adam notes as a ‘shift of emphasis from duration and succession to simultaneity and instantaneity’ (Adam, 1992: 177). Speed has been conceptualised through the timescapes of real time technologies leading to arguments for slow computing and slow urbanism (Kitchin, 2019). In this context, a refusal of time can be seen as the refusal to fall in line with the promised speed and desire for acceleration. But in Kentridge’s work, a refusal of time is not just about slowing down, rather the desire to disrupt the ‘linear march of time’, to rewind past injustices, undo the generational struggles and rework new aspirations for the future (van der Vlies, 2017: np). Thinking with Kentridge, we can argue that thick time is a project to decolonise the subaltern body by overlaying alternative versions of time embedded in the disruptive use of technology.

Using the lens of thick time, I suggest that the COVID-19 crisis presents a thickening of intergenerational injustices between the past and present, that is then projected into the future. COVID reinforces a ‘slow emergency’ (Anderson et al., 2020: 621) unfolding through the deepening of gendered burdens imposed upon working poor women. The immediate crisis of COVID lockdowns led to a fragmentation of daily routines and everyday life that were at the same time intimate, personal and collective. Yet state policy around COVID-19 did not address the hollowing out of intimate time characterised by loss of livelihoods, food shortages, imminent disease, death and a feeling of the end of time itself. Time was speeded up in bringing the image of death, starvation and homelessness closer, and yet also slowed down as marginal citizens found themselves suspended in the delayed time of decisions, actions, and lockdowns.

In this paper, I develop the concept of ‘thick time’ through a series of community podcasts with young working poor women to foreground feminist voice, speech and aurality as the intimate temporalities of present crises. I use experimentation as a method which includes podcast training workshops, as well as recording, discussion and co-production with young millennial women living in resettlement colonies in Delhi’s urban peripheries. Using their example, I make three arguments. **First** that the lens of thick time enables us to unpack the colonisation of subaltern gendered time and its tensions with technological time. State sponsored technologies that fixed the time of surveillance and monitoring of COVID-19 sought to govern the ‘ungovernable’ through temporal standardisation. Yet women’s use of mobile phone technology also challenged a temporal hierarchy where times of pandemic crisis are seen as more spectacular and exemplary than the long temporal crisis within intimate spaces of the home, as well as a ‘data hierarchy’ (Gallagher and Prior, 2014: 279) where the textual is considered more valuable than audio.

Second that thick descriptions of time through aurality, speech and voice can enable women to speak to the state or to their families directly, and thus document emergent gendered temporalities of the home and city in slow crisis. To do so, the community podcasts recorded and edited by the women redistributed the power-geometry of speech and voice from the subaltern body to the public digital sphere. Community podcasts can work as a refusal of time to accept the slow accumulative struggles of the past to which young women in low-income neighbourhoods find themselves multiply disadvantaged. Community podcasts are temporal and affective in their narration of gendered experiences of time channelled through reflection on the COVID19 crisis, a period thick with promises of a different future. They enable subaltern subjects to tell stories about one’s life that are also at the same time stories about intimate time.

Finally, experiments with voice through community podcasts can offer ways to reveal the slow crisis of social injustice. As Bignall et al. argue, “For a genuinely transformative effect to take hold, the critical and destabilising moment of decolonisation must also be accompanied by a reconstructive movement enabling the emergence of new forms of non-imperial society.” Experiments with community podcasting offer ways to learn from its failures and challenges and thereby offer value-laden descriptions of thick time for possible feminist urban futures. In this paper, community podcasts are seen as a form of urban experimentation with voice, speech, identity and subaltern authorship under crisis. I argue that community podcasts provide a destabilisation of the elite hold on digital spaces and form a ‘coalitional approach to theorising decolonial communication’ (Veronelli, 2016: 404).

2. The thick time of everyday crises

In recent years, the work by anthropologists, geographers and sociologists have given us critical tools to understand time as spatial, subjective, biopolitical and infrastructural. Significant in this is the conceptualisation of ‘colonisation of and with time’ (Adam, 1992: 180). For Adam, the experience of colonisation is not simply a relationship between imperial state and its colonised people, rather how a range of powerful vectors in the shape of the state, capitalism, modernity and so on impose restrictions and regulate subaltern time from within. This theme is evident in work that focusses on the experiences and construction of subjective time among ordinary citizens. As Carswell et al. note ‘various forms of waiting – ‘on the day’, ‘to and fro’, and ‘chronic’ waiting – reveals how temporal processes operate as mechanisms of power and control through which state actors and other mediators produce differentiated forms of citizenship and citizens’ (Carswell et al., 2019: 597). Here we might refer to the understanding of time from Mbembe as follows,

This time is not a series but an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones. (Mbembe, 2001: 16)

As Bailey and Madden note, ‘Experiences are accumulated over time and these become interconnected through symbolic systems of relevances, such that every lived experience relates both to past and to potential future experiences’. (Bailey and Madden, 2017: 6). The Indian states approach to managing future crises has been through a ‘technological solutionism’ (Mozorov 2013) that has forced subaltern citizens to live in the shadow of a temporal colonisation of their mobile phones. The coercion by the state to install apps, upload information regularly and track movement of citizens (Datta et al., 2020) could be seen as a blatant encroachment of the time of the subaltern body (Datta, 2020b) that have transformed intimate experiences of domestic time. Yet even as the state sought to speed up state surveillance through time-efficiencies offered by mobile phones, it slowed down everyday time for its citizens through closures, lockdowns and curfews. As zones of containment were

visualised and determined for remedial action in the COVID War rooms (Datta et al., 2020), time was suspended for marginal citizens across public institutions, public spaces and the home. The state's COVID management was geared towards real time monitoring of the crisis, yet it turned its back to the gendered crisis that encircled marginal citizens within a delayed and suspended everyday time of multiple domestic crises.

The architect Jeremy Till spatialises thick time as everyday time, “that time of the extended present which avoids mere repetition of past times, or the instant celebration of new futures. Thick time is where the interception of recurrence and belonging provides the space for action.” (Till, 1999: 7). This everyday time may also be evident in community podcasts, which reflect the intimate sounds of the home, and particularly the aural and sonic spaces around the body. In Sarah Sharma's work this is also ‘biopolitical time’ (Sharma, 2014: 18). Sharma notes that the distance between social groups is increased through the power-asymmetries of clock time that are often seen as impenetrable and indistinct yet experienced at an intimate scale by marginal social groups. It produces continued negotiations for affective and non-linear time (Datta, 2020c; Koselleck, 2018; Milojević, 2008; Saidi, 2008; Sharma, 2014; van der Vlies, 2017) across multiple scales – from the geopolitical to that of the home and family. The repeated motifs of clock time in everyday affective time are thus upheld by the use of digital technologies that reinforce power asymmetries across digital-analogue spaces. Thick time then can also be understood as an intimate aspect of biopolitical time that shapes the body's relationship to everyday time through the temporal frame of the home.

In her work on cruel optimism, Berlant offers us another way to understand thick time as the time of ‘impasse’ – ‘a time of dithering from which someone or some situation cannot move forward’ (Berlant, 2011: 4). Impasse, she notes is a state of continuous crisis in that the crisis becomes an ordinary aspect of everyday life. According to Berlant, this genre of crisis shaped by the time of the impasse, is what determines the present moment, which produces the tensions between public life and intimate domesticity. Yet this is also a time when the ‘impasse’ can become the route to something more meaningful for the future. This is evident in how the COVID19 lockdown that pushed women and their families into the impossible conditions of work from home, also became a conduit for verbalising a political space for their future. The community podcasts created by these women pushed forward a stretched and enriched notion of time within everyday life of the home as this shapes ‘how the now links to past and future, in the process reshaping the present and futurity’ (Holloway et al., 2018: 468). In verbalising one's struggles, women used the ‘infrastructural time’ of podcasting as an assemblage of technologies, people and temporalities (Appel, 2018; Berlant, 2016; Chien and Woodworth, 2018; Datta, 2020c; Kitchin, 2019; Mitchell, 2014, 2020) to carry their stories in their voices across geographies and generations. The podcasts claimed space of experiences and affect within the digital public sphere that for those who continue to live within a time of delay, suspended on the edge of policy and planning.

3. From broadcasting to podcasting in India

In recent years, podcasts have received increased attention as a ‘potentially powerful digital tool for engaging with a broad range of public, policy, student and professional audiences’ (Rogers and Herbert, 2020: 63). In India however, podcasts are a relatively new phenomenon, often seen as the strengthening of elite privilege in digital space. However, radio broadcasting (as another form of audio-based mass communication) has a long history since technological revolution in 19th century India (Pinkerton, 2008). As a technology of imperial governance over colonial subjects and a machine for imperial propaganda, radio (like the railways) was promoted to bring together the furthest reaches of India within the purview of imperial communication. However, it also promoted a wave of early anti-colonial movements,

which tapped into colonial radio waves to subversively reach out to the masses and garner solidarity for freedom movements.

Despite radio's potential for grassroots democratic movements, it remained within the purview of centralised communication even after independence in 1947, aiming to transform a vast population into a democratic citizenry (Shaw, 2005). Broadcasting remained largely within the control of the federal and regional states with a focus on disseminating paternalistic messages on various aspects of development. And yet, despite the increasing prominence of television in India since the 1980s, radio has remained the technology with the widest coverage in the country. In the 1990s, even as FM radio was introduced (Sen, 2014), the channels remained largely under private ownership and missed out on opportunities to include community voices. In 1995, the Indian Supreme Court ruled that “airwaves are public property” leading to the setting up of Community Radio as a third-tier broadcast (after public and private broadcasting). In December 2002, the Indian Government released the first set of Community Radio guidelines, but restricted this to established educational institutions/organizations (Srivastava, 2007). Thus, although geographically and socially marginalised populations have benefitted from the mass communication infrastructures of radio, television (and more recently internet), they have nonetheless remained largely excluded from creating their own content in their own voices.

While the politics of public broadcasting in India is outside the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that radio as a technology of 19th and 20th century has greatly influenced how podcasting has evolved in the last decade or so (Cwynar, 2015). That said, much of the public sphere of podcasting and radio is still dominated by the state or private corporations. This has become particularly poignant in recent years as the ruling party have once again taken to radio to communicate important state messages about welfare and development to the masses. Since 2014, the Prime Minister of India in particular has hosted a regular radio programme titled ‘Mann ki baat’ [talks from the heart] that has dominated the airwaves on diverse topics from governance to education to gender empowerment (Asthana, 2019).

State paternalism in mass communication became particularly evident during the COVID19 pandemic, where upon lockdown, the state pushed several public announcements via mobile phones in order to manage quarantine, work, education, employment and welfare. Yet these messages either did not reach those who were without access to mobile phones or state sponsored apps; or despite reaching vulnerable populations, the messages did not provide them pathways to express their concerns or voices. As we found during the podcast experiment, subaltern citizens use technologies in markedly different ways than those imagined by the state and private technology companies – their use of the mobile phone is often opportunistic owing to the challenges of data usage, lack of network infrastructures, structural conditions of path-dependency and lack of ownership of mobile phones.

Parallel to radio broadcasting, India's digital revolution in the last two decades have produced an alternative forum for podcasts as another genre of sound-based texts. Tulley notes that podcasts work as IT texts because they ‘foreground sound in the current cultural moment of secondary orality.’ (Tulley, 2011: 256) and ‘blur boundaries between virtual and face-to-face communications and virtual and physical spaces.’ As a relatively new genre of affective technology, podcasts produce temporality in the gendered body through voice, language and accent creating material of short duration which listeners can consume at their own pace. Characteristic features of podcast include ease of publication, subscription and use across multiple environments, as well as the need for minimal infrastructure. Podcasts adapt to the unstructured nature of interviews or conversations, and they have low-cost production and reception technologies.

The popularity of podcasts, particularly in local languages in India has risen substantially over the last few years, and particularly during the COVID19 pandemic. In 2020, India recorded a 29.3% increase in podcast consumption as a result of the restrictions of work from home

and lockdowns. Every media channel now hosts their own podcasts that are geared towards a listener audience who are short of time and on the go. As Florini notes, podcasts incorporate ‘element of immersion through practice of social gating’ (Florini, 2015: 209). Cwynar notes that as a ‘paratextual extension’ (Cwynar, 2015: 191) podcasts can be seen as ‘auditory parallels to blogging’. Yet these tools are often not available to marginal citizens.

I argue following (Pavarala and Malik, 2007) that community podcasts should be seen as forging forms of ‘subaltern counterpublics’ (Fraser, 1990) – a space outside the state that can be carved for voicing participation. This is evident in Sarah Florini’s argument about the ‘Chitlin Circuit’ broadcasts in USA, suggesting that podcasts can have a ‘conversational nature and the use of Black American cultural common places combined with the intimate qualities of radio-style audio, reproduce a sense of being in Black social spaces.’ (Florini, 2015: 209) In doing so community podcasts can work as ‘countertempos’ (Barak, 2013: 5) that are about critically reflecting upon, working with, resisting and challenging the dehumanising effects of the state’s temporal regulation of the COVID crisis within intimate domestic spaces. In this case the mobile phone as a technology of regulation and surveillance from above also works as a countertempo of voice and speech in the hands of young women who remain in the ‘networked margins’ (Shah, 2015: 9).

But podcasts are also embedded within their own affective temporalities as evident during the COVID19 lockdown in India. They capture thick descriptions of time as they move the body through time, through the actions of speaking and listening. As Boyd and Duffy note, ‘Sound is an integral component of this affective contagion as it offers a focus on the experiential ways that bodies and place intertwine and co-constitute one another.’ (Boyd and Duffy, 2012: np). Voices in the podcast brings the body within its timescape as it speaks through language, accent, pitch and pace, thereby inducing affect, emotion and experience. Voice captures the primacy of time flowing between the past, present and future, its flows through material and temporal spaces where the body is located. While clock time is ‘non-temporal time’ (Adam, 1992: 180), podcasts transform social experience into relational, intimate and thick time of space and its sounds bounded by the temporality of its own being. Intimacy in the podcast is not just in the realm of deeper feelings and experiences, rather also the sounds of physical proximity of people and their mobile phones compelled to live together under lockdown. Consequently, community podcasts lend themselves to intimate representations about temporality, subjectivity and multiple networks of gendered power across domestic and public spaces.

4. Delhi’s data peripheries

Madanpur Khadar and Bawana, where our participants lived are resettlement colonies in Delhi’s South-eastern and North-western peripheries. These colonies were carved out of agricultural land in the peripheries by the Delhi government for slum evictees in the 2000s. Both Khadar and Bawana are characterised by invisibility from the political and cultural life of Delhi. Information about them is absent in most public records, and scant references to them are only found in the context of slum resettlement programmes of Delhi or in the media on crime and deviance. More importantly, these resettlements colonies are positioned as peripheral to the city – flows of people, goods, services, welfare, information and communications between the peripheries and the city are delayed or even suspended because of an infrastructural paralysis therein. Here infrastructural time of the peripheries are always held in abeyance to the pace of the city – waiting to be connected to public transport, queuing up for public toilets, struggling with the lack of schools, uncertainty of food rations, intermittent mobile networks and barred from entering the city under COVID. Yet while these peripheries were hidden in the ‘power-chronographies’ (Sharma, 2014: 21) of the city, they were also made visible through the coercive technologies of apps, GIS maps and satellites, as their residents became data points in the COVID maps or passive data generators while using these apps.

Over the last two years we have been working with these women as part of an AHRC funded project titled ‘Gendering the Smart City’. With feminist NGO partners Jagori, and a women’s safety mapping enterprise – Safetipin, we created a network of participants and stakeholders committed to acting upon the exclusionary impacts of the smart city technologies on gender experiences. We created a WhatsApp group and through that created a safe space for these young millennial women to speak out in solidarity and freedom. From the WhatsApp group emerged several participatory outputs such as a public exhibition in Delhi’s largest metro station (Datta and Thomas, 2021), a Wikipedia page (Ray Murray and Datta, 2020) and a hip hop song (Datta, 2019) written and performed by the women. Through these various creative outputs, we initiated forms of digital authorship (Datta and Thomas, 2021) that could provide pathways to critical consciousness and voice to the women.

Unfortunately, the final phase of our project was marked by the COVID crisis which started in 2020. It was not possible to meet with the women in their homes or neighbourhood or for the project team to travel. However, the pandemic also provided us with a unique opportunity to discuss and reflect upon the gendered impacts of technological solutionism on their lives as they were largely confined within the home. We used the momentum and the familiarity that these women had developed with Zoom to structure a series of podcast training sessions which would provide them with the skills and capacity to speak back in very direct ways compared to our other arts-based initiatives.

Over the autumn and winter of 2021, with the help of two facilitators, we ran a set of 8 podcast training workshops with women of Khadar and Bawana. This was at the height of the COVID-19 crisis, just after the lockdown devastated the ‘survival infrastructures’ (Datta, 2020a: np) of migrants, street traders and low-income citizens of Delhi. We began by conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with the women via phone and WhatsApp with the support of our NGO partner Jagori. Jagori has been working in these communities for a very long time and their role had heightened particularly during the crisis when they organised relief supplies and access to welfare for many families stuck within the impossible conditions of lockdown. In these interviews, we asked probing questions about the experiences of lockdown and its gendered consequences in accessing basic infrastructures (water, sanitation, food etc) as well as the transformation of gendered power relations at home as the family spent more time together with very little space for privacy.

At the end of these interviews, we were able to identify broader conditions of risk and vulnerability brought about by COVID surveillance and its technocratic managerialism by the state. The women were at the most risk since the fallout of the crisis and lockdown meant that mobile phones were one of first ‘luxuries’ to be forsaken. However mobile phones became necessary technologies for accessing education, private tuitions, and numerous other training programmes that the women were involved in. In this context, we were acutely aware of the demands made of organising zoom workshops, both in terms of a mobile phone as well as the incessant need for data. While we were unable to provide mobile phones, we did reimburse the women on their use of data which was necessary in order to conduct the workshops.

Across eight workshops we followed what has been identified as ‘phonographic methods’ (Gallagher and Prior, 2014: 267) – the use of tools such as ‘listening, recording, playback, editing, distribution, broadcast’ to encourage the women to speak in their own voice, as well create wider space for listening to these voices. The workshops in themselves were loosely structured. They were a combination of training around use of software to record, edit and publish, as well as intense conversations and reflections on the gendered experiences of living in resettlement colonies.

Although the apps were heavy and often made their phones hang or occupy too much space, we nonetheless managed to work around these challenges to engage productively over two months in the production of four podcasts in a series the women named ‘Humari Kahaani, humari zubaani’ [our stories, our voices].

5. COVID19 as a temporal suspension

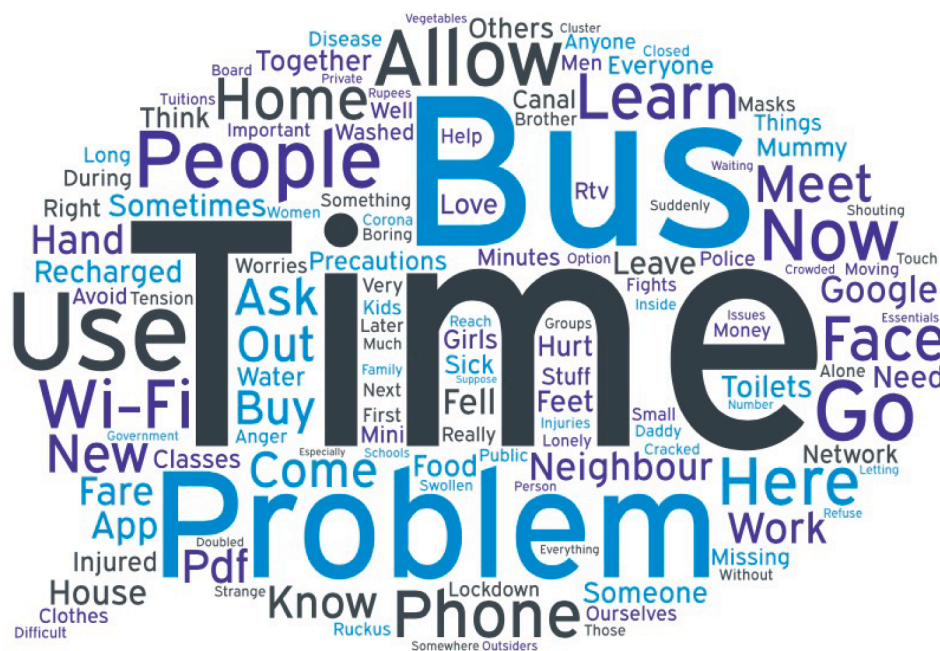
The COVID19 pandemic led to the state imposing a series of temporal suspensions such as – lockdowns, quarantines, curfews and restrictions. Synchronisation between spread and treatment, lockdown and movement, communalism and welfare further presented key failings of the state in knowing and addressing the pandemic. Here the state became the arbiter of internal boundaries between houses, families, neighbourhoods and cities, placing restrictions on mobility and routines between spaces and peoples. These suspensions varied between the first and second waves of the pandemic, when internal temporal borders were intensified or relaxed. As ‘time-space compression went along with a time-space comparison’ (Barak, 2013: 146), ordinary citizens negotiated their ways around familiar routines of work, trading and education within vastly unfamiliar spaces of the digital and domestic.

The lockdown imposed by the state was not just a closure of public spaces, it was also a simultaneous suspension of public and intimate time. People postponed weddings, festivals, and other major events in their lives; they also suspended everyday prosaic interactions of work, leisure, education and publicness. At the same time, women locked in the home were constrained by the challenging conditions of gender power dynamics, found their intimate time colonised by the increasing intensity of housework. It is during this moment of crisis both long and immediate that women began to reflect upon their subjective times, the gendering of their time in the home and outside as well as the impacts of this gendered time which began not just now, not just here, but with the loss of agency of their mothers or grandmothers.

While the state reinforced the idea that COVID was a race against time, it nonetheless kept the poor waiting in delayed and suspended time. Worktime, studytime, sleeptime, hometime were all blurred dur-

created heightened challenges for both young and elderly women in low-income colonies. Many women lost their livelihoods and employment, since their work was largely based outside the home, or because their families stuck inside the home needed increased care and attention. This was what Berlant has called the ‘temporal genres of the stretched out present’ (Berlant, 2011: 5) – a situation that is an ‘unforeclosed event’ remaining in continuous ‘animated suspension’ of a tragic COVID19 event in the very near future.

As women spent more time inside the home, time itself took on new thicker meanings. It was not possible to compartmentalise daily routines into education, working, leisure and domestic time, or allocate specific times for care, leisure and restfulness within the home. Rather, time flowed between different activities within the unchanging nature of domestic space. This produced what Barak has noted as a ‘malignant banality’ (Barak, 2013: 165), in that the performance of routines created increased uncertainties and vulnerabilities for those already marginalised within gender power dynamics in the home. As Geiger et. al. (2021: 220) found “routines are coordinated under increased temporal uncertainty - when the timing of critical events cannot be known in advance and temporal misalignment creates substantial risks”. Under this ‘always-present’ risk that daily routines will be disrupted, women lived in continuous uncertainty about their near and long term future. This experience of COVID shifted the meanings and significance of time. This was not just in its absence or time-poverty, but since domestic time was a crucial determinant of gendered inequality, the time of the lockdown was seen as a major threat to gendered privacy and freedoms in the long-term. As the wordcloud of their interviews shows, ‘time’ was the phrase repeated most number of times, and temporal suspension was directly connected to a range of infrastructural and other ‘problems’.



ing the lockdown whereas keeping track of time in smaller parcels was essential for fulfilment of daily routines. This, created a 'shadow pandemic' (Ravindran and Shah 2020: np) for poor women. Stuck within the home and their families, women faced a crisis of temporality. Time was always a constraint, but presented with the challenge of staying at home combined with the impossibility of working from home

Problems	Infrastructure
Fights, shouting, sick, hurt, worries, tension, recharge, clothes, difficult, love, boring	Bus, wifi, network, google, toilets, tuitions,

All conversations about time began from the home, since gendered time had effectively imploded in domestic space. Here the state and family as two significant institutions colluded in producing a complete suspension of women's temporal freedoms. On the one hand, clock time appeared to flow too fast as women struggled to fulfill domestic chores that increased substantially as all family members were confined within the home. Women noted that they felt domestic time (cleaning, cooking, feeding) consumed all day and the times they would usually allocate for work, education and leisure were reduced or totally consumed by domestic work. Time outside the home was curbed further as men completely took on the responsibilities of buying essentials for the home. Yet on the other hand, time seemed to move very slowly across days and weeks as each day brought in more of the same struggles with little variation between mornings and evenings, weekdays and weekends.

'Biopolitical time' (Sharma, 2014: 18) played a significant role in this reorientation and experience of a gendered unfreedom. Lockdown impacted heavily on the cyclical time of the body, sleep, rest, sanitation and menstrual hygiene. For those without toilets at home, the lockdown imposed additional burdens on their bodily cycles compounding the already aggravating situation inside the homes. With the strict enforcement of curfews, it became very difficult for most women to reach or use public toilets, which charged fees and operated only during daytime hours). If they did step out, they were stopped or harassed by law enforcement agencies. Economic distress at home also reduced the leisure time that was available on the phone or television, since these two expenses were the first to be curtailed. As schools moved online, a wide range of issues, from network connectivity, number of phones at home, or sharing phones led to educational disadvantages, or dropping out of school/college for a year. Not having the required number of phones at home meant that time had to be readjusted with other siblings and parents amidst household work, with men and boys having priority over their work or education online.

All dimensions of intimate and domestic time then was transformed by the state's management of COVID time. The women would note that a day should have 72 h since they never had enough time to do all the things they needed to do. They had a saying 'when there were no clocks, we had time; now we have clocks, but we have no time.' This refers to what Barbara Adam has called a 'non-temporal time' (Adam, 1992: 180) that is in fact an 'artefactual time symbolised by the clock'. Ironically, time-keeping emerged as one of the essential mechanisms of coping with the crisis in order to sustain a long-term future. Women began to perform what Geiger calls 'temporal boundaries under routines' (Geiger et al., 2021: 220) in this case, often conflicting routines that stretched between survival, care, livelihood and leisure.

During COVID everything had come to a standstill, nothing was moving, parents did not have any work. But since I was taking tuitions; I take tuitions from 10.30 in the morning till 8 at night, and I took only an hour out for relaxation. It is essential to get the mobile recharged to continue studying which I did and I also helped the children whom I used to teach to study online and even handled their exams etc. So, at that time, many things had come to a halt since parents did not have any work, but I continued my tuitions and did not let it cause a break in my studies. 'Cooking sabzi' with podcasts

When we started the podcast workshops, we were unsure what they would lead to. Our sound artists facilitating the workshops used the metaphor of cooking *sabzi* [vegetables]. In the initial workshops they asked the women to go shopping for vegetables [recording sounds and interviews], then cutting them [editing], putting *masala* [background score or ambient sounds] and then preparing the *sabzi* [bigger message]. They also mentioned that the *sabzi* will taste better if the women thought and planned what they would cook in advance.

The first few podcast training sessions were involved in introducing and familiarising with each other. As an online group without physical contact, sociability over Zoom demanded the emotional and affective labours of the local partners, research team and facilitators. The early sessions were also listened in by parents or siblings and therefore were more guarded and formal. We focussed on these sessions on digital training – understanding of what podcasts are and do, how they can tell their stories in their own voices and who would be the audience of these stories. We realised that technology was a huge constraint for the women in attending these workshops – data was limited and the Zoom app would crash several times. Thus many women kept their cameras switched off for needs of privacy and technology. As time was a precious commodity, women were also doing other jobs while participating – cooking or cleaning or other home-based economic activities. Yet they also expressed a keen interest in learning about podcasts, particularly how to edit their recordings. There were several long discussions on recording and troubleshooting on the Zoom platform.

Much of the intimate lives of citizens had to be organised through apps for monitoring health and contagion, for access to welfare during COVID, for education and work as well as for leisure. Yet these apps had a temporality of their own that demanded users to comply with the time of the state, which conflicted with the perpetual time of gendered domestic labours during COVID19. In this, the state constructed a future of technologically driven development, yet denied women their time for education and personal development in the present. This conflict was recorded in an interview by one of the women with their teacher.

On the one hand you are saying that the future belongs to technology and that in the future everything can be done with only your mobile and at the same time, you want to keep your girls away from education. How do you expect them to sustain in the future, it won't be possible to do so without education.

Time emerged as a critical issue not only in terms of COVID but also in the long term. Time was associated with and determined intimate life choices and trajectories – education, marriage and attire among others. And through reflections on these aspects as well as the recordings that the women circulated in the workshop, it became clear that 'time' would become an episode in itself for one of the podcasts. Women's struggles with time in different spaces and moments and the heightened temporal power geometries during COVID would tell its own stories about their struggles and aspirations in the past, present and future.

All conversations about time started from intimate gendered relationships. This was gendered time – where marriage was discussed as singly the most significant moment of a woman's lifelong confinement and colonisation with/of time. Marriage was seen as the time of loss – of



education, freedom and an equal future. Marriage was also seen as generationally accretive loss, since mothers who were married at a younger age were deemed unfit to educate or guide their children in important life decisions. Child marriage meant lower education, inadequate physical development to bear children, and a shift to a lifetime of living under the ‘marzi’ [wishes] of husband and in-laws. Education therefore was also seen as temporal – its accessibility was suited to time and space of one’s life course. One had to make time for education – it was dependent on one’s family situation, and the doors to education were always closed after marriage.

These observations materialised from a short recording by Salma, in which she speaks to her mother about education and child marriage. Salma starts by asking her mother about when she got married and how she felt about this. Her mother says she was 15 years old and was too young to decide for herself.

- *Ok, Ammi listen, please tell us, is it good to get married at a young age? What are the possible side effects?*
- *Well, early marriages have several adverse effects like you cannot study, you cannot concentrate and advance, you cannot do anything much for your own growth because you are involved in the family and do not get time to follow your heart.*
- *Ok, Ammi, suppose if you were educated like I am today at the time you got married then if you were married forcefully then would you have declined it?*
- *Well, I could have lived my life as per my wishes. I could have gone anywhere like I could have gone out for an hour or two, but since I lived with my parents, if I had ever gone out for some time there was a lot of questioning. Even now I cannot do so as my husband questions me as to where am I going? Why am I going? and tells me not to go out alone. There are a lot of restrictions. But, I have never put any restrictions on my children. When my child wanted to go for a job, I allowed her and now I have convinced her father too.*

Moments such as these were significant as Kincaid notes when ‘podcasts can communicate visceral elements of data through speakers’ voices, potentially changing how an audience responds to the research’ (Kincaid et al., 2020: 78). When this recording was played in the workshop, the other women were moved by this intimate conversation in which a mother described not just her own slow shift to critical consciousness but also the temporal moment upon which she began to act on this with her children. Ultimately it highlighted to them how intergenerational time of education, knowledge and consciousness impacts on them in the present and future. Thick time here is heavy with the burdens of the past but also laden with the fruits of reflection and consciousness about acting in the future. This moment is both a rewinding of time to Ammi’s moment of losing her independence through marriage, but also a slowing down of time to dwell on the present and future of her children through which past injustices could be addressed.

Similarly, clothes too were spatiotemporal. What one could wear was dependent on one’s life stage as well as the context one was in. Clothes evoked some of the most intense discussions since sexual harassment in public places was tied to victim blaming around sartorial choices. Attitudes towards clothes were also seen as everchanging where once their mothers had said to them ‘*jitni chadar utni paer*’ [stretch your legs only as much as the cover allows], the women said they have rephrased that saying to ‘*chadar apni bunenge, jitni bhi paer pheylayenge*’ [we will sew our own covers, and stretch our legs as much as we need to].

The podcasts themselves produced their own ‘sonic domains’ (Rogers et al., 2020: 434) – of family members talking in the background, children crying, the pressure cooker whistling, and the grainy sounds of recordings made during phone conversations. The facilitators had asked the women to use the DOLBY app to record these sounds in order to cut off ambient noise, but only one recording was actually made on Dolby. The podcasts then produced a double-time – time of recording

and the time of listening and reflection.

Much of these discussions on the future were about the impacts of ‘patriarchal time’ (Milojević, 2008: 329). Women discussed how their time was undervalued particularly with respect to the male members of their household, so much so that it did not leave any time for leisure. This experience was brought forth in a recording for the podcast.

We all know that a day in our life has only 24 h then from the societal view, why is it said that it is a girl’s responsibility to handle the household chores and take care of their family members, but nobody tells them to take out some time for themselves. and in my opinion women think a lot about others. Whether, it is their husband or brother or son. So, I would like to say that the male members of the family should help the women, so they also get some time for themselves.

Gendered time however was not only debated with respect to patriarchy, but also lost time or wasted time. In this, the women followed a notion of linear clock time which if not used productively, would make one’s future insecure.

So, we always repent about the time we waste unnecessarily. Like when I was in class 10th or 11th, I used to roam about unnecessarily and did not study much but now when I look back and think, I feel had I studied a little more, I would have done better in life, like I could have had a better job, or I could have got an admission in a better college. ... So, I have realized this that we should take timely actions and not procrastinate because you have no idea whether you will get time to take actions in the future or not because as the saying goes - “time and tide, wait for none”

Repentance about lost or wasted time was a familiar discussion in each workshop since time was the biggest determinant of inequality. Yet there was a sense that they did not quite understand its value till it was lost. This conversation around lost time was poignant during a pandemic crisis since it led to understanding how the lockdown has made them lose a linear sense of clock time, while keeping them in wasted time within the home. Wasted time here was the time that was spent in domestic work rather than ‘productive’ education or employment. And in that sense domestic work itself was undervalued in this temporal hierarchy.

We get to understand the importance of time when we lose it. We, especially repent when we lose time because time never waits for us, but we always have to wait for time.

Waiting was a familiar motif in the workshop discussions as well as in several recordings made by the women for the podcast. This waiting was intergenerational, lifelong, as well as instantaneous. Waiting was a form of coping with immediate crisis of the pandemic as well as a way of explaining structural inequalities that they found themselves wound up in. Waiting was also understood as suspended time-space, where many of their hopes and aspirations went unfulfilled, when disillusionment was simply delayed to the future, and a coming of age was marked by increased gendered responsibilities.

While many of these themes were debated during workshops, it was in the writing of a eloquent Urdu *Shayari* (poetry) by one of the women which meaningfully captured a thick notion of time, of waiting and wasting, a sense of time heavy with the burdens of the past, coming of age and increasing responsibilities in the future. The poetry was composed with short lines using rich metaphors that conveyed an intimate sense of time, thick with subjective and gendered constructions of temporality.

*Ye waqt na jaane kitne rang badalta hai.
Ye waqt na jaane kitne rang badalta hai.
Kabhi gham to kabhi khushiyan hazaar deta hai.*

This time, it changes countless colours.
This time, it changes countless colours.

Sometimes grief and sometimes thousands of joys it showers upon us.

*Ye waqt hai ki guzarta hi nahin.
Jaane kyun tham sa gaya hai.*

This is the time that does not pass
Who knows why it stands still?

*Kal tak jo masoom si khushi
ghar ki aangan ko mehkaati thi
na jaane kab zimadariyan uthane lagi.*

Until yesterday, the joyous innocence
that scented the courtyard in our home
have now unwittingly begun to bear responsibilities.

*Woh chhodkar saath kwahishon ki pannon ko
aangan ko diyon se sajaane lagi.*

She abandoned the pages of desires
and began to bedeck the courtyard with lamps.

*Usske mann mein bhi thi khwahishein.
Oonchaiyon ko chhoone ki beshumaar
sapnon se bhare zimadariyon ke
na jaane kitne pehlu badalte hai*

She too had contemplated many desires,
of scaling great heights,
Dreams filled with countless responsibilities,
Who knows why they keep changing.

*Ye waqt na jaane kitne rang badalta hai.
Kabhi gham to kabhi khushiyan hazaar deta hai.*

This time, it changes countless colours.
Sometimes grief and sometimes thousands of joys it showers upon us.

*Aaj sabhi ka mann dehleez par aas laga ke baitha hai.
Nai zindagi ka paigam lekar koi aane wala hai.*

Today, our hearts wait at the thresholds of hope
Someone will come with tidings of a new beginning.

*Intezaar khatm hua.
Raah dekhti nigahon ka
Daakiye ke bhes mein aaya tha waqt
Aur ek khaali yaadon ka lifafa de gaya.*

The wait is over
for the eyes trained on the road.
Time had arrived in the guise of a postman,
But it delivered only an envelope of empty memories.

*Par mann aaj bhi yahi sochta rehta hai
Ki ye waqt na jaane kitne rang badalta hai.
Kabhi gham to kabhi khushiyan hazaar deta hai.*

But the heart still keeps believing
that time, it changes countless colours.
Sometimes grief and sometimes thousands of joys it showers upon us.

Failure was a lingering theme of discussion in the training workshops. The women were very aware of the challenges they faced in their digital capacities and infrastructure and therefore were always uncertain about the ‘success’ of their podcasts. Indeed, the community

podcasts lacked the technical quality and editing style of more professional and accomplished podcasts circulating in digital space. They also became much longer than the 5 min podcasts that we had initially planned, and often the narrative thread appeared circular, fragmented or abrupt. The podcasts as uploaded on SoundCloud platform by the team, appeared more as a collection of multiple narratives on a theme rather than one singular narrative with a singular voice. Yet the podcasts use sonic devices of the voice that create a space of reflection, sharing and learning.

Because they were considerably ‘under watch’ by their families during the lockdown, these women had found it found it challenging to speak or voice their fears and uncertainties publicly. But in the final workshop when the finished podcasts were played, the women said that both their successes and failures will help someone else become successful. They understood that they had discussed themes which had been previously unspoken in public, they had acquired training and knowledge about occupying digital space with their voices, and most of all they had created a space of solidarity and authorship for themselves on their own terms using just a mobile phone.

6. The slow sounds of time

This paper has charted a theory, method and praxis of thick time using community podcasts at the time of crisis. In doing so, it has shown that crisis itself is stretching across generations and spaces of knowledge and consciousness and can produce the imperative to act in the present for more emancipatory futures. While infrastructure – water, sanitation, mobile network and so on remained as relevant and significant contexts to understanding their intimate connections to time, thick time is produced from the coming together of past, present and future temporalities layered over one another.

In experimenting with podcasts, we learnt not only from the processes of virtually training a disparate group of young women, but also the impossibility of keeping up pace with linear time of efficient management of a crisis. These podcasts refuse the state’s time of COVID lockdowns that closes down the multiple temporalities of gendered, subjective and layered time of domestic space. Instead, community podcasts occupy digital time and space in the impossibility of other forms of occupation by these women. In doing so, they also show that marginal women are no longer data mules or data points in the State’s COVID-19 time-management. Rather they are producers of sonic data in digital space, thus also disrupting a data hierarchy which places visual and textual above all other forms of data. As thick time connects intimate geographies to structural inequalities, the podcasts offer a way to verbalise these without paying abeyance to the hierarchies of data.

As Rogers et al. note ‘being critically reflexive requires slowing down to listen and observe, to ponder and reflect, and to integrate and synthesise.’ (Rogers et al., 2020: 449) The production of these podcasts rewound time by playing and replaying their recorded sound clips during the workshops. Each rewinding led to new ways of understanding the content, identifying with it and acting upon it. They slowed time by slowing sound in order to give women the space for reflection and critical consciousness, through simultaneity of thought in which their experiences are understood collectively within the space of a Zoom workshop.

The podcasts do not claim to completion or perfection; indeed, they are marked by a lack of technical perfection. Yet they reveal layers of the past and future time which are crystallised through actions in the present. Crucially they follow an experimental geography of ‘production without guarantees’ (Paglen, 2009: np) and therefore also a space for learning from failures. This means not only seeing podcasts as outputs of collaboration and co-production with subaltern citizens, but also as a praxis of training and capacity building through which learning and critical consciousness can be produced. These podcasts are also incomplete timemaps of subaltern lives. As aural devices, podcasts reorient and redistribute the power geometry of speech and voice from the

subaltern body to digital space. While visualisation can lead to resurrecting the power of presence, in podcasts, the sounds and feel for a place evoke bodily responses and experiences as an ‘ethical act’ (Rogers and Herbert, 2019) to challenge some of the established power relations within the home and the city. Community podcasts give voice and speech to those left out of policy and practice, yet at the same time open up conversations on difficult power differentials within families or communities that exist or are created anew.

By deepening time through the metaphors that capture difficult memories, present struggles and a disillusionment about the future, the podcasts produce thick time as a coming of age of these women during an ‘impasse’ (Berlant, 2011). Thick time then connects the public time of state with intimate domestic time of gendered struggles. Fragmented conversations about gendered temporalities and its incompatibility with patriarchal time suggests how thick time can become a window to rethinking the multiple times of a subaltern subject and their geographies of colonisation from the past to the future, from the state to the family, from the home to the city. Thick time raises important questions about ownership and occupation of time and space through subaltern bodies and their words spoken by them. It presents ways to conceptualise possible feminist urban futures that are non-hierarchical and plurilocal, that go beyond the binaries of non/linear time to gendered temporalities and time struggles across multiple spaces and scales. Thick time enables us to see time as a metaphor for struggles across spaces and across layered temporalities. This is a slow sound of the temporal crisis that unfolds across generations, from the state’s disregard of gendered time to the gendered temporal inequalities within the intimate domestic spaces of the home and family.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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