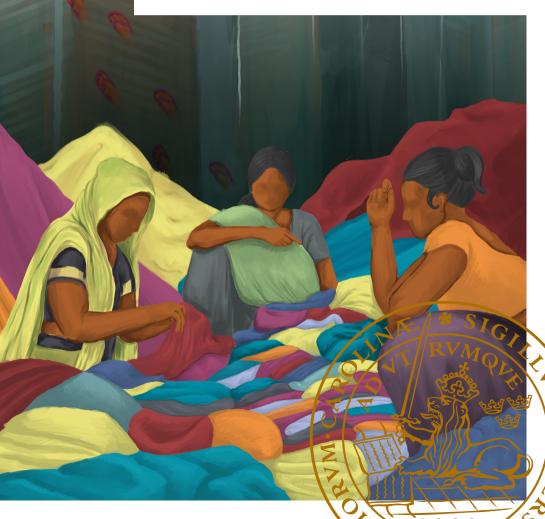# Circles of Value

A Study of Working Lives of Informal Sector Traders in Delhi, India

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The vast majority of India's workforce are employed in the informal economy, which implies that the workers are not covered by the social security benefits usually available through formal employment. Slightly more than half of the Indian informal sector workers are self-employed.

HOW CAN WE LEARN AND UNDERSTAND THE NUANCES OF THE WORKING LIVES OF SELF-EMPLOYED INFORMAL SECTOR WORKERS? How do the intersections of caste, gender and class frame the workers' lives? How do workers in these workspaces relate to their work? This study follows pheriwale's experiences of working in Delhi as self-employed informal sector traders which elucidates how informal sector workers play a pivotal role in the local and global flows of goods. By centring the experiences of informal sector traders, this thesis offers insights into how crucial it is to account for intersectionality within feminist studies on political economy.

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Circles of Value

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A Study of Working Lives of
Informal Sector Traders in Delhi, India

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Abstract

This study revolves around the working lives of pheriwale, a group of self-employed traders within India's vast informal economy. Pheriwale have been trading in Delhi for nearly a century and are involved in the second-hand clothing trade. Among the wide variety of street vendors and traders in the city, pheriwale are one of the most visibly women-dominated. They offer a door-to-door service, collecting used clothes in exchange for new kitchen utensils through barter, to the residents of the city and its suburbs. The collected used clothes are then sold to bulk-buyers in the marketplace (mandi), who in turn sell them forward after repair or washing; the used clothes can also end up in export factories, where they are disintegrated and become part of the rag industry. In addition, the pheriwale's marketplace offers a cheap and affordable second-hand clothing market to the city's low-income and working-class groups. Thus, pheriwale, like workers who are involved in recycling and belong to lower-caste groups, add value to the used clothes by collecting, sorting and bringing them back onto the market.

Engaging with the concept of value enables this thesis to account for the value generated by pheriwale's labour, as well as the aspects of their everyday working lives which they value. Locating these theoretical debates and empirical concerns through an intersectional framework inspired by Dalit feminist literature provides a more nuanced approach to exploring how caste, gender and class intersect. The research questions which guide this study include: How can the working lives of pheriwale women offer ways to unfold the multiple dimensions of value and deepen a theorisation of the concept? How do the pheriwale organise their working routines, and how are they as traders embedded within local, regional and global markets? How do experiences of waiting for state-issued documents and welfare benefits shape notions of value and pheriwale women's relation to the state institutions? How does a feeling of having control over one's time and energy at work by being self-employed frame notions of value in everyday working lives?

Qualitative research inspired by ethnographic study was conducted at the pheriwale's mandi in West Delhi, to facilitate this study. Primary empirical material includes conversations with pheriwale, observation and fieldnotes. The theoretical frame draws upon anthropological, Marxist and feminist theorisations of value, and intersectionality provides a lens to contextualise the discussion on value specifically for this study.

The findings of this doctoral thesis highlight pheriwale's working routines, and also how their trade is linked to local, regional and transnational flows of used clothes. Formalised state-issued documents are important for the pheriwale, who are primarily lower-caste women working in informal economic conditions, in order to secure welfare benefits. The feeling of having more control over time and energy and avoiding discriminatory and alienating work environments by being self-employed are important values at and beyond work for pheriwale.

Key words: value, pheriwale, informal economy, informal sector, recycle traders, Dalit feminism, intersectionality, caste, pheri, social reproduction, waiting, relational autonomy

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Circles of Value

A Study of Working Lives of
Informal Sector Traders in Delhi, India

Riya Raphael

LUND
UNIVERSITY

To Mamma & Appa

Contents

Acknowledgements

Most lovingly, this piece of work is dedicated to my father, Rappai, and my mother, Elsy, who have unfailingly believed in me, encouraged me and given unbounded love. They have consistently created a space to think, love, question and challenge ideas and realities at and beyond home. I am eternally grateful for their love, understanding and for their prayers.

Finally, I should state that, while numerous people have supported me in this project, all the limitations in it are my own responsibility.

List of abbreviations

AIDIS	All India Debt and Investment Survey
ASI	Anthropological Survey of India
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BPL	Below Poverty Line
BS	*Business Standard*
COVID-19	Corona virus disease
DPE	Department of Public Enterprises, Ministry of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises, Government of India
DU	Delhi University
EGS	Employment Guarantee Scheme
EUR	Euro
EWS	Economically Weaker Section
FE	*Financial Express*
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GGCC	Global Garment Commodity Chains
GOI	Government of India
GPN	Global Production Network
GVC	Global Value Chains
HT	*Hindustan Times*
IANS	Indo-Asian News Service
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ID	Identity Document
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INR	Indian Rupee
ManDev	Management Development
MCD	Municipal Corporation of Delhi
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee
MPO	Manpower Planning Organisation Branch
MSJE	Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NAM	Non-Alignment Movement

NCBC	National Commission for Backward Classes
NCT	National Capital Territory
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PAN	Permanent Account Number
PMJDY	Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PTI	Press Trust of India
PwD	People with Disabilities
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SC	Scheduled Castes
SEBC	Socially and Economically Backward Communities
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TNN	Times News Network
UC	Upper Castes
UIDAI	Unique Identification Authority of India
UP	Uttar Pradesh
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UT	Union Territory
VTB	Vocational Training Branch
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing

Select glossary

कचौड़ी – *kachaudi*: a snack

कबाड़ीवाले – *kabadiwale*: plastic, newspaper and cardboard recycle traders

काम – *kaam*: work

कोठी – *khothi* – upper/middle class house

कोरोना-काल – *corona-kaal*: corona times

गुलामी – *gulaami* – servitude or slavery

घोडा – *ghoda* or *ghora*: horse

चादर – *chaadar*: large cloth

चाय-वाले – chai-*wale*: tea seller

चिक-चिक – *chik-chik*: argument

चिंदि – *chindi*: rag cloth

चिन्दीवाले – *chindiwale*: second-hand cloth traders in Mumbai

ज़बरदस्ती – *zabardasti* – coercion, being forced

ज़रूरी – *zaroori*: important

दाल – dal: lentil dish

पानी-वाले – *pani-wale*: water seller

फेरी – *pheri*: peddle goods

बर्तन – *bartan*: kitchen utensils

मंगलवार – *mangalvar*: Tuesday

मंडी – mandi: large open market

मंदिर – *mandir*: temple

महत्व – *mehtva*: importance

मामी – *maami*: mother's sister

मूल्य – *mulya*: value

रविवार – *ravivar*: Sunday

रिक्षा – rickshaw: three-wheeled cycle

वाघरी – Waghri/Vaghri: caste/tribe

वाला – *wala* to denote men (singular)

वाली – *wali* to denote women (singular)

वाले – *wale:* to denote people (plural)

शुक्रवार – *shukravar*: Friday

समोसा – *samosa*: a snack

साडी-वाली – *saadi/sari-wale*: sari sellers

सोमवार – *somvar*: Monday

हफ्ता बाज़ार – *hafta bazaar*: weekly market

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is a chilly January morning in Delhi, India, and Meena seems relaxed. We sit comfortably in between massive piles of clothes while sipping chai, and she shares with me how it is to travel and work as a trader in a metropolis. Meena is in her early thirties and has been working as a pheriwali for the last decade. Pheriwale are cloth-traders who barter new kitchen utensils in exchange for old clothes. The traders visit various parts of Delhi, going from door-to-door to collect second-hand clothes. While some pheriwale go alone to different locations within the city, Meena says that she prefers to travel for trade along with three or four fellow pheriwale. This way they can share the costs of transport, visit distant localities of the city and return together after they have gathered piles of second-hand clothes. The following day Meena and her peers will bring the clothes to the mandi, which is an open bazaar or market, in Raghubir Nagar, where we sit this morning. Thus, pheriwale continue to have two primary modes of exchange: they first barter kitchen utensils for old clothes, then they sell old clothes for cash, which is their main source of income.

Meena explains that being a mobile trader in Delhi is laborious due to the scale of the city. The metropolis of Delhi is officially called National Capital Territory (NCT) and includes New Delhi, the capital of India. The city is one of the largest in the country, covering 1,484 square kilometres, and is also home to around 20 million inhabitants. Delhi is expected to take over Tokyo, Japan, as the world's largest city by 2030 according to the World Urbanization Prospects' 2018 report (The World Cities 2018:4). The majority of the city's population, up to 80%, are directly or indirectly employed in the informal sector (Raveendran and Vanek 2020:1–2). According to the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which is a national trade union for self-employed women workers in the informal sector: "There are close to 300,000 street vendors in Delhi but the Municipal Corporation of Delhi [MCD] official figure of 'legal' vendors is roughly around 125,000 of which around 30% are women" (SEWA Delhi 2021). Pheriwale are

among some of the women-dominated trading groups in Delhi, and Raghubir Nagar in West Delhi is one of the biggest second-hand cloth markets in the city (see Figure 1, p. 11).

Since I grew up in Delhi and lived the majority of my life in the city, my initial interest in pheriwale grew out of childhood memories of seeing women (as most of them were) with large bundles of clothes and kitchen utensils visiting my neighbourhood at least twice a month. Various types of traders move along the streets while they loudly announce information about their products or services, so residents know which trader is visiting that day. For example, the regular group of traders and service providers who visited my neighbourhood included the quilt-fixers, who would fluff up the cotton inside the thick winter quilts; the ear-cleaners; the *kabadiwale*, who exchange cardboard, newspapers and plastic for cash; knife-sharpening service providers; street vendors selling ornaments, vegetables, popcorn, peanuts, plates and cups. People with goods on carts continue to line the narrow neighbourhood lanes every day and service providers such as the pheriwale visit regularly.

Similar to pheriwale, 62% of the global labour force work in what is defined as the informal sector. This means that workers are employed or self-employed without formal job contracts that provide social security (ILO 2020*a*:1). According to a recent report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), informal sector workers are involved in maintaining local supply chains of goods and services worldwide (ILO 2020*a*:2). Working in the informal sector is the norm for a large segment of the global population. In many ways, "our entire planet primarily labours informally" (Mezzadri 2020:156). Despite this, calculating the value generated by the informal sector in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or in terms of employment, is widely debated upon (Harriss-White 2003:3–13; Leonard 1998:11–25). This is because it can be quite challenging to calculate the extent of work done in the informal sector as well as the amount of goods and products that may originate, enter and exit informal economies (Crang et al. 2013; Nguyen 2019; see also Medina and Schneider 2018).[1]

The informal economy employ more than 90% (including the agricultural sector) and 85% (non-agricultural sector) of the entire workforce in India and contribute to roughly 50% of the GDP (Maitra 2020; Mehrotra 2019:1; Srija and Shirke 2014). Around 56.22% of informal sector workers are self-employed (Srija and

2

Shirke 2014:45). Over the past four decades, scholarship on the informal economy and waste economies have been significant in showing how global value chains and production networks cannot be studied without taking into account the work that marks the dispersion of production, assembly, distribution, consumption and recycling, which largely lie outside traditional sites of formal employment. Pheriwale women included in my study thus become part of long and dispersed chains of goods in the global economy as they collect used clothes and reintroduce them into markets (cf. Crang et al 2013; Gidwani 2013; Norris 2010).

While there are contestations on how to measure the size of informal work, informal sector workers are, in short, "defined as those without any social insurance" (Mehrotra 2019:1). Terms which are often associated with the informal economy are "hidden, black, cash, underground, secondary, domestic, household, criminal and alternative economy" (Leonard 1998:11). Other terms also include "unorganised" and "illegal" (Hart 1973). The informal economy can only be defined vis-à-vis a so-called "formal economy" (Leonard 1998:2). The informal economy comprises income-generating activities that are not recorded in official statistics (Harriss-White 2003:4). Official statistics by governments may not include such activities either because there are no regulations on them and, hence, they may not be counted as 'economic' at all, or because information is withheld to avoid taxes, or the activity is criminalised by the state. Yet another reason may also be that the economic activity generates such a low income to the workers that it may not be taxed at all (Harriss-White 2003:4; Leonard 1998:1–25; see also Chen and Carré 2020; Norohna and D'Cruz 2017). Economic activity that is criminalised by nation-states such as drugs, trafficking, smuggling, sex work or systemic tax evasion by corporations is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, in my research I focus on informal work that is legal but 'informal' because it is not registered or taxed, as activities such as "rag-picking and recycling" mostly are "below all tax thresholds" (Harriss-White 2003:4). As I will show in my thesis, pheriwale's trade falls under such a category that includes low-income sites of work not covered by formal employment, social security or job contracts.

The body of literature concerning models such as Global Value Chains (GVC) and Global Production Networks (GPN) primarily revolves around transnational corporations, governance and how economic value is generated, created and

captured (Lepawsky and Billah 2011). Global flows of value and production are maintained by millions of "intermediate agents" that facilitate directly and indirectly the movement of goods as well as used goods (Crang et al. 2013:16; see also Ong and Collier 2005:3–21). Despite this, "informal workers, their livelihoods and their contributions are not well understood or valued but rather tend to be misunderstood, undervalued or often stigmatised" (Chen and Carré 2020:2). So, how can we continue to learn and understand the nuances of working lives of groups such as pheriwale, especially women, who are not only involved in recycling old clothes but illustrate the vast myriad of sites of work which create value? By drawing attention to the everyday working lives of pheriwale in Delhi, I would deepen our knowledge of work in the informal sector and the ways in which it is defined by caste, class and gender. I do so by exploring how twenty-first-century work is shaped by intersectional hierarchies of caste, gender and class within the informal economy, where the majority of India's workforce build a livelihood. In this thesis, I focus upon pheriwale's narratives, which I collected when conducting fieldwork in Delhi, from December 2017 to February 2018 and again in January 2019. In my thesis, I examine how a conceptualisation of value can be expanded and take into account the everyday experiences of ways in which a particular group of informal workers construct value at and through work. After outlining the aims and research questions which guide this study, I introduce the concept of value which, I came to realise, offers important insights into the working lives of pheriwale.

Aims of the study

While the scope of literature on groups such as pheriwale is marginal, it is acknowledged in previous scholarship that the clothes collected by pheriwale can end up in local, regional and export markets, thus making them an integral part of the global trade of second-hand clothes (cf. Bapat forthcoming *a*; Crang et al. 2013; Norris 2008; 2010). On one hand, the Indian clothing and fabric industry has invoked a considerable body of literature due to the vast expanse of its role in the global commodity and value chains. This also includes critical scholarship which delves into the declining conditions of work, sweatshops and informalisation of the labour processes in the garment industry (Breman 1996; 2010; 2013; De Neve 2005; Joshi 2003; Mezzadri 2017; Norris 2010). However,

since pheriwale engage with clothes after the production and consumption processes, their work remains mostly absent in this scholarship.

On the other hand, literature on street vendors which emerges from socio-legal frameworks and urban geography analyses issues of right to urban spaces and legalisation of street vending (Bhowmik 2005, 2010; Vargas 2016). However, due to the vast number of income-generating activities on urban streets, specific livelihoods within this large myriad of the urban informal sector have received less attention. Yet another scope of scholarship, which is relevant to the pheriwale's trade, includes research on recycling sites (Gill 2010; Harriss-White 2017; Millar 2008; 2014; 2018; Nguyen 2019). This is an emerging body of literature since themes like waste and the working lives of waste workers have increasingly received attention, especially in the last two decades. As pheriwale are overwhelmingly involved in recycling clothes, their positionality within recycling markets is unique due to the nature of their trade. I engage with the above mentioned scholarship and see a need to explore further how informal sector workers themselves name and understand their experiences within the informal economy. The purpose of my study emerges from the discussed interstices of the gaps within previous research as well as in the hope of contributing to these fields of studies. In the next chapter, I provide a more detailed overview of the previous literature.

The overarching aim of my research is to study the global political economy through the working lives of pheriwale, who are predominantly women, in Delhi. In this way, I hope to build upon as well as contribute to scholarship on changing global political economies analysed from a gender and feminist perspective. The commodity and value chains of second-hand clothes are dispersed; hence, by focusing on the working lives of pheriwale, I intend to highlight a marginalised but significant part of such chains which link the local markets to the regional and global flow of goods. Furthermore, as I hope to show through my thesis, research on the working lives of informal sector workers can be enriched and nuanced through a focus on the everyday working lives of pheriwale women.

Engaging with experiences and narratives of pheriwale women in Delhi offers an insight into their everyday work, their location within fragmented value and commodity chains and also how notions of value shape their lives. Therefore, the first aim of my thesis is to provide an in-depth study of an understudied group of

people whose working lives continue to be latent within India's vast informal economy.

Any research on work within the Indian context cannot overlook caste. As the architect of the Indian constitution and anti-caste activist Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar argues the: "Caste system is not merely division of labour. It is also a division of labourers" (Ambedkar 1987:66). The second aim of my research is to employ an intersectional lens to contextualise how caste is intimately intertwined with gender and class and frames the working lives of pheriwale.

To follow this research purpose, I draw upon Dalit feminist scholarship, which is inspired from Black feminist literature on intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; Pan 2021). Feminist work on intersectionality in India by scholars such as Shermilla Rege (1998), Anandita Pan (2019; 2021), Jayakumari Devika (2018; 2021) and Mary E. John (2013; 2015) offer analytical tools to approach multiple axes of hierarchies. Their explorations of intersectionality highlight how working lives in twenty-first-century urban India are not only premised on capitalist appropriation of informal labour but constantly moulded by intersections of caste, gender and class. This body of scholarship enables my research to study how experiences of being part of a marginalised caste cannot be separated from the hierarchies of gender and class which intersect in intricate and dynamic ways (Devika 2018; John 2015; Pan 2019; 2020; Rege 1998). An intersectional perspective offers an analytical entry-point to illuminate how social reproductive work within the domestic sphere is gendered but also how paid work within the informal economy is caste- and class-bound (John 2013:183). Thus, an intersectional framework allows me to examine how pheriwale's experiences as informal workers are shaped by the intersections of caste, gender and class. In doing so, I engage with Indian feminist scholarship on intersectionality which provides a thorough critique of the caste structure and how it impacts everyday realities. By contributing to this discussion, I engage with and build on anti-caste feminist scholarship, politically and intellectually.

The third aim of my thesis is to conceptualise value by taking into account pheriwale's working lives and bring my data into a dialogue with theories on value. To understand working lives and value, I turn towards Marxist, feminist and anthropological conceptualisations of value to unravel the multiple dimensions of the concept. The particularities of working in the informal sector across various geographical contexts illustrate how structures of global capitalism

transcend borders (Blair 2010). Moreover, the similarities of workers' experiences across numerous sites of informal work clearly indicate how intersections of gender and class frame experiences at work globally in the twenty-first century. Therefore, the fourth and final aim of my thesis is to build an analysis of pheriwale women's work and experiences that go beyond regional studies rooted in India by drawing upon broader scholarship on informal work and waste workers.

In conversations

In order to centre the working lives of pheriwale, I conducted twenty-eight semi-structured interviews among the traders at the mandi, where they sell their collected goods. Since pheriwale's mandi is dominated by women traders, most of my conversations were with women. Two rounds of fieldwork were carried out, from December 2017 to February 2018 and in January 2019, four months in total. In addition to interviews, I make use of observations which I gathered during the hours I spent at the mandi when I was not conducting interviews. I also make use of secondary data, published by the Indian nation-state and by national and international organisations. While I cite reports published by the Indian and international media, though, the focus of my thesis is on the conversations which pheriwale had with me and the information they shared with me.

Research questions

An analysis through the lens of value helps me to show how abstract ideas translate into everyday life realities and, furthermore, how everyday experiences transgress meanings of concepts to move and shape the theorisation of value. The inquiries within my thesis are framed through the scope of current debates taking place among Indian feminists on intersectionality (for example, Devika 2021; John 2015; Pan 2021), so as to account for experiences at work, which include paid and unpaid work, that are constantly shaped by caste, gender and class.

Following the trajectories which emerged from my conversations amongst pheriwale in Delhi, the research questions of my thesis include:

- How do pheriwale organise their working routines and how are the traders embedded within local, regional and global markets?
- How do experiences of waiting for state-issued documents and welfare benefits shape notions of value and pheriwale women's relation to state institutions?
- How does a feeling of having control over one's time and energy at work by being self-employed frame notions of value in everyday working lives?
- How can the working lives of pheriwale women offer ways to unfold the multiple dimensions of value and deepen a theorisation of the concept?

The above questions organise the theoretical and empirical segments of this thesis.

Concept of value

My research engages with the analytical lens of value as it develops as an overarching concept within my data. Value is not only imbued in the goods pheriwale collect and resell but also, I learned, appears in multiple dimensions in the everyday working lives of women in my study. For example, pheriwale point out the value of the state-issued ID card which further enables them to secure welfare benefits. At the same time, they also highlight how waiting for state welfare impedes upon their work, which in turn affects their income.

Scholarship on pheriwale, street vendors, the informal sector and waste workers acknowledge that labour within these spaces of work is "under-valued" because it is often grossly underpaid or not accounted for in official data (Chen and Carré 2020; Harriss-White 2003; Leonard 1998). Economist Barbara Harriss-White uses the concept of "social structures of accumulation" to analyse quantitative data, arguing that the Indian capitalist economy relies on and perpetuates caste and class boundaries through patriarchal relations to extrapolate surplus value (Harriss-White 2003:14). One finding is that women in paid work in India are more likely to be employed as casual workers, and thus, overwhelmingly work in the informal sector (Harriss-White 2003:103).

Developmental economist and gender studies scholar Alessandra Mezzadri expands the model of Global Garment Commodity Chains (GGCC) to account for value of labour and production processes within sweatshops, which are at the

core of the global textile industry (Mezzadri 2017:43–44). Anthropologist Minh Nguyen uses the notion of value to account both for labour as well as for goods collected by waste workers, who instil value in the goods as they are reintroduced into the market (Nguyen 2019:13).

As my findings from Delhi also indicate, the concept of value appears as a key to exploring how informal sector workers contribute to the local, regional and global economies. From an economic perspective, the value of a commodity or labour is calculable since it resides within the price at which the commodity or labour is sold (del Hoyo and de Madariaga 2016:12; Mazzucato 2018:6). However, within the field of political economy, the understanding of work being valuable is itself rooted in the notion that it generates economic value for the worker (as wages) and for the economy (as part of production). Yet, on the other hand, a commodity is valuable not only due to its use or price (exchange value) but because of the incalculable component of value added by the labourer, which is often beyond the wages given to them (Marx 1976[1867]:133–140). Similar to work in the informal economy, domestic work (paid or unpaid), which is primarily done by women, is also undervalued (Mezzadri 2019; Mies 1998[1986]:33; Waring 1999:153). Therefore, one aspect of the immeasurable component of value can be conceptualised as the value of care work or social reproductive labour, which workers carry out on a daily basis, so that paid work can be undertaken (Alessandrini 2018:7; Ferguson 2020:120).

From an anthropological perspective, the incalculability may be because the value of a commodity goes beyond its use or exchange value and may instead reside in its cultural significance (Appadurai 1986; Norris 2010). A commodity can live several lives not only for its cultural significance, but also because it may exit value chains as it becomes useless and has no exchange value. However, it may re-enter the market and be reintroduced as a commodity (with use and exchange value) through recycling (Gill 2010; Lepawsky and Billah 2011; Nguyen 2019). Hence, value emerges through so many theorisations, traversing disciplinary boundaries and theoretical traditions (Bal 2002). In this thesis, I bring in experiences of pheriwale women to build and expand on conceptualisations of value by drawing on the working lives of informal sector workers whom I got to know during my fieldwork. Below, I outline the structure of this dissertation.

9

Structure of the study

In 'Chapter 2: Caste, labour and capital', I contextualise this study by examining how labour and capital are shaped by caste in the Indian economy. I focus on some key policies made by the Indian state in recent years, ones that have directly impacted upon the informal sector because these policies were often recounted by pheriwale. 'Chapter 3: Theoretical framework' explores theories of value and conceptualises how notions of value can be facilitated to understand labour processes that are gender-, caste- and class-bound as well as everyday experiences of work. Furthermore, I provide an overview of the conceptual themes that guide my analysis.

The methods and methodology utilised in this study have been elaborated upon in 'Chapter 4: Methodology'. Here, I explain how tools of ethnographic fieldwork and feminist research have shaped my thesis. This chapter includes a detailed overview of the location where I conducted fieldwork, the epistemological and ontological basis, ethical considerations and ways in which the empirical material of this thesis have been analysed.

'Chapter 5: Pheri – in-between markets' is the first empirical chapter, where I trace the working day of pheriwale to show how they are located within local, regional and global markets. In this section, I also take into account how value is shaped not only by paid work but also by social reproductive and care work carried out by the pheriwale women in Delhi. As mobility is a central aspect of pheriwale's trade, I highlight how trading practices may be restricted due to the increased number of gated localities in and around Delhi.

In 'Chapter 6: Beyond waiting and patience', I explore how pheriwale women relate to the state institutions. Like many marginalised groups, their relation to the state is shaped by arduous moments of waiting. By opening up such experiences, the complexities of the politics of waiting are unveiled as well as how everyday claims to the state institutions are articulated by informal sector traders in order to obtain documents and social benefits. In the last empirical chapter, 'Chapter 7: Between autonomy and alienation', I elucidate how value of work and values at work are negotiated and how autonomy and fear of alienation influence pheriwale as a specific group of self-employed informal sector workers in the city of Delhi. Finally, I present the concluding reflections, major contributions and arguments of this thesis in 'Chapter 8: Value in the everyday'.

Figure 1: Illustrated map of Delhi, India, by Elin Morén

Chapter 2: Caste, labour and capital

In this chapter, I set the stage for the entire thesis. Yet to write on the informal economy during the 2020–2021 *corona-kaal* (corona-times in Hindi) is like performing a balancing act upon a moving stage. According to a report by the International Labour Organisation, by the end of April 2020 1.6 billion people who work in the informal sector across the globe were significantly impacted because of various full and partial lockdown measures. Moreover, the informal sector is overrepresented by women (ILO 2020*a*:1). The ILO report states that informal sector workers often have minimal savings and cannot afford to stay home. "'To die from hunger or from the virus' is the all-too-real dilemma" faced by the workers and, hence, needs to be addressed by governments (ILO 2020*a*:1).

The lockdowns revealed the extent to which national states and formal economies across the globe rely on the informal economic sector for goods and services. The report released by the ILO notes that the lockdown measures not only led to a massive decrease of income sources for the informal labour force, but that major "logistical challenges within supply chains, particularly cross-border and domestic restrictions of movements, may lead to disruptions in food supply" (ILO 2020*a*:2). Markets, especially in middle- to low-income countries, rely heavily on informal sector workers such as small-scale farmers and traders for goods and services. Therefore, declining revenues in the informal economies implies consequent ripples across many national and global markets. So, even when the lockdown measures are lifted, it will take a long time for formal and informal economies to stabilise (ILO 2020*a*). The economic impact of the lockdown in India has significantly affected the informal sector and the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) (Shekhar and Mansoor 2020).

The data presented above highlights the vastness of the size of the informal economy in terms of the number of workers it employs across the globe. Needless to say, pheriwale's lives are devastatingly affected by the pandemic itself, lockdown measures and the meagre economic relief provided by the Indian state (Sinha

2020). The fieldwork for my thesis was conducted from December 2017 to February 2018 and in January 2019, and therefore I will be unable to capture the fast-changing socio-economic phenomenon of 2020–2021 and its effects on informal sector workers. The intention with my research is not to do that, anyway. My thesis revolves around pheriwale women in Delhi, who are actors within the global trade of clothes and are located within the informal sector. The aim of this thesis is to focus upon the centrality of experiences as narrated by pheriwale and maintain a critical dialogue with theories of value. Hence, the arguments and discussions presented here speak to a certain period in time but also indicate some more general tendencies, despite the constantly changing terrains of informal economies.

In this chapter, I map out the backdrop against which pheriwale work. To contextualise and locate their trading practices, I begin with an overview of how the notion of the 'informal economy' took shape in the Global South and specifically in India. Within the Indian context, the economy, caste and labour are deeply intertwined: therefore, in the second part of the chapter, I provide an outline on how caste shapes the economy and the ways in which caste intersects with gender and class. Statistical data on the Indian labour market highlights how caste is an influential component within India's economy. Then I situate my research within previous scholarship, and elaborate on how I build upon and contribute to previous research. In addition, I examine how pheriwale as a group are located within the matrix of the caste structure. Lastly, I highlight some legislative and executive measures by the Indian state that have had direct effects on pheriwale and are crucial in my study to contextualise pheriwale women's experiences.

Informal India: Capital and labour

In 2000, the ILO published a report on the institutional history of adopting the concept of the 'informal economy' in institutional and economic policy-making. According to Paul E. Bangasser, the economic historian who wrote the report, the dominant belief among the economists and the policy-makers was that:

> With the "right" kind of macroeconomic policies, supporting institutions and enough development assistance resources, generating a sustained growth of per

capita was a technically feasible objective and attainable within an acceptable time frame […]. Obviously any poor, traditional, stagnant country would want to transform itself into a growing, dynamic, "modern" one […]. The core issue thus became one of "managing" this economic transition process. Within this mind-set, various cultural or political changes didn't seem essential "before the fact". These could be left to follow (Bangasser 2000:3).

As Bangasser argues, the belief was that the newly decolonising Third World[2] countries, between the 1940s and 1970s, would obviously want to become 'modern' and move away from an economy dominated by 'informal' exchange. Most of the income-generating economic activities were classified as 'informal' and organisations like the Manpower Planning and Organisation Branch (MPO), Vocational Training Branch (VTB) and Management Development (ManDev) were set up by the ILO to train the workers of the Third World, who were referred to as 'pre-industrial' and 'traditional'. The aspiration to have completely formalised economies in the Third World was already being challenged by the demographic statistics of the 1970s, which showed that informal economies were not decreasing, but were in fact increasing. Hence it was not a "temporary problem" as had initially been assumed by developmental economists and state-planners (Bangasser 2000:4; see also Breman 1976; Mazumdar 1976). Capitalist investment in infrastructure and human resource-planning for the Third World, especially those transferred from the Western world and former colonisers, did not provide the results that economists had predicted. Instead, it resulted in a severe lack of "modern jobs" as the new "modern formal sector" could not fulfil the employment needs of the increasing urban populations (Bangasser 2000:4). More importantly, as Bangasser argues, the problem with 1960s' economic models imposed upon the Third World was that they did not take into account work, employment or socio-economic justice. Instead, the primary concern of the economists and developmental policy-makers of that time was "capital formation, export promotion" (Bangasser 2000:5).

Bangasser challenges the market-oriented "mind-set", which assumed that the "various cultural and political changes did not seem essential "before the fact"" and that they would "follow" (Bangasser 2000:3) – the "fact" being market forces, determined by steady supply and demand, which would lead to equilibrium over time in the labour market. An illustration of such a "mind-set" that sidestepped "cultural and political changes" can be seen when the gendered nature of the

informal economy was overlooked by international organisations and governments (Bangasser 2000:18). Initiatives formulated to deal with the informal economies assumed that the workers would be men, despite the fact that early statistics and surveys of the 1970s revealed that the majority of women working in paid employment were in the informal sector across various contexts. For example, Dipak Mazumdar, in his study for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), cites surveys conducted in Brazil and Peru which note that the informal sector was overrepresented by women (Mazumdar 1976:660–661).

Early developmental economists and policy-makers failed to take account of the gendered aspect of the informal sector and continued to hope through the 1980s that the expanding informal economy of the Third World was only a temporary "waiting room" for migrants moving from rural to urban centres in the latter half of the twentieth century (Bangasser 2000; Breman 1976; Mazumdar 1976). It was predicted by economic planners that at some point the trickle-down would kick-start and Third World economies would then move towards completely formalised economies (Bangasser 2000; Breman 1976; 1996). However, in the case of India, even after multiple decades of following the dream of modernist developmental economics, and after two decades of high economic growth, "the informal economy in India still accounts for more than 80 per cent of non-agricultural employment" (ILO 2020*a*). As Bangasser shows, the rate of influx of workers into the labour market was much higher than the rate at which formal workspaces were expanding. The above-mentioned economic logic of the 1970s cannot be understood in the Indian context without mentioning the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) of the 1980s to 1991, which I explain below.

A short story of the Indian economy

The majority of modern-day India's territory became independent from British rule on 15 August 1947, and declared itself a republic on 26 January 1950 after the Indian constitution came into effect (Chandra et al. 2000).[3] The independence was framed against the backdrop of the violent partition of India and Pakistan, a mass exodus of people, a food and goods shortage and an economy reeling under the Bengal famine of 1943, which claimed almost three million

lives. In addition, the British regime drained South Asia of people and resources during the Second World War period (1939–1945) (Chandra et al. 2000). Under Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), who was the first Prime Minister of independent India (1947–1964), the Planning Commission was set up in 1950 to overcome colonial damages left by the British, especially in the agricultural sector (Patnaik 2015). Hence, in the 1950s, the socialist-inspired Indian state devised a Five-Year Plan and land reforms, and pushed for direct state expenditure to support farmers. Despite this, the 1960s witnessed a period of agrarian crisis, to be followed by increased investment in agricultural technology, mass nationalisation of banks and high subsidisation of agricultural input in the 1970s–1980s (Jha and Acharya 2016).

In addition, by the 1970s, American and European multinational corporations started turning to the recently decolonised Third World for cheap labour and resources and to expand the manufacturing sector (Patel 1994). The 1980s in India were a time of high financial deficit and foreign exchange crunch, which resulted in it approaching the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for credit (Patnaik and Chandrashekhar 1994:3001). Countries could only borrow and get loans from the IMF and World Bank if they agreed to adhere to the conditions, which subsequently meant making macro-economic structural adjustments to the economy, such as reducing state intervention and opening the national markets to tariff-free imports. Economists Prabhat Patnaik and C.P. Chandrashekhar note that during the 1980s the "real economy" of India was performing fairly well and the late 1980s even saw an industrial boom (1994:3001). The term 'real economy' is used to indicate the productive aspect of the economy, versus the 'speculative' or financial segments of it.

According to Patnaik and Chandrashekhar, major structural adjustments could have been avoided at that time. However, the "'liberalisation' lobby, consisting of both the Fund and the Bank as well as elements within the Indian government and business class […] considered this a heaven-sent opportunity to tie the country down to structural adjustment" (Patnaik and Chandrashekhar 1994:3002). Thus, India adopted the New Economic Policy in July 1991, under pressure from international organisations as well as pro-liberalisation planners and businesses within India. These SAPs led to the rolling-back of state expenditure, reduction of spending on welfare programmes such as a food subsidy for the poor, opening-up of the national market to foreign goods and foreign investment, and

an increased focus on capital and import and export intensive growth (Deshpande and Sarkar 1995; also see Patel 1994; Patnaik and Chandrashekhar 1994).

By the late 1980s to early 1990s, the effects of the SAPs started becoming more and more visible in various parts of Asia (Breman 1996; 2013; Broadbent and Ford 2008; Ong 2010[1987]; Patel 1994). These effects included the setting-up of factories across South Asia and South-East Asia, and employment of low- and medium-skilled labour in export-oriented manufacturing industries, with women workers being a major segment of this labour force (Ong 2010[1987]; Patel 1994:17). The terms of employment in factories or home-based work marked the turn of the twenty-first century and the normalisation of casual, contract and subcontracted workers who were employed by transnational corporations (Breman 2013; Mezzadri 2008; Mies 2012[1982]; Patel 1994; Sassen 2000:12).

The casual/contract/temporary/subcontracted workers, who work without social protection such as sick leave, pension or provident fund, and who face punitive measures when unionised, are on the margins of the formal economy. Global processes and the economic liberalisation of the 1990s have led to further 'informalisation' in India (Agarwala 2009:323; Kabeer 2008:38; Mezzadri 2008:613), understood as the process when workers are "situated within formal production but based on informal relations" (Mezzadri 2020:156).

Despite the promise of challenging the stark inequality in post-Independence India, the governments over the years have been unsuccessful in devising policies to ensure better wages, such as minimum income and better working conditions for a majority of its population (Gupta 2012:5). However, the liberal model of economic restructuring has been successful for a few people in India. While India's 90% workforce are in the informal sector, India has also become home to the fourth-largest number of billionaires in the world, adding 40 billionaires during the pandemic year of 2020 (PTI 2021; see also Kaur 2020:186).

Capitalism in India has been shaped in accordance with a 'compliance system', as it complies heavily with foreign investment demands. This has meant that Indian central and federal state governments[4] have increasingly diluted their labour laws over the past decades to attract foreign investment (Norohna and D'Cruz 2017:6–7). Increased liberalisation of the economy in India has intimately been accompanied by a surge in right-wing politics (Harriss-White 2003:252; Ilaiah Shepherd 2021; Kaur 2020:186).[5] The current Prime Minister of India is

Narendra Modi who is from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is a right-wing political party. Modi won both general elections held in India in 2014 and 2019.

Modi had previously been the Chief Minister of the western state of Gujarat, and has been a "lifelong member of the RSS" (Kinnvall 2019:289). RSS is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which is a right-wing Hindu nationalist organisation (Kinnvall 2019:289; Jaffrelot 2015). Under Modi's chief ministership, not only did the 2002 communal riots occur, which led to mass killings of Muslims in Gujarat, but the state also witnessed a high economic growth rate, with minimal state expenditure in the social sector, such as on education and public health (Jaffrelot 2015). Modi's economic model synchronises right-wing politics with big-business and market-friendly economics, based on the logic of minimal state expenditure. Modi has not only become the champion for India's Hindu-majoritarianism, but also tapped into and promoted nationalist and fascist ideologues, and has found resounding support in small, medium, national and international corporate businesses (Chatterji et al. 2019:11; Ghosh 2020; Harriss-White 2003:254; Ilaiah Shepherd 2021; Jaffrelot 2015; Kaur 2020:150).

In the past two decades, Modi has garnered support from the corporate sector in India and abroad "as a bold leader who did not hesitate to undertake tough measures to fully open up the Indian economy" (Kaur 2020:244). For example, one of the initiatives kick-started in 2014 by the Modi government has been the 'Make in India' campaign. One slogan in this campaign is '*shramev jayate*', which means '*hail labour*'. The initiative aims to transform India into the next factory of the globe in competition with China (Norohna and D'Cruz 2017:4). For instance, in order to increase the ease of business and investment in India, labour codes were amended in 2020.[6] Some of the changes in these labour codes weaken the rights of workers; employers have more flexibility to hire and fire, and industrial workers cannot go on strike without a sixty-day notice period (Magazine 2020). Before these changes, for example, companies "with up to 300 workers" could not "fire workers or shut plants without the prior approval of the government" (Haq 2020). However, now companies with a maximum of 300 employees can do so without government approval (Haq 2020; Magazine 2020).

Labour historian Chitra Joshi explains how inhumane working conditions are not just a feature of India's twenty-first-century economy but can be traced back to

the colonial era, when the British set up large-scale textile industries in India in the early nineteenth century (Joshi 2003:17; see also Guha 1982; Gooptu 2001:146). Sociologist Rina Agarwala notes that exploitative working conditions were a norm in the imperialist British textile and jute manufacturing factories. Most of the workers were barely paid and overworked while a tiny minority of workers received "protections by the British crown" during British rule (Agarwala 2009:326). In many ways, the spectre of working conditions under colonialism continues to haunt modern India. In the next section, I provide some insights into how caste and class have come to overlap in demographic terms to offer a picture of who comprises the informal sector of work in India.

Economy of caste

As the vast majority of the Indian workforce are directly engaged in the informal economy, to call it 'invisible' or 'hidden' would be a misnomer. As Barbara Harriss-White argues, liberalisation and a higher degree of deregulation of the economy to lure in capital and investment allow capital to avoid taxable activities, or provide social security to the labour force, in broad daylight (Harriss-White 2003:7). In addition, the processes of liberalisation and opening-up of the Indian economy to global economic flows indicate how the state is implicated, through regulations or the lack thereof, within the allocation and distribution of capital and the distribution of welfare (Harriss-White 2003:73). Moreover, the subsequent depletion of labour laws enables capital to receive massive subsidies to set up production units and exploit India's cheap labour. Thus, the labour and the labour power, which generate surplus value for India's growth rate, continue to work in deplorable conditions with casualised contracts and lack of a social security net (Harriss-White 2003:7–19; Mezzadri 2017:19).

Intersections of caste, class and gender mark the lines of who forms part of the labour force, who generates capital and for whom in India. Harriss-White reminds us that the informal economy may be synonymised with the term 'unorganised' but that that does not imply that it is 'unregulated'. In the twenty-first century, capital controls labour "through the manipulation of various non-class social identities but also through the segmentation and fragmentation of labour 'markets'" (Harriss-White 2003:21). In the case of India, the division of labour

and capital accumulation occur through the lines of caste and gender, which shape class dynamics in the economy. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) demonstrates in her study of the legal system in the USA how the analytical lens of gender alone cannot account for the lived experiences of working-class women who are being racialised. As Crenshaw argues, a critical analysis requires careful explorations of the structures at play and the webs of hierarchies which intersect with one another (Crenshaw 1991:1242).[7] In Crenshaw's research, focus is on the intersections of gender, class and race; in my own study, the critical intersections in pheriwale's lives are gender, caste and class. In the Indian context, any study on work and labour cannot overlook caste and how it intersects with gender and class, as my research clearly indicates (John 2013; Pan 2021). Caste is an omnipresent structure which pervades aspects of daily life as well as determines how people are located within professions, as I discuss in the next section.

A short story of caste

Rather than defining the caste system, it is more fruitful to understand how it has been approached over time and what it means in my study. The 'textbook' understanding of caste is that the *varna* system[8] "divided the Hindus into four mutually exclusive categories – the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras. Beyond the four varnas were the Acchoots (Untouchables)" (Jodhka 2012:2; see also Jaffrelot 2010; Karve 1959). The 'degree of purity' amongst social groups is considered highest for the Brahmins and decreases along the hierarchical chain, making the Untouchables 'the most polluted'. The Brahmins (first tier) are the priests, the learned and teachers of the *Vedas* (ancient Hindu spiritual texts); the Kshatriyas (second tier) are the warriors, the sovereign rulers; Vaishyas (third tier) are the 'commoners', such as agriculturists, who later became landowners and traders; the Shudras (fourth tier) were the servile group who performed menial services for the others, such as workers who till land and petty traders. The Untouchables performed even more menial jobs, such as dealing with animal carcases (leather), and manual scavenging, and lived in segregated areas in a town or village (Jodhka 2012:6–32).

This varna model was, of course, much more complicated in lived realities and had various regional forms such as *jatis*, that are subdivisions and sub-subdivisions of the four major groups as well as of the Untouchables (Jodhka 2012:6–32). Caste divisions exist for most religious groups in the subcontinent including

Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Buddhists and differ significantly across regions (Jodhka 2012:4). While the varna model conceals the complexities of caste relations, it has however become a predominant lens and terminology through which caste is expressed in everyday politics and studied in contemporary scholarship. Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, a scholar of political science and anti-caste activist, notes that the right-wing forces in India continue to propose a "varna-fixated ideological view" (Ilaiah Shepherd 2021).

The British approach to caste, which emerged from accounts of colonial administrators, missionaries and orientalist writings, provided an understanding of caste as a pre-modern division of society, which divided labour and social status in a hierarchical manner on the basis of birth. The British rulers often consulted with 'learned men', who were almost always Brahmin men, to understand the caste system, and, unsurprisingly, their theorisation of caste always placed Brahmins at the top of the hierarchy (Jodhka 2012:7). The colonial understanding of caste led the British administration to carry out periodical censuses across the colonised territory of the subcontinent, and they counted inhabitants on the basis of caste groups (Census India 2011). This resulted in the British rulers counting most of the population within the terminology of the caste system (defined by the Brahmin men), which grossly overlooked the distinct socio-economic practices of widely heterogeneous communities in the vast territory. Over time, caste as a classification mechanism became more concrete and got official recognition (Jodhka 2012:6). Social historian Nandini Gooptu notes how British industries and local urban governments during the colonial era recruited workers on the basis of their caste. For example, Untouchables were recruited to work within the leather industry, since working with animal carcases was considered impure, and in other menial jobs such as cleaning and scavenging (Gooptu 2001:146).

One of the visions of the independent Indian nation-state was that a liberalised economy would eventually get rid of the informal economy when becoming modern. Another dream was that the modernity of the late twentieth century would usher in a postcolonial era and lead to the decline of economic, political and cultural inequalities on the basis of caste (Deshpande and John 2010:42). But, in reality, none of these modern visions were realised. In fact, globalisation and neoliberalism not only maintained caste lines, but in many cases have further

deepened the relation between class inequalities and caste oppressions (Deshpande and John 2010:42).

Sociologist Satish Deshpande elaborates on this caste-blindness of modern state-making in India, arguing that "as a modern republic, India felt duty-bound to 'abolish' caste, and this led the State to pursue the conflicting policies of social justice and caste-blindness" (Deshpande 2013:32). The author traces how the attitude towards caste by leaders such as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948)[9] moved from a valorisation of the caste system to a reformist agenda and then to more anti-caste sentiments. Anti-caste sentiments emerged among the anti-colonial leaders only after the publication of *The Annihilation of Caste* in 1936, written by B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956) (Deshpande 2013:34). Ambedkar was a lawyer and anti-caste activist and scholar who belonged to an Untouchable community in Maharashtra. He was also the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution (after India's independence). Through the 1930s, Gandhi and Ambedkar continued to disagree on what 'abolition of caste' meant for the making of the modern nation. By the late 1930s Gandhi declared that inter-caste marriage would lead to social change, whereas Ambedkar challenged the whole basis of Hindu religious scriptures, as well as the political and economic structures built on caste (Deshpande 2013:34; see also Ambedkar 2004[1936]).

This classic debate between the two thinkers occurred in a series of discussions in the early 1930s. In these discussions, Ambedkar argued for separate electorates for the Dalits (then called 'Depressed Classes') in Swaraj India (self-ruled India), after India's independence, which would give political representation and autonomy to a historically, economically and ideologically marginalised group (Deshpande 2013:35; D.N. 1991:1329). But Gandhi objected to a separate electorate as he argued that it would "destroy Hinduism" and "divide Hinduism", and began a "fast unto death" to oppose separate electorates (D.N. 1991:1329). Finally, the Round Table Conference culminated in the Poona Pact of 1932 and proposed a form of affirmative action to marginalised groups by allocating reserved seats in the legislative bodies for a decade (D.N. 1991:1330). This led to the nationalist leaders mobilising under the reformist anti-untouchability politics but it did not really seek annihilation of caste as Ambedkar had envisioned (Deshpande 2013:33; D.N. 1991:1330). The colonial counting of caste groups as well as the ideological debates among the anti-colonial thinkers and activists shape the contemporary politics of caste today.

The term 'Dalit' (meaning 'broken people' in the vernacular language of Marathi) was constructed as a political identity by Ambedkar to account for the experiences of groups oppressed through untouchability, as a means to make political, cultural and social claims and articulations for the most marginalised groups (Muthukkaruppan 2014:34–35). The state's terminology for the lowest groups in the caste system, or in other words groups which fall outside the four in the varna model, are Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) for *adivasis* or indigenous groups. Throughout the history of anti-caste politics, there have been several terms utilised for political mobilisation among the lowest-caste groups; however, the term 'Dalit' became powerful due to its history of being a self-designated term by marginalised groups (Muthukkaruppan 2014:35). The articulation of Dalit movements has been significant in contemporary India to centre a discussion on continued symbolic and material violence perpetuated by caste.

The nation-state's response in terms of sustained physical, psychological and structural violence against lower castes has been affirmative action on the basis of caste. Historically, affirmative action has been present, in one form or another, through most of the twentieth century in various parts of the country, during and after British rule (Srinivas 1979:239). The historically marginalised groups such as SCs and STs have been guaranteed reserved seats since independent India adopted its constitution in 1952, in terms of "reservation of seats in the legislatures at all levels, and jobs in the government, and seats in educational institutions" (Srinivas 1979:239).

While academic publications on caste were available before the 1990s, nevertheless academic and political interest in caste massively increased after the Mandal Commission report (Deshpande 2014). The report was compiled in 1980 and was chaired by B.P. Mandal, and recommended the government to reserve 27% of seats in government jobs for Other Backward Classes (OBC) groups, which largely fall under the 'Shudra' category (fourth tier in the varna model), to ensure their representation and inclusion. The report argued that since OBCs comprised a large proportion of the population but continued to be socially and economically marginalised, there was need to devise affirmative action for the caste groups within this category (Mandal Commission Report 1980). This led to massive protests among upper-caste groups, especially among students in higher-educational institutions, who did not want to give up their privileges in

relation to jobs and higher education. However, the Mandal Commission was implemented by the central government in 1990, which subsequently led to more academic and political interest in matters of caste as well as a rethinking of the analytical importance of caste to understand contemporary India (Deshpande 2014).

Contemporary terminology indicates that there are various castes within 'lower caste' and 'upper caste' categorisations. As there are numerous castes across regions within each of the groups, it is impossible to list them all. However, on the basis of state surveys, legislations, previous scholarship and data, in general the term 'lower caste' includes Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) (Untouchables and groups outside the varna model, including the *adivasi*/tribal/indigenous population). The 'upper caste' groups (groups that largely belong to Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas) had often been called 'Forward Castes' or 'Higher Castes' in previous literature, and within legislations on affirmative action they are categorised as 'General' (Bharti 2018; Deshpande 2006; 2013; Tagade et al. 2018). Depending on the classification by state legislative lists, groups can access specific forms of affirmative action in the states they reside within. For example, more than 80% of the population in the states of Nagaland and Lakshadweep are indigenous groups; hence, the seats in government jobs are reserved for STs and not for OBCs or SCs (DPE 2016:11–12).[10]

While affirmative action has been vital for socio-economic justice for marginalised groups, however, it has not led to an annihilation of caste due to the dominant upper-caste politics. Deshpande argues that over the last decades of independent India, a consequence of the reformist universalised ideology in the modern republic has been that, while upper castes claim the 'General' category and believe themselves to be "caste-less", the lower-caste identities become highly visibilised and marked mainly with their caste identity (Deshpande 2013:32). As the author notes, "after having enjoyed the privilege of 'traditional caste-capital' and converted it to 'modern forms of capital like property, higher educational credentials and strongholds in lucrative professions', upper castes believe themselves to be 'caste-less' today" (Deshpande 2013:32). Moreover, Deshpande draws parallels to other forms of power dynamics to illustrate this play of visibility and invisibility:

This was in keeping with similar effects produced by other universal-modern categories invested with power – for example, patriarchal common sense reduces gender to women, while white supremacy limits race to non-whites or "people of colour". The unmarked universal becomes the abode of normal, naturalised power, its transparent invisibility being a sign of its privilege in contrast to the compulsory markings that subaltern identities were forced to display (Deshpande 2013:37–38).

Since this thesis is about informal traders who are located within the caste dynamics of contemporary India, the intention is not to hyper-visibilise their caste. Rather, the purpose in holding this elaborated discussion is to argue that a study on the working lives of informal sector traders in India cannot overlook caste as a social relation which is reproduced in everyday life. Below I outline how the Indian economy can be understood if we employ lenses of caste, class and gender to explore data.

Caste at work

'Locating' pheriwale in a myriad of castes, tribes, *jatis* (sub-castes) and regional sub-subdivisions presents a challenging task primarily due to the fact that caste counted in official censuses, caste categorised with state lists and caste practised in everyday life may vary. Nonetheless, I provide an overview of the distribution of wealth and labour market demographics, which will help readers to comprehend how caste, class and gender are intertwined and how pheriwale can be located within the Indian socio-economic fabric.

Using a dataset of 12,056 households in urban India, economists Abu Shonchoy and P.N. Raja Junankar note that lower-caste groups and Muslims are overrepresented in the urban informal sector (Shonchoy and Junankar 2014:7–10). The authors' findings point out that "Brahmins and people [who] belong to high caste are more likely to be salaried workers or professionals, whilst Dalits and Muslims are more likely to be non-agricultural labourers or artisans" (Shonchoy and Junankar 2014:7). While Indian women's participation rate has declined over the last decades, around 90% of working women in India are employed in the informal sector versus 9.4% in the formal sector (Chakraborty and Chaudhary 2019:7; Sundari 2020:710;). According to economist S. Sundari, structural changes in the Indian economy have not only led to a decline of paid work among

women, but have also pushed more women into the non-agricultural informal sector (Sundari 2020; see also Dubey 2016).

Economists Nitin Tagade, Ajaya Kumar Naik and Sukhadeo Thorat in their 2018 article analyse the decennial All India Debt and Investment Survey (AIDIS) from 2013. According to the authors, Hindu upper-caste households make up 22.28% of the population but own 41% of the total wealth in India, "which is almost double their population size" (Tagade et al. 2018:203). Hindu OBCs are 35.66% of the population and own 30.7% of the total wealth. If we were to include OBCs from Hindu and minority religions, then they comprise 43.57% of the total population, which makes the overall owned wealth even less in proportion to their number (Bharti 2018:16). SCs constitute 18.38% (including Hindus and minorities) of the population but only "hold 7.6% worth of country's assets or less than half their percentage share of households" (Tagade et al. 2018:203). STs, who are 9.09% (including Hindus and minorities) of the population, own only 3.7% of assets in India (Tagade et al. 2018:203). Muslim upper castes and lower castes make up 11.89%, according to the 2013 survey and own 8% of the wealth, whereas other minority groups such as Jains, Christians, Buddhists and Sikhs make up 2.69% (excluding SCs and STs) of the population but own 9% of the assets in the country (Tagade et al. 2018:203). If we include upper- and lower-caste minority groups (Jains, Christians, Buddhists and Sikhs), they constitute 5% of the total population (Tagade et al. 2018:199).

A longitudinal study by economist Nitin Kumar Bharti combines wealth surveys issued by the Indian state and lists of millionaires in India between 1961 and 2012 to argue how wealth has increasingly been concentrated at the top 10% of the population (Bharti 2018). According to Bharti, the annual incomes of SC and ST groups are "0.7 and 0.8 times lower than the all-India average income. OBC and Muslims: both groups have around 0.9 times household income of the overall average income" (Bharti 2018:13). Upper castes have 1.4 times the all-India average income (Bharti 2018:13). Bharti highlights that not only do the lower-caste groups own and consume less than their population share, but over the last four decades their economic situation has further declined in comparison to that of upper-caste groups (Bharti 2018:5).

The disparity of income levels and wealth directly translates into which groups are able to access education and other means to gain socio-economic mobility. In his 2006 article, Deshpande analyses how India's urban higher-educational

institutions are dominated by upper-caste groups. The author notes, "the Hindu UC [Upper Castes] are a little more than one-third of the total urban population, but around two-thirds of professional and higher education degree holders: their share in the highly educated is about twice their share in the general population" (Deshpande 2006:2439). For instance, despite affirmative action, a news report from August 2020 stated that out of 313 professorial posts reserved for OBC across all central public universities in India, only nine OBC professors had been hired as of 1 January 2020 (Dhingra and Sharma 2020).

Due to the gendered nature of inheritance in India, and income disparity, women in India are not only paid less than men but, even among the economically well-off caste groups, women own significantly less wealth than men (Bharti 2018:7). Data also shows that women across caste groups are less likely to enter and complete school, but there is a stark disparity among upper- and lower-caste women in terms of accessing education, wealth and income levels (Bharti 2018:7–13).

Caste-based classifications and data become crucial to highlight how caste, gender and class are interlinked. Furthermore, such data reveals that caste has persisted not only through cultural and social histories of traditional socio-economic divisions, but has become further sedimented through the neoliberal and capitalist turn in India (Deshpande and John 2010). Moreover, such data also suggests that caste, gender and class all become key intersectional hierarchies to understand inequality in India. Therefore, it can be argued that within India, regardless of religious, regional and indigenous variations, caste ideology and practices pervade all socio-economic, political and cultural lives of people. Even groups that may not have been religiously within the Hindu fold reproduce caste ideology to segregate and dominate on the basis of caste hierarchies.

An example of this are the Syrian Christians of India's southernmost state, Kerala, which my family belongs to. Christians are 2.3% of India's population, but are 18.38% of Kerala's as of the 2011 Census (Census 2011; Zachariah 2016:9; see also Thomas 2020). Most of the Christians in Kerala belong to the Syro-Malabar Catholic group, though Syrian Christians also include other denominations (Zachariah 2016:5). According to one of the legends, Syrian Christians, or 'Nasranis' (people from Nazareth), in the region trace their lineage back to the first century and claim to have descended from Syrian merchants and Brahmin Hindus who were converted by Jesus' apostle St Thomas himself, in 52 CE (Fuller

1976:54). There is, however, barely any historical evidence of either of these claims; there are also contestations over whether Brahmins existed in first-century Kerala in the first place (Fuller 1976:54; Thomas 2020; Varghese 2004:897).[11]

While the caste distinctions and practices within Kerala Hindus do not correspond entirely to the varna system, land ownership, division of labour and marriage practices reveal how caste has persisted within the region. For instance, in Kerala dominant caste communities are also found in low-status jobs, including the Syrian Christians (Harriss-White 2003:153). Nasranis in Kerala have not only historically observed Syriac liturgical rite but have also followed practices of dominant caste groups such as endogamy. In addition, Syrian Christians are among one of the landowning groups and have historically enjoyed socio-economic and political privilege within the region despite their minority status (Fuller 1976; Sebastian 2021). The example of Syrian Christians elucidates how minority religious groups that lie outside Hinduism reproduce and internalise practices of the regionally dominant castes, which have further provided them socio-economic access to recognition and assets (Fuller 1976; Sebastian 2021; Thomas 2020; Varghese 2004).

In the large Indian landscape, the regional caste dynamics have had specific historical contexts, though the legal classifications of OBC, ST, SC and 'General' category have been nationally administered as a means to execute affirmative action in education and the labour market. Depending on factors such as increased access to education and jobs, and the increase in wealth over a period of time, groups can also be shifted from SC or ST to OBC. The pheriwale's community, the Waghri/Vaghri, is an example of such a group which had been in the official SC/ST list and then reclassified as OBC in 2002 by the central government (TNN 2014). Therefore, it is not surprising that previous literature on pheriwale have used different terms to classify the group, as I discuss further below. In the next section, I highlight that despite the specificities of the pheriwale's group history, they face every day experiences of discrimination on the lines of caste. This reiterates my argument that even groups that may traditionally have existed outside the caste system continue to face marginalisation on the basis of caste. Furthermore, I engage with the strengths and weaknesses of relevant research and elaborate on the contributions to these discussions, which this thesis hopes to offer.

In (re)search of pheriwale

Waghri traders

Due to the lack of availability of large-scale surveys or quantitative databases on pheriwale or Waghris, I list here some of the sources which help in building knowledge about the group. I outline below how the Waghris have been written about in previous scholarship and how the group is classified in state records. This enables us to note how various authors understand pheriwale's trade as well as how they contextualise the traders within work and in cities. Furthermore, it enables me to provide a brief history of the respective groups. Sources synonymously make use of 'Waghri' and 'Vaghri', so I include both in my discussion.

I use the term 'pheriwale' throughout this thesis, since that is how the traders refer to themselves in Delhi. Colloquially, the group is referred to as '*bartanwale*' (utensil-people) by those outside the trade. Groups which are involved in trading second-hand clothes are present in several urban and semi-urban centres in India (Bapat 2016*a*; 2016*b*; 2018:121–122; forthcoming *a*; forthcoming *b*). Anthropologist Dipti Bapat is one of the first scholars to elaborately study a similar group in Mumbai and Nagpur, cities in Maharashtra, a state in the western peninsular of India (Bapat 2018). In Mumbai and Nagpur, the group is called *chindhi-wale*: *chindhi* means 'old rag clothes', and *wale* is a suffix used to denote people. Similar to the group in Delhi, *chindhiwale* in Mumbai are also primarily women and most belong to the Waghri community (Bapat 2018:129; see also Mundkur and Dedhia 2014). Although the trading practices are similar in terms of how the traders visit different neighbourhoods and arrange open markets to sell their collected goods, there are considerable differences between the two metropolises.

While the research and news articles by Bapat provide rich ethnographic insight into how a similar group constructs a livelihood in Mumbai, my research focuses on pheriwale in Delhi. In Delhi, for instance, pheriwale have one main designated large open market in the city to sell the clothes they collect, whereas the group in Mumbai have several market areas in the city. Moreover, Bapat points out that the group in Mumbai sort and mend the clothes, whereas in Delhi the pheriwale I spoke to told me that they primarily collect the clothes.[12] Bapat's study engages

with the group through an anthropological lens to analyse how urbanisation processes in India undermine street vendors such as chindiwale and how the group is central for cloth recycling chains (Bapat 2016*a*; 2016*b*; 2018; forthcoming *a*; forthcoming *b*). While Bapat uses the analytical lens of gender , the author engages with the Waghris primarily as a 'traditional community of service-providing nomads'. Though, in my study, I engage with the dominating structure of caste, as it pervades deeply into India's working lives, to examine how the capitalist economy reproduces intersections of gender, caste and class and how value is shaped in complex ways.

According to Bapat, the Waghri community were a nomadic tribe who were categorised as criminal by the colonial British administration under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 (Bapat 2016*a*). Sociologist Sushila Yadav notes that the Vaghri community were small-time traders and forest hunters, who worshipped goddesses and lived in Gujarat and Rajasthan (Yadav 2017:2442). In his study on capital development in Gujarat, geographer Vinay Gidwani states that groups belonging to the Vaghri community did not neatly fit into the categories of caste or tribe, and were perceived as thieves by locals and colonial officials and, as a consequence, the British criminalised them (Gidwani 2002:91; Yadav 2017:2442). Under these classification lists and laws by the colonial officials, 'caste' and 'tribe' were often synonymously used (Gidwani 2002:104). However, the Vaghris were discriminated against by both the British and local upper-caste groups, and because of "their long history of being marginalised, they are socially on par with the so-called untouchable or dalit castes" (Gidwani 2002:91). Such descriptions about the Waghris/Vaghris can also be found in *People of India – Maharashtra* (Part One, Volume 30) series, which were surveys conducted by the Anthropological Survey of India, published in 2004 (Bapat forthcoming *b*; Singh et al. 2004; Yadav 2017).

There are several subdivisions and subgroups within Waghris as well; however, the British enumerated only some of the subgroups (Bapat forthcoming *b*).[13] This Criminal Tribes Act was revoked after independence from the British in 1952 and subsequently the group was classified as a 'Denotified community' under the Denotification of Criminal Tribes of 1952 (Bapat 2016*a*; see also Ashraya Initiative for Children 2016: Gidwani 2002; Yadav 2017:2442). Within contemporary Indian state caste lists, Yadav notes that Waghris/Vaghris were

classified as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and subsequently have been removed from the SCs list (Yadav 2017:2442).

Bapat emphasises that the traders form a crucial part of Mumbai's urban economy; however, they remain invisible within the city's urban informal economy and marginalised by the local municipality (Bapat 2016*a*; 2018). The narratives of traders in Bapat's study express that, while they may have been removed from the list of 'criminals', they face discrimination in the city as they are referred to as "thieves" by Mumbai's residents (Bapat 2016*a*). While Bapat, in her study, primarily frames the group as a 'Denotified community', the narratives of the traders she interviews unravel how caste lines are reinforced in the metropolis of Mumbai. As a trader tells Bapat, "We trade with the rags; we are not thieves" (Bapat 2016*a*). The criminalisation of the group under the British, and the suspicion of dominant caste groups against lower castes and tribal communities, continue to persist within contemporary urban India as well (Ashraya Initiative for Children 2016; Bapat 2016*a*).

Anthropologist Ayako Iwatani's study explores the Vaghri community in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Iwatani notes that the group in South India is also involved with itinerant trade and traditionally belongs to nomadic communities, though there is no mention of Vaghris as second-hand clothes recycling workers (Iwatani 2002). A study which does explicitly refer to pheriwale in Delhi is Lucy Norris's ethnographic work, where the author traces the lives of clothes, how they are used, discarded, gifted and recycled or sold forward. Here Norris shows how clothes used by upper-class households in India can make their way to intermediary groups like pheriwale and then to export markets, where pieces of old Indian sarees can become the piping for an 'oriental' cushion sold in London's boutiques (Norris 2008, 2010). Norris's in-depth study on the lives of second-hand clothes has been crucial for my own research as it captures a fragment of the global chains of supply of second-hand clothes. It provides a way to locate pheriwale in these uneven value chains, as they remain rather dispersed and difficult to trace due to the involvement of many actors and locations. Other studies conducted by Norris focus on the materiality of clothes in the Indian context and how the second-hand clothing industries across the globe are interlinked, to show that chains of recycled commodities include extremely scattered processes (Norris 2004; 2012; also see Crang et al. 2013).

In her 2010 book, Norris follows used clothes from the point of buying, consuming and reselling. Norris comes across the pheriwale women at the mandi, where the traders resell the clothes. Norris elaborates as follows:

> The Waghri are a Dalit caste, and are known throughout India as unskilled labourers and itinerant petty traders, some eking a living from the "rag and bone trade" or selling vegetables and local cigarettes, beedis on the roadside (Norris 2010:48).

Norris provides crucial insights into the pheriwale's marketplace, or mandi, in Delhi, writing, "The Waghri were given Raghubir Nagar, in which to establish their community, in 1962, during Nehru's premiership" (Norris 2010:51). In the first couple of decades post-Independence, localities in Delhi were being assigned to large communities. Some of these groups included refugees who had been dislocated in Northern India after the partition from Pakistan in 1947 (Ghertner 2014:1561), while others included groups like pheriwale, who had been part of one of the trading groups in Delhi since the beginning of the twentieth century (Norris 2010:47–53). Norris further points out that by "1975 the Delhi authorities allocated a garden area for trading, and more recently it was paved with concrete" (Norris 2010:52). This is the marketplace where I conducted fieldwork for this study.

Other sources include scholarship from the perspective of the fashion industry. Nandita Abraham's study is centred around the circulation of reselling second-hand clothes. It does not engage much with pheriwale's labour processes but points out that the women in Delhi who collect clothes and resell them belong to the Waghri community (Abraham 2011:218). Scholars who study the textile and fashion industry, Suman D. Mundkur and Ela M. Dedhia, conducted a quantitative and qualitative study in Mumbai with a sample of 52 traders of second-hand clothes (Mundkur and Dedhia 2014:20; also see Mundkur and Dedhia 2012). Mundkur and Dedhia use the terms '*bhandivale*'/'*bartanwale*' for the traders, and the survey suggests that 50% of the traders are from the 'Waghri caste', while others are from other sub-castes and tribal communities (Mundkur and Dedhia 2014:20). According to the authors, the traders in Mumbai largely follow barter sales, while the younger generation seems to be shifting to exchanging cash instead of utensils for the second-hand clothes (Mundkur and Dedhia 2014:24). Mundkur and Dedhia's study provides quantitative insight

into the patterns of work among the traders in terms of hours of work and quality of clothes collected. They also corroborate findings from studies on Delhi's second-hand trade and note that women are the primary workers in the recycling clothing industry; however, there is little reflection on caste (Mundkur and Dedhia 2014:27).

The classification of castes into lists becomes important, as I mentioned above, since the lists determine which groups can access reservations in education and jobs. For instance, since SC/ST include the most marginalised groups, the proportion of seats reserved under this category are more than under OBC. Again, depending on the socio-economic standing of groups, central and state governments can move the groups around (cf. IANS 2019). As per the news article from 2014, three groups in Gujarat were removed from the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) list, including the 'Vaghri' community, which was moved to the Socially and Economically Backward Communities (SEBC) category in 2002 (TNN 2014). SEBC and OBC are recognised in a similar manner and have the same proportion of quota. However, a petition was filed against this decision demanding the central government to clarify why these groups were moved from the SC/ST list to the OBC list (TNN 2014). Governmental records, available on the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) website, mention 'Waghri' under the 'Central List of Other Backward Classes (OBCs)' in the state of Gujarat (NCBC 2020; see also MSJE 2017a, 2017b).

The various sources reveal how classifying a caste or tribal group can be a challenge due to the mechanisms of counting and naming identities and legislations and that these classifications may also change over time. This can then result in determining the kind of political, social and economic benefits such as reserved seats that groups can have in higher education and jobs. As demographic data, the division of labour and wealth and income distribution suggest, caste continues to be a major aspect of having access, or lack thereof, to types of work as well as shaping gender and class at work. While the shift of Waghri/Vaghri from SC/ST to OBC could indicate that the community has gained some form of socio-economic mobility (Gidwani 2002), the central government has not provided adequate information regarding their decision (TNN 2014).

As my research shows, pheriwale face everyday markings on the basis of caste lines, thus the overwhelming logic of caste is invoked at and beyond work. For example,

when the pheriwale in my study visit middle/upper-class households to collect used clothes, they are given water in a separate glass/tumbler from one used by the householders, because of assumed lower-caste status of low-income traders and discrimination on the lines of caste. Similarly, domestic workers, of which a large majority are women,[14] who work in upper/middle-class houses, may be given food on separate plates from those used by the upper-caste household members. Moreover, they may not be allowed into the kitchen or temple within the middle/upper-class house. These instances highlight how caste, class and gender come together and synchronise in creating intersections of hierarchies (Torgalkar 2017). Such daily life experiences explicitly evoke India's inherited legacy of untouchability, purity and pollution. In contemporary Indian society, this particularly emerges when an upper-caste person consumes goods, which a lower-caste person recycles as waste.

The above-mentioned literature has been incredibly useful to build knowledge about the traders and how they work in the city of Mumbai, but sources on the traders in Delhi remain sparse. Even though they provide insights into the working conditions and patterns of groups involved in second-hand clothing markets, our understanding of pheriwale can be deepened by turning to research on the working lives of traders in the informal sector itself. In the following sections, I therefore outline how pheriwale's trade can be located within broader fields of research.

In the informal economy

Despite the global economic slowdown due to coronavirus in 2020, India exported over US$ 4 billion worth of readymade garments to the United States alone. India is the second-largest exporter of textiles and clothes, behind only China (Keelery 2021). The agricultural sector continues to be the largest employer within India; the second-largest employer is the textile industry (ILO 2015:2). Hence, most of the literature on the informal economy in India has covered the textile and clothing production industries (for example, Breman 1998; 2010; 2013; De Neve 2005; Mezzadri 2017; 2019; 2020; Mies 2012[1982]; Norris 2010).

Sociologist Jan Breman has extensively utilised detailed fieldwork in India to highlight that informality has not only remained a consistent part of the Indian

economy, but has grown to encompass a large percentage of the working population since the opening-up of the Indian markets in 1991, including the labour force in the textile and clothing industry (Breman 2013:10). Breman's widespread scholarship has been essential to understand the extent of capitalist exploitation of informal labour (Breman 1976; 1996; 2010; 2013). More recently published work, by development studies scholar Alessandra Mezzadri (2017), explores the informalisation of labour within the garment industry through the lens of sweatshops in India (Mezzadri 2017). Scholarship on the exploitation of informal sector workers in the factory and agricultural fields is pertinent to understand the oppressive nature of twenty-first-century capitalism (Das and van der Linden 2003), yet hierarchies of caste largely remain side-lined in a discussion on the informal economy (Gill 2006:134). A notable exception is Harriss-White's 2003 publication. Harriss-White's intervention into the scholarship of the informal economy challenges the orthodox economic understanding of development and the formal–informal binary. Moreover, by bringing social structures and hierarchies into focus, Harriss-White unravels how capitalist private accumulation is built on structures of caste, class and gender in the Indian context (Harriss-White 2003:15, 21,182).

To follow the complex relations that pheriwale have as regards their work, I turn my gaze to scholarship which revolves around experiences of informal sector workers. Scholars such as Maria Mies, Geert De Neve and Elizabeth Hill, for instance, take into account the everyday experiences of work in the Indian informal economy. Sociologist Maria Mies's classical work on the lace-makers in Narsapur, first published in 1982, explores how fabric and garment manufacturers employ women as homeworkers to make lace for export. While the women received wages from the export manufacturers to make lace, their work remained invisibilised as paid workers as well as caregivers within the household. They did not receive any of the benefits related to waged work and were not even counted in the Census as workers (Mies 2012[1982]:59–62).

Women's labour is also captured by political economy scholar Elizabeth Hill. Hill's qualitative study is based in Gujarat and is among agricultural workers, artisans, and home-based and street-based daily-wage workers (Hill 2010). In anthropologist Geert De Neve's ethnography on informally employed textile workers in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, India, the focus on everyday politics of work and resistance enables the author to account for the everyday practice of

caste and class, and his findings show how gender and caste are negotiated on the factory floor (De Neve 2005:31). Hence, De Neve offers a dynamic lens through which we see both the experiences of exploitation as well as ways in which lower-caste labourers organise, create solidarities and resist at everyday locations of work (De Neve 2005:111–168). Development studies scholar Naila Kabeer and political science scholar Rina Agarwala provide examples of research that revolve around discourse analysis of policy documentation of the rights of informal workers as well as an understanding of the meaning of informal work for the Indian state and its economy (Agarwala 2013; Kabeer 2008).

The Indian clothing and textile industry has generated a considerable body of research, which include critical scholarship concerned with deplorable conditions of work, sweatshops and informalisation of work in the garment industry (Breman 1998; 2010; 2013; De Neve 2005; Joshi 2003; Mezzadri 2017; Norris 2010). As pheriwale are not involved in production and engage with clothes after consumption, their trade and labour process remains mostly overlooked in this scholarship. Pheriwale are self-employed traders and therefore, in a different work environment. I contribute to the above-discussed scholarship on the informal economy by carefully studying Delhi pheriwale women's narratives to enrich our understanding of value and thereby further expand studies on how gender, class and caste intersect for those working in the informal sector.

On the streets of the globe

Due to the wide visibility of street vendors on the streets of Africa, Asia and Latin America, there is a tendency to assume that the informal economy exists only in the Global South. However, data shows that informal economies are prevalent across the world, including in the Global North (Medina and Schneider 2018:46–47). Nonetheless, street vendors are among one of the most visible groups of workers in the informal sector of the Global South (Turner and Schoenberger 2011; Vargas 2016:18). Over the past decades, development discourses and notions of modernisation have triggered states and local municipalities in the Global South to beautify urban and semi-urban centres while disciplining and controlling street vendors' access to pavements and urban spaces (Turner and Schoenberger 2011:1029; Vargas 2016; see also Bapat 2018). Socio-legal scholar Ana Maria Vargas's ethnography from Bogotá, Colombia offers an insight into the lives of street vendors and rickshaw-drivers in the city. Vargas focuses on the

modes of control such as the police and municipality measures that directly affect the lives of street vendors (Vargas 2016).

Studies conducted by sociologist Sharit Bhowmik have been significant in framing national policies for street vendors in India, such as the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors of 2004 and a revised Street Vendors Act of 2014 (Bhowmik and Saha 2013; Rai and Mohan 2017; see also Bapat 2018; Vargas 2016:27). Such studies have been successful in conducting a large-scale data collection through surveys and in shaping public policies in urban areas. However, as Vargas (2016:18–31) points out, these studies largely tend to assume that measures of financial inclusion of the urban poor and the formalisation initiative in urban spaces are in general positive (for example, Bhowmik and Saha 2013). Hence, despite the persistence and growth of the informal sector and inefficiency of the formalising policies, the focus on the informal economy continues to be through the gaze of formal waged employment (Chen and Carré 2020:2). Scholarship on street vending has been fruitful to contextualise how pheriwale work in Delhi as well as compare experiences of street vendors in other cities of the globe. Focusing on pheriwale in Delhi allows me to shed light on the heterogeneity of income-generating activities which occur on the streets and thereby contribute to research on the working lives of street vendors. The parallels between narratives from various contexts indicate not only how global economies are interlinked due to the dispersion of production and commodity chains, but also through the experiences of workers.

Recycling and waste economies

Studies on waste workers, across various geographical contexts, have significantly increased, especially in the last two decades. This can be understood as an effect of growing consumption and, hence, exponential production of waste in the twenty-first century and increase of local and global economies of waste. For instance, Kaveri Gill's work on waste workers in Delhi explores the role of garbage collectors in the vast growing industry of plastic recycling (Gill 2010; see also Gill 2006). As a scholar of economics and geography, Gill studies how scrap trading in India creates 'entrepreneurs' who continue to work in exploitative environments for low incomes and who emerge overwhelmingly from lower-caste groups (Gill 2010; see also Gidwani 2015).

Minh Nguyen's research offers insights into Vietnam's recycling economy. Nguyen provides extensive examinations of how people build livelihoods through working in the waste industry, which subsequently enables their social and economic mobility (Nguyen 2019). Harriss-White's work on waste workers in South India explores how waste work is increasingly becoming subcontracted to private companies and how it is shaped by caste politics (Harriss-White 2017). Similarly, Kathleen Millar's work on *catadores* in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil analyses the complexities, including how gender and race frame everyday work in Rio's largest dump yard, Jardim Gramacho (Millar 2008; 2014).

While pheriwale are involved in reselling old clothes and, hence, become part of groups that recycle, their work is different from waste workers since their trade runs almost entirely on second-hand clothes. Moreover, the clothes they collect are used both as raw materials for industries as well as for immediate consumption in the low-cost market for the working classes of the city. Narratives of waste workers across the various contexts highlight how economies are built on the labour of marginalised groups such as the lower castes in India. By engaging with scholarship on waste, I not only contribute to this research field but also expand the scope by accounting for work done by pheriwale women who are located within recycling economies.

I end this chapter by addressing a few policy changes in recent years that have directly affected pheriwale.

Informal India and governance

While there are many economic policies that shape everyday working lives in India, here I focus upon few measures adopted by the Government of India that have had a direct impact upon pheriwale's work and life in the last decade (see Chapter 6). First is the biometric identity database and cards for all residents in India, also called the Aadhaar card. Second is demonetisation, whereby the Government retracted Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 500 currency notes from circulation, claiming to reduce 'black' money and to move towards the digitisation of economic transactions and a cashless society.

The Aadhaar card is officially a unique identification number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) for all the residents in India. This number is generated using biometric information of fingerprints and retina scans. It is a tool devised to establish a coherent database which can then be utilised to provide state social benefits direct to individuals' bank accounts. The logic is to overcome the leaks and corruption which hinder the reach of social security benefits (Bhatia and Bhabha 2017:64). The data collection procedure kick-started in 2009 by the UIDAI, whereby residents of a municipality could visit certain designated public offices to register and receive their Aadhaar number and card (Bhatia and Bhabha 2017; Chaudhuri and König 2018). As per the figures provided by the Government of India, over 90% of the Indian population have been issued the biometric identifier as of February 2020 (PTI 2020). One of the main aims behind this unique twelve-digit identification number for each resident is to collate the numerous identification documents that have been required in order to receive state benefits (Bhatia and Bhabha 2017; Chaudhuri and König 2018).

For example, different identity documents have been used to prove different forms of information, such as: a common proof of address has been the Voter's ID card and electricity or landline telephone bill; to prove age, tenth- or twelfth-standard certificates (from higher secondary school); to prove Below Poverty Line (BPL) status for food subsidies, the BPL and ration cards; to declare income taxes, the Permanent Account Number (PAN) card; to prove the names of parents or spouse, passport or certificates from higher secondary school; to access subsidised public healthcare pharmacies and clinics, the government official ID card (Sarkar 2014:516). These documents have been formalised only in the last few decades, and therefore many people of the older generation used to have barely any proof of identity. My grandmothers, for instance, had only the old ration card for food subsidy, which was a piece of paper with their name and address, as their generation had witnessed the last stretch of colonial rule and did not have many formal records. Hence, the primary aim behind the Aadhaar card has been not only to provide a proof of identity to every resident but also to synchronise all the ID data of an individual within a common database (Bhatia and Bhabha 2017; Chaudhuri and König 2018; Sarkar 2014).

Today the Aadhaar card is linked to a cardholder's bank account, phone number, electricity bills, and much more. The Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY,

'Prime Minister's People's Wealth Scheme') was launched in 2014 and is designed to provide access to banking services and financial inclusion to the population in India who do not have bank accounts (PMJDY 2014:ii). I will elaborate on these executive measures in Chapter 6, where pheriwale women shared their experiences of applying for these initiatives.

On 8 November 2016 at around 8pm, Prime Minister Modi announced that 'high value' currency notes of Rs 500 and Rs. 1,000 would cease to be legal tender overnight (Ghosh et al. 2017:3). The intention behind demonetisation, according to his speech, was to clamp down upon terrorism, corruption and 'black' money, which had been propagated with cash. Residents were given fifty days' notice to deposit their 500 and 1,000 rupee notes into their bank accounts (Modi's full speech on 8 November 2016 cited in *BS* 2017). The main consequence of this announcement was that suddenly millions of people, across the country, found themselves in long queues waiting to deposit their cash or to open bank accounts in order to do so (*HT* Correspondent 2017). ATMs ran dry as people withdrew other currency notes to cover living expenses. The fifty-day deadline given to deposit cash, 30 December 2016, had to be extended to mid-June 2017. The extension was primarily because the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) underestimated the time it would require for millions of people to deposit their cash or open bank accounts (IANS 2017; PTI 2017). Moreover, banks were not prepared to handle such an influx of people depositing and withdrawing money over a short period of time. Bank employees worked extensively over long hours from the end of 2016 through to the summer of 2017 (IANS2017).

The economic impact of such a monetary experiment in a cash-based economy like India was that overnight "slightly more than 86 per cent of the value of currency in circulation" became invalid (Ghosh et al. 2017:3). According to economists Jayati Ghosh, C.P Chandrashekhar and Prabhat Patnaik, the purpose of attacking 'black' money was already defeated by the end of 2016, as 90–97% of:

> the value of the demonetized currency had been deposited in the banks. In other words, almost all of the demonetized currency found its way back in the banking system, despite the host of complicated and restrictive measures employed by the RBI [Reserve Bank of India] and the government to limit that very possibility (Ghosh et al. 2017:47).

The immediate impact of this experiment was that there was an abrupt and severe liquidity crunch, which resulted in dire consequences for the informal sector. Since the informal economy in India primarily runs on cash, the lack of liquidity in the market meant that casual and subcontracted workers could not be paid, and small and medium markets and production units (which make up the bulk of India's real economy) had to shut down as trade and supply chains were affected. This in turn led to reduced demand, and production declined since "producers could not purchase the necessary inputs, and moneylenders providing working capital to small producers were unable to provide the new notes" (Ghosh et al. 2017:51). This further resulted in informal and small formal firms having to lay off their workers (Sen 2020:123).

Small and medium shops and mandis in metropolises like Delhi could not function properly because buyers did not have cash to purchase raw materials and consumer goods (Ghosh et al. 2017:51). Since it is mostly the poor who keep assets in the form of cash, the segment of the population that was most affected by this were the "farmers, landless labourers, petty traders and local service providers" (Ghosh et al. 2017:50; see also Bapat 2016b; Sen 2020:117–130). Moreover, the migrant workers who travel from rural to urban centres to work in factories and other informal spaces were among the most affected by demonetisation. Firstly, this was because the industries that employ migrant labour run entirely on cash and, secondly, migrants were unable to send home their cash and were also denied from exchanging cash in banks where they did not have an account. As Ghosh and colleagues argue, demonetisation is like most government policies that are designed for "stability of residence-based identities and access to services like banking" (Ghosh et al. 2017:60). Low-income women and transgender communities who work primarily in the highly cash-based sector were among groups that faced a severe impact by this liquidity crunch (Roychowdhury 2016). News reports stated that more than hundred people, who were mostly old and exhausted, died while standing in queues in front of banks (Bhatnagar 2018; Ghosh et al. 2017).

The question of accessibility of social security benefits for workers in informal settings and the ripple effects of demonetisation, which can still be felt in various sections of the Indian economy today, are ongoing discussions. Here, I have shed light on some important contemporary political and economic measures in India that cannot be overlooked in this study on the working lives of pheriwale.

Concluding reflections

In this chapter, I have covered some key aspects of contemporary India which help to contextualise my thesis in relevant research fields as well as my study of pheriwale's work. I have provided an overview of the informal economy in India, how liberalisation policies have further led to precarious working conditions and how the state has been incapable of providing formalised jobs to informal sector workers. I have also introduced important aspects of the Indian economy and discussed how labour in the economy is divided on the basis of caste, class and gender.

I have provided sources which classify Waghris/Vaghris, the pheriwale's community, and engaged with relevant previous research to situate this study within broader scholarship. Furthermore, I have presented how modern economic experiments can have consequences that are not neutral but can further harm already economically and socially marginalised groups. In the next chapter I build the theoretical frame of this thesis.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the thesis guides and frames the lenses through which the collected data is analysed. Feminist perspectives on economy, work and intersectionality have been a guide to help frame the trajectories emerging from the empirical process of this thesis. These enable me to bridge the themes vis-à-vis the empirical material and the theoretical knowledge production. The main rationale behind this analytical process is to highlight how working in the informal sector shapes, maintains and reproduces intersections of gender, caste and class within capitalist value chains.

The writing of this chapter did not follow a linear process, but rather was written in a back-and-forth conversation with the empirical material and previous research from a variety of fields, and the concept of value emerged through my engagement with that body of research and fieldwork material. These fields of scholarship help me analyse the themes arising from the fieldwork such as informal traders in the market, their relation to state institutions, and aspects of autonomy in everyday work. All these themes are rather broad and can be extensively elaborated upon individually as analytical entities. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I use the overarching concept of value as a lens to explore the fieldwork material, as it has been the most helpful concept to tie together all the trajectories in my analysis.

The main reason to explore the empirical material through value is because it enables me to unfold the multiple layers of value of pheriwale's labour and values that are important for pheriwale women in their everyday working lives. In this chapter, I therefore engage with multiple conceptualisations of value to build a theoretical framework that can guide my analysis. Through such an engagement, I show how multiple dimensions of value can illustrate the complexities of everyday working lives among pheriwale women and beyond. Hence, the theoretical aim is to connect and interlink these levels and layers of notions of value by taking into account the nuances of pheriwale's lived experiences.

In the first two sections, I briefly trace some meanings and scholarship debates associated with the broader concept of value. It is acknowledged that in this chapter not all theoretical traditions of value are represented, but I explain the rationale to choose the particular authors and theories addressed below. In the following sections, I devise the analytical and theoretical frameworks that are pertinent to this thesis. In the last section, I outline the major theoretical themes based on my discussion in this chapter and how they are used in this dissertation.

Spectre of value

According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the English noun 'value' (with roots in the Latin *valere*), dates back to circa 1300, meaning "price equal to the intrinsic worth of a thing". This meaning derives from the Old French word 'value': "worth, price, moral worth; standing, reputation". By the nineteenth to twentieth centuries the word came to be associated with the idea of artistic aesthetics which also invoke the moral: 'value judgement', borrowed from the German *Werturteil* (*Etymonline* 2019). As can be seen through these definitions of 'value', the term can be a signifier of both: value as price and value as prestige or status within a social dimension (Graeber 2001:9).

Narrating a story of 'value' is, then, like playing hide-and-seek. Theories on value and their interpretations are wide-ranging and sometimes random. This arises mainly because many scholars operationalise the concept of value in various fields of research, each with their own definitions emerging from their own set of theoretical traditions, thereby resulting in ambiguous understandings of the term 'value' (Graeber 2001:1). For example, Oxford University Press has published two handbooks on value: *The Oxford Handbook of Value Theory* and *Handbook of Value: Perspectives from Economics, Neuroscience, Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology*. While the former focuses more on the moral philosophical roots and axiology (Hirose and Olson 2015), the latter draws on political philosophy, neuroeconomics and other disciplines within social sciences (Brosch and Sander 2015). These books provide diverse understandings of the concept of value but end up with a long list of its meanings, each moving at different tangents. While one meaning of 'value' emerges, another disappears. Furthermore, as feminist political economy scholar Donatella Alessandrini argues, many works on post-

Fordist production processes (for example, by Hardt and Negri 2000) point to the pointlessness in thinking of value as it is extremely "contingent and immeasurable" (Alessandrini 2018:2). So, why then develop a theoretical frame which revolves around value?

One reason to continue a theoretical and empirical engagement with value is, as Alessandrini points out, that value has always been "contingent and immeasurable" and ambiguous. A purely economic understanding is not only narrow, but value theory has never been only about the 'objective' or 'subjective' accounts of what is valuable but, rather, makes sense of value "as a social relation" (Alessandrini 2018:4). This is an important point of departure for my analysis. However, before jumping into the nitty-gritties of value, I provide a brief outline about the concept.

Among the plethora of literature on value, anthropologist David Graeber's 2001 book provides an overview of the concept and how it has materialised in academic research. Graeber divides the conceptualisations of value into three categorisations of "theories of value". These comprise the sociological notion of "good, proper, or desirable in human life" (Graeber 2001:2); the economic adaptation of value (price, wages, rent); and the concept of value in linguistics through "meaningful difference" (Graeber 2001:2). Graeber goes on to ask his reader why these various streams and their theoretically diverse sets of thinkers use the term 'value', when it is opaque and vague, and what could possibly be the link between the "sale-price of a refrigerator", "meaning of a word" and value in the "meaning of life" (Graeber 2001:2). These three broad categorisations of the conceptual genealogies of value can, of course, be analytically distinguished on the basis of their disciplinary kinships and theoretical histories. Nevertheless, the crucial aspect that Graeber points to here is the multidimensionality of the concept of value as simultaneously being a signifier of material, lived and metaphysical character all at the same time.

Giving a brief theoretical history of value, Graeber states that for Marxists, substantivists (for example, Polanyi 2001[1944]; Sahlins 1976) and formalists (for example, Bourdieu 1977) value resides in the economic realm (commodities/labour).[15] On the other hand, for George Simmel, Igor Kopytoff, Arjun Appadurai, Christopher Gregory and some post-structuralists (for example, Deleuze and Guattari 1983[1977]), sacrifice (due to an exchange) and desire captures value (Graeber 2001:1–22). The third group includes the

conceptualisation of value within linguistics (for example, de Saussure 1959[1916]), which is premised on the basis that the value of a term is meaningful due to its relational "meaningful difference" (Graeber 2001:2).

For instance, Appadurai understands economic value as only one part of a commodity, which is why commodities such as heirlooms or meaningful objects for communities enter and exit the commodity phase (the domain of economic value). Drawing on Kopytoff, Appadurai argues that the focus should instead be upon the "biographical approach to things" to account for their social and cultural significance rather than simply the economic (Appadurai 1986:13). Therefore, Appadurai is critical of the Marxian understanding of value precisely because of its focus on value creation at the commodity stage (production and labour). For Appadurai, Simmel's conceptualisation of value as being derived from exchange is more adept in understanding the multidimensionality of value (Appadurai 1986). According to Simmel, what makes something valuable is the desire to have something and the sacrifice one is prepared to make for the commodity deemed valuable (Appadurai 1986:3; Simmel 2004[1978]). What is crucial to note here is the simplistic similarity that one can draw between these scholars that, whether it is sacrifice, production or economic laws/social control that determines value, they are all attempts to conceptualise how value is created, transformed or rendered meaningful (Appadurai 1986:3; de Saussure 1959[1916]). Though Graeber's classification of the scholarship on value may seem broad in terms of categorising diverse sets of authors into three streams (sociology, economics and linguistics), I go along with Graeber's classification of writings on value because he avoids reductionism and does not overlook the nuances among the scholarly traditions he examines (Graeber 2001:1–90).

There are outliers that may not appear to fit this broad classification: for example, some of the anthropological works on value such as by Marilyn Strathern and Nancy Munn (Graeber 2001:33–47). But even these authors can be subsumed under a few major ways of thinking through value: for example, Strathern's writings from the 1970s to 1980s can be classified as thinking of value in terms of the Saussurean code (Graeber 2001:23–47). Strathern is critical of feminist anthropologists who interpret the gift systems[16] of Melanesia through the lens of Western and Marxist understandings of gender equality and unequal gendered aspects of work (Strathern 1988:145). According to Strathern, the basis of notions of equality and value is not only Eurocentric but derived from the notion of

individualistic property and owning one's being (Strathern 1988:143–145). Hence, the premise that work done by women in Melanesia should be valued is itself Western-centric and thus does not capture the alternative reality of Melanesia, Strathern argues (1988:146).

For Strathern, the notion of value is located in the web of social relationships (Graeber 2001:37–41; Strathern 1988). However, Graeber classifies Strathern within the frame of the Saussurean code because, while Strathern does not understand value as generating from work or value located in items that are reciprocated within a gift exchange, she instead conceptualises value as emerging from social codes of difference. This implies that people come into being due to the social relations within which they are placed (Strathern 1988:171). Strathern argues that the Western notion of value is rooted in the premise that individuals are at the core of Western episteme and ontology. Therefore, the idea that workers ascribe meaning to the products of their labour (such as Marx would suggest) is itself to view value in terms of labour's self-expression, or workers' 'own' way to determine the value of their labour and of the product (Graeber 2001:39; Strathern 1988:145). Through this understanding of value, Strathern is ontologically challenging the notion of value and argues that value in Melanesia cannot be seen as one's 'own' reality and in the 'self'. In this way, Strathern's work presents an ontological distance, both from the understanding of value emerging out of work (for example, as it is for Marx) and its critical stance towards the scholarship that locates value in the goods that flow through the exchange process (like Simmel's or Appadurai's studies). For instance, Strathern writes in the context of Melanesia, "Hafted axes and shell valuables do not simply depict human beings but depict the relationships between persons" (Strathern 1988:170). Thus, Strathern's conceptualisation of value is primarily through the lens of difference and relationality.

Strathern's approach to value is parallel to de Saussure's argument of making meaning not out of arbitrary signs, but to conceptualise signs and meanings as valuable due to their semiotic relation to each other in linguistic structures (de Saussure 1959[1916]:73). In Saussurean terms, 'difference' or 'negation' of a sign renders its meaning vis-à-vis other signs and determines its placement in the larger system of linguistic signs (de Saussure 1959[1916]:65–70). De Saussure's work calls attention to a vast range of literature which follows a structural frame in the analysis of value. While Strathern's contributions to debates on value highlight

the limits of Western understandings of value, I show later in the chapter why focusing on 'difference' alone cannot aid a critical discussion on value in my study.

Another illustration of this structuralist logic is Louis Dumont's understanding of caste in India, which approaches the value structure within caste through relationality of difference (Dumont 1999[1970]; Graeber 2001:16–18). Because of this, Dumont's model of the caste structure relies on relational difference between the caste groups. For instance, Brahmins (first tier: priests) are at the top of the hierarchy due to their purity in comparison to other groups and their placement within specific hierarchical tiers, such as the warriors, or manual labourers (Dumont 1999[1970]:47). Dumont's structuralist understanding of caste stands in contention with Mary Douglas's analysis, which gives primacy to practices of purity and pollution within the caste system (Douglas 2001[1966]; Dumont 1999[1970]:xxxix). For Douglas, notions of purity and pollution are ordered on the basis of functionality, perceiving a society as being representative of a body with parts having specific functions (Douglas 2001[1966]:124). Whereas, for Dumont's theorisation, the caste structure is consolidated not only by the logic of purity/impurity and pollution, but precisely due to the complementary relation between the practices of purity and pollution (Dumont 1999[1970]:47).

In order to explore value in relation to caste, gender and class within twenty-first-century capitalist economies, I turn to feminist critical engagements with the concept.

Travels of value

Following on from the above, one question that arises is whether notions of value are translatable between theories, geographies, disciplines and histories (Bal 2012:11). It becomes clear in Graeber's reading of Strathern (1988) that, by locating value in a web of social relations, Strathern reiterates a structuralist analysis based upon the Saussurean code. This implies that value is understood through its location/negation in a larger social structure (Graeber 2001:41). Secondly, I would suggest that one of the characteristics of scholarship on the structuralist conceptualisations of value emerging from it tends to overemphasise the difference between the value system outside of the West and the value system

in Western markets, which then results in a binary between the Western notion of value and an-*Other* notion of value. Let me illustrate this. For example, drawing upon Bourdieu, Appadurai notes that the binary between "rational-western-exchange" and gift exchange is overdetermined as it overlooks the calculation that goes into gift exchange (Appadurai 1986:12). If we turn to Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), he challenges classic understandings of structuralist presumptions to argue that the logic of calculating self-interest is not only a feature of the Western market economy, but is also present in other contexts. Bourdieu goes on to state that if we take the example of rituals within a non-Western context, they may appear to be vague or exhibit contradictions; instead, they are based upon some practical schemes or "practical sense" of necessity that come to light when decoded (Bourdieu 1977:113).

It is, however, important to understand that it is not only the spatial or geographical dimension of West and non-West which may condition the notion of value but also the temporal aspect. In the context of the 1960s to 1980s, markets had only just begun to become interconnected globally, following the emergence of the 'new financial era' and rise of technical and digital platforms that rapidly increased the flow of goods and finance; hence, differences between the West and 'the rest' would have been more tangible from the mid- to late-twentieth century (Alessandrini 2016; Sassen 2000). However, for the twenty-first-century socio-economic context, measurements of value and social relations that determine these are more enmeshed within market relations. For example, in Minh Nguyen's *Waste and Wealth*, a study of Vietnamese waste traders, the local moral norms of communities such as patron–client relations and liberalised notions of flexible work and consumption are intricately webbed to form new globalised "regimes of values", both materially and socio-politically, for the lives and social relations of waste traders (Appadurai 1986:15 in Nguyen 2019:11). This is similar to the case of pheriwale, who are located in the specific context of gender, caste and class which shape the nature of their work, but they are also situated in the global value chains due to the nature of their work (cf. Norris 2010).

Thirdly, while observing the translations of a concept across geographies, languages and histories, I would argue that notions of value rooted in human labour or meanings that are important cannot be understood in isolation from economic developments. This is because of how rapid globalisation and the intense flow of goods and people have come to shape and reshape notions of value (Nguyen 2019;

Sassen 2000; Spivak 1985). My argument is not that all societies are capitalist or that they are capitalist in the same way, neither is it to overemphasise the centrality of the economic logic of self-interest as Bourdieu tends to do in his analysis (cf. Graeber 2001:26–30; Ortner 2016:53, 63). Rather, this is to acknowledge that, in the case of pheriwale, they are directly and indirectly implicated in the local, regional and global value chains as well as the social relations of value because of gender, class and caste. Though the empirical case in my thesis is specific, it is however not singular, meaning that the aspect of multiple dimensions of value is characteristic of informal traders across the globe (Millar 2014; Nguyen 2019; Noronha and D'Cruz 2017; Vargas 2016; Yadav 2018). Furthermore, locating informal work, practices and the value that they produce both economically and socio-politically in relation to global capitalism also allows us to see colonial links and consequences of colonial and postcolonial shifts on the lives of informal traders in Delhi and beyond (Jodhka 2012; Noronha and D'Cruz 2017; Vargas 2016:21; Yadav 2018). Therefore, let me now turn to feminist conceptualisations of value, which are mostly overlooked by Graeber.

Feminists' notions of value

To Graeber's classification of theories of value, I add the feminist intervention as a fourth stream. Feminist theorisations of value, emerging from sociology, literature and political economy, analyse the ambiguity of value through a gendered lens. Feminist dialogues are from distinct vantage points and illustrate how productive contestations have taken place in a discussion of value. In the scope of this theoretical chapter I am able to address only a few of these debates, although I do think that there is potential to engage in these discussions in future research. The feminist contribution to the conception of value combines the economic, sociological and linguistic understandings of value in order to delineate the social, economic and discursive terrains of value (John 2013; Spivak 1985).

For example, feminist scholar Marilyn Waring in her 1999 book focuses on work not valued by economic indices that is primarily done by women. By engaging with the scholarship within economics and policy papers, Waring shows how a restrictive notion of value emerges within economics, despite its multidimensionality. Waring's perception of value is highly dynamic, signifying

the material, symbolic and gendered ways in which value is invoked and obscured while counting both the significance of women's work as well as natural resources (Waring 1999).

A key concept that has emerged through the writings of Marxist and Socialist feminists is social reproduction. The rationale to open up production in order to account for social reproduction is precisely to reveal the complexities of economic value, to highlight the fallacy of counting economic value without taking into account the social (Alessandrini 2018; Fraser 2013; Spivak 1985; Waring 1999). Social reproduction entails providing care for oneself, family members, housework, and physical reproduction of members of the society. By visibilising social reproduction as contributing to macroeconomic value, feminist scholars make two analytical interventions in the discussions of value. The first is to locate the latent value in production in an economic sense (Alessandrini 2018; Bhattacharya 2018; Federici 1999, 2012; Ferguson 2020; Fraser 2013; Mezzadri and Srivastava 2015; Rai and Waylen 2013; Razavi 2012; Waring 1999). The second is to open up the concept of value itself to note the meanings it produces in academic knowledge production and the gendered consequences for lived realities and concepts (Alessandrini 2016; John 2013; Rao 2012; Rubin 1975; Spivak 1985; Waring 1999). For the purpose of this chapter and this thesis, I will not engage with debates on whether or how social reproduction can be 'counted', measured or indicated in national and global indices. The primary reason to delve into the concept of social reproduction is to emphasise that for any person to go about their daily working life, social reproduction is crucial to generate value at and beyond work. Since women are more likely to undertake unpaid household-related work such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, adults and the elderly, including responsibilities to educate the younger generation (Kaur 2021), it becomes important to consider social reproduction in this study, which revolves around pheriwale in Delhi, who are mostly women traders. Thus, social reproduction as an analytical lens captures not only the work that they do for themselves in order to work every day but also the work they do in their households.

The above body of literature has been important in understanding that, conceptually and in lived experience, the economic (exchange value) and the socio-political (use value) appear to merge analytically through social reproduction (Federici 1999, 2012; Mezzadri and Srivastava 2015; Rai and Waylen 2013; Razavi 2012; Spivak 1985:175; Waring 1999). Some feminist

Marxist scholars, such as Tithi Bhattacharya (2018), understand unpaid work as contributing to a capitalist creation of economic value as well as building socio-political-moral value for communities. The framing of social reproduction in such terms invokes a rigorous critique of the Marxist understanding of labour by taking into account a gendered perspective. Moreover, this also challenges the unidimensional understandings of economic value. Ongoing feminist discussions on intersectionality, social reproduction and postcolonial perspectives on value further push the feminist critical engagement with the concept.

Intersectionality and value

In their 2015 interview, McNally and Ferguson define social reproduction as a process that socialises and reproduces labour. They analyse how intersecting power hierarchies shape social reproduction in ways that "all labour-power is not the same" (McNally and Ferguson 2015). Furthermore, they state, "labour-power today is being massively reproduced at low-wage sites outside the core zones of capitalist production and accumulation" (McNally and Ferguson 2015). McNally and Ferguson's understanding of social reproduction is more suitable for my thesis, as they not only take into account the gendered nature of housework/care work, but also acknowledge the intersecting developments of migration and low-wage sites and thereby broaden the theorisation of social reproduction. In the case of pheriwale, these complexities are part of their everyday: for example, childcare can take place during the hours of trade, when traders are sitting at the marketplace (mandi) to sell their collected goods. Therefore, the line between paid work and caregiving is merged, especially in low-income and informal sites of work. Moreover, by bringing in the dimension of migration, McNally and Ferguson's theorisation of social reproduction also captures the role of movement that plays in the lives of pheriwale, especially for some who work in the urban spaces for the majority of the year and travel to villages for seasonal work.

What is useful for my analysis is to understand it as an aspect of human life that adds value to people's everyday as well as contributing directly and indirectly to the global value chains and production networks (McNally and Ferguson 2015; Mezzadri 2020). This simultaneity of blurred boundaries between paid work, social reproduction and care work at the mandi further highlights the enmeshed nature of value that people derive from their everyday routines. In Diana Mulinari's (1995:139) analysis of social reproduction among mothers in Nicaragua's low-

income job sites, paid work is understood as an extension of their unpaid care work, which often occur simultaneously, accordingly paid work is not perceived as being conceptually separated from caregiving. This is resonated within my study as well (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). For example, for pheriwale women, childcare at the mandi invokes both, in spending time with family and childcare while also engaging in paid work, and so the boundaries between paid work and household work are blurred. Furthermore, this frame of thinking through paid work and care also shows how abstracted conceptual boundaries are blurred between economic value and value that people derive from other aspects of life (Kaur 2021).

Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's 1985 essay provides a way to locate the geographic and material basis that shapes value (Spivak 1985). Spivak's essay is based upon Gayle Rubin's analysis of the sex/gender system (Rubin 1975) and Marx's notion of "exchange-value" and "use-value" (Marx 1976[1867]).[17] Spivak's main argument is that the transnational circulation of value is built upon colonial and gendered paradigms. According to Spivak, Marxists tend to simplify and exaggerate the difference between, and construct the binary opposition of, use-value (socially necessary) and exchange-value (determined by the market) (1985:154). For example, she shows that, in the fields of political economy and philosophy, most scholars focus on the exchange factor of value (for example, Deleuze and Guattari 1983[1977]). Drawing on Marx, Spivak argues that when theorists focus upon exchange, they miss that it is not simply the process of exchange that generates value but rather the circulation of the commodities. Take the example of a fake currency which is in circulation, Spivak states that it does not matter whether the fake currency is fake as long as it serves its purpose in circulation by maintaining the value of a currency (Spivak 1985:78). Therefore, in the exchange process, what gives money value is its constant circulation (Spivak 1985:78). Now, for the accumulation of money, a commodity needs to exit circulation and be consumed, and this is where use-value gets represented: in other words, this is in the act of buying and using a commodity (due to its use-value) (Spivak 1985:80). Hence, Spivak sees use-value (socially necessary) as an opening in the logic of economic value (represented by exchange-value). Spivak argues that use-value is inside and outside the scope of measurements of value, since usefulness cannot be quantitatively measured and is realised only after a commodity exits circulation (1985:80). This reading of Marx's notion of value by using use-value as a deconstructive lever, following a Derridian deconstructive reading of Marx, enables the author to make two conceptually significant analytical moves.

Firstly, by understanding use-value in such terms, Spivak not only shows the spaces of overlap between market logics of value and social meanings of value (usefulness), but she is also able to utilise this frame in order to understand the use-value of labour. Secondly, the logical consequence of the first point is that Spivak demonstrates how gender, geography and class are then implicated in the social prescriptions of labour. This means that the boundaries between use-value and exchange-value are blurred and can signify both the economic and cultural implications of value (Spivak 1985:83). For example, Spivak shows the social openings in the economic by arguing that one of the determining factors of capitalism is "the super-exploitation" of Third World women in manufacturing industries (1985:84). Writing in the 1980s, Spivak analyses the economic shifts of the new international division of labour which made use of (mostly) women working in sweatshops. For Spivak, this exploitative production is based not only upon capitalist manufacturing processes but also the selection process of women from certain classes as an operationalisation of local patriarchal social relations (Spivak 1985:84).

The shifting of geographies of production and the changing gender dynamics within workplaces are illuminated in Aihwa Ong's classic 1987 work. While Ong's text does not explicitly conceptualise value, the author presents changing social and economic values for the women who were part of the study. One of the key insights that Ong offers this dissertation is the ambiguity of a workspace itself; the hovering of the "*hantu*" (evil spirit) on the factory floor is an example of the blurred boundaries of the economic sphere (Ong 2010[1987]:1, 207). Another example is the selection of women workers for the manufacturing of electronics due to the assumption that young Malay women have "nimble fingers" and passivity and, consequently, will not unionise; such social markers and biases condition the establishment of factories. Here, Spivak's analysis of the use-value of labour and materialist geographies of capitalist exploitation is illustrated. Furthermore, Ong highlights the complexities and contradictions that capitalist factories bring into the lives and value systems of a place. For example, narratives of young Malay women working for the factories show that they have experiences of relative levels of economic freedom, changing norms of leisure activities, as well as the consequent pressures that they might face from the family (Ong 2010[1987]:67, 115).

Following the theme of factory work in the Third World, Alessandra Mezzadri connects the invisibilisation of women's work at home – that is, social reproduction – with the invisibilisation of informal labour. For Mezzadri, capitalism exploits and appropriates surplus value produced by the two spaces of labour, women's social reproductive labour and informal labour, both of which entail exploitative work that is undervalued (Mezzadri 2019; 2020). The author draws upon the case of homeworkers, mostly women, who produce and sew pieces of garments for multinational corporations. Since they work from home, they also take care of children and the elderly. Hence, for Mezzadri, global value chains run on informally employed workers. In addition, the global value chains exist only because of labour being reproduced and taken care of by women (Mezzadri 2019; 2020:157; Mies 2012[1982]). While Ong and Mezzadri explore feminist conceptualisations of work, they inculcate notions of value from theoretically diverse perspectives. However, their studies provide illustrations of how feminist writings on work, intervene and highlight complexities and show how gender and class become part of work and productive forces.

It is important to note that the studies mentioned above pertain mainly to the development and contexts of factories and industries in the Global South. In my thesis, pheriwale women are all located within the informal sector as mostly self-employed workers. However, there are some important points from the section above that become crucial for my analysis. Firstly, feminist scholars such as Spivak, Ong and Mezzadri provide examples of how social norms and economic rationalities are shaped in the process of movement of market logics as well as through the local contexts. Secondly, Spivak shows explicitly the inner contradictions of value (drawing upon Marx), but critiquing both the idealist understanding of it and the strictly materialist understanding of it, thus linking the two levels of abstractions of value. Ong, on the other hand, highlights lived realities that exist and change differing value systems, such as on the factory floor and within familial relations, vis-à-vis the shift in social and culturally held values. Writing from a classic Marxist feminist perspective, Mezzadri argues that informal labour (paid work) and social reproduction (unpaid work) build capitalist global value chains.

Theoretical conceptualisations that take into account the intersectionality of caste further complexify the above-mentioned feminist notions of value. According to Mary E. John, the Marxist-feminist perspective of gendered labour, including a

postcolonial feminist understanding of a labour theory of value, overlooks caste structure (John 2013:183). A labour theory of value is centred around how labour produces value and how the society is divided on the basis of a materialist division of classes. However, within the caste system, labour is bound within its prescriptive hierarchies of "stigma and humiliation" (John 2013:183; see also Rao 2012). Stigma and humiliation here refer to the ways in which caste not only recreates oppression through classifying certain manual labour as 'impure/polluted' but also how labourers are ostracised into watertight compartments. Therefore, while value can be abstracted from labour, within a caste structure "stigma cannot be abstracted from the body" (John 2013:183; Rao 2012). In other words, value in a society without caste can be extracted, while in a caste society labour produces not value but stigmatised labour. For example, in the case of groups who work as manual scavengers, they are amongst the lowest-caste groups and are perceived as Untouchables (Pan 2021:133).

There is more analytical potential to build on such a theorisation of caste and inner contradictions of theory of value through stigma, although I am unable to do so in this thesis.[18] On the one hand, pheriwale women's trade is defined within a caste society and yet, on the other hand, pheriwale are also important actors within the global second-hand clothing industry. To classify their labour only through stigma would be to overlook how global commodity chains are based upon value-producing workers. However, feminist critical engagement with value through caste leads me to Dalit feminist interventions into understanding intersectionality in the context of India. This becomes crucial in order to account for the fact that labour done in the Third World is exploitative not only on the lines of gender and class but also caste.

Dalit feminist interventions

Dalit feminist writings are inspired by the Black feminist epistemology of intersectionality and standpoint theory (Devika 2018; John 2015; Pan 2019; Rege 1998; Verma 2020). Sharmilla Rege refers to the debates in the 1980s to 1990s between the left-party-based women's groups, who tended to be mostly upper-caste, and autonomous Dalit women's organisations. Rege argues that the feminist "postorientalist" studies that were inspired by the Saidian framework of the 1980s to 1990s drew much attention towards colonial domination but overlooked the gender, caste and class domination of precolonial structures (Rege

1998:39). As Dalit feminist critiques gained more visibility, the reception of this anti-caste feminist movement was not seen as an epistemological critique of dominant feminism in India at that time. Instead, it was approached with a postmodern lens of pluralism and categorised within the 'diverse' India's Third World feminisms. Therefore, Rege's main criticism against the upper-caste feminist discourse is that it tended to reproduce analytical closures in a way that "issues of caste become the sole responsibility of the dalit women's organisations" (Rege 1998:39). For Rege, to account for 'difference' within feminist politics cannot merely be a process of "naming of difference"; rather, she argues:

> What we need instead is a shift of focus from 'difference' and multiple voices to the social relations which convert difference into oppression. This requires the working out of the cultural and material dimensions of the interactions and interphases between the different hierarchies of class, gender, race (Rege 1998:40–41).

Rege also provides a critique of Partha Chatterjee and the postcolonial theoretical frames which overlooked Dalit and working-class women's participation in the Ambedkarite movement (an anti-caste stance, inspired by Ambedkar's writings), and dismissed them for being inspired by Western notions of a modernist abolition of tradition (Rege 1998:41). Rege's critical reading of dominant Brahmanical feminists, who primarily saw gender and class, and postcolonial thinkers, who mostly saw colonisation and class, unravels critical intellectual debates of the 1990s' feminist writings in India. Below I include a brief account of some important arguments to show how contestations of gender and caste, epistemologically and politically, have guided the framing of intersectionality in my thesis. What Rege reminds us here is that in order to critically challenge gendered processes it is crucial not only to highlight merely the 'differences' of non-Western feminisms but to study the intersectional hierarchies of caste and class enmeshed in gendered processes within the Indian context.

Drawing upon anti-caste activists such as Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar, and linking the struggle with Black feminists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, Anandita Pan emphasises the need to see caste through the lens of intersectionality (Pan 2019; 2021). Intersectionality as a lens to understand the contemporary political economy helps to pinpoint the gendered, racialised, caste-ist and class-based hierarchies but also overturns the logic of social and cultural identities to show how dominant social, cultural and

economic structures reproduce and marginalise hierarchies (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Crenshaw 1991; Devika 2018; John 2015; Pan 2021; Rege 1998; Verma 2020). Furthermore, this scholarship clearly indicates how capitalist and liberalised economies manipulate the prevalent divisions of caste, class and gender to constantly reproduce dominant caste hierarchies, which continue to retain accumulated wealth within the upper castes. These studies on approaching caste through an intersectional lens are central to this thesis as they enable me to contextualise the lives of pheriwale women, who work within structures of gender, caste and class.

Work and value

The pheriwale I interviewed spend twelve to fourteen hours per day in activities that generate income; work is therefore pivotal to the conceptualisation of value, which I develop here. The motivation to focus on work is to argue that even in paid work (that appears to exist solely within the framework of economic value) value is multidimensional and becomes a site where the material, religious, spiritual, familial and moral values are invoked in everyday lived realities. As Graeber reminds us at this point, "framing things this way of course evokes the spectre of Marx" (Graeber 2001:45).

One crucial definition provided by Graeber which enables me to link a Marxist understanding of value (work done by pheriwale) with a feminist notion of value (social reproduction and intersectionality), as well as drawing upon my fieldwork findings, is the notion of value as signifying "importance" (Graeber 2001:13, 55). While discussing E.E. Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* (1940), Graeber notes that the word 'value' in the Nuer community is synonymous with terms like 'home, village, territory'. Hence, Graeber writes, "'home' […] 'becomes a political value' as well. Note here how 'value' slips back and from 'meaning' to something more like 'importance': one's home is essential to one's sense of oneself, one's allegiances, what one cares about most in life" (Graeber 2001:13). This understanding of value relates directly to the interviews I collected for my thesis research. The expression often used is not always *mulya* (Hindi for 'value') but closer to *mehetva* (Hindi for 'importance') or more colloquially denoted as *zaroori* (Urdu for 'necessary'). By understanding value as importance, I am able to shed

light on what is valuable to the pheriwale women in my study. Furthermore, locating their trade within larger frames of the informal economy enables me to show the link between their work and value (Alessandrini 2016; Crang et al. 2013). This shift from micro to macro through the lens of value in my analysis shows the link between multiple abstractions of the concept as it captures both the everyday lived understandings of value as well as its connection to global markets. The idea of concentric circles which are interconnected helps visualise such a network of value chains and value systems.

Contradictions of value

Once again returning to Graeber's classification, another outlier to the simple classification of theories of value could be Nancy Munn (works from the 1970s to the 1980s). If we compare anthropological studies on Melanesia, then Munn's point of departure on value does not lie in gift, gift exchange or Strathern's notion of a "web of social relationships" (Graeber 2001:45). Instead, Munn argues that value emerges from the activity of exchange itself (Munn 1977). This argument, according to Graeber, is not really 'new', as Marx's notion of value is inherently rooted in the human action of labour and processes rather than stationary codes of structures (Graeber 2001:45–52). The parallel that Graeber draws upon here between Munn's idea of value emerging from human activity and Marx's notion of labour enables him to make two distinct analytical moves crucial to this thesis. Firstly, by extrapolating value as action, Graeber is able to present a more complex idea of value than simply relational within a structure or exchange. Secondly, by juxtaposing Munn's and Marx's theories, Graeber broadens the scope of the notion of labour itself.

These two arguments are important points of departure for this thesis. Firstly, because this allows me to account for activities that are valuable to pheriwale in their everyday. Secondly, due to a broader understanding of labour, I can utilise the value theory of labour for the trading practices of the pheriwale women in my study, even though they are outside traditional industrial production.

Karl Marx's intervention into Hegel's idealism is not to disregard the metaphysical nature of a concept such as value but rather to suggest that metaphysical aspects of human life can have material origins and consequences (Marx 1932[1845], 1976[1867]:149; see also Graeber 2001:57; Spivak 1985). According to Graeber's

reading of Marx, what distinguishes Marx's theory of value from that of scholarship in classical political economy is the analytical frame:

> What makes capitalism unique, he [Marx] argued, is that it is the only system in which labour – a human being's capacity to transform the world, their powers of physical and mental creativity – can itself be bought and sold (Graeber 2001:55).

This indicates that value is not pegged to a theory of prices or simply the calculation of hours spent at work (such as Ricardo's theory of value), but rather the capability of the economic system to capitalise and commodify what humans value, and their creativity and transformative capacities while navigating the world. David Harvey, in his 2018 essay, also notes that the mere calculation of hours of labour at work was not the analytical contribution of *Capital Volume I.* Rather, it was to show the inherent instability and contradiction of value in a capitalist society (Harvey 2018). Furthermore, Marx's intervention into idealism allows him to situate conception and transformation through time (history) in the potential of human capacity, rather than Hegelian notion of the "Spirit of the Age" (*Zeitgeist*) (Graeber 2001:57; Marx 1959[1844]; Redding 2015).

Marx's approach is open and places much emphasis on the human capacities to change, produce, create and cooperate (i.e. labour) (Marx 1976[1867]). Graeber argues that for Marx it is not "reason" (here implying modern efficiency) which sets apart humans from other beings, but rather it is "imagination" (Graeber 2001:58). This way of framing the Marxian understanding of labour then also allows Graeber to see that, even at work, value cannot be simply quantified as economic value of output and income. Here the parallel between Spivak's reading of Marx and Graeber's reading of Marx is visible and they both emphasise the multidimensionality of value even when it may appear to be merely a simulacrum of economic value (wages/price of labour-power). While Graeber argues that work in capitalism capitalises upon human creativity and imagination to extract value, Spivak, on the other hand, argues that the value which capitalism accumulates is materially built upon gendered lines and a new division of labour that reproduces gender and class hierarchies. Therefore, the main argument here is that both the authors and their critical readings of Marx's notion of value show how, as soon as a strict meaning of economic value is constructed, the socio-political aspects of its dimension get foreclosed. I do not draw upon the idea of labour as rooted in "creative energies" and "imagination" to romanticise the concept of work, but to

emphasise that a broader understanding of labour highlights the contradictory nature of the experience of working and the value that it can hold in people's lives.

Ong's study of Malay women provides illustrations where this is visible. For the women working in electronic factories, the capacity and limits of human action become part of the everyday: for example, when the young women could not work, they were still able to resist on the factory floor through different means (Ong 2010[1987]:207). This frame then becomes pertinent to situate my fieldwork vis-à-vis the theory, as the pheriwale may not have "chosen" their conditions of work but family practices of the trade, caste, gender and lack of access to resources played an influence. However, work for pheriwale women also becomes a means to build livelihoods, be relationally autonomous at work and value dignity of labour to counter the alienating process. Hence, work, which takes up a major portion of the day for the informal sector workers, illustrates the multiple dimensions of value. While studies on informal labour in the contemporary political economy justifiably focus on the expropriation of informalised labour by capitalist value chains, by overlooking what work means or the values that work generates for the workers, a crucial aspect of experience of everyday work gets lost in theorising and abstracting lived experiences (Breman 1996; 2013; Mezzadri 2008; 2019; 2020). Instead, exploring the conflicting ways in which experiences emerge provides glimpses of how abstract ideas are translated, challenged and shifted in everyday working life.

Scholarship within feminist studies has been crucial in highlighting these contradictory aspects of value that people may attach to work, especially among socio-economically marginalised groups like the pheriwale (John 2013). In low-income sites, "the workplace becomes a threat and a promise simultaneously, and it is in the ambiguous meeting between the two that precarity is created" (Sager 2011:143). In Nguyen's study on Vietnamese waste workers, the link between work and value, and their ambiguous relation, is analysed. For example, Nguyen notes how the interviews she collected reflect notions of shame (worthless/valueless) due to the work revolving around waste. Yet the workers also provide narratives of social aspirations such as gaining the ability to put children through university education by waste work. Nguyen argues that such accounts "suggest contradictory valuations rooted in multiple value frameworks that people draw on from their social positions" (Nguyen 2019:1, 93). In relation to waste economies, geographer Vinay Gidwani points out that waste is a result of capitalist

accumulation and indicates "value-in-waiting" (Gidwani 2013:773), since waste is 'waiting' for labour to transform it in order to abstract its value. Here, scholars such as Gidwani and Nguyen capture the multiple aspects of value and the relation to waste or used-goods economies. Moreover, Nguyen also shows how economic value is intertwined with socio-political-moral dimensions of value.

Multiple dimensions of value

For the purpose of my thesis, I conceptualise value as being multidimensional and encompassing inner contradictions. In the sections presented above, the main points which become relevant for the analysis of the data of this thesis are as follows. Firstly, Graeber's reading of value as meaning 'importance', Marx's notion of value, and Graeber's interpretation of Marx's concept of labour offer a conceptually open telos. This scope of understanding value then enables me to explore how, even at work, multiple frames of value are at play. So the central argument is that a conceptualisation of value that is rooted in exchange and the use value of labour is intrinsically intertwined with meanings of value created at work. One way to grasp this is to explore the value of labour as well as the valuable meanings that workers experience or create at work. Work as a lived experience can offer critical insight into this enmeshment of layers of the concept of value. Though it is often associated solely with economic value, work can also be understood as a space where people engage with their capacities to create and organise their everyday, the values that people bring into work and value generated from work.

Secondly, feminist scholarship which engages with political economy, postcolonial studies and intersectionality offers valuable arguments to take into account and build upon. The debates and dialogues within feminist discussions pinpoint how value can be theorised through different perspectives as well as reveal the inner contradictions of conceptualising value. Social reproduction along with intersectionality can specifically show how gender and class shape value inside and outside the market and the household. Furthermore, an intersectional perspective enables this thesis to take into account how gender, caste and class are reproduced in everyday working lives. Thus, understanding both work and value

from an intersectional lens highlights the centrality of social reproduction as well as ways in which gender, caste and class are implicated in global value chains.

The lived experiences of caste, class and gender become highly relevant for my thesis as they offer both theoretical and empirical frames through which conceptual and everyday notions of value can be approached. Overall, such analysis that takes into account everyday working lives reveals that people are directly and indirectly linked to the market system. Therefore, the value that markets generate and the value that is shaped vis-à-vis the social or the cultural cannot be understood in isolation from the capitalist economy, in Western and non-Western contexts of value-making (local or global). Lastly, intersectionality as a lens to contextualise workers in their socio-economic environments allows an engagement with narratives of work that in turn enables the operationalisation of multiple dimensions of value and to recognise how they merge. Inspired by the Dalit feminist theorisation of caste and intersectionality, I examine intersectionality of caste as a social relation that is constantly reproduced and maintained not only through dominant historiography but through the twenty-first-century globalised politics and socio-economies as well. Below I touch upon the main empirical themes which I analyse through the lens of value.

Trajectories: trade, waiting and relational autonomy

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, due to the nature of pheriwale's trade, they spend most of their day engaged in tasks that generate income. Therefore, work in relation to value has been given considerable space in my discussion above. Apart from the everyday work of trading, the aspects that shape pheriwale women's lives as well as shape value (at work and outside) are waiting for social security benefits, autonomy and avoiding processes of alienation. These trajectories are the major themes developed from the empirical material. Here I provide brief overviews on the theories that helped me extrapolate the themes in the ethnographic chapters which follow and help in analysing the identified themes in my data.

Informal work is characterised by a normalised nature of precarity. For instance, Abel Polese argues that, in the context of India, precarity of work and life in general is not only market-driven but is "precariousness induced by a state"

(Polese 2018:viii). In addition, critical scholarship argues that while precarity is the norm for most workers in India, it is more detrimental to certain groups based on caste, class and gender which take specific shapes within the context of the informal sector (Agarwala 2009; Harriss-White 2017; Noronha and D'Cruz 2017; Yadav 2018). By following the working day of pheriwale, I explore how dimensions of value emerge in their everyday trading practices.

For groups who are socio-economically and politically marginalised, waiting for asylum, rights or social security benefits from the state is often long and arduous (Auyero 2012; Bandak and Janeja 2018; Bendixsen and Eriksen 2018; Hage 2009; Khosravi 2017; Sager 2011). While waiting is a mundane experience of everyday life, Bandak and Janeja note that conceptualising waiting is a fairly new phenomenon in social theory (Bandak and Janeja 2018:1). By engaging with the concept of waiting that occurs in pheriwale's lives for social security benefits, pensions, ID cards or bank accounts, I examine how the lived experiences of waiting for pheriwale women are shaped by value and intersections of caste, gender and class.

Lastly, the concept of autonomy is a recurrent theme in empirical material that revolves around self-employed informal labour (Leonard 1998; Millar 2008; 2014; Vargas 2016). By noting moments of autonomy and fears of alienation due to discrimination on the basis of gender, caste and class, I explore the important values at work for pheriwale women. I use the concepts of relational autonomy as well as alienation to capture the nuances of working life for informal traders, as the intersection of the two highlights the conceptual tensions that are experienced. In addition, the concept of alienation becomes useful as it invokes how one's capacity to be creative and to work can be hampered by dehumanising work environments (Graeber 2001:64; Marx 2009[1844]). In the following chapter, I outline the methodology of my doctoral thesis.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In order to centre the experiences of pheriwale within their everyday working lives I am inspired by ethnographic fieldwork as a qualitative methodological tool and practice for this study. Writing, describing, analysing and reflecting on work done by others, on the working lives of people, implies that an author or an observer is constantly engaged in interpretation as well as representation. Within this chapter I attempt to untangle these discussions as well as present an outline of the methods and procedures which I followed and carried out in order to conduct this study. People's experiences, while being anecdotal, individualistic or subjective, can offer a gateway into understanding how people are located within social, political, economic and cultural structures. Moreover, qualitative research rooted in people's lived experiences can challenge and contribute to new ways of thinking about theory (Auyero 2012; Jeffrey 2010; Millar 2018; Nguyen 2019; Ong 1987; Rydstrom 2003; 2012; Sen 2014; Tonini 2016). In turn, social theory can offer ways to name and conceptualise experiences, map and trace differences of experiences, historicise collective experiences and build critical knowledge that does not romanticise difference and neither does it overlook differences (Madison 2005:12–13; Mulinari and Sandell 1999:287–288; Narayan 1993; Rege 1998; Visweswaran 1997). Keeping in mind this dialectical relation between experience and theory, I elaborate upon the methods used in this thesis and the methodological concerns taken into account while writing this text.

Inspired by ethnographies

Similar to any other method for data collection or engagement with empirical material, ethnographic fieldwork entails the observation of certain procedures and rituals which researchers follow in order to build knowledge (Blommaert and Dong 2010:1). In the case of this thesis, the set of actions include: "pre-field

preparation" followed by fieldwork which utilises "observation, interviewing", then transcribing and coding the collected data (Blommaert and Dong 2010:2, 63; Rydstrom 2003:ix–xv). This set of actions of course appears linear in writing, but is much more dynamic during the process of the fieldwork. On the issue of collecting empirical material, sociologist Michael Burawoy (1998:11) notes that having fixed codes or "a predefined template" does not really help as everyday life is in constant flux and the sets of actions and questions have to incorporate these emerging dynamics while collecting data.

For instance, as part of pre-field preparation, I made a list of sixty questions in order to conduct semi-structured interviews (Edwards and Holland 2013:3). During fieldwork, I realised that my questionnaire did not contain questions regarding microfinance. However, when a few pheriwale women mentioned small loans, I included some questions on the subject, although in the end there were neither many responses nor detailed experiences regarding microfinance to add to my data. While some pheriwale mentioned that they would be interested in getting a loan, some explicitly told me that they did not want to get involved in a debt trap, and some just shrugged their shoulders and indicated they were not interested. Since most pheriwale had little to say about this matter, it is one of the topics in the thesis which, though it is mentioned through some of the narratives, I do not analytically engage with discussions on micro loans or self-help group models of microfinance (Allon 2014; Federici 2014). While scholars constantly engage in decision-making processes on what should be included or excluded from final piece of work, narratives of people and also findings shape and navigate what finally ends up in a text.

Location

Anthropologists Jan Blommaert and Dong Jie acknowledge that fieldwork is characterised by plans which do not always work out: one sets out with lists of actions and things-to-do and yet, during the process of collecting data, those lists go out of the window (Blommaert and Dong 2010:24–25). The process of fieldwork for this thesis started with such a chaotic beginning.

Having been born and raised in Delhi, I knew the language and was comfortable in the city as it was home, so I assumed many things about doing fieldwork there (cf. Narayan 1993). For instance, Delhi continues to be a major hub of cloth

markets and the garment industry; therefore, it remains a prime location where a large number of pheriwale trade, as well as the city attracting many traders from neighbouring towns, cities and villages (Norris 2010). Hence, one of my assumptions was that local organisations involved with the reuse and recycling of clothes may have knowledge of or work with pheriwale women, who have been one of the distinctly visible street traders in the city. I imagined I would easily build contacts as soon as I had landed in Delhi. My plan was to meet NGO workers or local organisations which could put me in touch with pheriwale or help me meet various actors in Delhi's informal economy. Accordingly, when I started the fieldwork in December 2017, I contacted some local NGOs[19] who work with second-hand clothes and recycling, as I thought they could provide potential connections for the fieldwork (cf. Eklund 2010). However, in the first two weeks it became obvious that none of the organisations I reached out to or visited in the city had any contact with the traders.

Lucy Norris, in her ethnographic study on second-hand clothes, refers to doing fieldwork in Delhi as an experience of a "disconnected nature" which "reflects the social distance of the various communities from each other and their lack of knowledge and awareness of each other" (Norris 2010:22). This social distance of the groups was not only for reasons of socio-economics or culture (particularly vis-à-vis class and caste) or linguistics but also space regarding the landscape of the city. While the organisations I visited were mostly located in South Delhi, which includes the richer parts of the city, pheriwale's main market in Raghubir Nagar (beside Ghoda Mandir) is near the slum area of West Delhi. Some pheriwale mentioned that they also travel to sell their goods in the Sunday market, near Lal Qila (Red Fort), in Old Delhi, which contains some of the city's oldest markets. I knew about the Sunday market and other weekly markets in Delhi because my parents used to buy everyday goods from them, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s (cf. Sharma et al. 2017:99–101). I found out about the pheriwale's huge, open marketplace or bazaar ('mandi') in Raghubir Nagar through a fashion blog on where to find cheap clothes (Dalal 2014) and Norris's book (2010). So, after failed attempts with the organisations, in early December 2017, I decided to track down and visit the market beside the Ghoda Mandir.

The overall time period spent conducting fieldwork and collecting empirical material was four months. The first round of data collection was carried out from December 2017 to February 2018 (three months). The second round I conducted

in January 2019. The mandi beside the Ghoda Mandir in Raghubir Nagar became the main site where I conducted the majority of the fieldwork, since all pheriwale in the city come to trade there. Previously pheriwale had set up their market beside (on the footpaths) the Raghubir Nagar Road. Since 1975, the pheriwale's mandi was moved inside the open area, as the local authorities wanted to clear the main road for traffic and growing developments in the city (Dalal 2014; Norris 2010:52). This once open-garden area is now a concrete-walled enclave, with a small gate at one end and a larger gate at the other end.

During the period I conducted fieldwork, the cost of setting up one *chaadar* (a large cloth which pheriwale lay out on the floor and arrange the collected clothes on top to sell) was INR 10 (approx. EUR 0.12). This meant that the pheriwale pay INR 10 per bundle every day in order to set up a selling spot, by way of entrance fee. There are no fixed or reserved spots; it is on the basis of 'first come, first served'. Customers who visit the mandi do not have pay a fees to enter. The items that the pheriwale collect are mostly clothes, so the mandi is piled high with those. But close to the entrance there are also some people selling second-hand electronics, shoes, sneakers, clocks, watches, mobile phones, etc. All the goods are presented on large *chaadars* on the ground, although people selling electronics or jewellery prefer to sell and showcase those in large boxes. The open mandi has a range of traders apart from the pheriwale: sellers of drinks such as water, juice, tea, or snacks (*samosa*, *kachaudi*, etc.) and small lunch bowls (broken rice and dal). Rickshaw-wale or rickshaw-drivers and sweepers arrive later in the day (at around 10–11am) to clean up after the day's trade is over. The rickshaw-wale offer transport services to the pheriwale and other vendors who want to take their goods back to their homes nearby or to the local bus station. A few vendors and pheriwale travel by the metro, but only when they do not have any bulky goods with them, because the security in the metro does not allow the carrying of goods in bulk. In addition, the recent hike in metro prices dissuades the traders from travelling on it.

In conversations

While, initially, I was annoyed that I could not make contact with pheriwale through organisations, in retrospect it was a good decision to directly visit the mandi early on during the fieldwork. This enabled me to get in direct contact with pheriwale and due to lack of middle-persons, I became more comfortable in going to the mandi and, in turn, some regular traders there also became more

used to my presence. However, since the mandi is pheriwale's workspace, I was aware that people may not have time for long conversations. Therefore, in order to facilitate conducting recorded interviews at the mandi, I chose a semi-structured format of qualitative interviewing (Edwards and Holland 2013; O'Reilly 2009). The mandi being a large open space where a lot of people work and earn a livelihood, the pace of movement is fast as customers and various types of traders come and go throughout the day. On that account, I needed a questionnaire which allowed a smooth flow of conversation but, if need be, then I could also restrict the number of questions asked, in case the person I was talking to was in a rush or became busy due to the flow of customers. Therefore, along with interviews, as part of the qualitative fieldwork method I also made use of observations and fieldnotes when pheriwale were too busy to talk to me or whenever I visited and 'hung out' at the mandi (Atkinson et al. 2001; Madison 2005; Smith 2001).

Sociologists Rosalind Edwards and Janet Holland stress in *What is Qualitative Interviewing?* (2013) that semi-structured interviews include some features such as an "interactional exchange of dialogue […]. A thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative approach where the researcher has topics, themes or issues they wish to cover, but with a fluid and flexible structure" (Edwards and Holland 2013:3). Hence, a semi-structured interview guide offered my study the possibility to organise and focus the interviews to some extent as well as adapt the questions depending upon what interviewees lay stress. Furthermore, I could restrict an interview to certain questions in case the research participant did not have time (as they were working). On the other hand, if there was more time, then I could make the interviews more fluid and extensive. In general, the questions were rather broad, and I used the questionnaire more as a question bank that helped me focus the conversation but, depending on what the person mentioned, I would let the conversation go with the flow. For example, the questionnaire included topics such as pheriwale's everyday work routine, health, workspace, trading patterns, and local networks. I elaborate on this later in this chapter.

The majority of the interviews took place at the mandi. I would go in the morning and 'hang out' till noon, and most days I had lunch at the mandi itself. This routine took a few weeks to develop but soon I made some regular contacts, such as Sita, Jyoti and Ritu, who subsequently became some of the key participants. Sita is a pheriwali who is single, in her mid-thirties and has four children. Since I

met her the first day and on subsequent days, she took it upon herself to take me 'under her wing'. Usually she would invite me over whenever she saw me 'hanging out' at the mandi at lunchtime, and we would have lunch together. Sita insisted on buying lunch for herself as well as for me most days, since it is customary in India for the elder to feed the younger person. On some rare occasions and only at my insistence, she let me pay for food or chai for her and her children. As December to February is the winter period in Delhi, most people enjoyed being in an open mandi, basking in the grey urban sun.

Whenever I approached traders with the intention to talk to them, I always introduced myself first and mentioned that I was interested in studying how people work and what happens at everyday workspaces. People were often quite receptive and, since pheriwale were sitting and selling the goods they had collected, they would be open to having a conversation along with taking a chai break. Some were also quite straightforward in telling me that since they had been sitting there all morning and were rather bored and tired, talking to me was a welcome distraction. Therefore, I found building a rapport with the traders fairly easy (Madison 2005:32–33; O'Reilly 2009). I conducted twenty-eight interviews, of which five were in groups of two to four people. The group interviews were not part of the 'plan' but, since we were at a large bazaar, people often walked around and would join the conversation.

Of the twenty-eight interviewees, twenty-five are women and three men. The range of age is broad, from people in their twenties to sixties. The twenty-five interviews with women are mostly with pheriwale; one is with a *saadiwali* (a different caste and from Rajasthan), one with a *paniwali* (from Punjab), and one customer. Pheriwale's trade is carried out by both women and men, although it is visibly dominated by women, hence there are more women who became part of this research. Most of the pheriwale belong to the Waghri caste and are from Gujarat; one of the informants was from Uttar Pradesh. The interviews range from shorter conversations to about an hour long. Altogether I recorded around 540 minutes in addition to fieldnotes. All my conversations with the interviewees were in Hindi. On some occasions during the group interviews, people would talk to each other in Gujarati, which is the vernacular language spoken by those from Gujarat (such as a majority of pheriwale). Since Gujarati is very similar to Hindi, I could understand much of what they said, as many words and meanings overlap. However, if I did not understand something, then I would ask someone in the

group to kindly explain, and they would do so in Hindi. One significant thing to note about the Delhi context is that it is a huge metropolis, and people who have been in the city for generations may still specify where their communities originate from. Moreover, it is also common to hear many other languages apart from Hindi on a daily basis in Delhi. People often have kinship ties in their respective 'home' states (since India is a federal nation-state, the states are important in terms of language and cultural differences).

As mentioned earlier, while for research purposes it would have been optimal to have hour-long conversations, most of the time the pace of interviews had to be fast, due to the busy marketspace. For example, holding a two- or three-hour interview would have been difficult for the pheriwale as they have to deal with customers or may leave the mandi in order to go home or for *pheri*, where they visit various parts of the city to collect second-hand clothes. Furthermore, I conducted interviews only after 9:00–9:30am, because the early-morning time slot is extremely busy for the pheriwale as that is when their bulk-buying customers arrive. After 9–10am the trade is usually calmer, attending to the customers who want to buy for everyday consumption. So, soon after the first few days of visiting the mandi, I noted that 10am to 1pm was a good time to conduct interviews as pheriwale tend to be more relaxed after the morning rush.

On the question of time, anthropologist Karen O'Reilly writes that time helps build rapport and trust between the researcher and the research informants (O'Reilly 2009:19). After conducting interviews, I would continue to 'hang out' at the mandi. I took a notebook to jot down key observations, or sometimes I recorded my thoughts. With twenty-eight interviews, the body of narratives and material was rich and I started the coding and analysis process in early 2019. Therefore, I decided not to return for another round of fieldwork to collect more interviews. Although having more interviews would have provided a larger sample size, I felt it was more fruitful to meaningfully engage with the interviews I had already collected.

Emotions during research

Despite my comfort and familiarity with Delhi as home, the context of fieldwork was unusual and invoked strange thoughts and emotions in me. As anthropologist Craig Jeffrey reflects in his study on unemployed youth in India, during his

fieldwork process, "First, I was often preoccupied with the question of my productivity. I often experienced fieldwork not as a steady accretion of perspectives and information but as long periods of relative inertia interrupted by moments of tremendous excitement" (Jeffrey 2010:29). These expressions resonate with me when I think about my fieldwork and doctoral studies' journey. As fieldwork entails constant travelling and talking to people, it can be quite tiring mentally and physically. For instance, travelling back and forth from the mandi took me roughly two to two and a half hours. During that time I often felt I was not 'doing research', or at least the notion of how research was portrayed in my head. Moreover, even though people were fairly comfortable to share experiences of their everyday work, I constantly felt that I was disturbing them or impeding their work schedules. Sometimes I would wait for informants, whom I had met on previous days, for a meeting or for a phone call. However, since the mandi was really crowded in the morning, it would be difficult to find them the next morning.

Initially, some pheriwale agreed that I could join them on *pheri* (rounds to collect goods), but then the next time we met they would not be comfortable with that idea. This is, of course, understandable as people have changing schedules and various demands during their day. As Blommaert and Dong note, fieldwork can be extremely unpredictable and entail last-moment changes (2010:24–26). Furthermore, as Jeffrey highlights, on some days fieldwork moves rather slowly, and on other days people would do things which perfectly fit with the focus of a research project (Jeffrey 2010:29). Even though it would have been good for this study to follow the pheriwale during *pheri*, I also understood that I would slow them down in one of the crucial parts of their working day, and that is why none of them encouraged me to follow them on their trading routes, and why I did not persist.

Another concern which came up during fieldwork, as an unpredictable point to mention, was that before conducting interviews or while preparing for fieldwork, I did not take into account the various kinds of sensitive topics which could come up in a discussion on work and everyday work dynamics. For instance, whenever I conducted interviews or just 'hung out' and chatted with people at the mandi, they would often talk about ID cards and occasionally display them to me. Due to the sensitivity of such personal data, whenever pheriwale talked about their details such as Aadhaar ID cards, or showed me their personal documents, I made sure not to document their personal data in any manner such as taking pictures, recording conversations or taking notes of their details. However, I have found it

useful to note how people relate to these state-issued documents, as they are crucial for proving one's identity and applying for welfare benefits, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

In the process of fieldwork, it is not just the researcher who is reading and interpreting the actors in the field, but the researcher is also read and assessed (Crapanzano 2010:57). For example, initially when I took a rickshaw (three-wheel cycle) from the metro station to the mandi, the rickshaw-driver would ask me why I was visiting Ghoda Mandir and the nearby slums and whether I was a university student. I am assuming this was because it is quite common to see students or young professionals travelling on the metro or arriving at the metro station with their backpacks, especially in the morning and afternoon. For the people I interviewed, I was often read as a middle-class, upper-caste student. As soon as I pointed out I was from Delhi, and they heard my colloquial accent, people would share experiences of working in the city, or name localities or neighbourhoods, and I would understand the spatial and socio-economic contexts they would be referring to (cf. Narayan 1993). Due to the nature of the marketplace, I would usually disappear into the crowd, though occasionally people I interviewed as well as passers-by would ask if I was from the municipality or a journalist or from the bank. This was mainly because, unlike the customers, who were walking around, I sat next to the person I was interviewing. Though, when I inquired if it was customary for people from the media or municipality or bank to visit them, the traders often had rather vague memories. Some older pheriwale mentioned that, while people had come in the past to write about the market or take photographs of the mandi, usually people did not hang around for long. During the interviews, I always mentioned that I studied and worked at a university, and wanted to talk about their working day.

According to anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano, fieldwork is a space that can produce both deeply troubling and positive emotions (2010:59). One afternoon, I was sitting and sipping chai next to Sita while she folded some clothes she had collected and her daughter played with my pencil and print-out of the questionnaire. I may have looked sad, as that week my mother had been ill, my father was not doing well either, and I was getting tired of the fieldwork. I had told Sita earlier that month that the fieldwork would be part of what I was writing for the university where I worked and studied. Sita looked at me, paused from folding the clothes, held my hand and said to me, "For our stomachs and family,

we have to work." In this instance, it was not I who was offering Sita advice on what to do regarding her widow's pension documents, but Sita was providing me with emotional support.

As anthropologist Ghassan Hage notes in his essay on political emotions during fieldwork, a researcher brings a range of things into the field, from emotions to personal politics (Hage 2010). Personal politics is then intimately linked to the epistemological and ontological underpinnings that we carry within ourselves; sometimes they are conscious and sometimes they may reflect more about our academic training and may not always be a "matter of choice" (Butler 2006[1999]:xix).

A note on writing and thinking

The epistemological and ontological underpinnings of this thesis depart from three intersecting points that present how I approach writing within social sciences, theoretical concepts and empirical material from fieldwork. In other words, these three points of departure highlight my vantage point and my epistemic positionality and where I am writing from. First is inspired by queer and poststructural scholarship (Butler 2006[1999]). The second emerges from postcolonial, Marxist feminist scholarship (Spivak 1999). The third draws upon Black and Indian feminist debates on intersectionality and Dalit feminism (Crenshaw 1991; Devika 2018; Hill Collins 2000; John 2013, 2015; Pan 2021; Rege 1998).

In the preface to the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler notes two aspects of writing in academia. Firstly, Butler argues that one of the restrictions of grammar is not only its character of constraining the expression of radical thoughts but also the limits of 'thinkable' that it imposes and disciplines. Secondly, while the task of a critical scholar is to question the gendered norms that grammar binds itself in, one cannot overlook that:

> [writing] style is a complicated terrain, and not one that we unilaterally choose or control with the purposes we consciously intend. Fredric Jameson made this clear in his early book on Sartre. Certainly one can practice styles, but the styles that become available to you are not entirely a matter of choice (Butler 2006[1999]: xix).

Here Butler is pointing not only to the disciplinary/epistemological and ontological constraints that researchers put on research participants but also to how grammar and academic training in turn discipline the researcher. My point is not to suggest that we are passively at the hands of academia, but rather to reiterate the complexity of thinking and writing within the scope of academia. Furthermore, this is to note that being situated with social sciences, and more specifically within feminist political economy, conditions how I see and engage with the empirical material, the theoretical framework and the vantage point presented in this thesis. However, the aim is to challenge these disciplinary grammars and boundaries. For instance, how we approach themes within research is shaped not only by the people's experiences or accounts that we encounter, but also by terms and concepts within social sciences that mould one's way of understanding the world, not least the personal politics.

The second point of departure draws upon postcolonial feminist scholarship. Challenging disciplinary grammars and boundaries does not entail a simple dismissal of Western scholarship and inclusion of 'writings on the Third World' and the *Other*. Spivak argues:

> Colonial Discourse studies, when they concentrate only on the representation of the colonized or the matter of the colonies, can sometimes serve the production of current neo-colonial knowledge by placing colonialism/imperialism securely in the past, and/or by suggesting a continuous line from that past to our present (Spivak 1999:1).

Here, what Spivak is pointing towards is that mere replacement of colonial discourses with postcolonial representations can reproduce dominant discourses that foreclose critical knowledge production. Rather, the aim is to question the logic and inner workings of knowledge itself to show that Western and non-Western scholarship can be colonial.

The third scope of writing and thinking is inspired by Black and Dalit feminist literature, which provides pertinent ways to contemplate experience and theory. With intersectionality as an analytical tool, Black and Dalit feminists not only take into the account the differences, tensions and silences across and within experiences, but intersectionality also enables the researcher to note how differentially emerging power structures are reproduced, maintained and perpetuated through dominant ways of thinking, writing and living (Crenshaw

1991; Hill Collins 2000; Rege 1998). Dalit feminist literature enables one to note, understand and contextualise the experienced complexities of local contexts of caste, gender and class (Pan 2019; Rege 1998; see also John 2015:75). This is not to say that experiences are the only basis of knowledge, which can lead to essentialising people to their narrated experiences. Rather, the logic is to understand and approach experience as space-, time- and context-bound while at the same time emphasise how marginalised experiences become relevant for emancipatory knowledge production that shifts dominant modes of thinking and writing (Pan 2019:45; 2021:6–8). As Pan argues, the Dalit feminist standpoint provides an "interventionist and revisionist approach whereby caste system and gender ideologies are recognized as mutually intersecting" (Pan 2019:45). Both Rege's and Pan's intersectional approach to experience and theory, Spivak's critique of representation and Butler's critique of hegemonic grammar provide key insights for my study. These serve as the lenses and frameworks that guide the writing and thinking process in this thesis.

A note on abstraction

The politics of whom is cited and why is important to acknowledge, because reading and writing a thesis involve the invocation and rationalization of academic sources that have complex and sometimes problematic histories. The first aspect is on the use of classical and contemporary works. I address this point as there has been a growing discussion within feminist scholarship on which sources are used in academic writing (Ahmed 2017:15). In Jacques Derrida's obituary, after his death in 2004, Butler writes:

> It is not his own death that preoccupies him, but rather his 'debts'. These are authors that he could not do without, ones with and through whom he thinks. He writes only because he reads, and he reads only because there are these authors to read time and again. He 'owes' them something or, perhaps, everything, if only because he could not write without them: their writing exists as the precondition of his own; their writing constitutes the means through which his own writing voice is animated and secured, a voice that emerges, importantly, as an address (Butler 2004).

In this short piece, Butler traces the legacy of Derrida and his major contributions to philosophy, linguistics, the humanities and social sciences, and for challenging the way we read and think. Butler notes that close to the end of Derrida's life he wrote *The Work of Mourning* (2001), where he mourns the deaths of writers to whom he felt indebted for his own work, such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Sarah Kofman, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-François Lyotard among others (Butler 2004). In the above quote, Derrida and Butler not only mourn the loss of great writers, but highlight how thinking and writing is never solitary but accumulative, inspired and shaped by authors and thinkers whom we read, hear and learn about. This is not to say that one always agrees with writings that precede us; rather, criticising a particular text is also having an engagement in relation to the text and an acknowledgement of the intellectual labour that helps us construct knowledge (Connell 1997; Derrida 2016[1967]; Spivak 1988). The purpose of bringing this discussion here is to note that while I acknowledge the intersecting specificities of the pheriwale women whom I interviewed, as well as the context of Delhi being a city with a postcolonial history, scholarship from various fields in academia has been utilised to draw upon relevant discussions for my thesis in addition to challenging the theoretical underpinnings of academic knowledge production by bringing in critical reflections from the empirical material.

Apart from issues of citation, abstraction, theory-making and situated knowledge, there are also inevitable parts of *doing* social sciences. Doing social sciences entails recognising that one cannot leave concepts at home when one goes for fieldwork. This also resonates with what Butler points towards, in terms of the restrictions of grammar: after years of education and training in particular disciplines, it would be unrealistic of me to state that I can understand the world completely outside the parameters of certain conceptual lenses, especially during fieldwork (Butler 2006[1999]:xix). This is not to say that the field, the informants or different encounters necessarily fit the concepts that have been wired into me. People, spaces and temporalities shift and challenge the concepts in our heads and in the textbooks. To assume that one can enter the field without biases, concepts or preconceived notions is not only implausible but also bad science, especially when the ideal of transparency of methodology is held so closely to science (Haraway 1991:183–201).

This requires being committed to doing fieldwork not from an all-seeing-eye perspective, but through transparency of acknowledging one's epistemic,

ontological and disciplinary baggage (Skeggs 1997:17–40). I recognise that travelling with concepts may reproduce analytical closures underpinnings, as concepts may have complex legacies and contestations. Interpreting what people share with a researcher may be presented in problematic ways, even if the intention is the opposite. For instance, any type of fieldwork which involves talking to people invokes asymmetric power dynamics between the researcher, who is also the author and the authority who frames and interprets what people share (John 1996:118).

However, to produce knowledge devoid of situating people's experiences may also construct and reiterate taken-for-granted assumptions within a field. For example, perceptions of people's working lives can only be framed in a nuanced manner by engaging with people's experiences of their work. In turn, theoretical lenses and theoretical abstractions can aid in challenging colonial and analytical restrictions of concepts and knowledge systems as well as essentialising experiences and narratives (John 1996; Mohanty 1984; Mulinari and Sandell 1999:294; Pan 2019; 2021; Rege 1998; Spivak 1988). To illustrate this, one of the assumptions I carried with me during the process of interviews was that the pheriwale operated (mostly) *outside* the formal sector and capitalist production and operated mostly at the local level. However, during the course of research, through previous literature and from the narratives of the pheriwale, it became increasingly clear that their trade is also linked to the regional and global markets.

The construction of theory and the analytical movement "from the particular to the general" is reflected in classical sociological texts as well (Marx 1993[1859]:1). For example, in his famous essay, '"Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy', Max Weber writes on the matter of abstraction in the process of theory-making: "The construction of abstract ideal-types recommends itself not as an end but as a means" (Weber 1949[1904]:92). A key contribution by various feminist scholars has been that the intervention into the process of theory-making and the relation between theory, methodology and empirical material has, however, provided a more sophisticated and nuanced approach to recognise that both the *end* and *means* of abstraction harbour matrixes of power based on gender, race, class and sexuality (Haraway 1991:183–201). Therefore, methodology in feminist scholarship offers a crucial space in academic writing to situate oneself, the text and the onto-epistemic baggage that one carries with oneself into fieldwork and during the writing on experience (Connell 1997; Hill Collins 2000;

Mulinari and Sandell 1999: Skeggs 1997). The section below includes how these epistemological and ontological underpinnings frame the process of fieldwork in this thesis.

On representation

One of the characteristics of the postcolonial and poststructural turn of the 1970s–1980s in social sciences was not just the critique of the modernist and colonial epistemic lineages in writing but it also led to deep self-reflection within various disciplines and techniques employed for knowledge production (Butler 2006[1999]; Derrida 2016[1967]; Mohanty 2003; Spivak 1988). The introduction of intersectionality in research from the 1990s onwards further challenged dominant ways of producing knowledge (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Crenshaw 1991; Hill Collins 2000; Mulinari and Sandell 1999; Pan 2021:30; Rege 1998; Skeggs 1997; Stacey 1988). Apart from the question of representation that these interventions have brought forth, they also stress the contradictory, intersecting, fractured and dynamic aspect of the human subject as well as social theory.

People say and think things that change over space and time. Informants who become part of any research and the research itself are not stationary, though they are made stationary through the materiality of writing (Narayan 2012). What is represented is not only a representation, but in a context of space and time. Sociologist Beverly Skeggs in her study on working-class women in the UK notes this contextuality of experience and goes a step further to point out that it is not only contextual but also partial (Skeggs 1997:28). Experiences are interpreted, classified and abstracted in the process of writing. Skeggs reminds us that even outside writing and discussions on methodology, "All experience is processed through practice, discourse and interpretation. We do not have pure experiences" (Skeggs 1997:28). The politics and onto-epistemological underpinnings of feminist theories and writings help "engender reassessment of previous interpretative frameworks" (Skeggs 1997:29).

This reflection presented above is to acknowledge that, while I include narratives from the interviews which I conducted for the purpose of this research, they are, however, contextual in terms of space and time. For example, when I collected interviews in the winter of 2017, a major concern often mentioned was the demonetisation[20] which had been initiated by the Indian government in

November 2016, and the consequent anxiety of those who had no bank account. In the interviews of January 2019, demonetisation was mentioned, but by then most participants stated that they or someone in their family had some form of access to a bank account. This illustrates how, even in a matter of a year, socio-political and economic changes can lead to different experiences and different narratives.

Furthermore, bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins argue how overlooking gendered and racialised experiences – not unlike caste-bound experiences – when producing scientific writings can reproduce hegemonic discourses (Hill Collins 2000; hooks 1984). Hill Collins further points out that when the positivistic legacy within the making of social theory undermines experiences of structurally subjugated groups, it highlights the lack of epistemological sophistication of the tools in order to understand and engage with *other* types of knowledge sources (Hill Collins 2000:255–256). In order to engage with any type of knowledge, listening and learning are inevitable steps. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise power in the process of knowledge production. Nikita Dhawan, in her article titled, 'Hegemonic Listening and Subversive Silence', points to the inner contradictions of utilising a postcolonial feminist perspective in combination with a narration of a subaltern group (Dhawan 2012). Dhawan writes:

> The postcolonial feminist is thereby caught in a double bind as she inhabits "intimately" the very structures that she seeks to critique. The solution is not a post-representationalist politics, but the persistent interrogation of one's complicity in the recolonization of "counter-spaces" (Dhawan 2012:56).

Below, I present a small moment from my fieldwork to engage in a discussion on why representation can be problematic but "post-representationalist politics" is also not a solution.

> Aunty[21]: "What form are you filling in?"
> Riya: "Aunty, I work at a university, so I write on work, how people work."
> Aunty: "So, how does this benefit us? We take out time for you; will we get something out of this?"
> Riya: [*laughs nervously*] "No, Aunty, but I had mentioned this earlier and I asked her" [*pointing to Anita*].

Anita: [*annoyed, to Aunty*] "It's okay. I was sitting here, so I said yes, gave her my time. People make time for me, so I can also make time for her […]. [*Snaps sarcastically*] It's not like I am a big businessman, that I can't give her five minutes!"

As can be seen in the snippet from the interview above, as soon as a researcher steps into a field and asks questions, the interviewee's day-to-day activities are disrupted (Blommaert and Dong 2010:28). In addition, as Aunty points out, mere representation of 'voices' may not be beneficial for the groups whose lives researchers disrupt. Furthermore, the question of representation, more explicitly visible while undertaking fieldwork, is not a new discussion within feminist writings (Adler and Adler 2008; Visweswaran 1997). In her famous article, 'Can there be a feminist ethnography?', Judith Stacey (1988) argues how fieldwork as a method is disruptive both in terms of disturbing the everyday lives of people who become participants in the research as well as in the process of writing and analysis. However, from the above quote, it can also be noted that a researcher may just be a speck in the day of the interviewee. Overemphasising the disruption by the researcher during fieldwork can also lead to a particular reproduction of the power that a social scientist may think they possess, which is to take themselves and their research too seriously (cf. Narayan 1993).

Returning to Dhawan's argument, acknowledging one's complicity and the contradictory structures of critique within writing and the process of knowledge production are crucial steps even to begin a discussion on critical theory, counter-hegemony or counter-spaces (Hill Collins 2000:285). Therefore, it is theoretically and empirically necessary to acknowledge the positionality of the researcher and the politics of knowledge production (Haraway 1991; Hill Collins 2000; John 1996; Mohanty 2003; Pan 2019; 2021; Rege 1998; Sager 2011; Spivak 1988; Stacey 1988). However, if this acknowledgement or recognition of hegemonic structures that researchers inhabit is merely confessional, it can also be complicit in reproducing an "enlightened gaze" which is inherently hegemonic (Skeggs 2002).

In the case of this thesis, I have attempted to put the fieldwork process and the methodology under a critical reflexive rigour as well as the theoretical engagements. This is to emphasise that reflexivity and politics of representation are concerns not only of the methodological section but of the entire process of knowledge production (Haraway 1991). Since there is no way out of these complexities and histories that become premises of knowledge production, I acknowledge that both the positionality of being situated within modern social

sciences and the methodology, such as fieldwork, incorporated in this thesis, are contested and are marred with histories of colonialism, Enlightenment and racism (Derrida 2016[1967]:107; Dhawan 2012; Pan 2019; 2021; Spivak 1988).

Literary scholar Anandita Pan in *Mapping Dalit Feminism* discusses the contribution of Sharmilla Rege's 1998 classic article on the potential of intersectionality as a feminist analytical tool (Pan 2021:6; Rege 1998). For Pan and for Rege the discussion of power structures within knowledge production cannot simply stop at the critique of who is speaking for whom and who can represent whom; rather, a feminist critical discussion needs to commit to transformative politics that challenges the caste-gender oppressional nexus in all contexts within knowledge production (Pan 2021:7; see also Devika 2021). To elaborate further:

> Dalit Feminism is not about authentically recording and representing what it feels to be a dalit woman. It is a methodological praxis to identify and analyse how various modes of caste and gender-based oppression intersect with each other to oppress dalit woman […]. In other words, Rege conceptualizes Dalit Feminism as a framework that has the potential to inform and possibly work with other marginalised groups by establishing solidarity (Pan 2021:6).

Therefore, while writing, thinking and representing invoke the hegemonies bound within academic structures of knowledge production, there continues to be intellectual and political potential to take part in and do feminist writing that contributes in ways to build critical dialogues on the political economy and work.

Ethical considerations

Ethics is deeply intertwined with epistemic positions, writing and thinking (cf. Dhawan 2012). For this study, I have followed the general guidelines prescribed by the Ethical Review Act 2003, employed at Lund University in Sweden (Research Ethics 2019). Although ethical guidelines as "general principles or following pre-established procedures" (Whiteman 2010:7), can help in thinking through some ethical decisions during research, they are not enough while conducting research that requires contextualised decision-making dependent on the local contexts and the participants who agree to be part of the research (Tonini 2016:100; Whiteman 2010:7).

For example, as mentioned earlier, when people showed me their personal ID cards or other documents, I made sure not to record them in any way. All the informants were provided information prior to being recorded and I started recording only after they gave consent and agreed to speak with me. In addition, their consent was asked on record and I also explicitly let them know that they could stop the conversation whenever they felt like it without any kind of negative consequences, or they could ask me to leave and I would do so immediately. Acknowledging ethical considerations also requires the researcher to observe silences, such as with regard to the confidentiality of informants. Similarly, there were some personal accounts and specific narratives which I deliberately excluded from the thesis, as they could be traced to certain research informants. All the people who took part in this thesis have been anonymised and given pseudonyms for the purpose of confidentiality.

Steps of analysis

Since the primary rationale of this thesis has been to follow the working lives of pheriwale and to understand their location vis-à-vis the local and global political economy, the semi-structured list in the questionnaire included questions on: everyday routine, work, trading routes, household and kinship, body and health, space, time, money, relation to authorities and local networks. While these broad topics organise the questionnaire, the themes used for analysis have been coded on the basis of the collected data. The recorded interviews were first transcribed, then coded into an index with minor and major themes (cf. Rydstrom 2003:xix–xx; see also Ochs 1979).

The transcription was first done in Hindi, and the quotes and expressions from the material which I bring into the thesis have been translated into English. Throughout the thesis, I use terms such as 'narratives' or 'experiences' to indicate direct or paraphrased accounts of people who spoke to me and shared their testimonies with me during fieldwork. While I bring in secondary quantitative and qualitative data published by previous research, governments, organisations or media reports, the analysis revolves around accounts of pheriwale. The rationale to engage with the concept of value in the theory section as well as in the empirical analysis has been

in dialogue with scholarship on informal working experiences as well as theoretical debates to understand and theorise the empirical material.

A key point of departure for the analysis in this thesis is inspired by sociologist Jennifer Blair's 2010 article, which presents a critical review of case-based and ethnographic research on gender scholarship regarding globalisation and multiple sites of work and production. Blair provides some pertinent insights which offer ways to analyse the empirical material. Blair argues that to simply state the differences which emerge within an empirical case are not enough and that research about specific contextual realities needs to account for specificities as well as general patterns across contexts to capture how the contemporary political economy can be understood (Blair 2010:205). While Blair focuses upon gender relations that have been studied mostly within the context of factory work which was shifted to the Global South for "cheap and docile" workers there, her focus on noting the contingent as well as larger patterns of globalisation are helpful to think through the analytical process of this thesis (Blair 2010).

The analysis of empirical material in the chapters is done in three simultaneous steps: first, to present the narratives of the pheriwale; second, to draw parallels with experiences of informal workers in other contexts; and third, to account for tensions and complexities that emerge within narratives and concepts. Through this process I show the differences and specificities of pheriwale's context as well as bring in relevant literature to highlight the similarities in narratives of low-income groups across various geographical contexts.

The concept of value acts as an overarching frame and the following chapters are organised along these lines: the first analytical chapter, Chapter 5, explores how pheriwale are located within local, regional and global markets; the second, Chapter 6, notes the phenomenon of waiting and how it becomes a crucial aspect in the relation between pheriwale and state institutions; and the third, Chapter 7, addresses how pheriwale relate to their work as self-employed informal traders.

To summarise, in this chapter I have focused upon the methods and methodology employed in this thesis. For the purpose of achieving the aims of this thesis, I am inspired by ethnographic fieldwork as a methodology (Madison 2005). In order to facilitate the fieldwork, I have used semi-structured interviews, observation and fieldnotes to gather primary data. The epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the thesis are rooted in postcolonial, poststructural and Dalit

feminist literature on intersectionality. These critical vantage points provide my research with the methodological and analytical lens to write and think. Furthermore, they enable me to conduct a study within social sciences by acknowledging critiques of hegemonic knowledge production and personal politics. Situating these epistemic vantage points helps in contextualising and framing notions of experience, discussions on representation and shaping the ethical considerations. Lastly, by focusing on the working lives of pheriwale, especially the women traders, and bringing in illustrations of shared experiences of informal sector workers in other contexts, I hope to build my analysis in the following chapters.

Chapter 5: *Pheri* – in-between markets

"*Humaara toh yehi kaam hai, pheri ka*" ("This is our work, to peddle goods")

Kaamini, a pheriwali.

Pheri

In this chapter, I explore the circulation of goods and exchange, as well as the processes of labour embedded within it. *Pheri* as a practice of circulation enables me to capture both the social embeddedness of local markets and in turn the embeddedness of a multitude of markets in the regional and global scope (Appadurai 1986; Polanyi 2001[1944]:60, 64). Apart from the circulation of labour and goods, *pheri* also involves sharing skills with the younger generation, relatives and spouses who want to earn their living as pheriwale. Through the narratives it becomes clear that the term *pheri* embodies the core of pheriwale's working lives, as it directly points to the circulation of goods, services and labour that they create.

The literal translation of *pheri* is "peddling goods and services". Based on my analysis of the empirical material in a critical dialogue with scholarship, pheriwale's trade can be divided into three circles (cf. Norris 2010; Bapat 2018; forthcoming *a*). In the first stage, they buy kitchen utensils of steel/glass/plastic near the mandi (open marketplace), which is surrounded by stores selling kitchen items. The second stage involves the carrying of these kitchen goods to residential neighbourhoods in various parts of the city in order to barter them for clothes. The third circle is completed when the pheriwale sell these collected clothes in the mandi the next day. After selling forward the clothes, the first circle of trade begins

again. Therefore, *pheri* here is going on rounds, with goods and services, forming a circulation of goods, services and labour.

In this circulation, the goods involved are kitchen utensils, clothes and sometimes other consumer goods collected from households, such as shoes, old mobile phones, and accessories including bags, handbags and belts. What pheriwale bring to the table is a door-to-door service of recycling second-hand clothes. For the households that pheriwale visit, people are able to get rid of their old clothes in exchange for new kitchen items. The collected clothes are further sold forward to various groups of buyers, maintaining their circulation through resale. In these three circles of trade, there are three layers of exchange as well: money is exchanged to buy the kitchen utensils, then the kitchen utensils are bartered in exchange for clothes. Further on, the clothes are exchanged for money, which is the income generated for the pheriwale's living expenses as well as to invest in buying utensils and transport costs.

The imagery of the circles presented above is to highlight how pheriwale are situated in the matrix of the urban informal working environment of Delhi. They not only provide the service to middle, lower-middle and working classes to get rid of their clothes and other consumer goods but they also contribute to the export and weekly markets and maintain a steady market for the poor and working classes of the city. Their trade has been established for almost a century, and pheriwale mark a crucial part of the labour and material landscape of the city. *Pheri* is shaped and determined by mobility and travelling across the city to facilitate the trade. *Pheri*, denoting mobility and the circulation of goods, inherently implies circulation of labour. Value as a concept is employed here to capture how the existence and labour of informal traders are key for the functioning of supply chains. For example, Lucy Norris notes how the clothes collected by the pheriwale form part of the global rag market. Delhi is a "major centre in the worldwide rag market" (Norris 2010:146) and pheriwale play a vital role in collecting and sorting second-hand clothes which end up in the rag-export factories. This chapter elucidates the variety of actors that are part of the twenty-first-century economy.

I trace these three circles of trade by following pheriwale's working day. Firstly, I explore the morning time slot, when pheriwale bring all the collected goods to the mandi and sell them to buyers. In the next time slot, during early to late afternoon, pheriwale buy kitchen utensils from the shops nearby the mandi. In

the late afternoon to evening time slot pheriwale travel through the city to residential neighbourhoods to barter the kitchen utensils in exchange for clothes and other consumer goods. Since the trade is dominated by women, the burden of social reproductive activities and care work falls on them, which occurs at home as well as during pheriwale's working day. Due to the nature of their trade, which requires them to be mobile, the changing dynamics of Delhi constantly affect the everyday work of pheriwale. Lastly, I explore how knowledge about utensils, clothes and the city is a valuable prerequisite, passed on by older generations to younger. In a regular working day, pheriwale navigate through these circles of trade as well as numerous circles of social relations, all requiring specific skills, regular customers, reliable networks and years of experience. Through these economic and social circular processes, I show how value is produced and reshaped through everyday processes of labour and meaning-making.

Morning

Locating pheriwale in the global value chains

On a sunny but chilly morning, Neeta points towards a man with a huge pile of white and off- white shirts, who has just rejected her pile of clothes because he did not find the right-coloured shirt. Neeta says that such buyers come in a rush and buy massive amounts of fabric; sometimes they are looking for something specific, sometimes they just buy in bulk. Neeta explains that the clothes can end up in different factories. Looking at my shoes, she says that the clothes from the mandi could end up in "the shoe factories", for example. "You know," she says, "they might make shoelaces after disintegrating the fabric. And [cloth would go to] to other factories, I think where they make clothes for export."

The connection between the pheriwale and the global market is most explicitly visible during the morning time slot. From 4am to around 9–9:30am the mandi overflows with the bulk-buyers of second-hand clothes. They search the open market for goods and buy huge amounts of clothes that can be sold forward as they are or after repair, in order to sell them to the factories, where they will be disintegrated and used as raw material for other clothing or fabric purposes. These factories then either export the finished goods or the fabric is sent to other factories for assembling purposes.

Norris, in her 2010 study on the second-hand clothing industry in India, gives the example of the global production of rags and cleaning cloth, and points out how much of this raw material and fabric arises from the clothes collected by the pheriwale. Due to pheriwale's trade and other intermediary actors, such as small and medium factory units, Delhi emerges as a major centre of the supply of raw material for the rag market in the world (Norris 2010:146). Dipti Bapat, in her research on a similar group in Mumbai, where the group is called *chindiwale* (*chindi* meaning 'rag cloth' and *wale* indicating 'people'). In a 2016 news article Bapat states that clothes collected by this group can end up in textile industries across India:

> Despite the discrimination faced from urban residents, municipal planners, police officials and residential authorities, the traders have constantly evolved their profession. They now provide old saris to the grape vineyard farmers, manage the old clothes of retail chains like Big Bazaar, provide cloth wipes to industry workers, create contacts with orphanages and household maids that sell them their cloth donations and so on (Bapat 2016*a*).

Hence, the morning time slot is intense for the pheriwale in Delhi, not only as they have to arrive at the mandi and set up their daily selling spot at the mandi, but also because they have to deal with hurried customers who buy huge amounts of clothes at cheaper prices, which entails quick bargaining and business. A crucial part of this morning time slot in pheriwale's working day is the selling-off of the clothes collected over the previous days. This reselling of used clothes characterises the nature of pheriwale's work, which is not involved in the direct production of clothes. However, with the collection and selling of clothes and fabric that end up in export factories, pheriwale's work becomes part of a larger chain of local and transnational circulation of goods.

In the context of the twenty-first-century global market, capital and information flows as well as the interconnectedness have massively increased due to the rise in technology, which has further fragmented production and distribution centres (cf. Mezzadri 2017; Ong and Collier 2005; Sassen 2000). Contemporary globalisation has not only resulted in interconnected and dispersed production processes but also includes a range of actors who are embedded within and facilitate these flows of goods (Crang et al. 2013:16). Mike Crang and colleagues argue that "intermediary agents, who are embedded in key locations and deploy relations of trust, coordinate flows in end-of-life goods. Unlike the majority of

cases studied in the literature, the global flows of these goods are not dominated by large transnational corporations" (Crang et al. 2013:13). Globalisation processes thus result in fragmented production and supply chains, but are also facilitated by people who work with goods after they have been consumed – in other words, "end-of-life" goods. Workers who are engaged in the collection and distribution of used goods, or waste, play a major role in reintroducing them into the market.

Pheriwale are one of these intermediary traders who collect used clothes and reintroduce them into the local, national and global markets. By bringing used clothes or 'rubbish' back into the circulation of goods, pheriwale add economic value to the goods they collect (cf. Crang et al. 2013:18; Harriss-White 2017:95; Nguyen 2019:13). This value is located in the goods that can be sold and resold multiple times, adding to and subtracting from both the use value and exchange value of the goods; moreover, the labour processes utilised by the pheriwale are essential for these flows of goods (cf. Marx 1976[1867]:136). Research on communities that work with waste, such as by Minh Nguyen (2019) on the Vietnamese waste economy, Harriss-White (2017) on South Indian waste collectors, Kaveri Gill (2010) on the waste economy in Delhi, or Kathleen Millar (2008; 2018) on *catadores* in Brazil, all highlight the intermediary actors and how they are indirectly involved in collecting, sorting and creating value out of used goods. These traders further show the interconnectedness of the global flows of goods and capital and how labour transforms value at various stages (Polanyi 2001[1944]). Furthermore, while the labour involved in pheriwale's trade generates the income that helps them support themselves and their families, it is also embedded in the goods they collect and the services that they provide to the householders and to the markets they engage in.

Value through reselling

Depending on the quality and type of collected goods, the morning time slot can either be super-profitable or can leave the pheriwale with piles of clothes that need to be sold either later that day or in the coming days. Not being able to sell the clothes forward not only means less income for the pheriwale but also anxieties on where to store the unsold clothes. In the narrow lanes where many pheriwale live in West Delhi, bundles of clothes are visible on balconies, terraces and on carts next to their dwellings.

When I meet Rahul at the mandi one morning, he explains that a month of good business enables him to cover his costs as well as save a bit. If it is 'a good business day', the pheriwale can make anywhere between 1,500–2,000 rupees[22] a day from selling clothes at the mandi. From this INR 1,500 the traders have to cover the overheads required to ensure the smooth functioning of the trade. These overheads include buying kitchen utensils (approx. INR 700–800), travel costs (approx. INR 200–300), entry fees to get a selling-spot at the mandi (approx. INR 10–40) and food and water during the hours spent at mandi and *pheri* (approx. INR 100). On top of that are the monthly rent for housing and additional ad hoc costs such as childcare or medicines. Whatever amount is left after all the necessary trade overheads and other monthly expenditure make up the savings.

Rahul, who does not have children, states that if he is able to save INR 100–200 per day, it becomes a viable business to manage his expenses and provide for his elders. The amount that a trader can save each month is dependent on familial obligations and number of dependants as well as the age and health of the trader. For example, Sadna, who is in her mid-sixties, cannot save as much as she used to when she was younger and had more energy to go on *pheri* daily. She has developed diabetes and high blood pressure in her old age, and has had to cut down on the number of hours she works per week. Yet, because of her extensive work experience gained over more than four decades, she has acquired some longstanding clients. She currently has three or four regular '*garag*' or households that she visits a couple of times a year, and goes on *pheri* a few days a month. Therefore, even when she is unable to go every day for *pheri*, Sadna is ensured a minimum steady supply of clothes. In this way she is able to save a little amount of money (up to INR 1,000–1,200) every month for her high blood pressure and diabetes medication. During periods when she is unable to secure this amount, she has to rely on her youngest son, who helps her with her medicines.

On the other hand, unexpected medical situations can affect this daily flow of earnings. One morning, I see Krishna with a white bandage around her right foot. When I point to it with concern, Krishna explains how she had been carrying a heavy bundle of clothes on public transport. When she was about to get off the bus, the heavy and bulky bundle of clothes caused her to slip and twist her ankle. Krishna went to the public hospital, just behind the mandi, where medical support is free of cost. A swollen leg affects Krishna's ability to work as it slows

the pace with which she can get around in the city. Because of this, she ends up working fewer hours than usual because of her injured foot. She says she might need to take a day off if her foot hurts too much to do the walking as usual.

Pheriwale are in a precarious situation as everyday challenges can have huge consequences for their livelihood and income. Within this precarity of low-income work sites, they are constantly engaged in shaping value (Harriss-White 2017:95; Nguyen 2019:13; see also Marx 1976[1867]:136). The political economy, for instance, tends to 'capture' value by looking at the final price of the goods, or by drawing upon rent and labour theories of value (such as Global Value Chains (GVC) and Global Production Networks (GPN)) that trace the chain of rents and labour costs (Crang et al. 2013:15). Most conceptualisations of value begin and end with production, assembly, shipping and consumption. While these theorisations of value, being formed and transformed at various points of production and assembly, are fundamental to understanding the conceptualization of value, they are, however, not able to capture the value that continues to circulate after the goods have been consumed and thrown away (Gidwani 2013; Harriss-White 2017; Lepawsky and Billah 2011; Nguyen 2019). Due to the actors in the recycling business, the 'end-of-life' goods can continue in circulation and result in value, and the products get new life as they are transformed and reused.

Pheriwale collect, sort and sell used clothes and bring them back into the market. Hence, their labour is also embedded along with other labour processes which went into the making and transporting of those goods. Labour theories of value are useful in analysing the value creation made by labour in recycling networks (cf. Gill 2010; Harriss-White 2017:95; Nguyen 2019:13). As previous research shows, most actors involved directly in collection, sorting and transforming waste or used goods are situated within the informal sector (cf. Gill 2010; Harriss-White 2017:95; Nguyen 2019:13; see also Norris 2015). Moreover, while the flow of global trade is largely from the Global South to Global North, the flow of used goods and waste, including second-hand clothes, is from the Global North to Global South (Crang et al. 2013:12; Norris 2015). The rise of globalisation and consumption has increased the amount of waste and used goods, but it has also generated economies (cf. McCormick et al. 2019; Niranjan 2019; Schauenberg 2019). Waste workers become crucial actors within these expanding economies of recycling and reuse (cf. Gill 2010; Harriss-White 2017; Millar 2008; 2014;

Nguyen 2019). Along with such actors in other contexts involved in the circulation of used goods, pheriwale have successfully carved out their economic role within Delhi's second-hand cloth market (cf. Bapat forthcoming *a*; Norris 2010:142).

Due to the geographic and temporal location of the conceptualization of the labour theory of value (from nineteenth-century Continental Europe) (cf. Marx 1976[1867]), the theory is not equipped to fully comprehend the twenty-first-century ways of informal economy and actors directly and indirectly involved in the transnational circulation of goods, used goods, waste, labour and value. The value chain in the twenty-first-century flow of goods is not only dispersed across locations to embed labour at numerous stages of the commodity's life, but value also becomes constructed and fragmented through the life of the commodity (cf. Appadurai 1986; Crang et al. 2013; Nguyen 2019).

Locating the work of pheriwale in the value chain of goods and labour is important because most conceptualisations about value either assume it to be conceived at its production or at the point of its exchange, whereas pheriwale come into contact with the commodity in an in-between space. After a commodity has been consumed (by a household) at the 'end-of-life' stage, and before it re-enters the production process (factory) or prior to its reintroduction into the market before consumption (by a household), the mandi becomes a site which invites various economic actors such as factory workers and traders of regional weekly markets who come to collect their raw material.

Tracing the commodity chain of second-hand clothes, Norris suggests that the pheriwale draw in "unwanted clothing that has been bartered for" (Norris 2010:51). By reintroducing the clothes at the mandi, the pheriwale's "market reenergizes the latent value of cloth, filters and sorts it, and acts as a powerful centrifugal force, ejecting tens of thousands of items every day" (Norris 2010:51). As Meena, a woman in her late-thirties, points out, "at four in the morning, the mandi is set up; 4–10am we sit here, then collect utensils and go for *pheri*. We hardly get time to eat." Meena elaborates how various types of buyers arrive throughout the day to purchase the goods collected by pheriwale.

Thus, as economic actors, pheriwale form part of the value chain, not as producers or consumers, but as in-between workers who collect used goods and reintroduce them into the production chain. In many ways pheriwale capture the complexity

of the twenty-first-century commodity, which incorporates not just the labour of the producer but also the supplier, assembler, collector, buyer and seller of the goods at the local level, which are then introduced and reintroduced into the global market. However, despite its limits, the Marxian view of labour remains fundamental to understanding value as it is rooted in labour being "the primary source of value" (Nguyen 2019:13). Therefore, according to Marx's understanding of value, pheriwale's daily work of collecting, sorting and selling (which involves time-consuming and intense physical labour) is definitely a source of value creation in materialist terms for the market as well as for creating flows of income for the pheriwale. This in-betweenness of value is visible in the case of pheriwale as economic actors, who enter the circulation after commodities have been consumed. By bringing the goods back into circulation, pheriwale reintroduce both exchange value and use value to the commodities. Moreover, 'end-of-life' goods or waste are "value-in-waiting" (Gidwani 2013:773), as they are waiting to be reused, transformed or resold via labour.

Another way to understand this in-between value, or rather the in-between labour to keep the value chain running, is to delve into the realm of circulation of the goods which pheriwale collect. According to Arjun Appadurai, things do not remain as commodities but instead enter and exit and re-enter the commodity status during their time in travelling through different markets. This entry and exit of commodities into and from circulation also determines their value status. For Appadurai, value is not formed at the stage of the labour process at production but the social and cultural valuation of goods. In addition, regimes of value are determined through the location of goods in a social, geographical and cultural context (Appadurai 1986:13). The pheriwale collect goods that householders see as useless and then reintroduce them into circulation, thus maintaining the commodity status of goods by relocating them in the value chain. People who work with waste and recycling sites "do not just create the economic value of waste but also transform it into social values important for sustaining family and communal life" (Nguyen 2019:12). For pheriwale, their trade offers them income, as well as ways to build livelihoods for their families and meaning in their working day, which I explore in the following chapters.

Locating pheriwale in the local/regional markets

I find Anita sitting one rainy morning in the mandi, under the roof-covered area. It rained all morning, and the mandi was almost empty with very few traders. Rain spoils clothes and other goods, so pheriwale prefer to avoid such mornings at the mandi. Anita sits encircled by huge piles of clothes. From the centre of the circle, she can reach out to all the piles and display her collection to her customers. Since it has been raining, customers are scarce as well. But as Anita and her relatives were around Raghubir Nagar for a few more hours, they decided to set up their small selling spot of clothes in the almost empty mandi:

> Anita: "People come here [to buy clothes] from so many places: from Rajasthan, Mathura, from Palwar, Balamgarh, Faridabad, from villages nearby, from Jahangirpuri – you know, from all these locations."
> Riya: "What do they do with the clothes; do they sell them?"
> Anita: "Ya, they sell [the clothes]. Sometimes they repair and sell [them] forward, after washing [the clothes]. You know those weekday bazaars? It goes there."

All the places that Anita mentions above are locations with textile industries, export factories and textile trade centres (cf. Norris 2010:154: see also Mezzadri 2017:114–115, 157–158). I go on to ask her about the process of bringing all the clothes from the households to the mandi in the mornings. While talking about her experience of collecting clothes, Anita tells me that sometimes householders hand her extra clothes, just to get rid of them. She also resonates what Neeta told me on another occasion, as mentioned above: that the clothes end up in weekly bazaars. Sellers from these bazaars come regularly to the mandi to buy goods in bulk for the regional markets. The regional and local clothing markets of Delhi are dependent to some extent upon the pheriwale to collect clothes which they can then wash–repair–sell forward in the weekly and export markets: for example, famous markets for cheap clothes in Lajpat Nagar and Sarojini Nagar in Delhi.

These weekly markets have been a characteristic of Delhi and the suburban landscape for decades. The weekly markets, often called '*Somwar bazaar*' (Monday market), '*Mangal bazaar*' (Tuesday market) or '*Shukravar bazaar*' (Friday market), have been a regular feature in many neighbourhoods. They are makeshift markets that pop-up at the side of roads or streets once a week in the evening. The sellers/traders rotate to different locations in the city depending on the day of the week. The markets consist of all items one can think of: clothes,

small furniture, cosmetics, street food, local farm vegetables, masalas, pickles, chicken and fish, toys. Often small merry-go-rounds are set up too, to attract local families with children; in more recent times, there are also traders selling local electronic goods.

Some weekly markets are famous among inhabitants and traders of the city, like the '*Ravivar mandi*' (Sunday bazaar) near Red Fort in Old Delhi (Norris 2010:37–39; Sharma et al. 2017:99–101). However, from late 2018 to early 2019 these weekly markets had seen a decline. Anita, for instance, recalls how weekly markets have been discouraged by municipal authorities. Local governments tend to shut down informal neighbourhood markets that sell cheap goods at the roadside, and this indirectly affects the sales of the pheriwale as well. The decline of weekly markets has meant fewer numbers of bulk-buyers being able to visit the mandi and, in turn, pheriwale find it difficult to sell forward their collected goods. Similar issues are also resonated in Bapat's study, where second-hand cloth traders (*chindiwale*) in Mumbai have to constantly renegotiate public spaces with the local municipality, since they are considered a "nuisance" to traffic (Bapat 2018:122). Nevertheless, since street clothing markets in Delhi and Mumbai have long histories, they continue to thrive despite periods of low volume of materials (cf. Bapat 2018; Norris 2010).

Here it is explicitly visible that a multitude of workers play differing roles in the maintenance of the circulation of commodities, adding value at different stages and resulting in multiple circles of value chains. In the case of the world economy of the rag market, while pheriwale may provide some part of the raw materials, intermediaries buy from pheriwale's mandi, and factory workers prepare them to be stripped, graded and packaged for household use, with painting and machine-cleaning carried out across the globe (Norris 2010:146). In the case of the local and regional economy, Anita explains to me that, while pheriwale provide the clothes and fabric, these may be repaired by weekly market traders. Thereafter the repaired clothes are sold forward in other parts of the city and in other parts of North India. Over the last few decades, pheriwale have carved out an important space within these multiple circles of value chains, contributing both to the export textile and fabric markets as well as the local/regional markets. Hence, pheriwale maintain local economies as well as form part of dispersed global value chains (Norris 2010; see also Crang et al. 2013).

After the early-morning hours, from roughly 9:30–10am onwards, the bulk-buyers start leaving with their large piles of clothes, and the buyers who buy for themselves and their households start scouting the market. In this way, the mandi offers an affordable clothing market to a large number of low-waged groups in Delhi, who include other informal workers and the working class. Krishna, a pheriwali in her fifties, states that apart from the people who buy for factories and weekly markets, "the customers include poor people – the rickshaw-wale, working class, they buy from here". Bapat also notes how *chindiwale* in Mumbai provide "affordable clothing for the poor" (Bapat 2016*a*).

Social shapes value

When I ask if her parents have been pheriwale, Meena explains: "This is something our elders have been doing for generations. From the start, grandfather, father, they did this work." Vaneeta and Rahul echo this, telling me, "our ancestors also did this," pointing out that, "This has been passed down from generations. We're not just doing it; our ancestors for generations have done this." As mentioned earlier in the thesis, pheriwale belong to the Waghri caste, which is important for our understanding of the livelihood of pheriwale (cf. Bapat forthcoming *b*).

Within the context of pheriwale's trade, their relation to their work and the goods which they collect is not solely due to purely economic reasons; instead it is the social and cultural context of familial tradition of trading second-hand clothes, which forms their relation to the goods and also to the value of their labour. The nature of the intersection of caste is its prescriptiveness of socio-economic constraints for its subjects. When work prescribed by caste or tradition interlinks with the contemporary circulation of used goods by workers, caste and class overlap in powerful ways within capitalist waste and recycling markets. Caste hierarchies, along with gender and class, get implicated in the capitalist liberalised economy while the economy also extrapolates value through these divisions of labour and labourers (cf. Ambedkar 1987[n.d.]:67; Harriss-White 2003:21; Jodhka 2012; Sen 2019:187). Caste politics has been central in determining the accessibility of resources, education, jobs and socio-economic mobility (cf. Deshpande 2006; 2013; Jodhka 2018; Pan 2019; Rege 1998). It is not surprising, therefore, that lower-caste groups are overwhelmingly represented in the informal

economy and sites of low-income work. As Harriss-White, Olsen, Vera-Sanso and Suresh (2013:399) point out:

> Now that India's formal economy has become linked to the global economy through liberalization and deregulation it has also harnessed the informal, unregistered economy to global markets, ensuring in the process that risks are transferred downwards and profits upwards.

Furthermore, due to the demographic composition of India's informal sector, caste, class and gender hierarchies are also pulled into the value chains that link the local, regional and global economies (Harriss-White et al. 2013:399). The circulation of value is shaped not only by labour, or the exchange value of goods, but also through the socio-economic divisions of caste, class and gender (Pan 2019; Rege 1998). Consequently, as lower-caste, lower-class and primarily women, in the informal economy, pheriwale's intersectional positionality contextualises how they are framed within capitalist labour relations (cf. Harriss-White 2003:21:43–71). So while, on the one hand, the goods they collect might continue to have a status of commodity (due to continuously being in exchange, barter or for money), pheriwale's labour is formed and shaped along intersectional lines. In this sense, value that is generated through pheriwale's labour is not only economic (in terms of their income and exchange value), but also evokes how intersectional hierarchies are perpetuated within global value chains. While global value chains encompass value added at various stages through labour, they also indicate how the production or collection and supply of goods is only possible due to labour, which is not just labour but gendered, caste- and class-based. In other words, class, caste and gender divisions are maintained and capitalised upon within twenty-first-century flows of capital, goods and labour.

Understanding the global value chains through this intersectional lens elucidates how the social is preserved and maintained by economic exchange, even in a globalised, neoliberal, capitalist economy that may appear to be beyond the complexities of the social and instead harbours intersecting and overlapping structural hierarchies. In this circulation of goods, which forms value through the act of collecting clothes by the pheriwale, they not only maintain the flow of goods and value in the transnational chain of commodities, but it shapes and manoeuvres the intersectional matrices of gender, class and caste. As previous research highlights, modernity and neoliberal economy are compatible with caste,

class and gender hierarchies, but the new division of labour also interlocks caste and class in ways that have further consolidated social hierarchies (Deshpande 2006; 2013; Harriss-White 2003:43–71; Jodhka 2012:105; Rege 1998). As the circles of caste, class and gender turn and are reproduced, modern markets continue to thrive on oppressive divisions of labour.

Afternoon

The second circle of trade in pheriwale's day includes buying kitchen utensils which they barter further on in the day. By late morning to afternoon, at around 11am to 1pm, pheriwale wrap up their goods and head off home for lunch or to take a nap and to store the clothes that they could not sell that day. The people left behind at the mandi have lunch and afternoon chai before going for *pheri*. After lunch many pheriwale go to pick up kitchen utensils from the local shops. Across the mandi, on the other side of the street, is a whole line of shops that sell kitchen items, mainly utensils, of steel, glass and plastic. One afternoon, while sipping chai, I ask Sarita about buying utensils before heading out for *pheri*. Sarita responds, "Yes, there are expensive ones, and some are cheap. One has to balance and buy some expensive ones and some cheap ones [to be able to afford it]." Some of the pheriwale told me that the regular clients whom they visited would often let them know what kind of utensils they wanted, and accordingly pheriwale would buy the desired utensils for those clients.

When I meet Sadna one afternoon, she shares her memories from her youth. When she was young, Sadna says, she used to go for *pheri* almost every day. Over her long career, she has had many regular clients. They often let her know which kitchen utensils they needed and she would arrange for the goods accordingly. While telling me about one such client, Sadna recalls, "I used to take dinner sets, worth 2,000–2,500 rupees, for that client!" Over time, though, she has lost contact with that particular client, since the client's family moved out into the suburbs, rather distant from the mandi. Sadna is older now and does not have the energy to go all the way carrying heavy dinner sets. In addition, the cost of transport to the suburbs is high and the households are not easily accessible because many are in gated communities.

The traders from factories and weekly markets depend on pheriwale for fabric and raw materials. Similarly, the local shops selling *bartan* (kitchen utensil) also depend on the pheriwale. As pheriwale sell the kitchen utensils forward, they purchase them in bulk, thereby the utensil shopkeepers can be assured of larger sales to pheriwale as compared to an average householder. Indian households used to depend primarily on stainless steel, copper or aluminium kitchen utensils. Over the past three decades, however, due to more availability of a variety of kitchen utensils on the market and a shift in consumption patterns among the middle classes, the local shops around the second-hand clothes mandi also now keep plastic and melamine utensils and glassware (cf. Norris 2004:66; 2010). Hence, it is not surprising that the mandi is surrounded by so many kitchen utensil shops as the shopkeepers depend significantly on pheriwale.

One of the main characteristics of a mandi is that it is an open market, on the street or in a designated location, such as the pheriwale's market, which is in an open enclave. The second characteristic of any mandi is that it is a microcosm of several economic actors. In pheriwale's mandi, where the traders sit to sell the collected clothes, there will be a range of sellers who peddle their goods to the pheriwale and the customers visiting the mandi. For example, in the early morning, as the pheriwale come into the marketplace, traders who sell goods such as water, food and tobacco also arrive there.

As the day progresses, the mandi is filled with all types of traders selling different goods and services, such as snacks, chai and coffee, lemonade and fruit juice (especially during summer months), jewellery and toys. By 10:30–11am food sellers come around with freshly made broken rice and dal (lentil soup), which pheriwale buy for lunch. One afternoon as we eat lunch, Sita points out to me that the food sellers are also primarily from Gujarat, and they cook specifically for the Gujarati palate. The spicy dal and broken rice combination is a staple of the region where pheriwale come from. Thus, pheriwale have created a local economy for themselves in this part of the city, which includes specific regional food. In Delhi, it is common to have regionally specific food markets and sellers since it is a metropolis and houses people from all parts of India. Rickshaw (three-wheel cycles) drivers start arriving in the mandi between 11am and noon. The rickshaw-drivers provide transport services to pheriwale who intend to leave the mandi with their large bundles of leftover clothes which could not be sold that particular day.

The mandi as an economic site offers an insight into the various actors who depend on pheriwale. In turn, pheriwale are dependent upon these sellers and service providers to carry on with their working day. Therefore, apart from the intermediaries of factories and the weekly bazaar sellers, the enclosed mandi itself has multiple circles of labour, all economic actors depending on each other to sell and buy goods and services.

Late afternoon to evening

After lunch, at around 2–3pm, pheriwale leave for *pheri.* In this third circle of trade pheriwale carry the kitchen utensils, which they buy from the nearby shops, to different parts of the city. In some localities (especially outside gated communities) pheriwale set up a small mobile shop with a cloth spread out on the street on which the kitchen utensils are displayed (cf. Norris 2004; Norris 2010:120). In other spaces of the city they go from door to door, or lane by lane. They carry the utensils, tied in a big bundle on their heads, while walking around the narrow streets of residential houses and shouting '*bartanwale–bartanwale*' ('utensil people'). A householder who wants to exchange old clothes for kitchen utensils will let the pheriwale know and may invite them into their house, where the trade takes place; or it may happen at the doorstep of the house.

Barter

Apart from the strenuous task of carrying heavy utensils across the city, daily encounters and negotiations of caste, gated communities and consistent bargaining are part of *pheri*. The nature of barter between the householder and pheriwale signifies a form of in-betweenness, as it lies beyond the commodity market transaction and outside reproductive gift exchange. These types of economic exchanges fall under the category of "household service economy", according to Norris (2010:135). Since the exchange takes place between independent transactors, pheriwale's trade is based upon commodity barter rather than gift exchange (Norris 2010:135). Norris defines the pheriwale's trade by drawing upon Appadurai's reading of Simmel's understanding of value, exchange and sacrifice,

Appadurai defines barter as the 'exchange of objects for one another without reference to money and with maximum feasible reduction of social, cultural, political or personal transaction costs'; it is the exchange of things with neither the constraints of sociality not the complications of money (Appadurai 1986:9–10 quoted in Norris 2010:135).

On the one hand, pheriwale's trade highlights how barter becomes part of the flow of goods within twenty-first-century economic transactions. The fact that pheriwale and their trade form part of the larger circulation of second-hand clothes illustrates the universalising facet of twenty-first-century capitalism. Yet, on the other hand, the persistence of the practice of barter in the everyday working lives of informal traders in Delhi, at the heart of a globalising Indian economy, also shows the persistence of traditional cashless economies in revealing fractures of capitalism (cf. Sen and Lindquist 2020:xvi). For instance, such fractures indicate how the governmental economic planning has not only been unsuccessful in generating jobs in the formal sector or providing other alternatives for low-income workers, but the regional particularities of capitalism unravel the limits of its universalising force (cf. Harriss-White 2003:137).

In following such barter practices, Norris's research points to the centrality of the social meaning of clothes for the middle- and upper-middle-class households. Norris's description of the mandi and middle-class interaction with the pheriwale is rich and detailed. For example, Norris notes that pheriwale and the householders may have differing notions of value being placed on the clothes. The author recollects an observation of a tense barter between a pheriwali and a middle-class customer. For the latter, branded clothes, such as Levi's, had much significance, whereas for the pheriwali the brands did not have much inherent meaning, which resulted in an arduous argument between the two. For the pheriwale, the value of clothes was not in the brand or the first-hand price of the clothes, but instead reflected consumer demand in the mandi (Norris 2010:131). According to Norris, middle/upper-middle-class women seem to be affected by the "sacrifice"/exchange of their beloved clothes in return for the *bartan* (Norris 2010:126–132; Simmel 2004).

In my conversations with the pheriwale, such exchanges were part of their everyday business. As I sit next to Vaneeta and we order chai from the *chaiwala* passing us with a large steel tea container, Pushpa comes and sits next to me and

Rahul joins the conversation as well. I ask them whether they face *chik-chik* (colloquial Hindi for 'annoyance') during barter:

> Pushpa: "Ya! A bit. I would say, 'Didi [sister], put this clothe and that clothe', but they will say, 'No, not this' or 'not that'. If they are kind, then they give good clothes [which are in good condition]. Chik-chik [here meaning persistent bargaining] is part of all this, otherwise they won't give. If we just sit around, they will not give anything."
>
> Vaneeta: "See, wherever you go, without negotiating, nothing will happen. There is no business in silence."
>
> Vaneeta: [*shouting at a customer*] "Stop jumbling the clothes! You're not able to buy anything but keep asking [the price] and running away." [*The young man runs away again.*]
>
> Rahul: "There is *chik-chik* there [with the householder] and there is *chik-chik* here [at the mandi]. For five rupees there are arguments, but that is how we can make those five rupees."

Some informants stated that, during the process of barter, tensions rise; this may lead to fights and intense bargaining. Basking in the winter-grey sun, Meena explains:

> They are usually nice [*shrugs*]. Most people know that we are pheriwale, so they give clothes accordingly. Many times if there are stressful people, then it's okay. If they like it, they give clothes [without hesitation]. Sometimes, they say that [their] "clothes are expensive; your *bartan* is only for 50 rupees – why should we give clothes?" If it doesn't work, then I leave. It's *pheri* so it's all okay.

Similarly, Leela also shares that bargaining and arguments are part of the barter process regardless of the location of the neighbourhood in the city. Bargaining and arguments can take place in all types of neighbourhoods, whether upper/middle-class, lower-middle-class or slums.

While the barter process can be stressful and can hold differing meanings attached to the goods bartered, for the pheriwale it is yet another day at work, or business as usual. As Appadurai argues, non-Western practices of trade, that may lie outside direct capitalistic transactions and commodity frameworks, are not necessarily less calculative and nor do they indicate only small-scale solidarity relations of exchange (Appadurai 1986:12). Often, non-Western trading practices, especially those that may appear to exist outside the capitalist

framework, sometimes are romanticised (cf. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen 1999; Martinez-Alier 2015:37). Such economic practices may even be exoticised and understood as opposing capitalism or as small solidarity-based economies, even if they are indirectly linked to larger markets and can be based upon patron-client relations along with rational economic decision-making (Appadurai 1986:12; Nguyen 2019:13–14). This may then further lead to the assumption that capitalist commodity transactions exist outside their socio-cultural dimension (Appadurai 1986:11–15). However, as pheriwale's trade shows, they may be a local trading group and yet be connected to the world's second-hand clothes industry.

At the mandi in Delhi, where I regularly met pheriwale, they continued to practise barter as a form of exchange of kitchen utensils for old clothes. Whereas in Mumbai, Bapat points out, some members of the community have moved away from the barter of used clothes in exchange for utensils and "have now set up shop to directly collect old clothes from the customers in lieu of cash" (Bapat 2016*a*; see also Mundkur and Dedhia 2014:24). Similar to *kabadiwale*, who exchange cardboard, old newspapers, plastic and tin for cash in Delhi, pheriwale may continue with their trade and replace barter with cash exchange in future.

Due to their long trading history in the city, seasoned pheriwale, like Sadna, have built contacts with householders for a steady supply of used clothes. She has three or four households which she visits once every four to six months and they keep clothes for her. All the pheriwale I spoke to referred to their regular clients as *'garag'* (householder). Pheriwale also share phone numbers to arrange trading schedules in order to meet the demands for specific kitchen utensils. Meena points out, "Usually they will not give out phone numbers; we generally go to them. However, if there is closeness, then they give the phone number. They say which date they will sort out clothes and keep [for us], then we go." With years of experience and gaining insight into the various parts and kinds of neighbourhoods and a variety of clients, pheriwale have been able to carve out a space for themselves and their trade in the city.

Though the upper/middle and lower-middle classes may be the main providers of second-hand clothes to the pheriwale, they are not, however, the main buyers of second-hand clothes. As Norris notes, middle-class households do not buy second-hand clothes from the mandi, especially if they are upper-caste. 'Second-hand' means that they are used goods and, as a buyer cannot ensure who has used

the clothing, caste hierarchies are reproduced through everyday demarcations of notions of pollution and purity (Jodhka 2018:22; Norris 2010:41; Pan 2021:132). Therefore, the second-hand markets in India do not perform the same function as they do in the West in the form of vintage clothing shops (Norris 2010:41). Here, the legacy of untouchability rooted in the Indian context is invoked within urban market relations. While the service provided by the pheriwale to the households that they visit is crucial for the supply of cloth and other fabrics to the regional and transnational flows, the labour of collecting second-hand clothes and being lower-caste workers in India's recycling business means being underpaid, with precarious and bodily exhausting work.

Reproductive work

Throughout pheriwale's working routine at the mandi, social reproductive work, which includes care work, is also stitched into their day, particularly for women (cf. Ferguson 2020). For instance, Sita's children come along with her to the mandi on most days. She has four of them: three are young; the eldest was in his late teens when I met him. Her daughter, who often accompanied her to the mandi, was around eight when I met her for the first time at the end of 2017. Sometimes her younger children (one was five years old and one four at the time) also came along; when the peak hours at the mandi are over, there is a lot of open space for children to play. The children do not accompany her on *pheri* as they are young and they get tired. Moreover, it is difficult to take care of a young child when pheriwale have to carry clothes and kitchen utensils. However, during the morning hours when Sita is at the mandi, she takes care of her children while she is trading clothes with the customers.

Many children and teenagers run around and play in the mandi every day. For instance, Sita's daughter would often have lunch with us in the afternoons; sometimes she and her siblings would take a nap on the piles of clothes next to me, as I sat making notes at the mandi. Parents prefer to bring their children along with them to the marketplace, especially if they are young. This way they can take care of them even during the intense business hours and they can make sure that the children are fed at lunchtime and can take naps in the afternoon. Apart from the everyday care, the social reproductive activities which pheriwale engage in are

provision of resources for children and elders in their immediate and extended families. Due to their lack of reliance on state-provided social security and lack of proper of infrastructure such as kindergartens, day-care centres or schools, at low-income sites in India the care work is intertwined with waged work (cf. Agarwala 2013; Kabeer 2008; Norohna and D'Cruz 2017). I elaborate on this in the following chapters as well.

Care-giving never simply follows the logic of strict working hours, meaning that "the rhythms of women's work in the home are not wholly attuned to the measurement of the clock. The mother of young children has an imperfect sense of time and attends to other human tides" (Thompson 1967:79). Pheriwale who are mothers and are the main breadwinners in their immediate and extended families share similar accounts to single mothers' in the informal sector in other contexts too. For example, an informant in sociologist Diana Mulinari's research, Dona Rosaura from Nicaragua, echoes what Sarita tells me by saying, "And then when they [children] are grown up they help and support you. But they are work, work and work" (Mulinari 1995:139).

One afternoon at the mandi, Sarita remarks on the matter of children and time. Sarita is in her twenties and a young mother. She tells me that her favourite part of the day is early morning, when she can pray quietly; her quiet zone. Once the children wake up, the day kick-starts instantly into work mode. On the days she goes for *pheri*, she spends the mornings at home doing all the house chores. She says, "Then kids need to be fed, washed. Half of the day just goes in this, then by 12 to 1pm I go for *pheri*." For the pheriwale women in my study, paid work is understood as an extension of unpaid care work. In this sense, social reproduction not only occurs during income-generating work for women, but paid labour is conceptualised as an extension of care work.

City as a workplace

While the mandi becomes a site of multiple activities such as selling clothes, meeting other pheriwale and traders, and may include childcare, *pheri* is the primary means to sell and collect the goods for a smooth functioning of the trade. Hence, pheriwale travel long distances and long hours to different neighbourhoods and localities in the city. Apart from the mandi, where pheriwale

set up their marketplace, Delhi and its neighbouring localities become the workplace for the traders as they move through the city carrying goods and providing services. I ask Meena which locations in the city she travels to for *pheri*. Meena says that she goes to places far from the mandi and her residence as well, "like Narela, Camp, Shalimaar Bagh […] we have to roam about a lot, it's really troubling. But if we don't work, then how will we eat?" She later tells me that she tries to go for *pheri* every day, although she takes a few days a month off. Most pheriwale who visit the mandi every day live close to the mandi, with their families, in the slums of West Delhi. Others, who travel from neighbouring or distant villages and towns of Delhi or other parts of North India, squat on the streets of the road near the mandi, with makeshift sleeping areas. Some traders come to stay near the mandi for a few days a week or a few times a month to sell their clothes, returning to their towns or villages to collect and gather more clothes.

As for most workspaces, it is not only pheriwale who shift around goods and services, but the workspace itself, comprised of changing contours of the city, also moves and shifts pheriwale and their trading routes and routines. The traders have to constantly adapt to contingent urban planning, the increase of gated communities, new rules regarding street marketspaces, and so on. In one of our first conversations, Sita and Jyoti mention how the second-hand clothes markets used to be on the street of Raghubir Nagar, which is the road right outside the enclaved mandi. Jyoti remembers how her parents had described the earlier selling spots:

> Riya: "So they [mandi gatekeepers] take 10 rupees every day to sit and sell at the mandi?"
> Sita: "No! Not to sit; a ticket for each bundle of clothes […] everyone who enters [for business has to pay], like rickshaw-wale, food sellers […]."
> Riya: "So government [municipality] has allocated this space? Have they always charged for a ticket?"
> Sita: "No, no, earlier the mandi used to be outside."
> Jyoti: [*Pointing to the road next to the wall enclosing the market*] "It used to be set up on the road. I was quite young when they told me, but my parents say that the mandi used to be on the road. But as traffic increased, the municipality gave us this space, since it's [our] livelihood. They told us to trade from here and not outside [on the streets or the roads]."

The moving of the mandi into the enclave indicates how the city's landscape has transformed over the past decades. As mentioned in Chapter 2, in 1975 the enclaved area beside the temple in Raghubir Nagar was allocated to the Waghri traders. Jyoti also explains that when Delhi was increasingly becoming urban in the 1970s, the municipality moved the roadside markets away from the roads. Apart from this shift of the mandi, the increase of gated neighbourhoods in the city also affects pheriwale's trading routines (cf. Ghertner 2014; 2017).

As a workspace, the city of Delhi specifically poses challenges to women traders, due to its high rate of violence against women (Datta 2016; Sen et al. 2020*a*; Viswanath et al. 2007). Pheriwale women would often narrate how they avoid staying out late in the evening for *pheri*. Almost all the women said that they try to return to their homes by 7–8pm latest after collecting clothes. For the women traders, being out on the streets of Delhi for their trade is a usual part of their working day, and some shared with me strategies on how they navigate the gendered landscape of the city. For example, younger pheriwale women, in their twenties to forties, like Jyoti, Neeta, Lata and Kaamini, state that when they plan to visit unfamiliar parts of the city or that they have not yet explored, they prefer to go in groups or with their spouses or relatives who are also involved in the trade. On days they are late in going for *pheri*, they will keep a mobile phone with them to let their family members know they may be running late, or in cases of emergency. For Gita, who is in her twenties, and, as she tells me one afternoon, has an abusive husband, because she does not feel safe at home, she avoids staying in for long durations. She finds more security in being out at the mandi or exploring different parts of the city during the day. When I ask Sarita whether police or men harass her during *pheri*, she tells me:

> See, I am not really scared of men, but then when there are gated neighbourhoods, then the police or security guard does not let us make rounds. We can't do *pheri* there, we can't even enter. Then we have difficulties [accessing those localities]. So we prefer to go to open localities.

Jeena also resonates with this, and one late morning elaborates on the problem of gated communities. I walk up to her as she sits on her *chaadar* next to her pile of clothes. The mandi is slowly clearing as it is about 11am and many pheriwale wrap up the goods and make their way out. Jeena, who is in her late twenties, warmly welcomes me but declines my offer of buying her chai, telling me that she

has had too many cups that morning. As a younger pheriwali, Jeena travels extensively across the city to trade and is up-to-date on which neighbourhoods have become gated over the years.

> Riya: "Where do you go in Delhi?"
> Jeena: "I go to Moti Bagh, Naraina, Daula Kuan. Wherever goods can be found, R.K. Puram. Safdarjung is now a closed colony [locality]."
> Riya: "Why? Why did Safdarjung close?"
> Jeena: "Because it is guarded now […]. Many spaces are sold to big businesses. For example, foreigners come and live there, from America, Africa, England. They want to make it […] a hi-fi colony [rich neighbourhood]. You know, where people earn from regular [salaried] jobs, people with money, people from offices, service people, governmental officers. The government sold the government houses to the people with more money."
> Riya: "What about the government-owned residences?"
> Jeena: "No, all of that was government quarters, but not now. What can we do?"
> Riya: "So you cannot go there anymore?"
> Jeena: "No, where can we go? There are guards! So now I roam around and go to Raja Garden, Moti Nagar. You know, the neighbourhoods that earn 20–30,000 rupees [monthly]. So that's where I go."
> Jeena: "There's no way of getting into [gated residential colonies], the guards, *chawkidars*, make boundaries and gates. Sometimes a guard might let us in, if a customer [resident] has asked them. So, they might let you enter or they might not […]."

The experience of the city has changed for the informal traders, as indicated by Jeena. For example, accounts of older pheriwale, like Sadna, show how they were able to enter, trade and retain contact with householders who lived in middle-/upper-middle-class neighbourhoods. This is primarily due to the fact that in the past most neighbourhoods were more open and did not have guards or gates. For the younger pheriwale, experience of the city is more concretely gentrified than it had been before. The names of localities which Jeena mentions above, such as Safdarjung Enclave and R.K Puram, are located in south Delhi. These spaces are large and not gated; however, Jeena here makes an observation of how an increasing number of neighbourhoods within these localities are also becoming gated by having guards at various entry-points. Jeena not only points out how gated neighbourhoods become extremely inaccessible, but she also provides an insight into the experience of localities as 'closed', and how some parts of the city

are shifting from public state housing to private companies. Furthermore, she also mentions neighbourhoods which have higher rents and are also 'closed' as they have many residents who are expatriates.

Therefore, Jeena states that accessing lower-middle-class and working-class neighbourhoods that are in the lower income bracket (such as INR 20,000–30,000 per month)[23] is easier and more reliable for business. Jyoti, who is in her late thirties, shares how the cost of housing in the city has also increased over the past decade:

> One doesn't even realise how all the money goes in rent. I have been paying rent for 20 years. It started from 250 rupees to now it's like 5,000 rupees. There are two income-earners in my family; the rest are small kids in the house. I can hardly save after giving rent to the landlord.

Since the late-twentieth century, Delhi has consistently been undergoing modern developmental urban planning. These changes include: rising rents, displacement of slums and squatted settlements, increase of private housing development areas and "urbanisation of periurban, rural, and protected land" (Ghertner 2014:1559). Nevertheless, pheriwale may have regular customers at the mandi, since the demand for affordable cheap clothes remains high due to a large number of working-class population in the city. However, because of the changing spatial and social geographies of the city, their working routines and moving workspaces need to be constantly adapted.

As pheriwale follow their own schedules, depending on the responsibilities they have at home, some people prefer to go for *pheri* earlier in the day and some prefer to go later. Moreover, as mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, while some pheriwale prefer to go for *pheri* in groups of three or four, others prefer to go alone. Going along with friends or other pheriwale for trading can ease the burden of transport costs and increase the feeling of security for women. The extreme climate of the city also alters this schedule: for example, in the winter, traders prefer to go before it gets too dark in the evening. In the summer, they prefer *pheri* in the morning or evening to avoid the harsh afternoons of Delhi. Jyoti tells me how the season of "burning heat" impacts upon the trade. The temperature in Delhi's summers can rise to 45°C during the hottest month of June, whereas in the coldest months of December to January it can be as low as 2–5°C. Pheriwale often mentioned that the trade takes on an incredibly slow pace in the summer;

extensive physical labour in the heat is not only not viable, but householders (potential clients) in general seem to be "on edge". As we sit in December's cosy winter sun, Ritu reminds Jyoti and me about Delhi summers and we laugh, remembering our worst memories of extremely hot days in the city. Ritu jokingly tells us, "In the summer, people in big houses are resting under the coolers and only take naps! Even if we shout, they don't hear it! People have asked me why I am disturbing them!"

Value of skills and knowledge

Throughout the pheriwale's working day, value of labour, goods and services is constantly created and transformed as the traders move the goods around. Apart from the income-generated value in their daily work, pheriwale also account for other dimensions of the notion of value, specifically that which signifies value as 'importance' in their everyday. The practice of *pheri* and, in the process, going through the city and the suburbs while collecting clothes, does not entail only the physical labour of carrying all the utensils and clothes. It also requires knowledge about the city, clients, quality of clothes and utensils and the changing markets. Therefore, most pheriwale remember learning about the nuances of the trade by following their parents, relatives, friends or spouses during *pheri*. *Pheri* then also becomes a space and a practice to circulate knowledge among family members and other networks for the pheriwale.

For the informal traders, the exchange and circulation of trading skills and knowledge has been central in coping with the changing politico-economic shifts. All the pheriwale whom I interviewed, except Aarti (whom I met in early 2019), learnt and honed their skills to be pheriwale from their parents, spouses, in-laws or other relatives, while accompanying them during *pheri*. As discussed in the first two chapters, all the pheriwale (apart from Aarti) are from Gujarat and belong to the Waghri caste. The Waghri community have been petty traders for generations. Removal and recycling of old clothes has been core to their trade (at least for the community in Delhi) since the 1920s (Norris 2010:48).

Sadna tells me that she has worked in the *pheri* and *bartan* trade all her life: "My mother used to take me along when she went on *pheri*." When I meet Anita on the cold, rainy day in January 2019, she is accompanied by her relative, Poonam.

As we fold up the large pile of clothes Poonam tells me how she arrived in Delhi and got into this trade:

> Poonam: "I have just come from my village [three months ago]. I have four kids. I came from a village in [South-West] Gujarat, after my husband passed away. I was doing farming before coming here."
> Anita: "She does not know this [*pheri*] trade, so I am teaching her. I am helping her. Last year [2018] agriculture was ruined in the villages."
> Poonam: "There was no rain."
> Anita: "So there is no work there. It's difficult to take care of the household, so she's come to the city with the kids."

Due to environmental shifts, lack of state investment in small-scale farms and the everyday precarity of the poor in rural contexts, people such as Poonam, who have some familial links in Delhi, come to the city to learn ways that can ensure them a more secure form of livelihood. Anita says that despite other forms of work that she has tried, such as construction work, *pheri* has provided a more reliable source of income for her family. The migration flows from rural to urban in growing cities have been a characteristic of twenty-first-century Asia. Nguyen states, "the rising cost of living, dispossession of landed properties, and shortage of local employment opportunities make it imperative for rural households to embrace migrant livelihoods" (Nguyen 2019:27–28). Within India, since the opening of markets in 1991, the incomes of small-scale farmers and landless groups have further deteriorated due to a consistent increase in farming input costs. The Indian economy overwhelmingly relies on what Jan Breman calls "footloose labour" or migrant labourers. Single mothers are among a regular group of people who leave rural economies to find livelihoods in urban centres (Breman 1996:86).

The transferable skills involved in the daily lives of pheriwale include: evaluation of the quality of goods such as clothes and utensils as well as other consumer goods, patience and perseverance when bargaining, and noting the patterns of demand at the mandi, the demographic needs of the market and their buyers. As Norris points out in her research (2010:131) and as Pushpa narrates through her experience, the pheriwale have to be able to sell a *bartan* in exchange for clothes and convince the householders they are trading with, through their knowledge about the utensils and the clothes, fabrics and their customers at the mandi.

At the mandi, pheriwale have three primary groups of buyers: the intermediaries who work in the factories, regional and weekly market sellers – both these groups buy clothes in bulk – and the urban poor, who buy for personal use. Due to this steady flow of buyers, pheriwale's business successes, though precarious and laborious, are also stable in many ways, such as the creation and maintenance of an affordable clothing market in the city. In addition, due to the rising consumption patterns in the city, even when pheriwale cannot access the upper-middle/middle classes' gated communities they continue to gather a large amount of clothes from lower-middle-class and middle-class open or ungated neighbourhoods. There is a continuous supply–demand circulation created and maintained by the pheriwale. Therefore, unlike many groups within the informal sector, including industrial labourers, who depend on various sources of income-generating activities (cf. Breman 1996; 2013), a vast majority of pheriwale in Delhi mostly rely on their trade for income (cf. Bapat 2018). Trading second-hand cloth remains a viable mode of livelihood for low-income groups such as the Waghri community, across India.

Pheriwale have carved out this space for the recycling of old clothes by ensuring that the goods they collect have the right quality and aesthetics for their buyers. When passing on the skills, pheriwale enable their mentees to learn about the clothes, different kinds of fabrics, the utensils and the trading process. This allows them to maintain their clients and customers at both ends of their trade. Due to recent changes in the documentation processes for all long-term residents in India, such as the universal social security number (printed on the Aadhaar card) and the requirement to have a bank account (after demonetisation), pheriwale have also had to teach themselves and their dependants how to navigate accessing municipal offices, banks and other state institutions. In addition, families, friends and kinship ties can not only provide physical and emotional care, but they can also be repositories of knowledge and provide networks of working opportunities (cf. Nguyen 2019:30).

Hence, *pheri* as an informal trade operates within paradoxes, such as, on the one hand, it becomes a space to generate income and, on the other, it becomes a frustrating zone as leaving it can be difficult because of inaccessible structures of education and state support (cf. Gupta 2012). The binding oppression of the restrictive caste system frames the trade, while at the same time the trade also acts as a space for maintaining livelihoods and for making meaning for the traders (cf.

Harriss-White 2017:95–111). I delve further into these complexities of working in such a trade in Chapter 7. These complexities mark key characteristics of recycling markets. Waste work or recycling work, along the lines of intersectional structures of gender, caste and class, also encompass intense physical labour and irregular income but may also pay "good money" vis-à-vis other informal trades and work (Nguyen 2019:68). Furthermore, this contradictory nature of the recycling markets characterises the lives of informal labour in recycling economies and underlines the ambiguity of value that pheriwale associate with their work.

Similar to the working lives of the large majority of informal sector workers in India, temporariness and in-betweenness enmeshed with precarious working conditions shape the daily working lives of pheriwale women. Despite these factors, lower-caste workers in urban spaces, such as the pheriwale, strategically navigate the changing contours of the city and the nation. For example, Poonam and Aarti find financial refuge within this trade for themselves and their families. Due to the continuous demand and supply of old clothes as a result of increasing consumption by the lower-middle and middle classes, pheriwale have been successful in maintaining these circles of trade as well as contributing to other actors regionally and globally in the textile industry. Even though they are framed within the informal economy, the labour which the trade of *pheri* is built upon and the circulation of goods add value to the national economy (cf. Medina and Schneider 2018:47; see also Lupi 2018).

Concluding reflections

In this chapter I have used the imagery of circles to trace how pheriwale and their trading practices in Delhi can be situated within the larger circulation of clothing markets both regionally and globally. The multiple circles of trade that pheriwale create and are part of also highlight the numerous actors involved in the daily circulation of clothes, fabrics and textiles. In the landscape of informal trading practices in Delhi, pheriwale women have carved out a crucial niche for themselves which allows them to be "a powerful centrifugal force, ejecting tens of thousands of items every day" (Norris 2010:51). As this centrifugal force, the pheriwale provide used clothes and fabrics to export factories, weekly and regional

traders and for immediate consumption to people who buy for personal use, creating Delhi as a key link in the global circulation of used cloth.

In these circles of trade, the labour processes circulate and maintain intersections of gender, caste and class within global value chains. This is not to suggest a closed circuit of value extraction and exploitation. Rather that the circulation is built upon work done by people who occupy specific locations within particular socio-economic geographies. Since care work in pheriwale's daily routine is threaded into the space and time of income-generating work, the circulation of goods, labour and services within value chains is more visibly built upon social reproduction. Furthermore, the socio-economic positionalities of pheriwale as informal sector traders further condition how they can access the metropolis. Therefore, the circulation of goods and services is directly implicated and invoked through socio-economic intersectional hierarchies. In the next chapter, I continue the discussion of complex conflicting meanings that merge layers of conceptualisations of value.

Chapter 6: Beyond waiting and patience

Pheriwale women often shared with me their experiences of visiting state institutions. When I conducted my fieldwork (in December 2017 to February 2018, and in January 2019), many pheriwale had fresh memories of some of the policy initiatives which had been implemented in the recent past, such as applying for the Aadhaar card and registering for bank accounts. The implementation and issuing of Aadhaar cards started in 2009 by the central government in India and is ongoing. The Aadhaar card is an identification document which contains biometric data of the cardholder as well as identity markers such as age, gender and address (Chaudhuri and König 2018; Dayal and Singh 2016). The card is officially linked to welfare schemes such as food subsidy (ration card), banking (PAN number), voting card, and employment schemes (MGNREGA), as well as people's mobile phone numbers. As residents of India, subjects are entitled to the Aadhaar card,[24] especially since the unique social security number is linked to other welfare provisions. For example, a resident must register their mobile phone number with the Aadhaar number to identify themselves to the mobile network provider. The rationale for the Aadhaar card has been to ease the number of documents for both residents and the state as well as to provide digital integration and ease of distribution and access to welfare benefits (cf. Rao and Nair 2019:473–475). Another executive measure which has had a direct impact upon every resident in India is the demonetisation drive[25] that kick-started in November 2016 (cf. Ghosh et al. 2017), and in this chapter I draw attention to these concerns raised by pheriwale women.

One foggy Delhi-winter morning, Jyoti tells me how she obtained her Aadhaar card: "We spent one whole day in the queue to get the Aadhaar card at the local office. A whole day of not being able to work!" Ritu and Sita are also part of this discussion as we all sit together sipping chai. They tell me about their experiences

of dealing with local municipal offices in general, and Ritu reflects with a sigh, "In government [offices] they keep pushing us around" (in Hindi: "*dhakka khilwate hain*"). The pheriwale meet state employees and experience encounters with the state institutions in daily life, including central and local municipal offices, state-owned or public banks and public hospitals. Jyoti and Ritu associate the experience of visiting a state office with expressions such as "spending one whole day in the queue" and of being "pushed around". Throughout my interactions with the pheriwale, the phrases which often emerged in the accounts of everyday encounters with the state include: when "a document/ID card/pension has not yet arrived" ("*abhi tak nahi mila*"); when a public official tells them to "visit another time or to come later" ("*baad mein aana*"); or that "it will happen next time" ("*agli baar hoga*"), thus keeping open a window of hope in the process of waiting.

Waiting enfolds within it an arbitrary sense of the duration of time, which then results in being pushed around from desk to desk, from office to office and from time to time. Hence, waiting captures these articulations since they indicate the experience of "delayed arrival" in a more general sense, for example the wait for one's ID card or pension. As Jyoti reminds us, spending a whole day in the queue implies loss of daily pay. Missing a day's pay is significant for informal workers such as pheriwale, who are dependent on irregular incomes. However, waiting in the queue for a document which will provide Jyoti and her peers formal recognition by the state, and an ID card, which is linked to all their other welfare benefits, also makes the process of applying and waiting vital.

The presence of the Indian state in everyday life is not unique to marginalised informal traders, nor is it a recent phenomenon. The purpose of visiting these public offices can vary from registering for an Aadhaar card, enlisting for the state pension, opening and accessing bank accounts, general paperwork with regard to one's identity, change of residence, and healthcare. Akhil Gupta notes in his study on Indian bureaucracy that the post-independent, postcolonial Indian state has always been present in the everyday lives of India's residents, as a provider of welfare, subsidised fuel for cooking, public transportation provisions, getting a telephone landline, education and healthcare (cf. Gupta 2012:33). This results in people constantly interacting with state institutions and visiting local, regional or central state offices to access welfare or register for subsidised food, fuel or to pay electricity and landline bills. For instance, the vast array of state-issued policies

which have explicit "target groups", such as welfare programmes aimed at the poorest groups in specific regions, especially in the 1980s, has in Gupta's words led to "bureaucratization of daily life" (Gupta 2012:32). Subsequently, the first two decades of the twenty-first century have seen the implementation of policies and measures that digitise and mark the technological turn of governance and banking in India (cf. Chaudhuri and König 2018). E-governance has been an important step for the twenty-first-century state as a way to modernise and make democracy "digital" (Prasad 2012). The establishment of a biometric social security number (in the form of the Aadhaar card), for all residents within the country, is an illustration of this drive to become a modernising, digital India.

Drawing on pheriwale experiences, in this chapter I explore the phenomenon of waiting. Anthropologists Andreas Bandak and Manpreet Janeja note that while waiting may be "as old as life itself", studying it as a phenomenon can invoke and capture experiences of "hope, doubt and uncertainty" (Bandak and Janeja 2018:5). I bring in pheriwale women's narratives from my fieldwork and also draw upon previous research to show how waiting for state welfare provisions is a crucial aspect of the relationship between marginalised groups and the state institutions. The recurrent themes emerging from my data include experiences of long and arduous forms of waiting, being pushed around, arbitrariness and inconsistency of information at several stages of the bureaucratic procedures, and "reluctant" hope. Later in the chapter, I delve into why people wait and how it is linked to formal citizenship. The interlinkages between value of welfare benefits and political recognition, imbued in being a welfare recipient, are pertinent to an analysis of waiting. Finally, I weave together the main themes to elucidate how the politics of waiting is interlinked with politics of patience and hope.

To capture waiting

Focusing on the relationship between the state and the pheriwale can help illuminate a myriad of locations they come to inhabit in everyday life vis-à-vis the socio-economic structures in contemporary India. On the one hand, pheriwale, like other informal workers, are located in precarious and informal work patterns. Yet on the other, as residents within India, there are a number of formalised databases and welfare measures that pheriwale become part of and are counted

within, such as the Aadhaar card database, the census, as registered bank account holders, and as recipients of the state pension or of affirmative action.

In studies on everyday relationships between the state and marginalised subjects like the pheriwale, accounts of experiences of "waiting" and the expression of "being pushed around" are often resonated in the narratives situated in other contexts as well (cf. Auyero 2012; Gupta 2012). For instance, Bandak and Janeja (2018:5) note how "structurally and institutionally imposed forms of waiting" determine the relationship between the state and subjects who are migrants. For instance, in the migration process waiting defines multiple stages from the time of movement to finding a safe refuge or getting rights to asylum or finding a job (cf. Bendixsen and Eriksen 2018; Khosravi 2017; Sager 2011). This characteristic of the relation with the state can also be observed in the case of low-income groups such as informal sector workers, urban poor and slum-dwellers (cf. Appadurai 2013; Auyero 2012; Ghertner 2017; Gupta 2012; Procupez 2015). For Appadurai the politics of hope, within social movements and strategies to make claims to the state by marginalised communities, is imbued within a politics of waiting (cf. Appadurai 2013). Here, I focus primarily on experiences of waiting to highlight how waiting is a crucial part of the pheriwale's relation to state institutions as well as to examine its entanglement with the notion of value.

The similarity of narratives across various politico-socio-cultural and economic contexts illustrates how the positionality of low-income groups vis-à-vis the state is not only unique to pheriwale and the Indian state but invokes larger structural tendencies regardless of place between the state and certain categories of subjects (cf. Appadurai 2013; Auyero 2012:28; Bandak and Janeja 2018:4; Bendixsen and Eriksen 2018:89; Ghertner 2017; Hage 2018:204). Situating pheriwale's experiences of waiting into broader scholarship allows me to elucidate and conceptualise their experiences as a marginalised group in the Indian socio-economic landscape, which women deal with as part of their everyday realities.

Relevant research revolves around the everyday encounters of marginalised groups with the state, such as in the work of sociologist Javier Auyero (2012) and anthropologist Akhil Gupta (2012), and the primary concern is a conceptualisation of power (see also Nguyen and Rydstrom 2018). While a focus on power in relation to the state and marginalised groups can offer certain insights, it can also pay less attention to the everyday strategies and tensions that people go through as they navigate the scopes of power of the state (cf. Auyero

2012; Bourdieu 2000; Gupta 2012). Focusing on pheriwale women's encounters with state institutions allows me to understand how value is shaped through such encounters and how pheriwale determine what is valuable to them, enabling me to add yet another layer to the conceptualisation of value. As I will show, by dedicating time, energy and resources, pheriwale shape and construct the value of documents or welfare benefits that they procure from the state.

Experiencing the wait

When I met Sadna for the first time in December 2017, she had just turned 61 years of age. I visited her for an interview on a winter afternoon, and Sadna received me warmly. She made space on her laid-out *chaadar* (a large piece of cloth) so that I could sit next to her. Sadna was straightforward in telling me that she was getting bored while trading in the mandi (open market) and that talking to me was a welcome distraction as she sat in the open marketplace. After we ordered chai from the local vendor, she told me about her working day and in particular her experiences of visiting local public offices. She had gone to the municipal and central state offices to arrange her pension card:

> Sadna: "Till now I have not received my pension. My husband passed away and, if we had his death certificate, my pension card could have been made. When I asked someone [a local officer], they said that now I can get [a pension] since I am above 60. But it has still not arrived. You know, I went 10 times [to multiple municipal offices], running around to get a pension. I have been to the local women's support group as well. They also say, 'it's closed' or 'come later' or 'it will happen next time' or 'get a receipt'".
> Riya: "I read on the government website that you are legally entitled to a pension after you turn 60."
> Sadna: "Yes, exactly! My friend is 70 years old, but she has not been able to get her pension either – she is very upset. I am still okay. She recently broke her leg as well and now she cannot walk without a stick or sit without a chair… till now, her pension card has not arrived. She told me, 'May God bless you, and when you get your pension, can you help me as well?' We have gone so many times together. We also went to the office nearby, to the local Delhi government office. They told us that [pension] papers cannot be made in that particular office but in another one [where they went]. And then, there they told us to go back [to the first office].

They just push us around. And how much can we be pushed around? Just going and coming to these offices is around Rs. 40 [that is, for transportation]. How can I afford this? Then I just gave up and decided to stop going. If I am not able to get the card, then fuck it [*Phir main har ke baith gayi. Phir ma-chudwane gaya, nahi jab mil raha hai toh phir kya*]."

Riya: "Yes, this is so terrible, that you have worked all your life and yet you cannot get a pension."

Sadna: "Absolutely! It really upsets me."

Like Ritu, Sadna also experiences being "pushed around" from one office to another, spatially and temporally. Initially Sadna is unable to get the widow's pension, as she was told that she does not have proper documentation, since she was unable to arrange proper certification of her husband's death; applying for the pension documents second time around also proved tedious. Sadna's friend, who is technically and officially entitled to a pension as she is well above 60 years old, also encountered difficulties when trying to apply for the pension card. Both Sadna and her 70-plus-year-old friend went through a physically and mentally exhausting process of applying for the pension, as they had to arrange multiple attempts to do so at several local bureaucratic offices. Sadna's experience touches upon many themes, which are reflected in other pheriwale's experiences as well, such as inconsistent and long durations of waiting, being shuffled around from office to office, as well as arbitrary information regarding papers required to obtain the pension. The effort that Sadna and her friend put into the application process for pension evokes a discussion on value, which I discuss later in this chapter.

As Sadna's account highlights, the strategies to deal with local everyday encounters with state institutions are many and can include going along with a friend to sort out paperwork, visiting state offices multiple times persistently, and the delicate balance of deciding when to wait and when to persist. While these processes may seem mundane, they provide a glimpse into the everyday workings of state legislation in the lives of a marginalized group. Moreover, they also capture the ambiguous spaces in which informal economic actors are located. On the one hand, the traders function within informal working patterns and irregular incomes, and on the other hand, they are regulated through various state measures. Furthermore, similar to other low-income groups in India, the pheriwale are entitled to various welfare measures. Their encounters with the state institutions indicate how their and their families' subsistence is procured through income generated from their daily trade as well as welfare.

In Sadna's narrative, waiting becomes a trajectory which shapes the relationship between the state institutions and its subjects. Similar to experiences of asylum seekers or migrants, waiting results in finding oneself in a constant state of insecurity, precarity and anxiety which frames everyday life while being vulnerable to the decisions of authorities. In the case of the everyday lives of informal sector workers like the pheriwale, waiting for economic, legal, political and socio-cultural rights means that precarity frames daily life. A part of these everyday anxieties is shaped due to irregular income or an unstable contract (if there is one) along with the uncertainties of whether the state welfare benefits will arrive or not (Auyero 2012:102; Breman 2013:48). In his study on the informal economy, Jan Breman (2013) argues that the Indian urban centres become one large "waiting room" for newly arrived informal workers from rural areas, as well as for the generations who have been part of the urban informal sector landscape. Waiting here signifies how the urban economy becomes a space that provides hope for upward economic mobility and more options to gain skills or engage in semi-skilled and unskilled labour (Breman 2013:34). However, due to the precarity of the urban informal economies (declining labour laws, regressive labour contracts, etc.), this waiting can be never-ending.

Waiting for digital India

In encounters with state institutions, the materiality of waiting revolves around welfare provisions such as social security numbers, bank accounts, employment opportunities, pensions, unemployment insurance, subsidised resources, etc. (Auyero 2012). Without stable jobs, informal sector workers continue to wait in their relation with the state for welfare and social security.

While discussing their frustrating visits to local bureaucratic offices, Jyoti, Ritu and Sita talk about one of the recently implemented national policies. They share their experiences of opening accounts in public banks as part of the financial inclusion programme by the Indian government. The Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), ('Prime Minister's People's Wealth Scheme') was launched in 2014 and is designed to provide access to banking services and financial inclusion for the population in India who do not have bank accounts (PMJDY 2014:ii).[26] The aim of the programme is to ensure bank account ownership for the vast majority of the population, in order to expand formal banking structures and digitise finance.

Jyoti: "See, there is this card by Modi, they said from the national banks – [we] saw it on TV – that for people who are illiterate, who are [formally] unemployed like us. For them there is an account. So, many Gujaratis [from the mandi] opened their accounts. It's from Modi. So whatever Modi puts – 20, 25, 50, 10,000 [approx. EUR 0.23 to 112.9] – that will all be donated to the poor. We saw all of this on TV. So, we went there [she points to a bank on the other side of the locality]. They took 200 rupees [from us]. Only we know how we saved those 200 rupees [approx. EUR 2.26]."

Ritu: "They keep saying they'll put 20, 40, 50 [in the account]."

Sita: "Nothing has come so far."

Jyoti: "They haven't put anything so far."

The idea behind such a scheme is to encourage low-income groups, most of whom earn income from informal work, to get accounts in public banks. This would then also allow the federal and local states to directly transfer welfare benefits into these bank accounts, such as an allowance for low-income and unemployed people, pension, childcare support, etc. Jyoti, Ritu and Sita had opened their accounts over a year before I met them. When I spoke to them, by that point they had already waited for more than a year for 'people's wealth' (*Jan-Dhan*). According to the 2017 World Bank Global Findex, while the Jan-Dhan Yojana has brought 80% of the population into the fold of formal financial infrastructure, 48% of the accounts had been inactive for more than a year. Moreover, not only had these new bank accounts been inactive for more than a year, but 54% of the accounts held by women were more inactive than those held by men (43%) (Demirgüc-Kunt et al. 2018; see also Azad and Sinha 2018).[27] As Gupta's ethnographic data shows, while there are many welfare provisions for the poor, they are not always efficient. In the case of these bank accounts, the lack of inactivity is not only from the bank account holder's side but also from the state's, which promised direct transfer of benefits (such as unemployment insurance and pensions).

Durations of waiting for state welfare, or the degree of its accessibility, is directly tied to the intersections of class, caste, race and gender (cf. Auyero 2012; Gupta 2012). For instance, in the shift towards digitised banking and financial systems, the low-income groups are unable to fully participate in it. Many pheriwale do not have smartphones, even though they work in a highly urbanised city (which has better provision of internet than rural areas); sometimes the older traders barely had access to a phone at all. For instance, Sadna mentions that she shares a phone with her younger son, since she does not feel confident to use it on her

own. Due to the lack of proper, affordable and accessible digital infrastructures, low-income and low-skilled groups immediately face exclusion in a world of virtual transactions of money (cf. Ghosh, Chandrashekhar and Patnaik 2017:88; Sen 2020:120; Sen et al. 2020*b*). Despite the success of the Indian information technology (IT) industry, it largely remains a provider to global markets and services. However, this has not meant deep dissemination of internet and IT services within India itself (Ghosh et al. 2017:88). In an ethnography conducted during the period of demonetisation in India, anthropologist Atreyee Sen observes how the low-income informants in her study were cut off from digitised banking systems and were forced to depend on their middle-class employers (Sen 2020:124). Therefore, due to the low levels of digital literacy among the majority of the Indian population and lack of accessible technology, the use of internet services remains marginal, further decreasing their ability to access welfare rights.

Unequal waiting

Apart from the lack of affordable and universalised forms of digital and welfare infrastructure, pheriwale women's accounts also reflect experiences of everyday discrimination on the basis of how they are treated when they interact with professionals and authorities. I met Jyoti, Ritu and Sita at around 11:30am, when the morning rush of buyers had ended, so they were more relaxed and comfortable to talk with me. Early morning and late afternoon are more hectic times at the mandi, since early morning draws in bulk buyers, and by late afternoon the pheriwale pack up to leave the mandi for the day. Our conversation soon turned to their experiences of waiting:

> Riya: "How does your body get affected due to this work?"
> Sita: "It hurts a lot, but whom do I go to? I have body ache. My leg broke a year ago; even then I had to work – for my kids I need to earn. Who will give me medicines? Who will get them for me? It doesn't matter if we are sick or have fever."
> Riya: "What about government hospitals?"
> Ritu: "In government hospitals they push us around."
> Sita: "The government hospitals just give pills, and then will ask us to 'bring this, bring that' – many documents. They push us around to the point where we fall."
> Jyoti: "Oh, the government people don't talk to us well at all."

Sita: "That's what I mean: when one has money, then there is everything. Then one can go to private [hospital] as well."

Jyoti: "For example, if I ask them to tell me what the medicines are about, then they just talk rudely at us. If I ask the name of a prescribed medicine, they give us a lecture."

Sita: "They just lecture us. Who listens to the poor? If someone were rich, there would be a line behind them: 'Here, madam! Your medicines.' They will work for them fast, but not for us."

In our conversations, pheriwale would mention how job-related injuries are part of their everyday working lives due to the nature of their trade, which involves carrying heavy loads on their backs. Here, Sita mentions how, despite ailments, pheriwale are forced to work due to irregular pay. Public healthcare is accessible, at least in urban areas, due to low costs of health services, but it can also involve being "pushed around", unclear information and waiting.[28] Sita, Jyoti and Ritu shed further light on how pheriwale are treated in public offices by professionals. Firstly, Sita, Jyoti and Ritu remark on how it is assumed by healthcare professionals that as informal traders they may not know anything about healthcare and hence are "lectured", reiterating the feeling of inferiority rather than receiving clear information. The recurrence of the feeling and experience of being "pushed around" which Sita, Ritu and Sadna share indicates not only that they are asked to visit the public offices multiple times, but also reveals how the hierarchies that are experienced in a particular moment of the encounter invoke an asymmetrical relationship between professionals embodying a representation of the state and marginalised groups. Studies on healthcare in India show that low-income and lower-caste groups face discrimination in their interactions with healthcare professionals. For example, findings from a study on grassroots-level healthcare providers highlight that healthcare workers spend less time with lower-caste groups, speak more rudely and refuse to touch them while administering medicines (George 2015:3–6).[29]

When Sita rhetorically asks, "Who listens to the poor? If someone were rich, there would be a line [a queue of people providing services] behind them [rich people]. They will work for them fast, but not for us", she captures how class and caste positionalities of being informal traders seep into the ways in which public officials encounter low-income groups. Here, class, caste and temporality are interlinked to illustrate that the rich can afford to wait less than can people like the pheriwale. As Sita notes, the experience of unequal waiting is felt when the

128

"poor are not heard" and the "rich are attended to in less time". Thus, accessibility alone cannot guarantee the inclusion of low-income groups within public services because the spatiality of bureaucratic encounters creates such hierarchies of temporality. While waiting does not necessarily mean that people may not receive healthcare, however, what Sita, Jyoti and Rita point out is that the poor are forced to perform the labour of waiting longer vis-à-vis privileged groups. In the context of Indian healthcare, when professionals provide unclear information which leads to being "pushed around", then the hierarchies of caste, gender and class are explicitly invoked and manifest as everyday realities in pheriwale women's lives.

Despite the fact that pheriwale's narratives are from specific politico-socio-economic and cultural contexts, it is suggestive of larger structural tendencies of hierarchies, within Indian society and even beyond, when Sita's experiences resonate with accounts in other ethnographies. For example, in Auyero's study of waiting rooms of public offices in Buenos Aires, Argentina, he captures the socio-economically unequal processes of waiting. Leticia, for instance, an informant in Auyero's study, notes that "We are all equals; there shouldn't be a difference. But, well, if you have money, everything is quicker […] if not, you have to wait" (Auyero 2012:20). Although Sita and Leticia are waiting for public services within two completely different contexts and continents, the similarity of their experiences and the use of these specific expressions elucidates how inequalities are felt and underlined on a daily basis for marginalised groups.

The experiences of unequal temporalities and long waiting periods is briefly analysed by Gupta in his ethnography based in rural North India. Below, Gupta refers to a camp which was set up in a village with the aim to register residents onto a list in order to provide state pensions:

> The camp I attended was to begin at 10:30am, but the government medical doctor, whose presence was essential, did not show until 12:30pm, and the tehsildar [tax officer] arrived even later still. I was soon to learn that, as a rule, the rank of an official was inversely related to punctuality. This was a way not only of signalling how busy the superior officer was but also of discounting the importance of the time of junior officials and clients – that hundreds of elderly, indigent people would have to wait outside in the heat of early summer was not a factor that influenced the actions of any official, high or low (Gupta 2012:9).

Gupta argues how people's status, and its relation to whose time is valued, is conditional on the basis of class, age and caste, since the elderly people waiting

for the state officials were not only poor but also largely belonged to lower castes (Gupta 2012:58). Gupta conducted his fieldwork in the late 1980s; in the past couple of decades the punctuality of local bureaucratic officers has become better, especially since the installation of a biometric attendance system in municipal offices by the early 2000s (cf. Kaushika 2012).

However, even in a twenty-first-century context of e-governance, executive decisions that are spontaneous and arbitrary continue to make subjects wait in India. For instance, between late 2016 and early 2017 long queues were a common sight in front of public and private banks across India, due to demonetisation (introduced on 8 November 2016). In a newspaper article of 28 November 2016, titled "Cash for queues: people paid to stand in line amid India's bank note crisis", the journalist quotes a person standing in a queue in front of a public bank: "Obviously I don't like coming and standing in line for two hours in the sun […]. I do it because my boss tells me to. It's not like I can say no" (Doshi 2016).

Dipti Bapat, in a news report from December 2016, writes how the second-hand cloth traders in Mumbai (*chindiwale*) were unable to sell their collected clothes in markets due to severe cash crunch caused by demonetisation. Lack of circulation of 500 and 1000 rupee bills meant that bulk-buyers who buy from the traders were unable to do so (Bapat 2016*b*). Sen in her 2020 ethnography on cashless economies describes the period during May 2020 in India, when the state decided to lockdown and follow quarantine measures due to fear of the spread of coronavirus. Reminiscent of the time of demonetisation, Sen notes: "Yet again, domestic workers are offering their services for reduced or delayed salaries, as elderly and upper-class employers are concerned about their vulnerability to contagion, and resist standing in queues and withdrawing cash from ATMs" (Sen 2020:125). In times of crisis, the fact that low-income groups, especially women, as in the case of domestic workers, are forced into new forms of waiting, whether in relation to the state or in relation to their employers, emphasises the disparities of who waits and for how long. Moreover, Sita's experiences, as well as the examples from times of demonetisation and coronavirus lockdown, show how middle and upper classes can get away with not waiting, as they have resources to hire someone else to queue in their stead. The phenomenon of who has to wait and who can buy time out of waiting or not having to do so illustrates a hierarchy of temporality on the basis of class, which in turn intersects with social hierarchies defined by caste, race and gender.

These collections of illustrations that I present in this section, from my own empirical material and by drawing on other studies, clearly indicate that waiting frames the relationship between low-income, lower-caste groups and the state in Delhi and beyond.

Arbitrary waiting

Along with waiting, or the hope of arrival of one's pension or ID card, the arbitrariness of instructions also shapes how waiting happens. As we saw in Sadna's account, not only did she and her friend have to wait for the arrival of the pension, but also they had to visit several municipal and central state offices due to arbitrary and contradictory instructions. The arbitrariness of waiting and of instructions is a recurrent theme in my data. The first instance of this arbitrariness is inherently present in the process of waiting itself, because while state welfare benefits may take a long time to arrive, sometimes they might instead arrive in a much shorter timeframe (cf. Auyero 2012:19).

Within studies conducted by Auyero and Gupta, this arbitrariness is bound into the operationalisation of bureaucratic mechanisms. In Auyero's study, he notes how "poor people's shared experiences of waiting" are determined by "the uncertainty and arbitrariness" which are inherently weaved into everyday power relations imbued in the encounter between poor people and the state (Auyero 2012:17). Through this constant uncertainty and arbitrariness "waiting (re)creates subordination" of poor people (Auyero 2012:19). For Gupta, this uncertainty and arbitrariness of whether a welfare benefit will arrive marks the inaccessibility of welfare for the poor. Therefore, he defines this as "structural violence", which is everyday violence perpetuated by the state through indirect harm (Gupta 2012:48–72). While the focus of this chapter is not structural violence, it is often used as a concept to understand the hierarchies that are invoked between the state and marginalised groups. For example, the arbitrariness of instructions is not only a feature of the two particular state offices that Sadna and her friend visited, but the inconsistency of waiting and instructions are markers of structural mechanisms.

Yet another example is from Gupta's ethnography where he interviews a local bureaucrat. The local bureaucrat, an official who works in state administration services, is meant to implement a policy which he considers unfeasible in the

context of that particular village. However, the bureaucrat goes on to implement it anyway, even though he is aware that it might garner a success rate of only 50%. The main reason that the local official implements the policy despite its major lack of efficacy is what Gupta expresses as "due to pressures 'from above'" (Gupta 2012:48). Gupta argues that experts located in Delhi come up with poverty-alleviation schemes which, though well-intentioned, may be irrelevant to tackle the issues at the regional and local levels. According to Gupta, this is a way in which the arbitrariness of bureaucracy perpetuates structural violence, as there have been a whole range of poverty-alleviation schemes over the last century (Gupta 2012:48). Here, structural violence is understood as "systemic violence" which "obscures the source of harm and whom to hold accountable. Operating throughout the socio-political body, "structural violence" remains non-personal and in this sense faceless" (Nguyen and Rydstrom 2018:57). As Gupta argues, structural violence is operationalised through the "faceless" bureaucracy or a policy (Gupta 2012:22–26). The PMJDY financial inclusion scheme which Jyoti mentions, that was set up to guarantee the direct transfer of welfare benefits, can be understood through this lens. Despite digitised banking solutions, not only have Jyoti, Sita and Ritu been waiting for this particular welfare benefit for over a year, but inequality in India is drastically increasing, reinforcing caste and gender hierarchies (cf. Bharti 2018; World Social Report 2020:3, 23–37). Hence, the systemic arbitrariness also perpetuates a long series of waiting by people on a day-to-day basis to access welfare, as well as on a structural level, waiting for an end to steep inequality (cf. Gupta 2012:71–72).

As can be observed through the narratives of Jyoti, Ritu and Sita in combination with the account of Leticia from Auyero's study as well as Gupta's findings, temporality and arbitrariness of waiting are inextricably interlinked with the intersections of class, caste, profession, gender and age. This hierarchy of temporality reveals whose time is deemed more valuable. I will further elaborate on this point of time and value in the next section.

Worth the wait? Waiting and formal inclusion

Patience or patients?

Previous research illustrates that informal workers, slum-dwellers, undocumented migrants and other socio-culturally and economically marginalised groups, such as indigenous groups, have to wait longer for delivery of services in their encounters with the state (cf. Appadurai 2013; Auyero 2012:28; Bandak and Janeja 2018:4; Bendixsen and Eriksen 2018:89; Ghertner 2017; Gupta 2012:71–72; Hage 2018:204; Sager 2011:172). So, "why do poor people comply with unbearably long and sometimes infinite waiting? […] How does domination work? Why do the subordinated yield to the wishes or desires of the dominant, who in this case tell them to wait?" (Auyero 2012:34). For Auyero, who is inspired by the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, waiting is a form of domination imposed by the state procedural mechanisms which specifically subjugate and exploit poor people. Therefore, "the urban poor, in their frequent encounters with politicians, bureaucrats and officials, learn to be patients of the state" (Auyero 2012:9). Through Auyero's conceptualisation, it can be seen how Jyoti, Sita and Ritu are patients at public hospitals while also "patiently" being turned into waiting subjects of the poverty-alleviation scheme, as they continue to wait for direct transfer of welfare benefits into their state-initiated bank accounts.

Anthropologist Craig Jeffrey, who theorises political waiting among young people in India, argues that time is a crucial phenomenon in everyday politics of subjects (Jeffrey 2010:20). Also drawing on Bourdieu, Jeffrey argues "how temporality is woven into people's ability to navigate fields of power on an everyday basis" (Jeffrey 2010:20). Furthermore, "value of a particular form of social capital" such as the ability to navigate government bureaucracy is dependent on relative forms of value of capital in other aspects such as economic (Jeffrey 2010:20; see also Prothmann 2019).[30] This is clearly visible when the middle/upper classes, regardless of gender, are able to buy not to wait in queues, which in turn becomes their way of navigating long waiting periods in their encounters with the state bureaucracy (cf. Sen 2020). However, this simply does not answer the question as to why marginalised groups, such as the pheriwale women I know, continue to wait (cf. Auyero 2012:19).

Waiting for hope

If we follow Pierre Bourdieu's logic, waiting is premised on the basis of hope. In *Pascalian Meditations,* Bourdieu writes that making someone wait is a way to exercise power over their time. But this power is realised through "hope" (Bourdieu 2000:228). For Bourdieu, "waiting implies submission […] making people wait, of delaying without destroying hope, of adjourning without totally disappointing, which would have the effect of killing the waiting itself, is an integral part of the exercise of power" (Bourdieu 2000:228). This is the lens through which Auyero understands the experiences of people waiting in welfare offices because, in an encounter with a state institution, there is always hope of receiving the ID card or benefits one is waiting for (Auyero 2012:74; see also Khosravi 2017:80–81). This is clearly visible in the accounts of pheriwale women. Sadna, Jyoti, Ritu and Sita denote this through the expression of "not yet arrived" (*abhi tak nahi mila*), whereas the terminology used by local state officials includes expressions such as "it will arrive later" (*baad mein aaega*) and "you will have to revisit [the office]" (*phirse aana padega*).

It is these entanglements of the characteristics of the relationship with the state institutions which intricately tie together socio-economic and political rights and provisions. Hence, according to Auyero, here waiting is not simply "dead time" (Auyero 2012:9), time where nothing happens or has no use. Instead, Auyero argues that it produces "productive phenomena" (Auyero 2012:9) whereby the state is able to repress, through "habitual exposure to long delays […] a particular submissive set of dispositions among the urban poor" (Auyero 2012:9). Moreover, Sadna's multiple attempts to apply for the pension card and visiting several offices highlights how waiting is not experienced as merely "dead time" either, but that it requires subjects to act from time to time.

Value and waiting

Bourdieu's theorisation of temporality and its intertwinements with the value of one's social and economic capital offers a frame to name and contextualise the phenomenon experienced by pheriwale women. However, to annotate and understand their waiting solely through the lens of structural power and domination, or through structural violence, tends to miss the nuances of people's

lived experiences. For instance, it may overlook how people manoeuvre and sometimes challenge the imposition of waiting, as reflected in my own findings.

"Waiting implies submission" offers one aspect of understanding waiting, while delving into people's experiences to understand the complex ways in which waiting is construed can offer other means of conceptualising the phenomenon. For instance, in the quote presented at the beginning of this chapter, Jyoti exclaims: "A whole day of not being able to work!" when she has had to wait in queues for her biometric ID card. In other words, waiting in a queue means missing a day's work, which then leads to not being able to secure one's daily pay. Whereas, in the case of Sadna, waiting for a pension is so that she can access money which can then provide some relief. The pension would enable Sadna to work less in her old age, especially during times when she is sick and unable to work. The link between waiting and loss of money is where the materiality of value is the most tangible. The common phrase of "time is money" is traced by economic historian E. P. Thompson (1967:86). Thompson studies changing state policies and local work regulations of private companies in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain to show how time became a mode of control and discipline by employers. For example, the setting-up of a big clock on the factory floor allowed the floor manager to keep tabs on breaks taken by workers (Thompson 1967:81–82).

While Thompson refers to another era and context, his writing shed light on my own data. In Thompson's study, time also became an element for the workers to mobilise around during that period, which culminated in their demand for a ten-hour workday and payment for overtime (Thompson 1967:86). Time, money and, hence, value came to be intertwined, especially in work environments.[31] Thompson's focus is on the industrial capitalist shift of eighteenth- to nineteenth-century Britain, but the zeitgeist of 'time is money' remains valid in the twenty-first century to understand Jyoti's experiences as well (Thompson 1967; also cf. Weber 2001[1930]). In other words, waiting for welfare or state documents, in the case of informal workers, costs money, literally. For pheriwale women in my study, a workday spans twelve to fourteen hours, which may exclude housework and care work (since most of them are women) in addition to paid labour. Therefore, time is of essential value precisely due to the lack of it. Hence, to assume that pheriwale wait in vain, or are simply manipulated to wait, would overlook the nuances behind why people wait.

The reasons behind waiting are worth conceptualising in a more dynamic manner rather than simply assuming that the urban poor become "patients" of the state or that "waiting" only "implies submission". While frames provided by Bourdieu, Gupta and Auyero offer ways to contextualise the relationship between state and subjects, overemphasising the lenses of power and domination results in analysing only part of the experience of waiting (cf. Graeber 2001:30; Ortner 2016:60). Opening up what is of value to pheriwale, I would suggest, can provide another layer of understanding as to why the pheriwale women wait. This leads my discussion to the importance of official documents, such as the Aadhaar card, in the lives of residents in India.

Material value and waiting

Pheriwale would often tell me about the documents which they possessed, such as Aadhaar cards or bank accounts.[32] For instance, at the end of January 2019, Sita warmly invited me to her house. As we sat on her small single-room apartment floor, she showed me all the Aadhaar cards, her own and her children's. They were neatly wrapped in a plastic bag along with some other official documents, and were securely placed inside a bigger plastic bag. This bag was kept on the top shelf in her home, where the children could not reach it. Sita would have spent at least several days and multiple visits to gather the five Aadhaar cards.

At the end of December 2017, when I visited the mandi for the first time, I arrived around 10:30am, by which time some pheriwale were already packing up and leaving as the morning rush of buyers had declined. I saw a group of women sitting in the Delhi-winter-afternoon hazy sun, enjoying chai. I approached them and, as they kindly ordered chai for me, I introduced myself and my research. We chatted about the weather, pollution in the city, and the rising cost of the metro, but they also let me know that they had Aadhaar cards.

Over the years, I had heard my mother mention about various official documents and how she had carefully gathered them, and there was often an underlying, subtle sense of pride in her words. From this, I assumed that claiming possession of the 'right' documents is something that people mention seemingly casually but is actually regarded as an accomplishment, especially for 1950s and 1960s generation in India, who received most of their official documents later in their lives. However, the ways in which people secure and care for their Aadhaar cards

and other state-issued documents reveal what they mean for people in India, especially for pheriwale.

First of all, for informal traders, the possession of formally recognised official documents is valuable not only to receive state benefits but also to determine one's membership in the socio-political context. Since value is multidimensional, the tangibility of the documents enfolds within itself the value that it holds for the pheriwale women. Here, value emerges in multiple ways, not least in the effort that pheriwale invest in securing the documents. The ways in which they talk about the documents and care for them is indicative of how they value them. Therefore, conceptually, the dimension of value which is illuminated here is one of 'importance' (*zaroori*). Yet another point is that even in its most tangible and materialist form – pension cards, ID cards, voter's ID cards, bank cards – value is enmeshed into the intangible political claims inscribed into those state issued documents and cards.

This tangibility of value inscribed and even incorporated into the documents is shaped by state institutions, which, as already mentioned, make these documents a requirement to access various institutions and welfare provisions. This materiality of value also emerges through waiting for state-issued documents, thus tying together the themes of this chapter: the time, money, patience and emotions that people invest into the processes of acquiring these documents. For pheriwale women, waiting implies hours or days of missed pay as well as the promise of welfare that is threaded into those ID cards and social security numbers. Jyoti, Sita, Ritu, Sadna and other pheriwale women I met have all spent days in queues to make sure that they have the right documents, which has meant physical exertion as well as economic cost. So, in the context of pheriwale and the discussions surrounding value, waiting and formal political citizenship, it is clear that gender and caste are intimately intertwined in the experiences of waiting. Despite the implementation of various ID cards and documents that are directly tied to welfare benefits and for participating in elections in India, certain groups have remained excluded for generations, due to caste, class, gender and regional hierarchies.

For example, the proof of one's existence in formal state records can be determined by: voter's ID card, Below Poverty Line (BPL) card, ration card for food welfare, government-issued ID card for employees, bank statement, electricity and phone bills for proof of address, tenth- or twelfth-standard (grades in school) for proof of parents and age, passport, certificate to prove one's caste,

birth certificate to prove age and place of birth, and PAN card (for banking services). Thus, these documents frame the lives of everyone in India, but in differentiated ways due to gender, caste and class.

Across the country, the groups that remain excluded from these registrations for welfare, and subsequently that lack access to subsidised food and other welfare, are Dalits, *adivasis* (indigenous population), other economically marginalised groups and women belonging to these groups, like most pheriwale. According to a survey from 2016, carried out by Lok Manch (People's Platform),[33] which was conducted in several states in India, data shows that 19.5% of the sample population did not possess ration cards, only 64.3% had access to secondary school and 60.7% to high school (Lok Manch 2016:5–7). As of 2016, there had been stark regional variations, due to disparity in resources (access to education, healthcare, etc.) and unequal levels of investment by central government across regions. The data shows that, in Bihar, up to 47% of the sample population did not have Aadhaar cards, whereas in Kerala and Chhattisgarh the number who had no ID card was less than 10% (Lok Manch 2016:2–3). However, in February 2020, government sources stated that 90.1% of the entire population possessed Aadhaar cards (PTI 2020).

Nevertheless, simply possessing the required document does not ensure access to resources. Economist Reetika Khera (2019) draws upon data from a survey conducted among 706 mothers in six districts across six states in India.[34] The study shows that the majority of pregnant women and young mothers in economically marginalised groups are unable to access state maternity benefits due to the strange requirements. One such requirement, for example, is that during the application process pregnant women and young mothers have to show the Aadhaar ID number of the father (Khera 2019). If for some reason they are unable to show this, the young mothers are left out of the maternity benefit scheme. This is an example of one of the welfare schemes which is technically meant to relieve the burden of childcare for low-income mothers. However, due to the gendered nature through which the requirements are made (pregnant women's and young mothers' identities being tied to men's ID cards), accessing welfare becomes redundant. Lok Manch's 2016 survey on access to formal documents is resonated in Khera's study from 2019 as well: marginalised groups and, especially, women from marginalised groups remain excluded. Such sources highlight that despite digitisation and quicker channels to ensure bureaucratic processes, marginalised

groups, especially women, continue to wait for formal documents which provide recognition and access to resources.

Over the past few years, the Aadhaar ID card has become pertinent to conduct even routine everyday tasks in India. For instance, one's phone number, address, access to schooling, purchase of a gas cylinder for cooking, voter's ID card, banking services, etc. all require the Aadhaar card (cf. Bhatia et al. 2020). While this can ease the struggles of having to collect multiple documents, however, it can also cause hindrance in daily life if one does not have the biometric ID card. Meena, a young female trader, reflects upon its importance:

> If people don't have property, then it's difficult to take [out] and pay a loan. Because when you have plot/property [assets], then it's everything; if you don't, then you don't have anything. For example, look at me: I could not get an Aadhaar card. When I left Mummy-Papa's [parents'] home, then my name got cut from the ration card. Since there is no property in my name at my in-laws' house, I couldn't prove my address to get [the] Aadhaar card.

Meena is unable to prove to the authorities that her identity is attached to a permanent address, and so she is unable to obtain her Aadhaar card. This process emerges as gendered because, similar to many young women in India, especially among lower-caste and low-income groups, Meena does not have access to ownership of assets that can aid in securing formal documents (Agarwal et al. 2020:10). Technically, in order to get the Aadhaar card one does not need to own assets (cf. Bhatia et al. 2020; Chaudhuri and König 2018). However, Meena's residential status completely relies now on her in-laws (her identity being tied to her husband's parents' house),[35] as it does for many women in India (Agarwal et al. 2020:10). Formally, she is unable to prove that she has a 'stable' residential address, and in consequence is unable to get her Aadhaar card. Meena's account shows how securing even basic documents such as the ID card can become a challenge for marginalised groups who may not have stable residential addresses and that it can be even more difficult for women to access state-issued documents.

These narratives and experiences of the pheriwale provide an insight into the various dynamics that go into collecting and securing formalised documents. The effort, time, physical energy and money which the informal traders invest in the process of securing these documents reveal how valuable and important formal recognition is for groups that otherwise function within informalised settings. A

conceptual scholarly discussion on hope is beyond the scope of this chapter; however, I engage with the notion of hope which directly relates to pheriwale's experiences of waiting. For instance, apart from all the resources that they put into the bureaucratic process, hope is also entangled in such processes, which frames the waiting for welfare and documents that may not yet have arrived. In the next section, I open up this 'hope' further to highlight how formal citizenship is tied with value for marginalised groups such as the pheriwale.

Redistributive value in formal recognition

In order to fully engage with and understand the complexity of why pheriwale, along with other marginalised groups, continue to hope and wait in their relationship with the state, it is crucial to take into account their everyday working lives as well as the socio-economic positionality of informalised work in a hierarchy of economic relations. This discussion adds to how my research can conceptualise the long and structurally arduous process of acquiring documents and welfare, and in doing so it invokes the value of formal recognition in order to secure economic resources.

In an online essay, Arjun Appadurai (2013) provides a way into unfolding the nuances of waiting vis-à-vis the positionality of informal traders. He traces the developments of urban housing in unregulated settlements and informal spaces such as slums in various cities of the Global South, where the majority of the urban poor live. Housing policies and privatisation, according to Appadurai, have led to the urban poor becoming "bare" citizens (a notion borrowed from Giorgio Agamben 1998), who live in precarious housing within an indefinite duration of waiting:

> All such campaigns to claim permanence in the face of the temporary and dignity in the face of disposability – to claim full citizenship and thus exercises in nurturing what I call "the capacity to aspire" (Appadurai 2013).

In a context of precarious incomes and insecure jobs, the aspirations of formal inclusion (through ID cards, enrolment in welfare schemes, establishing a bank account) form a part of the reason behind Jyoti spending a day without pay by waiting in a queue, or Sita's care for her own and her children's documents on the

top shelf. This is not to romanticise the promise of formal membership but rather to highlight the everyday subjectivities of human conditions, and to avoid the conceptualisation of waiting by marginalised groups simply as compliance or submission, which studies by Auyero (2012) and Bourdieu (2000) seem to imply. As Meena states, lack of formal documents results in lack of access to other resources as well. Due to the lack of stable residence or assets, not only is she unable to get an Aadhaar, but it further hinders her from getting any kind of financial support from banks in terms of loans or direct transfer of welfare.

This directly links to Appadurai's argument, namely that the claims of full citizenship are deeply rooted in its material consequences. Therefore, waiting for formal documents and recognition becomes "a navigational capacity through which the poor can redefine the terms of trade between recognition and redistribution, and through confrontation and negotiation with political and economic powers show their ability to construct collective hope" (Appadurai 2013). While Appadurai's focus is on the conditions of housing among the urban poor, his analysis of the recognition of citizenship interlinked with redistribution and waiting deepens our understanding as to why pheriwale continue to wait and hope to obtain documents or welfare from the state. Appadurai points out how waiting can entail hope and aspiration to claim full citizenship, not unlike the arguments of Bourdieu. For instance, the right to vote is contained in the form of a voter's ID card, which recognises someone as a political subject; but obtaining state-issued documents can entail long waiting. For Bourdieu, making someone wait implies manipulation of the subject's time precisely due to the hope that is scripted into the process wherein the urban poor are made to wait by the state; whereas, for Appadurai, waiting and patience can in turn be realised as a strategy to construct hope.

If the pheriwale women in my study wait for public welfare provisions, it is not motivated only by the materiality of the resources that can have a direct impact upon their livelihoods and survival. Seeking, applying and waiting for welfare provisions are entangled explicitly or implicitly within their claims as political subjects. Thus, in its materiality (pensions, ID cards, education, etc.), the notion of value is intricately interlinked with socio-political values, "between redistribution and recognition" (Appadurai 2013; see also Butler 1997; Fraser 1995; Tonini 2016). The value or importance that formal documents hold for pheriwale and the acts of patience and feelings of hope that are scripted into the

relationship with the state illustrate the blurred boundaries of recognition and redistribution.

For historically marginalised groups, waiting for a state pension, ration card, national ID card or public housing is not only the way to secure public goods but also the means through which they articulate themselves and lay claim to full citizenship. Therefore, waiting is not simply submission to state manipulation of time but a way in which pheriwale arrange documents and welfare provisions for themselves and their families. My study shows clearly that gender, class and caste are interlocked in an analysis of waiting and value. Since the pheriwale are mostly women who belong to the lower castes, the possession of formal documents has meant opportunities to access public goods such as education and pension to which earlier generations never had access. Hence, waiting in the lives of marginalised groups emerges as an inevitable process in their visits to state institutions. However, to frame the act of waiting as "valuable" in itself would also overlook how waiting impedes the economic value-generating process of work. Instead I suggest that it is more fruitful to acknowledge that waiting invokes a dimension of value in people's lives wherein it is complexly interlinked with formal recognition.

As pheriwale women's narratives highlight, and as Appadurai argues, the legacies of the histories of identities that communities carry within themselves are weaved into the experiences of waiting along with the value of obtaining formal recognition for groups that have a history of being excluded from political subjecthood (Appadurai 2013). As many welfare provision processes can include paperwork that requires information regarding proof of father's or husband's identity, and due to the lack of assets such as private property among the majority of Dalits and indigenous population (and lesser still among the women), the possession of formal documentation has been only a recent development in the lives of the marginalised communities, and for women to be autonomous, formal political and economic members (cf. Agarwal et al. 2020; Khera 2019; Lok Manch 2016). Understanding the tangible value of documents as well as the implications of inclusion of formal citizenship needs to be taken into account in any analysis of waiting.

Reluctant waiting

Apart from the conceptual nuances of waiting and patience, everyday coping strategies also form part of the experiences. Such strategies can include going with a friend to ease the burden of confusing paperwork, as Sadna and her friend did during the application for their pension. On a chilly grey morning, I find Kaamini huddling between her piles of clothes. She tells me how she managed to get her documents in order:

> Earlier I was part of a women's group. Many of the Gujaratis [women from the mandi] were part of it. So they arranged ration cards and other formalities. […] I got my Aadhaar card too.

In our conversation on challenges in relation to state procedures, Kaamini also recalls how she does not herself explicitly engage with the experience of waiting. Instead, she shares how the local women's group, which was active earlier, helped her in arranging her documents. In this way, Kaamini navigated the local bureaucratic requirements and processes of waiting by being part of a collective. While narratives about collectives were rare among the pheriwale, this brief moment shows how groups devise ways to wait collectively.

Kaamini and the women's group add yet another dimension to our understanding of waiting by illustrating an act of collective waiting. As anthropologists Bandak and Janeja argue, "modalities of waiting are shaped not only by those who make others wait, but also by those who wait" (Bandak and Janeja 2018:8). They draw upon Valeria Procupez's research to show this dialectical relation involved in waiting. In Procupez's study on public housing among poor urban groups in Buenos Aires, the author analyses waiting and hope not restricted to an understanding of submission. Instead, for Procupez "waiting" is "while working to make something happen, it is (reluctant) hope and the formation of a collective subjectivity" (Procupez 2015:S63; also see Bandak and Janeja 2018:8). Here, Procupez presents a critical lens to read Auyero's conceptualisation of "patients of the state" (Procupez 2015:S62).

For Procupez, the point of interest is not to inquire "why do poor people comply?" Rather, the important question, according to Procupez, is "what people do while they wait in order to try and shorten the waiting time or what their forms of coping may be" (Procupez 2015:S62). Framing the question in this manner allows

us to look into the dynamics of the experience of waiting and the everyday complexities within which waiting is imbued. Moreover, Procupez argues that waiting does not necessarily rely on blind hope, but may also be reluctant as people may be involved in other aspects of their lives (Procupez 2015:S63). For example, Kaamini applied for her Aadhaar card by seeking help from the local women's group, so waiting for her was not experienced alone but along with a collective. Procupez argues that waiting is always "entangled": one does not simply wait for just one thing or event at one point, but instead as social subjects we wait for multiple things at the same time, and, hence, are in multiple kinds of overlapping and intertwined processes of waiting. For instance, Anita, a middle-aged woman, explains to me how she is waiting for many things at the same time, thus implying a dynamism in the experience of waiting. She is waiting for a small loan. While waiting for the loan, she is also waiting for her son to start to learn how to drive an autorickshaw. She is also saving up every month to support him, while she waits for the loan to buy her son an autorickshaw.

Waiting is shaped through intersections of caste, gender and class, as indicated by my material from Delhi and by Auyero's research. A key observation in Auyero's descriptions is how most waiting rooms in Buenos Aires, where he conducted fieldwork, had large numbers of women and children (Auyero 2012:93). Similarly, in the case of pheriwale women who have small children, mothers may take their children or leave them with an elder at home, their partners or the neighbours when they have to visit a state office. Thus, many times childcare occurs during an ongoing process of waiting. This was also visible during the demonetisation period in India (which started on 8 November 2016). One of the most extreme and highly gendered cases was reported on 3 December 2016, at the peak of long queues in front of banks, when a woman delivered a baby while standing in a queue in front of a public bank in Kanpur (Siddiqui 2016). As can be seen, people never just wait, as much can happen in the waiting process, including giving birth. Rather, diverse types of activities are ongoing even while waiting in queues, such as reproductive labour and childcare.

The entanglements are also shaped through separate moments of waiting. For instance, in Sadna's narrative presented earlier in the chapter, when she grew tired of waiting for her pension card she stopped going to the municipal offices. In her words: "Then I just decided to stop going. If I am not able to get the card, then fuck it!" Her hope for a pension cannot be understood merely as a hope that is

submissive to bureaucratic manipulation, as discussed by Bourdieu (2000) and Auyero (2012). It is a "reluctant" hope, which implies that Sadna does not just wait for the pension to arrive. Instead, after trying many times, she "stops going", in order to avoid "being pushed around". However, not waiting implies that Sadna may not receive a pension. Unlike privileged groups who could choose not to wait or do not need to wait for welfare – in other words, for whom not waiting is a privilege – for Sadna not waiting comes with a material cost. These moments and spaces within everyday life show how waiting emerges within complex negotiations of when and how to wait and for what.

Below, I delve further into the arbitrariness of waiting and "reluctant hope". Furthermore, it illustrate what it means for low-waged and lower-caste informal workers to be able to access formal education for their next generation.

Arbitrary waiting with reluctant hope

I juxtapose two interactions with Sita, one from December 2017 and another from 2019. In the 2017 conversation, Sita is talking about the lack of possible job opportunities as she had been unable to access education earlier in life. Later, during our conversation in 2019, she tells me about the struggles of putting her children into school despite having all the documents. I compare these two narratives of Sita's encounters with public education to illustrate how structures can remain inaccessible to marginalised communities, regardless of acquiring documents, over generations. The arbitrariness of waiting is indicated by the ways in which Sita's children at some point had been able to access public education, while at another point they are unable to do so.

> Riya: "Do you think you should be doing some other job?"
> Sita: "Jobs! If we were educated, then we could get a job. But we are uneducated – who will give us jobs? Where will we go? This is the question of food for our lives. We [pheriwale] cannot do another job."
> Riya: "What about the kids?"
> Sita: "Yes, I have kids. They are at home, they are small."
> Riya: "Do they come for *pheri* [to visit different parts of the city to collect clothes] with you?"
> Sita: "No, I go alone. […] I don't wish *pheri* for them. That's not how it should be. I am thinking of educating them. So that their lives are improved. This is nothing; we do this job for our kids."

Sita shares an experience of the inaccessibility of the welfare system, as it was for her parents' generation as well, despite being in the political capital and Delhi having been a global metropolis for generations, where there is more availability of schooling. The urban economy becomes a "waiting room", as Breman suggests (2013:34), for informal sector workers, one that holds an aspirational promise, a hope with possibilities to improve their livelihoods.

In our conversation in 2019, Sita shares with me that her children have not been attending school for a period of time. They had been going to school two years ago; however, for various reasons they had to change schools a year ago. In the new school, their documents were not considered to be 'enough' or even valid. Sita tried for months to get the 'right' documents in order, but losing days of work and being a single parent meant that she was unable to arrange the 'right' documents in time. She tells me that as soon as she finds time, she will approach the local schools again to enrol her children.

The arbitrariness of information and randomness in which documents are required for accessing specific public services ultimately led to loss of education for Sita's children. This brings us back to what Khera finds in her study: that securing the right documents cannot in itself assure access to goods (Khera 2019). These moments from my conversation with Sita also show how waiting is entangled. Waiting for public goods may cease for a duration of time but may spring up again later. In the last section, I approach the notion of patience to further deepen our understanding of waiting.

Politics of patience

Throughout this chapter, ambivalences and tensions of waiting emerge through the relation between state and pheriwale through acts of compliance, perseverance, coping strategies, hope, reluctance and negotiation. In order to understand this kaleidoscope of compliance and negotiation, it is pertinent to explore the "politics of patience". As Appadurai argues, the politics of waiting includes hope for formal inclusion of historically marginalised groups such as pheriwale. Appadurai also frames this politics of waiting by arguing, "one strategy, especially relevant to the politics of hope, is to be found in how these communities oppose the politics of catastrophe, exception and emergency with their own

politics, which is frequently the politics of patience – or more accurately, the politics of waiting" (Appadurai 2013).

For the pheriwale to wait for 'people's wealth' and poverty-alleviation schemes, or in Sita's case wait in order to be able to arrange access to schooling for her children, the politics of "reluctant" hope is closely tied to a "politics of patience" as expounded by Appadurai. In spite of the shift to digitised modes of e-governance, and the growing synchronisation of the Aadhaar card with various welfare schemes (cf. Chaudhuri and König 2018; Prasad 2012), the politics of waiting and politics of patience persist for a large majority of marginalised groups (cf. Khera 2019; Lok Manch 2016).

I end my discussion of waiting with a narrative which brings together all the themes which I have discussed in this chapter. During one of my last visits to the mandi, Sita, her daughter and I sit on her stretched-out *chaadar*. As we eat lunch, Sita looks at the tattered papers lying on her folded clothes: it is a copy of the questionnaire which I always carried around. Looking at the questions in English and the scribblings in Hindi on the papers, Sita asks me: "You know English, right?" I nod. Then she asks me whether I could accompany her for a short visit to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) office in the locality. "You know English! Say something in English – they will listen to you!" During her previous visits to the municipal office, Sita had been asked to organise all her documents in order to get her widow's pension. This process of organising documents includes getting photocopies of her husband's death certificate, her Aadhaar card, bank statement and proof of current residence. We decide after finishing lunch that we will meet the following morning, collect the documents from her house and visit the MCD office to ask how long Sita would have to wait after submission of her copy documents.

The next morning, I meet up with Sita. We first go to her apartment to arrange the copy documents. As we sit on the floor of her one-room home, with the documents laid out in front of us, Sita tells me of the arbitrary ordeal she went through to collect them. During her initial visits, the municipal officials told her to get her husband's death certificate. Later she was told to prove his identity and to bring their marriage registration certificate. This meant that Sita had to visit his village near Ahmedabad, Gujarat, in West India, to collect his documents. The return train journey with her four children took almost 18 hours. Finally, when she went to the municipal office in Delhi with all the documents she had

collected, she discovered that not all of them were required after all. Here, the arbitrary information provided to Sita is visible: one official had told her to arrange a number of documents, but on her next visit she found out that some of them were not as relevant to make an application for a widow's pension. As Auyero and Gupta note in their different studies, the provision of random and inconsistent information is normalised by the local state authorities and by people who take it for granted that applying for welfare provision requires the preparedness of waiting, multiple visits and being "pushed around", as Ritu and Sadna emphasised (cf. Auyero 2012; Gupta 2012).

Once Sita secures the documents that will not be required for our visit onto the top shelf, we put the copies of the relevant documents into a plastic bag. She tells her neighbour to keep an eye on her children, who are playing in front of the apartment block. Then Sita and I cram into an e-rickshaw, and make our way to the MCD office in Tilak Nagar. At the municipal office, we first ask the receptionist where we can find information about the widow's pension. We are directed into two rooms where local bureaucrats sit at their desks, and are asked to "go to the next desk". After a rendezvous at the third desk, Sita nudges me to speak in English to the next official. At the fourth desk, I ask the bureaucrat in English: "Can you tell us which desk we need to go to, to get information about the widow's pension?" The officer looks up at the two of us, a little surprised – probably because I asked in English. In Sita's experience of Delhi and her visits to multiple municipal offices, public banks, hospitals and schools, she had analysed the hierarchy of languages. When Sita had previously told me: "Speak in English – they will listen to you!", she was hinting at the lingering colonial residue that is engrained into everyday life in India. In India, one learns very fast that speaking English is a switch that makes state officials listen to a subject a little more keenly. Speaking fluently in English invokes one's class and caste, which may indicate one's access to educational opportunities. Gupta in his description of Indian bureaucracy explains how, the higher one rises on the bureaucratic ladder, the knowledge of English gets better and more useful to navigate policy documents (Gupta 2012:ix, 197).

The official at the fourth desk looks at us and then politely directs us to the large counter of numbered desks, and tells us to approach the third counter for information. Sita and I thank him and join the queue in front of 'Counter No. 3'. When our turn arrives, I ask again in English about the widow's pension. As

an immediate first response, the local officer waves her hand sideways, indicating to us to go away. She tells us in a bored manner that it is not available any more: "widow's pension is discontinued". Standing next to Sita, holding her documents, I can feel her hope as well as mine turning into frustration. At this point, Sita moves me aside and steps in front to tell the official that that was not what she was told the last time she visited the office. The official seems annoyed that we refuse to move away from her desk. We do not move, and we place the copies of the documents on her desk. She reluctantly gives up and takes a look at the papers. The local official continues to give us an annoyed look, as she passes the papers to her assistant, who is sitting in front of a computer next to her. After running the Aadhaar card numbers through the system, the official's assistant informs us that the standard waiting time is three weeks; they will pass on the copies to the bank and the local welfare officers, who would then process her application for the widow's pension. The official tucks the copies into a filing cabinet, and notes down Sita's phone number while telling her that Sita will get a call after three weeks. We thank the official and her assistant and leave the MCD office.

This incident confirms the following points discussed throughout this chapter. Firstly, it epitomises the effort, time and money that Sita puts into claiming the widow's pension (value is invested in order to claim value in terms of pension). Secondly, waiting here comprises multiple entangled activities that go into it (cf. Hage 2018). For example, waiting to get documents involves travelling, visits to the local municipal office, taking along someone who knows English and then preparing for the next round of waiting. Thirdly, and most importantly, this highlights that despite being "pushed around" time and time again, subjects are never just passively waiting. By asking me to speak in English with the local officials and by insisting on information from a local municipal officer, Sita is also shifting the terms on which she has to wait. Here, as Appadurai notes, the politics of waiting is shaped via a politics of patience (Appadurai 2013), deciding when and how to approach the local offices. Fourthly, an important aspect of this politics of patience is to understand and manoeuvre the arbitrary procedures that underline the superficial appearance of a rationalised, digitised bureaucratic structure (cf. Ghertner 2017).

As urban anthropologist Procupez and geographer Asher Ghertner argue, the arbitrariness of waiting and the confusing state instructions definitely restrict the economically and politically marginalised groups. As in the case of pheriwale

women, they have limited resources that they can invest in the process of claiming formal processes of recognition and redistribution: limited resources in terms of time and money, and constraints such as long working hours, childcare or old age. Nonetheless, to presume that marginalised groups are just "patients of the state" would be to discount the nuances of experiences encompassed within the entanglements of waiting. For example, here Sita shows that, despite the frustrating hindrances of arranging documents to apply for a widow's pension, she also navigates how and when to approach the state officials. Whether it is the strategy used by Kaamini to approach the local women's group or Sita's approach to take me along due to my knowledge of English, pheriwale's narratives open up how marginalised groups learn multiple ways in which to navigate bureaucratic procedures. As this chapter shows, expansion of access to welfare is crucial for creating more socio-economic inclusivity and contributing to the lives of informal sector workers who are at the margins of Indian society. Moreover, state intervention in correcting historic and contemporary forms of oppression through affirmative action is necessary within contexts such as India.

Concluding reflections

The primary concern and the motivation behind this chapter has been to find ways to frame, conceptualise and analyse the narratives of waiting which various pheriwale shared with me. By focusing on the experiences and accounts of visiting state offices, arranging documents and waiting, it becomes visible how pheriwale women navigate different aspects of building livelihoods, from working to arranging welfare for themselves and their families.

By following the accounts of waiting, I examine how pheriwale women experience everyday encounters with the state institutions. Firstly, the multiple narratives show how compliance and negotiations are intricately webbed into the relation between the subjects and the state. On the one hand, the encounters between the pheriwale and the local state bodies are shaped through their caste and gendered positionalities. This means that their experiences are framed through these intersections. Therefore, one aspect of their waiting is how the state manipulates time, specifically in the case of economically and marginalised groups. In other

words, through the mechanisms of making poor people wait more, the state clearly shows whose time is considered more valuable.

On the other hand, this compliance and domination of pheriwale by the state cannot be understood without taking into account the histories of marginalised groups more generally. The documents and access to welfare benefits are important and of immense value to groups that have previously existed outside these formal structures. Hence, what pheriwale women in my study put into waiting in their relation to the state – such as time, loss of pay, energy – is also a marker of the value that they put into claiming formal recognition and state welfare benefits.

The third argument that I present in this chapter is that, as these interview excerpts show, marginalised groups such as the pheriwale are not simply waiting passively but also shape how and when they want to wait or show patience. These main points, based on my data from the field and related to relevant literature, open the implications, the struggles and complexities imbued in pheriwale's waiting.

Chapter 7: Between autonomy and alienation

Like many traders in the informal sector, such as waste collectors or street vendors, pheriwale are self-employed. As self-employed workers who are at the margins of the informal economy, pheriwale are in a constant state of precarity. While they have the mandi at Raghubir Nagar as a designated marketplace where they sell clothes, they continue go for *pheri* as mobile traders they travel to various parts of Delhi, visiting households door-to-door to collect second-hand clothes. In their conversations with me, pheriwale often reflected on how stress is part of everyday work, due to erratic working hours, irregular incomes and daily uncertainties. However, many pheriwale also noted that, since they did not have employers, there is more autonomy and sense of control over time. By drawing attention to pheriwale's experiences and accounts, I highlight how they relate to their everyday work (cf. Räthzel et al. 2014).

It is a sunny afternoon and, as I sit with Meena, she tells me how pheriwale organise their day after selling their collected goods at the mandi:

> Well, after going from here sometimes I get to sleep for two and a half hours. Otherwise I need to prepare again for the next day, since the mandi starts at 4am. So it's quite stressful. But it's our daily work. Now, if you look around [*urging me to look around the open market*], whoever needs to go for *pheri*, they have left earlier. Most of them [people who are still around in the mandi] may have household chores, or maybe they need to go somewhere else, like visiting family, so they will go home and have lunch, take a shower, visit a relative.

Meena shares that due to the early-morning hours of the mandi she does not get good sleep at night. Yet, on the other hand, since pheriwale are self-employed traders, she is able to adapt her schedule after spending the morning at the mandi. The afternoons and evenings are organised on the basis of whether Meena has a

certain amount of collected goods to sell on, or whether she needs to go for *pheri* to collect more clothes.

Meena expresses the dichotomy of being stressed due to lack of sleep and the pace of the trade, as well as having some degree of autonomy as to how she organises her work. Pheriwale persist within the trade due to generational roots of the practice within the Waghri caste. On the other hand, as I have noted in the previous chapters, the lack of economic assets to invest in social mobility among lower-caste groups and the structural inaccessibility of better work possibilities within the Indian economy are significant factors, due to which the informal economy is overrepresented by lower-caste groups in India. In this chapter I focus on narratives of pheriwale which explore the everyday experiences of being self-employed within the informal sector. Similar to findings within previous literature which include accounts of self-employed informal sector workers, the value of autonomy regarding time and energy at work emerges as an important aspect of everyday work for pheriwale.

Within the scope of this chapter, I do not delve into the philosophical debates about the notion of autonomy (cf. Mackenzie 2019; Stoljar 2018; see also Christman and Anderson 2005). Instead, the aim is to acknowledge how pheriwale create values in their everyday working lives as they live and navigate paid work. The contradictions that may surface enable us to understand the delicate traces of human beings as "active, intentional, imaginative creatures but at the same time, physical ones that exist in the real world" wherein people "make their own histories, but not under conditions of their own choosing" (Graeber 2001:57). My data encourages me to focus on autonomy, and I find the concept of "relational autonomy" particularly useful to open up the experiences of the pheriwale, particularly women, who are at the fore of my research. The concept takes into account social relations and the complexities of living in a gendered, caste- and class-based world where people are not outside the social (cf. Mackenzie 2019:146).

In her study on *catadores* (waste collectors) in Brazil, anthropologist Kathleen Millar suggests that "relational autonomy" can explore "how a relative degree of control over work activities and time enables catadores to sustain relationships, fulfil social obligations and pursue life projects in an uncertain everyday" (Millar 2014:35; see also Millar 2018:92). Such an understanding of autonomy enables me to frame pheriwale's narratives in a more nuanced manner and it provides a way to recognise the complexities of freedom and constraints that workers may

experience in their everyday. Entangled within these accounts of relational autonomy and having control over time and work are narratives where pheriwale allude to, explicitly and implicitly, the experiences of working in alienating work environments. The contradictory complexities of the social or the dominant structures that workers navigate within also invoke a feeling of being separated from "self, work and others" as they may lack control over their labour process, and face highly hierarchical and inhumane working conditions. Therefore, I also engage with the concept of alienation as it enables me to name and understand how pheriwale women negotiate the labour market that is riddled with complexities of feeling in control and a sense of feeling unfulfilled, estranged and isolated (cf. Leonard 1998:135–137; Marx 1959[1844]).

These contradictory relations that pheriwale express about their work are also resonated among other informal sector workers who are mostly self-employed. Narratives of street vendors and self-employed waste pickers reflect such ambiguities as having stressful work routines and at the same time draw attention to how they experience relational autonomy due to the lack of bosses or supervisors (cf. Hill 2010; Millar 2008; 2014; Vargas 2016). As developmental practitioners Niall Cooper and Catherine May note, informal work is not often associated with terms such as "decent work" or dignity, and instead it is assumed that it is primarily (if not exclusively) a "survival strategy" (Cooper and May 2007:88). Due to the fact that informal work is considered the underbelly of the economy as well as the repository of low-skilled and low-income work by economic planners and the state, it is seen as something to get rid of eventually (cf. Breman 1996:6; Cooper and May 2007:88–89; Mezzadri 2020:156).

However, over the past decades, the informal sector in India has not only persisted but remains the segment of the economy wherein a vast majority of the population continue to work (cf. Mehrotra 2019:3). Moreover, 90% of the women involved in paid work make their livelihoods within the informal sector (Sundari 2020:710). Geert De Neve notes, in his study of informally employed industrial workers in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, that one of the major blind spots within the literature on the informal economy are the accounts of how informal sector workers relate to their work (De Neve 2005:8–10; see also Harriss-White 2017; Hill 2010; Leonard 1998; Millar 2014; Nguyen 2019; Vargas 2016). By highlighting the everyday dynamics at work in the lives of pheriwale, I build on and contribute to previous research to strengthen our

understanding of everyday working lives in the informal economy as well as deepen conceptualisations of work and what it means to people. Furthermore, an intersectional lens illuminates how caste, gender and class shape work and values that informal workers create in their everyday.

Having control over time and the flexibility of working hours is a crucial factor for many pheriwale, so I explore the concept of relational autonomy through pheriwale's narratives. This further links to the discussion of value and how it shapes work. Later in the text, I delve into the caste and familial trading practices to note how it frames pheriwale's decision to continue in this trade. Pheriwale women shared how reproductive or care work becomes a major part of the daily routine. As scholars such as Naila Kabeer, Susan Ferguson and David McNally note, women in the informal sector often work and take care of family members simultaneously (Ferguson and McNally 2015; Kabeer 2008). This means that childcare responsibilities may often overlap with everyday trading routines, and the division between home and work blurs. De Neve argues that many aspects of the working lives of informal sector workers are taken for granted within studies on the informal economy (De Neve 2005:8). An example of one such assumption is that informal sector workers engage in their respective trade solely due to kinship and caste ties (De Neve 2005:13). Another is that informal workers are bound within the precarious sector due to the inaccessibility of formal employment and lack of viable alternatives for low-waged workers (Leonard 1998:128). While these findings within previous research shed light on some aspects of the informal sector, unravelling the heterogeneity of working patterns, motivations and routines in the informal sector can provide us with a more nuanced understanding of work in the informal sector. In this chapter I therefore elaborate upon how self-employed informal work is not only a means of survival, but it may provide spaces to avoid deplorable work environments and insensitive employers.

"We are our own bosses"

One morning I sit with Vaneeta, Rahul and Pushpa. As we sip chai, they tell me how they structure their day-to-day trading routines and how physically challenging it can be:

Riya: "Do you go every day for *pheri* [to visit different parts of the city to collect clothes]?"
Pushpa: "One or two days I stay at home."
Vaneeta: "If there is a family emergency or a festivity or celebration, then I stay home. It's not important that I go for *pheri* all the time. We also have bodies [*laughs*]!"

Pushpa and Vaneeta also point out:

Pushpa: "We are our own bosses. Whenever we want we can go for *pheri*; when we do not, then we don't go. We are not slaves to anyone [*Kisi ki gulaami nahi hai*]!"
Riya: "So, apart from trading clothes, do you do other types of work?"
Pushpa: "No, we don't do other types of work."
Vaneeta: "We don't serve anyone [*gulaami*]. We work hard, earn our own living, eat our own food."

Depending on the demands of a specific day, the working day can look different for different pheriwale. Rahul, a man in his twenties, shares that the work in turn helps him structure his day. He prefers to go for *pheri* every day, which enables him to sustain a livelihood and save a little bit every month. Pushpa and Vaneeta, who have been traders for the past few decades, note that an important aspect of this trade is that they do not have to work for anyone. The term *gulaami* means 'servitude' in Hindi and Urdu. Both Pushpa and Vaneeta use this term to indicate that they do not have a boss or an employer. On another level, such statements also mark that they do not belong to caste groups who work in other people's houses as domestic workers or cleaners (cf. Torgalkar 2017).[36] When Vaneeta or Pushpa say "We don't serve anyone", it is not only a comment on their having no bosses but also a comment which reflects the caste hierarchies that are embedded within work in India. One of the alternative jobs available in the city, often referred to by pheriwale women, is paid domestic work. Especially due to the fact that they are located in Delhi, where there are many middle/upper-class households, paid domestic labour is a major source of employment for many low-income groups, especially women (cf. Grover 2018; Raghuram 2001; Sarkar 2016:509; Torgalkar 2017).

On the one hand, their association of working for an employer, or having a boss, with servitude is indicative of the structures of work where workers have less or

almost no control over time, tasks and labour. On the other hand, the intersections of caste and gender also significantly shape how pheriwale understand work and labour in the structures they are embedded within. I will return to this point about caste and gender later in the text. The former aspect of work is also reflected upon in other studies on self-employed informal workers.

For instance, narratives of self-employed waste collectors also note how self-employment is more liberating, albeit with the precarity of labour. Millar's study is based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, among *catadores*, who are self-employed waste collectors. *Catadores* collect recyclables from large garbage dumps and sell them forward to recycling warehouses (Millar 2008; 2014). In Millar's study, *catadores* often reflect that the lack of supervisors and bosses enables them to have more control over their time, determine the amount of labour they want to dedicate at a given moment, as well as keep all the earnings they make from their daily work without having middle-persons (Millar 2008:27–28). Many *catadores* who may find jobs outside the garbage dumps, with semi-/formal contracts, tended to return to the dumps due to bad working environments. One such informant in Millar's study notes, "The boss treated me poorly. I couldn't miss a day, not even if I was sick" (Millar 2008:27). Another informant, a 70-year-old woman who had worked at the dump yard for fifty years, states, "Freedom, right? I don't like to be ordered around and I also don't like to order others around. I like to collect" (Millar 2008:27).

Collecting recyclables from the dump yard can not only be precarious and dangerous due to conditions hazardous to health, but the lack of controlling and disciplining bosses is a major factor for *catadores* to remain within waste collection. As Millar notes:

> Unlike most members of the formal working class, catadores are in a position to determine the schedule, pace and intensity of their work. Furthermore, since catadores work in the absence of any supervisor, manager or boss, and therefore are not subjected to disciplinary practices that arise in conjunction with capitalist wage labor […]. Many catadores value these characteristics of their labor, often appealing the conditions on the dump as a reason for working in Jardim das Flores" [one of the locations within the waste dump area in Rio de Janeiro] (Millar 2008:27).

This is clearly evident in what Vaneeta and Pushpa relate. Since they do not have bosses or supervisors, they can take days off in times of illness or when there is a family emergency. They do not have to go for *pheri* every day and can decide the pace of the work.

For Millar such narratives illustrate the value of relational autonomy for informal sector workers, who work in highly precarious and physically unsafe work environments and do not have employment with social security (Millar 2008:28). The author critically engages with economist Guy Standing's notion of precarious work (Standing 2011). Standing argues that flexibility of neoliberal waged labour instils "anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation", whereas for Millar the highly precarious nature of self-employment is a "politics of detachment" from contractual work which results in some form of "relational autonomy" in self-employment (Millar 2014:49; see also Standing 2014:10). I do not lay stress here on relational autonomy in self-employed work within the informal economy to argue that self-employment is itself "autonomous" or to associate informal economic actors as "innovative capitalist entrepreneurs" (cf. de Soto 1989; see also Leonard 1998). Rather, I intend to draw attention to the contradictions within work environments in everyday working lives (cf. John 2013). For pheriwale, the everyday experiences of having more control over time and energy at work cannot be understood outside the intersections of gender, caste and class hierarchies, which I untangle in the next section.

As with many groups within the informal sector who are self-employed, pheriwale are not organised in conventional ways of organised labour, especially in long-term associations (cf. Harriss-White 2003:32–33). Though pheriwale rarely mentioned links to formalised trading networks or organisations, a few women noted that a women's council became active from time to time. Pheriwale would often sarcastically tell me that politicians and caste-based mobilisations were primarily visible during periods of election campaigns at the local and national state levels. The absence of socio-economic infrastructure for informal sites of work is evidenced not only by the lack of accessible welfare and social security, but non-governmental organisations seem to have hardly any links with a vast majority of people who work on Indian streets. While websites and brochures by NGOs may claim to have plans to "empower" or organise low-waged groups, the ground reality looks quite different. Bapat, in her study on Mumbai's cloth-traders, notes that groups such as *chindiwale* remain invisibilised even among

NGOs who work exclusively with donated clothes and claim to provide clothing to India's poor (Bapat 2016*a*). As mentioned earlier in the thesis, pheriwale have been trading second-hand clothes and have been part of the urban landscape of Delhi for at least the last century (cf. Norris 2010:48). Despite that, none of the NGOs I reached out to during my fieldwork, including the ones who work with second-hand clothes and donate clothes to the poor, such as Goonj, had any links with pheriwale. Hence, self-employed traders such as pheriwale cannot rely on organisations or development aid but have to create livelihoods for themselves and their families.

Caste, gender and class at work

In one of my visits to the mandi, I find Krishna and Keertan sitting in the late-morning sun with their pile of clothes. Krishna is in her mid-to-late fifties and Keertan is in her thirties. They push a pile of clothes away to make a small seating area for me. I make myself comfortable, adjust my recording device on my knee, and ask them about their daily routine. Krishna and Keertan both look dispirited that morning and sigh deeply before responding to me. Krishna has one leg stretched out, with a white bandage around the foot:

> Keertan: "We have to go back and forth in so many narrow alleyways [*gullies*] with the heavy bundle."
> Krishna: "It shouldn't be like this; sitting at home and working should be the case. Most of us are uneducated here."
> Keertan: "Yes, we have not studied at school […]."
> Keertan: "But this is our work from the beginning."
> Krishna: "Our people do this work."
> Keertan: "We do not do any other work […]."
> Krishna: [*sighs*] "We're just somehow making a livelihood."
> Riya: "Do you have kids?"
> Krishna: "Yes I have kids."
> Riya: "Will they work with this?"
> Krishna: [*smiles*] "Kids will also do this […]."
> Riya: [*pointing to Krishna's bandaged foot*] "Aunty, what happened to your foot?"
> Krishna: [*pointing to her foot*] "Oh, this? I got hurt when I was getting down from the bus – I fell. It really hurts me, but soon I am going home" [*smiles*].

One of the health-safety concerns which directly affects pheriwale on a daily basis are injuries due to carrying heavy bundles of clothes and utensils while travelling through the city. Krishna's ailing foot is a marker of an injury that can take place at work due to the nature of the trade. Older pheriwale, like Sadna, Vaneeta, Pushpa, Tina and Aakash, would often mention that they had aches in their shoulders and backs due to carrying heavy goods. Even younger pheriwale, like Sita, Rahul, Rohan, Jyoti and Jeena, mention that everyday bodily effects such as shoulder and neck pain are experienced due to walking with the utensils and clothes, on foot and on public transport. Similar to the catadores in Rio de Janeiro, pheriwale face everyday hazards due to their work as well.

Keertan and Krishna also draw our attention to the caste and class dimensions of the trade. Krishna acknowledges that her children will most likely continue within the same trade due to their caste. Keertan notes that her community has not been able to access schooling and other forms of formal training. Despite multiple policies to make education accessible, its inaccessibility for lower-caste and -class groups, especially for women, has been a characteristic of the developing and modernising India (cf. Gupta 2012; Harriss-White 2017; Kabeer 2008; Lok Manch 2016; Noronha and D'Cruz 2017; Yadav 2018). However, some pheriwale, like Anita and Sita, who have younger children, hope that their children will be able to get education in the near future or find alternative ways to get out of the trade.

Pheriwale women often emphasised the fact that they would never want to work in middle/upper-class houses as domestic workers. As I continue to sit next to Keertan and Krishna, Keertan bargains with a customer who has come to buy the clothes, so I ask Krishna whether domestic work may have been an alternative for her:

> Riya: "Have you considered other types of jobs, like working in people's homes [cleaning or cooking]?"
> Krishna: "No, we do not work at people's homes. We don't like it [...]."
> Riya: "What do you like the most in this work?"
> Krishna: "I just don't like anything in this work. But one has to use the mental strength to just do it. One has to work for one's stomach and to raise a family."
> Riya: "Do you have to go for *pheri* every day?"
> Krishna: "No, I go two to four days in the week for *pheri*, two to four days I can be home. When my mind feels like [*Mann-moji hai*] there's no coercion [*zabardasti*]. Like if one gets a job somewhere, then one has to go."

On the discussion of domestic work, Krishna points out that her community does not engage in paid domestic labour. In the Indian socio-economic context, such a statement provides a few insights: that Krishna would not work at people's houses, because working for someone else, especially the upper/middle-classes, could be coercive (*zabardasti*), meaning that it may entail discriminatory exploitation. On the other hand, when Krishna states that she would not work in people's homes it is also indicative that her community does not engage in this type of work: hence, Krishna is also invoking prevalent caste divisions. This implies that people who do paid domestic labour belong to other caste groups. Here, hierarchies of class and caste are both experienced as well as reproduced. Caste is at work not only in terms of structural division of labour within the capitalist informal economy, but is an intersecting process that is reproduced and ongoing in everyday life as well. Therefore, paid work within the context of the informal sector is not only shaped by caste, but caste divisions are further exaggerated within the liberalised capitalist Indian economy, which thrives on a patriarchal and caste-ist division of labour (cf. De Neve 2005:319; Harriss-White 2003:103, 176).

Similar to what Pushpa and Vaneeta reflect upon, Krishna also associates working for someone or being answerable to an employer with the term *zabardasti* or 'coercion'. The everyday experiences and entanglements of caste are highlighted in such reflections. Work environments present highly unequal structures, especially for pheriwale, belonging to lower-caste and class groups. The inequality of structures is not only materialised through low incomes or deplorable working conditions, but also from 'coercive' environments of discrimination. In the Indian context, narratives of workers and their relation to work illustrate how caste and gender seep into the fractures of twenty-first-century capitalist working environments (cf. Harriss-White 2017). The complexity of why Krishna is a pheriwali is due to the boundedness of caste and also the familial traditional roles that link occupation with caste. Yet, at the same time, the nature of pheriwale's trade vis-à-vis other types of work within the informal sector emerges as one with a certain degree of autonomy as well as a working environment where she can avoid *zabardasti* or coercive work regimes.

Alienating labour markets

Jeena, who is one of the younger pheriwale, is in her late twenties. She tells me in detail of the various employment opportunities that may be available to her in the local urban and rural markets. When I ask Jeena whether she would like to take up another kind of job, she says:

> Yes, of course. But what can we do? There are so many types of jobs. There is manual labour: ironing clothes, construction, brickwork. There are thousands of types of work, millions of types of work, if one wants to. One can work in mansions, clean and wash, and in offices. But then they scold and shout, [and they] do not give money on time, so we have to beg or plead. What's the point? Then, the soul hurts. Because you work hard, and if you do not do something according to their timetable, then they stop answering, or refuse to give wages; they do not show empathy or humanity. Then what's the point of going [to them for work]? So there's no point! As things are rolling now, I get to keep the money I earn. I can eat, and so time goes. This is the story of humans.
>
> In Gujarat, near my home town there is agriculture, to sow, grow, put water; there is a lot of work there as well. When the crops grow in a few months, then one has to cut them, store them, use machines, ask someone for their machines – that's a lot of work too. Massive amount of work for a few months […]. But here, I can pay the rent and monthly costs. No matter how much you earn, it all goes in rent and costs. Even if you earn 15–16,000, it's mostly rent… so let's say 3,000 [rupees][37] in rent, then bus [transport costs].

Jeena provides a brief overview of the types of work available in the labour market, specifically within the low-waged and low-skilled job sites. The sense of being "slaves" to employers or facing coercive work environments is illustrated by Jeena more clearly. However, as a younger trader, she does not associate the trade solely with caste or with familial tradition. While older pheriwale relate to *pheri* mostly through their families' relation to the trade as the primary mode of livelihood (such as Krishna, Sadna, Pushpa and Vaneeta), the younger generation of the Waghris in Delhi may have found alternative livelihoods in the labour market. While Jeena provides many examples of jobs that she may see herself doing, she is also explicit in noting that other types of work – such as cleaning, farming, construction, ironing clothes – also include intense physical labour similar to the

pheriwale's trade. In addition, Jeena highlights how agricultural work, especially for small-scale farmers, implies intense seasonal work for low remuneration.

Apart from the physically exhausting aspects, everyday hierarchies also shape how workers relate to their work. Jeena is very forthcoming in narrating how working for someone else, that is being an employee within unfavourable conditions, leads to extreme distress. She powerfully expresses how employees are put in a position where they might have to "beg or plead […]. Then, the soul hurts" when employers refuse to pay wages. This expression is deeply moving because Jeena provides a glimpse into how a workspace can become physically and mentally devastating due to strict control of labour and lack of compensation even after working the whole day. Jeena speaks from a memory of an experience of being exploited. Her anxieties and fear of alienation at work are rooted in the lack of "empathy and humanity" in hierarchical workspaces. Jeena's work-life account is both explicitly and implicitly alluding to discrimination which is intricately intertwined in the intersections of gender, caste and class as threads that weave together the socio-economic fabric. These intersections provide the conditions that allow for the perpetuation of a lack of recognition of labour done by lower castes, classes and women. Such narratives are not unique to pheriwale, and are also resonated in studies which revolve around experiences of lower-caste groups and work.

Barbara Harriss-White's study explores the working lives of waste workers in Tamil Nadu (Harriss-White 2017:95–111). Harriss-White juxtaposes various narratives of waste workers, some who are employed by companies that do waste management and other workers who are informally self-employed. Through such narratives the author highlights how the conditions of work even under a regular paid contract may not be less stressful to the workers. This is primarily due to the fact that many of the jobs in waste management firms are subcontracted and the employer company does not include the social security that is traditionally part of job contracts.[38] This results in a marginal difference between the wages earned by contractual workers and the self-employed workers. Furthermore, since the contractual workers are consistently facing the threat of being laid-off with short notice, having a contract may not necessarily provide a reliable means of income.

Another key finding in Harriss-White's study is that as jobs get more formalised, including subcontracted work, they become more male-dominated (Harriss-White 2017:104,108). This implies that for lower-caste women, access to contractual, formal and semi-formal job sites remains limited. Kabeer also notes

164

that under widespread public policies that are targeted to tackle irregular employment, under-employment and unemployment in India, such as the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), women are underrepresented and continue to find regulated employment inaccessible (Kabeer 2008:148). More recent reports suggest that women's participation in accessing state-initiated employment has increased due to policies such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which is an employment-guarantee scheme designed for rural areas. However, the participation of lower-caste groups remains low (cf. Swain and Sharma 2015).

Similar to Jeena's experiences of exploitative working conditions, the informants in Harriss-White's study also reflect how alienating it can be to work for someone and face discrimination, especially for waste workers (cf. Harriss-White 2017:101–104). Due to the lines of pollution and purity embedded into the caste system, waste workers are overwhelmingly from Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) groups and face severe discrimination since they work in the waste industry (Gill 2010; Harriss-White 2017). As for the younger pheriwale, even though the number of job opportunities available to them may be more than to the previous generations, Jeena's comments reflect that maintaining a livelihood in metropolitan cities like Delhi, including the rising cost of rent, may not be possible with subcontracted, semi-formal or agricultural work that may pay less than what she earns as a self-employed pheriwali, who has more control over her income (cf. Harriss-White 2017). Therefore, on the one hand, pheriwale continue to work in a trade that is shaped on the basis of caste, but the lack of viable alternatives in low-income job sites is also a major factor for many traders to remain within the trade.

As mentioned early on in this thesis, all the pheriwale who are part of this study are from the Waghri caste, which specifically belongs to states in West India. However, one of the few persons I met who was not from this community was Aarti, a middle-aged woman who belongs to the *mazdoor* caste from Uttar Pradesh (UP), a group that is largely involved with low-income construction work. I meet Aarti one morning when she is in a hurry, but she speaks to me for a short while, as the morning rush of buyers buzzes around us. Aarti tells me, "I started [going for *pheri*] since I was in Roorkee [a village in UP]. My aunt [*maami*, mother's sister-in-law] used to do it – that is how I picked it up." She says that this is generally unusual for her family and caste. She moved to Delhi and taught herself

the nuances of the trade in the city by observing other pheriwale and visiting the mandi often to pick up routines of the trade in detail. Currently, she organises her work by doing *pheri* intensely for a few days a week and then selling the collected goods at the mandi on the other days. Similarly for some other pheriwale and many other informal sector traders and workers, urban areas provide a whole range of jobs in the informal economy (cf. Breman 2013:5; Nguyen 2019:27–28). Aarti has established herself firmly as a pheriwali in the city. She has a couple of *garag* (regular households) who have been her clients for the last fifteen years. She tells me that due to the decline of incomes in rural areas, people are increasingly getting engaged in pheriwale's trade:

> Aarti: "Nowadays, many people are doing this. Earlier, not many people did it [from UP]. Now it is increasing. If there is no work, no one wants to work in the big houses of the upper/middle classes [*khotis*], from our caste. That's why there is preference to work with cloth."
> Riya: "But this is so much physical labour." [*Earlier, Aarti had mentioned how her shoulders hurt.*]
> Aarti: [*nodding*] "Yes, there is a lot of work. There is only hard work in this, nothing else."

Aarti also reflects what Krishna states: despite the physically arduous nature of pheriwale's trade, she prefers to go on *pheri* instead of working in upper/middle-class households. Though domestic work is also extremely physically exhausting, Aarti's preference to work with cloth is indicative of both the caste divisions as well as to avoid working in upper/middle-class households where there is more likelihood of facing discrimination and unfavourable employers. Aarti also points out that due to the lack of job opportunities in Uttar Pradesh, people are increasingly finding informal trade like *pheri* as a viable means to build and sustain livelihoods.

It is crucial to mention that caste discrimination is not only prevalent in low-waged and low-skilled sites of work, but can take shape in different forms even in highly-skilled and high-earning workspaces (cf. ILO 2007; Subramanian 2019:24).[39] In the summer of 2020, a case of caste discrimination drew international media attention (cf. Iyengar 2020; Mukherji 2020; Sarkar 2020). This incident took place at the headquarters of a global transnational technology company, Cisco, in Silicon Valley, United States. A Dalit Indian-American engineer faced discrimination at his workplace by upper-caste Indian-Americans for his caste identity. The engineer was

outed as Dalit by his managers to the other Indians working in that particular department; and the managers gave him a bad job-performance review for disagreeing with them on the issue of caste politics (Iyengar 2020; Mukherji 2020; Sarkar 2020). Moreover, as narratives of pheriwale highlight and as sociologist Sharmilla Rege points out, caste cannot be decoupled from gender in scholarship on work in the context of India and nor does it only exist in informal spaces of work (Rege 1998; see also Subramanian 2019).

Care through economic value

In Chapter 5: *Pheri*, I trace a typical working day and routine in the pheriwale's day. Most pheriwale work an average of twelve to fourteen hours a day, especially on days when they have to go for *pheri*. For pheriwale who are women and have children and other family members dependent on them, reproductive and care work may often take place along with their paid work. This indicates how the flexibility inherent in the trade, as well as having more control over time and energy at work, can aid mothers during their long working hours. The relative flexibility of time in pheriwale's trade enables people to shift the hours and days of work depending on the requirements of their household and family members.

Since they have control over their time and workspace, for example, at the mandi, mothers who have young children can bring them to the marketplace and take care of them during their working hours. Therefore, despite the precarity that shapes the lives of pheriwale, their preference for the trade reveals how care work and varying demands in a household significantly affect women traders and how they organise their work. Narratives of young mothers being drawn towards flexible working hours and flexible spaces of work are also resonated in other contexts of informal work in urban centres. Socio-legal scholar Ana Maria Vargas's ethnography on street vendors in Bogotá, Colombia, follows the lives of people who are coffee, ice cream and street food vendors and rickshaw-drivers (Vargas 2016). For example, an informant in Vargas' study who is a mother of young children states that she prefers to work as a rickshaw-driver rather than for an establishment owned by someone else. Being a rickshaw-driver enables her to have more control over the pace of work and time, which in turn allows her to handle both waged work and care work on a daily basis (Vargas 2016:214). Apart

from the autonomy that is valuable to pheriwale, the women also shared with me how this trade has enabled them to build livelihoods for themselves and for their families. For almost all the pheriwale, as Krishna and Keertan highlight earlier, trading clothes is the primary mode of livelihood. Some pheriwale, such as Sita, who is a single earning member in her household and has four children, find it challenging to rely solely on *pheri*, especially in the summer months, when the incomes of pheriwale dwindle due to the decline of business caused by heatwaves in Delhi.

On our way to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) office to sort out Sita's widow's pension papers, she tells me her summer plans. "When it's too hot in Delhi [in the summer], I take the kids to my village as their grandparents are still alive." Sita says that her village is just outside Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Her annual trips to the village allow her to meet with her extended family and help out the elderly members. She smiles and adds that these trips are spiritual for her as well, and that she can take her children to the local shrine of Mata Rani ('Mother Queen': a local goddess). Since villages around Ahmedabad (the biggest city in the state of Gujarat) are developing rural to semi-urban spaces, there is a wide availability of seasonal work. To take advantage of this, over the summer she takes up construction work in and near the village. She says, "Construction work is a lot of work [that is, physically exhausting] but [it] pays well", which enables her to save a little bit and support her family in the village. When summer is over, she returns to Delhi and continues with the pheriwale's trade. I ask her if all pheriwale did these annual trips to their villages. According to Sita, it varies depending on people's links and whether they have relatives in the villages. Most pheriwale seem to have lived in Delhi for generations, hence many people's extended families live in the city itself; whereas those who still have many family members in a village tend to visit them there more often. For Sita, it is important to see her parents and in-laws at least once a year as they are getting old and require more financial and medical support.

Sita also shares that since she is not working for someone, she can pick up construction work during months when she is unable to go for *pheri*. On the one hand, taking up seasonal work in Gujarat, due to the decline of incomes during Delhi summers, exposes the precarious nature of informal self-employed economies (cf. Agarwala 2013; Breman 2013). Yet, on the other hand, Sita has found ways in which she can support her immediate and extended families. As

Minh Nguyen shows in the context of Vietnam's Spring District's and Hanoi's waste economy and waste workers, informal work in urban and semi-urban spaces offers ways to fulfil desires and some form of socio-economic mobility (Nguyen 2019:69).

When I ask Sadna, who is in her sixties and has older children, whether her children would like to pursue work as pheriwale, she looks upset and states that they would prefer to take up some other form of job, in a factory or in a small business. "Kids don't want to do this. They say that as soon as they find some other work, they will leave this, and that will be good." As we speak, Sadna also explains how she herself finds pride in this trade:

> Earlier, I used to go for *pheri* often. I worked hard, I did everything. I had so much energy [*laughs warmly*]. My husband left 19 years ago – he left home. We still don't know where he is. But after that I arranged weddings for four sons and two daughters. And the four boys have a plot [house].

The plot of land where Sadna and her children live currently was bought from her savings. Later her children and their spouses expanded the house built on it by working as pheriwale; so for Sadna, the trade has been central for her family to build their livelihoods. Older pheriwale, who have engaged in this trade for decades, often shared accounts of saving up, arranging children's weddings, buying small plots of land and building livelihoods for their families with great pride. For instance, Anita wants her children to do some other type of job which does not require so much physical labour and walking around the city:

> Riya: "So will your kids do this?"
> Anita: "I wish to teach them something nice. They were in school for some time but then their father passed away. It's been five years. My kids were quite young back then. I have raised three kids on my own. Now they are older. I want to buy them an auto [a three-wheel taxi]. But I don't have the money right now. My son wants to buy an auto. So, I am saving and looking if a bank can issue a loan, then we can get an auto. A government loan would be ideal."

While Sadna is not thrilled that her children aspire to other types of work, Anita tells me that she would like her children to get out of the trade due to the physically and mentally exhausting nature of it. As parents, Sadna, Anita and Krishna share their ambiguous stance on their children's futures. While some

would like their children to continue in the trade, others would like their children to explore other types of work and forms of livelihood. Despite the various kinds of aspirations that pheriwale have for their children, a common thread that connects all the narratives is the understanding that pheriwale are building livelihoods not only for themselves but for their immediate and extensive families as well. The pheriwale's trade, which is often their sole and primary mode of income, is perceived as part of social reproductive care work. This is most visible when children are brought along to the mandi, where mothers not only trade but childcare occurs simultaneously. Therefore, the income-generating activities are understood as an integral part of unpaid care-giving (cf. Mulinari 1995).

Here, I would like to draw attention to the more materialist aspect of this care work and building livelihoods for their families. As single earning women workers, pheriwale such as Sita, Sadna and Anita have been able to support their families, build houses (some have also bought small plots of land) and arranged weddings for their children. In many ways informal trade in Delhi, an urban space, has enabled groups like the pheriwale to gain social mobility vis-à-vis the previous generations. Apart from the class-based discrimination and racialisation that informal workers face, a major similarity that can be noted across various studies on informal work is the discussion of socio-economic mobility (cf. Harriss-White 2017; Millar 2008; 2014; Nguyen 2019; Vargas 2016). However, in the case of pheriwale, to talk about mobility is more complicated due to gender and class and the ways in which they are tied together with caste. This is not to presume that socio-economic mobility is plausible in other contexts of informal work (such as in Hanoi, Bogotá or Rio de Janeiro), because recent global statistics show that both income inequality and wealth inequality have increased globally between 1990 and 2015 (World Social Report 2020:22).

Moreover, income and wealth are being increasingly concentrated at the top, which has been a marker of the early twenty-first-century global trend. For instance, while the incomes of the top 1% have increased, those of the bottom 40% have decreased; hence, the gap is widening (Oxfam 2020; World Social Report 2020; see also Bharti 2018). Therefore, though mobility can be interpreted through the change in consumption patterns by informal traders (cf. Nguyen 2019; Vargas 2016), the structural boundedness of economic class seems to have made meagre shifts on a macro scale. However, it would be dismissive not to take into account and acknowledge a fairly recent historical development:

women owning property and other wealth-generating assets. Nevertheless, the wealth gap is skewed against women not only because of the amount of their domestic and care work but also in terms of ownership of assets (Oxfam 2020; World Social Report 2020).

For pheriwale women such as Sadna, Anita and Sita, building up savings to take care of family members or investing in assets such as homes or autorickshaws for children is a major shift. This is due to the gendered nature of the income and wealth gap in India.[40] The specificity of caste further adds another structural material boundedness and, hence, intersects with gender and class. For example, for pheriwale women, owning property and other forms of economic assets is a fairly new phenomenon when we look at wealth distribution across caste, class and gender (cf. Bharti 2018). A study from April 2020 on women owning land in India shows that upper-caste women are more likely to own land as compared to lower-caste women, which include OBC (Other Backward Classes) and SC/ST groups (cf. Agarwal et al. 2020:25). The majority of women, across caste lines, become landowners most likely after the demise of their husbands, which implies that ownership of land through marriage continues to be the primary way in which women come to gain some form of ownership of capital (Agarwal et al. 2020:21–25).

In addition, as noted in the previous chapter, public social security such as pensions and maternity benefits are least accessible to lower-caste women due to structural constraints (Lok Manch 2016). Therefore, for pheriwale, owning assets and savings is significant and foundational historically, especially for women. This marks the value of capital that has come to be acquired by informal trading groups and how pheriwale have managed to keep income-generating activities running within the changing economic landscape of India (cf. De Neve 2005:319–320; Norris 2010). Furthermore, it also shows how low-income groups create solidarities through sharing their income and wealth among immediate and extended families, in the face of a state that has consistently been unreliable in providing welfare and public social security (cf. De Neve 2005:319–32; also see Gupta 2012). Here, the economic value, in terms of incomes and assets, generated by pheriwale is deeply entangled with social reproduction and care-giving activities which take part in the everyday life of selling goods at the mandi as well as on the larger scale of supporting and nurturing both younger and older generations of family members.

Empathy in the face of alienation

The parallels between accounts of informal traders across various urban centres in the Global South, among pheriwale in Delhi, catadores in Rio de Janerio, and street vendors in Bogotá, indicate some stark similarities shared by informal sector workers (cf. Millar 2008; 2014; Vargas 2016). In spite of the fact that the three studies vary widely on the basis of local political and socio-economic hierarchical intersections, and emerge from different social science research fields, the way in which people's narratives resonate with each other clearly illustrates how low-income and marginalised job sites are located in the global economy. On one level, this points to how contemporary twenty-first-century capitalism operates and encompasses within its fold many people who work in disjointed sectors within local regional markets. Yet, on another level, the importance of the value of having more control over time and energy at work is strongly shared by all the narratives, across these three completely diverse sets of empirical material.

Despite the conditions of precarity and varying intersectional contexts, the similarities in people's narratives point to the embeddedness of structures of informal work and universalising nature of capitalism (cf. Blair 2010; Polanyi 2001[1944]:48). In addition, seeking more control over time and energy to avoid discriminatory exploitation at the hands of employers within informal and low-income formal sector jobs shows class biases which form the basis of twenty-first-century capitalism. This further highlights how capitalism maintains and perpetuates intersectional structures of power. While the informal sector in India continues to be overrepresented by the lower caste, the informal sector in Latin America is overrepresented by racialised minorities such as the indigenous populations (Montes et al. 2016).

The resonance of narratives of informal sector workers across geopolitical borders highlights that people's relation to their work cannot be understood only through the material dimensions of working conditions and levels of wages or skills, but that the social implications of discrimination and the hierarchies of intersections also shape the everyday working lives of informal sector workers. Therefore, value at work emerges not only from the economic means such as wages and capital but is deeply interlinked with values such as that of relational autonomy and feeling dignified at work (cf. Cooper and May 2007). For instance, Jeena states that she prefers to be self-employed, principally to avoid discriminatory workplaces but

also because, for her, empathy is part of an economic exchange and important even when she is trading clothes with householders when she goes for *pheri*.

It is a chilly January Delhi morning, and Jeena and I order chai as we chat. This particular morning she has more time, so we sit in a relaxed manner as I ask how it is for her to trade with people, especially when she visits people's homes to collect used clothes.

> Riya: "So is there a lot of *chik-chik* [annoying haggling/bargaining]?"
> Jeena: [*shrugs*] "It's okay. Sometimes I reduce the price, sometimes they do. There needs to be an understanding, right? They are also working, especially people who work in other people's houses – they also go here and there, they also know. Being warm is important [to humans]. If you pull people too much, put too much pressure, they will also get distressed. So, I don't put so much pressure. It's fate, and in the end, it's hard work."

Jeena points out here the process of trading and bargaining with people during her rounds of *pheri*. In the previous chapter, I explored her narrative when she explains how the city is increasingly comprised of more and more gated neighbourhoods. Jeena says: "They are also working, especially people who work in other people's houses – they also go here and there, they also know.' Here, she is telling me her experience of trading in working-class neighbourhoods, specifically among householders who are working as cleaners and domestic workers in middle/upper-class houses. She emphasises that kindness and warmth go a long way in maintaining exchange relations during the trade. Jeena acknowledges that people who work in middle/upper-class households work hard and that they often have to travel to distant parts of the city. She reminds us of an important aspect of work to reflect upon: that in order to create dignified and less-alienating work environments, empathy and recognition of another person's labour is crucial. Therefore, in everyday work, trade and exchange is not just a means to derive economic value, but human interaction requires empathy and warmth. Even during this seemingly calculative moment of trade, Jeena extends her empathy, bearing in mind that the householder she is trading with may also be tired of their work. Jeena's experiences speak to Graeber's point when he explains that value at work is shaped not only by "self-interested calculation" but also a matter of taking into account narratives of people being kind and empathetic in everyday socio-economic relations, as these can shed light on how human beings create values at work (Graeber 2001:29–30; see also Ortner 2016;

Sen 2014). As Jeena illustrates, work environments can be made less alienating by recognising the work of people she is trading with.

In her 1998 study on contractually employed cleaners in Belfast, UK, social work scholar Madeleine Leonard highlights that most of the contractual cleaners were primarily immigrant women. During the long shifts of work, the contractual cleaners often faced exploitation by employers. In order to humanise their working environment, the cleaners built:

> strong supportive employment networks based on kinship, friendship and neighbourhood relationships [which] allowed the women to adopt their own labour market solutions to their economic marginalization. These networks humanized the employment experience and their refusal to be alienated from personal values could be viewed as a form of potential power (Leonard 1998:139).

For pheriwale, the value of relational autonomy, having more control over the time and labour process in their everyday trading routines, is a way in which they build less-alienating work environments even in the face of precarious working conditions. As the narratives of Jeena, Aarti, Vaneeta and Pushpa illustrate, when working for someone else in the Indian context where class, caste and gender intersect, discrimination and exploitation are major factors for the pheriwale to remain in the trade, not least their inaccessibility to welfare and education. As Jeena points out, discriminatory working environments can be dehumanising and, as Vaneeta explains, working for an employer in low-income and low-skilled work sites can feel like "*gulaami*" or 'servitude', which in turn can also be alienating. Therefore, to understand and study the informal sector solely as a means to survive would be to overlook the nuances within everyday work in the informal sector.

Concluding reflections

In this chapter, the main aim has been to capture the relation between pheriwale and their work. By drawing attention to the narratives of pheriwale, the everyday contradictions of working in the informal sector become visible. Work for pheriwale emerges through these paradoxes which invoke relational autonomy, having more control over activities and ways to organise one's day and not being

subjected to disciplinary bosses. At the same time, the physically exhausting nature of the trade also means being exposed to physical injuries, and the seasonal impact on the trade makes their income more precarious. Yet the way in which pheriwale value relational autonomy against the backdrop of intersections of gender, caste and class also shows how workspaces are made less alienating and less constraining on a daily basis.

One of the main arguments presented in this chapter is that it is crucial not only to focus upon the narratives of informal traders in order to explore the nuances of their working lives, but also to acknowledge that they may not be located in the informal sector solely to poverty or lack of alternative opportunities. In the case of the Indian informal economy, the intersections of caste, class and gender play a primary role in shaping how workers are positioned within that sector. In turn, paid work within a capitalist economy further aggravates and manoeuvres the socio-economic hierarchies. Moreover, an intersectional perspective can also aid in conceptualising how care work, for many women in the informal sector, is enmeshed in and is performed during and through paid work. For pheriwale, this care work involves constructing livelihoods for themselves and their families, which includes building savings, arranging weddings and owning small plots of land or houses. The ownership of assets by informal sector workers who are lower-caste women is a significant socio-economic trend of twenty-first-century India and has more potential to be explored within research.

The narratives of pheriwale illustrate how values of relational autonomy, humanising work routines, empathy and kindness are pertinent to construct less-discriminatory and less-alienating work environments. I would therefore emphasise that, in order to devise policies and create employment opportunities for informal sector workers, it is crucial to take into account intersectional hierarchies which shape the working lives of workers. In addition, along with concerns of the material and economic value of work, it is important to value issues of humanising work environments to make workspaces more equal and dignified.

The next chapter is the Conclusion, where I weave together the main arguments and map out contributions of this thesis.

Chapter 8: Concluding reflections – Value in the everyday

In this final chapter of the thesis, I am reminded of what Meena told me about the rising cost of transportation in Delhi, which is mentioned in the Introduction. Such details that are part of everyday routines provide a glimpse into how people work, how the socio-economic and the political seep into people's working lives and in turn how people shape the socio-economic ebbs and flows of everyday life. In this thesis, I have attempted to capture some of these ebbs and flows of everyday life of pheriwale, particularly of the women traders, within the context of the Indian informal economy.

It has been challenging to write and compile this thesis during the pandemic years of 2020–2021, as I have constantly wondered and worried about how life must have changed for pheriwale in Delhi and the people who devoted some of their valuable time to talk to me for this project. What this pandemic has reminded us is that not only are informal sector workers a group that is one of the most vulnerable to unpredictable changes in the global political economy, but they are also at the centre of multiple commodity and supply chains. Therefore, it is not surprising that international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) have consistently brought out reports over the past year to account for the incalculable impact of economies during COVID-19 (ILO 2020*a*; 2020*b*, 2021; see also Chen and Carré 2020). Such reports highlight that not only is it difficult to estimate the real numbers of people engaged within informal economies but also that studies on the lives of informal sector workers remain mostly overlooked within political economy. Thus, this thesis urges and hopes to carry on the analysis of informal work and informal workers' working lives as an important focus within the fields of the global political economy and gender studies.

Revisiting major themes

The primary aim of this thesis has been to centre the experiences of pheriwale in Delhi, in order to understand how work shapes the lives of these traders and in turn how pheriwale reshape conceptualisations of value. Through an engagement with the notion of intersectionality and by taking into account the context-specific hierarchies of caste, gender and class I have shown throughout this thesis how studying the working lives of informal sector workers elucidates multiple dimensions of the concept of value. The research questions, outlined in Chapter 1, which have guided and organised the structure of this thesis, are: How can the working lives of pheriwale women offer ways to unfold the multiple dimensions of value and deepen a theorisation of the concept? How do the pheriwale organise their working routines and how are they as traders embedded within local, regional and global markets? How do experiences of waiting for state-issued documents and welfare shape notions of value and pheriwale women's relation to the state institutions? How does a feeling of having control over one's time and energy at work frame notions of value in everyday working lives?

Within research, even such narrowly defined questions could have led me in various directions; however, my primary concern has been to shape the thesis by following major themes in the narratives which came up in my conversations with pheriwale. Therefore, this doctoral project has been facilitated by employing a qualitative methodological approach inspired by ethnographic fieldwork, highlighted in Chapter 4. As pheriwale work for the majority of their day, I made a semi-structured questionnaire while keeping in mind that pheriwale may not have a lot of time for extended interviews, due to the pace of their work. Overall, I was able to collect twenty-eight interviews, over the course of four months. In addition, fieldnotes and observations along with the conversations have been the core of the empirical material for this thesis. Over the past four years of this thesis project, I was able to conduct two rounds of fieldwork, which provided me with an opportunity to meet some of the traders over a course of time with one year apart. Since the second-hand clothing traders in Delhi are primarily, and visibly, women, a majority of my research informants have been women.

Threading together and writing a background against which pheriwale build their livelihoods has been difficult not only because of the pandemic over the past year but also because of the complexity of the Indian context. The size of the Indian

political economy, the various specificities across its federal-states and the vast body of literature on various and overlapping subjects have been challenging to navigate. While I am able only to scratch the surface of an enormous discussion on the Indian economy, however, I have constructed an analysis of the Indian economy keeping in mind an intersectional perspective. Hence, in Chapter 2, I have built a narrative of a background that offers an overview of colonial and postcolonial legacies of the Indian economy but also provides an outline of the socio-economic factors. By locating this analysis through the intersectional lens of caste, gender and class, I am able to show how the contemporary Indian economy looks in terms of work, division of labour and wealth, and income gaps across various groups. In addition, delving into relevant previous research on pheriwale, the informal economy, informal workers, street vendors and waste workers has enabled the analysis of my empirical material. Framing the context in this manner highlights how pheriwale traders, who are mostly from the Waghri community, one of the-lower caste groups from West India, and who are predominantly women, are situated within the Indian economy. I build on previous literature and contribute to these fields of studies, which I elaborate upon below.

Designing a theoretical framework while keeping in mind the ebbs and flows of working lives, especially while taking into account an intersectional lens inspired by Dalit feminist literature, has been thought-provoking for this project as well as for my own politics of knowledge production. Moreover, it has also been a rather humbling experience in realising the vast scope and complexity of debates on value as well as the potential to engage with them to understand everyday working lives. Over this writing process, I came across diverging theoretical and empirical research directions which I have not developed, but I present in the next section.

The theoretical discussions in this thesis have revolved around theories of value. Value as a theoretical concept has enabled my thesis to construct a narrative of the analysis of the empirical material by bringing all the trajectories together. In Chapter 3, I have outlined various ways of unfolding the concept of value. I build on David Graeber's classification and theorisations of value, and contribute to this theoretical discussion by combining anthropological, Marxist and feminist contributions and interventions into a conceptualisation of value (Alessandrini 2016; Fergusson 2020; Graeber 2001; John 2013; McNally and Ferguson 2015; Mezzadri 2019; 2020; Mies 2012[1982]; Mulinari 1995; Spivak 1985; Strathern 1988; Waring 1999). By doing so, I deepen and expand the theorisation of value

in order to account for experiences of the working lives of pheriwale women. This further enables me to highlight how the economic value of work and value produced by informal traders are intimately intertwined with intersections of caste, gender and class. Moreover, values that people create at and through work are shaped through the intersectional situatedness of workers within the socio-economic landscape. By putting various theoretical perspectives on value into conversation with each other, I am able to employ a theoretical framework which accounts for the multiple dimensions of value. With such a theoretical frame, not only do I contribute to discussions on value and labour theory of value, but I also construct a novel theoretical approach to study the working lives of informal sector traders.

Following trajectories

Throughout the analysis in this thesis, I have drawn upon certain aspects of theoretical debates to unpack and detangle multiple dimensions of value. Firstly, by locating value within labour, I am able to show how pheriwale's work, which lies outside production processes, is central for the community to build livelihoods as well as an integral part of the second-hand clothing supply chains. Secondly, by drawing upon Graeber's theorisation of value as 'importance' I shed light on aspects of pheriwale women's daily lives which are valuable to them. Thirdly, I engage with Marxist-feminist perspectives on the undervalued aspect of gendered labour, which is social reproductive activities including care work, primarily done by women. By doing so, I acknowledge and take into account the unpaid work that pheriwale women do in their everyday. In addition, by bringing such discussions on paid and unpaid work within a study on informal work I provide insights into how boundaries between paid and unpaid gendered work are blurred, especially in low-income sites of work.

Through these conceptual and empirical engagements, I contribute to the theorisations of value within political economy and gender studies by placing the informal working lives of women traders at the centre of the analysis. I draw upon Dalit feminist writings on intersectionality to argue that, in order to understand gendered patterns of work within the informal economy, one cannot overlook intersections of caste and class and how they interact with each other in low-

income work. Fourthly, untangling the multiple dimensions of value requires one to acknowledge that there are contestations and inner contradictions among conceptualisations of value. By tapping into these contestations, I am able to shed light on aspects of pheriwale women's work that are restrictive, exhausting and exploitative as well as build a nuanced understanding of the spaces of work which they value.

Continuing with this theme of value, in the first empirical chapter, Chapter 5, I follow a working day in the lives of pheriwale. Organising this section in line with the working day enables me to map out for the reader how pheriwale in Delhi go about their everyday work. Although, as self-employed traders, their schedules may shift depending on their day, by tracing crucial aspects of the trade I am able to show an understudied space of work within India's vast informal economy. Following a day at pheriwale's mandi/marketplace illustrates how various economic actors interact with each other. Pheriwale are not only responsible for collecting, sorting and selling forward massive amounts of clothes but, in doing so, they provide cheap clothing for low-income and working-class groups in the city as well as contribute to the local and transnational rag industry. Furthermore, regional and weekly market sellers in and around Delhi also rely on pheriwale for a portion of their clothing supplies. All the buyers and sellers at the pheriwale's mandi, including the tea and coffee sellers, food sellers, rickshaw-wale and, particularly, the shops where pheriwale buy kitchen utensils depend on each other for business. Therefore, by centring on the pheriwale's working day, I am able to show how the traders create and shape value in used clothes by constantly bringing them back into market circulation.

By locating pheriwale's work at the centre of this chapter, I contribute to fields of research which study informal economies, informal work and street vendors. Furthermore, by highlighting the work done by the informal traders, I show how pheriwale generate value for the economy of Indian society more broadly. While they may appear to be at the margins of twenty-first-century economy, pheriwale and their trade is directly and indirectly linked to the global capitalist flow of goods and services. Pheriwale's daily work highlights how informal work cannot simply be categorised as unskilled labour but in fact involves knowledge of utensils, clothes, navigating the city and recognising the demands of their clients (householders), who supply them with clothes, and of customers who buy from the mandi. Hence, I bring to light how pheriwale are not only embedded within

multiple circles of trade and are linked to multiple markets, but also how intersections of caste, gender and class are reproduced and maintained through their labour within the twenty-first-century global political economy. For example, while pheriwale are impacted by increasing gated localities in the city and the suburbs, the working routines of women traders is also shaped by safety concerns due to high rate of violence against women in Delhi (Datta 2016; Sen et al. 2020*a*). Through this chapter, I contribute to the scholarship on pheriwale specifically, as well as to literature on the informal economy more broadly.

Pheriwale's working routines may be disrupted due to a number of factors, such as ill-health, family emergencies or celebrations, or taking days off to visit family and friends in the villages, and so on. Apart from these factors, waiting for ID cards, pensions and welfare benefits from the state may also from time to time hinder pheriwale from going about their regular day. In Chapter 6, I focus on the experiences of waiting in the narratives of pheriwale women. Waiting in relation to state institutions provides a window to examine how informal sector workers encounter formal processes of applying for state-issued ID cards and bank accounts for themselves and their families. While waiting for bureaucratic procedures is something shared by all subjects within a governed territory, previous research and my findings show how marginalised groups have to wait longer in their encounters with state institutions. This form of making marginalised sections of society wait longer implies that there is a hierarchy of temporality vis-à-vis caste, gender and class, but also that state institutions recreate and practise everyday forms of domination and subordination. Control over time is not only a characteristic of state bureaucratic institutions but also a regular feature of capitalist working environments. Therefore, loss of time in waiting directly translates into loss of income. As the narratives of pheriwale women reflect in my thesis, waiting in queues or visiting local state or municipal offices multiple times for the processing of paperwork literally translates into loss of income, and consequently loss of time spent on economic value-generation.

For pheriwale, who are dependent on irregular income due to the nature of their work, missing a day's work while waiting in a queue is detrimental to their monthly income. At the same time, procuring welfare benefits such as pension, widow's pension or unemployment insurance may ease the burden for low-waged workers, especially for elder members or single-parent households. Moreover, in the context of India, where many documents and welfare schemes have been

synchronised with the national biometric ID Aadhaar card, the Aadhaar card becomes necessary for everyday life in obtaining the crucial state-issued documents and to register for welfare. For pheriwale women, securing documents and welfare benefits for themselves and their families is valuable in terms of their importance. By focusing upon the experiences of waiting in pheriwale women's narratives, I highlight how using waiting as a lens can offer an insight into ways in which marginalised groups navigate their encounters with state institutions. Such narratives show how waiting is not only the experience of being dominated upon through mechanisms of 'imposed waiting' by state institutions; they also reveal how people manoeuvre the state institutions by compliance and negotiation, between waiting and being patient. Therefore, while analysing people's experiences of waiting in relation to state institutions, I argue that it is pertinent to take into account the nuances of how and why people wait, to unfold this phenomenon of waiting. For groups that have persisted at the margins of the Indian socio-economic landscape, especially for lower-caste women who are informal sector traders, formal socio-political recognition through the ID card, a bank account or as recipients of welfare becomes vital. By investing valuable time, energy and emotions into waiting, pheriwale women show how they do so in order to gain documents or welfare which in turn are valuable for themselves and their families. In accounting for waiting and how it is intertwined with the conceptualisation of value, I contribute to the emerging discussions on the phenomenon of waiting and how it impacts upon people's lived experiences.

While waiting invokes contradictory experiences of compliance and negotiation, work in the informal sector also evokes contradictory positions of being restricted due to lack of viable options in the labour market as well as work which would ensure building a livelihood for oneself and one's family. In Chapter 7, I bring together narratives of pheriwale to juxtapose how working in the informal sector in India as a lower-caste group often implies being caught within contradictory spaces. Apart from the aspect of creating and maintaining livelihoods, many pheriwale continue within the trade as it has been familial practice for generations. Some generational differences are visible among the various pheriwale who shared their experiences of the trade and working day with me. For example, while the older pheriwale saw their trade primarily in terms of familial and caste obligations, younger pheriwale, like Jeena, shared experiences of exploring other low-income jobs. However, what was common among most of the narratives were how pheriwale associated working for someone else with terms such as *zabardasti*

(coercion) and *gulaami* (servitude). Within the context of the Indian informal economy, it is indicative of how lower-caste workers equate working for someone with coercion or servitude. Not only did the pheriwale women share with me that they specifically did not want to work in *kothis* (middle/upper-class mansions) but they emphasised how they value the feeling of having more control over their time and energy.

Most pheriwale women are primarily involved in this trade as their only source of income, although a few traders, like Sita, also depend on other types of work, such as construction work, during the summer months, when the pheriwale trade declines due to the heat. By taking into account how pheriwale relate to their work, I am able to show how value at work is not only bound up within material forms of building livelihoods but also evokes notions of relational autonomy and dignity. By continuing with a self-employed trade, which is riddled with precarities and exhausting physical labour, pheriwale's trade is an illustration of how inaccessible formal or even semi-formal contract-based jobs are. Moreover, as self-employed traders, pheriwale women are to some extent able to avoid discriminatory working environments with coercive supervisors or bosses. These concerns raised by pheriwale in my study cannot be overlooked in policy-making processes which are formulated towards the informal economy and informal sector workers. Through this chapter, I build upon and contribute to qualitative research which takes into account workers' perspectives within the informal economy, specifically studies which focus on workers in the waste and recycling industries. Throughout the analysis, I have consistently engaged with previous scholarship from various contexts to point out the shared experiences of low-income informal sector workers and traders. This indicates how concerns of working environments within twenty-first-century capitalism cross borders.

Future explorations

Throughout the final stage of writing and compiling this thesis, there have been numerous trajectories that I realise I have been unable to build upon in this study. Therefore, I list some thoughts and directions which can be further explored. First, a historical and an extended quantitative and qualitative study on pheriwale can help illustrate how the trade has evolved over time and the number of traders

involved in it across Delhi and India. A comparative study across various parts of India, such as Delhi, Mumbai and other centres of pheriwale or similar groups can shed light on how these groups are closely tied to the second-hand clothing and textile supply chains. The differences among the groups across the cities can also highlight how caste-based traders have shaped and are shaped by the specific contexts of the urban and semi-urban centres within India. It would be intellectually fruitful and crucial for policy-planning to study how informal sector workers, especially self-employed low-income workers, have been affected by COVID-19 and the several lockdowns and related restrictive measures imposed on large Indian cities like Delhi and Mumbai. Second, a conceptual study, specifically of the barter practices which pheriwale follow, has vast potential to provide more insights into how traditional forms of exchange persist and are transformed by the fast-changing twenty-first-century national and global political economies. Juxtaposing new cashless economies with old practices of cashlessness can provide fascinating developments of economic practices (Sen et al. 2020*b*).

Third, studying the commodity, supply, labour and value chains of second-hand clothing markets may provide more details about the various traders, suppliers and factories involved within India as well as across the locations where rag clothes are exported, which may have been collected by pheriwale (Bapat forthcoming *a*; Norris 2004; 2005; 2008; 2010; 2015). Fourth, despite emerging research on informal economies across the globe, there still exists a wide scope to explore, both quantitatively and qualitatively, how people are employed within the informal sector, and the nature of work involved. There are many sources in governmental and international organisations and academic literature that analyse the vastness of the Indian informal economy, which employs over 90% of the workforce, including agricultural labour (and 85% of the non-agricultural workforce) (Mehrotra 2019:1). In addition, the informal sector contributes to almost 50% of the GDP (Medina and Schneider 2018:47; Mehrotra 2019:1; Srija and Shirke 2014). However, the specificities of the groups involved and the kinds of income-generating activities which are present remain largely latent. Moreover, data which unpacks how caste and gender locate workers within the informal economy can provide a more nuanced understanding of how the twenty-first-century market economy in India reproduces and retains caste and gender hierarchies through class positionalities.

Fifth, a comparison of different forms of waste work or recycling work in India can highlight how caste-based groups have been historically marginalised within low-income jobs. A broader comparative study of waste workers across various geographic contexts can further indicate how marginalised groups build livelihoods within this expanding industry across the globe. Sixth, in this thesis I have been unable to engage with all theories of value due to the focus of the study; however, a more in-depth conceptual and theoretical work on value can be intellectually fruitful. Seventh, as mentioned in Chapter 3, there is an emerging discussion on whether caste-based work produces value or whether it just fosters the degradation and stigmatization of the labourer (John 2013; Pan 2021:132; Rao 2012). This is specifically argued within the context of labour involving manual scavenging, primarily done by the most oppressed caste groups in India. Employing a Dalit feminist intersectional lens to develop theories of value can challenge how forms and prescription of labour are undertaken. Developing such a theoretical framework may be critical and hold potential to intervene into widely held theorisations on value. The eighth and last point would be to further theorise social reproduction as a concept through an intersectional perspective of caste, gender and class which is equipped to explore the gendered forms of labour within low-income sites in India.

Final thoughts

I hope that in the future I shall be able to conduct further research on some of the themes mentioned above. However, to conclude, throughout this thesis I have explored the working lives of pheriwale women in the metropolis of Delhi. I have outlined how pheriwale's trade is situated within local, regional and global markets. By delving into the phenomenon of waiting, I have presented pheriwale women's relation to state institutions and, by engaging with the notion of relational autonomy, I have taken into account how they perceive their work and how they relate to the trade. Overall, I have argued in this research that a qualitative study from a Dalit feminist intersectional perspective is pertinent to account for and illuminate how marginalised groups, especially lower-caste women, within India's vast informal economy work on a daily basis and the issues and concerns that they value.

Notes

1. See Medina and Schneider (2018) for statistics on informal economies across 158 countries.

2. 'Third World' originally referred to countries that were part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during the 1960s and 1970s, which did not formally align with either of the Cold War power blocs. First World countries aligned with the United States (US) and the Second World countries aligned with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) during the Cold War era. The Third World included most of the formerly colonised countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. For a detailed history, see Berger 2004.

3. The five main European colonisers in India included the Portuguese, Dutch, Danish, French and British. All the imperialists arrived initially as trading companies, between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, and subsequently established empires (Kuzur and Basu 2018). For instance, the British East India Company arrived in 1608, but by 1858 the majority of the South Asian territory came under the British Crown (Chandra 1971:51, 150). The British and the Portuguese were the primary colonisers in South Asia by the nineteenth century. While India got independence from the British in 1947, the Portuguese left only in 1961 (Kuzur and Basu 2018).

4. India is a federal nation-state with 28 states and 8 Union Territories (UT) as of April 2021 (Arora 2020). For example, since Delhi is the capital, it is a UT, which has an administration at the municipal and includes legislative and judicial levels, though many matters of jurisprudence, such as law and order, are directly under the central government. The state where most pheriwale come from, Gujarat, has a separate legislature, judiciary and state administrative body (Svensson 2016). These divisions imply that there are lists of items which can be legislated upon separately by the state governments and the union or central or federal government, and a concurrent list which can be legislated upon by both state and union government. The Indian central state has bicameral legislature (two houses in the parliament) and the state governments are bicameral or unicameral (one house in the parliament) depending on the size of the states. India's federal system within a liberal framework has led to "competitive federalism rather than cooperative federalism", which means that states compete with each other for attracting foreign investment (Norohna and D'Cruz 2017:6).

5. The right-wing turn in electoral politics began in the 1990s when a coalition, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), came into power in India for the first time in 1998. However, in 2014, the NDA won a majority of the seats in Lok Sabha, the representative legislative house of the parliament. Subsequently, the current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, was elected in 2014 and again in 2019 (Chatterji et al. 2019:1-15). The political ideological driver behind the BJP is premised on Hindu majoritarian rule in India, and the belief that India belongs to Hindus, the largest religious group in the country (Bhatty and Sundar 2020). Similar to right-wing tropes in other contexts, the majoritarian view is established

by propaganda that the Hindus in India are marginalised by minorities, especially Muslims (Bhatty and Sundar 2020; Chatterji et al. 2019:1-15; Kinnvall 2019; Kinnvall and Svensson 2010).

6. In September 2020, the Indian parliament revised three labour codes: the "Industrial Relations Code Bill, 2020, Code on Social Security Bill, 2020 and Occupational Safety Health and Working Conditions Code Bill, 2020" (Magazine 2020). Twenty-four union labour laws have been merged "in a major boost to labour reforms" (Haq 2020).

7. For example, if we look at data on the informal economy, studies show that racialised groups which are marginalised are overrepresented across various contexts. The Black population is overrepresented in the informal economy of South Africa (Fourie 2019), Black and indigenous populations are more likely to engage in the informal sector in Latin America (Montes, Corrales and Singh 2016), whereas seasonal workers from South-East Asia and Eastern Europe work with more precarious and informalised contracts in Western Europe (Neergaard 2015).

8. The *varna* system divides Hindu society into four hierarchical caste groups and has been mentioned in ancient scriptures such as *Rig Veda* and *Manusmriti* (Jaffrelot 2010; Jodhka 2012; see also Karve 1959).

9. M.K. Gandhi is the primary figure associated with India's anticolonial movements against the British Empire in the first half of the twentieth century. Gandhi's legacy has been famous for resistance based on non-violence and civil disobedience (Srivastava 2010).

10. Within government jobs and higher-education institutions, the Economically Weaker Section (EWS: economically marginalised groups within the 'General' category) and People with Disabilities (PwD) are also entitled to reserved seats. For example, see reservation guidelines for Delhi University admissions (Reservations and Relaxations DU 2020).

11. The evidence of St Thomas coming to Kerala in 52 CE, and the existence of Brahmins in first-century Kerala, are highly contested within historical records (Fuller 1976:54; Thomas 2020; Varghese 2004:897). Syrian Christians are heterogeneous and include sects which belong to the Catholic Church or Orthodox Church, among others. Although Syrian Christians have followed customs of the Eastern Church and practices of dominant castes in Kerala, Nasranis claim that they descend from the Namboodiris of Kerala (a regional priestly class/Brahmins). However, historical and anthropological scholarship observes that the characteristics of work and labour among the group are more similar to the Nairs', who are a dominant caste (but there is also a debate as to whether they are Shudras or a higher caste). Similar to Nairs, Syrian Christians have predominantly been farmers or traders, and include groups which own land. Though, it is also not uncommon for groups to rewrite their caste histories and claim the highest status in an imaginary past (Fuller 1976:54; Thomas 2020; Varghese 2004:897).

12. Conducting a comparative study between the cities could be intellectually and analytically fruitful to further understand trading groups and value chains, although it is outside the scope of this research study.

13. Bapat explores the archives on Waghris, which include records from British administrators and anthropologists (Bapat forthcoming *b*).

14. "Data from India's 2004–2005 National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) documents a sharp rise in the number of female paid domestic workers and indicates that 3.05 million of the 4.75 million workers employed by private households were women." (Grover 2018:187). According to social and political science scholar, Shalini Grover, experts argue that the government

reported figures are significantly underestimated and the real numbers of domestic workers in India is much higher (Grover 2018:187).

15 With the terms 'formalists' and 'substantivists' Graeber points to the debates of the 1960s within economic anthropology. According to Polanyi, the formalist approach, by scholars such as Smith, Malthus and Ricardo, relies on the assumption that human behaviour is synonymous with the rational economic autonomous human nature. One main aspect emerging from this notion of human nature is that of economic maximisation. On the other hand, the substantivist approach instead looks at how people create livelihoods and how economic activities are not removed from the political, familial or religious, and thus are embedded. Moreover, proponents of this approach critique the universal generalisation of economic maximising and use empirical examples of non-capitalist societies (cf. Graeber 2001:9–12; Polanyi 2001[1944]; Sahlins 1976). Graeber counts Bourdieu under the umbrella of 'formalists' because Bourdieu interprets every action in terms of "self-interested calculation" for both capitalist and non-capitalist societies (Graeber 2001:27–29).

16 Marcel Mauss, in his classic *The Gift* (1925), coined "gift economies" for exchange relations that do not follow purchase and consumption but rely on reciprocity in order to maintain solidarity-based relations. While Mauss's research on such gift exchange practices revolved around Polynesian social practices, his conceptualisation of exchange not only challenged disciplinary assumptions of economics, but also has been a phenomenal influence within social sciences (Mauss 2002[1954]). By centring the discussion on gift, Mauss is able to challenge the taken-for-granted basis of an economic subject being self-interested and self-maximising. In addition, due to his focus on gift, he is also able to highlight that gifts are not only selfless expressions but often lead to reciprocal relations (Mauss 2002[1954]:84).

17 In Marxian tradition, a commodity is made up of use-value and exchange-value. Use-value denotes the tangible usefulness of goods, and exchange-value the price at which the commodity is sold (Marx 1976[1867]:126–163). Classical economics gives primacy to the exchange-value of a commodity and locate value of goods within the price, which is determined by demand and supply in the market. Whereas for Marx use- and exchange-value cannot be studied without accounting for the labour, without which a commodity would not exist (Marx 1976[1867]:126–163).

18 Scholarship which examines the interaction of caste and stigma-inducing everyday acts draws upon Erving Goffman's classic work. For example, economists Ashwini Deshpande and Katherine Newman (2007) in their study on recruitment processes of highly skilled labour point out how employers ask family-related questions in a job interview to determine the interviewee's caste background. Deshpande and Newman use Goffman's notion of "discrediting" to argue that applicants who had received affirmative action during their university education (and who primarily belong to lower-caste groups) felt that their qualifications were "discredited" (Deshpande and Newman 2007:4138; Goffman 1956:6). On the other hand, interviewees who had received education without affirmative action primarily interpreted the family-related questions as being important for human resources and recruitment processes (Deshpande and Newman 2007:4138).

19. The organisations I reached out to include Chintan (environmental research and action group) and Goonj (NGO for disaster relief, humanitarian aid and community development, focusing on clothing as a basic need). Both have headquarters in Delhi.

20. Demonetisation: The government banned 500 and 1,000 rupee bills overnight on 8 November 2016. Most low-income groups, such as informal sector workers, indigenous groups, lower-caste groups, small farmers, small business owners, transpersons, and even many women in the middle

classes, kept their savings in cash (much of it being 500 and 1,000 rupee bills, which was equivalent to around EUR 6.8 and EUR 13.7 at end October 2016). This led to massive liquidity problems macro-economically, and micro-economically it led to great distress among the majority of the population, who were forced to stand in long queues for months in order to exchange their then-invalid cash. Also refer to Chapter 2 of this thesis for more details regarding demonetisation.

21. The term 'aunty' is commonly used to address middle-aged or older women. In this case Aunty was a pheriwali and customer of Anita's who was buying some things from her.

22. INR 1 = EUR 0.013, which was approximately INR 1,500 = EUR 19.5 in January 2018, when I met Rahul at the mandi.

23. INR 20,000–30,000 = EUR 250–375 approx. in January 2019, when I spoke to Jeena.

24. The Aadhaar card, issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), is an identity verification document, and is issued to "any individual, irrespective of age and gender, who is a resident in India and satisfies the verification process laid down by the UIDAI" (Aadhaar 2019; see also Bhatia and Bhabha 2017:64). I provide more details in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

25. Demonetisation is explained in Chapter 2: Caste, labour and capital. Also see note: 20

26. As per the Global Findex Database 2017, in 2011 less than 40% of the Indian population had access to bank accounts. However, in 2017 around 80% of adults in India had a bank account (Demirgüc-Kunt et al. 2018:19–20).

27. The articles cited here do not go in depth into the reasons behind the long inactivity of the accounts.

28. For inequities in access to healthcare in India, see Baru et al. 2010; George 2015.

29. According to data on the healthcare sector in India, there are wide disparities across caste lines. For example, similar to trends in other sectors of the economy, upper-caste groups are overrepresented as healthcare providers and professionals (George 2015:7). Consequently, not only are the lowest-caste groups such as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) unable to access jobs in public and private healthcare, but these groups also face discrimination at the hands of healthcare professionals. This ranges from discrimination on the basis of untouchability, "unwillingness of health workers to visit" SC and ST houses, to lack of care for women during pregnancy (George 2015:4).

30. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore discussions on waiting and stable jobs, specifically among youth, see Jeffrey's ethnography in India and Sebastian Prothmann's ethnography among young men in Pikine, Senegal (Jeffrey 2010; Prothman 2019).

31. For theorisation of time, change in working patterns and spiritual internalisation of Protestant/work ethics, see Thompson (1967) and Weber (2001[1930]).

32. I was careful not to record or document any sensitive personal data that the informants showed me or told me. However, I found it useful to note how people relate to these state-issued documents.

33. Lok Manch (People's Platform) is a platform which describes itself as: "of and by the Dalits, adivasis, women, minorities, urban poor and other marginalised communities" (Lok Manch 2016:1). 100 organisations from 12 states of India are part of this and the main focus is to spread awareness and expand access to state-provided welfare measures (Lok Manch 2016:1). The

report by Lok Manch cited in this chapter is based on a survey conducted in the summer of 2016, with a sample size of 273,802 households across 12 states in India (Lok Manch 2016:1).

34. These districts and states include: Sonbhadhra in Uttar Pradesh; Surguja in Chhattisgarh; Umaria in Madhya Pradesh; Himachal Pradesh; Jharkhand; and Odisha (Khera 2019).

35. It is common in India, among most communities, upon heterosexual marriage, for women to move into the man's family home. In other words, women 'leave' their own maternal home to live with their husband (cf. Abraham 2011:74).

36 It can be extremely tricky to name castes or names of groups among domestic workers. Domestic workers are very diverse and can belong to any of the lower-, middle- or upper-caste groups. For example, upper-caste people may be hired as cooks and lower-caste to clean. The lines of pollution and purity are played out through household chores (Torgalkar 2017).

37 INR 3,000 = EUR 37 approx. in January 2019.

38 For instance, the private subcontractor in Harriss-White's study provides a contract with a wage (of around Rs 210 per day) that is 'just above the minimum wage' (Rs 180, or Rs 5,000 per month), PF (Provident Fund) without ESI (Employees' State Insurance), and an unreliable contract wherein the employee can be laid-off with short notice (Harriss-White 2017:99).

39 The International Labour Organisation (ILO) released a report in 2007 which includes data that shows how caste discrimination affects employment at the times of entry as well as at work (Das 2007; ILO 2007:9).

40 The average wage gap in India between men and women across various sectors is 34% (ILO 2018:24). In terms of wealth ownership, women in total own only 20%–30% of the overall household wealth in India; the world average is 40% (Tandon 2018; see also Bharti 2018:7).

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212

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