

# Preface

## Gendered Journeys, Mobile Emotions

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We were inspired to bring together this edited collection following our experience of researching and writing *Train Tracks: Work, Play and Politics on the Railways* (Letherby and Reynolds 2005). It was during that time that one day, in particular, stands out. As often happened, we were travelling together on an early morning train. On the table between us were scattered papers and documents; we were on our way to work. Later we wrote in *Train Tracks*:

Working together on the 7.04 from Stoke-on-Trent one Monday morning we were sharply reminded of one persistent gender stereotype ...

SCENE: Gillian and Gayle sitting opposite each other at a table. Each is reading through some (different) notes. Gayle's large work diary is on the table. The Train Manager walks down the train and Gayle says 'tickets, Gillian'. As he clips the tickets the following exchange takes place:

Train Manager: Good morning, having a 'Girl's Day Out' are we?

Gillian: No.

Train Manager: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were together.

Gayle: We are, we are going to work together.

We feel sure that this exchange would not have taken place if we were two men. Just as we assume that doctors, solicitors and artists are male (and put 'lady' or 'woman' before such a noun if the job is undertaken by a woman), we 'naturally' assume that all commuters are male and that women remain more 'appropriately' in the private sphere ... (Letherby and Reynolds 2005, 152).

This encounter (and others throughout the project) made us reflect on the interconnections between the concepts of gender, travel and emotion and in this book we, and the authors of chapters herein, focus further on these interconnections. In this preface to the book we outline our understanding of key concepts; make some preliminary links between them and briefly outline the structure of the book.

Gender is of course much more complex than just a focus on ‘women’ and ‘women’s issues’: it is about social and cultural expectations, behaviours and relationships built upon and framed around differences of sex. Thus a true understanding of gender has to consider both femininities and masculinities, the range of ways in which these can be expressed and the interrelationship between gender and other signifiers of social difference (such as age, class, ‘race’, dis/ability and sexuality). In addition our gender is not merely something that we ‘have’; not a fixed given but rather needs to be understood more fluidly as something that is re/constructed. In paraphrasing Chris Brickell (2005, 32) we agree that:

the gendered self can be understood as reflexively constructed within performances; that is, performances can construct ... [gender] rather than merely reflect its preexistence, and socially constituted ... [gendered] selves act in the social world and are acted on simultaneously.<sup>1</sup>

Travel is more than the concept of transport, or being transported from A to B in a box and/or on wheels, but less than an all-embracing concept of movement through spaces, or a euphemism for tourism: ‘[M]obility needs to be reconsidered as a multi-layered concept, rather than the mere accumulation of miles travelled’ (Fay 2008, 65). A concern with travel is one aspect of the ‘turn to mobilities’ (Sheller and Urry 2006, Urry, 2004, 2007). John Urry (2004) emphasizes the need to separate out the nature of five interdependent ‘mobilities’ that form and reform social life:

- corporeal travel of people for work, leisure, family life, pleasure, migration and escape;
- physical movement of objects delivered to producers, consumers and retailers;
- imaginative travel elsewhere through images of places and people on television;
- virtual travel often in real time on the internet, so transcending geographical and social distance, and
- communicative travel through person-to-person messages via letters, telephone, fax and mobile phone (Urry 2004, 28).

Focusing on ‘real’ travel stories challenges the view that mobility is becoming an ‘elusive theoretical, social, technical and political construct’ (Cresswell and Uteng 2008, 1) and emphasizes that ‘[u]nderstanding the ways in which mobilities and gender intersect is undoubtedly complex given that both concepts are infused with meaning, power and contested understandings’ (Cresswell and Uteng 2008, 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Where Brickell uses the word masculine or masculinity we have replaced this with gendered or gender respectively.

Traditionally, mainstream sociology (and social science more generally) took the masculinist route of 'rationality', which aimed to specifically exclude human emotion from analysis (e.g. Weber 1968). Emotion was felt to be 'irrational', or indeed the subject matter of other disciplines such as psychology. But as Simon Williams and Gillian Bendelow (1998, xvi/xvii) argue:

the 'deep sociality' of emotions – offers us a way of moving beyond microanalytic, subjective, individualistic levels of analysis, towards more 'open-ended' forms of social inquiry in which embodied agency can be understood not merely as 'meaning-making', but also as 'institution making'.

We would further suggest, with Stephen Fineman (2005), that analyzing such 'sociality' of emotions is a fundamental and necessary part of any investigation that attempts to understand, as distinct from 'rationally' categorize, the social world. Furthermore, pointing out that the word 'emotion' comes from the Latin, *emovere*, meaning 'to move, to move out', Sara Ahmed (2004, 11) suggests that 'emotions are not only about movement, they are also about attachments or about what connects us to this or that ... What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place.'

It is increasingly acknowledged that a full analysis of travel needs to include a consideration of both gender and of emotion. Tana Priya Uteng and Tim Cresswell (2008, 2) argue that 'understanding [travel] mobility ... means understanding observable physical movement, the meanings that such movements are encoded with, the experience of practicing these movements and the potential for undertaking these movements.' They add that each of these aspects of mobility – movement, meaning, practice and potential – has gender difference. In addition travel is also an emotional experience. Our emotional relationship with travel may be affected by feelings of nostalgia and affection or frustration and even anger. These responses may be prompted by our personal experiences as workers and/or as passengers and/or by historical and current cultural representations of and political influences – including those that impact differently on men and women – on travel and travelling. Trains, planes, cars and buses are spaces and places within which we may have to engage with the emotions of others (see, for example, Letherby and Reynolds 2005; Sheller 2004). Although motorbikes, bicycles, small single-person crafts (in the air or on water) and travel by foot do not offer the same kind of space within which to move around in quite the same way, such travellers do engage more or less constantly with other travellers in the same spaces. Travel and travelling then not only prompt emotional reactions but also at times require the management of, and work upon, one's own emotions and the emotions of others (e.g. Hochschild 2003 [1983], Frith and Kitzinger 1998). Emotions are also gendered, either through the differing experiences of social identities, or through cultural expectations of the 'normal' display of emotions, such as 'weeping women' or 'angry (young) men'. In each contribution to this collection, readers will find the

presence of emotion – sometimes overt and extreme, sometimes implicit or less overtly articulated – in addition to a gendered critique of the travel experience.

As we move/travel through this multi-disciplinary book we illustrate the process of making some connections between gender, travel and emotion and making sense of those connections. This book is based largely on auto/biographical reflections on gendered experiences of travel. Some chapters appear to be unrelated to the personal and only by relating the work to its author's biographical note at the beginning of the book does that connection become clearer. Other chapters clearly have overt connections with the author's experiences of everyday life. The book is divided into four main sections. Section 1: *Planning the Journey* includes three chapters each focusing on some of the background theoretical issues to a consideration of gender, travel and emotion. Section 2: *Moving Off – Autobiographical Perspectives* contains 15 short explicitly auto/biographical pieces in which authors reflect on personal experiences of gender, travel and emotion. Section 3: *Working on the Move* includes three chapters focusing specifically on travel workers' experience and Section 4: *Making the Journey – Travel and Travellers* features three chapters on travellers' experience. Finally, in *Destinations Unknown* we (the editors) reflect on what we have learnt, where we have got to and where else we might have to travel; both with reference to substantive and methodological issues and in terms of our editing experience.

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