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Beyond the mobility biographies, the social production of travel choices: socialization, space and social relations

Joseph Cacciari
Leslie Belton Chevallier

The cultural domination of the private car in travel or mobility practices can be assessed through several indicators, such as household motorisation rates (in 2015, 83% of households had at least one car, 35% had several—INSEE, 2017) or their propensity to use a car to get around, for whatever reason (65% of day-to-day trips of less than 80 km are undertaken by car—Quételard, 2010). The car remains deeply associated with freedom of travel, with independence, with the assurance of a rapid and effective mode of transport that guarantees optimum access to shops, services and jobs. With ownership and use of a car, the individual demonstrates adherence to the dominant norm of automobility (Urry, 2004) and is able to exist in a car centred world (Sattlegger, Rau, 2016). Several trends indicate that this automobile norm still has clear skies ahead: resumed rises in car traffic and sales in certain countries or where household economic circumstances have improved, citizen movements against fuel price increases ("Yellow Vests") or against the transition to an 80 km/h speed limit on the national road system.

Given that car ownership and use remain dominant factors in day-to-day spatial mobility, their lack would seem to signal that non-motorised people occupy a dissonant or subordinate position compared with car owners. The poorest households have fewer cars (Lucas, 2012; Mattioli, Colleoni, 2016) and move around less, are more immobile. This reduced capacity for movement is often perceived as a problem for access to employment as the car is still seen as the best way of obtaining a wage and affordable housing, even though this ignores the advantages that households obtain from proximity or from relative immobility (Fol, 2009; Belton Chevallier et al., 2018). Lower car use is also profoundly associated with gender differences. While rates of driving licence possession and car ownership have become relatively equal between men and women (Roux, 2012; Demoli, 2014), gendered differences remain in terms of distances covered and reasons for travel. Trips remain more local and more focused on domestic activities for women, in particular in households with children (Shirgaokar, Lanyi-Bennett, 2019). Apart from poverty and gender, carlessness (Sattlegger, Rau, 2016) or reduced car use are also linked with age. While French people are driving later and later in life, for older people stopping driving is an event that can signal an end of physical independence (Espinasse, 2005). At the opposite end of the life cycle, teenagers and young people still see passing their driving test as an essential rite of passage (Demoli, 2017; Vincent-Geslin et al., 2017). The car remains associated with a positive image of the world for teenagers, a synonym for speed, convenience, comfort, independence or security (Drevon, Ravalet, Kaufmann, 2019). The car appears equally indispensable, at least in representations, in low-density or car-dependent areas (Dupuy, 1999) where it seems difficult to do without the car by comparison with more urban zones with better public transport services or with mobility services that enable people to continue using a car without owning one. In such low-density areas, indeed, multiple car ownership is the norm (Hubert, Madre, Pistre, 2016).

Income, gender, age and residential location are variables frequently found in studies on variation in household motorisation. These studies highlight the importance of the life cycle in household decisions (Prillwitz, Harms, Lanzendorf, 2006; Nolan, 2010; Clark, Chatterjee, Melia, 2016; Oakil, Manting, Nijland, 2018). The arrival of a child or formation of a couple are circumstances conducive to motorisation. Conversely, demotorisation, understood as a reduction (either total or partial) in the number of cars owned by the household, is generally associated with circumstances such as moving to a more urban location, divorce, loss of employment (or more generally a fall in income), a child leaving home, the death of a spouse, or ageing. These events are associated with a sudden fall in car ownership, often linked with impoverishment or household breakup. A close examination of the phenomenon of demotorisation through these studies shows that only a small fraction of households in industrialised countries change their level of car ownership, whether upwards or downwards (Dargay, Hanly, 2007). In France, over the period 1994-2001, only 14.1% of households changed their level of motorisation (i.e. by increasing and/or reducing their number of vehicles), with just 2.7% of them opting for total demotorisation over the period (Dargay, Hivert, Legros, 2008). The same authors show that demotorisations are on average as frequent as increases in motorisation, the most common transitions being those where the household maintains a minimum level of motorisation. In fact, according to the data from the National Transport and Travel Survey (2008), only 8% of households seem to have entirely relinquished car ownership in France (Aguiléra, Korsu, Proulhac, 2021).

While demotorisation is rare in reality and sometimes a synonym of a position of social subordination, reductions in car ownership rates are nevertheless a topical issue reflected in the small but growing challenge to the automobile norm. Some authors claim that the millennial generations take fewer driving tests and are less dependent on the car than their predecessors (Kuhnimhof et al., 2012; Hopkins, 2017; Klein, Smart, 2017). On this account, they are more likely to consider car ownership as devaluing because it is in contradiction with the imperatives of more sustainable development, whether economic, social or territorial. This picture still requires some nuance. Nonetheless, it raises questions about the possible decline in the automobile norm, a trend on which certain public authorities are counting. In recent decades, in several areas, measures have been implemented to reduce the role of the car. Apart from the effort to reduce car dependency in low-density areas (Buehler et al., 2017), the purpose of such measures is to lessen the externalities associated with the car, such as congestion, air or noise pollution and road accidents, to mention a few. Big cities like Paris, London or Lyon, for example, have tried to reduce the modal share of the car in everyday trips in favour of public transport and active modes (walking and cycling), whether temporarily (pollution spikes) or permanently (e.g. incentives for bike buying, reduction in the number of parking spaces, banning of the most polluting vehicles, etc.). Given the scale of the climate challenges, plans are now afoot to reduce the number of private cars, encouraging local authorities, particularly in cities, to think about factors that might favour household demotorisation, or at least a reduction in car ownership levels. This goal, whose realism and robustness have been questioned, has been translated into concrete measures affecting the day-to-day experience of motorists and with the potential to change the choices they make in their travel practices (Rocci, 2007; Vincent-Geslin, 2012).

It is against this background of a tension between the still nascent challenge to the role of the automobile in day-to-day travel and the fact that the car remains a central lifestyle object, that we thought it would be useful to explore the extent to which the lack of a car, whether with respect to use or ownership, could still be a source of stigma for individuals or households. This attempt seems timely at a moment when many studies conversely seem mainly to focus on the positive correlation between carlessness and the ecological values of our era.

The concept of stigma will be employed in this article as defined by Goffman (1975 [1963]). It refers to a social attribute, whether physical or otherwise, that demeans the individual in the eyes of others and places the affected person outside the norm, separating them symbolically or even physically from "normal" people, those who occupy a form of normality. Stigma in Goffman's sense is conceived in relational terms, which is why it is generally appropriate to speak of stigmatisation. As a descriptive category, stigma in fact relates both to the social identity that it generates and to the social reactions that this identity elicits, together with the stigmatised person's efforts to escape from it. If ownership of a car and of certain categories of car constitutes a strong social marker and a norm in the quantitative sense (Coulangeon, Petev, 2012; Demoli, 2015), how do individuals themselves perceive the lack of a car? In what way can this become a demeaning characteristic? To explore the circumstances in which a stigma may emerge as

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a result of the non-use or non-ownership of a car can prove a particularly heuristic way to understand the strength and limitations of contemporary urban demotorisation policies, some of which conversely attempt to achieve their goal by stigmatising the car itself.

The purpose of this article is to cast light on the diversity of the lived experiences of demotorisation, as an oblique perspective on the question of the choice or obligation to demotorise. To try to understand how relinquishing the car may or may not become a stigma, for whom and in what circumstances. Exploring demotorisation through the prism of experience is ultimately a way to examine the social dimensions of the continuing dominance of the car. The article is organised as follows. We begin by briefly presenting the survey on which the article is based. Next, we will try to describe the diversity of the profiles of the demotorised people we interviewed, before uncovering some of the mechanisms that generate this variety of experience. Third, we will draw on this presentation to describe how demotorisation can be experienced unevenly, and sometimes in ways that vary in the course of a single social trajectory, as a stigma or as a positive dimension of social identity. Finally, this description will be explored further through the prism of the relation to "alternatives" to the car (public transport, cycling, walking). While these are generally perceived as alternatives to motorisation in urban areas, the analysis of our materials shows that they can only be understood and adopted within particular social histories and configurations that are directly linked with the (de)motorisation of the survey subjects.

Materials and methods

The argument will draw on the results of a survey through interviews (1) lasting 60 to 180 minutes and conducted in four urban areas in France (Bordeaux, Dijon, Lyon and Paris). We were careful that the sample should be as diverse as possible in terms of gender, age, residential location and occupation. While certain profiles are more common (urban women of working-class origin in their 50s) than others (few or no interviewees with militant views for or against the car), the diversity of backgrounds (spatial and social) is satisfactory.

The 51 people were identified as demotorised on the basis of data from the Parc Auto panel database (TNS Kantar) describing car ownership in France. Among these households, some had completely relinquished the automobile, others had demotorised only partially and still owned a vehicle. These partially demotorised households were less numerous than those that were completely carless.

Drawing inspirations from the *Mobility Biographies Research* (MBR) approach (Müggenburg, Busch-Geertsema, Lanzendorf, 2015; Chatterjee, Scheiner, 2015; Manton, Rau, 2016), more particularly qualitative MBR based on a biographical and reconstructive approach (Sattlegger, Rau, 2016), or on *Travel Socialization Surveys* (Baslington, 2008), the interviews were built around biographical storytelling by the interviewees about their socialization to everyday mobility and about the construction of a relationship to the car during this process, then about the process of demotorisation. In order to reconstruct these narratives, the discussions focused on descriptions of the practices, social relations and conditions that had shaped and continued to shape the interviewees' relationship to everyday spatial mobility. With regard to the driving licence, for example, we looked at factors as varied as the age of registration for the test, whether or not there was family pressure to take the test, the relationship with the instructor or instructors, the number of test attempts or the number of years between obtaining a licence and acquiring the first car. The purpose of considering all these factors that shape the individual experience with automobile culture was to characterise the relationship to the automobile norm as it had formed during the socialization of the interviewees and to record its variations over time.

While our approach is consistent with recent work on mobility biographies, it nevertheless departs somewhat from it. In general, these approaches combine qualitative and quantitative data to explore the long-term mobility practices of individuals over the whole life cycle of households, not in terms of the transition from one mode of travel to another alone (Döring, Kroesen, Holz-Rau, 2017). Studies have generally been structured around the notion of key events (Lanzendorf, 2010) that are considered significant for individuals and prompt them to reassess their mobility practices. Key events can be ordinary life events, such as outside interventions and decisions that decide the long-term mobility of a whole section of the population in a given area (Zhang, Van Acker, 2017). Very different events, adaptations or interventions can thus be considered to be key, depending on one's perspective. In most cases, these surveys rely on quantitative data, from panels or pseudo-panels, as well as on small sets of interviews (Müggenburg, Busch-Geertsema, Lanzendorf, 2015; Schoenduwe et al., 2015). The limitations of the studies, whether qualitative or quantitative, lie first in the

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notion of a key event, which tends to view a change of practice as the consequence of a one-off or even isolated event, often predefined by the authors and focusing in particular on traditional occurrences in the life cycle, such as a house move or a divorce. Instead, we take the view that changes in motorisation patterns cannot be explained in terms of a single event or a clearly identified and identifiable moment in the history of individuals. Following on from the proposals made on this point by Sattlegger and Rau (2016) in their survey on carless households, we were keen to understand the process of demotorisation among the people interviewed in terms of the social, material and biographical context of everyday mobility practices, in other words without automatically attributing an individual's relinquishment of the car to a single key event. We therefore considered the relinquishment of the car, of which demotorisation constitutes one form, rather as a long process that can play out across the entire life course, in the earliest phase of childhood and beyond. Beyond the description of specific situations, we sought to understand how certain households become carless whereas others in similar circumstances do not, or at least not immediately.

Through our corpus of interviews, therefore, we were able to look at cases of probable sequences of events over the full life course and in context. In the life stories studied, these sequences influenced the gradual process of demotorisation, whether temporary or permanent. This renunciation is thus embedded in personal trajectories and in their different components, both social and spatial.

A plurality of demotorisations

Three categories of demotorised people can be identified in the material. The first consists of individuals who consider themselves demotorised without having renounced car ownership. Hélène, (2) aged 53, separated, a full-time restaurant employee who lives in the outer suburbs of Paris, demotorised by a reduction in the number of vehicles in her household following her separation. But she has kept one, which she scarcely uses under normal circumstances, for work or anything else. Keeping a car has a precise function, which limits her adherence to the category of "motorised person".

> Interviewer (I): You're not thinking of getting rid of it [the car]?
>
> Hélène (H): Well, for the moment, no, because I mean, I've insured it third-party, there's no point taking comprehensive insurance, because it's a Twingo… […] I've got a parking space. So I mean, it's just an old Twingo, the old model, it's in perfect condition, but I use it just occasionally, as I told you. Afterwards, I probably won't because it's true that I live on my own, but it's true that I need to have this vehicle to be able to do my shopping, mainly, you see, and then occasionally to go off for a weekend and all that. After, in the future, I don't know, perhaps when I'm retired or whatever, why not, because you don't have the same needs…
>
> E: Yes, I imagine that it also depends on your needs.
>
> H: Exactly, but it is true that it is still perhaps a good thing to have a car for the occasional one-off, like me, as a standby, because my parents are getting older, though my father still drives. My mother has stopped driving, but my father drives. They are 86 and 83, if anything happens, it's good to have at least one car so that I can get to their house, if someone needs a lift to hospital.

The second category consists of people who no longer own a car, but continue to use one from time to time. One such is Françoise, 62, retired and separated, who lives in Lyon. A former driving instructor, she has not owned a car for several years. Her main explanation for her demotorisation is that she does not need a car of her own. However, she has continued to use a car after selling the last one she owned.

> E: And once you got rid of your car, did it affect your day-to-day life at all or not? […] And… that being said, you could have bought another one.
>
> Françoise (F): Yes. Yes, I could have, yes. In any case, I had no real need of one, because when you travel by car, apart from… to go… to my son's place, to look after my grandson, but… at one point, they were not in France, so I did it straight off… And then to go to the Part-Dieu, to go where I wanted to go, or to shows, but trying to park, it's crazy... So, there was no point.

Finally, the last category consists of people who felt forced to demotorise. Laurent, 53, separated, father of an 11-year-old daughter who spends one week in two with him, has lived since childhood in the 14th arrondissement in Paris. He has mainly worked in mobility related professions: courier, VIP chauffeur… Motorised vehicles, in particular motorbikes, were very important to him from an early age. At first sight, the equation "Paris = demotorisation" might seem unsurprising. But the story he told us is quite different: he lost his licence.

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> Laurent (L): So, it was… let's see it was 2 years after my mother's death, so it must have been 2011 […] In another two years I would have had my driving licence for 30 years, I got my licence in 1983. And I'm leaving the estate, I pass the cops coming the other way, they turn round and stop me at a red light: "Yes, Sir, you smell of weed." I say "No I don't". "You do, that's it, you're under arrest" […] So, arrest, blood sample. So, "Sir, you've been smoking, your licence is revoked…" So, I go to court, the judge is a real hard case and I refused the court assigned attorney […] He took away my licence and my right [to a car]… I mean, I had to go and take tests, for motor skills, you know, psychomotor tests… […] And after that, I could retake my driving test, the theoretical test or for driving. […] Either one of them and I could get back my licence, except I had no money left at that time, so I couldn't retake the test I needed. […] So there it was, I couldn't get my licence back, all of a sudden, no licence. After 5 years, cancelled. So that meant I had to sell my scooter, I had to sell my parents' car, which they had bought new. There it was, I had to rely on public transport.

These three cases show three different life experiences of demotorisation. Hélène has kept a vehicle for its standby function, without using it on a daily basis. Françoise disposed of her vehicle in a way that proved final, because she had no objective reason for owning one and had access to one through her job. Laurent was obliged to demotorise following the loss of his licence. While he wanted to get it back, he was prevented by his financial situation. These three registers or categories do not cover all the possibilities. What they highlight in the analysis is the variability within a single population category. The three individuals' social and economic situations are similar in several respects: no geographical relocation just before demotorisation, changes in family composition well before, modest incomes of between €900 and €1400 a month, and an urban place of residence with a wide variety of transport options. An examination of the three cases shows that demotorisation is not only plural because it operates on different discursive and decision-making registers, which vary between social or geographical categories. Demotorisation is also plural within groups of people who are homogeneous or similar in their socio-spatial characteristics. This means that demotorisation may be explained as an effect of social trajectory that is difficult to understand in the absence of a contextualised investigation. The social properties of categories of gender or class membership clearly have an incidence on the relationship to the car, as is extensively shown in the literature. However, their effect is mediated by and in the lived experience of the automobile, an experience that needs to be situated on a continuum ranging from the non-autonomous experiences of childhood through to or even beyond the moment of demotorisation.

Our corpus allows us to identify this finding about the importance of the effects of experiences on the driving force of social characteristics for different social configurations, from the most insecure to the most advantaged, but also for different categories of social context. What explains this variability within a single population category? What does it tell us for the study of household demotorisation? It seems to indicate that it is not so much the choice of demotorisation at a specific point in the biographical trajectory that is important or helps us understand the choices made in this respect, as the history of the relationship to demotorisation and to life as a car owner or user. This proves to be the dominant factor. By starting from this postulate, we can develop new ideas about what demotorisation is, but also re-examine existing ideas about the automobile norm. The sections that follow will focus on examining this connection.

The long history of demotorisations through the prism of automobile experience: a few mediating mechanisms

In surveys based on quantitative data, the reduction in the role of the car in households is related first to demographic factors (Beige, Axhausen, 2017; Clark, Chatterjee, Melia, 2016; Scheiner, 2014; Scheiner, Holz-Rau, 2013; Clark, 2012): death of a partner, divorce, a child leaving home, etc. In contextualised surveys, these stages of the life cycle, whether expected or not, are also very widely cited in interviews. This is also the case in our material. However, as we have just shown, whether or not the household surveyed has retained access to a car, demographic demotorisation (a reduction in the rate of car ownership as a result of a reduction in household size) is not always synonymous with relinquishment of car ownership and use.

Demotorisation is a process that needs to see in relation to the process that precedes it: that of motorisation. To understand how individuals give up this everyday object—the private car—it would therefore seem necessary to reconstruct the process whereby they adopted it in the first place, the role that it played in their practices or the practices of their family circle (parents, peers, progeny). To put it differently, more than the events that date a turning point in household automobile practices, the

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way to understand the sources of demotorisation is to situate this turning point within the totality of an individual's socio-spatial trajectories.

It is difficult in a single article to show all the mechanisms that punctuate the trajectories of individuals with respect to the car, and that are responsible for the degree of ease with which they are subsequently able to relinquish ownership or use. Here, we will concentrate on some of the mechanisms that seemed to us most significant or to carry most potential for future research.

Story of a thwarted relationship to the "road": the fear of driving or the personal history of driving, irrespective of events

In the responses of our interviewees, fear of driving was often referred to in the gradual decision to do without a car. This fear could be the consequence of several earlier events. Stéphanie, a 64-year-old, totally demotorised, retired former nurse living in Paris, told us how this feeling had coloured her entire driving career.

> Stéphanie (S): Ah, so, I was always a bit frightened, particularly at the beginning, I don't know, the first time I had to drive across a square in Paris, I was ready to dump the car with the keys in the ignition… in the middle of the square, it was Place de la République. And I found that, forcing my way into the traffic, I found it… […] so, I didn't want to force my way, that wasn't really my… my thing. […] Until somebody said to me "But Stéphanie, your car is an old wreck, oh, go on, take the plunge, they're the ones who will be worried about you scratching their motor".

Amélie, a 54-year-old, separated financial controller living in the outer suburbs of Paris, was another one for whom fear was a constant feature of her driving career. Following her divorce, she left the village where she lived with her former husband for a town with better shops and a regional express train station. This decision was linked with her absolute refusal to drive:

> E: Yes. Okay. And it was when you were learning to drive that you realised that you didn't like driving, in fact, or…? How did it happen?
>
> Amélie (A): I don't really know, being frightened, I've no idea… I've never had an accident, thank God, I never experienced an accident, whether as a passenger or driver, but somehow, as I told you, it makes me nervous…me… I get stressed, in the car. I always have the impression that a car, it's going to be… it overtakes… I get nervous. On the motorway, when people overtake or whatever… or when I'm on the road, I, there are always people who tailgate you,… a truck… driving alongside a truck, I get stressed. When there's some kind of big vehicle alongside, I feel "My God…" That's the way it is, I know, it's probably stupid, but there it is, I… cars make me nervous. Even as a passenger. Perhaps a bit less when it's me driving. There you are, but… what's more, I've never driven on my own. I've never driven without somebody else in the car.

These verbatims illustrate how fear of driving cannot necessarily be linked with an event or a turning point in an individual's automobile trajectory. Experiencing an accident, either personally or affecting someone close, can lead to an attitude to the car in which the fear of driving, of having an accident, is already present. It is constructed throughout the trajectory. The negative experiences of an accident then reinforce the first frightening experiences or stories about driving and about cars. These experiences are perhaps exacerbated here by a gendered socialization to the car. This may contribute to the construction of a nervous attitude to the car, or increase the probability of such a nervous attitude developing. However, it should be noted that this kind of relationship to the car also occurs among men and should not automatically be reduced or ascribed to gender alone, which may sometimes be confused with the interviewee's sex. There are two questions that might be asked here about the gender variable: how does it contribute to the construction of the relationship to the automobile norm and how can the relationship to the automobile maintain "gendered" identification?

Without going further in the exploration of this problem, the mechanism of fear signals the impact of past experiences in the present relationship to the car. This kind of mechanism therefore prompts us to pay particular attention to the stories associated with the automobile norm or experience. It is likely to have a powerful impact on present choices, sometimes even relinquishment of the car when circumstances seem favourable to such a choice. This does not preclude considering the socio-spatial situation of the interviewee. However, the two approaches should be able to work together to explain why, in equivalent social circumstances, some people relinquish the car and others do not.

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The power of the automobile norm: stigma and stigma reversal

To be more precise, we need to look at the internalisation of the automobile norm and its coercive force. Abandoning the use of a car for travel is a process that can vary in duration, so the decision is embedded in time. It depends in particular on how individuals are socialised to the car: ranging from the presence of the automobile norm in the family circle in early childhood, to the experience of obtaining a driving licence, to the sensation experienced on the road, as we have just seen.

The earlier and more forcefully people have been socialised to the car, the harder it is likely to be for them to give it up (Vincent-Geslin, 2012). By socialization to the automobile, we mean the process that begins in childhood and continues in adulthood and induces individuals to internalise the perception of the car as the dominant and most efficient mode of travel for getting from A to B by comparison with other modes.

This is not to say that the dominance of the automobile norm as a mode of travel, and the entire culture that it generates, automatically impacts individuals simply through the regularity of its occurrence in individual life experiences. We suggest that it requires much more, because it has to dominate and maintain itself in the reiteration of different experiences, including discursive experiences such as, for example, the assertion that "the car is essential", a renewal or reformulation of the relationship to the car that can be further facilitated by the social reality—understood as the materiality of the world—within which the individual is embedded.

In this way, socialization to the automobile norm is considered as the process which, in a given society, leads to the car being perceived as the norm for purposes of travel and to this perception being perpetuated over time. Reiterated in minds and in things, this norm supposedly almost automatically marks out those who do not conform to it as demotorised, in particular those who no longer have a car. Through a knock-on effect and beyond the actual use or ownership of a car, the automobile norm is also given practical form in the very extensive incidence of the driving licence within the population (Roux, 2012).

Starting from the idea that all the individuals we interviewed had to varying degrees been socialised to the car and to equally varying degrees had internalised the fact that the car is the dominant norm in the sphere of travel, the question is to what extent the absence of a car or of car-based mobility does or does not constitute a stigma, a status-lowering attribute? This mechanism of stigmatisation in fact proved important to understanding the demotorisation trajectories of our interviewees.

The lack of a car is not of course a stigma in itself and for everybody. For example, several people we met grew up in areas of low population density, in the countryside, in territories considered to be car-dependent. Depending on the context (generation, socio-economic or spatial conditions) in which they grew up, they were not necessarily socialised to the automobile in the same way.

Let us take the case of Paulette, 60, a divorced counsellor in social and family economics with no dependent children, whose parents were gatekeepers in a small village in Champagne. It was only as an adult that she was directly socialised to the practice of car-based mobility. Not only did she come from a very poor milieu in which the car had no place, but she also grew up during a post-war period when car ownership was not widespread, especially in French rural and working-class populations. For her, the automobile stigma does not seem to exist.

Conversely, Jean-Pierre, 53, an artist living in Paris, and Nicolas, 41, a secondary school teacher in the Paris suburbs, grew up respectively in the outer suburbs of Paris and of Bordeaux in middle-class, detached housing areas during the 1970s and 1980s where the car was already much more widespread and normal:

> Nicolas (N): I lived in Bordeaux, though more in the countryside, which meant that the car was pretty much compulsory, otherwise it was impossible to get around. So of course, at the age of 16 [accompanied driving], I passed my driving test at 18, and I had a car at 18. […] And then, well, I had mates who… who liked cars as well. And lots of mates who were mechanically minded, so…
>
> Jean-Pierre (JP): There was one car per household, that was most usual. Later, my parents bought this second small car for local trips, but it was a bit of a novelty in the neighbourhood to have two cars. […] [about learning to drive] It was perhaps more than just something you wanted, a kind of compulsory rite of passage, we all did it, and also we all did it, everyone around me, at the same time, we said "first we will do the baccalaureate, and after that we'll focus on learning to drive". […]

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E: I don't get the impression that for you, at any rate, there was a particularly strong interest in cars, the world of cars, I don't imagine that you used to collect cars…

JP: Not at all, in fact as a small boy, to tell you the truth, I was somewhat girly by nature. And I was more interested in dolls than in cars. I'm telling you this, because it's relevant… it's also interesting for my relationship to the car, no, I wasn't that interested. It was a tool, I mean you had to have a car to get around, I mean, I was pretty happy to have a car and to use it. […]

Even if they have a licence and decided not to buy a car or only to use a car for one purpose (work), the stigmatisation seems stronger or more clearly expressed in interviews with the last interviewee, especially in reference to expectations about gender and age practices, social properties that we can see here are embodied in the normativity of social practices and interactions.

Baptiste, 36, who grew up in a slightly different environment, more working-class and more urban, expresses the same thing in emphasising the role of the car as a status symbol, and conversely the stigma of not having one and using other ways of travelling:

Baptiste (B): As soon as you had a car [in his valley], and even just to go and visit a friend who lived nearby, a trip you'd done on foot a thousand times, well hey, you went by car, especially when your car was not too crappy, and you had a bit of dosh to pay for the fuel (and having money for fuel is a vital issue). […] One thing that might get discussed was several of you getting in the one car. There, the challenge was to convince the person with the most "respectable" car to do the driving. […] However, there's one thing that that's really worth emphasising. The bus, that was for losers, most of the time you really avoided taking it, no way you wanted to be seen waiting at the bus stop. It almost meant "you don't have any friends or family [i.e. someone with a car] to give you a lift into town". All that changed later, at least I think so. But for me and some of my friends, the bus was also sometimes a place for some fun. Not that we did anything stupid. But we would buy a ticket and do the round trip by bus, from our neighbourhood to the town. And then we'd stay on the bus all the way back home. We really looked like what they call a bunch of "wallies".

While in a sense, the nicest car supposedly gives its owner and the people in it higher status (Marchal, 2014), not having a car, evidenced by taking a long time to get a licence or having to take public transport, then constitutes a powerful stigma within the peer group and in the family circle. Indeed, it was only after social and geographical separation from his milieu of origin that Baptiste would move away from the automobile norm, in Marseille then in Paris, where the automobile stigma is almost reversed compared with his childhood situation, at least in the environment where he currently lives, the Parisian intellectual middle-class. The internalisation of the automobile norm, the perception of its coercive power and their continuance over biographical time are not only linked with the material conditions of existence, with social properties, but also and above all with the social normativity of the social practices and relations that can exercise pressure that necessarily varies from one person to another, even between those belonging in abstract terms to the same population (e.g. the "metropolitan cognitive elites").

However, it should be noted that it is sometimes more the indispensable nature of possessing a licence that contributes directly to the assertion of the automobile norm, at least to a greater degree than car ownership in itself. Thus, not having a licence, not being able to drive a car unaccompanied, is a source of tensions, of significant discourses of self-justification for the people in our sample with no driving licence, regardless of the category of demotorisation concerned. Let us return to the case of Amélie. Her parents did not drive and she had a very distant relationship to the car. Nonetheless, she stresses the indispensability of being able to drive.

Amélie (A): With us, my daughter, aged 18, as soon as she reached 18, she got her licence. From the start, as soon as she was old enough, we said "off you go!", and for both me and her father, for us, it was important. That she should get her driving licence because… because I think that now, perhaps, it's more… it was independence, it was… I mean, for different reasons, me, I know, I don't drive, you see, after, it's a choice, if I really didn't have the choice, well, I mean, if I was obliged for all kinds of reasons, I would start again, I've got a licence, I've driven in the past, but well… I don't want to. I don't feel the need and then… no, that... there it is, and anyway cars make me nervous. So, there you are, I can't see myself… I don't want to get behind the wheel, it makes me nervous, but my daughter, I absolutely wanted her… I didn't want her to be like me.

For people like Amélie, having a driving licence doesn't lead to stigma, nor the fact of not owning a car. There is obviously a certain logic here in that not having a driving licence necessarily implies not having a car. However, not having a car leads to people being challenged about their non-adherence to a travel norm, for people who live in low-density areas, as is the case with Amélie.

The same is true for Lucette. Widowed 10 years ago, Lucette, 81, lives in an area of detached housing in the western part of the Paris region. She does not have a driving licence or a car. She uses the handful of shops available nearby and mainly relies on the help of one of her neighbours who takes her shopping or does the shopping for her. While Lucette says that she gets by perfectly well without her own car, she depends on somebody else's car, a dependency that annoys her and that she wants to escape by perhaps moving to a more urban area with more shops and services. While the lack of a car emphasises the dependency of old age and other experiences of stigmatisation, what is apparent in Lucette's words, as well as in those of other interviewees, is the highly situated dimension of the social normativity of the practices and interactions associated with the stigma of not having a car.

Valentine, a senior executive from a bourgeois family, resident in the centre of Paris, has always lived with cars. In fact, she says that she considers it "normal" to travel by car: she obtained her driving licence very young, has owned several vehicles, loves driving, but has nevertheless been "forced" to sell her car. The main cause is traffic and parking difficulties:

> Valentine (V): Madame Hidalgo prevents me parking my car, so… I don't park my car. So, if I can't park my car, I don't see what I can do with it. I stopped [sold] my car because I can no longer park it. Not because I can't drive.

As a result, she travels mainly by public transport or by taxi, or else hires cars when she goes on holiday. While she would like to have a car again, not having one is not a stigma for Valentine because there are few car owners in her social circle in Paris. In Valentine's case, we can see two possible reasons why the lack of a car is not associated with stigma. The first possibility concerns the bourgeois, almost elite, status associated with the high incomes in these households, which gives them better access to a wide range of travel modes in an equally wide range of places, above all without excessively close dependence on residential location or the location of shops, employment or leisure. The second, which does not exclude the first, relates to the social acceptance of the fact that in certain areas such as dense urban centres, and in particular in Paris, the car is not an ineluctable norm, since social position can be asserted and assessed by other means (such as travel or cultural practices).

Automobile socialization that also affects the socio-economic perception of "alternatives" to the car

Assessed in different ways, because embedded in different not only socio-spatial but also historical contexts, the automobile norm, internalised during the social trajectory, exercises a lasting influence in the form of a relationship to the automobile: detached, validating or coerced. As we have just seen, non-adherence to this norm can lead to certain individuals being stigmatised, not only within their peer networks, but even more so in many social situations such as work or leisure.

While in almost all the cases examined so far there are or have been alternatives to the car, observation suggests that the adoption of these alternatives is shaped not only economically but also socially, particularly through the prism of the stigmatisation mechanism we have just outlined.

The case of Baptiste (see above) exemplifies this reality. However, the situations of other people interviewed explain to what extent it is less the economic perception of mobility than the social perception of a mode of transport, acquired then reshaped through a series of experiences, which is fundamental in the decision to adopt it.

The trajectory described by Nicolas (see above) reveals a shift in experience in this respect. Initially socialised in the Bordeaux region, he arrives in Paris with a fairly negative perception of public transport, but is nevertheless obliged to learn how to use it.

> E: How did you find the experience of learning to use the metro?
>
> Nicolas (N): It was very very hard. Ah yes, I remember how… it shocked me to see people rushing into the metro, squashing into those compartments, I really couldn't. It was… at the beginning I found it hard to accept. That is why I always travelled by car.
>
> E: Yes, yes, yes. So it means that… you found it stressful.

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N: Yes, that's right, I couldn't stand it. It drove me crazy. […] To start with… I often got it wrong. Ah yes, it was terrible. I got lost, I went in the wrong direction, all sorts of things, I just couldn't get it. It was disastrous. […] So, yes, so, about… where I still find things a bit hard is when there are masses of people in the metro… And… frankly, I don't always necessarily find it very comfortable… No, it's the crowds. Yes, I think that it's, I mean… seeing people squashed together, I prefer to wait, in fact… Until it calms down, rather than getting crushed like a prat in the train and it… […] So… I mean, it's like, it's… as a result I get less stressed though I might also get stressed in the car, yes sometimes, I've got deadlines, which I mustn't miss, or that kind of thing, so as a result, I was a bit revved up, there it is, I don't quite have the same sensation of being in… being revved up, even if other people are. But in the end, I learned to get over that a bit.

In tackling the ordeal of learning to use public transport, Nicolas has shifted his perception of the use of the private car to such an extent that he calls himself demotorised though his household still owns two cars. He said he doesn't use them any longer, that only his wife drives. Whereas in his youth he drove a great deal and saw the car as an integral aspect of his social identity, he now feels a degree of disgust towards the car.

N: Paris changes the way you see things. My way of seeing things. […] With regard to… Yes, on… with regard to… in fact, I realise that I I used to get seriously stressed in the car… […] clearly, it's hell. […] And… seeing… seeing how you get pissed off, in fact, on the road, you have to pay for this, pay for that, pay for the other, it's starting to piss me off, that's a fact, all the shit. I mean, you have to do the annual technical tests, you have to do the repairs, all that stuff…

E: But that has caused… perhaps?

N: Yes, disgust.

This could be seen as simply the effect of Paris life. But that would miss the essence of the dynamic experienced by Nicolas: the long-term experience of the "sense of freedom" associated with the car. In the Bordeaux region, at the beginning of his life course, the car represented, as he says "a liberation", experienced in an almost fantasised way as a young man. Today, this sense of freedom has disappeared with the practical ordeal of driving under duress for reasons of education or work. Driving is now seen as hell, which is not exclusively linked with Paris, since Nicolas also refers to the Bordeaux region.

With Baptiste and Nicolas, the experience of mobility, whether in public transport or in the car, seems central to the internalisation of the perceptions of the preferred mode of transport, in the same way as the social world in which the interviewees live and its specific normativity. In their cases, these perceptions have been internalised over a lifetime, not only during childhood or adulthood. These perceptions can then contribute to the choice of the mode of transport to use for travel, depending on the duration or distance of a given trip. These perceptions in fact contribute to the decision over the adoption of a mode of travel, in order to bring it—as far as possible and within the limits of available resources—into line with the mode or lifestyle that people identify with socially.

The internalisation, reshaping and reformulation of the relationship to the car in the course of biographical trajectories

By drawing on a diversity of lived experiences of demotorisation, we have explored mechanisms which—in the course of biographical trajectories—affect the propensity of individuals to abandon the ownership or use of a private car. Feelings about driving, the relationship to the automobile norm and perceptions of the alternatives to the car seem, in conclusion, to be a trio of major influences in this process.

Around these mechanisms, the main result of the survey is that a person's decision to demotorise can be understood through their motorisation trajectory and the internalisation, then the reshaping or reformulation of a certain relationship to the car through lived experiences where the probability of the occurrence of those experiences is not unconnected with their social properties, such as gender or social origin. There is therefore no causal link between event and decision, but a reconfiguration that connects together a set of lifestyle factors that construct a space of choice.

This contribution is heuristic in that it casts light on why it is that certain experiences associated with mobility will turn out, sometimes after a long period of time, to be decisive in inducing the transition to demotorisation, experiences that may be lived and constructed throughout the individual's entire life course

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without being limited to a single experience of demotorisation that would be a sufficient reason for total demotorisation.

At the same time, this result opens up more avenues for research than it resolves. In any case, it forms a foundation for an argument in future studies that a dense conception of socialization to the car, and more broadly of socialization to mobility, constitutes a heuristic approach to future discussions about the "automobile norm" or the "hegemony of the car". Up to the present, most research on mobility choices in the course of biographical trajectories has implied a somewhat mechanical definition of socialization to mobility, one that focuses on a single normative instance (Scheiner, 2017). A more in-depth approach to the field of socialization and mobility would thus seem promising, notably for the prospect of documenting socio-spatial, gender and race inequalities, and the processes associated with the lived experience of mobility, whether car-based or not, from the perspective of individuals.

Such an approach could also be useful for a rethinking of the conventional variables used in mobility surveys (such as the big Transport and Travel surveys), by drawing on contextualised research in order to identify indicators that are closer to ordinary experience. The dialogue between ethnography and statistics is a potentially valuable resource in this domain.

Finally, in terms of public response, our survey—which notably shows the impact of individual life history in mobility choices—should encourage prudence and humility. Indeed, there is much to be done to narrow the gap between mobility policies and real perceptions of the different modes of transport. It is always possible to coerce people into using the bus, the train, the metro, or taking their car at peak times. However, they cannot be coerced into seeing one mode of transport or another as "economical, "virtuous" or "ecological". The official structures of socialization (school, government, transport service) have a role to play with children and throughout the lives of adults to deconstruct the social representations around mobility, and perhaps—from the perspective of the energy transition or sustainable development—to begin by combating the tenacious idea that "the car spells freedom".

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Notes

(1) The interviews were conducted in 2018, before the emergence of the Yellow Vest movement.

(2) In order to protect identities, the names and first names of the people quoted have been anonymized.

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Abstract—Joseph Cacciari, Leslie Belton Chevallier—Household demotorization as an analyser of the diversity of experiences of socialization to the "automobile norm"

Giving up car ownership is a potentially strong choice given its importance in travel practices in France. The absence of a car or its slightest presence does not necessarily materialize a gap devaluing to the norm, a stigma, when we examine the whole trajectory, from the socialization of individuals to the car. Based on the results of a qualitative survey by biographical interviews with people without cars, we examine both the multiple drivers of demotorization and the effectiveness of a potential stigma. Ultimately, it is a question of understanding the diversity of automobile socializations and their impacts in terms of renouncing this mode of travel.

Keywords: car, socialization, stigma, norm, renouncement

Résumé—Joseph Cacciari, Leslie Belton Chevallier—La démotorisation des ménages comme analyseur de la diversité des expériences de socialization à la « norme automobile »

Renoncer à posséder une voiture est un choix potentiellement fort au regard de l'importance de cette dernière dans les pratiques de déplacement des Français. L'absence d'une automobile ou sa moindre présence ne matérialise pas forcément un écart dévalorisant à la norme, un stigmate, dès lors qu'on examine l'ensemble de la trajectoire de la socialization des individus à l'automobile. En nous basant sur les résultats d'une enquête qualitative par entretiens biographiques auprès de personnes démotorisées, nous examinerons les ressorts pluriels de la démotorisation en nous interrogeant sur l'effectivité d'un potentiel stigmate. In fine, il s'agira de comprendre la diversité des socializations automobiles et leurs impacts en termes de renoncement à ce mode.

Mots-clés : automobile, socialization, stigmate, norme, renoncement

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