"24 Hours On Air": Gender and Mobile Phones in a Brazilian Low-Income Neighbourhood

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, which is part of a twelve-month ethnography on the sociocultural practices and meanings ascribed to mobile phones in a low-income neighbourhood in Southern Brazil, I examine various forms of appropriation of this gadget in their intersections with gender relations[1]. Following a literature discussion about gender relations in low-income groups, as well as the role of mobile phones in love/sexual relationships, I argue that mobile phones are appropriated to strengthen love ties, but also cause tension and conflict to arise as they become tools of surveillance. In this sense, I discuss the ways in which mobile phones engender what Foucault called the micropolitics of daily life, in which men and women interact in sociocultural dynamics that may reproduce gender hierarchies, but also hold the potential to subvert them. As such, the analysis also pays attention to the vitality and humour present in women's narratives, in order to argue that these seem to be connected to a certain autonomy of the female persona. The discussion engages with the work of various other researchers internationally and in Brazil and reflects on the cross-cultural implications of these practices in relation to similar studies in Africa.

KEYWORDS
Mobile phones, gender, appropriation of technology, everyday life, Brazil.

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MOBILE PHONES AND THE MICROPOLITICS OF GENDER RELATIONS

Brazil has more than 250 million mobile phone subscriptions (Teleco, 2012), and more than 115 million Brazilians own at least one mobile phone[2], out of a population of more than 195 million (IBGE, 2011). Despite this widespread use, themes concerned with the cultural practices involved in mobile phones and their impact on social relations have only recently become an object of scientific enquiry in Brazil. My aim in this paper is to contribute to this understanding, with a study of the gender appropriation of mobile phones in a low-income group. I draw upon the concept of 'appropriation' from the domestication approach devised by Silverstone (2006). Appropriation is thus framed as a process of daily consumption which necessarily involves symbolic dimensions and the social actors' concrete experience. Appropriation is more than mere adoption or 'use'; it is a complex cultural process and not an event.

My ethnographic findings show that, among the dwellers of Morro São Jorge – a low-income community in Florianopolis, the capital of the Southern state of Santa Catarina – mobile phones are appropriated to strengthen love ties but, at the same time, can be used for surveillance purposes, which are directly connected to the fear of a partner's infidelity. I argue in this paper that mobile phone consumption engenders the micropolitics of everyday life among couples, in which there is conflict and subversion. To support the argument, I draw on anthropological literature on gender relations in low-income groups in Brazil.

The ethnography carried out by American-Brazilian anthropologist Fonseca (2000) in the South of Brazil is an important reference, given the many similarities in the social dynamics analysed by the author and what I observed in my own study. In her work, Fonseca acknowledges the relevance of the concepts of honour and shame for gender relations, critically reviewing the way these are framed in the classical work of Pitt-Rivers[3] on Mediterranean populations. Fonseca adds new dimensions to the analysis in the constructions of ideals of masculinity and femininity. She acknowledges honour and shame as relevant concepts that help to explain the subtleties of the symbolic universe of those she studied. For men, 'husband honour' is intimately connected to the expression of symbols of prestige, such as the economic means to provide for a family and thus conquer the exclusivity of his wife/partner's sexual favours (Fonseca, 2000). At the same time – complicating the equation – another important element of the so-called 'hegemonic masculinity' is the exercise of virility through the sexual predation of women: not only for single, but also for married men, having multiple partners is socially accepted and even works as a symbol of social prestige among members of his peer group (Vale de Almeida, 1995). However, when a woman is unfaithful to her husband, the honour acquired through marriage quickly becomes shame for him. It is profoundly shameful for a man to have his wife's unfaithfulness disclosed. This gives way to being called a *chifrudo* (literally, 'man with horns') and becoming the laughing stock of relatives and friends. Therefore, a man not only worries about

economic support and family protection, but also is keen to restrict his wife's free circulation in public, or can be resistant to her having a job outside the home. Fonseca argues that this dynamic causes 'the protection of women surreptitiously to become a means to control her sexuality' (Fonseca, 2000, p.28). In anthropological literature, as Fonseca points out, for married women honour is closely connected to the keeping of their reputation as good mothers and wives; the image of the dedicated housewife and faithful wife being crucial to feminine prestige and, in this sense, it is important to cultivate values such as family honour, chastity and discretion to avoid gossip about them.

Taking a critical approach, Fonseca argues that there were significant differences between her ethnographic findings and the classical situations of Mediterranean honour: it is not entirely true that 'men set the rules of the game and women submit to it meekly' (Fonseca, 2000, p.151). Fonseca shows that her informants, in opposition to the 'martyrs' found in the original Mediterranean literature, were active and outraged women. Thus, she proposes the category of the 'brave woman' as an explanatory key to the narratives of feminine bravery that she encountered. Those were accounts of transgression of hegemonic notions of 'respectability' associated with feminine passivity that, softened with a humorous tone, show 'an ironic spirit which holds at bay the heavy hand of this type of conservative morality' (Fonseca 2000, p.130). Thus, Fonseca indicates that humour (jokes about *chifrudo* men, for example) and gossip are the main symbolic weapons of women against men in the power games between genders[4] ; humour and gossip are used by women as a constant reminder to men that the threat – real or imaginary – of feminine infidelity can be used as a negotiation tool. Gossip and jokes about infidelity can, in this register, be understood as the feminine tactics in the everyday micropolitics of gender, and are used to counterbalance the asymmetrical power relations between men and women.

This picture of gender relations provides a good background for the presentation of how mobile phones integrate with the everyday lives of men and women. As studies about the socio-cultural impacts of mobile phones are recent, there is not much accumulated knowledge on the role of mobile technologies in relation to gender (exceptions are Ellwood-Clayton, 2006; Lemish & Cohen, 2005). Studies are even scarcer when related to low-income contexts. In a general sense, sociological explorations such as those of Castells et al. (2007) note that mobile phones, which have started their careers (cf. Kopytoff, 1986) as artefacts related to the masculine world of work, are increasingly present in the lives of women. Currently, there are no marked differences in the possession of mobile phones between women and men. However, some pioneering studies that investigate the intersections between gender and mobile technologies, such as the one carried out by Lemish & Cohen (2005) argue that mobile phones tend to be used symbolically in different ways by men and women. Their investigation, in Israel, found that both men and women discussed their perceptions in relation to the role of mobile phones in their lives by adhering to traditional views on masculinity and femininity: for men, mobile phones are about activity and technological appropriation; for women, dependence and domesticity.

Other studies, such as those by Ellwood-Clayton (2006) and Ling (2004), highlight the role of mobile technologies in the transformation of intimacy and relationships – especially to the growing popularity of Short Message System (SMS) in family and love relationships. In this register, Pertierra (2005) points out the significant role of text messages –the Phillipines have been dubbed 'the texting capital of the world' – in the formation of new relationships, whether these are aimed at making new friends, finding a boyfriend/girlfriend, or even a partner for casual sex. Text messages are one of the biggest communications phenomena in history: in 2007, around seven billion of them were sent worldwide every single day; a third of them with sexual content. In Sweden, for example, forty per cent of text messages portrayed explicit sexual content, and half of these were sent to someone who was not the sender's formal partner (Vicaria & Ferreira, 2008). Sexual text messages, obviously, can be sent to regular partners; yet, it is the other possibility that worries couples: a partner's infidelity, whether virtual or physically consummated through the mediation of information and communication technologies. Thus, mobile phone consumption is double-edged as far as partners' relationships are concerned: they can strengthen love ties (Ling, 2004) but can also hold the potential to shake long-term relationships.

Mobile technologies, according to Ellwood-Clayton (2006), are the main reason for separation or divorce of many couples. In her study, anthropologist Ellwood-Clayton cites data collected from detective (private-eye) agencies specializing in marital infidelity investigations. In Italy, for example, mobile phones are involved in as much as ninety per cent of uncovered infidelity cases, whereas in the UK, thirty per cent of those who answered a survey on technology and adultery confessed to using electronic communication to flirt with potential partners or have an affair. Also in the UK, one quarter of the clients of a law firm held the Internet or SMS text messages responsible for the end of their marriages (Ellwood-Clayton 2006). In Brazil, a market survey on mobile phone use and behaviour carried out by IPSOS Institute[5] revealed that around ten per cent of respondents had used their mobile phone to flirt with someone other than their regular partner, or to end a relationship by text message, in comparison with thirty per cent in France, and ten per cent in the UK. Similarly, ten per cent of Brazilians had searched their partner's mobile phone for possible clues of extra-marital relationships, as opposed to twenty per cent in the UK, and thirty-five per cent in France (Vicaria & Ferreira, 2008).

This data not only accounts for the pervasiveness of mobile phones in social life (Ling, 2004) but also highlights their potency as a tool of surveillance in a society of control, as has already been the case with other information and communication technologies (Lemish & Cohen, 2005). This invokes a subtle reading of Foucault's Panopticon. If mobile phones can mean surveillance, they can also be turned off, for example – as mobile technologies allow for what Foucault (1995) regarded as the Panopticon's most relevant effect: to induce those subject to it to 'a conscious and permanent state of visibility which ensures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault 1995, p.166). Following this idea, the study by Nicolaci-da-Costa (2006) – one of the few researchers who have investigated the sociocultural dimensions of mobile phone appropriation in Brazil – points to the emergence of a new kind of control played out by mothers over their children, to which mobile phones are

central. The author reminds us that Deleuze, writing in the early 1990s, had already envisioned the creation of a 'digital leash' that would be able to locate humans and animals any time (Nicolaci-da-Costa, 2006). I suggest that the image of the 'digital leash', used by Nicolaci-da-Costa and also by Ling (2004) to describe the control exercised through mobile phones by mothers over their offspring could perfectly be extended to the relationships between men and women in couples. To illustrate this proposition, that mobile phones have become a kind of contemporary digital Panopticon, which has become significant in the relationship dynamics among couples, I analyse in the next section three ethnographic cases involving married women at Morro São Jorge and their reactions to the ways in which their husbands appropriate mobile technologies.

'TWENTY-FOUR HOURS ON AIR': THE PANOPTICON BETWEEN COUPLES
The low-income neighbourhood portrayed in this paper, *Morro São Jorge* (Saint George's Hill), is located in downtown Florianópolis, capital of the Southern state of Santa Catarina. In order to ensure the anonymity of my participants, I used a fictitious name for the research location, as well as for those involved in this study.

About two thousand people live in Morro São Jorge. The vast majority of the adult population is employed in low-skilled jobs such as domestic servants, bricklayers, bus drivers, or street vendors. The neighbourhood was originally populated by former slaves and their families, which makes Morro São Jorge one of the most long-standing black communities in the city. There is a strong connection between African and Brazilian religiosity, and this neighbourhood houses Florianópolis' oldest samba school. As in many other urban Brazilian peripheries, the area is strongly affected by poverty and violence, especially that derived from drug trafficking.

Over twelve months, from May 2008 to April 2009, I visited Morro São Jorge almost on a daily basis in order to conduct fieldwork for my PhD dissertation[6], which consisted of an ethnographic study of the diverse sociocultural practices associated with mobile phones. My research results showed that such practices affect many domains of social life, such as gender and generation relationships, the production of identities, economic issues and, even, the experience of religious practice (Silva, 2008, 2010, 2012). The methodology used in my PhD dissertation is ethnography, which privileges intense contact on the part of the researcher with the dwellers of the researched field – a true immersion in the social life of the community, during which time the researcher carries out observation and in-depth interviews. This long immersion is necessary to establish a bond of trust between researcher and participants in the investigation, which is essential for the quality and depth of data obtained. In fact, the methodological perspective that informed my study was modelled on the ethnographic study about the appropriation of mobile phones conducted by Horst & Miller (2006) among urban and rural low-income populations in Jamaica, one of the few anthropological works on such a theme published so far.

For Horst & Miller (2006), ethnography necessarily entails a sensibility on the part of the researcher regarding the perspectives of the informants, not only during fieldwork, but also during the analysis and writing of the results. Such effort is only made possible through the empathy established between researcher and participants in the course of the ethnographic encounter. When the research

concerns low-income groups, it is especially important to refrain from adhering to simplistic generalizations about what the experience of living in a low-income neighbourhood is like. Ethnography is more than a methodology – it constitutes the craft of the anthropologist. Its purpose is to pursue an intellectual effort towards what anthropologist Geertz (1973) termed a 'thick description' – a process of interpretation that intends to explain the structures of meaning present in the diverse cultures of human groups. Much more than a mere technique for collecting data, ethnography presupposes, as Brazilian anthropologist Zaluar (1985) advocates, the establishment of social relations in which both partners, researcher and informants, learn to know one another.

In this paper, I present an analysis of data obtained through participant observation and three in-depth interviews of women who became my privileged informants - that is, research participants with whom I established a strong connection. I spent long hours over several months with Helena, Marisa and Lila during fieldwork; the first contacts occurred through social workers. As time went by, I started to circulate more freely in the neighbourhood and eventually was invited to visit the three women in their homes. My participants shared a low level of schooling, and employment in low skilled jobs, in common.

At first sight, the positive character of mobile phones as a mediator between husbands and wives, seems to be most immediately visible. The ways in which mobile phones enable new practices of communication among couples, be those of boyfriend/girlfriend, lovers, live-in partners or wives/husbands, go well beyond simple voice calls. It is interesting to notice that the mobile phone functions are also appropriated as a means to express love and strengthen bonds. A common practice in Brazil among dating couples – especially in the case of girls – is to personalize the mobile phone screensaver with an image of the happy couple.

The first ethnographic case is about Alvino and Helena, who have been married for twenty-five years and have four children aged 24 to 15 years old. For the couple, the mobile phone helps to maintain contact while they are separated by the daily routine of work. Helena is a domestic servant and her husband is a bricklayer. Their marriage had been threatened for years due to Alvino's alcoholism, but nowadays it is celebrated with daily declarations of love. In these dynamics, the mobile phone plays a vital role: Helena says she 'dates' her husband using text messages. When he is out working, Alvino sends romantic text messages to Helena's phone many times a week – sometimes more than once a day. These messages always have the same content: 'I love you very much'. Helena can read these simple messages, but does not reply as she attended school for only two years and can't write at all; she is currently attending an evening course in order to learn how to read and write properly. However, the very same mobile phone that sends these love messages and symbolizes the current harmony in Alvino and Helena's marriage, almost led to a serious misunderstanding between them:

> ..about these mobile phones... How can I tell you...? Once there was this young girl who during Carnival started sending text messages to my husband, but he showed them to me. I started jumping up and down about it, but good job he was honest

about it, huh? She was the one who did wrong here. She found out about his number, because he worked selling beer during Carnival and everyone had his number. She must have got it with someone. One day my husband came to me and said: 'Look who sent me a message'. I wanted to beat her up, but she ran away from me [laughs].

The mobile phone may create symbolic bonds among couples (after all, husband or wife are likely to be the person a married individual most talks on the phone with), as Helena's account shows, but when there is an argument between them, this bond may be challenged in a sometimes violent way. I heard more than one account of quarrels, arguments and even fights between husbands and wives. Most likely those would involve some level of suspicion regarding marital infidelity, and the mobile phone was constantly the focus of suspicion on the grounds of unusual calls or text messages received. In more than one account the 'guilty' mobile phone was thrown against the wall, usually by distressed women. Alane, a seventeen year old girl, broke her boyfriend's mobile phone because she was jealous – but the relationship did not end. However, the pressure from Alane was so overwhelming that boyfriend Jefferson simply did not bother to buy a new phone.

The second ethnographic case involves a mode of appropriation of mobile phones which is perceived as a violation of privacy. In stark contrast with the loving text messages proudly received by Helena, in this case the mobile phone is considered a demonstration of lack of trust in relation to one's partner – it is a way to be 'tracked down'. In this practice, the mobile phone is a means of surveillance and control.

Marisa, one of my privileged informants at Morro São Jorge, is a 43 year-old cheerful housewife who is also a grandmother to a baby girl. Marisa is in her third marriage. Her oldest daughter and son are already married, and currently Marisa lives with her husband, Carlos, and fifteen-year-old son (to her second husband), Everson. Marisa sees many qualities in Carlos' personality: hard-working, determined, always ready to give a helping hand. Working as a professional driver for the local bus company, Carlos spends many hours away from his wife. This is his very torment: not to know for sure where Marisa is, or what she is doing exactly. According to Marisa, in spite of his many qualities, one trait of Carlos' personality is highly disturbing: 'The problem is that he is a very controlling kind of guy, he is very, very, he is extremely and totally jealous of me. He is an excellent person, very hard-working, but this is his flaw...' And it is at this point that the mobile phone emerges as an instrument used by Carlos to control Marisa's life.

Among other practices, Carlos calls his mother-in-law (Marisa's mother) countless times a day, as she lives next door to her daughter and has a landline phone – what Carlos wants is to confirm that Marisa is at home. In addition to those calls, Carlos sends text messages and calls his wife on her mobile phone many times every single day. Marisa is retired because of health problems and receives a pension of R$678 (about £175) a month, but sometimes manages to get a temporary job to boost her income. When Marisa has to leave the house to work, Carlos demands to know the number of the landline of the location Marisa is going

to. On arrival, Marisa must call her husband's mobile phone from the landline. Only upon seeing the landline number on his phone's screen would Carlos become satisfied and sure that Marisa really is where she said she would be. 'I think his life's dream would be a phone that would film me anywhere I went, just that he could always be sure of my whereabouts', says Marisa. In 2008-9, when I carried out the fieldwork, technologies such as the iPhone (with 'FaceTime' ability) had only recently been launched in Brazil. It is important to highlight that all research participants portrayed in this paper had low-entry market mobile phones. Smartphones were still a privilege of the better off, who could afford them. In addition, not only was it the lack of economic resource, but also the limited internet access, that made such technologies not a part of everyday life of those I studied. When Marisa goes to the city centre for some shopping or to another neighbourhood to sort out any problem, she needs to let Carlos know which bus number she has boarded, at what time, and which driver was on duty. These details are sent to him, sometimes by voice calls, but due to the high costs of telephony, most of the time by SMS:

> 'Whenever I go to the city centre, I have to let him know: Carlos, I got on such and such bus, by sending him an SMS. Carlos, the driver is this and that, one more message. Before I arrive, I sometimes send more than fifteen messages to him from my phone'.

This is how Carlos can check with his fellow driver workmates which bus line Marisa boarded:

> 'When I board the bus I have to send another message: "Carlos, I boarded the bus at this and that time", "I am on my way", another message. A thousand messages a day'.

Marisa uses the expression '24 hours on air' to define her husband's controlling habits. To be '24 hours on air' accounts for the masculine pressure that women be constantly available for their husbands' surveillance through the mobile phone.

> 'If a woman has a boyfriend or a husband, this is the way it is here at São Jorge: she has to be 24 hours on air. It is a pain in the neck, really. My husband is just like a GPS – always tracking me down. With my mobile phone I am always 24 hours on air'.

Marisa enjoyed some relief when Carlos lost his mobile phone, at a previous Carnival: 'This is the only way so that he can't find me'. But Marisa is a strong woman, a woman of attitude, who does not easily submit to her husband's eccentric behaviour; because of Marisa's personality, arguments and rows are part of the couple's routine: 'Once in a while I get really fed up and think: goodbye and farewell to you, Carlos. I turn off my mobile phone but things get worse, this drives him totally mad'. In one of these occasions, Carlos was so mad that when he got home after work, a violent argument with Marisa ensued; as a result, Carlos knocked down one of the brand new wardrobe doors –which Marisa was still paying for by instalments.

> 'Can you imagine such a ridiculous thing, Sandra – we already have so
> little. I told him off right away: "You damaged it, you are the one
> who's going to repair it." I don't need to depend on men to support
> me, my house or my son. I have my own money, thank God'.

Carlos' excessive jealousy eventually led to a separation between the pair, which lasted two or three months during my fieldwork at São Jorge. In one of my many visits to Marisa's house, she confessed to having sent her husband away. As it was a time for the municipal elections (2008) – equivalent to county council elections in the UK - Marisa had got a temporary job in which she was supposed to hand out leaflets portraying a local candidate's profile to the community. She had offered to introduce me to potential research participants during her visits to local residents. On the day we had arranged to meet, her mobile phone was off. Eventually, I met Marisa circulating in São Jorge later on that same day. She explained why she had turned off her phone: 'Carlos was so out of control, called me every five minutes to check me out, a real hell. My mobile is inside some drawer now'. Marisa ended up disclosing another mobile phone number to me; that is how I found out she had a second phone. She had never before said anything about this. She asked me to keep it secret and that she was giving me that number out of trust. That mobile phone was only used to communicate with her second husband, when they had to settle matters related to their child, Everson: 'As husband and wife it didn't work for us, but nowadays he is a good friend who helps me a great deal. But Carlos doesn't approve of my keeping in touch with him'. She tells me then that besides her ex-husband, only an old friend and Marisa's two adult children, all of them aware of Carlos' practice of keeping Marisa under surveillance through her phone, knew about the 'secret number'. Marisa tells me: 'Look, I've had this phone for quite a while, but Carlos can't have a clue about it, ok?' On another day, at the end of a busy afternoon in which we walked up and down São Jorge, Marisa gets an SMS on her 'secret' mobile phone. She eventually confessed that it was an 'old fling', a relationship that occurred in between marriages, who wanted to meet her again. At the time Marisa was making up her mind about whether to take her husband back or indulge in the possibility of finding a new partner. At the end of the year, Marisa and Carlos gave their marriage a new chance.

The third ethnographic case that accounts for the tensions brought about by the consumption of mobile phones between couples is that of Lila, a thirty-seven year old cleaning lady and mother to four children, aged between sixteen and one and a half. Lila is a devoted mother, and extremely jealous of potential rivals. However, like Marisa, she also receives constant calls from her husband – although not quite in the extreme 'GPS tracking down' style.

> 'My husband calls me about ten times a day. I can't stay away from
> my mobile phone, God forbid. I have to carry my mobile phone even
> when using the bathroom. If he calls me and I don't take it right away,
> he starts jumping up and down'.

Lila is keen to keep not only her husband's, but also her children's relationships under control. Her sixteen-year old daughter to her first husband, for example, is

not allowed by her to have a mobile phone. The same goes to her fourteen-year-old son: 'I will only let my children have mobile phones after they turn eighteen'.

Lila's second and current husband, Flavio, has three mobile phones, of which two are kept at his mother's house. Of course, this causes Lila to be suspicious of her husband's intentions, although Flavio swears that he leaves the phones there so that his mother and other family members can use them in case of an emergency. The third phone, and the only one that enters the couple's house, is constantly under Lila's surveillance, who often searches the content of messages and the call log when her husband is not watching. One of the text messages received by Flavio was the cause of a great misunderstanding that almost led to physical aggression. Lila was furious to find out her husband had received a text message with an image of a woman attached. As jealous as ever, Lila knew exactly what to do, as she recalls in between proud laughter:

'I think I am really one of a kind. I sent this woman a message pretending to be my husband: 'Hi, my love. I miss you, I love you so much. I will be waiting for you at six by the taxi rank at Central Square'. He was watching TV in the living room, and I pretended that nothing had happened – I put the mobile phone back in the pocket of his jacket and went to sleep. Next morning I dressed myself up. He got very surprised and asked me where I intended to go, to which I replied: I am going to buy some bread. Shortly afterwards he left for work. I called a taxi and went to the meeting point at Central Square. If she showed up I was determined to beat her up until she regretted the day she was born. I arrived and waited. But only later on I got to understand what happened. Someone called my husband on his mobile phone – actually, that was the husband of the woman I had sent the message to. [Sandra: what a big mess I got myself into!] He asked my husband: 'Did you send my wife a message?' And me husband went: 'Who, me?' 'Yes, you. A message to my wife, saying that you love her very much, that you wanted to meet her and such and such'. My husband replied: 'But I know who your wife is. She is my workmate, isn't your wife an accountant?' And the man went: 'Well... yes. But anyway what's about this message here?' My husband realized I had something to do with it and told the poor man: 'This must be my wife's fault, jealousy drives her out of control'. My husband called my mother right away (she has a landline) but to no avail as I had already left. My husband came to meet me. There I was at the meeting point when a woman arrives with a man. That was her, I could tell from the picture. My husband arrived at the square shortly afterwards, livid: 'Lila, have you gone completely mad, woman?!' I knew nothing about her being my husband's workmate and was ready to knock her down: 'Who is this woman? What is she doing here?' And, mind you, she was with her husband by her side. She seemed scared too and was quick to try to clear the confusion: 'Madam, you are Flavio's wife, aren't you? He showed pictures of his family to us'. I was still aggressive: 'I want to know nothing about it, don't tell me you know who I am'. Her husband tried to calm me down: 'Hey, she is my wife, keep it cool, madam', to which I replied: 'If she is your wife why did she send my husband her picture?' She tried to explain it was some sort of joke all the workmates had played together. …I said I had no idea they worked together... And I eventually confessed to both of them, and to my husband, that it was me who had sent the message. (My husband) gets

really mad, but I have always searched his mobile phone: if there's a different picture I delete it, if someone sends a text message I demand to know who the sender is, if there's an unknown phone number in the call log I check it right away by calling the number. I am the kind of person who leaves no stone unturned really, you see what I mean?'

THE MOBILE PHONE AS A TOOL OF SURVEILLANCE WITHIN MARRIAGE IN BRAZIL AND AFRICA

Over the last ten to fifteen years, a significant body of academic literature on the sociocultural impacts of the adoption of mobile phones has come to light, written mainly by North American and European researchers. More recently, the Global South has also started to attend to this theme, as demonstrated by the work of Horst & Miller (2006) on Jamaica, Pertierra (2005) on the Phillipines and a number of authors on Africa (DeBruijn, 2008; Archambault, 2009, 2011, 20013; Donner, 2008 amongst others). In addition, a volume edited by Katz (2008) features studies carried out in locations as diverse as India, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Ghana and Tanzania. This body of work sheds further light on the case of Brazil. In particular, the work of Archambault (2009, 2011, 2013) in Africa bears strong resemblance to a great number of cases I encountered in my fieldwork and corroborates many of my findings. Here, I use her work to further develop my analysis in a comparative perspective. The analysis that follows is divided into three parts: first, the expectations of men and women of the mobile phone as a potential tool for infidelity; second, the politics of display and disguise (Archambault, 2013) related to mobile technologies; third, the use of humour by Brazilian women as a strategy to offset their lack of autonomy in a patriarchal society.

As Archambault (2011, p.449) argues, 'infidelity is indeed common and somewhat expected, especially from men, but increasingly from women as well'. Both in Brazil and in Africa, there is a strong perception about the changes mobile phones have brought about in intimate relationships. Increased mobility and connectivity mean that nowadays both men and women can potentially be under their partner's constant surveillance. Among the women I interviewed, I found the same discontent that Archambault (2009, 2011) reports about the fact that, in many cases, this 'perpetual contact' (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) is enforced by jealous husbands over women having to report their every move or, in extreme cases, being forbidden to have mobile phones (Archambault, 2009). As we could see in the account of Marisa - and corroborated in the analysis by Archambault (2011), in Brazil the possession of mobile phones by married women is regarded by men with the same sort of moral panics as in Africa. The study by Archambault in Southern Mozambique showed that men express ambivalence towards the new technology, which in their opinion comes with hidden costs that spawn conflict, mainly related to the interception of incriminating phone calls or text messages.

Yet, although Brazilian men also rely on their phones to manage multiple relationships and control their partner's sexuality, it seems that there is a marked difference between my findings and those of Archambault. Illustrations of differences are the explicit reaction of women like Helena (constantly 'dating' her

husband by texts) and, more intensely, Lila (with her self-confessed jealousy). I shall return to these cases ahead in the analysis.

Concerning the politics of display of mobile phones, there is the point of visibility and invisibility – that is, what content and practices are to be publicly displayed and, more important to this paper's discussion, what is meant to remain secret. I agree with the argument of Archambault (2011) that, quite opposite to the existing literature, which points to the blurring of private and public domains, mobile phones have allowed individuals to enjoy a level of privacy not possible before in a society where neighbours live in close vicinity and gossip is the rule of the day. Marisa, for instance, can have a 'secret phone' to solve family affairs with the father of her younger son, well away from her husband's jealous eyes; and Flavio, Lila's husband, keeps two mobile phones at his mother's house. When it comes to a woman's regular or public mobile phone, however, I found among the women I interviewed a great concern about to whom one's number should be given. Although I did not find, contrary to Archambault (2011, 2013), women who preferred not to have a mobile phone due to fear of gossip, what I did find, was women who worried about wrong number calls that could be wrongly taken by their husbands to be a lover's call.

Regarding the strategies used by poorer women to offset their lack of autonomy in the context of a patriarchal society, perhaps the most striking difference between my findings and those of Archambault (2009, 2011, 2013) is the humour present in the narratives of Brazilian women. Although I agree with Archambault (2011) about her understanding that the consumption practices related to mobile phones engender new discursive spaces within which couples can re-negotiate the terms of their relationships, it is important to notice that, especially in the last two ethnographic cases presented here, the vitality and humour that Marisa and Lila show in their narratives seem to be connected to a particular sort of autonomy of the female persona. In this sense, I would like to draw, once again, from the work of Brazilian anthropologist Fonseca (2008) to argue that humour is a discursive weapon of women against men. When Lila says, for example, that she considers herself 'one of a kind', she is playing with the power that her transgressions exercise over the honour of her man. Not being submissive, both in her actions and discourse, denotes that she is openly challenging any external threats to her status as a married woman. The 'brave woman' described by Fonseca would not silently bear the disrespect represented by traces of adultery left behind, as in the case of Flavio's pictures with his workmate. As Archambault (2011) argues, mobile phones play a very ambiguous role in deceit. As such, for Lila it does not matter if her husband is innocent or guilty; what indeed matters is that the brave woman Lila is to publicly display her willingness to fight to keep her man.

CONCLUSIONS
The ethnographic cases discussed in this paper demonstrate that there are various facets to the consumption of mobile phones as far as gender relations are concerned, and what I have pursued here shows that such facets carry dimensions of both conflict and humour.

Although mobile phones were considered a positive mediator by many of my research participants, especially when it came to expressing love and affection for a partner, what predominated in their accounts were narratives in which the mobile phone was considered a negative mediator of suspicion, arguments and, even, divorce. Practices such as the ones analysed in this paper have also been observed by Horst & Miller (2006) in their ethnography of mobile phone appropriation in Jamaica. The constant inspection of a partner's mobile phone – as in the case of Lila – and the keeping of a secret number – as in the case of Marisa – are two of the main strategies pertaining to the negotiation of power relations in the micropolitics of gender at Morro São Jorge.

As the ethnographic cases show, when it comes to exercising control and surveillance, men tend to be more explicit than women: they call or send text messages to locate their wives. It is important to consider here the role reserved for men and women in a patriarchal culture such as the one dominant in Morro São Jorge. As Fonseca (2000) reminds us, women are considered by men – especially in economically poorer, socially deprived groups - as possessions that should preferably be confined to domestic spaces. In this regard, mobile phones have become a convenient tool of surveillance, as the case of Marisa's husband demonstrates.

Women, in contrast, tend to prefer more subtle tactics that do not, at first, directly challenge the virility of their partners, such as veiled phone searching. However, everything can change when a suspicion is confirmed. The women of São Jorge, as we saw in the case of Lila, demonstrate that they are far from exhibiting classic notions of feminine passivity. Central to this argument is the concept of the 'brave woman' as devised by Fonseca (2000). In such register, what Lila's humorous account reveals is that, in her social milieu groups, such transgressions are not a reason for shame, but quite the opposite: these active women are to be admired. Remember how Lila starts her account: 'I am really one of a kind'. Thus, stories of infidelity through the use of mobile phones, whether real or imaginary, become part of an already existing circuit of narratives of feminine bravery that are exchanged among women. For, as Fonseca writes, and Lila's account illustrates, 'a woman can be proud of her bravery even when she is *not* right...[...] an admirable woman is the one who knows how to deal with things – whether looking after her home, getting her own money, or fighting to get her husband out of a lover's arms' (Fonseca, 2000, p.130).

In conclusion, I hope that this paper will contribute to a larger debate about the role of technology consumption - and, especially, that of mobile phones – in the daily micropolitics of gender. In this sense, it is important to consider that studies about the use of mobile phones – these techno-objects that have become omnipresent in contemporary daily life, as Castells et al. (2007) demonstrate – have a relevant role to play when it comes to gender relations. What I have argued here is that there are fruitful analytical perspectives to be explored by research when mobile phones are thought of as much more than mere information and communication technology, towards the analysis of their roles in reinforcing or changing relationships between women and men.

ENDNOTES

[1] This article was selected for oral presentation in the 8th Ibero-American Congress of Science, Technology and Gender, held in Curitiba, Brazil, 05 – 09 April 2010.

[2] In comparison, only 46.5% of Brazilians enjoy regular Internet access, whether from home or the workplace (IBGE 2011).

[3] Drawing on Portuguese anthropologist Pina-Cabral, among others, Fonseca (2000) highlights that most criticism suffered by the theory of honour and shame that is key to explaining gender relations in Mediterranean societies are, firstly, the creation of the stereotypes of the macho man and the submissive woman. Those are regarded as a dichotomous and ethnocentric analysis that does not take into account that the 'egalitarian couple' typical of Western middle-classes is a sociocultural and historical construct. For the author, the critical review of the work of Pitt-Rivers in contemporary research involves 'not only the recognition that "natives" are not the exact opposite of "modern", but also that due to the influence of hegemonic forces such as school and mass communication, is it impossible to treat our research objects as if they were culturally isolated' (Fonseca, 2000, p. 136).

[4] Fonseca (2000) argues that gossip is mainly spread by word of mouth, but that recent dissemination of mobile phones has changed this practice.

[5] Six thousand Brazilians of all social classes took the survey, which aimed at assessing the impact of mobile communication on everyday life. It replicated in Brazil a survey carried out in five European countries (UK, Sweden, Spain, Germany and France) by the London School of Economics and Political Science (Vicaria & Ferreira, 2008).

[6] This article is a revised version of part of the fourth chapter of my PhD dissertation (Silva, 2010). The whole process of researching involved over twelve months of participant observation in the field and fifty-two in-depth interviews, which resulted in more than seventy hours of audio-recorded material.

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