



Nancy Cook and David Butz (eds), *Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social Justice*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2019. ISBN: 9780815377030 (cloth); ISBN: 9780429434587 (ebook)

Catastrophic global warming, miserable congestion, soul-sucking commutes, working class displacement from walkable, job-rich cities, road rage and vehicular violence, illness linked to sedentary and car-based lifestyles, the paving of open spaces, cities choking on smog, piercing traffic noise: the need for better and fairer ways of moving around cities and regions has never been more urgent and desperate.

We know many of the technical and policy solutions to mitigate the negative impacts of mobility, and there have been decades of scholarship and advocacy pointing us to feasible and fair outcomes. Yet rational pathways for a sustainable mobility transition remain intractable. Why can't we solve this? Part of the answer, according to the authors of *Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social Justice*, is power.

Shepherded by geographers Nancy Cook and David Butz, this new collection of vignettes and multidisciplinary perspectives contends that none of the deeply troubling and inequitable impacts of mobility can be addressed without confronting and understanding the structure of power at multiple geographic scales. Drawing on critical theory in Human Geography, Anthropology, and Sociology, in the first chapter Cook and Butz urge readers to consider mobility and power through the lens of "mobility justice", a new theoretical concept coined by sociologist (and contributor to the volume) Mimi Sheller.

In Chapter 2 of the book Sheller explains that "mobility justice is an overarching concept for thinking about how power and inequality inform the governance and control of movement, shaping the patterns of unequal mobility and immobility in the circulation of people, resources, and information". After laying out theoretical foundations for mobility justice, the next 15 chapters tap into current academic research corralled by the editors from organized special

sessions at the American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting in 2016 and the Nordic Geographers Meeting in 2017.

Acknowledging that there is no single definition or agreement on the meaning of mobility justice, the book is a “thinking through” of the concept. The aim is to fuse the “mobilities paradigm” (everything is in motion and motion is shaped by power) with a sedentary and fixed-in-place social justice tradition. This totalizing framework pulls together multiple spatial scales of mobility and multiple approaches to justice – from global climate justice, to local environmental justice, social and spatial justice in cities, and racial, gender and migrant justice.

Mobility can at once enhance and compromise justice at different spatial scales. Cars and roads can enhance mobility for some by improving access to local jobs and lived experiences but disrupt and harm others who are adjacent to the road and car traffic, while harming global climate. This isn’t groundbreaking, but mobility justice improves on conventional transport justice frameworks with more critical reflections, moving beyond narrow focuses on redistributive mobility or on identity and mobility and pointing at power.

For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, without taking on power relations, well-meaning scholarship and advocacy about transport justice can be easy to co-opt for urban boosterism and gentrification through spatial fixes of the entrepreneurial city. Instead, the quest for improved transport infrastructure, if critical inquiries and challenges to power are absent, simply displaces the marginalized or aggravates injustices at the global scale (with more carbon emissions).

Another strength in the mobility justice framework is how it can help critical geographers grapple with global climate change and justice. Those examining and proposing sustainable mobility transitions will need to look at power relations and jumping scales and take a holistic approach to the nexus between mobility and climate, energy, race, gender, income, class and geographic location. In that vein mobility justice can also help respond to “carbon

gentrification”, whereby working class people are displaced and alienated from gentrifying “low carbon” urban centers (Rice et al. 2019).

A mobility justice framework is sorely needed, and with it we might have a better lens for examining such events as the Yellow Vests/*Gilets Jaunes* protests in France in 2018-2019. There, pricing transport to reduce emissions raised distributive justice concerns over labor access, commuting and living wages. Yet the uprising was also stoked by right-wing anti-urban resentment and new forms of European populism critical of carbon mitigation and restricting cars. Mobility justice can help us disentangle and identify multiple threads of political backlash like the protests in France.

Reappearing throughout the volume, one provocative strength of the mobility justice framework is how it considers the unevenness of “immobility” and the right to not move. In Chapter 7, for example, Noel Cass and Katharina Manderscheid examine the power relations that compel movement, and reframe freedom of movement to freedom from the compulsion to move. The automobile system (infrastructures, sprawling low density cities, laws, cultural norms), they point out, can be theorized as a kind of “unjust compulsion” shaped by political power. Turning driving a car into a social safety net exonerates owners of the means of production (employers) from responsibility for the commuting costs of workers, and social and economic well-being are instead placed on the neoliberal individual, who must drive to survive.

There is powerful potential in mobility justice and this is a necessary research trajectory for critical geographers to engage. But there were several shortcomings of the book’s organization and content. First, the chapters that follow the two introductory chapters were sometimes disconnected. Some chapters worked really well, such as Chapter 3, Weiqiang Lin’s “Aeromobility Justice”, or Chapter 10, Sharon Roseman’s “Fighting for Ferry Justice”, and were more clearly aligned with the multi-scaler examination of mobility.

Yet other chapters seemed out of place, or at least not well integrated into the mobility justice framework. Chapter 13, on queer spaces, while important and potentially insightful, lacked any explicit discussion of mobility although it was implied in the context of urban gentrification. Chapter 14, describing rural Pakistan, left out how people traveled and by what mode, and only outlined an unevenness in extra-familial ties that drew people to cities from rural areas. This is by no means a critique of the chapter authors or their scholarship, but sometimes it felt as if some parts of the book were exposed to a slippery slope of expanding meanings of mobility beyond what might be a useful framework for mobility justice. As the book progressed, and especially in the latter chapters on animal mobilities, disease vectors, or the sentiments of migrants, it resulted in an awkward fitting for some chapters. At times the disconnect resembled an AAG Annual Meeting where four un-related papers might be dropped into the same session.

A second critique is the lack of engagement with the broader canon of transport scholarship beyond critical mobility studies. The book is quickly susceptible to an intellectual silo rather than talking directly to the broader transport academy and profession. The volume is detached from transportation geography, transportation planning, and urban planning, which are disciplines and non-academic professions where decisions and policy debates are formalized and implemented, and where mobility justice is very much needed. In that vein, it continued the unfortunate tendency for transport (and other geography) researchers with different theoretical and epistemological backgrounds to talk past each other.

To be fair this goes both ways. Much of the mainstream and conventional transport and urban studies research on transport regrettably ignores critical perspectives such as mobility justice. In times of great urgency and desperation, these scholarly threads need to be speaking to one another. Especially with new climate reports like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (2018) groundbreaking *Global Warming of 1.5°C* report, which elevated the equity dimensions of climate impacts and mitigation, mobility justice must reach more than empathetic

critical theorists and graduate students. It must be part of the policy framework for fast decarbonization.

Lastly, after sifting through sometimes disconnected chapters, the book suddenly ended. It would have been helpful to tie together the chapters and to suggest research directions or to summarize some of the main points and discuss how the chapters might have connected.

These critiques are aimed more at the structure and organization of the book rather than its core substance and arguments. On that, the need for a mobility justice framework is clear. Our collective inability to grapple with mobility and its harmful impacts is due, at least in part, to transport scholarship, professions, and advocates ignoring power. We cannot talk about solving our mobility crises without talking about power, analyzing its structure, exposing its inequity, and challenging its hegemony. Kudos to Cook and Butz for getting that conversation and debate started.



References

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