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Book review

Review of 'Urban Mobilities in the Global South', by Tanu Priya Uteng and Karen Lucas, 2018, Abingdon and New York: Routledge. (£105.00 (hardback). 9781138291713)

This edited collection emerges from a due acknowledgment of the inadequacy of current theories and approaches to transport and mobilities in the Global South. Fortunately, it sets a milestone towards building a response. It proposes a balanced, interdisciplinary, theory-dense and varied array of case studies and theoretical contributions that highlight simultaneously the complexity of the mobility crisis in the Global South and the responsibility that academics and practitioners have in developing new approaches to tackle it.

The first 9 core chapters of the book, each including a different case study from Asia or Africa (plus one example from Latin America), open the reader's eyes to the multiplicity and diversity of experiences and practices that form the everyday (im)mobilities in those geographies, with specific due attention to the needs of lower income groups. The chapters show how (im)mobilities can constitute practices of resistance, with examples from New Delhi, Santiago (Chapter 1) and Hanoi (Chapter 2); how mobile phones can help redefine young South Africans' mobilities (Chapter 3); they give new insights on the daily life and roles of informal transport providers in New Delhi (Chapter 1), Kampala (Chapter 4), Maputo, Nairobi (Chapter 5) and Dar es Salaam (Chapter 7); they highlight residents' travel needs and patterns in Bandung (Chapter 6) and Abuja (Chapter 9); and provide a political-economic analysis of the development of mobility systems in South Africa (Chapter 8). The last chapter proposes a solid theoretical framework that combines the work of Lefebvre, de Certeau and Simone to rethink mobilities focusing on the 'in-betweenness' of urban processes and the role of agency, action and encounters in these.

Such heterogeneous examples of the intersections between mobilities and livelihoods constitute a strong warning against current approaches to transport planning in the Global South. Based on a 'tyranny of experts' (p.105), these tend to produce blind generalizations, approaching the existing different and varied mobility systems as a uniform problem to be solved, and proposing Western-style mobility systems as winning solution. In line with those theories in critical urban studies from which the transport literature has still much to learn, the book is a call for instead examining the Global South holistically and learning from it, paying particular attention to the initiative and creativity of grassroots actors and their diffuse practices of solidarity (Chapter 1, 2 and 4).

At the same time, the book highlights clear common patterns and themes specific to (im)mobilities in the Global South that deserve attention (Introduction and Epilogue). First and foremost is the sharply different modal split when compared to western transport system. Sadly, however, the predominance of walking and cycling in the Global South does not correspond to any ideal picture of sustainable and healthy cities. Combined with a flourishing culture of automobility, it is instead the indicator of systems in which a wealthy minority strongly benefits from the increase in infrastructural and road investment, whilst the corresponding growing pollution, congestion and safety issues threaten and undermine the health, wellbeing and livelihoods of a poor majority. This walking majority is often silenced, segregated and forced to adopt specific patterns of (im)mobility to adapt to highly uneven urban environments. Approaching (im)mobilities in the Global South means therefore reversing the hierarchy of sustainability dimensions, bringing its social side at the front. In this respect, most chapters in the book highlight how narratives of modernization and development, often reinforced by directives proposed by international agencies, as well as by the visions of emerging middle classes and pressure by car/oil lobbies, contrast with the everyday needs of the urban poor and are often supporting policies whose effects on the poor majority are highly detrimental. A key example is the increased tendency to ban or heavily compromise informal transport. Despite moto-taxis, rickshaws and minibuses providing a fundamental service to otherwise immobile urban residents (and not just those on low incomes), they are considered not in line with the development strategies and removed at the expense of hundreds of residents and their livelihoods.

This crucial importance and problematic nature of the informal sector for everyone's mobilities is another common pattern that emerges from the case studies. Authors in the book provide several examples and, brilliantly linking to the idea of 'institutional bricolage' (Chapter 7) or the work of AbdouMaliq Simone (Chapter 10), problematize the concept, proposing to go beyond the dichotomy between formality and informality in order to fully understand the changing and heterogeneous nature of mobilities in the Global South. This requires, as well-summarized in Chapter 10, opening up to local (im)mobilities as a world mostly invisible to Western understanding, one which emerges 'in-between' the geographies, practices and possibilities normally considered in traditional transport planning. Several chapters in the book contain an insight into this world, from the network of solidarity that street vendors in Hanoi build with local residents to constantly renegotiate their space in the neighborhood (Chapter 2), to the way women in rural South Africa reinvent their sense of safety using mobile phones (Chapter 3), or the way the implicit rules that guide minibus and moto-taxi drivers' practices are reshaping public transport policies and organization in Dar es Salaam (Chapter 7).

By looking at these 'undertheorized' mobilities (p.195) we can clarify the multi-scalar aspects of their politics and their intersection with broader issues presented by living in the contested and unequal urban space of the Global South. This means recognising forced (im)mobilities as constitutive part of a broader denial of the right to the city. Chapter 8, which gives a detailed analysis of apartheid's spatial policies and their use of mobility as a form of 'social regulation', is a neat example of this. In this regard, the way the work of Lefebvre and other critical geographers has inspired most of the authors in the book it is to be particularly appreciated, as well as the way they have proposed a critical approach to the idea of 'development' in favor of more analytical approaches that consider closely whose mobility needs are given priority.

Each of the 10 chapters also provides an indication of potential

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research approaches or tools that can be used to start addressing those issues, as reflected in the essential recommendations proposed in the Epilogue. From the potential use of ICT and virtual mobilities to co-produce new mobilities and/or research them (Chapter 3 and 4), to a strong belief on the importance of co-production and participation, as well as reflexivity and interdisciplinary exchange to foster change (Chapter 1 and 4), to the need to open up to more political-economic analysis of systems of mobility and constantly recognize the political nature of transport planning (Chapter 8), to the importance of the wellbeing agenda (Chapter 9), and the need to develop more experiential and people-based approaches to mobilities (Chapter 2, 3, 4 and 9).

The book would have perhaps benefited from problematizing more broadly the concepts used, especially that of 'Global South' and the provenance of authors and knowledge used. The mix of contributions is definitely positive, but its bias towards Western academics and literature speaks loudly to the current state of affairs in this body of scholarship. Perhaps an opening to theories such as Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, especially in the discussion on wellbeing, or to indigenous epistemologies would have better completed the picture, and potentially would have also given deeper insights on the environmental aspects of the issues analyzed.

Overall, the book is a must-read for transport geographers and planners, especially but not just those involved in transport planning in the Global South. As evident in the guidelines proposed in the Epilogue, it sets fundamental steps for rethinking the role of academics and practitioners and the principles of planning. As researcher from the Global North, I welcome it as a way to start responding to our duty of responsibility towards people whose detrimental living conditions are a fundamental consequence of a strong colonial past and present. The book reminds us of the importance of progressively tackling the strong reliance on an engineering mindset and the emphasis on infrastructures and technologies as a panacea for all issues, as well as patterns of neocolonialism that unfortunately still infect most of the transport planning interventions that take place in the Global South.

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