

HOW DO WE PAVE A RIGHT? – THINKING RIGHT TO MOBILITY FROM WOMEN’S DISPLACEMENTS IN RIO DE JANEIRO

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Cecília wakes up at five every morning. Some minutes later, she wakes her daughter, Rosa, up so they can catch the six-five train. Then, they ride a bus to Rosa's school. Cecília follows her way towards another neighborhood where she works and studies. After school, Rosa attends her mom's college classes and they both go home at night at a quarter to nine. If they manage to catch the last direct train, they get home at half past ten. However, if they ride the multiple-stop train, they only get home after eleven pm. Conceição wakes up at half past five, gets dressed, and then wakes her children up. After her teenage children leave, she tends to her house, feeds the cats, and at eight in the morning she is at the bus stop to catch the first bus on her journey. Conceição rides two buses to and fro work every day. She gets back home around nine pm. By then, her children are bound to go to bed. Cecília and Conceição live in cities belonging to the Rio de Janeiro Metropolitan Area, which is the second largest metropolitan region in terms of population density in Brazil. They both spend three to four hours a day commuting. These hours make up their routine, and options for work, study, management of family life.

Cecília and Conceição are two of the participants of an ethnographic research conducted between March and August 2018. The research is targeted at reflecting upon what the right to mobility would be based on women's mobility. Considering mobility in large cities as an unavoidable component of the relationship with the city, the right to mobility becomes a fundamental right to fully exercise the right to the city. But neither city nor mobility are neutral elements. To the contrary, they are organized (or limited) by markers of gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, among other markers. To question the spatial project itself, which, under the aegis of an alleged neutrality, reiterates the excluding urban planning. Therefore, highlighting these markers is essential.

This analysis is linked to an intersectional feminist perspective, which seeks to construe the right to mobility by means of women's daily commute.². To do so, I am briefly introducing the current methodology for empirical research. Then, I am setting forth the concept of mobility as regards changes in the concept of transport. Finally, I am highlighting critical issues related to women's mobility and listing the parameters to define the right to mobility.

Although the research has been conducted before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the labor and transport reorganization stemming from imposed covid-related sanitary measures has duly confirmed the current conclusion, at least within the geographic scope of analysis. During periods of restricted transport and lockdowns, people who had financial security have managed to better protect themselves. Those people belong to a certain group with similar markers of class, gender, and race.

1) Research Methodology

Due to their inherent complexity and recurrent invisibility within urban dynamics, studies on mobility usually lack methodological deficiency. According to Jíron and Imilan, when considering mobility as a path, only considering the starting point and the destination in a journey, traditional methods conceal issues, such as the reason routes are chosen, the effects (as regards cultural, economic, and social elements) and what kind of spatiality arises from transport practices. They believe a study that allows for addressing these concerns, constituting a broad and critical concept of mobility, is only possible by applying an ethnographic approach. (JÍRON and IMILIAN, 2016)

Thus, approaching mobility as a complex phenomenon, which concerns not only moving but a full range of projects and possibilities in life, the understanding of women's right to mobility can be construed by means of identifying the ethnography of their commute within the scope of field work about how a group of women uses transport. When proposing a methodological strategy to shape information in ethnographies of mobility, Jíron and Imilan introduce four research stages: 1) semi-structured interview; 2) shading technique; 3) transcription and data analysis; 4) return of data to study participants. This research, inspired by this methodology, sought to cross empirical data with theoretical and statistical readings pursuing a more complex understanding of mobility.

This research's *locus* of analysis is women's mobility in the Rio de Janeiro Metropolitan Region. We have conducted interviews and analyzed the ethnography of daily commute performed by eight

² As Kimberlé Crenshaw explains when introducing what is currently construed as intersectional analysis, and using, in fact, an urban metaphor, the intersection of axes of power, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, such intersection creates a place. Crenshaw regards expressions of oppression as if they were streets. So, women often find themselves at the crossroads of distinct types of oppression. In contrast, other groups of women who do not bear the burden of similar structures of domination are effectively in a different place. Therefore, it is no simple superposition but an intersection. Such intersection must be analyzed in its complexity to be, if not understood, not made invisible. Several Black feminists have approached this debate. However, the pioneering concept used herein, at least in the academic field, was coined by (CRENSHAW, 1989)



women who live in different areas of the city. The interviews have been conducted from March to August 2018. We were seeking to highlight their entire experience. of commute, even data usually not recorded in statistics. Overall, women's ages in the group range between 25 and 68 years. There were 6 Black women and two white women, two women with school-age children, all of them are public transport users on a daily basis. The outcomes presented herein highlight two of these participants, Conceição and Cecília (fake names). Both Cecília and Conceição are Black women, mothers, who live in the outskirts of the Rio de Janeiro Metropolitan Region, and work in Gávea, one of the neighborhoods with the highest concentration of income in the city of Rio de Janeiro. It is important to underpin that this type of research does not have any quantitative or statistical goals, but it might add some perspective to the process of interpreting numerical data.

I outline research perceptions together with the theoretical debate to try and shape the rationale intertwined with ethnographic results. I do so as if it were a road that can only be taken altogether.

2) From transport to mobility: A changing concept

Cecília and Conceição use public transport daily. Cecília rides the train and municipal bus and Conceição rides a municipal bus and another intercity bus. Cecília would like to be able to take a direct bus but there are none available covering her whole route. On the other hand, she is afraid of missing her daughter's school entrance time due to traffic unpredictability. Conceição resents the lack of a more accessible subway structure. She says that she can only ride the subway when she does extra work close to subway stations. Both reported the price of transport is an issue. Cecília struggles to make ends meet as she spends a lot of money on transport fares for both her and Rosa, her daughter. Conceição only goes out for fun once a month as the return ticket is expensive.

The 20th century has seen a sharp rise in urbanization and technological possibilities of transport within and between cities. In fact, much of city's growth towards becoming a metropolis is also based on the technological possibilities of transporting large amounts of people daily between housing areas and areas of economic concentration. Therefore, there is a relationship of interdependence between the development of transport systems and the uneven expansion of cities, one enabling and feeding back the other.

However, having transport as a starting point means focusing on vehicle movement, flow management, vehicle speed and capacity. The development of transport technology is based on the mechanical possibilities of vehicles, allowing physical access to jobs, not necessarily the demands and experiences of people. (AMAR, 2016)

Thus, managing transport would be based on making sure flows *from* somewhere *to* someplace else, that is, a management that organizes commutes to provide an answer to basic questions, such as where, how, and where we commute. In terms of transport, commuting is construed only as a means devoided of meaning and connection. Places as a starting point or a destination are a given. Even, the need to commute is a given. However, what happens along the way is overlooked.

On the other hand, acknowledging the lived experience of mobility delivers meaning to countless everyday acts as integral factors in forging and exercising the right to mobility. The notion of transport, as the French urbanist Georges Amar points out, reiterates a dual logic of transporter, and transported where the transported is clearly passive in the face of a system greater than individuals. Mobility, to the contrary, is an activity, it is a way of life whose multiple dimensions affect and determine the entire daily life of this *homo mobilis* for whom commuting is not an option but a mandatory way of being in society. For this *homo mobilis*, even time and space bear different meanings. Mobility time is no “wasted” time. It is time considered in the dimensions of lived experiences. Similarly, the notion of space is transformed since mobility itself is a space. (AMAR, 2016)

This perspective gains special importance in the diffuse shape of current metropolises, especially South American metropolises, and their deficient transport networks. Those regions have alternating centers of interest connected by poor transport structures, overlapping people who *can't* commute and people who *cannot* commute. Still, arriving at a place and having access to a place are completely different experiences. Being able to commute to a certain place does not mean one is actually going to get to that place. Also, exercising the right to accessing a certain place depends on other criteria.

The concept of the right to mobility was academically coined by François Ascher, in dialogue and based on Henry Lefebvre's right to the city. Ascher, also a French sociologist, creates theories based on new relationships established with time and movement. Movement, in fact, would not be a new marker but it has been transformed by the effects of the division of labor in the globalized economy (ASHER, 2005). But if, as the author points out, the division of labor in the globalized economy transformed movement within cities, the gendered and racialized division of urban flows highlights the unseen barriers of the city one has access or not. The place of mobility, a place not all people can profit from, is a place that changes city borders.

3) Women's mobility within city flows

Cecília and Conceição are always on the move, but transport structure flows do not usually cater to their needs. They cross and reinvent the city's borders to work but also to perform home managing



tasks, parent their children, and access leisure equipment. When crossing these borders, they highlight them, especially the borders that constitute gender and race within the city.

Caren Levy, upon criticizing the travel choice paradigm, demonstrates how such rationale has been forged within the logic of the “rational man” of classical economics. The kind of person who would take individual decisions in a kind of *social vacuum* (LEVY, 2013). Not only is transportation planning built upon gender standards but such standards, as Levy again points out, are obviously those of a Western middle-class family. I would dare say they cater to the standards of a white, heteronormative, Western middle-class family. If, on the one hand, the gendered transport planning reiterates power relations that guide the (im)possibility of choices, highlighting trips that go beyond this restricted classist and racist conception of the city show an exercise and demand for mobility much broader than rational man's routes to and fro work.

Therefore, construing urban mobility from a gender-based point of view means assigning a different meaning to time. Trips are spatial-temporal routines forming a set of behaviors along time. In addition to trips outside transport standards, they affect time management, behaviors shaped by fear of harassment or strategies to fight it, changes and restrictions to the relationship with the city.

Shaping the male subject in urban development, as Christine Bauhardt points out, has an intimate relationship with technization of actions in the city. Cities are regarded as machines for rationalizing everyday life. They strongly combined with male bodily autonomy, taking over urban areas as if they were institutions with their own predictable and determined flows. However, such rationalization does not consider care-providing tasks, which are socio-normative attributions of women (BAUHARDT, 2005).

The routes of our research subjects have precisely demonstrated a range of multiple commutes or stops in the route initially planned to meet care and safety needs. Although the financial cost is essential for commute accounting, it is weighted against physical safety, fatigue, multiple tasks, care-providing tasks, the city in a state of alert. Travel time is managed not only as it regards to speed but also to related care-providing tasks, especially for women who are mothers. How many means of transport one must take and where are also decided in those terms. Therefore, the geography of health and education facilities imply changing the direction of routes and how fragmented they will be. Choices, if we could dare call them that, consider financial costs, attention to safety, care-providing tasks, and the ultimate limits of the body.

4) Parameters for a gender-based right to mobility

To shape the right to mobility based on women's mobility, I set forth four parameters to define the right to mobility:

Mobility as a place

Conceição normally takes the first bus with a friend. So, for a quarter of the trip, they talk about work, make plans for the weekend. Later, he gets off the bus and she eats something she has brought in her bag, gets updates on how her children are at home over her cell phone. She would always like to read. Riding the bus is her best place to read with no distractions. Cecília also tries to read. She prefers to study when she is riding the bus or the train. But she is so tired that she ends up falling asleep. She tries not to get too relaxed, so she does not miss the station she is supposed to get off and keep an eye on her daughter. When they are going to school, they go over school material and discuss interactions with teachers and classmates.

Therefore, the bus and the train are not mere spaces of transit. They are spaces where the dimension of lived experiences create everyday life. The logic of a transport engineering managed by hourly quantification and patterns of origin and destination makes no room for the full range of lived experiences *at the* commute whether inside a vehicle or not. This issue also includes all the dynamics of bodily acts performed to commute, both to have access to the transport system and go through it, as well as sociability because it manages the organization of timetables and transport.

It is not possible, therefore, to consider hours of transport only as a total number – even if they are a worrying total number to be curbed in South American metropolises – but one must bear in mind that these hours are lived by people who allocate them to everyday tasks, by bodies that perform complex bodily acts to protect others, protect themselves, and endure all the way. Thinking about mobility as a place reveals dimension occurred in the experience of mobility itself. Such dimension is unreachable when one can only see where they started from and how they arrived. The right to mobility cannot neglect the diverse range of mobility-space experiences because such range allows for a livable and feasible space for tasks and bodies *living* within it.

Time management

Cecília every now and then thinks about getting some more sleep but she knows that if she does not take the train at that exact time, the next one will be so crowded, and the trip will be unbearable for Rosa. Conceição is always on time. If she is ever late, she knows traffic jams are going to get much worse. Sometimes, she negotiates with her boss to get to work later and leave later to escape the rush hour.

Mobility time is not just the time actually spent commuting but the entire transit-related time management. When commuting at certain times is mandatory, it creates specific burdens for this management, such as walking along unlit streets at times of greater exposure to urban violence or facing horrible traffic jams at rush hour on one's way to work. In addition, domestic-related tasks, overlooked in the entire dynamics of transport systems, require specific time management, such as allocating time to take children to school, buy groceries, and provide food for the family.

Considering time management when shaping the right to mobility and not just the time actually spent commuting allows for including several perspectives of analysis. The right to mobility, therefore, must engage in the possibility of time management by people who commute, turning mandatory schedules flexible, and creating better commuting conditions for people whose schedule remain mandatory. Similarly, by making commuting for care-providing/reproducing tasks visible, it would allow for better time management of people commuting. In other words, better circular bus lines and nicely kept public roads for commutes, and other measures.

Choosing transportation modes

Conceição would like to take the subway in Gávea to do other kinds of work. But the station that was supposed to be built for the Rio Olympics (2016) has never been constructed. Among the bus line options to her place, there is one bus line she avoids riding because she was once mugged there. Cecília too would like to ride a single bus home so Rosa could sleep on the way. Or at least manage to sit with the girl on her lap on the train.

One can only talk about choosing the type of transport or modal transport if there is a feasible option available. Fulfilling the right to mobility means more than having transport available for people to move around, it also means having access to viable options in the same route. Viable options do not only mean existing ones, but they must be equally accessible and do not pose a different kind of threat. Therefore, we need a real transport offer. We need an offer that does not only consider commutes to areas of massive demand of formal work, in other words, we must consider various flows of people within the city. Also, we should ride non-motor vehicles on the streets, as well as take better care of sidewalks, lighting, and traffic planning so people could favor walking. Choosing how to commute is a non-negotiable component of the right to mobility.

Non-compulsory mobility / mobility levels

Conceição and Cecília have already worked in places closer to their homes, but both agree they cannot find good wages there. And Cecília has no doubt Rosa's quality of education is much better at her current school, hours away from home. Cecília and Conceição are forced to commute to have

access to better work, as well as access to leisure. However, timetables and the price of transport are barriers for them. Thus, commuting in the city is both an obligation and a challenge, except for people who can choose not to commute. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the difference between people who had to commute and people who could choose not to commute grew stark.

The option of not commuting, which, in fact, is related to the possibility of managing timetables and choosing modes of travel, is an important differentiating mark of exercising the right to mobility. Therefore, we could argue that fulfilling the right to mobility is a privilege restricted to few people. Nonetheless, reflecting upon mobility in a complex way requires understanding the levels of mobility created for and by the city, identifying the people who can move and what they are allowed to do while moving, and the people who need not move and when they do commute. This relates both to allocation of well-paid jobs in the urban fabric and investments in municipal and state-level urban apparatus.

Thus, the right to mobility must encompass the organization not only of transport but the entire urban organization so investment centers are available in several areas of the city. That is why it could be interesting to tell what levels of mobility are, instead of investing in an absolute dichotomy but to make such organizations more visible:

Impossibility to move: The impossibility of movement today means the impossibility of crossing physical and social borders in the scenario of exacerbated levels of exclusion. The impossibility of movement is related to the economic impossibility of affording the unreasonable prices of public transport, the lack of fitness of urban roads for people with reduced mobility, exposure to increased risk of police violence, risk of constant sexual harassment, risk of violence/murder due to sexual orientation, among other factors that make it impossible for people to move around the city.

Mandatory movement: There is a thin line separating the impossibility of movement from mandatory movement. Mandatory movement is related to production and reproduction tasks and the distances for both are an outcome of differentiated allocation of resources in the city. Thus, the more vulnerable the working conditions are, the more likely people are forced to move through the urban fabric. Similarly, those who are responsible for household chores, usually women to this day, are more likely to face mandatory movement for managing survival tasks, such as purchasing food – and longer commutes to seek cheaper food – commutes to care for the children, health, and performing care-related tasks for other family members. There is a thin line separating mandatory movement from the impossibility of movement precisely because people who are forced to move are often unable to do so, rendering the most basic tasks impossible. Similarly, turning the very possibility of movement, even if utterly vulnerable, a better option than not being able to perform the basic tasks to sustain life.

Movement as an option: In fact, movement as an option is listed here to contrast with impossibility of movement/mandatory movement. Also, it could represent the core of an effective *right to mobility*. Choosing to move means being able to move, that is, not having economic obstacles in urban commute, having access to public roads and transport that allow and enable one's commute, not being under constant threat of physical and psychological violence. And movement as an option also means being able to choose not to move or not to cross long distances. In other words, having access to well-paid jobs throughout the urban fabric, as well as quality hospitals, legal services, education structures.

Currently, non-mandatory movement/movement as an option is increasingly a social, racial, and gender privilege marker, not a right. People who can work from home, who have managed to do it throughout the Covid-19 pandemic X people who needed to go to work despite facing risks, people who do not need to go to the supermarket X people who deliver supermarket orders. Observing the city and mobility from that spectrum allows us to rethink its design to grant the right to both groups of people.

Conclusions still (or always) in motion

The right to mobility, from these four spectrums of analysis, could thus be regarded as the right to be in the space of mobility, manage one's mobility time, choose one's way of moving, and choose when and how to move. So Cecília could choose how she is going to take Rosa to school but also choose between schools that are not so far away from her home and provide equal education quality. It also means both a chance for Conceição to work closer to her home and, when she is not working, being able to leave her home at a time that allows for her to go to the supermarket, if needed. It is Conceição and Cecília's right to enjoy the space of mobility by rebuilding the city.

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