

Mobility

ADEY, Peter. London & New York: Routledge, 2010, 267 pp.

*Carmem Lussi**

Peter Adey, a scholar in Cultural Geography at Keele University (UK), offers what we can call a ‘philosophical approach’ to mobility, in a very broad interdisciplinary exercise, in dialogue with authors from different disciplines and various cultural contexts.

The volume investigates, in its 4 main chapters, meanings, policies, practices and mediations of mobility, understood as a transversal theme that, like ‘globalization’, is a notion which is absolutely linked to relations. In this sense, mobility is a “way of having a relation with, engaging with and understanding the world analytically”. The author treats mobility as a human and non-human process, which is much more than simply connectivity or inter-dependency, and because of this he considers mobility a key component of the world today. Although the title of the book is “mobility” written in singular, the author reflects on that mobility as always being necessarily plural, since “mobilities” involve “how we form relations with others and indeed how we make sense of this”. It has to do with the recognition that nowadays one has to deal with multiple identities and the ability to see the world from the perspectives of the others. So, Adey assumes mobility as a fundamental process that covers, from migration to infrastructural services, all material, social, political, economic and cultural processes operating in the world. Mobility “performs and holds together” any type of relation; and, among them, human mobility is taken as any other mobility and, since it is a relation, it is socially differentiated and can improve the social standing of its actors.

* PhD student at Pontificia Universidade Catolica of Rio de Janeiro/Brasil.

Chapter 3, where Adey presents his investigation on policies, is the part of the volume in which migration and others forms of human displacement are deemed as intrinsically implicated in his analysis of mobility. Situated among any other type of mobility, from river movement to air travel, migration emerges as a meaningful process of giving sense and opportunity in an unequal and hierarchical society. For the author, mobility can become both the prerequisite for, and the consequence of, social interaction. Moreover, special mobility has to be understood along with social mobility, but one has to effectively gain the improvement that mobility can bring. Through the interlocution with many scholars, Adey recognizes that mobility also reveals “a society divided by the way it moves”, and, in this sense, migrants and refugees are the people that more than any other can be excluded from those who “take advantage of mobility and modern communications”. At the same time, the study distinguishes mobility from freedom, in view of the fact that mobility has constraints and social differentiations that have effects and exert force on who can move and who cannot move, because there are people excluded from the real possibility of gaining new and different spaces. The author implies that the freedom of mobility for some (citizens, tourists, businesspeople) is made possible through “the organized exclusion of others forced to move around” as irregular ‘aliens’, migrants or refugees.

The richness of such a huge approach, made by a geographer in dialogue with dozens of scholars from different disciplines, opens for human mobility a great horizon of new meanings and new insights, from which innovative perspectives emerge, situating the subject ‘in relation’, as proposed by the author.

For scholars engaged in studies on migration, refugees and displaced people, this new approach on the theme of human mobility is a challenge, not only because of the link to human rights, that requires sometimes a less ‘philosophical’ approach, but also due to the difficulty of studying human mobility detaching it from the historical and geo-cultural contexts where it takes place. It is a challenge, and a suggestion.