

## 1. Southern Diaries



# Presentation of our new section : "Southern diaries"

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"Southern Diaries" opens its doors! The section features articles on issues linked to mobility in Souths. Discover the section's editorial line and the conditions of participation.

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### Research participants

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*"Should Africans see themselves as part of a universal enlightenment, of Christianity and civilization, of Shakespearean English and scientific reason (Masilela, 2003)? Or should they strive to 'combine the native and the alien, the traditional and the foreign into something new and beautiful', as H. I. E. Dhlomo wrote in 1939 (1977)?" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012)*

Mobility plays an important role in the paradigms of progress and development, which have long divided the world in a binary way between what is commonly called the North, the Global North, the West, or developed, industrialized or "modern" countries on the one hand, and the South, Global South, Third World, developing or underdeveloped countries on the other. This division, wherein the territories vary depending on the terminology (Wolters et al. 2015) and the political, economic and scientific institutions that use them, is based on socio-economic and, or more rarely, cultural data. There exists a presupposed "model" of modernity born of Enlightenment rationality towards which the whole of humanity should strive; while certain countries and territories succeeded in applying it, others still

struggle to catch up through processes of modernization, development and industrialization (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012).

## **Challenging the notion of a single development model**

However, this representation of the world is increasingly being challenged by authors in various fields, who recognize modernity as a vernacular value that changes according to the context and society (Cooper, 2005); hence the existence of "multiple modernities" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012). Thus, we speak increasingly less about a single, imposable development model from the "North" and more about the centre-periphery inequalities (Ferguson, 2006) specific to each context in its relationship with others, not only in terms of political, economic or cultural domination and dependence but also with regard to benchmarks such as poverty and access to services. In this respect, there is no such thing as a completely homogeneous territory or group of territories, but rather a multitude of contexts with their own characteristics, dynamics and complex interactions between territorial scales, wherein the centre of certain territories becomes the periphery of others.

Given the complexity of this, it seems necessary to speak of 'Souths' in the plural, to show that they are, in fact, comprised of a wide range of territories – just as the North is more accurately spoken of as "Norths", which today face the same issues that were once limited to 'Souths' (informality<sup>1</sup>, for example). In other words "There is as much South in the North as North in the South" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012).

## **A different perspective**

"Southern Diaries" is an invitation to examine mobilities by adopting a broad, inclusive perspective. Our aim is to help normalize references to 'southern mobilities' in comparative research and to further our understanding of other forms of organization and involvement in research on mobilities. This is therefore an explicit attempt to expand, enrich and geographically realign an academic field born partly as a response to growing transnational flows and interdependencies but which, somewhat paradoxically, is still dominated by research in and about the West.

The enduring myth of a benign, expanding, and convergent landscape of global mobilities is cracking under the weight of myriad events and processes whose origins and trajectories are entangled across various regions, systems and cultures. Over the last three decades, demographic, economic, political and environmental dynamics in the 'Souths' have increasingly defined the magnitude and significance of transnational flows and their ramifications into everyday places, experiences, fears and expectations. Think, for example, of migration from Africa and the Middle East to Europe and the growing number of airports in Asia to satisfy new travel aspirations. We need to question whether the study of mobilities is best served by bodies of knowledge that prioritize the realities of North America and Western Europe and only partially acknowledge other contexts and experiences.

This perspective serves to avoid the myth that the historical evolution of Southern societies will be mirrored in mobility patterns and infrastructures that have characterized successive developmental stages of the industrial North. 'Souths' are not always places that are 'lagging behind' or 'lacking'; nor are they the realm of persistent, intractable problems. Despite the many challenges facing Southern societies, these are also places of creativity and great ingenuity, as illustrated by the diffusion of mobility related concepts and innovations, not just North-South (like, for instance, logics of urban and transport planning), but also South-South and, increasingly, South-North. For example, the Bus Rapid Transit began in Curitiba in 1974 and is now used by 300 cities, of which 56 are in Latin America. The TransMilenio in Bogotá, Colombia, the Metrovia in Guayaquil, Ecuador, and Los Angeles's Orange Line are well-known examples. Likewise Bogotá has inspired transport planning in, for example, Guangzhou, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Jakarta and New York.

## Making Souths visible

“Southern diaries” gives greater visibility to local initiatives in Souths.

We believe that some of these initiatives can help us think about the mobility transition by avoiding transposing a new universal model forged in the 'Norths'. These include traditional practices (such as river transport in certain parts of the world or the organization of collective transportation in Africa) that have escaped “modernization,” like the omnipresence of cars in certain cities, and feature elements of sustainability upon which to base the mobility transition<sup>2</sup>. There are also new practices resulting from the innovation of the ordinary city<sup>3</sup> (Robinson, 2006), which attempt to meet inhabitants needs and expectations (e.g. informal practices, possible technological advances with ICT, etc.). In our opinion, these are all signs – albeit nascent – of the emergence of new mobilities that should be supported to bolster their effectiveness and sustainability.

## Doing research differently

“Southern Diaries” is also premised on the belief that good research emerges from a multiplicity of perspectives, methods and research styles. This means considering the institutional and material conditions under which researchers in 'Souths' work. There is often strong professional involvement on the part of these researchers within local communities, neighbourhood associations, labour movements, environmental associations, and minority groups. This style of doing research retains the academic rigor and methodologies of sociology as a discipline, while seeking to illuminate and address problems through a dialogue with different sections of the ‘public’ (residents, local government representatives, associations, etc.). Public sociology is the term often used to describe this kind of involvement that reaches beyond the academic world and that includes different types of participatory action research or the development of alternative techniques of collaborative research. “Southern Diaries” will attempt to support this style of research and heighten the profile of researchers working, as Michael Burawoy has put it, ‘tirelessly and invisibly in the trenches of civic society’ (2009 : 460).

## How it works

Every month , “Southern Diaries” will feature a new article on a wide range of mobility issues. In line with research developed by the Mobile Lives Forum, special emphasis will be placed on contributions examining people’s aspirations and ways of life, and the challenges and opportunities of ongoing social and cultural transformations for sustainable mobility transitions.

“Southern Diaries” is interested in works of research that are sometimes ignored by the “global” academic world. By including new voices and addressing wider publics, “Southern Diaries” hopes to offer greater visibility to scholarship committed to opening up the dialogue about mobility futures in the 21st century.

If you would like to publish your work in this new section, please submit your proposals to (for works in French) or (for works in English). Please see **the call for papers** for the terms and conditions of participation.

**Corum ( Collectif de Recherche pour un Urbanisme ouvert sur les Mondes) is a partner of Southern Diaries and will publish a certain number of articles for the section. To find out more, please visit their website: <http://corum.hypotheses.org/>**

## Bibliographical References

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## Notes

1 This is the case, for instance, of new human settlements (e.g. the Calais Jungle) linked to recent migratory wave, as well as new so-called informal services like Uber and Deliveroo.

2 “Southern Diaries” key ambition will be understanding how the dynamics and processes resulting from the myriad mobility practices around the world – both old and new – can encourage or impede the mobility transition (i.e. a shift towards desired, sustainable mobility). The mobility transition aims to not only reduce the environmental impact (pollution, traffic and greenhouse gas emissions), but to take into account people’s aspirations with regard to lifestyles (i.e. the spatial and temporal organization of activities through travel and the use of information and communication technology).

3 The ordinary city is a concept developed by Jennifer Robinson designed to move away from the ranking of cities as North or Western cities and the others. She considers that all cities are ordinary, that they have their own specific features and are capable of innovation and adaptation to their own context.

## Mobility

For the Mobile Lives Forum, mobility is understood as the process of how individuals travel across distances in order to deploy through time and space the activities that make up their lifestyles. These travel practices are embedded in socio-technical systems, produced by transport and communication industries and techniques, and by normative discourses on these practices, with considerable social, environmental and spatial impacts.

En savoir plus x

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1 <https://fr.forumviesmobiles.org/agenda/2016/12/05/southern-diaries-mobilities-global-south-mobile-lives-forum-3381>

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