

ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG
BRUSSELS OFFICE

JANNA ALJETS

TAKE UP SPACE!

MOBILITY FOR EVERYONE IS IN, CAR-CENTRISM
AND HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IS OUT

A POLEMIC



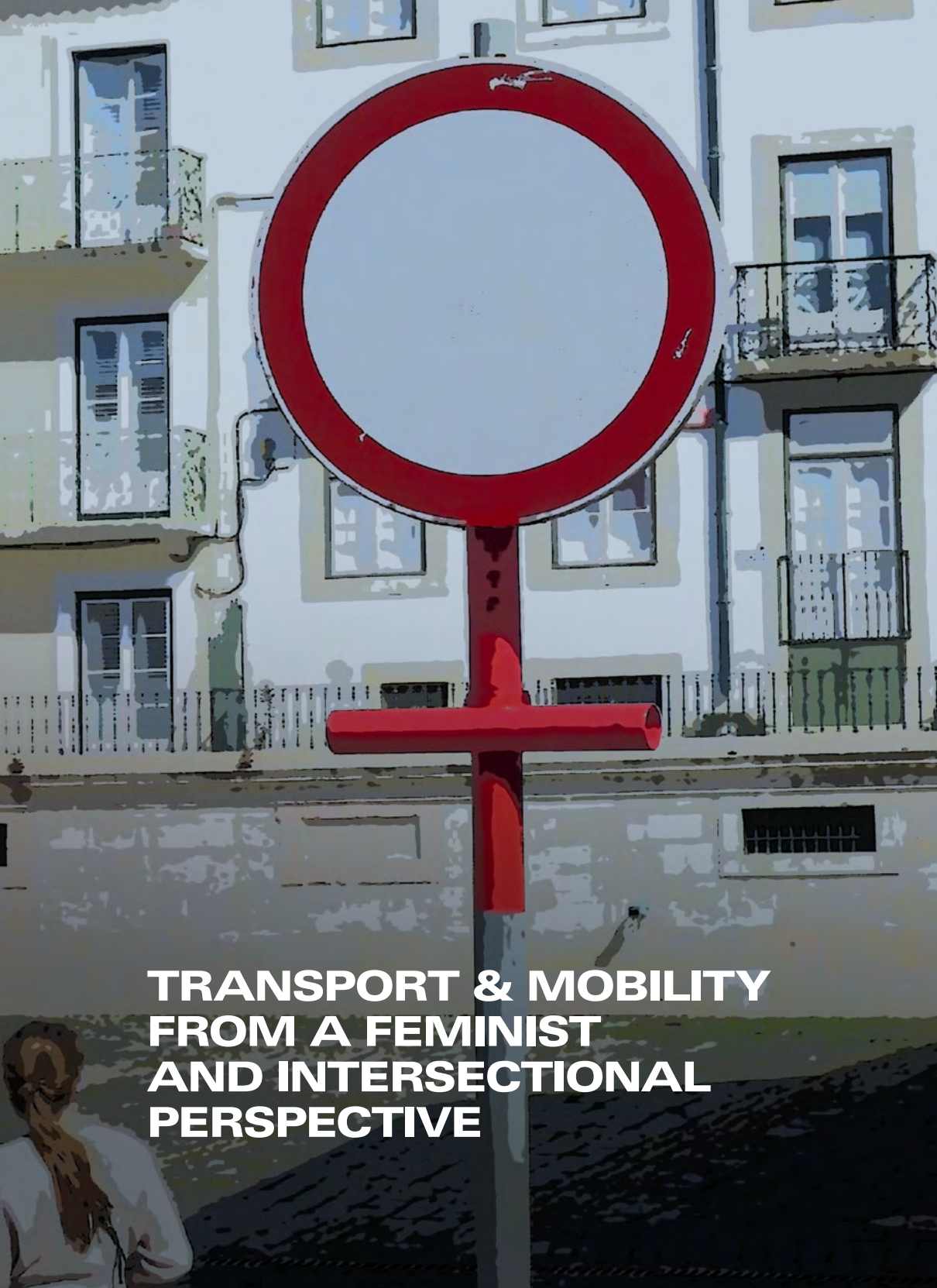
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JANNA ALJETS

Janna Aljets is an active member of the climate justice movement, campaigning against coal, cars and the patriarchy. She established the transformation of the automotive industry and the transport transition as a key focus area of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Brussels Office.

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**TRANSPORT & MOBILITY
FROM A FEMINIST
AND INTERSECTIONAL
PERSPECTIVE**



To participate in social life, we need to be able to get from A to B. However, this ability is more common in some segments of society than others depending on, for instance, where you live, your financial means and physical ability as well as on **gender**¹, class and ethnic origin. However, infrastructure and transport planning, which are negotiated at political level, are equally important here. The discrepancies in access to mobility and associated services have become increasingly clear during a global pandemic, with more and more people temporarily restricted to travelling in their local area. Our cities are not built for everyone.

Street canyons, pavements and cycle paths, bus and underground stations as well as car parks and playgrounds are found in every cityscape and seem to be made for all inhabitants. Accessibility and availability appear to be universal: a lift can be used by everyone just as much as a four-lane inner-city ring road – both offer **mobility** for everyone...or do they?

As different as the world's cities and their transport systems are, they are nevertheless very similar in one aspect: they all give physical form to the male* view, patriarchal relations and Fordism. Such embedded power structures and infrastructure benefit only a few and thus negate the (mobility) needs of many others.

This polemic analyses today's capitalist-shaped cities, **transport** and the respective (im)**mobility** of their inhabitants from a **feminist** and **intersectional** perspective, centred around the theory that **car-centrism** in particular (i.e. the focus on and prioritisation of cars) systematically neglects the **mobility** needs of women*, **Black people** and those with lower incomes in favour of outdated **gender** norms and lifestyles. In other words: today's cities and the associated transport planning reflect and replicate patriarchal, racist and classist patterns of production, consumption and thought. This culminates in the dominance of the car over all other means of transport and thus cements discriminatory power structures and infrastructure. In light of these structural processes of discrimination, alongside our increasingly inhospitable cities and the escalation of the climate crisis, an **intersectional** analysis is needed in order to enable **mobility** for everyone and at the same time push back on **car-centrism**.

1 Key concepts are clarified in the glossary.

The author describes this social construct surrounding cars that has become entrenched in our cities and transport systems. At the same time, she draws attention to alternative approaches: though the starting point of the analysis is a **feminist** perspective of **gender** issues, it also incorporates other forms of discrimination, as these are all interconnected within the fabric of society. **Intersectional** and sustainable urban and transport planning specifically addresses the patriarchy, racism and classism as well as the capitalist mode of production in equal measure. This perspective on cities and transport allows access to fair **mobility** for all, more tranquillity and space, room to interact with others and, above all, a safe and climate-friendly environment. In this respect, fair **mobility** always makes a vital contribution to social and ecological justice.





**THE CAR AS THE
ULTIMATE EXPRESSION
OF HEGEMONIC
MASCULINITY**

"You are not born a motorist, you become one."

Anna Nygard, Planka.nu

It is undeniable that our current **transport** system is built around the car as the central and most important mode of **transport**. However, this **car-centric** culture extends far beyond the purely infrastructural alignment of urban and rural areas in favour of the automobile and the key role the industry as a whole plays in the economy. The focus on the car and its privileged position within our entire **transport** system is also a question of **gender** and is therefore built on a strong social construct. The car is deeply emotionally charged like almost no other consumer product and is successfully marketed by the car advertising industry as the symbol of freedom and independence, as well as strength, dominance, power and technology. All these terms and concepts are also used synonymously to construct and perpetuate masculinity*.

The image of typically male* drivers and female* passengers still lingers today, along with the idea that tinkering with or polishing your car is solely reserved for proud fathers and "real men*". After all, they are the ones who understand technology and progress, according to the age-old patriarchal, though still widespread, idea. Or, as Dan Albert puts it: "Driver's ed made teenagers into citizens; auto repair made boys into men" (Albert 2019).

Margarete Stokowski brilliantly analysed the connection between the heated discussion about speed limits in Germany and wounded masculinity*: "Whenever there are discussions about restrictions to activities that are supposedly more 'male', whether eating meat, setting off fireworks or driving fast, squadrons of politicians and journalists are always at hand to declare that entirely unreasonable motives driven by a hatred of pleasure are castrating a God-given human liberty" (Stokowski 2019).

It would almost be funny if it weren't so sad. Yet this analysis aligns with the well-known macho "guy's guys" in the car and journalism industry: Elon Musk, Martin Winterkorn, Ulf Poschardt and others uphold this testosterone-soaked stereotype of masculinity*. "Cars are advertised according to sexist tropes; their design serves the purposes of sexual stereotypes; they

encourage the development of a **hegemonic masculinity*** rooted in qualities such as aggression, violence and technology, and in a time when physical strength is losing its significance in the workplace, cars serve to reconstitute masculinity* around questions of technical competence” (Brand / Wissen 2021: 140).

In concrete terms, hegemonic masculinity* then means that engines should be noisy and dirty or, if they are electric, need to pack real horsepower. Cars are now increasingly built to resemble miniature tanks that dominate city streets – and are supposed to impress at all costs, as is perceived satirically time and time again: “Posing, or the behaviour of heterosexual men* when driving to supposedly impress women*. When posing, they prefer to mindlessly race along, gunning their engines, involving others in their behaviour, much to the disgust of the unwilling participants. According to psychologists, by driving in such a way, testosterone-fuelled road users are striving to overcompensate for physical deficits elsewhere” (Müllender 2020: 25). As low as this humour may seem, there is no denying that the posing and flaunting of cars is used across different cultures to establish and perpetuate **hegemonic masculinity*** and dominance.

Cars take up space and are uncompromising, accepting at most other small tanks and nothing else. Cyclists and pedestrians are forced to squeeze past them almost apologetically, since roads and parking spaces are built for cars – and cars only. The trend for SUVs, which has proven so lucrative for car manufacturers, has pushed this spatial dominance to the extreme. In some ways, it is reminiscent of “manspreading” (where a man* sits in public with his legs spread wide apart) and “mansplaining” (when a man* gives a patronising explanation of a topic, mistakenly assuming that he knows more about the subject than his female* interlocutor). Cars take up space, without consideration for those who lose out, whether that be other human beings, those who are less able or are disadvantaged, or the environment. Here, the right of the stronger party is expressed as unconditional, and is propagated and largely accepted by society. Or, as an advert for the Ford Mustang sports car (unironically) puts it: Denken Sie einmal nicht an Ihre Kinder (literally: Just don’t think about your kids) (Roß 2018). Only your own ego, desires and lust for domination count.

This escalation draws attention to the catastrophic effects of **car-centrism** on the environment and climate. In a way, the SUV trend and the prioritisation of the car in our **transport** systems reflect the “imperial mode of living” (Brand / Wissen 2021) where resources are overexploited for our lifestyles and mobility at the expense of people in the **Global South** or future generations.

The fact that growing numbers of women* and also some PoC groups are driving cars and participating in the trend towards ever larger and more polluting cars initially seems contradictory but does not refute the argument in its essence: the display of **hegemonic masculinity*** is, after all, about dominance and power exercised at the expense of others, not biological sex or origin. Moreover, cars also provided women* with freedoms within the framework of the capitalist logic of exploitation.

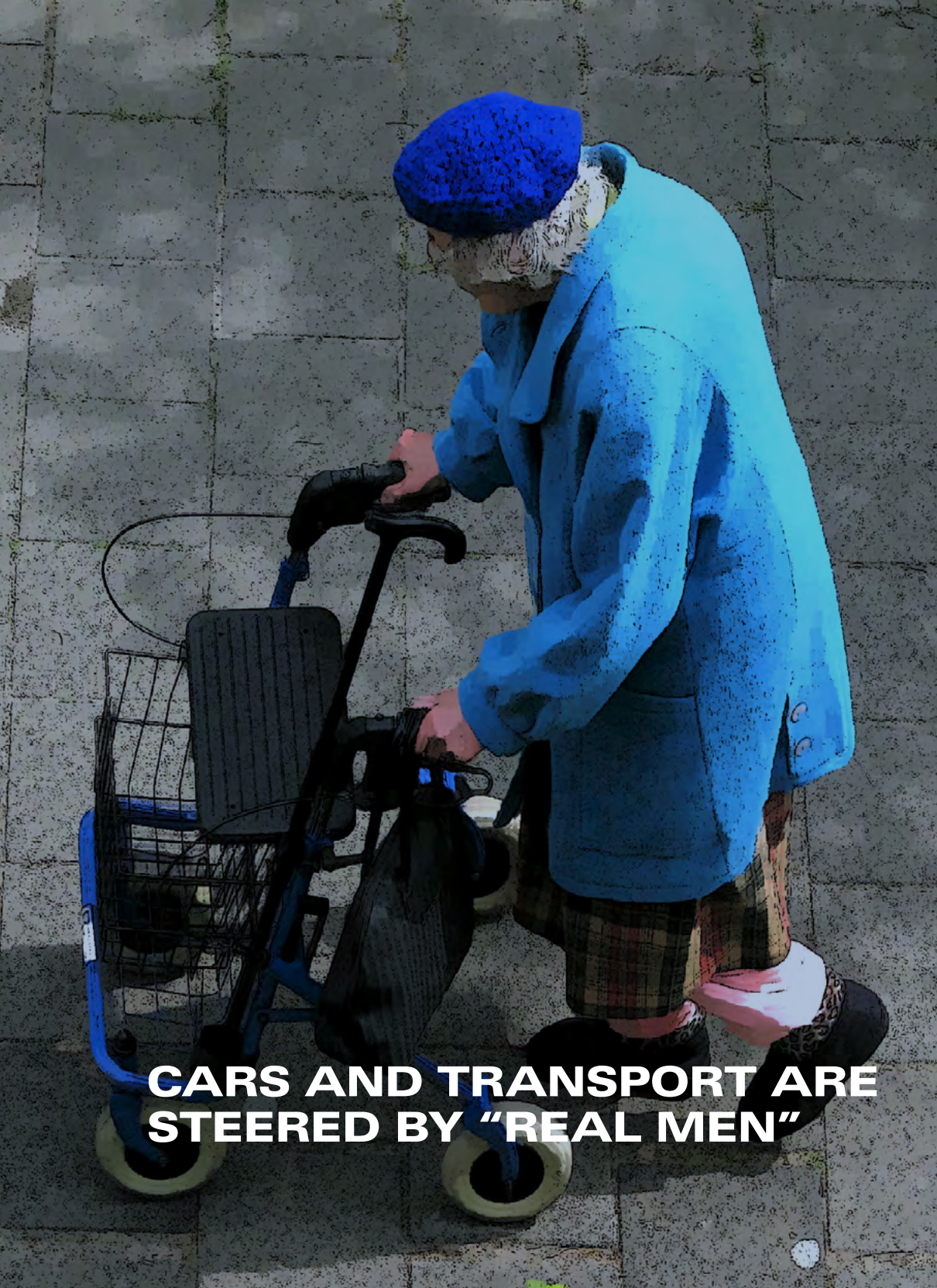
The symbolic independence forged through social advancement efforts thus also crosses **gender** divides. Or, in other words: it is about a general need to distinguish yourself from those “below” you, a display of one’s own elevated social position. In this respect, driving a car is and always has been something deeply classist. “The SUV is a means of protecting oneself against an inscrutable and frequently threatening world. [...] driving an SUV is an individual strategy [...] – a strategy, however, that intensifies the very phenomena to which it pretends to adapt.

Finally, this phenomenon could also be considered a secondary stage of class struggle: an SUV puts its owner into an unassailable position and thereby becomes a means for the middle class to cope with its latent fear of social decline” (Brand / Wissen 2021: 128f.). This appropriation of **toxic** behaviour for the purpose of social exclusion is also evident in other areas of society (Dämon 2018, Gersemann / Kaiser / Michler 2016).

This catastrophic trend, which has caused accident rates, environmental pollution and the profits of car companies to skyrocket in equal measure, can also be compared to a kind of arms race. SUVs are fundamentally changing the safety needs of all **transport** users. The more big two-tonne tanks on the road, the more everyone else feels unsafe.

Driving a normal-sized car no longer seems safe, hence the need for a bigger car for maximum safety, increasing the danger for everyone else on the road in turn. **Hegemonic masculinity*** and **car-centrism** thus perpetuate a kind of vicious circle that triggers an arms race at the expense of the environment and the freedom and safety of all. The increasing sales of SUVs confirm this observation (Greenpeace 2019). Critical and **feminist** theory is already familiar with similar phenomena from many other areas of society in which **toxic masculinity*** prevails – in other words, practically all of society. In this context, most people want to be less dependent on their cars –² the car, like traditional **gender** roles, thus becomes more and more of a burden rather than contributing to everyone’s freedom and independence.

2 German Environment Agency 2017: “Most Germans want to be less dependent on their car.” Nevertheless, one potential consequence of the coronavirus crisis is the reversal of this mindset, as there is an even greater need for safety and social distancing and people are once again choosing the car as their main mode of transport. This is a major social risk posed by the COVID-19 crisis.



**CARS AND TRANSPORT ARE
STEERED BY "REAL MEN"**

“[T]he assumption that shorter walking trips are irrelevant to infrastructure policy is little short of an assumption that women are irrelevant to infrastructure policy.”³

Caroline Criado-Perez

It is not only the technical and emotionally loaded fetish for and prioritisation of cars, however, that make mobility and **transport** an industry dominated by men*. Of course, this is unfortunately still the case in far too many areas of society. But the **transport** sector in particular seems to be a bastion of masculinity*, where *white* men* can still enjoy their own company (except, possibly, when travelling first class on planes and trains) and where women* and **Black people**, never mind their perspectives or concerns, are barely visible. Because here, too, **gender** and origin cause and perpetuate class differences.

The **gender** gap is primarily evident in one of the most powerful industrial sectors (Aljets 2019): in the car industry, women* are estimated to make up just 14% of the workforce, which is far below the average for other industrial sectors. The proportion of women* then continues to drop as levels of pay or qualification rise, and attempts to find any in the boardroom will in most cases prove fruitless. The same applies to **Black people** and people with a migrant background, who, since the guest worker generation in particular, have often been assigned the lowest-paid positions and are rarely promoted.

The proportion of women* in the total workforce varies between individual branches of the economy: in 2008, women* only accounted for 12% of those employed by car manufacturers, while on the supply side they accounted for between 12.2% (manufacture of car bodies, superstructures and trailers) and 18% (manufacture of parts and accessories for motor vehicles and motor vehicle engines) of the workforce (IG Metall 2010). Separate wage brackets for women* and low-income earners, which designated different (i.e. worse) pay levels for these groups, existed until the 1980s (German Trade Union Confederation 2013).

3 Criado-Perez 2020, 58.

If almost only men* build cars, then they also build them primarily for men*. The so-called **gender** crash gap indicates that women* are more likely to be seriously injured in accidents due to the fact that their build and the way they sit differ to men. The mandatory crash tests conducted on new cars are still only conducted with dummies based on a male* body (Dron 2019, Criado-Perez 2020: 253f.). The core aspect of one-sided safety is once again clear: the patriarchy ensures the safety of a few (passengers) and endangers everyone else.

Moreover, it is no coincidence that accident statistics also reflect **toxic masculinity*** through reckless driving. For example, men* are significantly more likely to cause serious or fatal accidents, and are even the main perpetrators of so-called "trivial" offences such as drunk driving, speeding or parking violations (Federal Statistical Office of Germany 2018, Runter vom Gas 2018, Kayser-Bril 2018). Consequently, insurance policies used to be cheaper for women* until 2013, when a ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union declared this to be an inadmissible form of discrimination (Sommer 2012).

However, the dominance of *white*⁴ males* is of course also more or less visible in other areas of society. For example, at the German Federal Ministry of **Transport**, where not a single female* minister has held office since its inception, senior position holders are almost entirely male* and *white* (German Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure 2020). This male* exclusivity continues to dominate other areas, too. For example, **transport** and urban planning in municipalities and administrative bodies falls largely under the purview of men*, chairs and professorships on **transport** are held by men*, and even in political parties there are few women* who speak on this topic. So-called **transport** experts are almost always men*, at conferences the few women* present nod to each other secretly, knowingly and encouragingly, and so it is no wonder that **transport** still seems to be the sole preserve of men* (and only boys are allowed to play with cars).

4 Driverless cars clearly struggle to recognise darker-skinned pedestrians, which may have fatal consequences. See Hern 2019.

It is striking that women* generally tend to behave in a more climate-friendly way (Räty / Carlsson Kanyama 2010) and are also more environmentally conscious in the way they travel, i.e. they walk, cycle or take public transport much more often, while more men* still drive their own cars (Verkehrslub Deutschland 2009, German Environment Agency 2019, Alber 2015)

One could almost speak here of an institutionalisation of the narcissistic (often male*) driver's perspective, as Tomas Vašek describes it: "It is the driver's gaze, their view of the world – the 'driver's perspective'. The driver's gaze is primarily directed forward onto the road. Anything encountered while on the road is perceived as a potential obstacle. The driver's perspective is a narrowed one, tunnel vision that is fixed on driving itself, on making progress as quickly and easily as possible. [...]"

It is also about a German way of life, an almost total car culture that permeates every last corner of this country. The car is entrenched in our mindset, it determines our lives" (Vašek 2019). There is somewhat of a mutual affirmation here: the patriarchal emotionalisation and prioritisation of the car forges and strengthens the car's institutionalisation and position of power, while these structures in turn strengthen the emotional sense of superiority and relentlessness of car drivers – one cannot be explained without the other.

The philosopher and car critic Peter Sloterdijk even created the following image for the emotional significance of the car in modern societies: "Any theory that characterises cars as a means of transport leaves out a whole dimension: the car is a means both of intoxication and regression. It is a **uterus on wheels** that has the advantage over its biological model of being linked to independent movement and a feeling of autonomy" (Sloterdijk 1995, emphasis by author).

Cars are entrenched in our loins as well as our heads, as is clear from the almost erotic or affectionate relationships people have with their car. However, the car differs from its biological counterpart mentioned here (the uterus) in that the latter poses no danger whatsoever, whereas cars are probably among the deadliest products of mass industry. Any other such deadly product would surely have been taken off the market long ago. The

very idea of comparing a car to a safe uterus seems like a patriarchal reflex and, incidentally, also provides unexpected insight into patriarchal gaps in knowledge about the female reproductive organs.





**HEGEMONIC
MASCULINITY IN THE
TRANSPORT SECTOR:
WHERE DOES IT LEAD?**

“If you want to know if an urban environment supports cycling, you can forget about all the detailed ‘bikeability indexes’ – just measure the proportion of cyclists who are female.”⁵

Jan Garrad, Scientific American 2009

Having more women*, **Black people and people with physical disabilities** in positions of power and decision-making does not necessarily guarantee **intersectional** urban and **transport** planning. But committees, expert panels and decision-making bodies that are almost entirely *white* and male* definitely only allow for very limited **transport** planning. Thus, the **transport** and **mobility** needs of full-time working men* have dominated transport planning for decades (Criado-Perez 2020: 56f.). Urban planning thus runs the risk of reflecting the Fordist-capitalist economic and social systems, in which a (male*) sole wage earner in an industrial job is economically responsible for their nuclear family.

The capitalist mode of production reinforced this artificial divide between domestic reproductive labour and non-domestic productive labour. Although the latter would be inconceivable without the former and unpaid care work forms the foundation of and is a prerequisite for other economic activities, paid productive work is assigned a much higher value in this economic system; this is expressed in different material and ideological recognition, which also aligns strongly with traditional **gender** roles.

Outdated images of **gender** and consumption patterns around mass products are formed, consolidated and constantly reproduced through this artificial divide – as is precisely the case in **transport** and urban planning. Society, however, has actually long since outgrown this vision of urban life, being home to many different forms of employment and family, as well as, of course, diverging **gender** roles. Seen in this light, current urban and **transport** planning can no longer even slightly reflect the changed social realities.

The **road layouts** of numerous cities provide a prime example of the limited view of patriarchal economic systems and urban planning. They are based on the long commuting distances (from home to and from paid work) that are driven once a day, usually by the male* sole earner of the family, and preferably in a private car with an internal combustion engine on an urban motorway, ruthlessly cutting through residential and shopping areas. These routes were tailored to the idealised 1950s model of family and **mobility**, where cities were designed according to the principle of being “car-friendly” and ensuring “boundless mobility for free citizens”. Roads thus lead through the city, past life and housing, towards work and the supposed centre of the productive economy. Routes to work are set as the standard and considered “forced **mobility**” (European Commission 2014). As if other routes were shaped by less force....

The work that is still mostly undertaken by women* and therefore considered “feminine*”, and the routes taken by these workers, are less linear and even less predictable. But they are not characterised by less “force”. **Care work** (such as looking after children and the elderly, shopping, doing the school run) requires many more journeys a day. These journeys are often very complicated and should ideally be located within a person’s immediate neighbourhood (e.g. having schools, kindergartens, doctor’s surgeries and supermarkets within the vicinity of their homes).

The car is not necessarily the first transport mode of choice here (if it is available at all) (Sánchez de Madariaga 2018). Care workers are therefore much more reliant on safe, short foot and cycle paths and a well-developed public transport system – all the more so since the global outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. However, the needs of this so-called “mobility of care” are overlooked in a purely *white* and male* view of urban and **transport** planning, and as such the development of the necessary infrastructure is comparatively poor. Fast, rather than local, roads are then prioritised.

Last but not least, care workers have completely different **transport** and **accessibility** needs. For example, parents are often on the go with prams and shopping bags, which require wider pavements, flattened kerbs and easier ways to get on and off public transport. This also applies to children,

the elderly and people with physical disabilities in particular. For them, stairs, kerbs or steep entrances/exits already represent a considerable hurdle, which would have to be taken into account in well thought-out urban and spatial planning. Universal accessibility is key here!

Overall, care workers have needs in terms of their immediate infrastructure, which arise primarily from their different roles, tasks and requirements (Murray 2018).

In addition to **transport** safety, however, patriarchal urban and **transport** planning easily overlooks the **physical safety** of certain groups of people in public spaces. **FLINT*** and **Black people** are much more vulnerable in public because their bodies are almost permanently exposed to sexual harassment and racist discrimination and threats. Public space is then always also potentially dangerous, as their bodies are (sexually) objectified and/or racialised. These dangers must also be taken into account when planning routes and choosing a mode of **transport**. In some cities and at certain times of the day, cycling is then considered a safe defence strategy against cat-calling (verbal sexual harassment), when elsewhere female* cyclists are much more exposed to road rage (aggressive behaviour when driving) and sexist insults (Change.org 2018). Under certain circumstances, public transport can then be safer or it can be particularly unsafe – so safety is very subjective and contextual (see the examples below). In some areas, expensive private taxis are the only truly safe mode of **transport** able to protect against physical or discriminatory assaults. *White men** as well as drivers of all genders rarely have to consider these questions.

Spatial infrastructure can offer an important contribution to making public space safer. For example, long and dark tunnels or anonymous small underground carriages or even poorly lit bus stations can be frightening places for many, especially at night when many assaults take place. A progressive response to this must not involve constant video surveillance – instead, public space must be designed differently so that it becomes safer. It is also important to note here that different groups of people can have vastly different safety needs – this must be developed together with them, rather than excluding them. Therefore, participation and inclusion are crucial here.

In addition, a car-centric city and society creates further risks. Children, the elderly and people with physical disabilities in particular move at a different pace. Car-centric spaces are oriented towards possible car speeds of about 50 km/h – as such, traffic lights change quickly and pavements are narrow. This orientation ultimately disadvantages all those who want or need to travel more slowly and creates unsafe conditions for them due to the high risk of accidents and injuries.

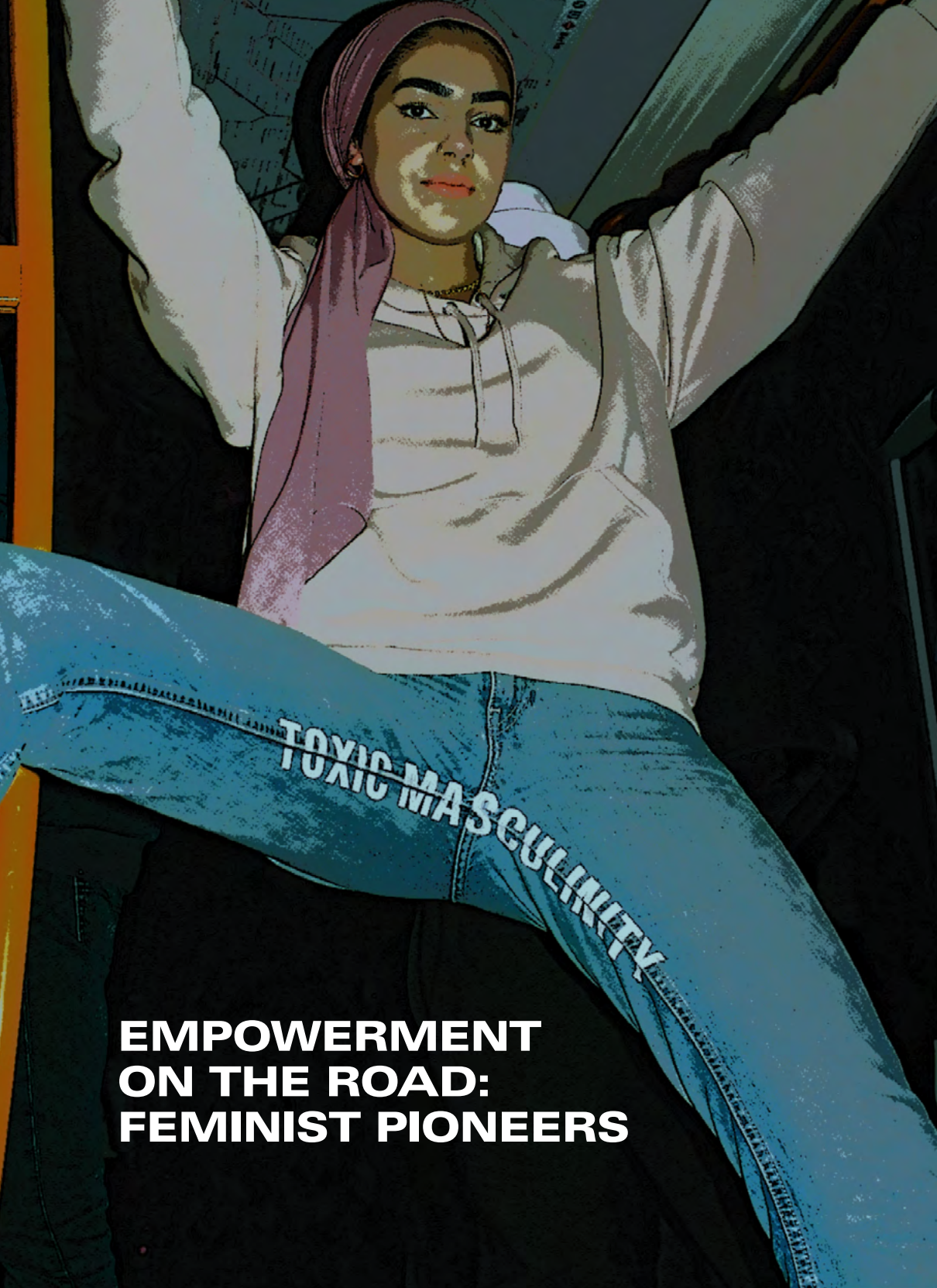
Last but not least, the democratic aspect of the **unjust distribution of area and space** caused by a car-centric and patriarchal society should also be highlighted here. Almost every space that is built and used for cars is no longer accessible for other **transport** users or other forms of transport: the space for roads and parking spaces, motorways and multi-storey car parks as well as for petrol stations is therefore not only a visual nuisance, but is also exclusively reserved for cars and difficult to change.

According to the current guideline in Germany (FIS 2016), 60% of road space should be dedicated to pedestrian and bicycle traffic, with only 40% being allocated to cars, which nevertheless significantly prioritises cars. But the reality is very different, as road planning is often done from the inside out (i.e. starting from the car) instead of the other way round, as the theory suggests.

Transport is also a source of noise pollution. Here, too, it is often the case that bystanders, people who do not even cause the noise, are much more affected by it than drivers, who can sit isolated in an almost soundproof car.

Car-centric cities thus limit the space for social interaction. When people are asked what is important to them in their neighbourhood, they want space to meet others, i.e. benches, parks and traffic-free areas – this is all the more important during the coronavirus pandemic in order to continue to facilitate safe social interaction. A study conducted in Bristol (UK) showed that neighbourhood social interaction increased as the volume of traffic decreased (Hart / Parkhurst 2011). Cars and the associated infrastructure therefore prevent vital social interaction! This is especially important for care workers, but also older people, as they rely heavily on a supportive environment.

In addition, **car-centrism** is of course also an issue of **climate and environmental degradation**. In no other sector are emissions so consistently high. In Germany, the **transport** sector accounts for around 20% of greenhouse gas emissions, 96% of which is attributed to road **transport** alone (German Environment Agency 2016). So those who continue to build cities and rural areas for cars and design them according to their needs are heating up the planet and polluting the air, both of which pose more of a threat to women* and people in lower income brackets. For example, those with little money live on the noisiest and dirtiest streets, while the rich can afford to live in the countryside with long, state-subsidised commutes in their cars (Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing 2015). But housing in the city is also increasingly the source of competition, pushing low-income households into dirty and overbuilt neighbourhoods. The damage to health caused by air and noise pollution exacerbates the greatly reduced quality of life experienced by these households.



**EMPOWERMENT
ON THE ROAD:
FEMINIST PIONEERS**

*“Public space belongs to all of us,
not to the sexist car machos alone!”*

Purple Ride Berlin activists

Car-centrism originated in countries like Germany, which is why this essay has so far focused on its impact in this country. However, similar phenomena can be found in all European countries as well as most countries elsewhere in the world. Resistance to **car-centric** culture and the associated **hegemonic masculinity*** is mounting everywhere, in both the Global North and the **Global South**. In many places around the world, **feminist** and/or queer activists are organising to bring **intersectional** perspectives into **transport** and urban planning, to make spatial infrastructure more diverse and to appropriate public space. This section therefore touches on some of the campaigns and initiatives that empower **FLINT***, People of Colour and others in their **mobility** and visibility, while pushing back against **car-centrism** and **hegemonic masculinity***. Their perspectives are inclusive and tell stories of how to successfully foster a **feminist** and **intersectional transport** transition.



CARISHINA EN BICI

QUITO, ECUADOR

The voluntary collective Carishina en bici was founded in Quito in 2009 by a small group of women* who wanted to promote and encourage cycling among women* in the Ecuadorian capital. Cars are still the main mode of **transport** in the city, with poorer people in particular being dependent on public buses – the streets are often congested. However, it is precisely on these buses that many women* experience sexual assault. Bicycles therefore serve as a way to empower women* and give them freedom and independence. The collective organises joint bicycle tours and demonstrations and gives free cycling lessons by women* for women*, thereby helping to promote a more just and humane society.

For more information, see:

<http://carishinaenbici.blogspot.com> (in Spanish)



CAIRO CYCLING GECKOS

CAIRO, EGYPT

The Cairo Cycling Geckos cycle through Cairo and deliver hot meals to those living in poor neighbourhoods. The group of young female* cyclists has a dual aim. Firstly, cycling represents an emancipatory act for young women* in traditional Egyptian society. Cycling is very rare in Cairo, even more so for women*, because conservative Muslims consider it unseemly and dangerous. Secondly, the young women* deliver hot meals to poor neighbourhoods by bike. Cycling is the ideal way to negotiate the narrow streets of these neighbourhoods. The food is very welcome, and the young cyclists encourage the girls* living there to dare to do more than society traditionally allows. Combining charity and cycling has thus opened up space for emancipation. The group also holds monthly cycling events, which among other things also serve to boost self-confidence among young girls and self-awareness of physical ability through sport.

For more information, see:

www.arte.tv/en/videos/084346-000-A/egypt-the-female-cairo



CAIRO CYCLING
GECKOS

PURPLE RIDE

BERLIN, GERMANY

A **FLINT***-Only Critical Mass took place in Berlin on International Women's Struggle Day on 8 March 2020. According to the organisers, a woman* on a bicycle is always a political statement. In many countries around the world, cyclists are unusual and girls* are frequently forbidden to learn to ride a bike. Though women* on bikes are threatened and persecuted, they are independent and free and occupy an equal place in public space. Wearing purple clothing, playing music and demonstrating on bicycles, the activists are together fighting to combat machismo and foster the **mobility** transition on two wheels.

For more information, see:

www.facebook.com/events/1268439900031715



URBAN PLANNING FROM A WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

Seestadt Aspern, a district of Vienna, is home to somewhat of a **feminist** utopia when it comes to urban planning: the district was planned mainly by women*, who prioritised the need to reflect a range of differing perspectives and realities. The result is that the district is very much geared to the needs of families, half of the area is public space for everyone and paths are barrier-free and wide. In addition, a lot of space was created for interaction, pedestrian paths were given priority and lighting was improved. Playgrounds were placed between blocks of flats, which are separated from traffic. Communal areas are structurally separated from **transport** routes by means of residential buildings. The area in front of the school was also designed to be particularly safe and removed from traffic, as there are no roads running directly alongside the school, though there is a bend in the road to the side of the building. Another interesting detail: all the streets are named after famous women*.

For more information, see:

www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/may/14/city-with-a-female-face-how-modern-vienna-was-shaped-by-women

OVARIAN PSYCO-CYCLE BRIGADE

LOS ANGELES, USA

The Ovarian Psycho-Cycle Brigade is a group of young **Black woman*** who have formed a bicycle collective to create a safe place and family cohesion for each other. Here, cycling primarily strengthens their own empowerment and reclaims public space. The group's main focus is the constant violence that **Black women*** are exposed to in US society as well as the general difficulty experienced by **Black women*** striving to get into positions of power in society.

For more information, see:

<https://ovarianpsycos.com>



BIKEYGEES

BERLIN, GERMANY

#BIKEYGEES e.V. began in September 2015 as a small empowerment project for refugee women* and has grown into a non-profit association focusing on educational and integration work in Berlin and Brandenburg. They offer cycling lessons for women* and girls*, multilingual lessons on dealing with **transport** as well as basic bicycle repair. Borders and barriers based on origin, religion, language or status must be consciously overcome. Regardless of this, every woman in the world should be able and allowed to ride a bicycle – and thus be mobile.

For more information, see:

<https://bikeygees.org/en>





**FEMINIST,
INTERSECTIONAL AND
FAIR MOBILITY**

*“People don’t cross roads –
roads cross our environment.”*

(Postcard from Verkehrsclub Deutschland)

What would transport and **mobility** look like from a **feminist** and **intersectional** perspective? How can **transport** be planned more democratically? How does a **feminist** city move? And who could bring this about?

Toxic and hegemonic masculinity* is based on the principle of being stronger and thus on exclusivity. This enables car-centric urban spaces as well as unfair **transport** systems, because mobility is not available to all to the same extent and space is only made to accommodate the needs of a few.

In contrast, a **feminist** and **intersectional** approach must focus on inclusivity and taking into account people who are socially disadvantaged or less physically strong. Such an approach must also emphasise diversity and the possibility of different ways of living and doing business and thus correspond much more to actual social realities and the associated changing **gender** roles. After all, **mobility** opens up the opportunity to participate in society in the first place and should therefore be made more accessible, if only from a democratic point of view. As such, **mobility** must be seen as part of public services of general interest. In my view, adopting such an approach results in five principles for fair transport planning: **mobility** for everyone, safety for everyone, focus on relationship-building, error-friendliness as well as new alliances. If implemented consistently, these combined principles could trigger a radical change in the **transport** sector.

MOBILITY FOR EVERYONE

Until now, cities have been built for, and around, cars and therefore the strongest **transport** users (usually those with the highest income); they should now be (re)built for all people. Everyone must be able to enjoy **mobility** as a right, without **mobility** for the few encroaching upon or impeding the freedom of movement of the many. Consequently, this means that roads should not displace pedestrians and cyclists, which is usually the case today. Ecomobility (walking, cycling and using public transport) is precisely what ensures **mobility** for a large number of people without taking up a relatively excessive amount of space from others. During the COVID-19 pandemic, stronger safety measures are also needed for journeys by public **transport** (Daum 2020). This requires all the more space.

Mobility for everyone also means mobility that is safe, affordable, accessible and environmentally friendly, regardless of **gender**, income, origin, physical fitness or skin colour. These aspirations also clearly point to collective and shared means of **transport** as well as cycling and walking. These modes of transport take up significantly less space, consume fewer resources, and produce less noise and air pollution than cars. In addition, they are generally much cheaper, meaning that they are more inclusive for more people. Last but not least, the diversity of users must also be a priority here, which is why it is important that **transport** infrastructure can also be used in a multi-modal and multifunctional way. Instead of focusing purely on fast roads for cars, **mobility** for everyone requires a much more complex planning of **transport** and **mobility** services. In principle, this already per se excludes today's standard mode of transport: private car.

SAFETY FOR EVERYONE

Another aspect is the necessary safety of the **transport** system and urban infrastructure in all its dimensions described here.

First, **transport** must be safe for all, because modes of **transport** must not become potential murder weapons. Vision Zero is a strategy built around the core idea that **transport** should no longer cause any traffic-related fatalities or injuries. Consequently, this requires rolling back the use of cars, because despite all technical or urban planning advancements, cars still cause fatalities and injuries. This often particularly affects slower road users, who are also less well protected. A city with fewer cars would therefore benefit the elderly and physically disabled, but also all cyclists and pedestrians. Children being able to get to school independently and safely without their parents should no longer be a privilege enjoyed by a few.

Interestingly, cycling infrastructure is a key indicator of a fairer, safer and more inclusive system of **mobility**. The better and safer it is, the more women*, children and old people will use bikes (Medina 2019). It is precisely these population groups that must be the focus of **feminist transport** planning.

Secondly, it is also about safety in the form of an absence of threats, assaults and harassment. Women*, the elderly and children generally have a much greater need for safety. This then primarily concerns urban planning issues. The places where *white* men* can feel at ease and safe can be frightening places for women* or **Black people**. Dark underground car parks, poorly lit station entrances and underpasses as well as overcrowded trains and constant traffic make cities unsafe and turn **mobility** into a gauntlet to be run. We should aim to ensure that no one need fear assault in public space any longer. Physical and psychological safety needs must be taken into account in **transport** and urban planning, because some bodies are more vulnerable than others.

FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

A **feminist** and **intersectional** perspective also takes a closer look at transport routes required for care work. The concept of “mobility of care” encompasses a more complicated and small-scale version of **mobility** with different purposes; it usually takes place in a person’s immediate spatial vicinity. However, it is often invisible and undervalued, and receives less social and financial recognition, even though this care work is the foundation of productive work. It is therefore all the more important to make the routes and mobility needs of care workers more visible and to improve them. Special attention should be paid to complex routes in neighbourhoods and the immediate vicinity. Daily needs, for example, should be within walking distance everywhere. This would be a first aspect of a focus on relationship-building.

Secondly, it should be recognised that care work is first and foremost about relationship-building; contact with and between people is absolutely essential and central. It therefore comes as no surprise that many women* (as well as older people) need more spaces for social interaction in cities, as their care work also brings them into contact with others (Hegarty 2019). Such social interaction remains essential even during the COVID-19 pandemic and needs all the more public spaces to minimise the risk of contagion. More space for social interaction would incidentally also facilitate a social mix of different groups of people and enable encounters between heterogeneous groups, thus promoting diversity and acceptance overall. Creating simple and inviting seating areas and parks is a way to ease and enable care work, interaction and relationship-building. If spaces in towns and cities are gobbled up for commercial use and car parking spaces, it renders these kinds of social encounters impossible.

ERROR-FRIENDLINESS AND HUMANITY / IMPERFECTION AS A NORMAL ASPECT OF HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

Until now, car-centric cities have assumed that all people and machines function perfectly. But neither one nor the other functions as faultlessly in reality as one might wish. Cars, buses and bicycles are steered by people who can cause serious accidents through inattention, overstrain or even recklessness. Pedestrians are not always alert either, with ever-present smartphones pushing up the error rate. Traffic is therefore currently not organised in an “error-friendly” or “human” way, and mistakes lead to injuries and deaths. This could be avoided!

Transport planning must recognise such imperfection as a normal aspect of human behaviour and design infrastructure and **transport** services accordingly. For example, **transport** services would have to be organised for people who cannot (yet) walk quickly or can no longer do so, or cannot see or hear well, or simply do not know their way around. Again, the inclusive focus on the weaker and disadvantaged within societies plays an important role here. This could entail significantly longer intervals between changing traffic lights for pedestrians, wider cycle paths, barrier-free signs, lifts and much more. However, it also means actively and specifically restricting the supposed right of the faster and stronger, i.e. mostly car drivers. A general 30 km/h speed limit significantly and directly reduces the risk of accidents. After all, traffic management and **mobility** services must not pose a danger or restrict participation in social life.

NEW ALLIANCES FOR MORE MOVEMENT

A **feminist, intersectional** and democratic **transport** transition must promote those most affected by the current **hegemonic masculinity*** and dominant **car-centric** culture and/or who are already working on alternatives: parents, cycling activists, environmentalists, People of Colour, those with physical impairments, the elderly and children. Greater collaborative organisation at grassroots level is required, with potential new alliances a welcome prospect. However, radical changes are also needed within established institutions in parties, NGOs, and ministries, as well as in local politics. Giving women* and People of Colour a seat at the table and space to speak is the first step towards encouraging more inclusivity. Even more important, however, would be **gender-sensitive** and **intersectional** planning that understands **transport** and **mobility** as being part of public services of general interest and therefore always keeps in mind the fact that all people should have fair access to **mobility**.

Ultimately, these principles could actually benefit everyone. What is clear is that it would curtail the (male*) dominance of the car in our cities, no matter the engine or size. It is also clear that routes, plans and implementation may vary greatly from city to city and must be devised in collaboration with residents. This also requires more democratic participation and the creation of a better data basis (Criado-Perez 2020, Badstuber 2019) through **intersectional** and **gender-sensitive** research. In any case, however, such urban and **transport** planning would foster greater access, fairness, tranquillity, space, fresh air, safety and (interaction) space for all.



**GLOSSARY OF
SOME KEY CONCEPTS**

The language we use reflects our worldview and our truths, thereby cementing or challenging social power structures. Language therefore has great critical potential and is always political, because it is also an expression of dominant ideas and social constructs. This essay uses a number of key terms based on a range of suppositions, and these terms can be understood in different ways. They are therefore explained in slightly greater detail below.

BLACK PEOPLE AND PEOPLE OF COLOUR (POC)/WHITE

The terms “Black people” and “People of Colour” are derived from the self-designation of people who have experienced racism. In both terms, the focus is on self-empowerment, while at the same time drawing attention to the social construct of categories such as “race” that make discrimination and racism possible in the first place. Conversely, “white” is deliberately italicised in this essay to refer to the underlying social construct, which can only be read in its historical and cultural context and which usually confers advantages and privileges on those so ascribed. All these terms denote political relations and have nothing to do with biological or visible characteristics.

CAR-CENTRISM

In this essay, the reinterpreted term “car-centrism” refers to the underlying orientation, prioritisation and focus of **transport** systems as well as urban planning that regard the private car as the main and most important mode of transport and thus assign to it the corresponding space, financial resources and infrastructural modifications. Within this culture, alternative modes of transport are made subordinate to the car without argument.

FEMINISM

“Feminism” refers to social, political and academic currents and social movements that critically analyse prevailing patriarchal and binary gender structures and advocate for equal rights, human dignity and self-determination for all people of all genders and against sexism. Feminist theory and practice claim to have an eye on the totality of social relations and thereby criticise gender inequality and the associated social order.

FLINT*

Abbreviation for female*, lesbian*, inter*, non-binary and trans* people, i.e. people who (may) have experienced sexism or (gender) discrimination at different points in their lives.

GENDER

“Gender” refers to a social construct, independent of biological reality. This is based on the assumption that social and historical context shapes and reproduces gender roles, and that they are therefore changeable and fluid. Gender does not move within rigid boundaries but operates in broad, very diverse and changeable categories that need to be read within their context.

GLOBAL SOUTH AND GLOBAL NORTH

These terms refer less to the geographical hemispheres than to historical and political power relations created by colonialism, racism and the capitalist economic order. “Centre” and “periphery” could be used here instead but these would overemphasise economic imbalance at the expense of highlighting racist power relations.

HEGEMONIC (AND TOXIC) MASCULINITY

The term “hegemonic masculinity” can be traced back to the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci and his concept of cultural hegemony and was introduced into feminist discourse by sociologist Raewyn Connell in 1995. It describes the construct of the dominant social position of men* that subordinates women* and divergent masculinities (e.g. homosexuals). The concept aims to analyse complex power relations between social classes within a society and emphasises the constant need to uphold the dominant, hegemonic position, which can vary depending on the context or time. Toxic masculinity emphasises the destructive and aggressive manifestations of these constructed efforts to secure hegemonic status.

INTERSECTIONALITY

“Intersectionality” describes the intersection and interaction of different forms of discrimination faced by one person. Intersectional discrimination occurs when a person becomes a victim of multiple forms of discrimination such as racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, homophobia, ableism or classism at once due to different, interacting personality traits. This leads to unique forms of discrimination. An intersectional perspective allows us to see how these different, non-comparable experiences of discrimination are intertwined. The Black women’s* movement in particular has ensured that racist and classist experiences are more strongly recognised and dealt with than they were in the movement so far dominated by *white* women*.

MOBILITY

“Mobility” refers to a person’s lived or potential ability to move independently from one location to another. Mobility serves to satisfy needs (e.g. social interaction, food, learning) through spatial change. A person’s respective mobility depends on numerous internal and external factors; it is also a multi-layered and potentially multimodal phenomenon. Mobility discerns the length of a route between A and B, i.e. the entire quality, experience and possibility of the route.

TRANSPORT

Transport refers to the purely functional, fastest possible way to cover a distance between A and B. Transport is the tool needed to actually move from one place to another. It encompasses vehicles, infrastructure and rules and is also very measurable. Modes of transport and their associated planning and provision are intended to provide people (and goods) with mobility, which they usually need to fulfil other needs. The need for mobility thus gives rise to demand for transport.

WOMEN* AND MEN* / MALE* AND FEMALE*

The use of an asterisk here is intended to draw attention to the social construct underlying these categories. The asterisk indicates that words such as woman/girl/female/man/boy/male are social attributes and enable learned roles and behaviours but are not based on biological or immutable realities. Moreover, the asterisk points to the greatest possible diversity contained within these linguistically binary gender boundaries.



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The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung is an internationally operating, left-wing non-profit organisation providing civic education. It is affiliated with Germany's 'Die Linke' (Left Party). Active since 1990, the foundation has been committed to the analysis of social and political processes and developments worldwide. The Stiftung works in the context of the growing multiple crises facing our current political and economic system.

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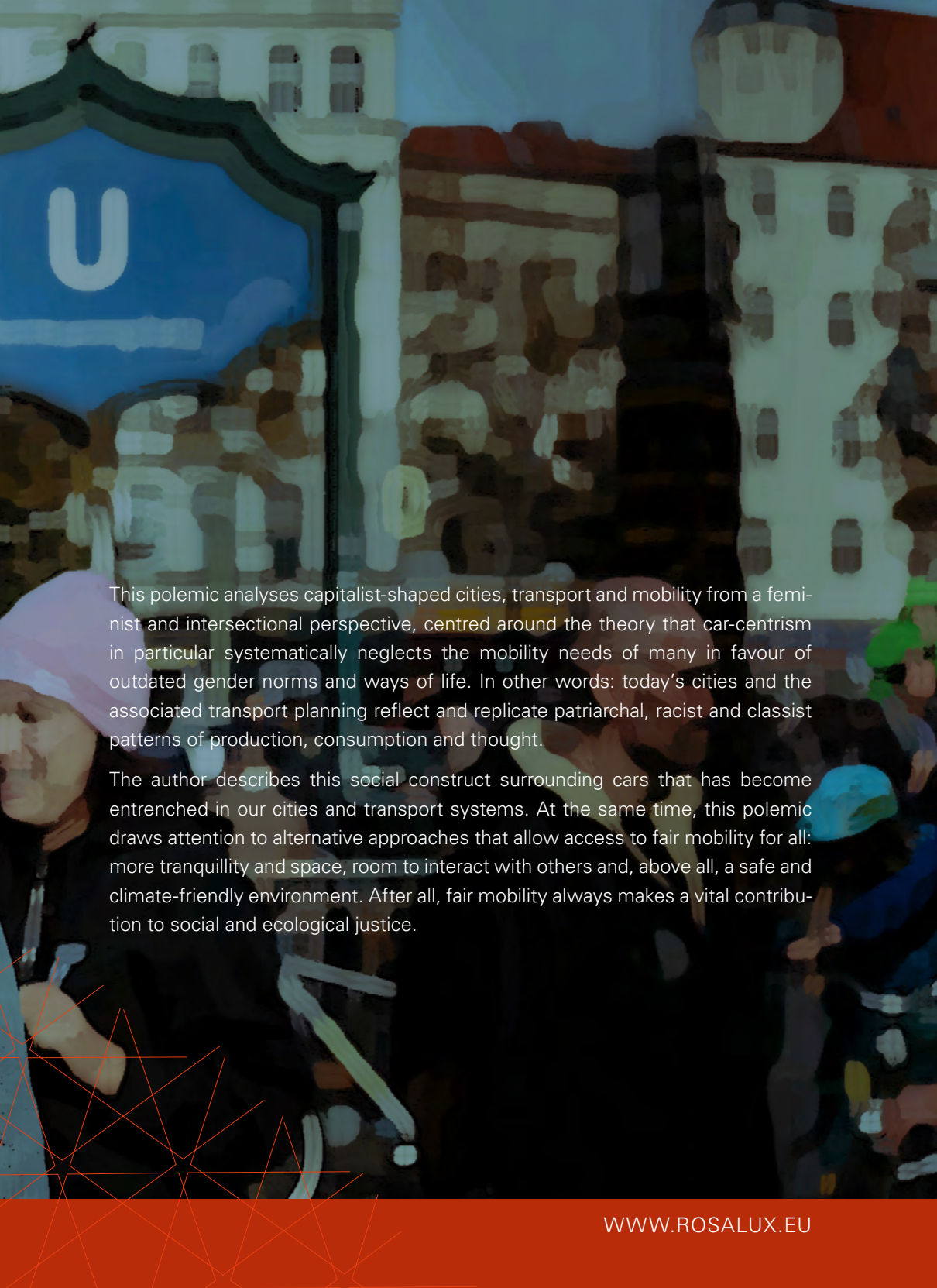
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This polemic analyses capitalist-shaped cities, transport and mobility from a feminist and intersectional perspective, centred around the theory that car-centrism in particular systematically neglects the mobility needs of many in favour of outdated gender norms and ways of life. In other words: today's cities and the associated transport planning reflect and replicate patriarchal, racist and classist patterns of production, consumption and thought.

The author describes this social construct surrounding cars that has become entrenched in our cities and transport systems. At the same time, this polemic draws attention to alternative approaches that allow access to fair mobility for all: more tranquillity and space, room to interact with others and, above all, a safe and climate-friendly environment. After all, fair mobility always makes a vital contribution to social and ecological justice.