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Book review of *Climate Mobility Justice: Narratives and Visual Politics of the Panicocene*

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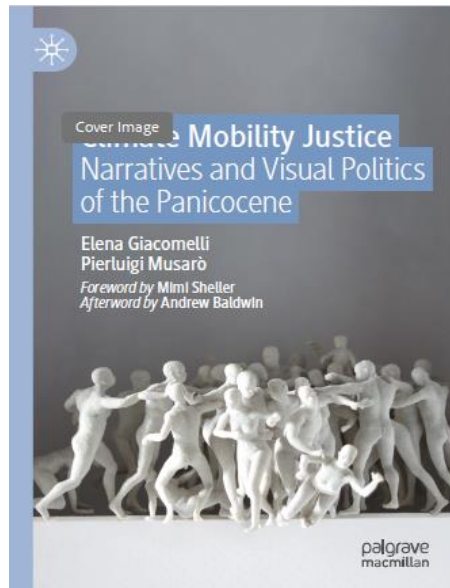
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Abstract

This is a review of *Climate Mobility Justice: Narratives and Visual Politics of the Panicocene* by the authors Elena Giacomelli and Pierluigi Musarò (Palgrave Macmillan).

Keywords: Climate mobility justice, Panicocene, discursive analysis, visual politics, mobility justice.



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The book *Climate Mobility Justice: Narratives and Visual Politics of the Panicocene* by Elena Giacomelli and Pierluigi Musarò offers an in-depth and critical analysis of the intersection of climate change and human mobility, placing this debate within a broader framework of global justice and the politics of representation. In a context where the discourse on “climate migration” has become increasingly present in the media, politics, and academia, the authors challenge reductionist approaches that treat this phenomenon as a linear and direct consequence of climate change (Giacomelli & Musarò, 2025). At a conceptual level, the book resonates strongly with the contemporary literature on climate mobilities, which argues that the relationship between climate and migration is multidimensional and mediated by socio-economic and political factors (Boas et al., 2022). This approach challenges the early narratives that predicted mass migrations as a direct result of climate change and that dominated public discourse in the early 2000s. Instead, the book emphasizes the plurality of forms of mobility and immobility, placing emphasis on their contextuality and complexity.

One of the most important contributions of the book is the critique of the figure of the “climate migrant”. In line with Bettini’s (2019) analysis, this figure is not a clearly defined empirical category, but a discursive construct that reflects the contradictions of the global system. Bettini (2019) argues that narratives on climate migration often simplify complex realities and create a false cause-and-effect relationship between climate and migration, neglecting structural factors such as inequality, politics, and colonial history. The book extends this argument by showing that these narratives are not neutral, but are loaded with political and ideological implications.

In this context, the concept of the “Panicocene” stands at the center of the book’s analysis. This concept refers to an era characterized by the production of panic and fear through media and political narratives on climate and migration. This idea is strongly supported by studies of media discourse, which show that climate migration is often presented in an apocalyptic manner and as an imminent threat (Bonneux & Van Praag, 2024). In this era of narrative panic, conceptualized as the *Panicocene*, the production and circulation of fear-based narratives play a central role in shaping public opinion and political action. Such narratives are not merely spontaneous, but are actively mobilized by political actors through strategic framing processes (Entman, 1993). In this context, the figure of the “foreign other” is frequently instrumentalized, even when immigrants demonstrate successful integration within host societies, revealing how political discourse selectively amplifies difference in order to reinforce symbolic boundaries, as occurred at the 2026 Sanremo Festival (see Ugolini, 2026). Within this mediated environment, the relevance of the *Panicocene* becomes even more pronounced. As Marichal (2012) argues in his analysis of “Facebook democracy,” digital platforms privilege affective expression, personalization, and visibility over deliberative, rational debate. Consequently, panic-driven narratives are not only produced but also amplified and normalized within these communicative spaces. In this

regard, the book's engagement with the *Panicocene* is both timely and necessary, as it provides a critical lens for understanding how contemporary democracies are increasingly shaped by emotionally charged, mediated, and strategically framed discourses.

The role of the media and visual representations is another key dimension of the book. The authors argue that images and visual narratives are not simply mirrors of reality, but active mechanisms that shape public perceptions and policies. This perspective is linked to the analysis of Giacomelli and Cappi (2025), who show that international awareness campaigns often contribute to processes of "othering," presenting climate migrants as different, dangerous, or powerless. These narratives not only create symbolic divisions between "us" and "them," but also legitimize policies of control and exclusion.

At a theoretical level, the book builds on the mobilities paradigm by placing mobility as a central element in understanding climate change. As Baldwin et al. (2019) argue, mobility should not be seen simply as a response to crises, but as an ontological and political dimension of social life. The book adopts this approach by proposing a shift from the concept of "climate migration" to a broader understanding of mobility in the Anthropocene.

An important aspect of this reconceptualization is the integration of decolonial perspectives. Whyte et al.'s (2019) study shows that Indigenous traditions of mobility have existed for centuries and represent forms of adaptation and resilience to environmental change. This challenges narratives that present climate migration as a new and unprecedented phenomenon, highlighting that many of the most affected communities have long histories of mobility. The book uses this perspective to argue that colonialism and power structures are key factors in the production of climate injustice and mobility.

In this context, the concept of mobility justice becomes central. The book argues that justice should not be limited to the distribution of resources, but should also include the right to move, to stay, and to choose. This approach is consistent with the literature that emphasizes the interaction between mobility and immobility and the role of power structures in shaping them (Boas et al., 2022).

An interesting element, albeit somewhat peripheral to the book's central focus, is its perspective on mobility in everyday life. Mobility, as the authors suggest, is not confined to international migration or border crises, but should instead be understood as a multi-level process encompassing the body, the city, and the infrastructures through which people move, live, and sustain themselves, as well as the broader global relations of movement (Giacomelli & Musarò, 2025). This expanded conceptualization contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of mobility as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, reinforcing the book's broader call for a more nuanced and critical approach. In this sense, mobility—whether individual or familial—emerges not merely as a functional act of movement, but as a relational, affective, and materially embedded experience (Whittle,

2019).

The book has a strong focus on discursive and theoretical analysis, which leaves less room for empirical analyses of concrete cases, but remains highly useful for generalizations. This makes the book very strong at a conceptual level, although it may limit its applicability in practical contexts. Furthermore, its high theoretical level makes the text accessible to advanced academic audiences on a global scale.

In conclusion, *Climate Mobility Justice* represents a significant contribution to the literature on climate change and migration, as it challenges dominant narratives while advancing a justice-oriented and critically informed approach. By integrating perspectives from mobility studies, climate justice, and media analysis, the book offers a robust framework for understanding one of the most complex issues of our time. It convincingly demonstrates that the ways in which climate change and migration are framed carry tangible political and social consequences, making the construction of alternative narratives essential for fostering a more just and inclusive future. In this regard, as Baldwin rightly emphasizes in the afterword, the book advances a “positive political imaginary” for the future, opening up new ethical and political horizons.

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