



**Authors' reply to review of "Street Fights in Copenhagen
Bicycle and Car Politics in a Green Mobility City"**

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Authors' reply to review of *Street Fights in Copenhagen: Bicycle and Car Politics in a Green Mobility City*¹

Julie Gamble's review of our book, *Street Fights in Copenhagen: Bicycle and Car Politics in a Green Mobility City* is timely and appreciated as she raises important points about including local grass-roots and community voices in transportation practices and knowledges. Gamble raises a good question asking what "actual people think and experience" with regards to Copenhagen's cycling infrastructure. While we did tap into many secondary sources that gather this kind of information, including notable scholarship and city-led surveys of Copenhageners, this may not have been clearly conveyed. We kept the interviewees anonymous and so this might have hidden some of the advocates connected to broader social movements, for example. But admittedly our interviews were primarily with experts, decision-makers, or advocates, through snowball and networking.

Yet it is difficult to move beyond Gamble's hyper-focus on how we describe and celebrate Copenhagen's best practices, as the overarching goal of this book is to illustrate the political fights, social commitment, and struggles faced by residents and decision makers over time. While it is true that one of our aims in the book was to describe best practices, it was not our primary goal (we explain that this has been adequately done by many others). Our broader aim was to examine politics and ideology, not to employ a "one-size fits all" narrative, but to

¹ Julie Gamble's review of *Street Fights in Copenhagen: Bicycle and Car Politics in a Green Mobility City* (Routledge, 2019) was published on *AntipodeOnline.org* on 3 October 2019:

<https://antipodeonline.org/2019/10/03/street-fights-in-copenhagen/>

uncover nuances in the Copenhagen narrative that we illustrate are useful for political struggles over mobility in other places.

For example, in our admittedly cursory examination of debates in Mexico City and Bogota, we have observed similar ideological alignments to those in Copenhagen – from left progressive challenges of elite car owners, neoliberal urban strategies, and conservative politics (Montero 2017; Paget-Seekins 2015; Sosa López and Montero 2018). In line with this thinking, Gamble also has a research agenda on left-leaning cycling activism in Quito.

Of course cycling infrastructures like cycle tracks are deployed differently beyond Copenhagen, but the point remains that the struggle over street space and the fight to truly encourage mass cycling (or mass public transit) will require taming the private car and claiming space. What we've tried to do is shine light on how that is ideological. Among different cities, ideological alignments are variegated, but a basic ideological outline is evident. Neoliberalism, for example, is evident in all of the cities mentioned above. We are urging readers to think of how Copenhagen's politics of mobility might relate to their own experiences and other places. While we could have attempted a more deeply ethnographic approach such as Gamble's research in Quito, we chose to address the broader political context of bicycle and car politics in Copenhagen and beyond because this perspective sheds light on institutional power struggles and inequalities.

The way this review concludes by alleging colonial knowledge is disheartening. To some extent it suggests a very cursory and pre-judged read of our work. More broadly, we are concerned that, in critical geography especially, there is a recent trend at too hastily dismissing cycling infrastructure and other green mobilities as colonial. We completely agree cycling infrastructure can be co-opted and we show that in Copenhagen. But our point in *Street Fights in Copenhagen* is that cycling was attached to a broader social commitment, not just infrastructure, and that is noteworthy for cycling promotion worldwide. Yet instead Gamble seems to unfairly

dismiss our work with this ending sentence (p.5): “Placing and constructing infrastructure without considering racial, class and ethnic segregation can also reinforce existing social problems (Lugo 2018).” In fact we cite Lugo on this exact point, but we also stress that there must be something beyond this – such as a coherent political ideology and social commitment capable of operationalizing these justice concerns. We believe that somewhere on the social democratic-socialist spectrum provides that capacity. A more united and collaborative front on the part of mobility scholars could not only legitimate previously silenced voices and knowledges but also provide critical and urgently needed solutions for local activists and policy makers in the global struggle for climate justice.

A couple of minor errors. The review highlights that roughly 29% of all trips in and around Copenhagen are cycling, but we did not make the claim that 29% of all trips was the highest rate of cycling in the world. For example, Amsterdam has a slightly higher rate on this particular metric. There is admittedly a lot of data to sift through, and confusion may arise because in finer-grained analysis looking at work and education trips within Copenhagen (62%), the city does stand out at the top (with the exception of much smaller Groningen).

Typo page 3, 2nd paragraph: the quote should read “how political power, expressed through political ideology and operationalized by political parties and organizations, shapes urban transport policy in Copenhagen” (p.3). In the same paragraph, next sentence – car ownership and car use has not gone up in much in the city center, but instead (and this is emphasized throughout the book) it’s up in Copenhagen’s suburbs. Technically in the city center car use has gone down (9% of education and work trips within the city) and rates of car ownership are standing steady at 200/1,000 (but population is increasing, masking the absolute increase in cars).

Page 4, the Harbor Tunnel and Eastern Ring Road are basically the same thing, not two different roads. The Tunnel is promoted as completing the Eastern Ring (see map on p.161).

Lastly, the second author's name, Natalie Marie Gulsrud is misspelled in the review as Natalie Maria Gulsrud.

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