

# Mobility (in)justice, positionality and translocal development in Gojal, Pakistan

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## **Introduction**

The northern Pakistani region of Gojal is located in the province of Gilgit-Baltistan, in the midst of the Karakoram mountain range. Gojal has undergone exceptional transformation over the past decades, particularly in relation to improved levels of human development, that are virtually unparalleled in other rural regions of the country (Benz, 2014a, 2014b). Mobility and migration have been important drivers and facilitating factors of educational achievement, poverty reduction, women's empowerment and off-farm employment by enabling Gojalis to access resources and opportunities outside the region as part of translocal livelihood strategies (Benz, 2016; Kreutzmann, 2012). However, Gojali households are differentially mobile. While most have benefited from mobility-related opportunities like higher education and professional employment in downcountry urban centers, some have not been in a position to appropriate such opportunities and develop migration strategies. Differential mobilities at the household level have produced significant and growing socioeconomic disparities within Gojali communities. Mobility-related inequalities ~~also have~~ developed within individual households as differently positioned members have differential access to mobility-based opportunities and social goods.

Because these new socioeconomic inequalities are produced in relation to the differential access to social goods that mobility affords, they raise concerns about social justice but also about mobility justice in Gojal. In this chapter, I scrutinize the particular interplay of social justice and mobility justice in the region, drawing on a case study of the neighboring villages of Hussaini and Passu, located in lower Gojal. I argue that in Gojal social justice is challenged by growing socioeconomic inequalities between the households of these communities and by the unequal distribution of opportunities, like education, employment and income, within households. I further argue that access to mobility and migration is a precondition for socioeconomic prosperity and access to these opportunities. Because unequal access to mobility is a major driver of social inequality, mobility justice is a precondition for social justice. Case study findings show that access to mobility and migration depends on social capital in the form of access to the 'right' kinship

networks as well as on gendered social norms and social positionings within the household. I conclude that in Gojal, mobility justice and consequently social justice are governed mainly by social norms, household position and social capital as the major determinants for access to mobility.

My argument builds in three sections of the chapter. I first review recent conceptualizations of mobility justice and social justice to identify their constituting elements and determinants, and to shed light on their interrelations. In the same section I discuss the importance of social capital to the distributional dimension of mobility justice. Second, I describe Gojal's development path since the 1940s, highlighting the role played by mobility, migration and translocal social networks in that history. I use this historical sketch to explain the growing socioeconomic disparities within Hussaini and Passu villages with reference to households' differential access to network capital, which has shaped their participation in – or exclusion from – translocal livelihood strategies. Finally, I focus on dimensions of (in)justice at the household level, in which differently positioned members have differential access to mobility and its socioeconomic affordances based on gendered social norms.

Empirical data was collected during three months of field research in 2011 and 2012. Key data sources include migration histories of villagers from Hussaini and Passu that were collected through household-based village surveys of all 1,283 members (including temporary migrants) of the villages' 185 households, as well as more than 450 permanent outmigrants. These histories provide insight into villagers' migration biographies and educational and professional careers. I also draw from biographical oral history and focused narrative interviews conducted with former and current migrants, village elders, teachers and representatives of village organizations and social sector NGOs.

### **Conceptualizing mobility justice**

Recently, advances have been made within mobility studies to theorize the relationship between social justice and spatial mobility (e.g., Cook & Butz, 2016; Montegary & White, 2015; Sheller, 2015a, 2015b). Notions of the “politics of mobility” (Adey, 2006; Cresswell, 2010) and “motility” (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Kesselring, 2006; Sheller, 2014), understood as “mobility capital” (Kaufmann, Bergmann & Joye, 2004) or the “capacity for movement ... under conditions of one's choosing” (Cook & Butz, 2016, p. 400), ~~also have~~ been useful in considering the unequal distribution of access to mobility as both an outcome of existing power asymmetries and a mechanism of reproducing socioeconomic inequalities. In these strands of research, differential mobilities have systematically been linked to social exclusion. The unequal distribution of mobility capital may enable, facilitate or speed up the mobility of some, while at the same time slowing down, hampering or inhibiting the mobility of others, thus constraining their ability to actively participate in social and political life and to access economic opportunities (Sheller, 2014, p. 798). According to Cook and Butz (2016, p. 401), critical mobility studies

thus center around questions related to social justice: “Who is able to access and appropriate mobility capital?” and “How broadly are capabilities of movement extended throughout a social system?” These questions are also central to issues of mobility justice.

Cook and Butz (2016) develop the concept of mobility justice in relation to social justice. For this purpose they draw on Young’s (1990) notion of social justice, which considers not only the equitable distribution of social goods and harms, but also domination, the institutional and structural context of distribution, including rule-setting procedures and the opportunities of individuals to participate in decision-making processes. When applied to mobility, this concept of justice suggests that attention needs to be paid to inequalities in the “uneven distribution of capacities and competencies [for mobility] in relation to the physical, social and political affordances for movement” (Sheller, 2014, p. 797), but also the (un)equal participation of individuals in the governance of mobility systems.

While Cook and Butz (2016) put the notion of domination at the center of their mobility justice approach, Sheller (2008, p. 31) instead focuses on the notion of freedom. She differentiates three senses or meanings of mobility justice: (a) the degree of “personal freedom of mobility”, which is related to the distribution of mobility rights to individuals and the actual provision of access to mobility; (b) the “sovereign freedom of mobility”, meaning the power of individuals to control others’ personal freedom of mobility; and (c) the degree of “civic freedom of mobility”, implying the power to determine mobility systems and rights in a society, as well as possibilities for individuals to participate in this decision-making. Sheller (2008, p. 28) points out that certain interdependencies exist among these different meanings. For example, realizing some people’s personal freedom of mobility may imply the exercise of sovereign freedom of mobility by restricting the personal freedom of mobility of others, potentially creating a situation of mobility injustice; some mobilize, others are demobilized, and both processes are closely interlinked.

These approaches to mobility justice share common elements. For instance, Sheller’s personal and sovereign freedoms of mobility are commensurate with the distributional meaning of mobility justice in Cook and Butz’s work, while the civic freedom of mobility speaks to mobility justice’s institutional and structural contexts. In both approaches, the distribution of mobility capacities is shaped by the institutional and structural context in question. This context includes social capital in the form of social networks, gendered social norms and the institution of the household, all of which are central to the mobility context of Gojal. While I later reflect on gendered norms and the household, in what follows I outline what I mean by social capital and social networks.

Portes (1998, p. 6) defines social capital as the “ability to secure benefits through membership in networks and other social structures”, which can range from family and kinship to ethnic and religious networks. He delineates three basic effects of social capital. First, it can serve as a “source of social

control” as found in structures of bounded solidarity and enforceable trust (Portes, 1998, p. 9). The social capital created by tight community networks may be useful to parents, teachers and police authorities as they seek to maintain discipline and promote compliance among those under their charge. Second, it may serve as a “source of parental and kin support” (Portes, 1998, p. 10). And third, social capital constitutes a “source of benefits through extrafamilial networks” (Portes, 1998, p. 9), such as communal networks based on shared imaginations and constructions of identities, ethnicities, origin, descent or religion (Portes, 1998, p. 13).

Whether, and to what degree, an individual enjoys the benefits of social capital in kinship and extrafamilial networks largely depends on their membership and position in these networks (Portes, 1998, p. 13). Unequal access to networks and different positions within networks leads to unequal access and distribution of assets and benefits. These distributive effects of social capital have often served as an explanation for social stratification and unequal access to social goods and opportunities, such as education, employment and social mobility (Bourdieu, 1977; Portes, 1998, p. 13). Equally, I argue, social capital is decisive in distributing mobility capacities by providing or withholding the means and opportunities for mobility, thus enhancing or restraining personal freedom of movement. Therefore, the effects of social capital as a source of kinship or extrafamilial support tie in with the distributional meaning of mobility justice. In turn, the social control effect of social capital ties in with the institutional and structural context of mobility justice. It facilitates enforcement of rules and norms and, thus, may curtail individual freedom of movement.

In the context of migration, social capital created by migration networks plays a central role in enabling and facilitating mobility (Castles, 2010; Faist, 1998; Massey, 1990). Consequently, Ernste, Martens and Schapendonk (2012, p. 510) consider migrants’ social networks as an institutional structuring force that enables the movement of people, goods, capital and information. Given the selective membership and differential positions in migration networks, these structures enable and facilitate migration for some but exclude others. The uneven individual endowment with social capital is a decisive factor in determining unequal mobility capacities and access to mobility. Consequently, any inquiry into mobility justice should pay close attention to the role of differential access to and positionalities within social networks.

The following case study focuses on the role played by social networks in distributing mobility capital to individuals. I argue that unequal access to translocal social networks is a decisive aspect of mobility (in)justice in Gojal. Who is able to access mobility is predicated in this context on membership in powerful translocal networks. Over the last several decades, many Gojali families have established social networks and moorings in a range of down-country cities and, thus, have been able to enhance socioeconomic opportunities for their members. Other families, however, have not been in a position to spatially diversify their livelihoods through translocal networks. I explain

the reasons for these differential mobility paths and unequal distributions of mobility capital and draw out some of their implications. I begin by describing the process of mobility expansion in Gojal since the 1940s.

### **Translocal development in Gojal**

Gojal is home to about 20,000 villagers of Ismaili faith and Wakhi ethnolinguistic heritage. Historically, Gojalis have experienced extreme poverty, frequent famine and pervasive illiteracy (Kreutzmann, 1989, p. 162, 1996, p. 289; Malik & Piracha, 2006, p. 360). But since the late 1940s, the region has realized impressive advancements in people's wellbeing and is currently well known for its impressive levels of human development (Kreutzmann, 1996; World Bank, 2011). Educational achievement and gender equality, for example, have reached levels virtually unparalleled in other rural areas of Pakistan (Benz, 2014a, p. 99; Felmy, 2006). Gojalis' mobility and migration strategies were key to enabling these developments (Butz & Cook, 2011; Kreutzmann, 1991, 1993, 2012).

Migration from Gojal began in the 1940s when the region was integrated into the Pakistani state and rigid travel restrictions were eased (Kreutzmann, 1996, p. 289; Sökefeld, 1997, p. 87). Massive road construction projects, particularly the Karakoram Highway, improved accessibility, thereby fostering mobility, increasing exchange flows and creating new livelihood opportunities such as cash crops, trade and tourism (Allen, 1989; Kamal & Nasir, 1998; Kreutzmann, 1991; Malik & Piracha, 2006). Increasing numbers of young men who left in the 1950s and 1960s to serve in the army or as unskilled laborers remitted earnings to their families.

At the onset of outmigration, local communities were characterized by a high degree of socioeconomic homogeneity in terms of livelihoods, income, occupations and landholdings (Cook & Butz, 2016, p. 408; Wood & Malik, 2006). As new livelihood opportunities became accessible, social inequalities increased. Different households incorporated new mobility options into their livelihood strategies in differentiated ways, initiating a long-term process of growing inequality in terms of unequal access to non-local resources, such as education and jobs.

Initially, Gojali migrants focused on Karachi, where they found support from the affluent Ismaili community, in the form of jobs in their factories, hotel chains and other businesses, and in other Ismaili networks and institutions (Kreutzmann, 1989, p. 192, 1996, p. 35). This social capital in extrafamilial networks was based on solidarity among members of the same identity group without prior personal acquaintance. Quickly, Gojalis and other Ismaili migrants from northern Pakistan built their own support networks in Karachi to facilitate new migration, and they provided assistance for new arrivals. They organized food, dwelling and jobs for newcomers, provided contacts and information and introduced them to the local Ismaili community. These forms of solidarity were based on symbolic ties of religion, ethnicity and region, but

increasingly also on agnatic kinship relations, indicating a shift in the effects of social capital from support through extrafamilial networks to forms of kinship-based support. The next generation of Gojali migrants spread beyond Karachi to other lowland cities, continuously expanding their migration and support networks. The earnings of soldiers and unskilled laborers of the first migrant generation were used within translocal kinship networks to enable other family members to acquire higher education in urban centers. After graduation, this second generation often built highly skilled professional careers, in turn supporting subsequent generations' migration for higher education. Since the 1980s, increasing numbers of women have joined this migration pathway.

The coupling of one generation's success with their readiness to support a second wave of migration triggered an upward spiral of rising education and income levels among Gojalis. Thanks to well-established kinship solidarity and resource redistribution systems, many family members benefited whenever an individual secured a professional position and salary. Dominant values of sharing, solidarity and reciprocity prevent individuals from hoarding resources and encourage the redistribution of money and provision of accommodation, food, contacts and assistance in different locations within kinship networks. These support systems, which constitute important aspects of the regional institutional and structural contexts of mobility justice, are not restricted to the household or nuclear family, but usually include larger family networks. However, they always exclusively run along lines of agnatic relations. At marriage, women leave the parental household to join their in-laws' family networks, which truncates virtually all support flows to and from natal families. The basic unit of support, therefore, is patrilineal branches within kinship networks.

This extensive translocal solidarity and family support has provided new opportunities for higher education and professional employment outside Gojal for many villagers. My survey data show that on average households in Passu and Hussaini spend about one-third of their disposable income on education, which has allowed Gojali youth to acquire the requisite educational credentials, knowledge, skills and experience to land remunerative jobs in the private and government sectors or to establish their own enterprises. Most migrants have returned – at least temporarily – to their home regions to serve their communities, as teachers, medical specialists, engineers, financial experts, development consultants and entrepreneurs, and to take on responsibility for mobilizing their communities and instigating social change. But while absent, they retain close ties with their families and communities, and they actively contribute to their development through financial and social remittances.

Migration and improved wellbeing are closely intertwined in the case of Gojal (Kreutzmann, 1989, pp. 180–195, 1993, 2012). Consequently, migration has been identified as a “key livelihood option” in this area (Wood & Malik, 2006, p. 73). It is linked to positive effects on education, income, investments and living standards for most households, but not for all, and not in the same

way. But this positive general trend demands further differentiation. Not all households participated in the early phase of outmigration, which was dominated by military and labor migrants. This differentiation had significant implications for households' ability to engage in later phases of migration, particularly for education. In most cases, only those households that participated in early outmigration were in a position to send children out for education, because only they had the requisite financial capital (remittances and savings of early migrants) and access to translocal networks (family members living in other places that could provide *in situ* support). Consequently, differences in the potential of certain kinship networks to support migration developed at this early stage. These differences multiplied in the course of intensifying outmigration from Gojal, because kinship networks with a high number of migrants proved to be more capable of supporting the next generation of migrants, while kinship networks with few or no migrants struggled to participate in migration activities due to lack of remittances and weak translocal support networks. Access to the 'right' networks, then, significantly enhances the mobility capital of a household or individual, which again is a precondition for access to social goods, such as education. Because unequal access to networks translates into unequal education levels, which then determines opportunities for professional careers and income levels, social capital created in kinship networks becomes an issue of mobility justice in its distributional meaning.

Today, migration and mobility are significant aspects of Gojalis' lives, as demonstrated by the region's rate of labor outmigration, which is well above the average of rural communities in other parts of Pakistan (World Bank, 2011, p. 20). According to my 2012 survey, 30% and 41% of the male workforce in Hussaini and Passu, respectively, have migrated to cities outside Gilgit-Baltistan. Among youth aged 15 to 24, migration rates were even higher: 63% in Hussaini and 77% in Passu. In total, 69% of households in Hussaini and 79% in Passu had at least one family member living outside Gojal at the time. Another 21% of households in both Hussaini and Passu that had no current member living outside included at least one returned migrant, indicating their former participation in migration strategies. All Passu households had at one time employed migration as part of their livelihood strategies. In contrast, 8 out of 84 households in Hussaini had yet to have a member migrate. Consequently, these households are characterized by comparatively low adult education levels, low monetary household income, lack of members in formal employment, high dependency on agriculture and occasional laboring, and by a four times higher prevalence of multi-dimensional poverty. Subsistence agriculture plays a more important role in their livelihoods, but they have fewer livestock and lower cash-crop income compared to households that have used migration strategies. In addition, they have very few, if any, migrants among their agnatic kin, which limits their translocal links, opportunities for support at potential migration destinations and translocal assistance within their family network. These mobility-poor Gojalis are simultaneously economically poor.

Similarly, my data shows a clear correlation between the level of migration activity and levels of education, monetary income and professional employment in those Hussaini and Passu households that have employed migration strategies. This correlation underscores the importance of access to mobility as a precondition for tapping new external livelihood opportunities and for overcoming local constraints and limitations with respect to education, employment and income.

### **Mobility justice, gendered social norms and household positionality**

So far, I have demonstrated that the distribution of mobility capabilities is uneven among households in Hussaini and Passu. Here I explain their inequitable distribution *within* households. Given that individual opportunities for mobility are a precondition for access to education and employment, and subsequently to economic prosperity, the unequal distribution of mobility capital among household members decisively affects mobility justice and social justice. Following Sen's (1990, p. 123) conception of the household as an arena of "co-operative conflicts", differently positioned members, enmeshed in asymmetric power relations, compete for scarce household resources. Power relations pertaining to gender, age and marital status are frequently exercised in ways that lead to the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities.

The most senior male usually occupies the most powerful position in a Gojali household, followed by junior male members. Women occupy subordinate positions. A woman's status improves with age and the number of children she bears, particularly sons. The weakest position in a household is that of a daughter-in-law before giving birth to her first child (Felmy, 1996, p. 20). These differently positioned household members experience differential access to mobility as a social good, just as they do with respect to other resources and opportunities, resulting in differential mobility capabilities. Decisions about the distribution of resources and opportunities are generally made by the head of the household, who sometimes consults with other household members.

Household heads often draw on dominant gender norms when making decisions about their children's educational opportunities. Boys' education has been prioritized over girls' education since the first boys-only schools were established in Gojal in the late 1940s. Not until the 1970s, with external incitement by the Ismailis' spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, did the first girls' schools open, encouraging parents to dedicate household resources to their daughters' education. Today, most households value education for their sons and daughters equally. However, many parents continue to argue that significant investments in their daughters' higher education do not make economic sense because at marriage they leave the parental household to become part of a new family. Further investments in sons' education, in contrast, have long-lasting benefits for parents; sons generally assume responsibilities for the care of their parents in old age.



This reluctance to invest in girls' higher education becomes particularly apparent when households make decisions about student outmigration. While overall educational achievement is fairly equal in the young generation, a pronounced gender gap exists in patterns of education migration to places outside Gilgit-Baltistan. Young men have many opportunities to acquire higher education in Pakistani lowland cities, and they tend to receive a disproportionate share of household mobility investments. This differential intra-household resource distribution is influenced by expectations regarding the rates of return on investments (e.g., future employment and income opportunities), but also by gendered norms that shape the gendered division of household labor. Women's extensive list of household tasks and farm responsibilities keeps them close to home and leaves little time for travel. Gender-related differences in mobility opportunities and mobility costs pertain to travel constraints for women and the gendered concept of honor that restricts young women's interactions with non-kin men and the range of appropriate living arrangements away from home (Cook & Butz, 2017; Gioli et al., 2014; Gratz, 1998). Women are expected not to travel alone beyond the region, necessitating the accompaniment of a male relative or group of women. Female student migrants cannot rent a flat alone or share an apartment with fellow female students; rather, they are required to join the households of male relatives at the migration destination, in which they undertake chores that often hamper their educational progress. The only alternative is living in a student hostel, but costs are extremely high, which is another significant disincentive for girls' education.

The need for special travel arrangements and living accommodations leads to considerably higher mobility costs for female student migration. These costs severely constrain girls' access to higher education outside the region, thereby limiting their access to translocal livelihood opportunities. This form of mobility injustice interrelates with social injustice in the reproduction of gendered norms, mobilities and power imbalances. However, when compared to other regions of Pakistan, levels of education and professional employment for Gojali women are extraordinarily high and rising.

Given the comparatively higher costs and efforts associated with female student migration, their mobility opportunities largely depend on membership in the 'right' kinship networks. Only well-established translocal networks provide sufficient monetary resources from urban professional employment to cover educational costs and hostel fees if family living accommodations are not available. Female student migration, therefore, gained momentum only in the 1990s, after generations of pioneering male migrants established these translocal networks (Benz, 2016, p. 149). Given prevailing gender norms, pioneering female migration would have been unthinkable.

Currently, many men are engaged in outside income-generating activities and educational endeavors, while most women and the elderly stay put in their villages, compensating for absent men by taking over their agricultural work, household chores and social responsibilities in addition to their own

reproductive and subsistence work (Cook & Butz, 2017). Mobile men thus exercise 'sovereign mobility freedom', which negatively affects other family members' freedom of mobility, leading to mobility injustice within the household. It is precisely the immobilization of women and elderly people that enables men to be mobile. Male and female mobilities are tightly connected and interdependent, forming a system of relative (im)mobilities (Cook & Butz, 2017). Those who stay put fulfill important tasks – caring for children, the sick and the elderly, tending cattle, cultivating gardens and fields, maintaining houses and material property – to the benefit of absent men, households, families and communities.

Due to gender norms and related mobility restrictions, then, women who might hope to pursue university studies outside the community are often pushed by their families and in-laws into the 'traditional' role of mother and housewife, confined to the realm of the household and subsistence production. Even many of those who do achieve an advanced education take up this role (or are forced into it), with only a few entering professional remunerated employment. Among 20- to 40-year-old women in Hussaini and Passu (excluding students), only 23% were pursuing remunerated employment, compared to 77% of their male counterparts.

## Conclusions

This Gojali case study points to the important role of translocal opportunity structures, mobility and networks in improving livelihoods and social wellbeing. I demonstrated how the diversification of livelihood strategies through new opportunities and income-generating activities pursued in places outside Gojal has led to unprecedented socioeconomic advancement and prosperity. A precondition for such translocal livelihoods is mobility, which in turn links the ability to access social opportunities as a precondition of social and economic wellbeing with the ability to move. I also showed that unequal access to mobility at the household and individual levels has resulted in growing socioeconomic disparities and gendered discrimination. Therefore, questions of social (in)justice in the context of translocal opportunity structures are bound up with questions of mobility (in)justice. Access to mobility depends on social capital in the form of translocal networks as well as on gendered social norms and social positionings within the household. In the following I draw conclusions about the role of social networks before turning to the importance of norms and positionings.

An analysis of the history of outmigration from Gojal since the 1940s reveals how, at the household level, access to mobility has been governed by social capital in the form of access to potent translocal networks that provide support and assistance to migrants. Depending on the translocal assets available in these networks (e.g., remittances, on-site support such as providing contacts, information, free board and lodging), differential degrees of support and facilitation for mobility and migration can be provided. Unequal network access has resulted in unequal mobility capital and consequently unequal access to new livelihood opportunities and economic prosperity. While many

Gojali households can benefit from new translocal livelihood opportunities to improve their wellbeing, a minority of disadvantaged, mobility-poor households are increasingly marginalized from the overall trends of educational expansion, professionalization and improved wellbeing, resulting in a growing socioeconomic gap among households in Gojal's mountain communities. This situation underlines the central importance of social capital to the distributional dimension of mobility justice.

At the intra-household level, access to mobility is shaped by gendered norms and social positionings, as is shown through an analysis of the household as an arena of cooperative conflict, in which powerful household members distribute available assets and assign livelihood opportunities among household members, resulting in mobility injustices along lines of gender, age and marital status. Some household members are forced to refrain from mobility, and those staying put bear the costs of others' mobility.

I argued that the current situation of deepening social inequalities and growing social injustice in the region is largely attributable to the situation of mobility injustice derived from unequal network access, gendered norms, household positionings and gendered mobilities. Social justice would imply equal access to opportunities for all people of the region irrespective of their gender, family background and socioeconomic position. In a situation where social prosperity and advancement depends on access to mobility, creating and securing social justice depends on achieving mobility justice. Attempts to prevent a further widening of the social gap need to take into account the root causes of mobility injustice and pay attention to marginalized households' lack of mobility capital and the unequal distribution of mobility capital within households. This strategy of overcoming social injustice by tackling mobility injustice could comprise, for instance, targeted scholarship programs for student migration, improved education facilities within the region, provision of affordable hostel capacities at migration destinations and subsidized and reliable public transport systems. These measures should focus primarily on disadvantaged groups such as girls and women as well as members of socioeconomically poor and less translocally connected households. In this way, the impressive socioeconomic advancement that has resulted through migration as "the main livelihood story" of the last few decades (Wood & Malik, 2006, p. 73) could eventually become a success story including all Gojalis.

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