

**Negotiating the everyday city; women's mobilities and public
transportation in Saltillo, Mexico.**

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Abstract

Access to public transportation can have a significant impact on many people's quality of life and opportunities. It can affect access to education, jobs, and social life, and it can also shape a person's potential for social mobility and development. Women's urban experiences can reveal complex mobility patterns due to gender related factors. Fears of sexual assault, feelings of vulnerability, and the strain of having to juggle paid work and (often unpaid) care and household work shape women's mobilities and these difficulties can be exacerbated by inefficient transport systems.

This thesis examines the current transportation system and its associated infrastructure in Saltillo, a city in northwestern Mexico, by implementing a mixed-method approach that combines 1) ethnographic shadowing, 2) transect walks, and 3) urban audits of bus stops. I explore the ways in which care work and gender-based violence shape women's mobilities and how the transportation system in Saltillo and its associated infrastructure shapes their urban experiences. My research approach draws on feminist theorisations of the production of space and feminist urban geography, problematising the concept of the 'neutral city' through an intersectional lens.

I present a thesis-by-papers structure that delineates how the public transport system and its associated infrastructure exacerbates women's financial, spatial, and temporal constraints (Paper Two) and how the physical characteristics of the transport infrastructure shape women's perceptions of vulnerability (Paper Three). I also elaborate on my methodological approach rooted in a feminist-informed understanding of *sentipensar*¹ (Paper One) and reflect on my fieldwork journey and positionality as a woman researching women's mobilities in Mexico (Paper Four). This thesis also includes Chapters dedicated to the introduction (Chapter One), literature review (Chapter Two), context of the study (Chapter Three) and methodological framework (Chapter Four).

¹ *Sentipensar* is a term in Spanish that stems from the words: *sentir*/to feel and *pensar*/to think.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

The copyright of this thesis is mine. Quotation is allowed provided that full acknowledgement is given. This thesis may not be reproduced without my prior consent. Where appropriate I present authorship statements to clarify the involvement of third-party collaborators.

This thesis follows a thesis-by-papers structure. Papers One, Two, and Three are currently under review at The Geographical Journal, Mobilities, and Gender, Place, and Culture (respectively). Paper Four of this thesis has already been published as a research article in Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space and can be seen fully as Appendix Eight.

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I declare that my thesis consists of 81,352 words.

Use of third parties

I declare that this thesis-by-papers contains two research articles that are co-authored. At the beginning of each research article, I have included an authorship statement to detail the role that third-party research collaborations played in the development of my research. This thesis has been copy edited for conventions of spelling and grammar by me and my Ph.D. supervisors Harriet Gray and Joshua Kirshner.

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Ethics statement

This research project received ethical approval by the Ethics Committee at the Department of Environment and Geography, at the University of York.

Para Ana Sofia.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is a feminist informed study that focuses on women's experiences in the urban environment, particularly around public transportation in Saltillo, Mexico. In this project, I explore how the current transport system and its associated infrastructure shape women's mobility and access to the city by looking into women's everyday struggles when navigating and negotiating the city. I present a mixed-method analysis of women's journeys in public transportation and illustrate how gender-related factors such as care work, reproductive labour, and fears of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) shape women's perceptions of and decisions around using public transportation. I draw from feminist theories of space and the city in order to contribute to feminist human geographers' call for research that centres women's urban realities and the challenges they face daily (Monk and Hanson, 1982; Jirón, 2017; Butcher and Maclean, 2018; Soto Villagrán, 2018; Kern, 2020a; Quinones, 2020). In doing this, I adopt an intersectional approach to the task of analysing women's urban experiences in order to understand how social markers like gender-assigned roles, age, and socioeconomic background shape their mobilities.

Since the early 1970s, feminist scholars have critiqued urban planning models that centre around a masculine ideal of mobility patterns between public (productive) and private (reproductive) space (Wekerle, 1979; Harman, 1983; Matrix, 1984; Massey, 1993). A key barrier for feminist knowledge to permeate in urban planning policies, understandings and strategies may relate to the notion of space as a 'neutral' setting with no social characteristics (Soto Villagrán, 2018). However, scholars across various fields have challenged this depiction, arguing that in fact, space is socially constructed, full of power and symbolism; space is a dynamic product of social relations (see Soja, 1980 and Massey, 1994b) and, equally, social relations are shaped by space where markers like gender, age, physical abilities, ethnicity, class and many others, can determine urban experiences (Wekerle, 1979; Chouinard, 1997; Ortiz Guitart, 2007; Burgess, 2009; Whitzman, 2013)

As I explore in more depth in Chapter Two, global literature indicates that gender-related barriers like fears of GBV, (unpaid) care work, gendered paid work opportunities and the lack of care-services exacerbate women's lower quality of life and social exclusion, and place further constraints on their mobilities throughout the city. Women's fear of sexual assault casts a shadow over their mobility patterns and affects how, when, and where they travel, placing restrictions on their journeys that may seem individual, but are part of a larger pattern of violence that seeks to keep women "in their place" (King, 1999, p. 6; Macmillan, Nierobisz and Welsh, 2000; Logan, 2015; Dunckel Graglia, 2016; Quinones, 2020). And while women have been rapidly incorporating themselves into paid employment in recent decades, domestic work is still overwhelmingly considered women's work in most societies given women's "natural" association with childbirth and the home, their role as main caregivers (Benería, 1979; Pain, 1991b; McDowell, 1993b, p. 165).

This dynamic often translates to a “double shift” for women who have caregiving responsibilities and work outside of the household. Urban planning policies related to land-use, zoning, and transport services play a key role in women’s challenges. Gender-related barriers complicate and intensify their daily travel patterns; women’s mobilities can be worsened by transport systems that are infrequent, unreliable, and that prioritise the masculine, heteronormative productive citizen and their travel patterns (De Simone, 2018); this in turn affects access to professional opportunities (Hamilton and Jenkins, 2000; Turner and Grieco, 2000). These challenges are dynamic throughout women’s lives, and they reshape and build on one another in relation to other factors like socioeconomic status and the support networks that women have available to them (Vickery, 1977; Massey, 1993; Maclin *et al.*, 2020; Menon, 2022)

Public transportation, thus, is a main point of analysis when it comes to talking about women’s rights (and access) to the city. As I begin to narrow the focus of analysis from global literature to research that draws similarities to the sociocultural and geographical context of Mexican cities, the vibrant literature on Latin American cities is necessary to explore. In recent decades scholars have developed qualitative and quantitative studies that seek to measure and analyse the extent of women’s urban challenges in order to envision policies that could redress them. For instance, in Santiago de Chile, Jirón (2007a, 2007b) has showcased how everyday urban experiences are deeply impacted by gender; for women, travel decision-making and consequent mobility strategies are not individual, but heavily depend on other persons because of their role as main caregivers. Although the public transport system in Concepción, Chile has broad spatial coverage of the urban area and speed in commuting time, its lower frequency and convenience during non-peak hours affects women’s journeys because their mobility patterns do not follow male-commuting trip conventions (Jirón and Gómez, 2018; Jirón, Carrasco and Rebolledo, 2020). In Bogotá, Quinones (2020) highlights that sexual harassment and the threat of GBV in public transportation deeply affects women’s lives and everyday decisions, restricting their freedom of movement and expression. Her research calls for policies that do not seek to segregate women in order to protect them (i.e., women-only transport) and instead, argues that effective policies should challenge the power relations of men and women in public space, and the domination of men over women’s bodies.

In Mexico the story goes differently. In 2000, Mexico City’s department of transportation recognised women’s right to travel without harassment and began a women-only transport policy that reserves specific sections for women in the subway and metrobus system. As Dunckel Graglia (2013, 2016) has argued, while women-only transportation may provide women with a safer commute, pink transportation³ fails to address an underlying issue, which is men’s sense of entitlement to harass

³ I refer to women-only transport strategies as pink transportation strategies because they tend to be associated with the colour pink. For instance, in India, women-only bus system is called “Pink Express” and in Pakistan is called “the Pink Bus”. Mexico City’s and Tokyo’s women-only carriages are also pink.

women, and their objectification and appropriation of female bodies. Taking into account the severity and relentlessness of the levels of GBV that women endure while commuting, women-only transportation solutions seem reasonable at face value. However, these strategies target only the violent aspects that women face and not the lingering systems that reproduce deeply rooted gender inequalities that overlook and even normalise harassment and violence against women in transportation (Dunckel Graglia, 2016). Women-only transport strategies considers that by removing women from the place where the aggressors are (namely men), that their mobilities will resume safely and without any further issues because their focus is only on GBV. However, women's mobilities, as I will argue, do not follow male commuting conventions due to their disproportionate role in care work, and women-only strategies fail to address this aspect of women's needs in public transportation. For instance, in Monterrey, Mexico, women with caring responsibilities are more likely to suffer spatial segregation on an urban scale due to their restricted economic activity; time and cost of commuting are a significant constraint for women who want to pursue paid employment because of their social domestic roles (see Garnica-Monroy and Hernández-Reyes, 2022) and women-only strategies unintendedly fail to address these complexities.

Furthermore, while there is significant literature focused on women's urban challenges in Mexico, most of it frames the experience of women who live and travel in major, "global" cities like Mexico City, Guadalajara, or Monterrey. Smaller, or secondary Mexican cities remain underrepresented in research addressing women's mobility and their urban understandings. Smaller Mexican cities also have differentiated access to resources and, as a result, they have vastly different transportation systems with distinctive challenges. There is a lack of data about women's mobilities at the local level in Mexico that further complicates the task of advocating for gender-conscious policies that can address localised problematics. In this sense, Saltillo, Coahuila presents a compelling case to analyse women's mobility and their relationship with public transportation services in a less-studied context.

In presenting this study, I identify and address a gap in empirical knowledge about the needs of women in Saltillo in terms of gender-conscious public transport policies. I argue that the knowledge that stems from this study can apply in other small Mexican cities with similar transport challenges, drawing a comparison line and reference point for local change. To do this, I use a mixed-method approach that combines 1) transect walks, 2) ethnographic shadowing, and 3) urban audits.

This study will answer the overarching question: 'how do gender-related factors such as care work and gender-based violence shape the mobilities and access to the city of women in Saltillo?'. In order to answer this, I address two supporting questions. Firstly, how do women in Saltillo experience and perceive the public transport system? And secondly, how do various characteristics of the public transport infrastructure shape women's urban perceptions and experiences of mobility?

I argue that the current public transport in Saltillo and its associated infrastructure complicates women's mobilities by placing gendered financial, spatial, and temporal constraints upon them, and by exacerbating their perceptions of vulnerability to sexual assault and harassment.

Outline of chapters

This thesis-by-papers focuses on women's mobilities when navigating Saltillo's transport system over five chapters and four papers (currently under review in peer-reviewed journals). In Chapter Two, I present a literature review where I engage with feminist theorisations of the city and critique conceptualisations of the urbanisation models that perpetuate the separation of public and private space. I elaborate on how the physical and ideological separation of gender roles has spatial consequences that impose constraints on women as default caretakers, and how this in turn shapes their mobilities. I identify two gender-related factors that complicate women's patterns of mobility; 1) care work responsibilities and reproductive labour; and 2) fear of sexual assault and harassment, and I elaborate on how these aspects place further challenges in women's urban experiences when negotiating the everyday city. I identify a gap in the literature related to the lack of empirical knowledge of the extent to which the transport system in Saltillo shapes women's mobilities both at the level of policy and of physical infrastructure, and I present the aims and research questions in this study that seek to redress that.

Chapter Three: *Bienvenidos a Saltillo, Coahuila* provides a detailed description of the sociopolitical, geographic, and historic context of Saltillo, and therein, I present the hegemonic political dynamics in Saltillo and Coahuila. I also present the way in which social markers like ethnic origin, migration status, socioeconomic background, and gender alter urban experiences in Saltillo, challenging the image of the city as 'one of the safest, most competitive cities in the country' (see more in Chapter Three). This Chapter briefly zooms out of public transportation issues in the city to discuss Saltillo's foundation and origins to understand how it connects with the urban issues present in today's Saltillo. As I explore further in Chapter Three, I adopt a Narrative Policy Framework that allows me to bring more detail about Saltillo's sociopolitical context and question how political narratives shape public policies, and where and who they take into account. Doing this allows me to continue with the narrative thread of questioning and problematising the 'neutral' city and objectivity. It also helps me broaden the conversation to other scholarly fields like comparative urban studies and policy innovation in Latin America, and mobilise Saltillo's challenges as more than just transport or gendered mobilities, instead positioning Saltillo's case study from local conversations to broader debate in the urban studies scholarship; seeking to provoke questions around who shapes public policies and how do political narratives and agendas shape the success and implementation process of public policies aiming to address social inequalities.

In Chapter Four, I elaborate on the methodological approach that serves as the scaffolding for my research project. This Chapter presents *sentipensar* as a research avenue and elaborates on how my research approach is rooted in a feminist-informed way of *sentipensar la ciudad*⁴. I engage with indigenous cultures and ontologies of *Abya Yala* to contextualise *sentipensar* and then engage this layer of information with what has been theorised in the gender and feminist scholarship about situatedness, embodied research, and researcher's positionality. Afterwards, I present some of the diverse and various ways in which feminist scholars across Latin America have engaged with embodied methodologies to produce feminist and decolonial research, and lastly, I present the details and specifics of each method for this project—how they are rooted in *sentipensar*, the technical and emotional intricacies that this process entailed, and how each method comes together, informing and complementing one another.

In Paper One, I present a feminist-informed approach to *sentipensar* as a way of producing decolonial, embodied research for women. I argue that *sentipensar* provides an avenue for feminist researchers to challenge androcentric and colonial research practices and embody and locate their knowledge production. I offer reflections that showcase *sentipensar as a flexible, creative tool for feminist human geographers to centre women's lived experiences*. This Paper is closely connected with the previous Chapter and presents selected information from it in order to build an argument in publishable format that would speak to an audience of scholars and researchers looking to engage with decolonial and feminist research frameworks.

Moving forward, in Paper Two I look into women's mobility patterns through a three-stage ethnographic shadowing approach where I discuss how women's urban experiences in public transport are significantly shaped by spatial, financial and temporal limitations that stem from gender-related factors like care work and housework. In this paper, I argue that when women navigate the city, they do not only negotiate the physical urban conditions of the transport network but also juggle additional—seemingly individual—limitations that affect their mobility patterns. I adopt a framework of mobility injustice in order to delineate how their personal urban experiences are examples of mobility injustice at the personal and urban level that are connected to broader systemic gender inequalities. I conclude this paper by signalling at how the current transport system in Saltillo and its associated infrastructure play a key role in perpetuating these dynamics.

Paper Three focuses on assessing the bus stops in Saltillo and applies a mixed-method approach that combines transect walks and urban audits to evaluate the physical infrastructure of the transport system (i.e., bus stops). In this paper I present the results that stem from 340 urban audits and two transect walks with 19 adult women participants and 4 underage companions. I argue that that fear of gender-based violence and care work are the two main issues that impact women's patterns of mobility and that urban infrastructure has a significant role in shaping women's perception of vulnerability in the city. I

⁴ Feeling/thinking the city

close this Paper by offering general policy recommendations on how local authorities can integrate a gender-conscious approach to infrastructure provision for transport.

Paper Four brings personal reflections around the challenges of carrying out fieldwork as a woman after being catcalled, followed, and harassed on multiple occasions. I explore my positionality as a researcher, and I reflect on how gender played a role in the differentiated degrees of vulnerability and perceptions of the city while walking the streets of Saltillo. This paper fits in with the research theme at hand for this thesis because it showcases the complexities of navigating the city as a woman from the researchers' perspective and continues the thread of reflexivity by exploring the challenges of producing embodied, feminist, urban research. In this paper, I develop a critique of the current fieldwork preparation processes in place at many higher education institutions in the UK (and elsewhere); I argue that current ethical approval forms and travel risk assessments do not provide a space where true reflection on risks and vulnerabilities can occur, therefore failing to prepare researchers for the impact that fieldwork can have on us.

Finally, I present a conclusion Chapter that integrates the findings of this project; I reflect on how my findings relate to the gap in the literature and how my work contributes to the existing scholarship. I also offer some reflections on the gaps and limitations in this study, and the questions it creates that can spark further research. I conclude this thesis by presenting my views on how gender-conscious transport systems can look like for cities like Saltillo.

This thesis presents some terms in Spanish as an attempt to make this material and Papers findable to scholars in the Latin America diaspora that wish to engage with international scholarship regarding women's urban experiences and public transportation issues. As an international scholar based at a UK university, I understand the expectations of writing and producing research in English that can contribute to international scholarship debates. As a native Spanish speaker and Mexico-born immigrant, I also use some terms and phrases in Spanish as a political stance to include *Spanglish*⁵ in my academic endeavours—that is, acknowledging how *mis propias raíces* as a feminist *mestiza* from *el Noreste de México*⁶ inform and shape this project, its decolonial aims, and its feminist goals.

⁵ Spanglish, as described by Gloria Anzaldúa, is the mix of Spanish and English, common in the everyday interactions of people who inhabit (or are impacted by) the Mexico-US border (Anzaldúa, 1987).

⁶ Spanglish for 'My own roots as a feminist mestiza from Northeast Mexico'

Chapter Two: Literature review

Who has the right to the city?

In an influential work that has sparked much critical urban research, Lefebvre (1968) conceptualised the right to the city as the capacity of appropriating public space and participating in the decision-taking process related to the production of space. Many scholars have since complemented this notion by adding that the right to the city is not merely the right to access education or work, but to belong everywhere and inhabit cities through interdependent exploration (Whitzman, 2013). As Fainstein (2014) argued, the right to the city means more than just inclusion or physical presence in existing urban spaces, but that it relates to access to a city that fully meets, above all considerations, the needs of its inhabitants. In this sense, realising that women's needs and other marginalised groups' needs are not met by cities that still reproduce normative standards, being able to use public space or not, cannot be the only determinant factor in asserting an individual's right to the city, it requires the production of spaces that actively foster a dignified and meaningful life (Fainstein, 2009). As feminist geographers have contested, it is not only the (physical) access to public space what defines the right to the city, but rather the conditions in which space is used that determines true access to public space and the city (Rodó-De-Zárate, 2016; Simone, 2016; Butcher and Maclean, 2018).

In the 1980's, black and *chicano* feminists began critiquing the feminist movement of the time because of racial conflicts between white women and women of colour— They rejected the notion of a 'common oppression' instead arguing that white women's liberationists used sexist ideologies to suggest that to be female is to be a victim and that the idea of a common oppression was a 'false and corrupt platform' that disguised and blurred the reality of women's complex social reality (hooks, 1986, p. 127; Davis, 2011). Black feminist scholars and women of colour highlighted how race, difference of cultural backgrounds, and class are significant political divisions between women, calling for an acknowledgement of differences in order to build meaningful political solidarity (Davis, 1981; hooks, 1982, 1984). Intersectionality as a critical framework was born out of the 1980's feminist struggle of black women and women of colour with the aim to focus attention on how single-axis thinking undermines struggles for social justice (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013; Crenshaw, 2014). Since, feminists from all fields have adopted and adapted intersectionality as an analysis framework to understand women's experiences and challenges in the world. This framework provides the mindset and language for examining how social categories affect lived experiences, and how these differentiated experiences link to issues of social justice and inequalities (Atewologun, 2018).

The right to the city must be conceptualised through an intersectional lens because urban experiences vastly differ depending on social markers such as socioeconomic background, ethnic origin, migration

status, age, gender, physical disabilities or cognitive impairments, amongst others. In this Chapter I engage with feminists and scholars who have theorised how social markers shape women's urban experiences and the challenges in the city. I do so in order to frame my analysis in a framework of intersectionality that focuses on how gender-assigned roles, fears of sexual assault, and socioeconomic background alter women's urban mobilities. This is a critical framework that brings women's differentiated urban experiences to the forefront and allows us to broaden the scope of the concept of the right to the city—women and marginalised groups that have to navigate their environment through constant fear of sexual assault, or that travel despite significant spatial, temporal, and financial constraints imposed on them by urban planning and transport policies, technically have access to the city, but their right is not being met (Soto Villagrán, 2012; Ortiz Escalante, 2014)

As argued by scholars like Whitzman (2013), the exclusion from 'the right to the city' can be as a steep curb, or steps that represent a physical barrier for people with disabilities and limited mobility—including children, people with prams or pushchairs, and the elderly—all groups that heavily rely on mostly women caregivers. It can also consist of graffitied spaces with homophobic or transphobic slurs that create unwelcoming environments and perceived vulnerability for queer people trying to navigate their urban environments. Often, however, the exclusion is subtler. The provision of services shapes women's access to the city in important ways—where they go, how they get there, what time they feel safe traveling depending on their mode of transport, and with whom. As dynamics of power come into play, there are added barriers attached to the use of public space and thus, as Rodó-De-Zárate (2016) argues, it is important to approach the right to the city through an intersectional and affective lens that can tap into marginalised experiences of the urban environment.

The conceptualisation of the right to the city includes the power to use public space. But so far, women live and endure cities that often do not take their needs into account at best, and that blatantly disregard their rights and presence in the public sphere at worst. Instead of women being able to appropriate and participate in the production of public space, the underprovision and lack of regulation of basic facilities that can accommodate women's needs in the city end up shaping women's and other marginalised communities' urban experiences. The lack of knowledge and consideration of how women interact with public transportation services differently from men underpins an unmet right to use and participate in the production of public space; since their needs are not being met and considered, this fundamentally raises questions around issues of belonging, and who has a right to access, navigate, and occupy space (Burgess, 2009; Soja, 2009; Lucas, 2012; Enright, 2019). For many women and marginalised groups, the ability to assert their right to the city is directly linked to the provision of safe, reliable, and adequate transport services that allows them to participate in public life, because as Enright (2019) argued, transit systems are intrinsic to fundamental questioning about who belongs in the city, who is allowed to participate fully in urban activities, and how transport participates in the social and political life of a city.

As I will argue below, transport systems impact women's access to the city and the opportunities it has to offer; they influence quality of life, opportunities for development and economic growth, democratic participation, and community engagement (Gammage, 2010; Lei, Desai and Vanneman, 2019; Carmichael *et al.*, 2024; Escobedo, Moreno and Cuellar, 2025). This literature review will explore the many ways in which women and other marginalised groups can be oppressed in– and by– urban environments at the personal and urban scale adopting an intersectional lens focused on gender, age, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status; from the segregation of spaces that further maintain the division of gender-assigned roles, to the politics of infrastructure provision that shape women's urban experiences.

Gender-blind geographies and other forms of spatial segregation

In this section I map out feminist scholarship in the overlapping fields of urban planning and urban geography that have engaged with a critical framework of intersectionality particularly related to how gender and class shape urban experiences. I engage with various critiques of mainstream geographical perspectives on the city and on urban spaces and engage with feminist scholars that theorise the production of space through a gender lens. In doing so, I present the scaffolding that supports my analysis of how public transportation services in Saltillo impact women's mobilities and urban experiences.

Feminist geographers have been pushing for the theorising of public space through a gender lens since the early 1970s. In 1979, for instance, Wekerle and Benería argued that cities were planned by men and for men, pointing at the need to analyse women's role in reproductive labour and the private sphere in order to understand and visualise women's place in the city. In 1982, Monk and Hanson challenged the field of human geography and critiqued the “meagre impact of feminism” on the field (p.11), arguing that the nature of sexist bias in geographic research could lie in the fact that knowledge is a social creation; they argued that the knowledge that emerges from a field very much depends upon who produces that knowledge, what methods are used in its production, and what are the purpose and goals of knowledge creation (see also Haraway, 1988; England, 1994; McCorkel and Myers, 2003). Similarly, McDowell also theorised that urban geographers have been blind to gender divisions and power relations in urban development to “an astonishing extent”, by having accepted the spatial structure of the industrial urban city as the “natural” state of affairs (1993a, p.166).

For feminist scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, urban planners and city and regional development authorities and professionals, predominantly men, may not necessarily have been promoting their own interest at the expense of women's, but they lacked the consideration and understanding of different groups of population that have differentiated environmental and social needs (Monk and Hanson, 1982; Matrix, 1984). Thus, the ideological separation of space, public/men and private/women is necessary to understand and critique the physical separation of spaces and how this, in turn, impacts the production

of knowledge, urban planning policies, and service provision. In such terms, McDowell categorised the “contemporary city model” in advanced industrial societies as “the concrete (and steel, and brick) embodiment of conventional gender divisions” (1993a, p.167). However, the interpretation that capitalist urban development is the only factor shaping women’s urban understandings is insufficient according to Massey (1994), because other factors like race and gender also have a clear effect on women’s urban experiences, and thus, their mobility. It is crucial to conceptualise space as socially constructed in order to understand women’s exclusion from the public sphere and the ramifications of this (Koskela, 1999)

In this sense, space is, by very nature, full of power and symbolism, where “distinctions of A/not-A are created, and while A is defined positively, not-A can only be conceived in relation to A, and as lacking in A” (Massey, 2008, p. 72). Industrial urbanisation processes place public/productive spaces as the norm and private/reproductive places as the exception, adding that under this model, a norm is established and cities and spaces are created with “abstract citizens” in mind that reflect the characteristics of its creators: cis-male, young and able-bodied, resulting in an androcentric vision of cities and space that accommodates a neutral understanding of the masculine, heteronormative productive citizen (De Simone, 2018). This understanding of the city and public space as ‘neutral’ and abstract then obscures the urban experiences of all those who do not meet the narrow criteria of these “abstract citizens” (Wekerle, 1979; Burgess, 2009; Cresswell, 2010; Soto Villagrán, 2018).

Gendered differentiations in urban experiences are not exclusive to women and feminised people—as Massey argues, different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to social markers and the issue is not merely about who moves and who does not, but about power in relation to movement (Massey, 1993). In this dynamic of ‘power geometry’, some people are more in charge of their mobility than others, some initiate flows and movement whereas others do not, and some people are effectively imprisoned by it (p. 61). In that sense, it is not only women who fall outside of the scope of the “abstract citizen” for androcentric cities, and whose mobility is heavily shaped and constrained by it. For instance, there are groups of people who do a lot of physical moving but are not ‘in charge’ of the process in the same way (Massey, 1993, p. 61). Migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees from Central and South America, for example, embark on extensive journeys crossing countries and using various modes of transport in hopes of reaching the Mexico-US border, yet, their journeys are often plagued with human rights violations and precarious health conditions (Castillo, Benavides and López, 2019; Astorga, Maldonado and Corpus, 2020). This example illustrates the complexity and social differentiation of mobility and control over mobility, and the importance of adapting an intersectional lens to observe how gendered geographies shape urban experiences—most of the migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees who use the *Casas del Migrante*⁷ in the northern area of

⁷ Spanish for ‘Shelters for Migrants’ see more in Chapter Three, Section: ‘The many different Saltillos’

Mexico are young, able-bodied men who could be conceptualised as ‘in charge’ over their mobility, however their status as racialised immigrant men places them at intersections of inequalities that render differentiated urban experiences unique to their circumstances. It is important to establish how the intersection of gender and urban policy is not solely about women’s issues because men also face distinct gendered urban experiences that are affected by their age, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and other characteristics (McDowell, 2001). Elsewhere, scholars and researchers have focused on expanding men’s place in the city through an intersectional lens that considers how class, gender and other social factors come into play (see Chowdhury, 2021, 2023), creating and addressing tensions between hegemonic masculinities in the urban context (Noble and Tabar, 2014; Noble, 2025).

As the field of urban geography expands, feminist scholars have deepened their analysis of women’s relationship to the city and the public space while drawing similar conclusions to early feminist scholars. More recently scholars have argued that materiality is central to the production of social difference and complicit in impacting social dynamics, such as intersections of gender, race, caste, class, and sexuality (Menon, 2022). In recent decades, Latin-American scholars have also theorised the construction of space through methodologies that aim to provide a more sensible and social understanding of cities’ configuration from different perspectives. For instance, Sweet and Ortiz Escalante (2010) and Soto Villagrán (2018) have critiqued the dichotomy that links the public/productive space with men and the private/reproductive spaces with women that still dominates the production of space in Latin American cities. In Costa Rica, Rojas Herra (2018) argued that the urban space is the result of a society that distinguished between men and women –the first category being the norm– and it is through these categories that the spatial functionality is explained within a city, conforming to the heteronormative parameters for social organisation. In Bogotá, Quinones (2020) argued that transport planning tends to ostensibly ignore women’s mobilities characteristics, and is in fact designed to suit male travel needs, highlighting that men and women do not have the same transport needs or mobility patterns.

Indeed, transport systems are no strangers to gender-blind geographies because they are also part of the production of space. Scholars including Turner and Grieco (2000) and Greed (2008) have argued that transport planners generally do not take into account the differentiated impact that policies can have on users with different social markers. Thus, in some cases, urbanisation policies that aim to revamp transport systems and urban development with green or “smart” strategies, can exacerbate pre-existing social inequalities and create vicious policy cycles after a policy fails (Temenos and Lauermann, 2020). For instance, repeated attempts to build eco-cities in China generated path dependencies in urban policy despite their failure, by establishing planning procedures and repeatedly hiring particular consulting groups; or when cities’ failed bids to host mega-events like the Olympics brings forward development projects like transport networks that adversely affect low-income settlements and can mean eviction, relocation, or displacement for many (Silvestre and de Oliveira, 2012; Lauermann, 2016; Chang, 2017).

Marginalised and “invisibilised” communities can be excluded through policy due to several barriers (Chouinard, 1997; Burgess, 2009; Lucas, 2012). These obstacles can relate to spatial constraints (i.e., the distances and physical barriers existing in people’s trajectories in the city); technological barriers (i.e., the role of information and communication technologies on people’s daily mobility like knowing how to use a navigation app, having access to a smartphone and/or the internet); financial constraints (i.e., the monetary restrictions that may include the possibility to pay for a bus fare); emotional and corporeal limitations (i.e., how feelings and embodied experiences shape people’s mobilities); and many others (Jirón, Carrasco and Rebolledo, 2020). Urban fragmentation and segregation became an important mechanism in the reproduction and perpetuation of socio-economic inequalities (Burgess, 2009) that ultimately influence quality of life, access to opportunities, services (Jirón, 2007b; Bardasi and Wodon, 2010; Gammage, 2010; Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017), and the right to the city for different social groups.

Intersectionality as a critical framework in urban planning and transport policies can allow us to envision how groups like women, people with disabilities, immigrants, and other marginalised groups (i.e., queer women/men or people of colour) experience these spatial inequalities marked by varying levels of access and differentiated perceptions of the city. The spatialisation of inequalities is reflected in the provision of infrastructure that aims to enable mobility, the access to transportation services, and the conditions and characteristics that surround them, especially for women. Transit networks are political infrastructures that fundamentally shape who belongs in the city, who is allowed to participate fully in urban activities and who gains from access to urban transportation (Enright, 2019). In this sense, transport systems are political infrastructures, and accordingly, they can entrench existing hierarchies and create new forms of urban marginality, inequality, and exclusion (Hamilton and Jenkins, 2000; Turner and Grieco, 2000; Iudici, Bertoli and Faccio, 2017). As an example, disadvantaged communities must often rely on using underfinanced and inefficient bus services, whereas the alternative (private automobiles) comes at a costly price that is unaffordable for many (Mercier, 2009) and widely regarded as unsustainable (Gössling, 2016).

Gender and age have a profound impact on an individual’s everyday perception of the public space and its experiences (Valentine, 1993). Although men and women may begin life with roughly comparable potential, their urban experiences are influenced by gendered constructions that also have spatial and temporal attributes (Law, 1999; Jirón, 2007b). Cities and transport systems are the product of the social organisation of space, and within their spatial structures, they reflect uneven power dynamics; the experiences of the urban space will vary depending on a person’s sexuality, social status, age, cultural background, and ethnicity (Ortiz Guitart, 2007; Burgess, 2009). In urban settings like in India, religious identities and caste also come into play in shaping urban experiences and access to opportunities (see Phadke 2012).

It is important to acknowledge and highlight that it is not only women who are affected by the uneven power dynamics embedded in the social organisation of space; indeed, for men, the city can also be a place where they face sexual harassment and precarious working conditions (Herek and Gillis, 1999; Qi and Dong, 2018; Chowdhury, 2023), and social markers like migration status, ethnic origin, and socioeconomic background will significantly shape their access to resources, opportunities and urban experiences (Yee Quintero and Cantalapiedra, 2016; Astorga, Maldonado and Corpus, 2020). For instance, the urban experiences of a 17-year-old *mujer indígena* who works as a *trabajadora del hogar*⁸ living in Mexico City will present a specific set of challenges that can contrast or resemble the challenges that a 17-year-old *hombre afro descendiente y universitario*⁹ in Veracruz might face.

Their assigned gender and ethnic background, along with other social markers like socioeconomic status and level of education, among others, will shape their access to resources like time, money, and skills development as gender roles come into play (Junqueira, Nunes and Leda Sabino, 2019). These gendered constructions condition mobility choices as well as the experience and social meaning of mobility itself (Law, 1999). An intersectional analysis framework allows us to envision how oppression systems do not hinge on gender or class factors alone, rather it becomes an intricate web of inequalities that intersect with one another, reshaping each other dynamically (Crenshaw, 2014; De la Cerda, 2025). While men's urban experiences fall outside of the scope of this thesis, it is crucial to acknowledge that they face a particular set of challenges that should be addressed and analysed through an intersectional lens to avoid reductionist notions that place all women equally as the only victims in the spatialisation of inequalities (hooks, 1986).

As Phadke (2012) detailed, women spatially inhabit, negotiate, and perceive a city differently from men. A sharp example of everyday practices that shape women's experience of the city is the lack of toilet facilities that are clean, accessible, and secure, although the same argument could apply to people who menstruate and people with disabilities (Dyck, 1995; Lowe, 2018). Women, people who menstruate, and people with disabilities may need differentiated access to toilet facilities because their clothing may require more time to remove; they may feel more comfortable breastfeeding or changing their infant's diaper in an enclosed restroom, or they may need to relieve themselves more frequently if on their period, perimenopausal, or dealing with a chronic illness.

The provision of facilities like bathrooms and adequate transport systems that answer to women and other marginalised groups' needs relates to important administrative policy decisions that transform women and other vulnerable groups' experiences of the public space (Phadke, 2012; Lowe, 2018; Enright, 2019; Kern, 2020a); ranging from access to safe and clean public toilets, the segregation of productive/public and reproductive/private spaces, and the provision of accessible and reliable transport

⁸ Spanish for 'Indigenous woman who is employed to carry out housework.'

⁹ Spanish for 'afro descendant man who attends university'

systems. The spatialisation of inequalities has differentiated effects that are tied to social markers and gender-assigned roles and these gender-blind geographies and varied forms of spatial segregation ultimately shape one's urban experiences.

Juggling care work and paid work

In this thesis, I focus on the differentiated urban experiences of women regarding transportation services and mobility. Accordingly, it is particularly important to note how social aspects of their lives like care-work, paid work, various degrees of social exclusion, and family dynamics intersect with one another, shaping their understanding of public space and how they navigate it. In the section that follows I map how the existing literature engages with the concept of reproductive labour and how it shapes women's urban experiences and mobilities.

In 1979, Wekerle engaged with the concept of care work to argue that women not only use the city more intensely than men do, but they also use it for a wider range of activities like childrearing, shopping, cultural facilities, neighbourhood participation and (paid) work. Reproductive labour and care work are concepts that encompass work that is physically demanding, often unpaid, carried out historically by women to tend to the needs of children, elderly and other dependents, including the work needed to run a household (Benería, 1979; Sánchez-De Madariaga and Zucchini, 2020). Jirón (2017) has argued that care work not only relates to sickness or feeding but that it also includes everyday varied activities like ballet classes, play dates and many others, like accompanying elderly people and escorting people with disabilities and pregnant women on their everyday journeys (Jirón and Gómez, 2018). Patriarchal family relations and the socialisation of men and women into different gender roles have their most fundamental expression at the household level, and this both limits and shapes their mobility and experiences in the city (Benería, 1979, 1992; Soto Villagrán, 2018; Junqueira, Nunes and Leda Sabino, 2019).

As women begin to navigate the private and public spheres, their ongoing domestic duties frequently remain unchanged, in fact, their workload doubles (Harman, 1983; Pain, 1991b; Greed, 2008). Women's incorporation in the "productive" sphere has been accelerating rapidly whereas men's involvement in care work has not been growing proportionally (Pain, 1991b; Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017). Even when men take part in care-related tasks, there is significant differentiation in the type of tasks; while men will engage in certain activities, it will mostly be in the execution aspect, like taking the kids to the playground or driving them to school, women will take care of mandatory tasks that require scheduling systematisation, planning, organisation, coordination, and execution (Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017; Jirón, Carrasco and Rebolledo, 2020). For many women, care responsibilities are a reality from a very early age and continue dynamically throughout their lives. In Latin American countries, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, or CEPAL in

its Spanish acronym) has estimated that unpaid care work could represent from 15% to over 24% of certain countries' gross domestic product (CEPAL, 2016). Since the availability of good quality services to care for children, people with disabilities and the elderly is scarce in Latin America, it is mostly women who sustain the care economy (CEPAL, 2016; Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017).

As Benería (1979) argued, domestic work is overwhelmingly considered women's work in many societies; women's biological function has been the basis for the association of women with child rearing, the home and domestic tasks related to household work and care work. Women's reproductive labour is much less valued compared to men's productive labour because care work is seen as women's "natural" duty (McDowell, 1993b, p. 165). This gendered division of labour leaves women in economic inferiority and places further restrictions on their development opportunities; care work and reproductive labour are a key factor in shaping women's opportunities at paid employment because it places financial, temporal, and spatial restrictions related to care work that women must juggle alongside paid employment (Bardasi and Wodon, 2010; Gammage, 2010; Carmichael *et al.*, 2024). Women are prone to suffer more persistent and long-term poverty because of the restrictions that care-work imposes on them, making poverty a gendered experience (Hamilton and Jenkins, 2000; Chant, 2008; Román Rivas, 2009).

The combination of care work assigned to women by default, the lack of good-quality and accessible care-services, and the restriction in their work opportunities *because* of their double workload further women's social exclusion and lack of participation in the public sphere (McDowell, 1993b, 1993a; Hamilton and Jenkins, 2000; Wright, 2001; Chant, 2008). In Latin America, by 2014, UN ECLAC estimated that one in three women over 15 years old who were not exclusively studying had no income of their own, compared to one in 10 men in the same scenario (CEPAL, 2016). According to the *Panorama Sociodemográfico de México* in 2020, out of the 39.8 million Mexicans who are not economically active, 43.9% are dedicated to household activities full-time (INEGI, 2021b). Similarly, the *Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo* (National Survey of Occupation and Employment) in 2021, revealed that 76 out of every 100 Mexican men are economically active, while the same scenario only applies to 44 out of every 100 Mexican women. When it comes to non-economically active statistics, women take the lead. Although in comparison with statistics from 2010 the number of women who were not economically active diminished by 1.4 million, women still represent 55.8% of the national population aged over 15 years old that does not have an active economic participation (INEGI, 2021).

The degrees of social exclusion that women face is shaped by their care work responsibilities and access to service provision, but also by urban space, including land-use zoning, and transport infrastructures. Over the decades, scholars have argued that city planning models that prioritise automobiles and the expansion of the urban area present a double barrier for women because city planning follows male

perceptions of functionality that exclude women to residential, suburban environments that are often poorly serviced by transport networks. Although this narrative is proven accurate in US cities (see Wekerle, 1979; Greed, 2008), it also applies to Latin American cities where “the car is king” and urban development is frequently tied to expansion rather than densification (Greed, 2008 p. 243; Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017). Women have complex, multi-purpose trips to and from work because of their role as main caregivers. Their daily travel itinerary is worsened by transport systems that are modelled after normative standards of mobility, affecting not only the professional opportunities available to them, but the access to social support networks and health services, damaging life chances. (Hamilton and Jenkins, 2000; Turner and Grieco, 2000).

Women differentiated urban mobility experiences relate to their gender-assigned roles and care responsibilities, reshaping one another in a dynamic way that women must navigate on a daily basis to access the public sphere of life. Just as a person’s experience of the built environment varies depending on social markers like age, ethnicity, and gender, so do the ramifications of care work in women’s lives and mobilities. For more affluent women, paid care workers or other paid services are available that enable them space and time accessibility to engage in other activities like paid work (Benería, 1979). However, women from poorer backgrounds tend to spend more time on care-related tasks on an everyday basis, resulting in a more restrictive time-space accessibility and more complex schedules and chained activities compared to men; for instance, women tend to link trips while commuting by adding stops to run errands or fulfil responsibilities like dropping children off at daycare, picking up medicines at the pharmacy on their way to work, picking up school supplies, or doing a grocery shop after work. (Falú, 2014; Jirón, 2017; Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017). This is how class, gender, and caring responsibilities intersect with mobility challenges. Many women navigate their lives having to balance a double workload between care (unpaid) work and paid work (Benería and Feldman, 1992; Sánchez-De Madariaga and Zucchini, 2020) and as they struggle to secure more economic resources, their mobility relies on support systems that allow them to carry on other activities in the public sphere. As noted above, care-related work is often seen as women’s responsibility even if they are involved in the “productive” sphere of life (Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017; Jirón and Gómez, 2018). For Latin American women, there has not been a more egalitarian division of labour at home since gaining a more active role in the public sphere; rather an intensification of women’s financial and emotional responsibilities and obligations (Motta, 2013). It is up to them to make sure housework and care work will run smoothly in their absence by organising support systems that can cover their role.

For women from poorer backgrounds the story goes differently. Wekerle (1979) evidenced how the hegemony of male-stream thought in transport and urban planning affects women living in suburban areas poorly served by public transport systems in the United States. Women become “prisoners in their homes” (p. 147) when dependents such as children, people with disabilities or elderly relatives living at home, they will face bigger challenges, especially if they cannot financially afford paid carer(s) that

can cover their responsibilities when they leave their house. Similarly, for the Latin American context, Benería (1979) argues that women who care for children automatically reduce their mobility and earning opportunities in rural communities in Mexico (see also Garnica-Monroy and Hernández-Reyes, 2022). In some cases, women's support systems will usually involve family, neighbours or friends that will allow them to step out of the private sphere for a few hours and thus their social capital comes into play to afford access to the public sphere. Nonetheless, these precarious support networks represent a considerable amount of stress, mental workload, and task-juggling that translate to a cost-benefit analysis where the immobility of a member of the family, usually a woman, is viewed as the solution (Whitzman, 2013; Jirón, 2017; Jirón, Carrasco and Rebolledo, 2020). Women in those scenarios may wish to participate in the public sphere but obstacle upon obstacle of urban inaccessibility forces their immobility and makes it impossible for them to leave their assigned-by-gender responsibilities (Whitzman, 2013).

Women's mobility is conditioned and reshaped by myriad challenges and obstacles that are dynamic throughout their lives and that depend on several social markers (Ortiz Guitart, 2007; Buckingham, 2010; Ortiz Escalante, 2014; Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017). Care work and gender roles in turn shape mobility patterns, creating "mobility of care" that consists of chained trips to cover the multiple tasks of women's everyday lives (Turner and Grieco, 2000; Sánchez-De Madariaga and Zucchini, 2020). Scholars have argued that the spatialisation of urban inequality has gradients that vary and evolve. Existing inequalities can be exacerbated and redefined by the physical, organisational, temporal, and socioeconomic dimensions of mobility systems (Jirón, 2007a). While women and men may navigate the same city and its transport systems, their experiences of it vastly differ depending on their access to resources, gender-assigned roles and activities, time and space accessibility and socioeconomic conditions like ethnicity, income, and education (Turner and Grieco, 2000; Del Valle, 2005; Whitzman, 2013; Falú, 2014). Even so, not all women face the same obstacles in the same way as other women and vulnerable groups. All this combined, delineates how women move around a city— when, with who, and where to— and so their differentiated urban experiences translate into differentiated patterns of mobility. In this thesis, I present how women's mobilities in Saltillo are affected by care work responsibilities in Paper Two and argue that the current transport system and its associated infrastructure play a role in exacerbating these challenges.

Fearing the city

When it comes to women and marginalised groups experiencing the city, there is an associated fear of crime that relates to fears of sexual assault or harassment. This heavily shapes their mobility and brings about differentiated urban understandings and experiences (Macmillan, Nierobisz and Welsh, 2000; Pain, 2001; Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2010). Feminist geographers have suggested that, in light of the

violent urban environment that many women face and their perceptions of unsafety due to fear of crime, women develop mental maps of fear (Pain, 1991b; Fenster, 2005; England and Simon, 2010; Kern, 2020a). Those geographies of fear are dynamic and influenced by their experiences in the city. They shape their understanding of the urban context, shape how they approach life in the city, and limit their access to opportunities, their power and agency (Fairchild and Rudman, 2008; Dhillon and Bakaya, 2014; Quinones, 2020).

The spatiality of fear differs from men to women in terms of extent, nature and its effects on each group's lives (Koskela, 1999; Ortiz Escalante, 2014). The extent of women's fear has widespread effects that cast a shadow in their urban understandings. Pain (1997, 2001) suggested that women's fear is closely associated with fear of rape and sexual violence, while men's fear is associated with property damage, theft, mugging, and similar crimes. This fear of sexual violence and assault also extends to queer people, feminised subjects and other marginalised communities that step out of the norm (Rodó-De-Zárate, 2016). The fear of sexual violence is unique in its nature as a crime (Valentine, 1989; Pain, 1997, 2001); rape is one of the most traumatic of crimes that can have long-lasting effects, with implications that go far beyond those of crimes against property, theft or mugging. Indeed, the fear of sexual violence shapes women's and other marginalised groups' view and experience of the urban space, it leads to "self-imposed" restrictions that shape their autonomy and liberties however, none of those restrictions are voluntary. As Román Rivas (2009) argued, fear of being sexually assaulted is a powerful and effective tool to oppress and control women, girls and other vulnerable communities' liberties and autonomy.

While the act of modifying one's routine on our way to work or school may seem an individual choice, it hardly is. There is a collectiveness of that "resignation" of freedom that stems from relentless sexual violence in the public sphere (Falú, 2009; Román Rivas, 2009; Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2010). Vulnerable groups adapt their experiences in the urban context to reduce exposure to potential assault. Their spatialisation of fears translates to the reduction of spaces they visit, policing how and when they access public space, thus impoverishing their social relations due to fears of insecurity and assault (Laub, 2007; Falú, 2009). In some cases, this fear arises from situations of violence, but fear as a socially constructed concept is nurtured by other people's experiences and collective fears too (Koskela, 1999), the early socialisation of fear is instilled in girls and boys differently and limits their enjoyment of public space from an early age (Valentine, 1989; Falú, 2014). Fears of girls being sexually assaulted is one of the main factors that limit their experience of the city, even though boys are also exposed to risks (Román Rivas, 2009). Just as family members' experiences of assault and sexual violence in the city may shape our own patterns of mobility and behaviour in the city, the news, social media, and strangers' perception of fear can also reshape our geographies of fear (Soto Villagrán, 2012). Collective fears, even if there are "imaginary" collective perceptions of fear, are powerful in the shaping of urban experiences for women and marginalised groups (Del Valle, 2005 p. 4).

For women and people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community fear of broader forms of violence is also an important factor that shapes their urban experiences. The influential social and cultural geographer Valentine (1993) has examined how heterosexuality is powerfully expressed in space and considered the norm. In her research, Valentine shows that lesbian women censor themselves by avoiding or minimising time spent in (hetero)sexualised space. Rodó-De-Zárate (2016) reinforced these ideas through her research in Brazil and Spain, arguing that lesbians and gay men feel “out of place” for not following the norm (p.13). Because there is a strongly reinforced binary system that separates men and women, masculine and feminine, and productive and reproductive spaces, individuals who transgress these binary social constructions around gender are amongst those most at risk of assault, discrimination, and violence (Namaste, 1996). In the dominant culture coding of gender that reinforces that there are only men and women, individuals need to live as one or the other in order to avoid verbal and physical harassment. Lesbians and gay men who transgress acceptable limits of self-presentation that are considered the norm are attacked differently according to the public space they occupy, and people within the transgender community feel the need to “pass” as either a man or a woman (p. 228). Transgender people are part of the marginalised communities that reshape their urban and public understandings; the division of public and private spaces, which relies heavily upon and reinforces the binary gender system, has profound implications for those who live outside normative sex-gender relations (Namaste, 1996). If their perceived gender does not “pass” normative standards, then they also are vulnerable to discrimination and violence because they are perceived as breaking gender norms in a major way (Butler, 1989; Lombardi *et al.*, 2002; Doan, 2007).

While the conceptualisation and theorisation of sex, gender, and sexuality is vast and varied, the concept of gender harms all individuals when it is used as a vehicle for violence and exploitation of some (Olufemi, 2020). People who are part of the LGBTQ+ community experience urban environments differently because they transgress the binary gender system, but often even individuals who identify as their assigned sex/gender at birth can be at risk of harm if they fail to correctly perform their role: a woman who is failing to do womanhood correctly, or a man that adopts “effeminate” mannerisms also represent a transgression to the binary gender system and as such, are at risk of discrimination and violence (Namaste, 1996 p. 224; Olufemi, 2020). For transgender people and individuals who do not follow traditional gender norms, the access to public space and basic services becomes uncertain, people who do not appear to fit the norms of male or female accordingly can be denied access or face harassment for trying to access fitting rooms and toilet spaces (Namaste, 1996; Lowe, 2018).

The geographies of fear of women and vulnerable groups not only limit their movements by avoiding certain areas or neighbourhoods of a city, they also limit their time of movement, if they travel alone or accompanied, and their mode of transport (Koskela, 1999; Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2020; Kern, 2020a). Women and marginalised communities learn to navigate their urban environments by renouncing places and areas that may be part of their everyday urban experiences (Del Valle, 2005),

and while some women from higher socioeconomic backgrounds may be able to use a private vehicle to avoid being sexually assaulted in public transport, for women from poorer backgrounds this will not be an option. A woman's ability to choose a coping strategy and therefore her consequent use and experience of the public space is largely determined by her age, income, and lifestyle (Benería, 1979; Valentine, 1989).

King (1999) argued that systematic violence plays a crucial role in defining and maintaining the economic status of women and people of colour, adding that rape, and the fear of rape particularly, has functioned to keep women "in their place" by making many public and semi-public areas off-limits (p. 6). This notion shapes not only women's mobility but their approach to the city. GBV in the public sphere can look like unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature, ogling, stalking, catcalling, whistling and groping, and can even escalate to more brutal acts like rape and femicide (Macmillan, Nierobisz and Welsh, 2000; Logan, 2015; Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2020). Concerning public transport, the fear of sexual harassment lingers as the line between public and private blurs, as Neupane and Chesney-Lind (2014) showcased in their research. Harassers take advantage of the conditions of the transport system (including public buses, bus stops and roads) to blur the boundary between intentional harassment acts and the natural consequences of traffic: when buses are tightly packed with passengers and the bus driver goes over a pot hole or a speed bump, harassers can poke women with their genitals as part of unwanted sexual touching and use rough driving and crowded buses as an excuse to deny and deflect harassment claims, as testimonies show.

Because of these fears, women have significant constraints in terms of time and places available to them. The threat of crime— that is the threat of sexual assault— creates a constant state of apprehension that leads to "self-imposed" restrictions in terms of clothing, areas of a city, methods of transport and even job opportunities available to them (Pain, 1991, p. 416). Women have adopted strategies into their routines in public transport and navigating the city to cope with sexual harassment. For example, they take longer routes in order to avoid areas or modes of transport perceived as unsafe and adapt their clothing and facial expressions in order to avoid being targeted by strangers. Some women will even carry non-lethal weapons to defend themselves if needed (Dhillon and Bakaya, 2014).

Although the effects of GBV in transport and public spaces have physical consequences on women, the lingering fear of being assaulted also leaves lasting consequences that affect their mental health and leave women in a constant state of fear. These adjustments to the way women approach the city and its services, like public transportation, impact the way women perceive themselves and the city, as well as their psychological and emotional well-being (Valentine, 1989; Neupane and Chesney-Lind, 2014; Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2020). Women who have experienced assault or harassment episodes while on public transportation will feel unsafe, disgusted and objectified (Dhillon and Bakaya, 2014). The social anxiety and frustration related to not being able to avoid sexual harassment exposure means

women end up restricting their exposure in terms of how and when, in order to protect themselves from the threat of rape or assault (Pain, 1991b; Fairchild and Rudman, 2008; Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2020; Kern, 2020a; Quinones, 2020), but even women who have yet not lived an episode of assault in public space as a first-hand experience, may well limit their urban experiences regardless (Del Valle, 2005).

The gap in the literature: local strategies for local challenges

So far, this literature review has focused on exploring how and why urban experiences are different particularly for women and marginalised communities due to various social markers and conditions including socioeconomic status, income level, age, and sexual orientation. I have engaged with scholars whose research highlights that the physical configuration of space and the social process by which it is created has biases embedded that ignore or fail to consider women's needs. I have explored how the production of space, and in turn, of transport systems, responds mostly to heteronormative needs for default, abstract subjects and how this hinders and disregards women's mobilities and right to the city. While outside of the scope of this literature review, it is necessary to critique how these heteronormative patterns of mobility with abstract subjects in mind often also leave behind men who find themselves within marginalised communities: men from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who are immigrant, racialised or queer, among other social characteristics that affect their urban experiences. .

Planning strategies, including conceptualisation of space and transport systems, will continue to have a narrow approach that neglects people's needs until there is a clear understanding of how social markers intersect and produce differentiated urban experiences. In this thesis in particular, I focus on how women approach and negotiate the everyday city. In presenting this review of the existing scholarship I have sketched out how gender-related factors like care work responsibilities, fear of sexual assault, and GBV shape women's mobilities because it is crucial to conceptualise urban issues through an intersectional framework that examines differentiated urban experiences. However, there is a lack of literature that can illustrate these dynamics in less studied places, including secondary cities in the global south. Smaller Mexican cities thus contribute an important perspective because they face distinct local challenges that require localised strategies. Thus, this research project contributes to this gap in the literature about the perspectives that are centred in the existing scholarship by bringing forward the realities and challenges that women face in less studied cities in Mexico, in this case, Saltillo.

In order to address the knowledge gap, this thesis will aim to respond to other scholars' call for gender-sensitive research that centres women's experiences (Monk and Hanson, 1982; Falú, 2009; Phadke, 2012; Kern, 2020b; Quinones, 2020). With this research I further the understanding of the way women in Saltillo experience public space, specifically public transport, and how gender-related factors like

fears of GBV, and care work responsibilities shape their urban understandings. As an overarching research question, this study will focus on answering:

‘How do gender-related factors such as care work and gender-based violence shape the mobilities and access to the city of women in Saltillo?’

In order to address this, I present two supporting questions:

- 1) ‘How do women in Saltillo experience and perceive the public transport system?’
- 2) ‘How do various characteristics of the public transport infrastructure shape women’s urban perceptions and experiences of mobility?’

This study responds to the current lack of knowledge of how the transport system in Saltillo and its associated policies and infrastructure affect women’s mobilities by implementing a mixed-method approach that combines transect walks, ethnographic shadowing, and urban audits. I approach this research project through a feminist-informed framework of *sentipensar* as a methodology (see Chapter Four and Paper One) as a way to problematise my knowledge production practices, situate my standpoint of inquiry, and continue with an intersectional approach to research. In doing so, I provide in-depth qualitative empirical data that illustrates how women negotiate the everyday struggles they face when navigating the city through its public transport system. I also contribute quantitative knowledge about the bus stops in Saltillo and demonstrate how women’s perceptions of vulnerability and everyday challenges could be addressed through policy changes to the associated infrastructure in Saltillo. This is the first study to produce data of this kind about Saltillo and offer nuanced and important reflections on how women live, walk, and endure the city, and it has potential uses for local authorities, policymakers, and scholars interested in addressing women’s differentiated urban experiences. In what follows, I present Chapter Three: *Bienvenidos a Saltillo, Coahuila* to provide much needed context about the city where this study takes place. I introduce the dominant political narratives present in the region and how these have affected transport policies in the city that continue to overlook women’s urban challenges. As I present this upcoming Chapter, I begin to focus on women’s experiences, particularly through an intersectional lens that looks at how gender-assigned roles and socioeconomic background shape their mobilities. These two social markers are the common denominator in the urban challenges for women in this study, but it is important to recognise that these are not the only social markers that shape their mobility. Social markers like sexual orientation, immigration status and disabilities also play a role in shaping women’s mobilities in Saltillo however they are outside of the scope of this study, leaving room for feminist scholars to engage with these issues using a critical intersectional framework.

Chapter Three: *Bienvenidos a Saltillo, Coahuila*¹⁰

Saltillo is the capital city of the State of *Coahuila de Zaragoza* (Coahuila) in Mexico. It is located between two mountain ranges that cross the county called *Sierra Madre Oriental* and *Sierra Madre Occidental*, both of which are part of the American Cordillera. Saltillo is located in a valley surrounded by mountain ranges, and it is 400km away from the border with the US. Together with the neighbouring municipalities of Ramos Arizpe and Arteaga, Saltillo's metropolitan area has over one million inhabitants and, over the past decades, industrial-oriented development has led to an accelerated urban development process (Andrade Ochoa, Almanza Salazar and Fuentes Mata, 2026).

In this Chapter, I present context on Saltillo's sociopolitical landscape to problematise the hegemonic political narratives in the city that frame Saltillo as one of the safest, most competitive cities in the country. I present the existing political powers present in the State of Coahuila and at the local government level in Saltillo to understand how political narratives shape policies and how this, in turn, shapes urban experiences. As I argued in Chapter Two, cities are not neutral because social markers significantly shape urban experiences; the production of space is inherently intertwined with dominant social dynamics of who belongs in the city and who does not.

I present this Chapter on Saltillo in order to frame the findings of this thesis and to continue problematising the 'neutral and objective' city. Drawing from Jones, McBeth and Shanahan (2014) I adopt a Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) to contextualise the dominant political narratives present in Saltillo and analyse how political narratives shape policies and marginalisation levels. Then, I present how Saltillo's sociopolitical dynamics relate to the Mexican and Latin American contexts to spark conversations about the role of political narratives and agendas in addressing social issues. This context is necessary because as I will argue, political narratives are strategic constructions of a policy reality promoted by policy actors that are seeking to strategically influence the policy process and obtain specific outcomes (Jones, McBeth and Shanahan, 2014; McBeth and Lybecker, 2018).

In Saltillo, it is important to acknowledge and unpack the hegemonic political narratives in the region that aim to present a neutral and objective image of the city. As I will demonstrate throughout this Chapter, urban experiences in Saltillo vastly differ depending on social markers like migration status, ethnic origin, socioeconomic background, and gender. It is necessary to confront and build a critique of these narratives because hegemonic political narratives have the power to shape whose urban experiences count and whose voices are represented. As such, the majority of this Chapter seeks to momentarily zoom out from the focus on public transportation issues in Saltillo to bring necessary context about the sociopolitical landscape in the city before zooming back in from a situated standpoint

¹⁰ Spanish for 'Welcome to Saltillo, Coahuila'.

that explores women's urban experiences in the public transport system of Saltillo. Doing this will allow me to broaden the conversation to other scholarship fields like comparative urbanism and policy innovation in Latin America and frame Saltillo's spatial injustice issues as more than transport or gendered mobility challenges and spark conversations around who shapes public policy and why policy implementations fail to address spatial injustices.

In the upcoming sections, I present the political parties that have dominated politics in Saltillo and Coahuila to contextualise how hegemonic narratives in Saltillo have come about and how they remain in place. I then contrast the hegemonic narrative of Saltillo as one of the safest, most competitive cities in Mexico with the urban experiences of different marginalised groups in the city that reflect a different reality of the same Saltillo. I do this to further critique and question hegemonic narratives and problematise Saltillo's image as one of the safest, most competitive cities in Mexico, instead asking whose safety matters? And what urban aspects of a city matter when measuring competitiveness? Following this, I mobilise Saltillo's study from local conversations into the field of comparative urbanism to invite wider theoretical conversations around how power dynamics and hegemonic narratives shape the spatialisation of inequalities. I relate Saltillo's case study to other case studies in Mexico and Latin America—specifically in Ciudad Juárez and the Brazilian Amazonia—to highlight how my 'comparative gesture'¹¹, as conceptualised by Robinson (2011), seeks to explore urban issues at a more abstract level, tracing connections among cities with shared features and dynamics. To conclude, I acknowledge the limitations of this Chapter and circle back to the focus of this thesis going forward, that is, the *sentipensares* of women in Saltillo and their urban challenges.

Political context: Coahuila, *el último bastión del PRI*¹²

At its heart, a Narrative Policy Framework questions the role that narratives play in the elaboration and implementation of public policy and aims to demonstrate how narratives impact agendas and agenda settings (Jones, McBeth and Shanahan, 2014; Rodrigues Neto and Barcelos, 2020). In that sense, when choosing to focus on issues related to public transport challenges, it is also important to understand who the key players are in setting the agenda and implementing public policy, and the narratives that these players engage with. In Saltillo, in order to understand the municipal and state political context today, it is necessary to discuss political history in the country.

¹¹ As I explore further in section 'From local conversations to broader debates', Robinson (2011) theorises that all scholarship about the urban represents a 'comparative gesture' because it invokes comparison with other 'cities in a world of cities' thus, with this Chapter, I seek to make this 'comparative gesture' explicit and mobilise Saltillo's case study into broader debates.

¹² Spanish for: 'Coahuila, PRI's last bastion'

Mexico gained its independence from the Spanish crown in 1821 and began shaping its own political identity after centuries of colonial rule (Khan and Lara-García, 2021). Amidst struggles to install democratic governance, General Porfirio Díaz was eventually elected president in 1867 and remained in office for the next three decades—a period in time also known as *El Porfiriato*. This period of Mexican history is defined by rapid infrastructure development, economic expansion, and industrialisation of the country though Díaz's regime heavily relied on authoritarian techniques of political repression. Dissenters and critics faced false imprisonment sentences and assassinations, as Díaz made use of threats of military force to 'keep critics in line' (Khan and Lara-García, 2021, p. 29).

In 1910, the Mexican Revolution movement finally ousted Porfirio Díaz out of power after decades of deep social conflicts and inequalities and, in 1917, presented the *Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos de México*¹³. Nevertheless, political instability continued until 1929 when former president and prominent Mexican politician Plutarco Elías Calles, consolidated the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, (PNR) which would later come to be known as the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI).

Since 1929, PRI maintained power over Mexican politics through political patronage, violence and election-rigging, and remained in office for seventy years (Langston, 2017; Khan and Lara-García, 2021), a political period also famously referred to as *la dictadura perfecta*¹⁴. In 2000, following several economic crises in the 80s and 90s that brought increased criticism over PRI's ability to lead the country, the main opposing political party *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) won the presidential elections—for some this represented the country's first truly democratic elections (Khan and Lara-García, 2021, p. 31), while for others, this transition of power is often referred to as a simulation of a 'democratic transition' (Seneff and Roth, 2018, p. 1). Over the years since, there has been some variation on the political party sitting at the presidential chair— PAN won the presidential elections of 2000 and 2006, however, following Felipe Calderón's brutally violent presidential term¹⁵, PRI return to the presidential chair in 2012. The most notorious electoral transition was López Obrador's presidential win in 2018, followed by the first woman president, Sheinbaum Pardo, both from political party *Movimiento Regeneración Nacional* (MORENA).

The 2018 election indeed marked the history of Mexican politics. Not only did López Obrador finally win the presidential election after three consecutive attempts, but political forces that heavily favoured PRI at all levels of government (municipal, state, and federal) switched to MORENA. The 2018 election was a political landslide. MORENA secured a majority in the House of Congress, five out of the nine

¹³ Spanish for 'Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico'

¹⁴ Quote from famous Peruvian writer, Mario Vargas Llosa. See (Clemens, 2025).

¹⁵After assuming office, Felipe Calderón launched a so-called 'War on Drugs', leaving over 70,000 dead people and significantly altering the levels of violence in the country. (See more Rosen and Zepeda Martínez, 2015; Zepeda Gil, 2018)

state governorships that were at play, and a majority in 19 of the 26 state congresses whose elections lined up with the 2018 presidential vote (Seneff and Roth, 2018).

It is paramount to understand PRI's political position and historical power in the country because Coahuila is the only state as of 2026 where PRI has not been ousted at the state level since 1929. Over the last two presidential administrations, PRI has been steadily losing power in numbers (Martínez, 2026) and governorships at key states like the State of Mexico, who had not seen power alternation in 94 years before the 2023 state elections. As many Mexican journalists and scholars have conceptualised, Coahuila represents PRI's 'last bastion' (*el último bastión*) of power, and this is a key piece of context that frames the political agenda at the State and local level.

In 2018, the political party PRI won the local elections in Saltillo after having lost for two consecutive terms in a row since 2013 against its most prominent opponent at the time, PAN¹⁶. Since, the local and state government, both from PRI, have worked hand-in-hand to frame Saltillo as one of the safest, most competitive cities in the country (Comunicación Social, 2021; Mexico Daily Post, 2021; Milenio Digital, 2021; Aramayo, 2022c; IMCO, 2022a; Gobierno Estatal de Coahuila, 2024). This is the hegemonic political narrative that shapes the urban development of Saltillo and the region. As a political party, PRI has been steadily losing relevance in the Mexican political landscape, however framing Saltillo and Coahuila as the safest, most competitive areas in the country arguably grants PRI credibility to remain in power at the local level and keep setting the agenda and policy implementations that shape whose urban experiences matter. The state and municipal governments have indeed spared no expense to disseminate this narrative to the public. In 2025 alone, the State Government of Coahuila allocated and spent 600 million Mexican pesos (around 35 million USD) in communication and advertising services, meaning publicity spots in radio, television and/or other media (namely social media) about works and programs carried out by the State and local government. By contrast, others state departments like Arts and Culture and the Women's Secretariat, and even the State's Executive Commission for Attention to Victims faced restricted budgets (14M USD, 2M USD, and 1.5M USD, respectively) amidst criticism from journalists and political leaders (Digital News Mexico, 2019; Flores, 2020; Gallegos, 2025).

Saltillo's metrics as a competitive city come from the *Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad*¹⁷ (IMCO), a public policy think tank that defines competitiveness as "a city's capacity to generate, attract, and retain talent and investments that can detonate the productivity and wellbeing of its inhabitants" (author's translation, IMCO, 2022b). IMCO's reports measure competitiveness at the State, Municipal, and International level, with categories of assessment like innovation and economy, infrastructure, and

¹⁶ *Partido Acción Nacional*

¹⁷ Spanish for 'Mexican Institute for Competitiveness' (author's translation)

the job market, amongst others (IMCO, 2024). The advertising campaigns in Saltillo and Coahuila heavily present an image of a city and a state that equates competitiveness (in terms of productivity) and mass surveillance, with the wellbeing of the population (Corpus and Villanueva Ibarra, 2026).

Coahuila, and by extension, Saltillo's political agenda relies heavily in surveillance investments to state and local police forces to 'make Coahuila bullet-proof' (*blindar a Coahuila*) (p. 22-32) (see Fig. 1), including new police and military headquarters in the region, and over 100 MDP (around 5M USD) to fund and run the *Sistema Estatal de Videointeligencia*¹⁸ that operates thousands of surveillance cameras in urban areas and highways. In Saltillo alone, there are over 2000 surveillance cameras, and 500 of them are fitted with facial recognition software that is able to track faces, cars, and licence plates (Gobierno Municipal de Saltillo, 2026).

PRI's hegemonic political narrative in Coahuila and its politics means that surveillance and policing are at the forefront of the political agenda. It means that these aspects are heavily prioritised in contrast to other urban issues like human rights violation to immigrants, levels of perceived public safety, and public transportation issues, amongst others, as I will show in upcoming sections. However, as scholars from different fields have highlighted, programs that hinge on mass surveillance and policing do not lead to effective strategies for meaningfully addressing social issues because they create and raise tensions between marginalised groups like people of colour or from low socioeconomic backgrounds, people in situation of homelessness, or people who struggle with substance abuse (Wekerle, 2000; Ortiz Escalante, 2014; Kendall, 2020; Garcia-Reyes, 2021). A focus on mass surveillance and CCTV ignores how social markers like socioeconomic background, race, ethnic origin, gender, amongst others, come into play in the urban sphere along with the social, economic, and institutional aspects of the reproduction of violence (Chattopadhyay, 2018; Perea, 2019; Garcia-Reyes, 2021). For women in Saltillo for instance, as I argue later on in Paper Three, these protectionist measures that heavily rely on CCTV do not necessarily address the underlying issues they face in the city, particularly women who use public transportation, because they obscure how the urban infrastructure beyond buses fails to meet their mobility needs due to differentiated mobility patterns, and they also fail to recognise women's right to safely negotiate risks in the city (see more in pg. 153).

¹⁸ Spanish for 'State Surveillance (videointeligence) System'

Figure 1: *Coahuila Blindado*¹⁹



Source: *Coahuila's State government report* (p. 27), 2024.

Arguably, Coahuila's hegemonic political narrative serves the purpose of preserving PRI's strong hold of Coahuila's governorship, and acts as a political device akin to what Ahmed (2006) conceptualised as nonperformative speech acts: pushing the narrative of Saltillo as the safest, most competitive city in the country is an institutional performance because the work being done becomes about securing insiders and outsiders' perception of Saltillo as the safest city in order to remain in power, rather than addressing the social issues that affect the wellbeing and sense of safety of Saltillo's population (see Ahmed, 2006, p. 118). The narrative of safety and competitiveness in Saltillo brings forward an agenda that favours policing and surveillance not because the state or local governments are indeed concerned with people's sense of safety or well-being in the city, as I will argue in the upcoming section, but because the goal is to continue a hegemonic political narrative. In that sense, this narrative as a nonperformative speech act is not failing to address the urban issues present in Saltillo, rather it works *because* it preserves PRI's image and political rule over Coahuila without bringing about structural change that could jeopardize their rule over their *último bastión*.

Furthermore, it is necessary to probe and question this narrative because it does not reflect or focus on repairing systemic inequalities or social injustices (Corpus and Villanueva Ibarra, 2026, p. 67), and it does not account for how social markers like socioeconomic status, gender, ethnic origin, or migration status affect the urban experience that Saltillo has to offer, and the challenges it poses. The narrative of Saltillo as the safest, most competitive city in the country begs the questions 'competitive in what regard? and safest for whom?', because urban experiences are intrinsically intertwined with social

¹⁹ Spanish for 'Bulletproof Coahuila'.

markers and access to resources that shape the Saltillo we experience. A hegemonic political narrative that hinges on surveillance and CCTV to build an image as the safest, most competitive city in Mexico inherently disregards the urban experiences and challenges of marginalised communities because it presents a delocalised and generalised viewpoint of Saltillo as an objective image.

So far, my NPF analysis has identified the key players in Saltillo and Coahuila, alongside their hegemonic narratives and the motivations behind them. While I have started building a critique of this narrative, it is still necessary to bring diverse urban experiences to the conversation to continue unpacking how this hegemonic narrative obscures the realities of marginalised communities and ends up impacting policy implementations that could bring about change. In what follows, I present more context on the many different *Saltillos* that exist within Saltillo and Saltillo's historic origins in order to build a critique of the institutional performance of framing the city as the safest, most competitive in the country.

Saltillo: two towns in one

Saltillo started as two towns that settled on indigenous territory. Before the *Conquistadores* arrival in what is now Saltillo, the area was a forested valley in the middle of the north region of what we know as Mexico. There, two indigenous communities coexisted throughout the seasons relying on shared observational knowledge of the fauna and flora of the region for sustenance, however this was not without its conflict. *Guachichiles* and *Rayados* had managed to create ways of coexisting through conflict resolution strategies over land disputes, and this allowed each population to thrive avoiding warfare (Valdés Dávila *et al.*, 2013). While slave trading had been abolished in 1493 by Queen Isabella the Catholic, it was common practice amongst Portuguese and Spanish slave traders to capture and enslave indigenous people from the northern territories of what is now *Tamaulipas*, *Nuevo León*, *Coahuila*, and *Texas*. In the mid-1500s Spanish Friars that had been tasked with evangelising adjacent regions— that is, teaching and converting indigenous people into Catholicism, forcefully disregarding their own ontologies and beliefs— notified the Spanish crown of how slave traders operated in the Northeast of the *Nueva España* (Valdés Dávila *et al.*, 2013).

In 1572, Alberto del Canto, a Portuguese *colonizador*²⁰, sent under the Spanish crown's orders, arrived at a landscape that resembled an oasis after having travelled through the dessert of North Mexico. There, he saw springs of water that emanated from the nearby mountain range and he founded *Saltillo*²¹. He performed the expected rituals of founding a city—tossing soil to the wind, bringing more *conquistadores* and settlers along with him, and rearranging flowing river for irrigation ditches— and

²⁰ Spanish for 'Colonizer'

²¹ In Spanish, the meaning of this word makes a reference to springs of water

in doing so, the territory, and everything in it, was now part of the Spanish Crown, including the indigenous communities, the *Guachichiles* and *Rayados*, that originally inhabited the area.

The indigenous communities did not welcome this invasion and fought *conquistadores* for their land—the nearest mountain range is now known as *Sierra de Zapalinamé*, meaning ‘*Zapalinamé’s* mountain’ because of an indigenous *Guachichil* leader called *Zapalinamé* that fought and evaded the Spanish *conquistadores*. This conflict was not insignificant for the Spanish who already had found themselves forced to flee adjacent areas that are now known as Monterrey, Monclova, and Parras because the indigenous communities would not surrender. As a combat strategy, the Spanish then invited the indigenous community *Tlaxcaltecas* to emigrate north and help them settle in Saltillo—by then, the Spanish had established a working relationship with *Tlaxcaltecas* after three generations since the *Conquista* in 1492. *Los Tlaxcaltecas* arrived in September 1591, and the Spanish settlers then created two towns in the same territory: *El pueblo de San Esteban Yancuic Tlaxcallan* (*San Esteban de la Nueva Tlaxcala*) where the *Tlaxcaltecas* coexisted with the *Guachichiles* and *Rayados*, and *La Villa de Santiago de Saltillo*, reserved only for Spanish *conquistadores* and settlers, along with a sizable population of slaves of African descent (Osante, 2009; Valdés Dávila *et al.*, 2013; Venegas Delgado and Valdés Dávila, 2013).

This division of towns could be seen in the morphology of the city and infrastructure provision. The settlers controlled and regulated access to water, land, and wood to the indigenous communities and although *Villa de Saltillo* had an abundance of fertile land, the settlers did not adopt agriculture and livestock practices as the indigenous people had tried. At the beginning, the Spanish had willingly shared their resources with the *Tlaxcaltecas* because they saw their presence as a way to stay in the region without fearing conflicts with the *Guachichiles* and *Rayados*, but as time went on and as resources began to dwindle, settlers reluctantly began acknowledging *indígenas* demands over infrastructure provision to secure access to water for their lands and harvests.

By 1835, the Spanish *Villa* and the ‘*pueblo indio de San Esteban*²²’ became a single town now known as Saltillo de Santiago, and this meant that the *indígenas* had to change their ways of organisation, political systems, beliefs, and even leave behind their primary language *Náhuatl*. But this transition was far from peaceful—throughout the XVIII century, the new established State government adopted a genocidal stance against all ‘rebel *indígenas*’ who refused the new order (Archivo General de la Nación, 2022) and eradicated all indigenous communities “until exterminating them or subjugating them to the loyal obedience of our *rey amabilísimo*²³” (Venegas Delgado and Valdés Dávila, 2013, p. 199).

²² Spanish for ‘Indigenous Town of San Esteban’ (see Valdés Dávila *et al.*, 2013, p. 128)

²³ Partial translation to English from author. Spanish for “our kindest king”.

This context is important because the city of Saltillo, and the region that surrounds it, still struggles with infrastructure issues that date back to how the two towns coexisted during its foundation, and how they later on adopted industrialisation trends (see Valdés Dávila *et al.*, 2013): The urbanisation model that merged the two towns continued sprawling—for a time, wealthier families in Saltillo lived in the centre of town leaving people from lower socioeconomic classes and marginalised communities at the outskirts of the city. Saltillo's economy included agriculture and textile factories that produced threads and weavings also known as *sarapes*, however, it was the arrival of the rail network during the *Porfiriato* that significantly changed Saltillo's character and accelerated the urban expansion of the city.

At the beginning of the 1900s, rail infrastructure reached Saltillo and this cemented Saltillo's position as an industrial city— Mexico became a key supplier for countries like the US, the UK, and Germany during both World Wars, and Coahuila specifically became a key player due to the presence of *guayule*, an endemic bush that could be chemically transformed into plastic. Saltillo's geographical location shaped its access to natural resources and its economy deeply. Thousands of *campesinos* and *campesinas* in south of Saltillo and north of Zacatecas worked collecting *guayule*, *ixtle*, and *candelilla* for plastic production, and at the State level, Coahuila had up to 14 warehouses that produced between 35 and 40 tonnes of plastic every month in the early 1950s (Valdés Dávila *et al.*, 2013). In the second half of the XIX century, Saltillo began changing its character by switching from *adobe*²⁴ as the main construction material, to brick, and soon, *ladrilleras*²⁵ began operations in the city, altering the character of the architecture in the region and methods and methods for construction (Dávila del Bosque, 2025).

These vocational changes of the city can be seen in the urban grid of Saltillo to this day—the neighbourhoods *Guayulera*, and *Landín* got their names because that is where the warehouses for *guayule* and the brick factories were placed (respectively) and the people who worked in those factories began settling nearby them. From their origins, these neighbourhoods in Saltillo alongside others like *Águila de Oro*, *Virreyes Obrera*, *Las Brisas*, and *San Buenaventura*, have been neighbourhoods where labourers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have found a place to settle and build a home, but this does not mean that urbanisation and service provision has followed them, too, because as Flores Ramírez (2023) argued, real estate and political interests in the region have historically decided to redirect their investments away from the social issues present in *colonias populares*²⁶

The separation of the two towns in Saltillo did not only divide its population by race and ethnic origin in the beginning, it also embedded the physical separation of space between people with access to resources (to water, lands, and money, to name a few) and people without them. Historic

²⁴ A traditional building material made up with sand or clay, water, and organic binders like straw.

²⁵ Brick factories

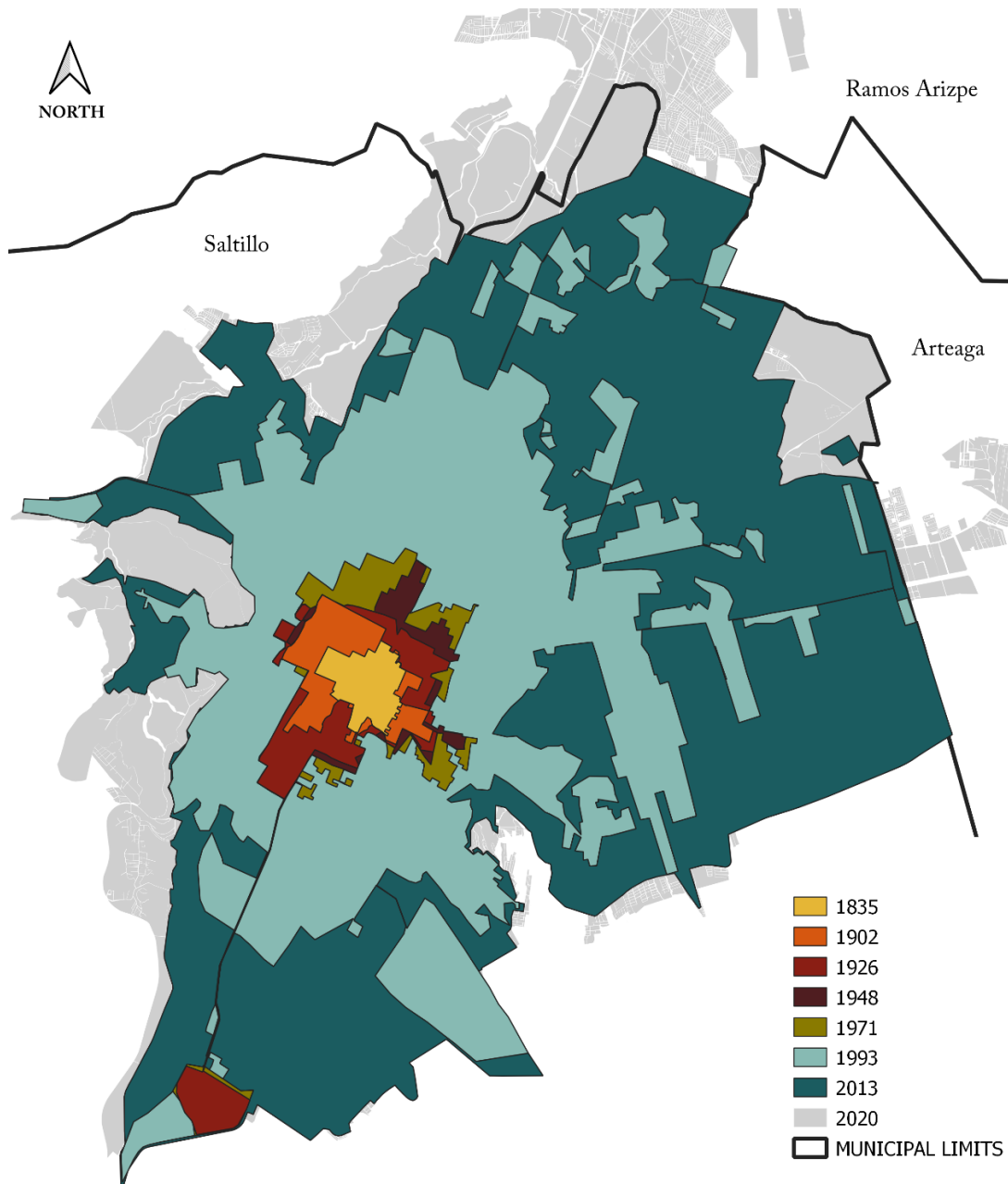
²⁶ Term in Mexican Spanish for neighbourhoods from low to medium socioeconomic background.

neighbourhoods like *Guayulera*, *Landín*, and *Las Brisas*, alongside newer ones that follow the same premise of expanding around industrial areas like *Mirasierra*, *Derramadero*, and *Colinas de San Lorenzo*, struggle with service provision for basic infrastructure like water and public transport.

While Saltillo's current economic activity does not directly depend on its natural resources, its closeness to the US border and industrial past have positioned the metropolitan area of Saltillo as part of one of the most important clusters in the automotive and auto part industry in the country, and this has boosted its economic development (Andrade Ochoa, Almanza Salazar and Fuentes Mata, 2026; Corpus and Villanueva Ibarra, 2026). Currently, Saltillo's main economic activity centres around the automotive industry and the manufacturing of auto parts, with a strong concentration of automotive, metallurgical, and aerospace companies. Since the 1970s, the main focus of this region has been the production of machinery and equipment for automotive companies like General Motors, Magna, Chrysler, Nemak, Delphi, and many others (Díaz *et al.*, 2021; Corpus and Villanueva Ibarra, 2026). However, industrialisation trends in Saltillo led to the expansion of the periphery rather than the densification of the existing urbanised areas (see Fig. 2) (Andrade Ochoa, Almanza Salazar and Fuentes Mata, 2026), leading to a fragmentation of the city where spatial struggles are linked to socioeconomic background and service provision.

In analysing Saltillo's historical origins, is that we are able to contextualise its current struggles and understand how hegemonic political powers translate to spatial injustices that can be observed in the contemporary geography of the city. While the separation of the two towns may not be as obvious as it was during Saltillo's foundation in 1572, *Saltillenses* still face a significant barrier that relates to how their socioeconomic background and access to resources shape their urban context and service provision. Saltillo's level of urban expansion is one of the most significant challenges in the implementation of public transport strategies because transport routes that connect opposite ends of the city face financial strains and struggle to keep the route profitable. As I explore in more detail in Paper Two, it is marginalised neighbourhoods who struggle the most with this lack of reliable and accessible public transportation and when a public transport route can no longer continue operating due to financial struggles, it is people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and *colonias populares* who feel the brunt of this.

Figure 2: Historical urban growth of Saltillo



Source: Own elaboration with information from IMPLAN, 2016, *Proyecto y Destino*

The many different *Saltillos*

At the same time that the government spends millions of pesos daily in framing Saltillo as the safest city in the country, there are dozen weekly reports that emerge and reflect a different side of ‘the safest city’ narrative. In this section, I want to dedicate some space to engage with the Saltillo that marginalised groups experience before circling back to how the experience public transport also represents one of those many different *Saltillos* that dismantle dominant political narratives in the city.

I do this to further question the hegemonic political narrative of Saltillo as the safest, most competitive city in Mexico, and also to acknowledge that public transportation issues, although pressing and urgent, are not the only issue that marginalised communities face in a Saltillo where political narratives seek to erase their urban experiences.

For instance, the hegemonic narrative present in Saltillo obscures the realities of Latin American migrants and how ethnic origin and migration status significantly shape the urban experience of Saltillo they get. In Mexico, migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees converge in spaces called *Casas del Migrante*²⁷ located in strategic cities across Mexico along the route to travel to the US (Infante *et al.*, 2022). The first *Casa del Migrante* was founded in Tijuana as a space for humanitarian response to the context migrants face while attempting to cross the US-Mexico border, and in 2011, a Mexican federal law recognised these spaces as *santuarios*²⁸ which grants them protections from immigration enforcement authorities.

In 2002, Saltillo's diocese founded *la Casa del Migrante Saltillo*, assisting migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers with humanitarian aid, mental health support, and legal guidance, amongst other resources (Castillo, Benavides and López, 2019; Astorga, Maldonado and Corpus, 2020). *La Casa del Migrante Saltillo* plays a strategic role for central and south American migrants because, for many, it is the last *Santuario* before attempting to cross the border with the US (Yee Quintero and Cantalapiedra, 2016; Castillo, Benavides and López, 2019; Astorga, Maldonado and Corpus, 2020). Migrants from countries like Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua enter Mexico through the southern states of Chiapas and Tabasco where they embark on a gruelling journey via the Pacific coast' route, or the Gulf route. When they reach *La Casa del Migrante Saltillo*, they usually descend the cargo trains that connect with the city, and by then, they would have faced extremely precarious conditions; more often than not, during their migration journey, they are at higher risk of sexual abuse, forced labour, kidnapping, and extortion, and a heightened risk of dehydration and malnutrition (Astorga, Maldonado and Corpus, 2020).

The Saltillo that migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers experience includes a heightened risk of police violence and brutality. For instance, in 2019, local and state police opened fire against a group of migrants that had left *La Casa del Migrante Saltillo* aiming to catch the next cargo train towards the US— the group was made up of men and women, and even children. A police officer shot and killed a migrant man from El Salvador who was traveling next to his 8-year-old daughter. At the time, the State's General Prosecution Office argued that the group was armed and had opened fire against police officers, however the administrative personnel at *La Casa del Migrante Saltillo* denied their allegations

²⁷ Spanish for 'Migrant's shelter'

²⁸ Spanish for 'Sanctuaries'

and issued a statement condemning the State's antimigration policies (Amnistía Internacional, 2019; La Izquierda Diario México, 2019). Throughout the years, *La Casa del Migrante Saltillo* has advocated for migrants human rights at the local and national level and has denounced institutional violence from the State including cases of forced disappearance of migrants in the context of the ongoing drug war in the country (Villanueva Ibarra and García Corpus, 2025; Ríos, 2026).

The narrative of Saltillo as one of the safest cities in the country does not ring true for the urban experiences of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in Saltillo because it does not account for how migration status and ethnic origin alter urban experiences. Similarly for locals, the narrative of safety does not necessarily match with their urban experiences in various different contexts. For instance, in terms of community violence, the National Survey of Victimization and Perception of Public Safety (ENVIPE) 2025 shows metrics that do not match up with dominant political narratives (INEGI, 2025). In 2025, over 54.2% of people aged 18 or over agreed that lack of public safety represents an important challenge in the State and almost 70% and 60% of the population think that the local and state police are corrupt (respectively). These metrics are relevant because they shape Saltillo's urban experience and contrast the dominant political narrative, but also because these perceptions shape people's behaviours in the public space and the city. For instance, 64.1% of the population in Coahuila no longer allow children in their households to venture in the city on their own; 32.4% avoids going out in the evening out of fear of crime; and 41.9% of people feel unsafe in public transportation (INEGI, 2025).

The narrative of Saltillo as the safest, most competitive city also largely overlooks the challenges people face when commuting in the city, either with their own private vehicle, bike, or public transportation. To begin, road safety also represents a major challenge in Saltillo. In 2023 alone, 56 people died as a result of road collisions and crashes, and 467 more people were injured in a total of 892 road accidents in the city (Aramayo, 2024) and, in 2025, the Deputy Director of Local Transit estimated that between 40 and 50 road accidents occur daily (Pánames, 2025). In Saltillo, car ownership has been steadily increasing over the past decade, going from almost 30,000 cars per 100,000 inhabitants, to almost 43,000 cars while cities like Morelia and Puebla have managed to decrease their car ownership metrics (Flores Ramírez, 2026b).

Saltillo's extended urban development, combined with a low investment in public transportation initiatives, leaves people with few choices on how to get around the city because not adopting private vehicles comes at a costly price in terms of quality of life; people without a private vehicle are marginalised and their mobility is conditioned by the urban development of the city, as this thesis will showcase (Corpus and Villanueva Ibarra, 2026). Concerns over road safety intersect with social markers such as socioeconomic background and gender in a Saltillo where people experience harassment and marginalisation as an everyday reality. As Corpus and Villanueva Ibarra (2026) argue, people in Saltillo do not necessarily choose to move in private vehicles directly, however they are forced to adopt private

vehicles because the urban design prioritises industrial developments and cars, and this shapes the decision-making process of ‘choosing’ how to move around the city (p.62).

The alternatives for people without private vehicles are challenging. For instance, people who would rather commute by cycling face precarious infrastructure coupled with concerns over road violence and safety (Aramayo, 2023) and these conditions shape who cycles in the city, where, and how. In 2025, Andrade Ochoa, Almanza Salazar and Fuentes Mata (2026) carried out a cyclist count at five strategic intersections and cross-sectional surveys that produced a characterisation of the cycling population in Saltillo, identify motivations, perceived barriers, and usage patterns. In Saltillo, 94.5% of cycling journeys are done by men, and women only represent 5.5%, with the dominant age group being people between 30 and 59 years-old (45.3%), followed by young adults aged 19-29 years-old (33.1%). As the study highlights, opting for cycling in Saltillo does not hinge only on individual factors or environmental conditions, but around the structural conditions of the urban environment such as safe and connected urban infrastructure (bike paths, protected or segregated lanes, parking, etc.). Over 46% of cyclists in Saltillo agree that exposure to road violence is a major constraint for cyclists and people who wish to take up cycling as a mode of transport, followed by the lack of cycling infrastructure (32.5%), and public safety, where women cyclists report higher levels of perceived vulnerability while cycling compared to men (p. 89-90).

So far, I have tried to bring to the forefront some of the urban realities of marginalised communities that Saltillo’s hegemonic narrative obscures in favour of a neutral and objective idea of the city that can advance political interests. Now, I turn my focus on public transportation issues in Saltillo to unpack how hegemonic narratives impact policy implementations that could bring about change. Public transportation in Saltillo indeed presents many challenges that contradict Saltillo’s ‘safest, most competitive city’ image. The public transport system in Saltillo operates through a private concession system model, meaning that the local authority grants private entities (often individuals) the rights to run a certain public transport route for profit. This business model is the case of public transportation in almost every Mexican city. Private concession owners take on forms of local risk like purchasing buses through loans and oversee operation and maintenance of the buses and routes (see Gamble and Dávalos, 2019). In this setting, the local authority does not take part in the hiring, training, or setting the working conditions of the bus drivers; these responsibilities are left to the concession owners, often resulting in bus drivers who work 14-hour shifts, rarely take breaks and who have unreliable job security given that their employment conditions will vary depending on the concession owner of different routes (Chowdhury, 2023). And when running a bus route is no longer profitable or becomes financially unsustainable for concessionaires, the company can declare bankruptcy and thus a route disappears from service, sometimes even overnight (Flores Ramírez, 2026a).

Bus routes in Saltillo have been steadily diminishing over the past five years from 42 routes to only 20 currently in operation (Flores Ramírez, 2025c). This places a strain particularly on lower-income residents who rely on public transportation and people who live in marginalised neighbourhoods in the south, east, and west of the city, leaving over 250,000 people with no meaningful transport alternative. Over the years, the local authority has tried to work alongside concession owners to avoid this and keep routes afloat but the dramatic decrease in ridership, given the disconnected and unreliable service on offer, is a serious obstacle for many operators (Flores Ramírez, 2025e, 2025d).

As Corpus and Villanueva Ibarra (2026) argue, many people ‘choose’ to switch to private vehicles as soon as they can to avoid the perils and uncertainties that come with being a public transport user. The transport system itself poses many inconveniences; the buses in operation are not accessible for people with limited physical mobility and are often in a poor or unsafe state. Users routinely share reports and complaints on social media with photos and videos that depict buses breaking down mid-journey, leaving them stranded for a considerable amount of time or buses that have been poorly retrofitted from previous long-distance coaches to public transport buses and that do not meet requirements in terms of bus stop buttons or handles for users standing. Additionally, the current infrastructure does not have estimated timetables and the information about routes timings is not publicly available. In general, users navigate a public transport system that is riddled with uncertainty and whenever they reach a bus stop, they are left wondering whether the bus has already gone by and they missed it, or if it has not arrived and how long they will have to wait. The narrative of Saltillo being one of the most competitive cities in Mexico obscures the urban realities of the people who are exposed to a precarious and unreliable transport system every day and this, in turn, affects what public policies are implemented to address these issues and how.

For instance, in 2019, the local government invested millions in ‘modernising’²⁹ Saltillo’s public transport infrastructure with not much success. The strategies considered –among other aspects– reorganising the routes, upgrading the bus fleet, training programmes for bus drivers, and setting up a joint trust where private licensees and the Municipal Government would collectively create a fund for future investment in the public transport system (Comunicación Social, 2019). The launch of this programme aimed to justify the steep 18% increase in the general single-ride fare, going from 11.00 MXN to 13.00 MXN³⁰ (Chacón, 2019), however the ‘modernisation’ strategy never fully materialised (Aramayo, 2022b). Some of the buses upgraded their external appearance, with white paint and an image that included government logos of the administration at the time, but the buses’ interior remained the same; the number of active buses and frequency of service remained the same and later on decreased

²⁹ This is a direct translation of the campaign launched by the Municipal government of Saltillo at the time with the aim of *modernizar* (modernise) the transport infrastructure.

³⁰ 13 Mexican Pesos is roughly 0.76 US dollars as of early 2026.

after being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ruedas Rebeldes, 2023). The transport authority announced that the bus drivers would now be required to undertake training programmes in coordination with the Municipal Institute of Women and the Technological University of Coahuila (Universidad Tecnológica de Coahuila), but this lacks measurable indicators that could point to their effectiveness or lack thereof (El Herald de Saltillo, 2019; Estrada, 2021). In sum, this project only served to justify a fare increase, delivered no meaningful change to the public transport experience in Saltillo, and users were left navigating the same unsafe, unreliable transport system, and paying a higher fare.

In this case, the public policies that came into effect did not improve or modify the experience of using public transportation and while the behind-the-scenes of why policy fails is complex and multidimensional (see Temenos and Lauermann, 2020), it is necessary to recognise that the hegemonic narrative of Saltillo as one of the most competitive cities impacted how the local authority addressed transport challenges in the city: In order for meaningful change to occur, the local and state government needed to recognise that the transportation issues in Saltillo run deeper than just the branding of the buses or the training of bus drivers, and arguably, recognising that would have also meant putting Saltillo's competitiveness up for debate when the goal had been to secure Saltillo's image as competitive and safe.

Shortly after that local government administration ended in 2022, the following one launched another 'modernisation' plan called *Nueva Estrategia de Transporte*³¹ (NET) that aimed to reorganise the public transport routes in the city and introduced a new transport route called 'Circuito Capital' that had buses fitted with CCTV cameras and tracking devices that provided people with estimated timetables (Rodríguez, 2024; Pérez Paz, 2025). Importantly, this transport route only accepted payment through the frequent rider card scheme (NET card) and this represented a significant challenge for users because the rest of the transport network had not adopted the NET fare system. The NET did not bring about any meaningful change to the urban experience of public transport users. Firstly, the buses used for this route were the same make and model of other transport routes, except the outside branding was different—this means that the buses were still not accessible or fitted with greener technologies. Secondly, *Circuito Capital* serviced a very limited route of the urban area of Saltillo, and it was not a meaningful alternative for users with complex travel patterns commuting from neighbourhoods in the periphery of the city. The NET only operated for four months and was shortly dismantled after the administration ended in late 2024, and with it, the public transport route stopped operations, as well as the NET card (González, 2025). As I argue in further detail in Paper Two, frequent rider cards pose many challenges for public transport users who lack the time flexibility to follow through with the paperwork to obtain one. These schemes fail to take into account people with complex mobility patterns (namely women with caring responsibilities or people commuting from poorly serviced areas in the

³¹ Spanish for 'New Transport Strategy'

city) and further entrench inequalities around lack of money and time (see more in Pg. 134). Once again, the focus of the transport policies implemented was to reproduce Saltillo's image as competitive and safe through the use of strategies like CCTV and a new frequent rider scheme, but in doing this, failed to acknowledge and address the challenges users face daily. Arguably, the goal of these 'modernisation' programs was never to bring about meaningful change to the transport system in Saltillo, but to acquiesce growing demands for better transport conditions (Aramayo, 2022a) and protect the hegemonic narrative of Saltillo as a competitive and safe city, a narrative that allows the current people in power to remain in power.

The obstacles of using public transportation as a main mode of transport, coupled with infrequent and reduced number of buses in operation are enough to drive users to seek alternative modes of transport whenever possible (Corpus and Villanueva Ibarra, 2026). These are aspects of how class and socioeconomic background clash with the narrative of Saltillo as one of the safest, most competitive cities in Mexico. People who cannot afford to switch their mode of transportation are left with the everyday struggles of having to negotiate and navigate a precarious transport system, and for people who cannot afford a bus fare and opt for cycling as an alternative to the private vehicle, road violence and road safety represents a significant daily challenge.

When analysed through a gender lens, women's experiences of crime, violence, and harassment, also bring a new dimension to the conversation of Saltillo as the safest, most competitive city. For instance, in Saltillo in 2024, the Family Planning Unit in the municipal government reported that one of the most common types of violence is women's reports on intimate partner violence, and that it is women from marginalised neighbourhoods in the east, south, and west of the city who report this the most (IMPLAN Saltillo, 2024, p. 55). According to the official report about criminal incidence as of July 2022 by the Executive Secretariat of the Public Security National System, Saltillo occupies the 36th position in the ranking of 100 municipalities with alleged femicide crimes (Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, 2022). For women, buses are also often perceived as unsafe spaces where they face constant sexual harassment and are systematically dismissed by local authorities when trying to report assault episodes. Until recently, there were no statistics about gender-based violence in the public transport system of Saltillo but my previous research sets a baseline for the severity of the issue. Cities like Torreón and Monterrey partnered with UN Women to produce statistics and strategies to combat gender-based violence in public spaces (ONU Mujeres, 2017, 2018); while 78.2% and 77.9% participants reported being afraid of being sexually assaulted while in transport respectively, Saltillo's results overwhelmingly surpassed those metrics at 95.59% (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021). Gender-based violence in public spaces is an everyday reality for women in Saltillo, and this shapes their urban understandings and the ways they navigate the city and its transport system. Nevertheless, the local authority in Saltillo remains dismissive and avoids acknowledging the extent of the issue through a

failed reporting system that perpetuates and normalises violence against women (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2022).

In Saltillo, women rely more on public transportation compared to men (22.58% vs 16.46%, respectively), while men rely more on private vehicles, either cars or motorcycles, or company transport (69.05% vs 74.27%, respectively) (INEGI, 2020). However, more often than not, it is marginalised women who are forced to endure precarious transport conditions and who face spatial, temporal, and financial constraints that limit their urban and social mobility, as I will showcase throughout this thesis in Paper Two, Three, and Four.

In Saltillo, the need to preserve the hegemonic political narrative of a ‘safe and competitive city’ impacts what social issues are addressed and how: from ignoring human rights violations to Central and South American immigrants in the city; to disregarding cyclists needs for cycling infrastructure in the city; and to implementing non-performative transport policies that claim to ‘modernise’ transport conditions rather than acknowledging and addressing the pressing issues in public transportation.

The section that follows seeks to mobilise Saltillo’s case study from local conversations about public transportation and into broader debates in the urban studies scholarship. I elaborate on how this Chapter represents a ‘comparative gesture’ (Robinson, 2011, p. 2) made explicit, to invite scholars from adjacent fields like comparative urbanism and policy innovation to explore the role of power dynamics in the production of space and the spatialisation of inequalities, and how sociopolitical context affect public policies that seek to redress spatial injustices.

From local conversations to broader debates: Saltillo as a case study in Mexico and Latin America.

In Saltillo, the need to preserve the hegemonic political narrative of a ‘safe and competitive city’ impacts what social issues are addressed and how: from ignoring human rights violations to Central and South American immigrants in the city; to disregarding cyclists needs for cycling infrastructure; and to implementing non-performative transport policies that claim to ‘modernise’ transport conditions rather than acknowledging and addressing the pressing issues that affect mobility patterns. In Coahuila and Saltillo, PRI’s presence at the local and state government since 1929 represents a unique case study in Mexico, and while this thesis will focus solely on how public transport infrastructure affects women’s mobilities, it is still necessary to mobilise this research project from local conversations about transport challenges to broader debates in the urban studies sphere because the spatialisation of inequalities through hegemonic narratives extends beyond transportation challenges.

To that end, comparative urbanism as a field can provide new approaches to understanding global urban challenges by bringing different cases together to inspire conceptualisation. In this field, traditional

methodological approaches find shared processes or outcomes as the basis for urban comparison, making connections that can generate conceptual insights and theoretical conversations (Robinson, 2015a). As Robinson (2011) argues, the act of theorising the urban at any scale is inherently a ‘comparative gesture’ because it invites questions that place cities in a ‘world of cities’— that is, it recognises urban interconnectedness in economic, social cultural, and political structures that link together—and this invokes a comparative gesture (p. 2-3).

As Robinson examines the potential and shortcomings of the comparative techniques in the field, she presents how the existing practices of comparative urbanism can impose constraints in comparisons to only cities with very similar features or characteristics. Instead, she argues that in order for urban studies to have an international and post-colonial approach, the comparative gesture needs revitalising. She presents an argument to conceptualise comparative urbanism as a field that can help ‘think cities through elsewhere’ (p. 18) by putting case studies into wider conversations—case studies that do not need to be defined territorially but that compose bespoke comparisons across shared features, trace connections among cities, and launch distinctive analyses from specific urban contexts into wider theoretical conversations (Robinson, 2011, 2015b). Instead, exploring urban issues at a more abstract level can bring about creative theorisations across a wider range of different contexts that might otherwise remain unexplored in favour of “global cities” (see King, 1989; Robinson, 2013).

While engaging in a comprehensive comparative analysis of how narratives affect transportation policies elsewhere falls outside of the scope of this Chapter, and this thesis, I am interested in making a ‘comparative gesture’ as Robinson (2015a) suggests, because I want to position Saltillo’s case in a manner that invites comparison and that seeks to spark conversation beyond transport issues. In Coahuila and Saltillo, PRI’s presence at the local and state government since 1929 represents a unique case study in Mexico, however the way dominant political narratives have shaped policies and marginalisation is not exclusive to Saltillo or transport issues. My comparative gesture involves wider theoretical conversations around how power dynamics and hegemonic narratives shape the spatialisation of inequalities and marginalisation, and my intention is to position Saltillo as a case study not defined by its territorial characteristics, instead, as a case study that can trace connections among cities with shared features and dynamics.

At the Mexican level for instance, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, faced a crisis as over the large number of femicide cases in the city in the early 90s— Hundreds of young women had been found murdered, showing signs of torture, and dumped in the desert however the local and state government repeatedly dismissed reports and demands of action under the logic that “good girls” do not go out at night, and since most of these victims disappeared in the dark, they probably were not good girls (Wright, 1999, p. 456).

As this was happening, Ciudad Juárez was aiming to transition into the next “Silicon Valley of Mexico” (p. 94) and this plan necessitated the reproduction of the city as it was—marked by poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and unskilled, low-waged labourers in labour-intensive industries (Wright, 2001). Notably in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua, local and state governments repeatedly failed to acknowledge, address and help women who were experiencing situations of violence, forced disappearances, or cases of femicides because ‘the priority is to protect the image and economic interests [of the government], not the people who are feeling the brunt of the violence’ (Ensalaco, 2006, p. 426). Saltillo has not seen the brutal levels of femicides that Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua did in the early 90s but arguably what these cities have in common is the local and state authorities reluctance in acknowledging the worrying levels of urban violence women face in favour of maintaining an image that can protect their economic interests, and in Saltillo’s case, its image as a competitive city that can attract and retain investors.

At the Latin American level, for instance, in the Brazilian Amazon, the advancement of right-wing politics has increasingly reframed nature and environmental protection as obstacles to national development, and as a result of this shift of narratives, there has been large-scale deforestation and dismantling of the existing socioenvironmental policy framework. In their research, Russo Lopes and De Castro (2026) provide a meso-level analysis adopting a NPF to reveal how forests and local communities have been continuously reframed over time—how public narratives steer ideas, meanings and values attributed to forests, and how this plays a crucial role in landscape transformations in the Brazilian Amazon. Their analysis identifies what they call a ‘narrative-policy nexus’, through which the state can promote or hinder landscape transformations (p.12), and adds nuance to generalising interpretations of the Amazon within debates about land-use, forest governance, and landscape transformations. The conversations around how power dynamics and political narratives affect socioenvironmental policies in Brazil are linked to what is happening in Saltillo because the government, and their agenda, also reframe how urban development occurs in the region—the political interest of remaining one of the most competitive cities in Mexico (that is, one of the cities that prioritises industrial development the most) leads to an urban sprawl development model over compact and dense cities that could create proximity to job centres. This, in turn, places further strains on services like public transport provision, housing, and water and drainage infrastructure. This Chapter presents the sociopolitical context that surrounds Saltillo and its dominant political narratives not to engage in the villainization of local authorities and politicians but to point out how political narratives are playing a role in shaping public policies in the city. As Robinson argued, bringing the spatialities of cities to frame the process of comparative reflection can stimulate comparisons across different cities and urban areas. Saltillo as an urban area has many differences with Ciudad Juárez and the Brazilian Amazonia but analysing the dynamics of space production and how power relations play a role in shaping policy implementations brings a common element that places Saltillo in the Mexican and Latin American

conversation in urban studies and policy innovation. Thus, analysing the sociopolitical context of Saltillo and the existing hegemonic political narratives, allows me to bring an abstract element of how space is configured in Saltillo, inviting comparative reflections from places that might otherwise remain outside the scope of comparative analysis.

A generalised representation of Saltillo as one of the safest, most competitive cities in the country overlooks the levels of marginalisation and social issues, across different sectors of the city, and how social markers shape urban experiences. In that sense, this analysis of the political narratives at play brings nuance to Saltillo's generalised and uniformed image which masks complex social dynamics and intersections of inequality. Indeed, there is a version of Saltillo where migrants face brutal violence at the hands of local and state police; there is a version of the city where low-income men from marginalised neighbourhoods are forced to risk their lives because they cannot afford any alternative transport methods other than their bikes. There is another version of Saltillo where people with reduced mobility and disabilities are forced into immobility because the city and its pavements are not accessible to them (Flores Ramírez, 2024), and other people may also experience a version of Saltillo that is characterised by homophobia and transphobia (González, 2026).

Latin American cities are no strangers to local and state governments pushing political narratives that favour their interests and ignore the urban realities of marginalised and overlooked communities. Saltillo as a case study in Mexico and Latin America is a representation of who capitalist urban development leaves behind in the name of progress and how political discourse shapes policies and reproduce inequalities. In bringing this localised sociopolitical context, I am making a comparative gesture explicit by placing Saltillo's case study in broader urban debates, and leaving questions open for further theorisation. For instance, do political narratives shape policies the same in different cities, could they be similar but for different reasons? How are inequalities present in the spatial configuration of other cities that might share similar characteristics to Saltillo (e.g., population size, sociopolitical dynamics, social issues, geopolitical context), or how does the spatialisation of inequalities change as other factors come into play? These are some questions that invite comparative analysis in the urban sphere and that mobilise Saltillo's case study as a conversation that extends beyond local conversations around public transportation issues.

Going forward: a focus on public transportation

The motivation behind this Chapter is to present context on Saltillo that can problematise the hegemonic political narrative in the city that depicts a generalised and delocalised version of Saltillo as one of the safest and most competitive cities in Mexico. In doing this, my aim is not only to provide context that is relevant to public transportation issues in Saltillo— although it is important to acknowledge this is

the main theme of this thesis— but to broaden the reach of this research to other scholarship fields like comparative urbanism and policy innovation in Latin America because the issues present in Saltillo can resemble issues present in other cities in the Latin American region at the local level, and these issues extend beyond public transportation issues.

In that spirit, I adopted Narrative Policy Framework as a way to structure my argument because, as I have highlighted, it is critical to understand the sociopolitical context when aiming to address spatial injustices through public policy implementations. Firstly, it was necessary to introduce the sociopolitical context that surrounds Saltillo and Coahuila to understand who the key voices are in this hegemonic political narrative and their motivations. Later, it was important to discuss Saltillo's foundation and its origins as a city to understand how it connects with the urban issues present in today's Saltillo. This then allowed me to bring forward diverse urban experiences that challenge the generalised version of Saltillo that ignores social struggles around issues like immigration, road safety, and public transportation issues, to name a few. I purposefully used a Narrative Policy Framework in this Chapter as a way to contextualise Saltillo's issues and invite other scholars to problematise their research endeavours around spatial injustices in a way that explores how the sociopolitical context and hegemonic political narratives shape public policy implementations. I am interested in sparking conversations around who shapes public policies and why do policy implementations fail when addressing spatial injustices and urban issues because, as highlighted through the examples in this Chapter, and throughout Chapter Two, space production is inherently embedded in power relations about who belongs in the city. As mentioned before; in doing this, I am making comparative gesture explicit by presenting Saltillo's case study to broader urban debates about how political narratives and power dynamics shape the spatialisation of inequalities in Mexico and Latin America. While these conversations fall outside of the scope of this thesis, it is still necessary to bring this to the forefront because Latin American cities share these struggles and they extend beyond public transportation provision.

Going forward, I am focusing exclusively on issues that pertain to public transportation issues and mobilities, specifically for women who live in Saltillo. My research endeavours seek to produce decolonial knowledge that can decentre the androcentric experience of the city and this is reflected in the focus of my enquiry, the selection of my methods, and in my standpoint for analysis (read more on this in Chapter Four and Paper One). In what follows I present a vivid version of Saltillo that is not neutral, rather, it is situated in the lived urban experiences of women who rely on the public transport network because these social differences—that is, gender and socioeconomic background—significantly alter the urban experience that Saltillo has to offer. I focus on these experiences to challenge the dominant political narrative in the region that aims to solve women's perceived vulnerability through surveillance and protectionist measures (Vega, 2025; Gobierno Municipal de Saltillo, 2026). Indeed, acknowledging the pervasiveness of GBV and violence against women in public

spaces, including public transport, would not only run counter to ‘the safest city’ narrative, but it would also require the local and state government to admit to flaws, mistakes and irregularities in their terms and internal reporting processes. Within a sociopolitical and cultural context in which women’s lives are under-valued in comparison to political agendas, this does not appear to be a trade-off worth making.

This thesis thus details the urban conditions that exacerbate women’s perceptions of vulnerability and how the currently public transport infrastructure complicate women’s mobilities in Saltillo as a way to contribute to the gap in the literature about women’s urban realities and challenges. As a feminist researcher seeking to produce knowledge that questions hegemonic narratives, it is important to situate Saltillo’s context in broader debates in urban studies, particularly through an interdisciplinary approach that moves beyond transport challenges and acknowledges the complex political dynamics that shape transport policies. Framing Saltillo’s case study in the hegemonic political narratives mobilises Saltillo’s issues as more than just transport or gendered mobility challenges; it analytically broadens the conversation to a wider audience of scholars and policy makers at the intersection of feminist geography, urban studies, comparative urbanism, and comparative public policy in Latin America. In doing so, I am presenting a counter-narrative that challenges Saltillo’s image as safe and competitive in favour of one that taps into women’s *sentipensares* to understand their needs and address them through public policy *enraizada* in their lived experiences.

In the following Chapter, I present reflections around the limitations of my research endeavours and how I was not able to explore deeply the urban experiences of people with disabilities, elders, and children. Yet, it is necessary to acknowledge that these social markers—age, ethnic group, immigration status, disabilities—also alter the Saltillo people experience. This thesis, indeed, leaves room for future researchers to explore these intersections of inequalities. I also present a detailed account of the methods and materials used for this thesis. I elaborate on my decision of rooting my research endeavours in a feminist-informed approach to *sentipensar*: where it comes from; its strengths, and shortcomings; and how every method comes together to bring a methodology *enraizada en el sentipensar*³².

³² Spanish for ‘Rooted in sentipensar’ (See Chapter Four)

Chapter Four: Materials and methods

In 2023 I began conducting field work for my Ph. D. research in Saltillo, Mexico. I implemented a feminist mixed-method approach rooted in '*sentipensar*,' that combined 1) group transect walks, 2) ethnographic shadowing, and 3) urban audits to bus stops in order to understand women's urban experiences. In this Chapter I elaborate on the methodological approach that serves as the scaffolding for my research project. This Chapter presents *sentipensar* as a research avenue and elaborates on how my research approach is rooted in a feminist-informed way of *sentipensar la ciudad*³³.

Before focusing on *sentipensar* and how my methods relate to a feminist approach to this framework, I firstly engage with the indigenous cultures and ontologies of *Abya Yala* as a way to frame where *sentipensar* comes from and why it is conceptualised as a decolonial research framework. I then weave this layer of information with what has been theorised in the gender studies and feminist scholarship about objectivity and neutrality in the research process to highlight the need for a feminist-informed approach to decolonial frameworks. Afterwards, I present some of the diverse and various ways in which feminist scholars have engaged with participatory and embodied research; thereafter I introduce *sentipensar* and explain how and why I chose to engage with *sentipensar* from a feminist stance to produce situated, embodied, and decolonial research. In this Chapter I also present the details and specifics of each method, how they are rooted in *sentipensar*, and the technical and emotional intricacies that this process entailed.

This Chapter is intimately tied to Paper One, where I build an argument, in publishable format, presenting *sentipensar* as a feminist-informed approach to research.

Otros mundos y otros saberes (Other worlds and other ways of knowing)

The region of what is now known as Latin America and the Caribbean was brutally shaped by the processes of colonisation led by the Spanish and Portuguese crowns in the late 1400s. For the indigenous people in the region, the colonisation by the Europeans was a cataclysmic event that meant the destruction of their cultural and physical worlds; the loss of their sovereignty and the destruction and devaluation of their forms of knowledge and spirituality in favour of a colonial-western way of knowing (Harding and Mendoza, 2021). Before 1492, the Amerindian communities inhabited the territory that decolonial scholars and activist refers to as *Abya Yala* (meaning 'land in full maturity' in the language of the Kuna of Panama and Colombia) as an alternative to 'Latin America'.

³³ Feeling/thinking the city

The Incas, Mayans, and Aztecs—the major Amerindian groups mostly inhabiting what today is Mexico, Central America, Perú, Chile, Bolivia, and parts of Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia—had sophisticated knowledge systems for chronology, astronomy, agriculture, and construction (Galeano, 1971, p. 43). They had also developed their own cosmovision of the world; their diverse spiritualities were linked to a communitarian sense of the cosmic vision of life, and spirituality was considered the search for balance, mutual nurturing, and harmony with ourselves, with others, and *Pachamama*³⁴ (Chipana Quispe, 2025). In the ontologies of the indigenous people of *Abya Yala*, the separations of spirit and body do not exist; matter and mind are interpreted as a continuum and theory could not be done without a body, without action, without practices. But indigenous ways of knowing had no place in the new order and under this imposed perspective of the world—for colonial western knowledge systems to legitimise their power, the *saberes*³⁵ from the indigenous communities had to be delegitimised and destroyed (Rodrigues, 2022).

Colonial relations in the Americas began in 1492 and they came with an imposition of rigid knowledge systems and hierarchical concepts of race, sexuality, and gender (Segato, 2016; Lugones, 2023). As Harding (2019) argued, for the Europeans, the discovery of new lands across the Atlantic appeared as a solution to some of their most pressing problems. Europeans welcomed the thought of being able to leave behind the economic and political problems as well as overpopulation and famines; with the discovery of new lands, they could “start over” (p.52).

Mestiza and criolla feminists and decolonial scholars have deepened the conversation around the effects of colonialism in the production of knowledge and its relation to gender hierarchies. Scholars like Lugones (2010, 2023) have argued that the existing gender system in *Abya Yala* was overwritten by the gender system introduced by Europeans. Scholars like Segato (2016) have argued that gender dynamics were present in pre-colonial times. Whilst these debates are not monolithic throughout the subcontinent or even throughout regions, indigenous conceptions of gender largely placed the feminine and masculine forces as complementary and parallel—women’s power of child birthing was understood as equally important as men’s role as warriors and soldiers (Harding and Mendoza, 2021). It was the advancement of the Mexica and Inca empires that heightened the differentiation between genders, and colonialism that introduced the separation of the public and private spheres thus minoritising indigenous women (see Segato, 2016). For many critical indigenous, feminist, and queer scholars, heteronormative patriarchy is a result of settler colonialism (Zaragocin, 2019)

The 1494 ‘Treaty of Tordesillas’ defined how the Spanish and Portuguese authorities would divide the territory for governance and from then on, the city itself became an instrument of domination in colonial

³⁴ Meaning ‘Mother Earth’ in *Quechua* and *Aymara* cultures

³⁵ Ways of knowing

times (Galeano, 1971, p. 16; Ortiz, 2024). Under Spanish rule, the urban grid became a physical representation of the new world where the Spanish controlled and denied access to resources to indigenous communities and separated themselves (settler colonialists) from the natives—the Incan empire, for example, built cities to be oriented toward the sun and around terraces for growing food, but the Spanish *conquistadores* “killed off their planning systems in favour of their own design guidelines” of how urban life should carry on (Corburn, 2021, p. 129). Colonialism also involved a social pact between colonised and coloniser men based on the acceptance of the subordination of women to men; centuries before 1492 Amerindian women had occupied important social and political positions and were part of the production of knowledge in fields like agriculture, environmental and technical knowledge, and speculative ontology in the Aztec, Inca and Mayan communities, and were now relegated to the private, the intimate, the minority (Segato, 2016; Harding and Mendoza, 2021). While there are tenuous elements of gender hierarchy in indigenous Mayan communities, it was never a “full-blown ancestral patriarchy” (p.112), rather one in development, that was then fast-tracked with the introduction of European conceptions of gender binarism.

There is territorial unevenness to be acknowledged in these discussions. As Ortiz (2024) highlights, the generational racialised, gender, and territorial dimensions of social inequalities of what we know as Latin America are multilayered and complex, but while each country has different point of departure, there is still a shared legacy of pervasive colonial capitalist, patriarchal and racist systems. The separation between body and mind in Latin America advanced with colonisation processes that imposed colonial rationality. Cartesian dichotomies that separate mind and body, humans and nature, and nature and society are foreign in Mesoamerican and Andean cultures— all of these elements are interdependent and their cosmovision calls for a balanced and harmonious existence between all of them (Cariño and González, 2022). Colonial, androcentric, and scientific rationality is the basis of the multiple separations or fragmentations of reality with the purpose of building knowledge that is not embodied, not contextualised, and therefore, “objective and universal” (Lander and Castro-Gómez, 2000; Cariño and González, 2022).

Urban scholarship in Latin America, as Ortiz(2024) captured, is abundant, complex, and ranges in perspectives, topics, and approaches. It moves between creating *conocimiento propio*³⁶ and expanding and contesting ‘global’ urban debates. Scholars and researchers have questioned the role of theory, the relationship with their social reality and the “vicissitudes of imported paradigms” as universal explanations of the urban (p.401) (Cabnal, 2010; Heimer *et al.*, 2022; Ortiz, 2024). Feminist theorisations of space in particular, have had a crucial role in centring networks of solidarity and resistance in research, and in the urban, because intersectional feminist critiques problematise ‘objective and universal’ knowledges. Latin American decolonial feminism has immense potential for

³⁶ Our own knowledge (translation from source)

decolonising geographical knowledge because its very framework depends on bridging different scholarly critics of coloniality, promoting a plurality of epistemologies, political alliances, and embodied ontologies (Zaragocin, 2018, 2019). Decolonising our research endeavours, in that sense, is about changing the way we think, act, and inhabit the world, unlearning “historically embedded patterns of domination of the Western cannons of city making” (Ortiz, 2024, p. 418)

Problematising neutrality from the feminist sphere

In the gender studies and feminism sphere, scholars have also problematised the concept of objectivity and have analysed the processes of knowledge production in the social sciences. Ideal objectivity assumes a homogeneous human nature where knowers are substitutable for one another; they could put themselves in anyone else’s place and know exactly what she or he would know (Code, 1995). Haraway (1988) critiqued objectivity using the term “god trick” to refer to the apparently universal truths produced by disembodied researchers who can observe “everything from nowhere” (p.581) and argued that feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge. Her critique extended to western cultural narratives about objectivity and highlighted the need to learn in our bodies, attaching the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and where we are not. Objectivity then turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and only partial perspectives can promise objective vision. She built an argument against unlocatable knowledge claims instead arguing for a doctrine of embodied objectivity that would allow us (researchers) to become answerable for what we learn how to see.

There is power and privilege associated with shaping social science research. Disembodied research practices are a fundamental privileging of elite men’s systems of thought because knowledge produced by these practices influence our conceptions of the social world (McCorkel and Myers, 2003). Under this epistemology, knowers that cannot see from an ideal objective observation that could be “anywhere and everywhere” cannot produce knowledge and therefore so-called “special interest groups” such as queer people, women, or POC, cannot be objective and their experiences and circumstances cannot yield knowledge (Code, 1995, pp. 16–17). Critical positioning and standpoint reflexivity is central to feminist research approaches in order to ground and situate knowledge; it is necessary to discuss the personal motivations that give rise to the study and recognise how the researcher’s positionality facilitates specific forms of understanding and impedes others (McCorkel and Myers, 2003). Feminist reflexivity and positionality bring about questions related to power imbalances between the researcher/knower and the researched/known and requires the researcher to consider how she reproduces her own privilege through her analysis and practices. While there is no single way to do feminist research, understanding the processes that result in inequalities is a necessary step toward changing women’s positions in the picture of the world that results from scientific research. Feminist research, as Haraway argued, should engage with politics and epistemologies of location, positioning

and situating; it should aim to visualise from a structuring and structure body and reject the “god trick”, the view from above and from nowhere (Haraway, 1988).

If the overarching goal of feminist research is better accounts of the world and situated knowledges that are about communities rather than isolated individuals, then a feminist-informed approach for decolonial research can enable us to produce socially situated knowledge *for* women that promotes a plurality of *saberes*, making embodiment a central feature of our research practices (Zaragocin, 2019). In what follows, I will present *sentipensar* (see below) and situate how I engage with this framework, as a feminist researcher, to address the specific research questions in this thesis. I will also elaborate on why I chose to engage with *sentipensar* for this specific urban context and share my own *sentipensares* around the challenges and gained perspectives of this research process.

Embodied methodologies

The scholarship on feminist geography that feature embodied research framework is rich and diverse. Indigenous ontologies significantly shape how feminist, indigenous, queer, and black geographers in Latin America ground their work and engage with their context. Embodiment is a central feature in the discussions that propose decolonisation for geography because, as argued before, decolonial theory cannot be done without a body, action, and practices. Contemporary scholars have developed and implemented various frameworks that involve a praxis of radical accountability and that place an emphasis on the embodied resistance practices of queer, indigenous, and black women from marginalised backgrounds.

For instance, in Maré, Brazil, Heimer *et al.* (2022) worked alongside women residents of one of the largest favela groupings in Rio de Janeiro’s north Zone—an area with high levels of poverty, inequality, and public insecurity—using body mapping strategies to map women’s resistance to violence. Their work linked emotions and lived experiences with the corporeal experience and how it related to territorial concerns: what is experienced by the body is simultaneously experienced by territory in a codependent relationship (see also Zaragocin and Caretta, 2021). Participants were asked to draw an outline of their silhouettes and afterwards were encouraged to envision their body as territory and identify places or regions that they considered to be marked by 1) tensions in terms of violence, risks and fears, and 2) by potency, in terms of liberating, motivating, and engaging experiences. This approach enabled participants to tell and listen to each other’s stories in a collective way—some participants shared how painful it was to look at parts of their bodies that were marked, to look at everything that had been done to them while other participants reflected on their experiences and how this allowed them to elaborate on stories of overcoming struggle. Importantly, the workshops for this project ended with stretching exercises to release tension and as a way to acknowledge how emotions trigger bodily responses, and how the research process might in turn, also trigger reactions in participants that needed to be acknowledged and mitigated. This body mapping exercise highlighted

how violence and resistance are experienced as a continuum that crosses emotions, bodies, and spaces; it emphasised how women carry in their bodies territorial knowledge of their context that is connected with territorial, political and social struggles.

This focus on the dimensions of the body and the emotions as elements that could be studied began in the 90s and was a result of a progression of the critique of the Cartesian dualist assumption that rationality is distinct from, and superior to, emotions (Zaragocin, 2019; Rodríguez Castro, 2021; Zaragocin and Caretta, 2021). Feminist geographers began studying bodies and emotions to proactively challenge a long history of masculinist research and knowledge produced as ‘objective and universal’. Embodying decolonial research— that is exploring the corporeal dimensions of how our bodies, emotions, and thoughts relate to social issues— was a deliberate decision to problematise research practices and subvert engrained understandings of what is politically important.

In a very similar way to body-mapping, Zaragocin and Caretta (2021) worked with *Cuerpo-Territorio* (from Spanish body-territory) as a method to address the need for more practical and methodological actions towards decolonising geography. *Cuerpo-Territorio* is conceptualised as a data gathering and analytical method that is consistently used by contemporary feminist circles in the region, particularly by feminist collectives organised for the defence of territory against extractive industries. It stems from long-asserted indigenous ontologies of space because it recognises the body’s inseparable nature with the territory and centres the body as the unit of analysis of spatial dynamics. For instance, feminist researchers have extensively focused on the ways in which water struggles affect women’s lived experiences through embodied methodologies. Sultana (2011) studied how water contamination is lived as an everyday emotional struggle and how, this in turn, triggers emotional worries about health and physical long-term impacts. Perreault (2013) also used embodied methodologies to study contaminated water issues in Bolivia in the context of mining and linked the accumulation of toxic water to the dispossession of the local population and their land. Embodied research is a deliberate political act that explores, and builds a bridge between, the personal/individual/bodily experiences to connect it to issues of the nation and geopolitics (Zaragocin and Caretta, 2021).

Latin American scholars have also engaged with *sentipensar* as a way to ground their practices to decolonial efforts that stem from indigenous ontologies. *Sentipensar* was first described in the 1980s by Orlando Fals Borda, a Colombian researcher and sociologist, as a living principle of indigenous communities of *campesinos*³⁷ and fishermen in the Caribbean coast of Colombia that is rooted in *Abya Yala*’s ancestral knowledge (Fals Borda, 1986). *Sentipensar* translates to ‘feel-think’ (from Spanish *sentir*/feel and *pensar*/think) and refers to the holistic approach of knowing and being that is rooted in thinking with both heart and mind (Fischer, 2021).

³⁷ From Spanish: farmers (male, plural)

Since then, *sentipensar* has developed as a way of feeling and knowing in the world, moving away from colonial anthropological research paradigms of studying people/places/nature to *doing knowledge with* (Rodríguez Castro, 2021, p. 67). It can be an approach to decolonise and situate knowledge production because it confronts researchers with questions about where we stand, what we see, how we research. It implies a conscious awareness of being interconnected with all entities at all times and explores the affective-sentimental of “feeling the feet on the ground” and requires the deconstruction of objectivity. *Sentipensar* calls for an exercise of explanation –akin to reflexive positionality–that engages with the larger social structures that manipulate, consciously or unconsciously, our rationality (Cepeda H., 2017, p. 15):

[...]
 The ontological *sentipensar*,
 as a *research method*,
 requires the non-pretentious facticity
 of the encounter with others,
 listening
 next to the fire,
 learning with humility
 from the indigenous, the farmer,
 the *taita*³⁸, the grandfather,
 the popular wisdom,
 paying attention respectfully to their *saying*
 just as respectfully as we read a scientific paper
 [...]

But while Fals Borda’s work of *sentipensantes* planted a seed and demonstrated the importance of grounding our work in social justice, political commitments and exercises of reflection (see also Escobar, 2016), it is still important to acknowledge that the work of *sentipensantes* in Colombia was often seen through a male gaze that presented predominantly the *campesino* (male) rather than the *campesina* (female) lived experiences (Rodríguez Castro, 2021). Since the development of *sentipensar* as a way of conducting research, feminist scholars have enriched the field of embodied methodologies and expanded it with methods like body mapping, *cuero-territorio*, visual methodologies like participatory film-making, and creative art-based research practices through mediums like theatre, sewing, and weaving (Tapia De La Fuente, 2021; Heimer *et al.*, 2022; Marzi, 2023; Marzi and Pain, 2024; McIlwaine, 2024; Quiceno Toro and López Petzoldt, 2026).

³⁸ The traditional male authority in native indigenous peoples (note from Cepeda H., 2017, p. 17).

I chose *sentipensar* as the *raíz*³⁹ and framework of my methodology to present how a feminist-informed approach to *sentipensar* can look like. This decision stems from the acknowledgement and understanding of indigenous ontologies of space where body and mind are a continuum, and from the need to keep challenging— from a decolonial and feminist point of view— whose *sentipensares* we listen to⁴⁰:

I seek to listen
next to the fire
and learn
with humility
from mothers, grandmothers,
the *trabajadoras del hogar*⁴¹
and the everyday women who walk/feel/live the city.

Sentipensar as a *raíz* for the methodology allows me to centre the knowledge and experiences of the participants who walk/feel/think/live the city I research. In parallel, adopting a reflexive feminist standpoint allows me to decentre the male experience as the main universal experience. I have chosen *sentipensar* as the appropriate framework for this research because the research questions for this project aim to tap into women's urban experiences at the personal/individual/bodily level in order to yield a broader picture that can delineate how the current infrastructure of the public transport network in Saltillo shapes women's mobilities and envision a gender-conscious alternative. The task of dismantling the myth of the 'neutral' city requires researchers to question our research practices and reflect: how do we engage with the city and its inhabitants? Who are we listening to and what urban experiences are we tapping into? Thus, it is necessary not just to adopt a *sentipensante* framework but to do so from a decolonial feminist perspective that rejects the myth of disembodied knowledge and seeks to problematise our position as researchers. As a feminist mestiza *enraizada*⁴² in the north of Mexico, I interpret the task of embodying our research efforts with dual meaning. Firstly, as a way to reflect on the theoretical position from where I research, and secondly, as a way to reflect on how my body relates to the field, fieldwork, and my research practices, that is, the corporeal (embodied) experience of where I chose to walk, the circumstances surrounding *mis caminares*⁴³, and how that in turn also shapes my findings.

³⁹ Spanish for 'root'

⁴⁰ Author's adaptation to the excerpt from Cepeda H., 2017, p. 17

⁴¹ Spanish for women who perform paid care and house work.

⁴² Spanish for 'rooted'

⁴³ Spanish for 'my walks'. I use this term to refer more broadly to the political dynamics of my walking practices.

In what follows I present my approach to *sentipensar* as a feminist geographer. I present my *quehacer*⁴⁴ as a feminist *sentipensante* by 1) sharing my positionality as a researcher in relation to my project, to the field, and to the participants, and 2) by elaborating on the specifics of each method that I carried out. I engage with issues of researcher's positionality and method selection and implementation. I also offer a candid reflection of the challenges and limitations for each method and how this relates to what has been theorised in the feminist research sphere. I present a critical account of my research endeavours and selected methods as my attempt to produce feminist research, and as an illustration of what *sentipensar* as a methodology from a feminist standpoint can look like. I am not, however, claiming to solve the problems of doing emancipatory/feminist/reflexive research, but by sharing my accounts rooted in *sentipensar*, I am contributing to the re-imagination of research that is *for* women.

Sentipensar la ciudad (to think and to feel the city)

Who I am and where I stand has a significant impact in the way I shape my research and how I interact with others. I was born and raised in Saltillo and grew up using public transportation regularly. As I grew up, the decision to keep using public transportation in my city became a political one. As a feminist interested in sustainable transport and mobility justice issues, I actively wanted to reject car culture, and it was important for me to remain exposed to the experience of being a woman using Saltillo's transport system so that my approach at envisioning a gender-conscious city could come from the knowledge of living the city. But there are underlying privileges that allowed me to keep using public transport as a political decision: at the time, I was a privileged middle-class woman who lived in a wealthy neighbourhood. I was also privately educated and had the financial and social capital that could allow me to remove myself from inefficient or uncomfortable experiences if needed; my family members or friends were also middle-class, had access to their own cars, and would often offer to drive me places or give me lifts to shorten my journeys.

My understanding of how the public transport network functions has been influenced and expanded by academic epistemologies throughout my years as a young professional and graduate student. Even though I have had first-hand experiences of sexual assault as a woman using public transportation, those experiences came from a very specific lens due to my class privilege— my personal aftermath of being assaulted on the bus looked different than for women without links to local government officials or media outlets. I was assaulted and the local authority tried to victim-blame me for the events; in that sense I share experiences with many women in Saltillo who use public transport. However, after the events took place local media outlets reached out to me to press the local authority into action and aided

⁴⁴ The word *quehacer* directly translates to 'chores' in English, but it is often also used to refer to everyday care work or housework activities. I use it as a play on words to not only reflect on the tasks I carried out as a researcher but to link them to the care work involved in conducting research as a *sentipensante*.

my case for reparations (Mexicano, 2019a, 2019b); by contrast, many women live these episodes as part of their everyday experiences and are systematically revictimised until they desist from reporting altogether (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2022). I research the public transportation system of the city in which I grew up; a transport system I am intimately familiar with, and in many ways, I am both an insider and an outsider to this because of my positionality.

Feminist research has challenged the notion of a static insider/outsider dichotomy. As Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) argued, this relationship is fluid and constantly shifting because as women researchers studying women's issues, the state of outsider/insider is negotiated throughout fieldwork. The knowledge of other women's experiences and our own are mutually informing because we share the condition of being a woman, but it would be simplistic to assume that all women identify and relate with each other by virtue of gender alone. Our shared experiences as a consequence of gender are not sufficient to override structural inequalities of social status, class, age, race, ethnicity, sexuality and disabilities (Cotterill, 1992). Acknowledging my own positionality became a crucial part of designing the methodology of my feminist approach to *sentipensar*: it was key to recognise my privilege and opinions and situate them in relation to other women in Saltillo and my research. My standpoint of enquiry turned to women situated across various intersections of oppression and their relationship with public transportation: How do gender-related factors such as care work and gender-based violence shape the mobilities and access to the city of women in Saltillo? And how might we reimagine an alternative, gender-just transport system for Saltillo?

The selection of methods was a fundamental aspect of creating a feminist approach to *sentipensar* – not only did I need to question whose voices I would interact with; it was also important to reflect on how and when those interactions would happen, and what power dynamics each method could bring about. I opted for a mixed methods approach for multiple reasons: on a technical level, evidence shows that mixed methods approaches can unearth unintended impacts and practical constraints that might be remain hidden in quantitative assessments. For instance Lucas, Philips and Verlinghieri (2022) argued that a mixed-method approach significantly enhanced their understanding of the social benefits and disbenefits of a road project, helping bring 'hard to reach' voices to the conversation and enhancing their understanding of local concerns that would have otherwise remain undiscovered with dataset analysis alone. If the goal is to bring the sexist structures of society to a more egalitarian one, then situating the individual personal experiences (qualitative accounts) within the broader socio-economic structures (critical quantitative methods) can provide a path to connect experience to understanding (Jayaratne, 1983; Maynard, 1994). As a *sentipensante*, I was also interested in exploring the dynamic of thinking and feeling about how to bring a corporal (embodied) aspect to the collection of qualitative and quantitative data in the field—how reflecting about my feet on the ground could inform my production of quantitative knowledge. I was interested in producing analytical data that could be

tracked, georeferenced, and statistically analysed over time in order to create a reference point for future studies and as a way to produce knowledge *for* women that can be revisited and built upon. I also wanted to ground women's individual experiences in the collectiveness of living and enduring the city as a woman as a way to begin charting a path forward for women's emancipation in the city.

But how does one access women's experiences and perceptions of GBV? And what level of access am I seeking to obtain? *Sentipensar* as a methodology allowed me to reframe my role and reimagine how fieldwork could look like: it was not just about asking the participants to walk/feel/think the city, but to do so alongside them. I wanted to immerse myself in the participants everyday experiences and encourage them to share their *sentipensares* with me while navigating the city together. An important element of decolonising research and rooting my practices in a feminist approach to *sentipensar* is the reflection process on power dynamics and differentials. It allowed me to put into perspective how even when engaging in practices of walking the city alongside participants, our walks, and the interpretation of them, would not necessarily be the same. The process of critically reflecting on our *sentipensares* and the motivation behind our research practices should also involve an exploration of the power dynamics present in our endeavours— while I have elaborated on my positionality as both an insider and outsider, there is still work left to do in exploring how my situatedness brought about power dynamics in my research practices.

There are inherent power relations in the production of knowledge through the study of others; research is embedded in social relationships in which there are power differentials in favour of the knower (researchers) who assume power to define the process of research (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983). When researchers reveal aspects of their identity without engaging in a larger analysis of how their positionality shapes and is shaped by the power arrangements within specific context, then they fail to provide a meaningful account of how power organises knowledge production. Adopting a feminist standpoint is not about erasing these complicated dynamics, but about looking behind the curtain of our own research process and studying how position and privilege influenced our production of knowledge and research endeavours (McCorkel and Myers, 2003).

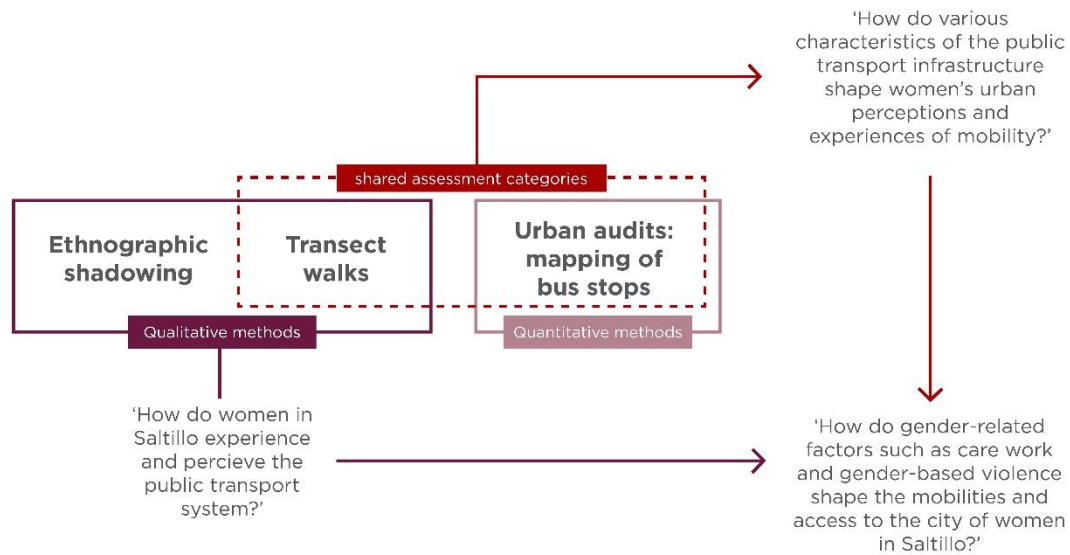
As much as I am being forthcoming about my *sentipensares* and positionality, this still comes with inherent power dynamics that no candid or reflexive accounts can erase. As feminist researchers in the field, there are various ways in which we can work to try and flatten the power disparities between researcher and researched, and still, the power imbalance will always remain to a certain degree because of our role as ultimate narrators and creators of the research process itself. Perhaps the largest disparity of power that favours the researcher is getting to define other people's realities for them, and for a wider audience (Cotterill, 1992). Reports and publications that stem from the research process are *our* interpretations of people's lives and experiences regardless of how involved they were during the data collection stage—we get to set the scene, articulate and analyse the participants and how it is linked to

broader structural issues, and how it should be interpreted. From a *sentipensante* point of view, reflecting on and critiquing these power dynamics is a key process in decolonising the production of knowledge. It allows us to dismantle disembodied, “objective and universal” colonial practices by engaging and acknowledging the larger social structures that shape our rationality (Cepeda H., 2017; Rodríguez Castro, 2021). In what follows I present each method used for this research project. I elaborate on the technical and emotional challenges of each method and also share the reflexive process behind the decision of incorporating them to a methodology rooted in a feminist-informed approach to *sentipensar*— what that process looked like at the various stages of the research process, and the advantages and shortcomings of my decisions. In doing this, I am laying out how each method relates to one another, and how and why it was important to implement them through a feminist lens of *sentipensar* in this specific context and for the research questions of this project.

The methods: reflections on the challenges, power relations, and ethical implications as a feminist *sentipensante*

The overarching goal of this research project is to understand **how gender-related factors such as care work and gender-based violence shape the mobilities and access to the city of women in Saltillo**. To achieve this, I opted for implementing a mixed-method approach that could link women’s personal/individual/bodily experiences of the city with the broader urban conditions that shape their mobilities in the city. I created two supporting research questions as a way to narrow down the scope of my inquiry and ensure that my research process would be rooted in *sentipensar*. The first supporting question looks directly into women’s *sentipensares* about their urban experiences and asks: **how do women in Saltillo experience and perceive the public transport system?** For this question, I selected ethnographic shadowing and urban transect walks to tap into women’s daily urban struggles. The second supporting question focuses on the urban conditions that shape women’s *sentipensares* and asks: **how do various characteristics of the public transport infrastructure shape women’s urban perceptions and experiences of mobility?** For this question, I opted for technical urban audits to public transport infrastructure (bus stops) in order to get a quantitative snapshot of where and how women’s struggles can be identified in the physical conditions of the urban environment. Importantly, the transect walks also had a qualitative urban audit component where participants audited several bus stops with the same assessment categories as the technical urban audits (see more below). In bringing these supporting questions together, this thesis aims to answer how we could reenvision an alternative, gender-just transport system for Saltillo (see Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Research methods in relation to research questions.



Source: Own elaboration, January 2023

My decision to address these questions from a feminist-informed approach to *sentipensar* was rooted in the need to co-construct knowledge alongside women in Saltillo about their mobilities. I chose ethnographic shadowing and transect walks because these methods create a space where women could walk the city and share their *sentipensares* with me as they navigated their daily urban struggles. While similar in nature, shadowing and transect walks brought different elements to the conversation about the challenges women face in the city. As I elaborate further below in section *a) Caminatas de exploración urbana*, transect walks allowed me to hear women's *sentipensares* in a controlled setting—that is, a pre-planned route around the city—while shadowing allowed me one-on-one time with each participant as I walked alongside them, understanding their particular context and real-time challenges. I then decided to complement these two methods with urban audits to bring a critical perspective that would place women's personal/individual/bodily urban struggles against the conditions of the urban environment that can be observed city-wide. I chose to carry out the technical urban audits by adopting walking as a research method (see more below) as my interpretation of conducting embodied research, as a way of *sentipensar la ciudad*, and as an avenue to integrate feminist reflexivity to my endeavours as a *sentipensante*. It was important to situate my stance not only by framing it in feminist standpoint theory and building a critical reflexive analysis, but by embodying my research efforts through my walking practices, feeling my feet on the ground and letting the lived experience of walking the city inform my understandings.

While each method implemented on its own would have yielded rich information, it is the combination of the three, the link between them, and their *raíz* in *sentipensar* which makes this methodology bring forth results and conversations that are unique in its nature because of my situatedness. With this approach I welcome reflexive and critical conversations around power dynamics, knowledge creation, and researcher's positionality; not only from a theoretical standpoint, but from a corporeal perspective that acknowledges our minds and bodies as a continuum intimately related to our context. Now, I give space to each method to delve deeper on my decisions and the advantages and challenges that these represented.

1 Caminatas de exploración urbana (Transect walks)

Transect walks are a flexible research method that centres around the practice of walking as a way to produce knowledge (see Middleton, 2010, 2011; Pierce and Lawhon, 2015; Mason, 2020). Researchers can adapt transect walks to fit their focus and objectives across various research interests. For instance, Paasche and Sidaway (2010) experimented with transect walk methods to reflect on social relations of power in the city, specifically through a focus on the ways that security and space are intertwined in Maputo, Mozambique. In their research, their selected transect walks contrast different sectors and spaces of the city, navigating and juxtaposing tourist areas, and areas of wealth and power to allow for a richer and deeper analysis of this city. Their experience implementing transect walks concludes that the activity of walking, talking, and writing enables insights that could not have been gained through analysis of texts or formal interviews; they can unveil insights that could not have been gained through analysis of texts or interviews because the activity of walking and talking unearths feelings and thoughts that directly respond to the experience of navigating a place in real time.

Castán Broto, Sudhira and Unnikrishnan (2021) argue that walking as a research method can reveal what is visible alongside what is hidden. For them, walking through urban landscapes was a strategy to engage with the ordinary as experienced in passing, contingent moments that ultimately make the city. Their study focuses on walking alongside the oldest and main water pipeline in Bengaluru, India that crosses the urban fabric in a manner that reveals the history of urban development in the city. Their approach to transect walks structures their analysis around vignettes that illustrate various aspects of the social life around urban infrastructure. As the authors argue, infrastructures are imbricated in daily life through social practices: “they are not invisible, but rather integrated into the urban infrastructure landscape in a manner that makes them disappear from human consciousness but not from human existence” (p. 18). Ajaz and Zakir (2022) highlighted the important contribution that innovative methods like transect walks can make to feminist scholarship while helping researchers to understand the community in which they are working. Their research combines participatory spatial mapping with transect walks to analyse gendered power relations and elements like water resources, sanitation, waste waterflows and available facilities such as schools and hospitals in Punjab, Pakistan. Ajaz and Zakir

turn to transect walks and participatory spatial mappings in order to engage with the community they research, arguing that active participation of the community members in the research activities developed a sense of community ownership among participants.

Feminist collective *Col·lectiu Punt 6* in Spain has become a reference point for feminist urbanism research and methodologies, fighting for women's visibility and inclusion in urban life. Through their projects, *Col·lectiu Punt 6* has developed several methodological toolkits aimed at researchers, activists, and community leaders with approaches like participant observation, focus groups, workshops, and exploratory walks, among many others. Contributions like 'Liveable Environments (*Entornos Habitables*)' and 'Women Working (*Mujeres Trabajando*)' lay out a comprehensive guide to approach exploratory walks and urban recognition walks (Collectiu Punt 6, 2014, 2017).

Another way in which transect walks can be paired with other community-based participatory methods is through urban assessments. In Latin America, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), alongside SampaPé! have explored the benefits of transect walks with a gender perspective in order to determine the walkability of an urban area (Sabino *et al.*, 2022). IADB's recent methodological handbook develops an evaluation scale through an urban recognition approach to evaluate the elements that limit the mobility of girls and women in a given city. Their Technical Index of Walkability (*Índice Técnico de Caminabilidad*) has six categories – pavements, connectivity, road safety, facades and buildings, comfort and urban fixtures, and signposting – and 23 variables for analysis.

I chose to engage with the framework developed by the Inter-American Development Bank and SampaPé! as an acknowledgement of the work carried out by Latin American feminist geographers. The Technical Index of Walkability brings forward a tool that can be used to assess Latin American urban environments, through a gender perspective, to measure the quality of the elements of the built environment that allow walking. However, a significant aspect that guided my decision of adopting and adapting this framework of research were the authors reflections on their work. The methodology they developed does not necessarily reflect women' and girls' experiences of walking, meaning, their perception of fear, and how and where they detect symbolic violence in the city—that is, their *sentipensares*— and as Sabino *et al.*, (2022, p. 5) reflect, this layer of information can only be gained from the analysis that only the women who walk the city can provide. Walking infrastructure intimately shapes how we relate to, and access, public transportation and pairing Sabino *et al.*, (2022)' work with transect walks would allow me to bring a qualitative dimension, through women's *sentipensares*, to the aspect of auditing public transport infrastructure.

I approached transect walks as a flexible, creative method and implemented two 'hybrid' walks, a mix of walking and use of public transport, since I wanted participants to reflect on their experiences using public transportation and bus stops in Saltillo. The goal of the walks was to prompt participants to

engage in informal dialogue and share their *sentipensares* about the city and the public transport system while walking the city together. For this method, I collaborated with Triana Zepeda-Saldaña from the feminist collective *Transeúntas*⁴⁵ in order to implement both transect walks together safely. She shared her *sentipensares* with me as someone who has implemented transect walks as public protests for the past eight years, and she worked alongside me during the walks to manage the flow of the group while crossing streets and boarding buses.

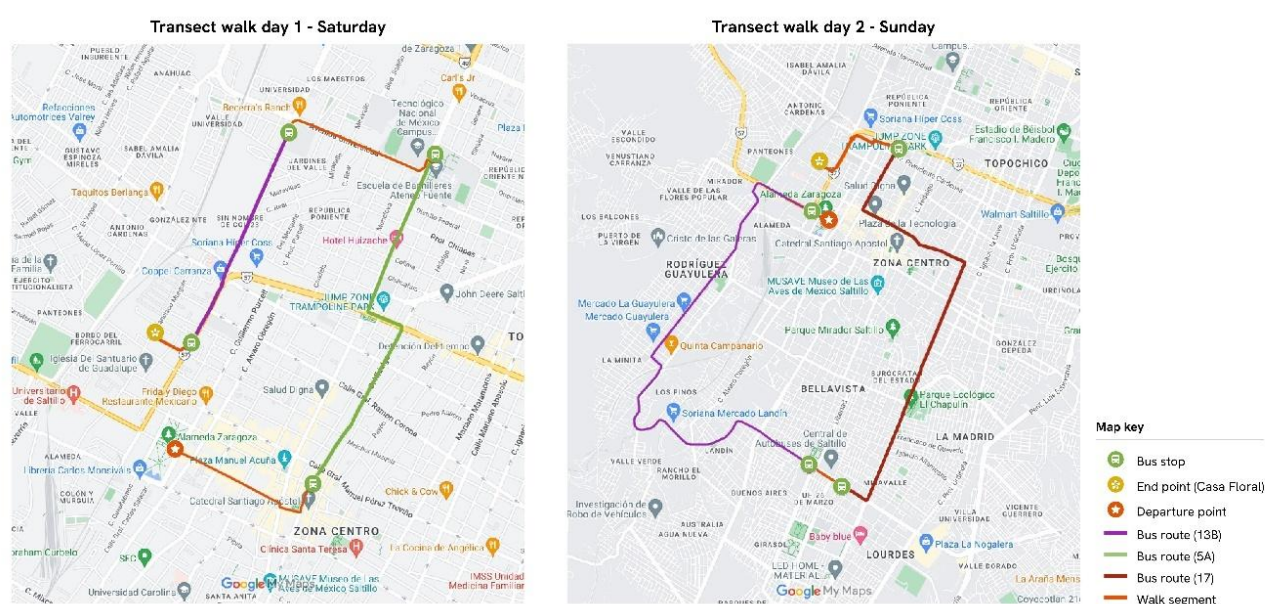
In total, Triana and I welcomed 19 adult women participants, some of whom had caring responsibilities and brought along four underage companions (all girls, aged 5- to 16-years-old). I wanted to welcome women with caring responsibilities because, as argued before, care work significantly shapes women's urban struggles. However, women with caring responsibilities can often struggle securing childcare services (Jirón and Gómez, 2018), and in recognition of those obstacles, it was important to welcome their dependants (namely children) too. Children's geographies and urban challenges are significant conversations that need to be addressed (see Beazley, 2015; Corres and González, 2017; Vargas Silva, Martínez Ruiz and Urquijo Torres, 2022; Idoiaga Mondragón *et al.*, 2024), however this fell outside of the scope of this research, and I did not directly engage with underage companions, their mobility challenges, or the views of the city. Instead, I asked adult participants with children to sign a consent form on their behalf to allow them participation; neither Triana or me collected any personal data from them, and the activity was not structured around their participation. The children who took part in the transect walks engaged with the rest of the group and the organisers with consent from their legal guardian/caregiver and their interjections were unprompted and unstructured. This means that some of their reflections and experiences of the walk are present throughout this thesis because their comments would often redirect the line of conversation women were engaging with, but we did not ask underage companions follow up questions or asked them to actively engage with the activity. When we arrived at the workshop set up in *Casa Floral*, children were asked to play in the patio (an open space within sight of all participants at all times) while their carers took part in the discussion session after the walk.

Both walks started at a meeting point in the city centre that was easily accessible and well-connected by public transport and from there we began a short walk towards our first bus stop. The walk and bus segment varied for each as well as the bus stops that we used and assessed, and this can be observed in more detail in Fig. 4. The transect walks took place on the 5th and 6th of August 2023 and lasted around 3.5 hours each. At the highest point, temperatures reached almost 40°C, while these conditions immersed the group in the real-life experience of using public transport, they also prompted interesting observations and brought stress and frustration for other participants. For instance, during one of the transect walks two of the young girls who joined the activity (5-year-olds) got overwhelmed by their

⁴⁵ *Transeúntas* is a feminist collective based in Guadalajara, Mexico who implement transect walks as a way to reclaim women's right to the city.

surroundings and began crying as we had been waiting at the bus stop for over 15 minutes next to a busy and loud street. The bus stop had no shelter from the sun, and the temperature had reached over 35° C; the girls also did not have a place to sit and were tired from walking 5 blocks in the sun. The girls' reactions to the circumstances prompted participants to talk about care work and motherhood in the city, and these reflections happened as a natural effect of the experience they were living.

Figure 4: Transect walks routes



Source: Own elaboration with Google My Maps, July 2023

Initially, prior to flying back to Mexico for fieldwork and drawing from Paasche and Sidaway (2010), I had designed two transect walks that juxtaposed two neighbourhoods in Saltillo with different socioeconomic dynamics. I wanted to create an experience for all participants that could immerse them in the urban experience of using public transport in different sectors of the city, prompt them to reflect on what felt different, and why. However, after organising and participating in a workshop alongside Triana in July 2023, it became clear that it would represent too many challenges for participants and could potentially impact assistance. For instance, participants would have needed to commute to the starting point of each walk. If I had chosen to begin the activity in neighbourhoods hard to reach by transportation (which is the case for the most marginalised areas of the city as well as the wealthy neighbourhoods) then participants would have struggled to commute there and would face a complicated commute back home which could have deterred involvement. Among the obstacles where

the unreliability of the transport network, and unavailability of safe ways for participants to commute to and from the departure point at a reasonable cost. While the initial transect walks were interesting scenarios to analyse, these had to be modified to accommodate participants' and researchers' safety and time.

In a similar line, I had originally intended to incorporate photovoice as a supplementary tool to my approach as a means to register and log elements and situations that are crucial to understand about an urban environment. For instance, Berbés-Blázquez (2012) combined photovoice with transect walks for a community-level assessment of environmental services in a watershed dominated by pineapple monoculture in Costa Rica. She asked participants to take pictures of ecosystem services that affected their health and well-being, in positive and negative ways. Her approach encouraged residents to make visible what matters most to them, allowing the community –and not the researcher– to determine what is relevant to the study and choosing what elements they wish to bring attention to. Similarly, Kato and Charania (2020) explored the application of photovoice in understanding experiences of children and youth living in remote rural areas in India. Their study combined photovoice with participatory methods such as daily activity logs, community mapping, and debriefing sessions. Their approach demonstrated great potential for empowering young people from rural communities to tell stories of their experiences in their surrounding environments, their relationships with nature, local non-governmental organisations, and government school.

I intended to replicate their approaches during both hybrid transect walks, however, multiple concerns about safety deterred me from it; firstly, I wanted to create a safe environment for women who wanted to participate with their children, since it was important to welcome mothers and care givers, and asking participants to take photos while out walking in the street could have led to distractions that would jeopardise their own safety and their children's. Secondly, due to the size of the group of participants (n1=13 and n2=10), navigating the streets of Saltillo became challenging. Some areas of Saltillo offer little to no pedestrian infrastructure and this became all the more evident while conducting a small group with children when crossing streets, stopping traffic, and getting on and off buses. Ultimately, there was a significant constraint on human resources to safely manage the groups during the transect walks and this informed my decision-making process.

Lastly, I wanted to encourage participants to focus on their urban *sentipensares*⁴⁶ and share them with one another to enrich the dialogue of the experience; and in a way, photovoice could have distracted participants from being fully engaged and present in the walk. During the implementation of the workshops, participants took some photos and videos of the experience to share on their social media

⁴⁶ *Sentipensares* is a word in Spanish that combines the words *sentir*/to feel and *pensar*/to think. For more context about this approach, see Paper One.

but largely remained engaged in the exercise of reflecting on our walk and how it felt to navigate the city. My decision to not incorporate photovoice as part of this research project responded to the multiple constraints in the field, and wanting to create an immersive experience so I could tap into women's *sentipensares*. However, this should not be taken as an argument against photovoice as a valuable tool because it could be a creative and engaging avenue grounded in *sentipensar* with the appropriate safeguarding measures and methodological focus in place (see Berbés-Blázquez, 2012; Kato and Charania, 2020).

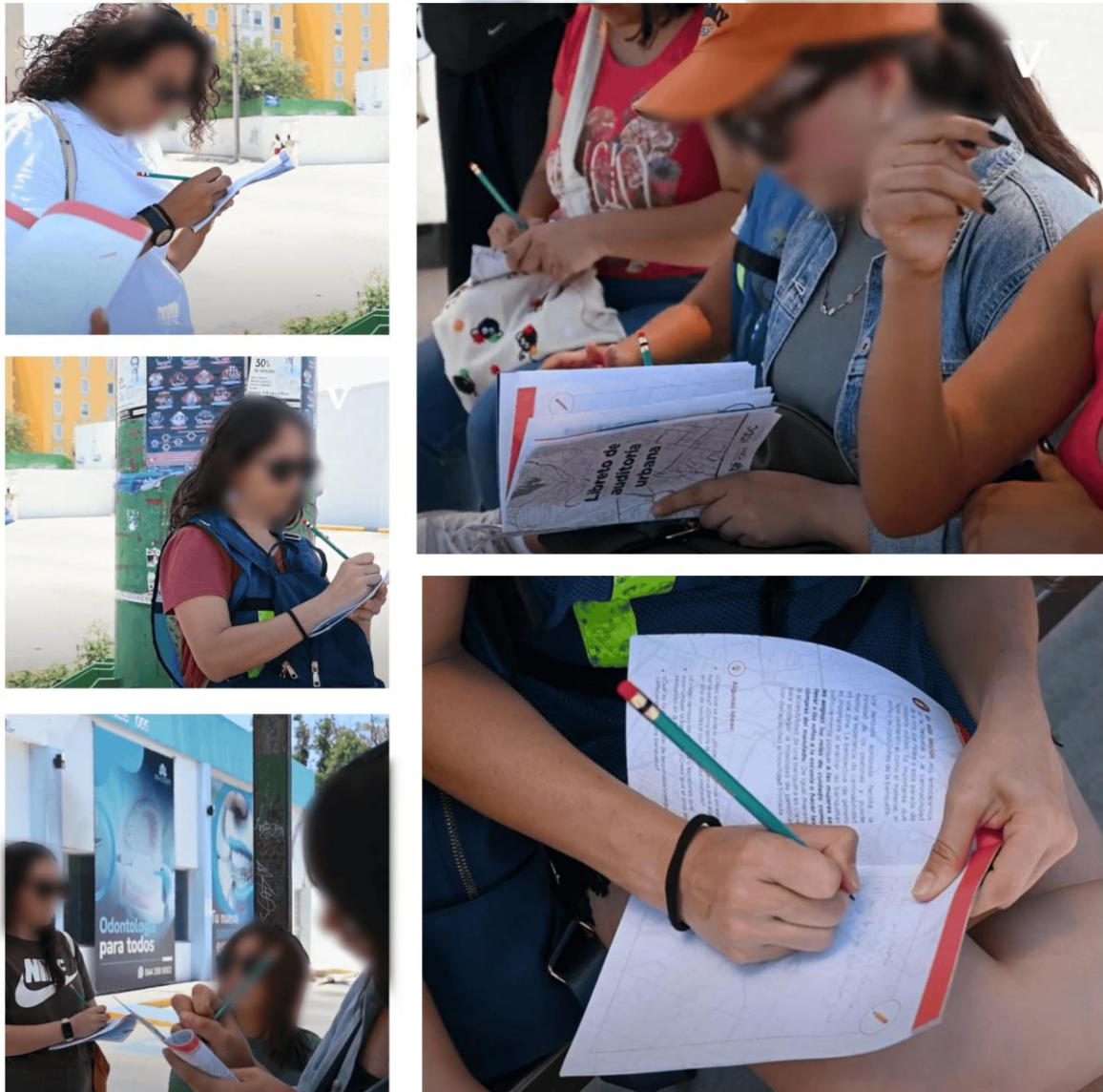
I approached this method alongside *Transeúntas* due to its complex nature and as an acknowledgement of my own shortcomings as a feminist researcher; I had read about transect walks and participated in them, but I had never led one or organised one on my own, let alone one that involved the use of public transport. Once I was in Mexico for fieldwork, I was then able to shadow Triana and learn the intricate process of coordinating a transect walk. From that experience, I was able to make a judgement call about what should stay and what should be scrapped from the plans I originally had, keeping in mind my responsibility as a researcher to safeguard participants and my objective of carrying out a research project rooted in *sentipensar*. *Transeúnta's* expertise on exploratory urban walks as a way to empower women to reappropriate their city guided the design of this process and, during the implementation stage of the transect walks, Triana worked with me as a moderator for the group as a crowd control measure while I led the activity.

My adaptation of transect walks incorporated the Inter-American Development Bank's Technical Index of Walkability and used their work as a reference point (Sabino *et al.*, 2022). I designed a 'participant assessment booklet' and invited participants to log their *sentipensares* related to the four categories present in the IADB's work: pavements and walkability; road safety; signposting; and street furniture and comfort. Their booklet included prompts to encourage them to think about how the space adapts (or not) to their needs (i.e., if they felt comfortable walking by, if the material of it made them feel like they could slip or walk securely, how they would feel if they needed to push a pram or a wheelchair). I carried out the technical aspects of the assessment by conducting urban audits on a larger sample as I explain further along, and I involved the participants on the qualitative aspect of the study. This means that during the urban audits I focused on assessing bus stops in terms of width of pavement, speed limit of the adjacent road, presence or lack of elements like sitting opportunities, signs, bins, among many others, while participants were encouraged to reflect on how those elements made them feel while navigating public space (see Fig. 5).

My focus on their *sentipensares* allowed me to bring topics of discussion and insights that can only come from day-to-day knowledge and would otherwise remain unnoticed by a technical assessment. Throughout the walk and bus journey participants shared previous experiences related to how care work or gender-based violence had shaped the way they move around the city (see Paper Two and Three).

As a safeguarding measure, participants were asked to only fill out their booklet once the group had reached a natural stopping point during the walk, however the discussion of reflections happened throughout the entire experience as informal conversations (see Fig. 6).

Figure 5: Participants and their assessment booklet



Source: Own elaboration with images courtesy from Vanguardia MX, 18/08/2023, '¿Es Saltillo una ciudad caminable para mujeres?', YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAfDIRqF_ys&t=40s

Figure 6: Participants exploring the city during the transect walks



Source: Own elaboration with images courtesy from Vanguardia MX, 18/08/2023, '¿Es Saltillo una ciudad caminable para mujeres?', YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAfDIRqF_ys&t=40s

Both transect walks finished at the local cultural centre *Casa Floral* where participants had the opportunity to rest and get refreshments before jumping into a discussion session after the walk. I opened the session by asking to revisit the path I had created for this walk and reenvision it through their *sentipensares*: I asked them to re-draw the route we travelled and to point out the positive and negative things that stood out to them while they discussed amongst themselves (see Fig. 7). These

sessions were semi-structured, and participants were free to explore topics of conversation that were not necessarily the central point of the walk but that were relevant to them and their urban experiences. As a result, participants engaged with issues related to gender-based violence and care work in relation to their urban experiences and mobility challenges, but also brought issues like climate change, police brutality and systematic corruption to the discussion table and how these also impact their urban experiences.

Figure 7: Reimagining the transect walk through their *sentipensares*



Source: Own elaboration, April 2025.

There were multiple technical and emotional challenges around planning and implementing transect walks for this research project. Prior to the walks, as I have shared above, I had to revisit how I had planned to carry them out and the elements I was going to use to invite participants to share their urban *sentipensares* with me. During the walks, Triana and I navigated dynamic challenges as we walked the streets as a group. To begin, the transport system in Saltillo does not have publicly available information regarding the buses timetables or frequencies, and as a result, the group would end up waiting for the bus in narrow pavements for over 15 minutes under the sun with no shelter or shade. Triana and I had to halt traffic to allow the participants to safely cross the street, and in some instances, this led to confrontational interactions with aggressive car drivers that were reluctant to yield to pedestrians.

My mindset while moderating the walk section in between points quickly shifted to safeguarding and monitoring rather than active and attentive listening of participants *sentipensares*. Triana and I could not be fully immersed in the participants' discussions because our role was to remain alert of our surroundings. Our collective walk around the city did not go unnoticed by passersby; at various points

participants talked about how people would stare at us while standing at a bus stop or walking down the street as a group as if what we were doing—exploring the city together and talking about social issues—was out of the norm. When boarding buses, I would be in charge of flagging down the bus and letting the driver know how many fares I would be covering. Then, I asked participants to board and start doing a headcount to make sure no one was left behind. During the implementation of the first transect walk, while boarding the second bus on our way to *Casa Floral*, the group boarded a bus route that services one of the industrial areas in the north of city, connects with the city centre, and then heads to the south neighbourhoods of Saltillo. The bus was full of working-class men, most of them wearing their *planta industrial*⁴⁷ uniform and when the group boarded the bus, we received lascivious looks and catcalls, the environment suddenly became tense and hostile.

The event shook us in the moment because it dismantled the dynamic of the activity; before it happened we had been researchers (Triana and me) moderating a group activity with participants, but when the harassing happened, we all got reduced to objectified women in public transportation (see Brison, 2002). The challenge for Triana and I was to remain alert and responsive in order to deescalate a tense situation safely, but the dynamic had shifted palpably. During the first bus ride, the bus was almost empty, the windows were clear and free from obstructions, and women were able to keep on sharing their *sentipensares* despite the loudness of the bus (see top left image in Fig. 4), however during the second bus ride, we boarded a public transport bus that was a poorly retrofitted long-distance coach: this means that the seats were closer together and had taller backrests; this makes seeing the row of seats in front or behind really challenging. The windows were tinted and had curtains, and this altered the amount of light inside the bus even though it was broad daylight outside. The bus was not full, there was enough room for most participants to sit while Triana and I stood next to them, but some participants were clearly uncomfortable about having to be in this bus. All participants descended safely from the bus shortly after boarding but this still impacted the rest of the walk and the discussion session that followed.

As the bus left the bus stop, participants quickly defaulted to checking in with one another. Triana and I addressed participants and acknowledged how we also got scared, frustrated, and angry, and participants began sharing previous experiences of harassment and how these shape how they move in the city. We took this opportunity to ask participants if they felt distressed beyond the point of continuing and gave them the option to finish their participation if they wanted so. All participants opted to keep going, and some mentioned that the experience sadly reflected their everyday struggles and had brought *sentipensares* to the surface that they wanted to share with the group. Participants knew that we wanted to foster conversations about the corporeal experience, reactions, and emotions associated to using public transport in Saltillo because at the beginning of each walk, we had explained that our

⁴⁷ Spanish for 'Industrial Plant'; meaning a large industrial manufacturing or assembly facility.

transect walks were framed in *sentipensar* and what that meant. After this episode of harassment occurred, we did not shy away or push down the *sentipensares* that came to the surface. We were able to put them into words, recognise them and where they came from, and how they fit into the broader discussion we were having: women's challenges in the city.

While I explore the dialogue sessions that came after the transect walks in greater detail in Paper Three, it is important to acknowledge the significant challenges that transect walks as a research method bring to the table. Triana and I were in charge of safeguarding participants, however there are inherent risks in navigating the city, particularly as a woman, that Triana and I cannot fully control when walking the city with a group. This should not be taken to mean that transect walks are too risky and unpredictable to be used as a research method, but that what is needed is an extensive process of reflection of the elements we can and cannot control during fieldwork and how we can safeguard participants and researchers from these risks. As I argue in greater detail in Paper Four, these safeguarding measures should also include conversations and dialogues that allow participants and researchers to make sense of the messy emotions of fieldwork not as a deterrent from risks but as a way to reclaim their agency to safely negotiate risks.

The recruitment process of participants was another key element that shaped this method. Once in Saltillo, I partnered with various organisations to disseminate my call for participants; these organisations have different focus, as seen in the table below, and my goal was to broaden the reach of my audience:

Table 1: list of organisations and collectives that I partnered with for this project

<i>Proyecto Mujeres</i>	A feminist collective focusing on period justice and women's rights to period dignity. This group organises events to receive donations and fundraise money to provide menstrual products to women living in the prison system of Coahuila.
<i>Ruedas Rebeldes</i>	A non-profit media outlet that focuses on issues of active mobility and urban development in Saltillo. This group has social media presence promoting issues related to public transportation, pedestrian and cycling urban infrastructure, and

	participative public expenditure and budget allocation in Coahuila
<i>Matatena AC</i>	A feminist non-government organisation that focuses on child and teenage pregnancies in Coahuila and advocates for comprehensive sexuality education in schools and access to abortion in the State. This organisation has led educational campaigns in schools and marginalised communities with the motto <i>niñas jugando, no pariendo</i> (girls should be playing, not giving birth) and has led the conversation between local authorities and community groups about how to safeguard children from sexual assault and abuse in Coahuila.
Saltillo Decide	A feminist collective that has been pushing for the recognition of women's right to access free, safe, and legal abortions and pregnancy termination processes in Coahuila. As of now, abortion has been decriminalised at the State level which means that women who wish to terminate a pregnancy cannot be prosecuted by the State anymore, however, this does not guarantee that women can access this right in hospitals or medical centres.

Source: Own elaboration, March 2026.

In partnering with these organisations, I shaped the audience that could be reached through them. I opened the call to women above 18-years-old living in Saltillo. The call to participate in the transect walks only collected information related to age group and caring responsibilities since it was not in my interest, at this point in the research, to collect information related to perceived socio-economic or employment status or level of education. However, it is safe to assume that the women who responded to the call had a previous alignment and understanding— to various degrees— of feminist theorisations of women's place in society because they either followed or engaged with the activities carried out by these organisations. This was not a deliberate measure to gatekeep the transect walk activities from a

certain audience; I had planned to approach other organisations with broader interests in urban issues but was met with less interest and a reluctance to back an activity that ‘excluded men’. I then decided to partner with organisations with a feminists focus as a more effective recruitment strategy and in doing so I shaped whose voices are present and whose are not. This decision opens up a place in this section to address how the power dynamics and my positionality as the researcher shaped this method and the conversations that were born from it.

There are significant power imbalances in my implementation of transect walks for this research projects. To begin with, the recruitment strategy altered who heard or found out about the call for participants. Participants who wanted to join the transect walks had to have access to social media where the call was posted and disseminated and later had to fill out a Google Form with their personal information (name, phone number, age group) and it is possible that this shaped the age group of the participants. Only one participant out of 19 was in the 35–45-year-old age group, the rest of the group was mostly made up of women between 25-34 years-old (n=12) and women aged 18 to 24 years old (n=6). This is important to take into account because the *sentipensares* collected through the transect walks do not directly represent the mobility struggles that a woman over 45 will face in the city. There were also constraints in terms of which participants I was able to welcome to the walks because the public transport system in Saltillo is not accessible: Buses have narrow doors at the front and back and users need to go up three steep steps to board and descend the bus. This meant that I could not welcome participants who use mobility aids like wheelchairs or walking frames to this method because I lacked the resources (time, money, and research support) to appropriately create safeguarding measures that could allow them to participate in a study that could focus on their mobility challenges. It is important to acknowledge that elderly people and people with reduced mobility limitations in Saltillo frequently use public transport despite these characteristics, for example, Esther and Elena, two participants who we will meet later on in this thesis, struggle going up and down the bus and it takes them extra time when boarding and descending. While recruiting participants for the transect walks I did not make an active effort to diversify the age group of the participants. Instead, I concentrated those efforts in the ethnographic shadowing section of this project, as I elaborate further along. The women who took part in the transect walks reflected on the mobility challenges that people with reduced or limited mobility face in the city, and how age, caring responsibilities and being able-bodied shaped urban experiences. While these reflections are present in Paper Three, it is still necessary to recognise that participants’ reflections do not fill in the gap of the *sentipensares* of the population groups that are not represented in this research.

There were power disparities also embedded in how we lived the transect walks. The participants joined transect walks I had pre-planned, meaning they did not get a say on what area of the city we would walk or what bus routes we would use. They also qualitatively audited the bus stops I had pre-selected for

them on the basis of the sample I had set for the quantitative urban audits' method (more on this below). I chose the categories of assessment and provided questions to prompt them to reflect on specific characteristic for each section and in a way, this may have also shaped their *sentipensares* and what came to mind when looking at the city or a bus stop. Participants were encouraged to explore any theme that the experience of walking the city together brought to mind, but in my role as the researcher, I shaped that experience significantly.

Carrying out research and fieldwork represents a series of small, project-defining decisions that add up and shape the process and the final product. I am being critical and forthcoming about my decisions because the ethical integrity of my decolonial and feminist approach demands it— I have given a detailed account of my positionality as a researcher, the power dynamics, and challenges that transect walks represented not in the spirit of undermining my own research contributions or deterring other scholars from engaging with this method, but as a way to bare the scaffolding of my approach, to share my *sentipensares*, and take accountability for how I lived/felt/walked the city.

Our research processes as feminist *sentipensantes* should entail candid exercises of reflexivity, acknowledging the complexity of the relationships as insider/outsider and researcher/researched to engage with questions about whose voice is my data representing? Whose experiences am I not including and therefore should disclose in order to bring more validity to my production of knowledge? In presenting these reflections I recognise and point to the power relations embedded in my research practices and how my positionality shaped the process from the beginning (selecting the methods) to here (presenting a narrative from my role as researcher and sole author of this thesis).

In the midst of all of these challenges and complex conversations, sharing *sentipensares* alongside women proved to be an opportunity to produce knowledge that decentred the androcentric lived experiences of the city. Framing the transect walks in the context of *sentipensar* legitimised participants' urban experiences and *sentipensares* by counting them as valuable sources of information and, at least during the discussion section about the perils of being a public transport user, we were all women sharing *sentipensares* on a levelled ground. Participants could have reflected on their lived experiences of the transport system through a focus group approach or by only implementing the discussion section of the method and not the walking/busing, but these reflections would have not tapped as deep without the embodying of the research process. It was the act of *sentipensar* their walk and bus experience, engaging mind and body at once, that deepened their discussions and arguments.

In Paper One I present sections of this Chapter with the goal of speaking to an audience of scholars and researchers about how to engage with *sentipensar* from a feminist-informed stance. I present how my approach to transect walks was rooted in *sentipensar* and why, and what that means on a technical level while implementing fieldwork. While there is some repetition present in the writing of this section and

Paper One, it is with the intention of producing a standalone manuscript that can lead to a research publication. In Paper Three, I elaborate on some of the findings that stem from participants' reflections during the transect walks and lay out how the physical characteristics of the transport system in Saltillo play a role in exacerbating women's perceptions of vulnerability and safety when negotiating the city.

2 Sombreado etnográfico (Ethnographic shadowing)

My decision of incorporating ethnographic shadowing came from the acknowledgement of my role in shaping the urban experiences that the women in the transect walks reflected on. I wanted to explore women's perceptions and experiences of their urban mobilities. Transect walks had allowed me to create an environment where women with various life experiences could come together and *sentipensar* the city while walking and using public transport together, however, these activities unfolded within a somewhat controlled environment. We still had to navigate the uncertain and unreliable transport system of Saltillo in summer heat, but participants relied on me and Triana to navigate them, and I had carefully planned the route for a 3.5-hour activity and covered their bus fares and refreshments. During the discussion session some participants jokingly commented on how positive the experience of walking the city had been for them during this activity: they felt comfortable surrounded by a group of women sharing *sentipensares* and opinions about the city; they felt safe enough to drop their guard and not feel the need to remain hypervigilant of their environment; they had crossed the streets easily and without rushing knowing that Triana and I were navigating (and halting) traffic for them to cross safely.

In many ways transect walks prompted nuanced discussions about public transport and the city but in some others, it was also an artificial bubble experience where participants did not necessarily live or reflect on the everyday experience—the juggling of care work responsibilities and the financial and time constraints. The decision to incorporate shadowing to the methodology came from confronting my own positionality and place of power as a narrator: whose realities and journeys am I paying attention to? What opinions am I incorporating in this study and what realities are those opinions reflecting? In order to understand those daily, often hidden and quiet struggles, I needed to walk the walk and listen to women's *sentipensares* in context.

My implementation of ethnographic shadowing focused on how gender-related factors like care work and GBV affect women's mobility patterns, and I adopted a three-stage structure drawing from other scholars' research projects. For instance, Jirón's work (2007a) provides a reference point for ethnographic research in Santiago, Chile. Her approach applies a three-fold process with households as participants, using in-depth interviews in order to gain an understanding of their context and day-to-day routines. She shadowed participants on their daily trips throughout the day and afterwards conducted an exit interview where she prompted the creation of mental maps that would bring more detail into the mobility patterns of each participant, while also using household focus groups. Her

approach aims to represent the complex urban experiences and its social, economic, physical, and cultural implications for different participants from different neighbourhoods in Santiago.

Similarly, Soto Villagrán (2012) implemented an interview-based approach with participants that allowed her to gain understanding of situations that the participants deemed dangerous depending on different circumstances like day/night commutes, places they avoid, how and why, and the seemingly small strategies that women adopt on a daily basis to assert their agency and navigate their environments. Using a similar approach, Jirón and Gómez (2018) studied interdependent mobility and care mobility ethnographically. They shadowed three women, two of them living in Santiago, Chile, one of them commuting through public transportation and the other one with private automobile, and one woman from Ciudad Juárez, México –a region known for its maquilas and cases of brutal violence against women⁴⁸– who uses company provided private transportation. Building on this work, Jirón, Carrasco and Rebolledo (2020) approach mobility through an understanding of the multidimensional, multi-relational and interdependent ways in which people move. As they argue, gender is a fundamental variable in understanding mobility patterns, trip purposes, modal split (i.e., if they break up their journeys using different modes of transport like walking, wheeling, public transport, or driving during the day) and, by extension, transport sustainability. Their research consists of shadowing participants throughout their daily journeys, observing how participants organise and experience their trips. In this process, the researchers interviewed participants before the shadowing exercise and included different household members to capture various spatial and social interactions.

I applied a three-stage ethnographic approach that consisted of 1) starting-point interviews, 2) shadowing of participants, and 3) exit interviews. I decided to follow this approach to allow the relationship between the participants and me to gradually develop over a few interactions, and to obtain a more intimate reading of their context and constraints through the combination of in-depth interviews and the shadowing process. The goal with the starting-point interviews was to familiarise myself with the participants' daily routine and get a sense for aspects of their lives that may have an impact on how they move around the city: the responsibilities they need to manage; the constraints that limit their mobilities; and the support networks in place that aid their everyday. Mainly, I needed to establish a connection with them and build rapport to make them feel comfortable around me so during the shadowing they would not feel monitored or invaded. During the shadowing stage of this method I documented their journey, mode of transport, expenses, waiting time at bus stops, and their interactions with the urban environment. During the exit interview, I created a space where participants were encouraged to reflect on the barriers and obstacles they need to manage on their daily trips, as well as their support networks.

⁴⁸ See Wright, 1999, 2001; Walker, 2005; Ensalaco, 2006

For this method, I welcomed different perspectives and intersections of inequalities that could offer a unique insight to women's lives in Saltillo. I had the opportunity to shadow 10 participants over a day in their day-to-day routine while gathering field notes and voice memos for transcription and translation purposes. All participants were women of varying ages, socioeconomic background, level of education, assigned care work and paid work status (See Table 2).

Table 2: Overview of participants involved in the ethnographic shadowing⁴⁹

Pseudonym	Age at the time of participation	Employment status and occupation	Highest education level	Neighbourhood the live in (and sector of the city)	Caring responsibilities ⁵⁰	How did they join this project
Marcela	23 years-old	Full time student and part-time administrative assistant	Undergraduate (not yet finished)	'Saltillo 2000', Northeast Saltillo	Not direct – she shares housework responsibilities with her mother and brother	Social media open call
Elena	56 years-old	Part-time employment as a cleaning assistant	Primary school	'Vicente Guerrero', Southwest Saltillo	She is the full-time carer for her two granddaughters; her son and daughter in law are not in the picture	Existing connection to previous research project
Liliana	25 years-old	Full-time freelance architect	Undergraduate	'City Centre', Saltillo's extended City Centre zone	Not direct – she lives with her mother and sister and shares some expenses	Social media open call
Joana	49 years-old	Full time employment as a cleaning assistant	Secondary school	'El toreo', West Saltillo	She is the full-time carer for her mother (late 60s) who was diagnosed with dementia in 2021.	Referred by another participant

⁴⁹ The order in which I introduce the participants responds to the order in which they joined the research project. All identifying characteristics have been anonymised or slightly altered to protect participants' anonymity.

⁵⁰ This is a quick summary to provide a snapshot of each participant's caring responsibilities. I engage with this more elaborately in 'Paper Two: The participants'

Perla	25 years-old	Full-time human resources assistant	Undergraduate	'Antonio Cárdenas', East Saltillo	Not direct – she lives with both of her parents and three younger siblings	Approached in person
Olivia	28 years-old	Full time administrative officer at an education and travel company	Undergraduate	'Bellavista', South Saltillo	She has a one-year-old son. Her and her partner share care and housework responsibilities.	Approached in person
Sara	18 years-old	Full-time student and part-time store assistant	Undergraduate (not yet finished)	'Las Teresitas', Southwest Saltillo	Not directly – she lives with her brother and mother, whom she shares household expenses with	Social media open call
Cecilia	43 years-old	Full-time administrative assistant at a government institution	Technical secretary school	'Landín', Southeast Saltillo	She is the mother and main caretaker of her 13-year-old son who was diagnosed with autism at 5 years old. She also lives with her two parents	Referred by another participant
Esther	67 years-old	Unemployed – full-time caring responsibilities	Primary school	'Landín', Southeast Saltillo	She cares for her husband (late 70s) and her 13-year-old grandson. Esther and Cecilia are mother and daughter	Referred by another participant
Andrea	21 years-old	Full-time student, part-time legal assistant	Undergraduate (not yet finished)	'Brisas poniente', North Saltillo	Not direct – she lives with her two parents and two brothers	Social media open call

Source: Own elaboration, March 2026.

I chose a cluster non-probability sampling method; this means that I divided Saltillo's population into groups: in this case, women with direct caring responsibilities, and women who did not have direct caring responsibilities but lived in a shared household with family members or friends. From then I looked for and prioritised the participation of women who lived in different sectors of the city and had different levels of caring responsibilities, for example, women who had grandchildren, people with disabilities or elders under their care. I selected 10 participants for this method based on my opinion of the voices who were not yet present in this research: women whose family and financial struggles deeply shaped the access to resources they had, women whose age, mobility limitations and health conditions impacted how and when they moved around the city, and women who juggled double workloads to the point of reaching time poverty.

I relied on the help of local organizations to disseminate the call for participants. I partnered with feminist collectives and activism groups in Saltillo including *Proyecto Mujeres*, *Saltillo Decide*, *Matatena*, and *Ruedas Rebeldes*, however, only four out of ten participants for this method joined the project through this avenue. The rest of the participants agreed to be shadowed after I approached and informally pitched them the idea on the street while waiting on bus stops (n=2), other participants joined the project after a friend or family member had talked to them about my research and volunteered to participate (n=3), and one participant joined this project because we had worked together on a previous research project that related to GBV in public transportation and was eager to share how her story had evolved (see Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021, 2022).

Fieldwork for this method took place over the span of four months, beginning in July and ending in October 2023. The process of recruiting participants was an ongoing task from June until mid-August 2023 because securing participation proved more challenging for this method compared to transect walks. Once women expressed an interest in participating, I would share the research project information brief (translated into Spanish for them) and schedule the initial interview. The goal was to shadow 10 women, however, after signing up their initial interest, a few prospective participants had second thoughts related to schedule availability and hesitance to share details about their family dynamics, and thus the process of recruiting expanded as I looked for more women who would be interested in taking part.

For this method, I received support from the Social Sciences School at the Autonomous University of Coahuila, Mexico, and was allowed use of their facilities to carry out all interviews for this methodology— the Social Sciences School is conveniently located in the city centre of the city, accessible with most public transport routes and this made it easier to provide a safe, private space for participants. At the beginning of the interviews, I would go over the research project information brief with them as well as the consent form, explaining in plain Spanish what each item meant and why it was important for them to understand this information. I also reiterated that they could stop the interview

and/or withdraw from the project at any point, even after they had signed the consent form, or even if the shadowing had already taken place. These elements were part of my ethical responsibilities as a researcher, but my goal was to go further and acknowledge my responsibility for actively safeguarding their emotional wellbeing as a decolonial feminist researcher. As part of the safeguarding measures I designed, I carried out all interviews alongside Atziri Herrera-Valero. While I elaborate on her role and how her participation came about later on in this section, it is important to acknowledge at this point that all participants were provided with third-party psychosocial support with a non-disclosure agreement in place to safeguard participants right to privacy while providing them with an outlet for emotional and psychological support in case they needed it. In this project, there were no participants that withdrew from the shadowing at any stage from the point of carrying out the initial interview together.

After the initial interview, the participants and I would agree on a date that would work for them to be shadowed. I offered them full flexibility, and I explained that I wanted to see what an average day for them looked like. Some had changing itineraries depending on the day of the week or the month of the year, particularly participants who cared for children. Participants determined when the shadowing would take place depending on the day they thought would best showcase the struggles they face when navigating the city using public transport. For some participants this meant that the shadowing took place within a few days, but for others, for example Elena, Olivia, Cecilia, and Esther, the time between the initial interview and the shadowing was close to a month. These participants have direct caring responsibilities for children and wanted to wait until the school year started (late August) because they thought it was important for me to see what their commutes looked like when they had to juggle care work and paid work. In Paper Two, I present a section where I introduce each participant in more detail and talk about their individual contexts and constraints (See Paper Two: The participants).

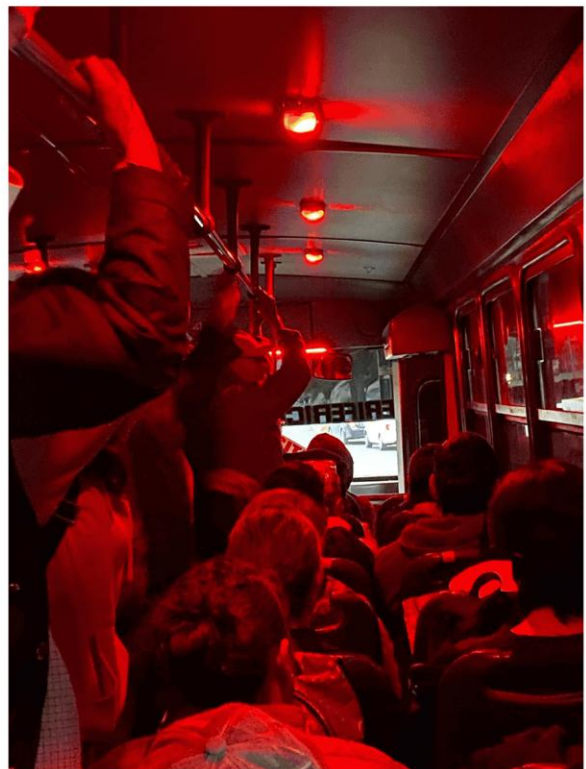
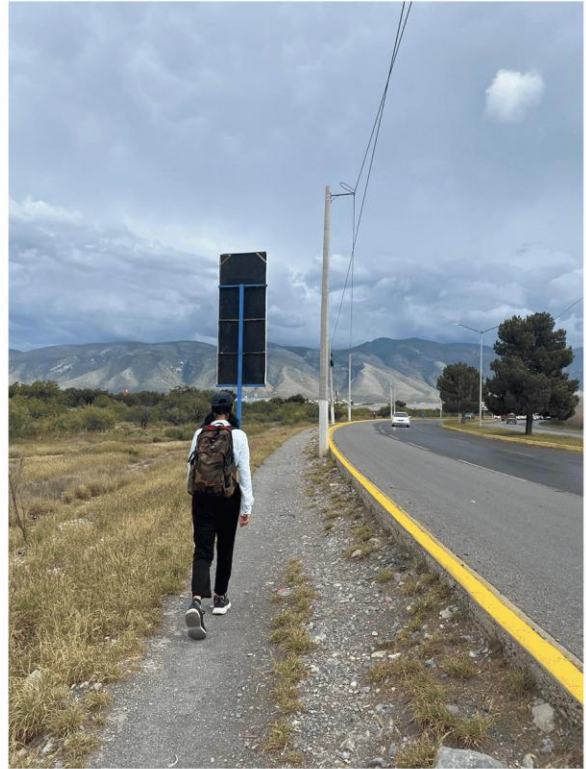
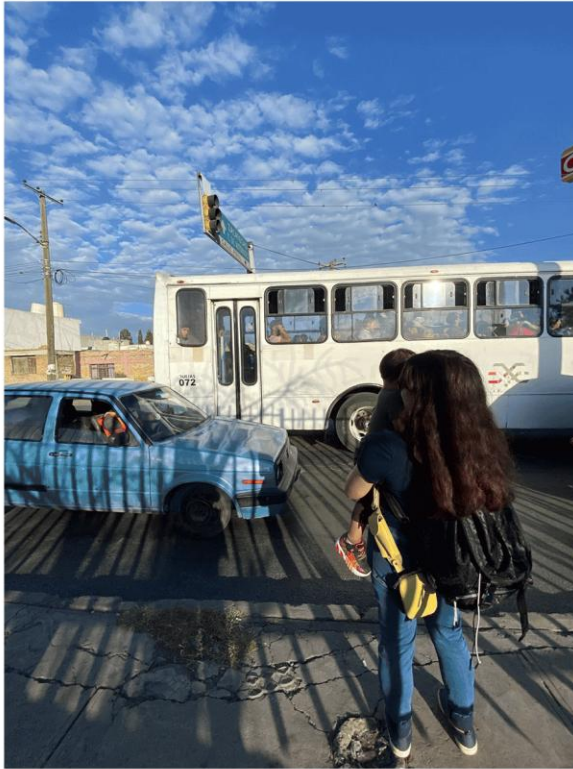
The immersive experience of walking the city together was equally helpful and stimulating for the participants and for me. At the beginning, during the starting-point interview, most participants described their everyday journeys as average or normal. Some women mentioned feeling uneasy when crossing big intersections or using crowded buses when navigating the city, but overall, none of the participants mentioned struggling to navigate the city due to gender-related issues like care work or GBV. As I shadowed them, I quietly realised their routines often involved walking next to urban highways with no pavement, crossing complex and dangerous intersections, and navigating unlit or crowded spaces during dark hours.

All participants lived in different sectors of the city, and this allowed me to explore women's challenges when navigating different neighbourhoods and bus routes in the transport system at different hours. For instance, when shadowing Olivia, our walks included trying to cross large and busy roads during peak hours with her carrying her one-year-old son in her arms. Her son was growing heavier than she felt

comfortable carrying for long periods, but she did not really consider a stroller an alternative because none of the crossings have lowered kerbs or ramps, and most of the pavements are in poor conditions as depicted in the image at the top left corner of Fig. 8

When shadowing Joana (top right corner, Fig 8), we got to walk together the southeast area of the city next to urban highways where cars reach speeds of over 80 km/h. Car crashes are a frequent occurrence given the speed of the vehicles and the windiness of the road. Her walking journeys are scenic because her neighbourhood is on the outskirts of the city and faces the local mountain range, but given the public transport coverage this meant that she only had access to two routes that had scarce frequency and no timetable on display. Most of her commutes involved walking instead of waiting at a bus stop, but often her walks happened on unpaved paths that had glass and car debris from the crashes on the road next to her. Shadowing Esther (bottom left corner, Fig. 8) shed a light into the challenges that elderly people with reduced mobilities face when navigating the city. Her journeys to pick up Lucas from school often involved her walking on the road because the pavement was obstructed with rubbish, vegetation, rubble, or steps in poor conditions with no support railing. Lastly, because many participants' journeys began very early in the morning and would finish late in the evening, I got to shadow their mobilities during dark hours as seen on the bottom right corner of Fig. 8, where we can observe the low-lit, crowded environment women navigate when using public transport in Saltillo.

Figure 8: Participants navigating the city during the ethnographic shadowing



Source: Own elaboration, November 2023.

After we had our shadowing day together, during the exit interview, almost all participants began their interactions with me by commenting on how worried they had been for me and my safety during the shadowing. I had remained a few meters behind them during the shadowing and while I always had a visual of them when walking or moving about, they did not always have eyes on me, and this caused stress for most participants. Their comments were meant as light-hearted remarks, but I invited participants to unravel them slowly with me so we could understand where they were coming from. A few of them were concerned about me navigating the streets safely (mainly crossing streets, dodging traffic) and the rest of the participants were concerned about me getting followed, catcalled, or left behind (alone) in what they perceived to be unsafe areas of the city. Their comments opened up a door for us to explore the participants' *sentipensares* that had been hiding under the surface. Participants reflected on the "everyday things" that make them feel uneasy and began elaborating on the rationale behind their decisions: where they sit when they get on the bus, what part of the bus stop (or which one) they wait at and why, what time they decide to leave home for work or school and what walking route they decide to take depending on multiple factors (Infante-Vargas, 2025). What started with participants describing their commutes as normal and average grew into a deeper analysis of the daily challenges they face but have normalised over time.

Shadowing as qualitative research tool opened the door to more accurate testimonies from participants but also allowed me to connect with them more intimately: we now shared *sentipensares* because I had lived what they live—the hidden, the quotidian. In a sense, the participants and I had walked the same walk and that is what allowed us to connect and co construct shared *sentipensares* about the challenges they face in the city. However, my walk was different from theirs because after we had finished their participation I got to walk back to my life, and they stayed living their everyday, continuing the walk.

For all the positives that this method represents, there is still room for a nuanced discussion about the power relations that evolved dynamically with every participant. Unlike with the transect walks, I did not cover the participants' bus fares on the day of the shadowing and perhaps as a consequence, a major point during both interviews was their financial and time constraints. Ethnographic shadowing required a lot more analysis and interpretation of participants' *sentipensares* in a way that contrasts with the data collected for the transect walks. During the semi-structured discussion for the transect walks, participants got to reflect on the experience of walking the city as women, and their reflections strongly guided my rendering of results. However, with the participants for the ethnographic shadowing, I needed to analyse and interpret how the various constraints and particularities they shared with me intersected with broader structural inequalities in order to point at the larger issue within their individual experiences. This meant that my role and privilege as the narrator and interpreter of their *sentipensares* further complicated the power dynamics.

There is also a power dynamic embedded in the process of creating categories for participants to fit into and assigning them a label. The need to contrast participants experiences and labelling them confronted me with my power as the narrator of their *sentipensares* in a similar way to how Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) faced a dilemma of placing women in categories. For them, it became problematic to label participants as ‘not carers’ because most women move from unpaid work to paid work during their lifetime, and only a few fit totally within the dichotomy. Failing to acknowledge the power imbalance of being the one with the power to label participants would have thwarted my attempts at decolonising my research practices. While there could be an argument for avoiding labelling, using categories as a tool to group participants is a useful way to identify factors that may exacerbate women’s journeys (i.e., income, caring responsibilities, age, number of dependants) and draw conclusions as to how to address their needs through policy or research. In my case, I decided that a fitting label would be one that reflected their role within their sphere as women co-habiting with others, making the distinction for those participants who had direct full-time caring responsibilities assigned.

The issue of safeguarding measures for participants was a sensitive subject too and I approached it with caution given the power dynamics between researcher/researched and my role as the narrator of their lived experiences. Many researchers have stressed that working ethnographically is always a political act, with political effects (Watson and Till, 2010). An ethnographic framework places reflexivity as a crucial aspect of the methodological approach, however engaging with ethnography from a feminist-informed stance demands going further by designing ethnographic projects that help transform the role of participants from just informants to collaborators (Carlson et al. 2006; Watson and Till, 2010; Sutton-Brown, 2014).

More often than not, women in Mexico are exposed to high levels of gender-based violence in different environments in their lives, and talking about past or ongoing experiences of sexual violence can be emotionally draining. For many women, revisiting violent episodes through retelling can be a triggering experience; particularly if their stories are not met in the right environment. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that some research also points towards the opposite effect: women can find validation and support through retelling their experiences of assault and sexual violence. Within the context of gender-based violence, the naming of events and giving meaning to words can help individuals grapple with the injustices committed against them; through their research, Young and Maguire (2003) highlight that just as how people talk about their emotions impacts their everyday lived experiences, the way people discuss their sexually violent experiences shape how they make sense of what happened to them.

As McClain and Amar (2013) have argued, while there are risks present in research participation, risks are also present in not doing research related to women’s experiences of sexual violence as we run the risk to reinforce societal avoidance of this issue, ultimately harming survivors. To thwart victims and survivors of sexual abuse from sharing their experiences because of exposure risks could also rob them

of their agency and decision-making ability to give informed consent for research participation. It is essential to minimise and limit harm to research participants, particularly when involving participants with history of sexual violence, but it is similarly important to avoid reinforcing stereotypes of fragile, broken, or helpless participants by robbing them of their agency to make informed decisions about consent in research projects. Furthermore, in McClain and Amar's research, women talked about the lack of information and silence surrounding abuse, and participating in research studies provided them an opportunity to break their silence and share their feelings as a way to "turning something negative into something positive" (p.485).

Having this in mind, one of the challenges was to provide a safe space for them while also recognising that I am not professionally equipped to adequately handle an emotional outbreak if it were to occur. Acknowledging this, I teamed up with the deputy director of the immediate attention department at the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims (CEAV) of the northern Mexican State of Coahuila de Zaragoza— Atziri Herrera-Valero, during the shadowing stage of my methodology to provide an emotional outlet for all participants from a trained professional.

At the beginning of each session, I introduced Atziri to all participants and talked about her role in this research project. I explained that she had signed a non-disclosure agreement, and she would not be collecting any data from our interactions; afterwards Atziri introduced herself to participants and talked about her previous professional experience and would reassure them that her involvement in the project was meant as a safety and confidential channel for them. This worked very well in creating a bond between the psychologist and the participants, where they felt safe asking for personal advice on sensitive situations and referral to other support services at the end of an interview. In two cases, participants requested that I leave the room and had a private session with Atziri when they felt the needed to. One participant asked to pause our interview to have a private moment with Atziri after she began to feel overwhelmed by the emotions of recounting how her family dynamics had evolved in the past years due to domestic violence. A second participant asked Atziri to remain in the room once we had wrapped up our exit interview to talk about some emotions that had come up when she talked about how the health of her son and her mother affect her decision-making process. Atziri also acted as a safe contact point during the ethnographic shadowing stage and monitored our live location when navigating the city.

This methodology required careful and reflexive planning when it came to the type of questions asked and the environment where participants would be welcomed and the overall atmosphere of this exercise for them. For instance, while small seeming, the seating arrangement during our interviews was important to me and I asked Atziri to sit next to the participants so they would both be facing me, rather than the participant facing Atziri and me. The conversations of power dynamics and my role as the researcher are necessary as I present how I went about carrying out research, however, during my

interactions with them it was equally important to also present the ways in which we shared *sentipensares*. At the beginning of the interview, I shared a few details about my own experiences in public transportation and walking the city as a woman and how that led me to have a passion for researching women's urban experiences in the city. My decision of doing this was rooted in wanting to dismantle the role of the detached observer, and instead, acknowledge to the participants the ways in which our urban experiences may be similar and the ways in which they may not. I also wanted to set the tone for our interactions: I talked about my *sentipensares* when walking the city because I wanted them to know that I saw their own *sentipensares* as valuable knowledge and I wanted them to share these with me in whatever way they felt comfortable. Using a framework of feminist-informed *sentipensar* allowed me to build rapport with participants and engage in conversations about the urban challenges they face that went beyond the technical constraints. This means that we talked about, for example, how money limits their mobility but also the emotional and physical consequences of having financial constraints that force them to alter their mobility. How feelings of anxiety, fear, tiredness, and guilt also shaped their mobility decisions as much as access to financial resources. And it was important to me to work alongside Atziri because these conversations rooted in *sentipensar* have the potential of triggering even more anxiety or fear when emotions are left unchecked.

For example, in Paper Two, I explore how Elena makes decisions of what mode of transport to use depending on her financial resources and with the well-being of her granddaughters in mind. She recently had to switch jobs because her previous boss got angry that she had to step out of work during lunch time to pick up 'her girls' and bring them into the building for the last few hours of her shift. Her new job is only part-time and so her finances are tighter and still, whenever traveling with her girls, Elena chooses to avoid public transport and take a taxi despite the increase in her expenses. When Elena and I were having this conversation, it was clear that there was something unspoken behind her decision-making process because she kept saying "I would rather take no risks" over and over as she elaborated on the reasons that justified her decisions.

At one point, I prompted Elena to clarify what she meant by risks and to reflect, if comfortable, on what emotions she felt behind those words. Elena then teared up a little bit and, after I checked in with her, she shared that her girls had been harassed by a guy a few months before while they were all in public transport. Elena and I met in 2020 when she participated in a study about sexual harassment and abuse in public transportation in Saltillo. She shared her story with me and narrated the aftermath of trying to report the episode of harassment to the local authority. She was told that someone her age had nothing to complain about, she was too old and "should take it as a compliment" (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021, 2022, p. 11). In 2022 while using public transport to get back home after work, her eldest granddaughter, Ana (then aged 8yo) told Elena that a guy that sat next to her in the bus kept showing her 'something weird' under his backpack. Elena had been sitting in the row behind Ana, with her

youngest granddaughter Sofía (then aged 6yo), but did not have clear vision of Ana; she did not notice the episode of harassment until after they left the bus and Ana was visibly distraught. After asking Ana more about it, Elena understood that a guy had been showing Ana his genitals. When Elena kept saying “I would rather take no risks” she was talking about the unpredictable and uncomfortable experience of waiting for a bus in a street with no shelter for the sun and with no timetables, but importantly, also about avoiding the feelings of guilt, anxiety, and shame that came with ‘exposing her girls to public transportation’ where they could be harassed.

This brief example showcases the complex and intimate conversations that unfolded with participants and how a framework of *sentipensar* allowed participants and me to explore the feelings behind their urban mobilities. These feelings of frustration, fear, and guilt severely impact the way women walk and live the city and thus this project demanded the appropriate safeguarding measures that could emotionally contain and diffuse complex *sentipensares*.

On the surface level, conducting ethnographic shadowing rooted a feminist approach of *sentipensar* may not look to dissimilar to other research practices (see Jirón, 2007; Jirón and Gómez, 2018), but at its core, it is important to acknowledge the small-seeming decisions that connect my research endeavours to the goal of recognising and valuing other knowledges and dismantling the idea of the objective and neutral observer. From the seating arrangement, and types of questions asked, to the provision of psychosocial support as a safeguarding measure and asking participants to choose what day of their mobility they wanted me to see the most, my goal was to place women’s voices and experiences as unique sources of knowledge and recognise the places in which our *sentipensares* converge and the places where they divert. This approach to ethnographic shadowing rooted in *sentipensar* is not the only way in which we can dismantle the myth of objectivity, and it certainly still raises tensions of power dynamics and ethical responsibility. What I have done in this section is unpack the details and decisions that make up my *quehacer*⁵¹ as a *sentipensante* with the continuing goal of remaining accountable for who I am engaging with, what I am seeing, and how I present their stories.

In Paper One, I present excerpts from this section to build an argument for *sentipensar* as a feminist-informed approach to knowledge production in the field of feminist human geography. In Paper Two, I present the findings that stem from the ethnographic shadowing and cross reference them with the information obtained from the urban audits to public transport bus stops (see below) to highlight how the transport system infrastructure exacerbates the financial, temporal, and spatial constraints women juggle.

⁵¹ The word *quehacer* directly translates to ‘chores’ in English, but it is often also used to refer to everyday care work or housework activities. I use it as a play on words to not only reflect on the tasks I carried out as a researcher but to link them to the care work involved in conducting research as a *sentipensante*.

3 Auditorías urbanas a paradas de transporte público (Urban audits to bus stops)

In the early stages of second wave feminism there was a strong idea that the main way to carry out feminist research was mainly through qualitative approaches in order to understand women's lives (Maynard, 1994). Quantitative methods like surveys and questionnaires seemed to represent a 'masculinist' approach to knowledge production because of the detachment of the researcher and the collection and measurement of 'objective' facts. The results of these approaches were standardised variables which feminist researchers viewed as unable to convey an in-depth understanding of, or feeling for, the people under study (Maynard, 1994). Feminist research regarded qualitative methods more appropriate for understanding women's subjective experiences and meanings because of their potential to produce non-hierarchical, non-manipulative research relationships (Cotterill, 1992; Oakley, 2008). There is a significant emphasis in the importance of listening to and understanding women's own accounts because feminist research aims to produce knowledge for women that is in their interest rather than knowledge about women who are seen as objects of study (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983; Cotterill, 1992). Feminist researchers recognised the opportunity for empathetic and narrative analysis of qualitative experiential research—research that engages directly and empathetically with women (Code, 1995).

Incorporating *sentipensar*⁵² in my methodological approach to feminist research placed a further emphasis on listening, feeling, and thinking with others, namely through immersive ethnographic approaches. However, rejecting quantitative methods due to their perceived detached nature can also shape women's research contributions to issues that involves numerical representation (i.e., the gender-pay gap, employment rates by field, women's participation in higher education) and limit their ability to bring about substantive change through feminist policies. In that sense, quantitative methods could also be seen as a feminist research approach in order to produce embodied knowledge for women. The appropriate use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in the social sciences can help the feminist community in achieving its goal more effectively than either of the methods alone (Jayaratne, 1983). Thus, it was important to integrate a quantitative component that would ground and contrast participants' *sentipensares* to provide an indicative view of what the urban challenges they face look like across the city. My decision to carry out mixed-methods research aligns with my goal of producing decolonial and feminist research because I seek to link women's personal and individual urban mobilities to large-scale issues that can be observed across the public transport infrastructure of the city

⁵²*Sentipensar* is a term in Spanish that stems from the words: *sentir*/to feel and *pensar*/to think.

with the aim of producing knowledge that recognises and validates women's experiences and seeks to redress inequalities through public policy.

However, rooting a quantitative approach in *sentipensar* felt more intricate and complex than the qualitative approaches for this research project. A significant part of that complexity stemmed from my own preconceptions of what a quantitative methodology should look like: representative sample sizes; high confidence levels; clear-cut assessment categories; in sum I thought to provide an 'objective and detached' snapshot of what bus stops look like in Saltillo. But urban space is not produced in a neutral way, and our interpretation of space, even interpretations that come strictly from quantitative assessments, are not neutral either (Matrix, 1984; McDowell, 1993b; Massey, 1994a). There is an objective aura about traditional quantitative research that makes it convincing and influential because it is 'detached' but personal standpoints impinge on the research process in many ways: from theory formulation and interpretation, to development of design and data collection and analysis (Jayaratne, 1983). Our opinions, positionality, and lived experiences shape our research, what we analyse, and what lens we analyse it through. In order to frame my quantitative approach through *sentipensar* as a feminist, I had to reflect on what experiences would influence my perception and assessment of the bus stops and how my situatedness would be reflected in my findings.

So, what constitutes an embodied quantitative method? And how can we achieve this as feminist researchers? As a *sentipensante* approaching quantitative methods from a feminist stance, I drew from my dual interpretation of 'producing embodied research' and related my efforts to the corporeal experience of conducting fieldwork— I needed to reflect on *how* I collected data and what this positionality would reflect. Would it be from my desktop using databases of satellite imaging and if so, what and who would that information represent? Would it involve walking, cycling or driving, and how would each of these approaches shape my views?

I developed my approach by referencing the work of other scholars around ethnographic methodologies and urban audits, mainly focusing on the way they envisioned urban design strategies that would prioritise women's perspectives and experiences. For example, the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategy first gained popularity around the 1970's and continues to be a popular technique for the urban design of public spaces across Latin America (Ortiz Escalante, 2014). CPTED centres around crime prevention in its entirety; it implements strategies like increasing police presence and restricting access to the public space, as well as other more interactive strategies like increasing the amount of people in the public space and crime-prevention workshops in disadvantaged communities. Nevertheless, feminist scholars have widely criticised this approach to urban design, mainly under the argument that it fails to account for gender-based violence and other social markers that shape the urban experience like race and ethnic origin— focusing on crimes against property and crime rates (Kendall, 2020; Sabino *et al.*, 2022). Wekerle (2000) argued that CPTED programs tend to

ignore crimes against people, most importantly, the differences in fear of crime between men and women and, between white and minority urban residents. CPTED strategies promote “target-hardening solutions” like fences, buzzers, gates, and traffic barriers designed to keep people out and define territory (p.46); departing from the more subtle elements of urban safety that Jane Jacobs had envisioned like housing projects, civic centres, and a mix of activities and land uses to attract diverse population to streets and, neighbourhoods (Jacobs, 1961; Wekerle, 2000). Furthermore, it has been widely researched how concerns about safety act as a barrier to physical mobility and social mobility; built environment influences perceptions of safety and, for women, poor perceptions of security influence mobility decisions more than time travel or costs (Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2010; Whitzman, 2013; Junqueira, Nunes and Leda Sabino, 2019; Basu *et al.*, 2021).

Feminist geographers have advocated for urban design strategies that consider women’s experiences in the urban space, developing participatory research tools that implement safety audits with a gender perspective (Wekerle, 2000; Falú, 2009; Ortiz Escalante, 2014). In Brazil, activist organisations such as *Red MAS* and *SampaPé!* have created the project *Mulheres Caminhantes!* (Walking Women) that aims to place participants as experts that can propose intersectional, effective solutions to improve women’s safety and sustainable mobility through the implementation of walking urban audits. Their method of *Auditoria de Segurança de Gênero e Caminhabilidade* (Walkability and Gender-Safety Audit) merges transect walks and urban audits to evaluate the level of walkability of the Terminal Santana – a major urban bus hub that serves the north area of São Paulo – and implements a three-stage approach. Firstly, Junqueira et al (2019) conducted a Rapid Situation Analysis, gathering demographics and statistics related to transport, crime rates, public services available, violence against women, and any other that may be relevant to the area of interest. Afterwards, they met with a group of participants to reflect on their perceptions of security, to evaluate the surrounding public space in terms of sustainable mobility, sexual harassment, and walkability, and to collectively create strategic solutions that can alleviate the issues that were identified.

Junqueira et al (2019)’s approach is informed by gender-conscious urban audit methodologies that have been developed by other feminist scholars such as Sweet and Ortiz Escalante (2010) and the work of *Collectiu Punt 6* (2017). Their work *Entornos habitables: Auditoría de seguridad urbana con perspectiva de género en la vivienda y el entorno* (Liveable environments: Urban safety audits with gender perspective for housing and urban environments) develops six strategic lines that assess the environment across categories like signposting, visibility, vitality, surveillance, urban fixtures, and community development. Their manual provides a blueprint on how to engage with methods including participant observation, focus groups, transect walks, community mapping, and several other approaches in order to conduct gender-conscious urban audits.

For this method, I collaborated with Óscar Mesta-Rodríguez, a local activist for pedestrian and cyclists' rights, who also has a background in urban planning and understands the urban challenges that face Saltillo in terms of sustainable and active mobility. I approached Óscar and invited him to join me as a research assistant for this project due to the volume and extension of the sample I wanted to cover; he joined as an unpaid academic collaborator and accompanied me during the auditing of bus stops however this decision did not come about without raising tensions of researchers positionality and ethical considerations, as I explore further along.

My approach to urban audits as a feminist *sentipensante* involved developing a three-stage process that presents an analysis of the bus stops from 7 out of 21 bus routes in Saltillo. Firstly, I carried out a Rapid Situation Analysis (RSA) because the local transport authority in Saltillo does not have a map with the location of the bus stops across the city, and in order for us to set a sample size of bus stops to audit, we first needed to conduct a rapid assessment analysis (RSA) and map the location of the bus stops. During the RSA, I began identifying the neighbourhoods and bus stops shown in satellite images and creating a preliminary map for each bus route using Google My Maps; I had obtained some PDF files from the Municipal Institute of Transport for each of the urban routes currently active in Saltillo, but these still needed to be digitalised in QGis, exporting the information to Google My Maps to be able to cross reference with Google Street View and satellite images; this was a necessary step to work with an adaptable and modifiable dataset. Originally, I had selected five bus routes for this study as a way to narrow down my focus and sample, however, due to the lay out of the transport network, that meant leaving entire sectors of the city out of the study—neighbourhoods that house marginalised communities and people from low socioeconomic backgrounds who only have meaningful access to one bus route. I decided to add two more bus routes so that the study could provide a snapshot of the bus stop conditions in these areas as an indicative of the urban conditions of other marginalised neighbourhoods that are not present in this study. This can be observed in Fig. 9; the two green routes on the right-hand side map provide context for what women's urban challenges on those areas look like and without revising the selection of the bus routes while carrying out the RSA, these areas would have remained overlooked.

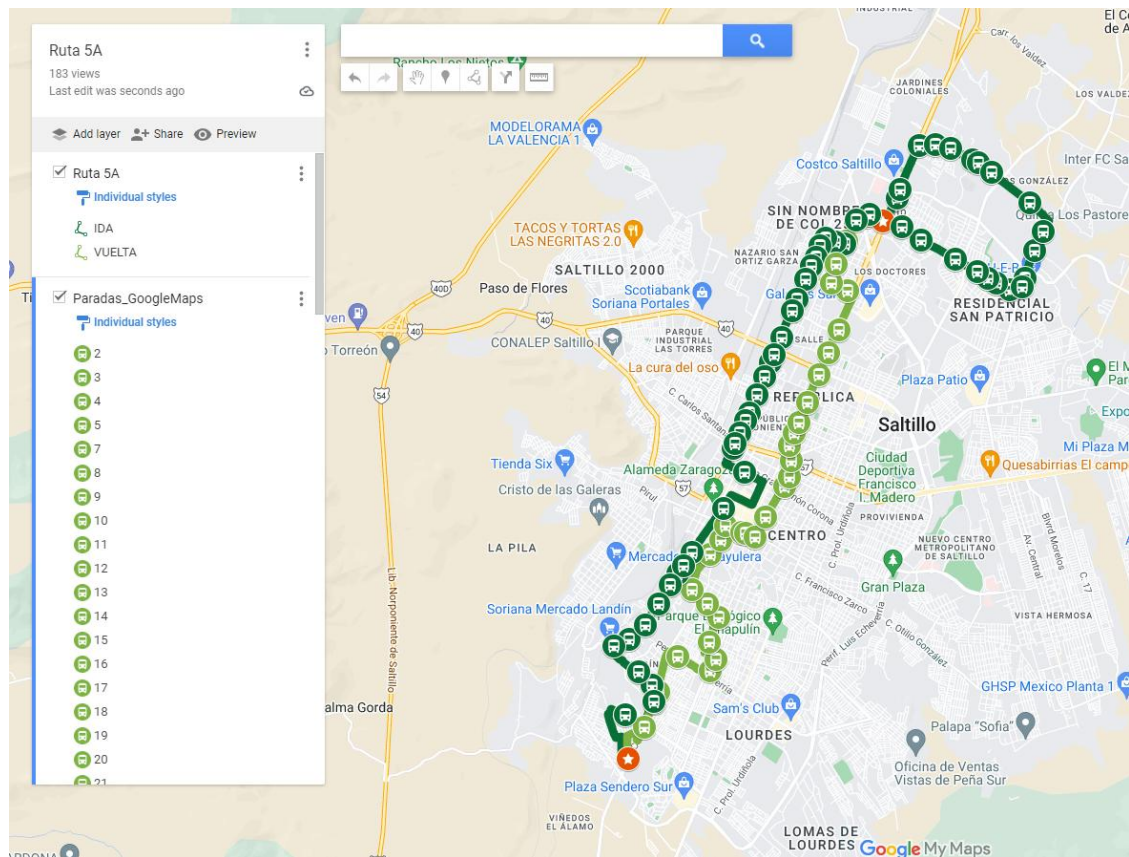
Figure 9: Selection process for bus routes to include in this method



Source: Own elaboration with information from <https://transparenciasaltillo.mx/articulo-28/rutas-establecidas-en-planos-y-tarifas-de-transporte-publico/>, March 2026.

While the information provided by the local transport authority created a point of reference, some areas of the city had no Google Street View images or had not been updated since 2006. This meant that I could not get a complete and reliable rapid assessment in some areas of the city. I began taking note of the types of bus stops (shelters or posts) and pinning down informal but popular bus stops across seven routes to produce a first-stage mapping of bus stops (see an example of this in Fig 10). A significant challenge for this methodology was the availability and the reliability of official information; the dataset provided by the transport authority was meant to be up to date for 2019, however, upon further inspection, several bus routes did not coincide with their current path or had not been updated for several years, and there was no information regarding the location of any bus stop across the city.

Figure 10: RSA, Preliminary mapping of bus stops for route 5A

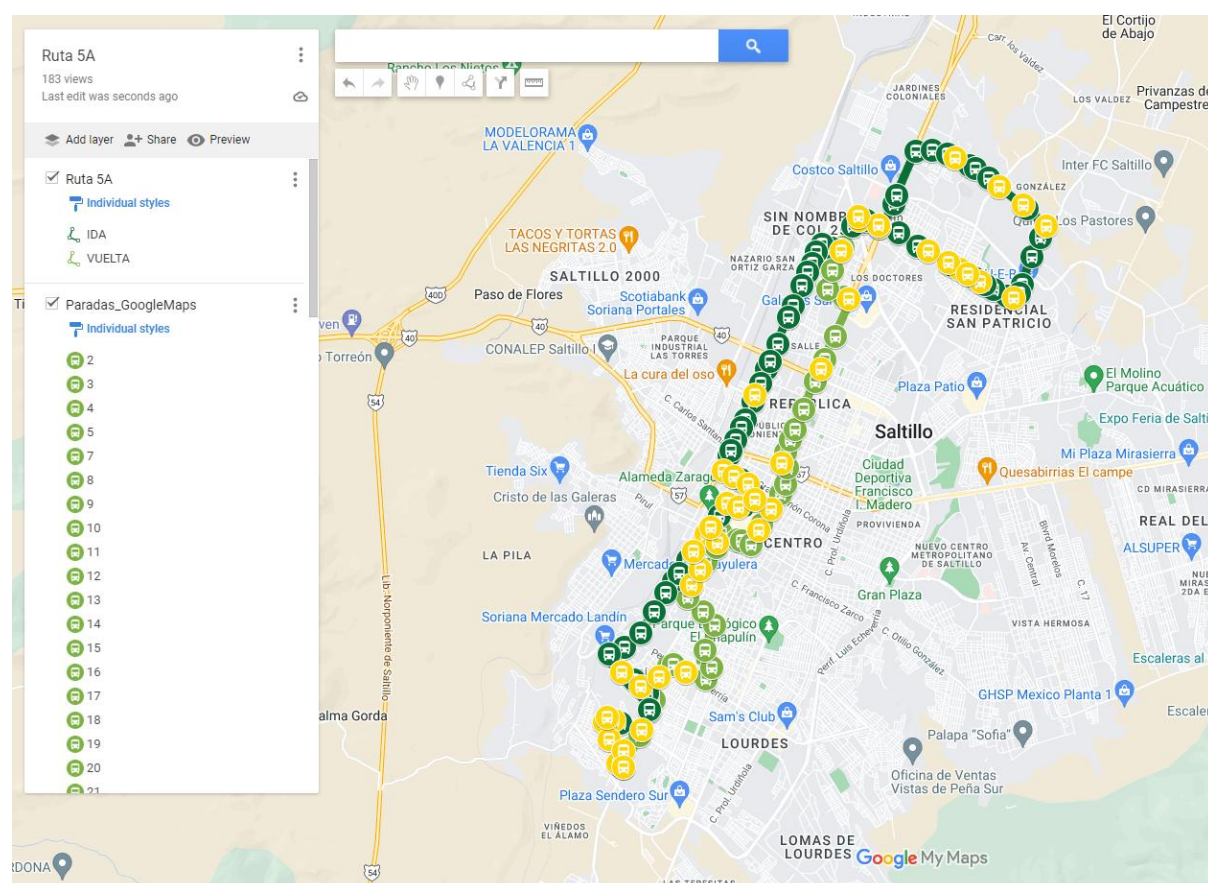


Source: Own elaboration with Google My Maps, May 2023

For the second stage of this approach, Óscar and I conducted a series of fact-finding trips for each bus route and began cross referencing the information I had mapped out on the RSA for each route. This is where fieldwork began for us. We began marking down informal bus stops as we rode each bus route and corroborated the existence of previously located bus stops on each lap; we rode each bus route on three separate occasions. We did this because I wanted to have a reliable snapshot and estimate of the bus stops across the city in order to set a sample size, but relying only on the information available online would have skewed our approach leaving marginalised neighbourhoods out of the picture. Óscar and I needed to walk the city from top to bottom to get a reliable idea of the amount of bus stops we were going to be dealing with. We amended the original first-stage map where necessary and incorporated all informal bus stops — each route had a second iteration of a map (see an example of this in Fig. 11) with the current bus stops on a numerical sequence and from there we were able to obtain our sample frame ($N=751$) to calculate the sample size for the urban audits. A key challenge of this process was discerning between coincidental stops and informal bus stops, that is, places where the bus stopped because a passenger requested so but did not necessarily constitute an informal bus stop —where the residents of a given neighbourhood would gather to wait for the bus despite no sign, shelter, or official post. As we conducted each fact-finding trip, Óscar and I informally engaged with the bus

drivers and talked about some informal bus stops and other official bus stops that they did not service (and why), among other things like their working conditions and their perceptions of safety. This was not originally planned as part of the methodology, but informally engaging with them allowed us to deepen our understanding of the transport system network and its' operational side, and this informed our understanding of the user experience going forward.

Figure 11: Second stage map, bus stops for route 5A



Source: Produced by author with Google My Maps, May 2023 For the third stage, Óscar and I conducted the technical assessments (urban audits) of the selected bus stops evaluating characteristics of the built environment like type of bus stop, materials and conditions of the pavement, signposting, road safety, and comfort and street furniture using a Likert scale. For this, I referenced the methodology developed by the Inter-American Development Bank and SampaPé!, in their *Índice Técnico de Caminabilidad* (Technical Walkability Index) (Sabino *et al.*, 2022) and adapted it to fit this project. The urban audits for each bus stop shared assessment categories with the urban audits carried out by participants during the transect walks. For instance, when assessing the pavement where a bus stop is located, participants of the transect walks were asked to reflect on their perceptions of it, while the technical assessment gathered data like width, type of material, presence of accessibility ramps, amongst other entry points.

Drawing from Lavrakas (2008), I decided to apply a probability sampling strategy due to the advantages it provided to the project, for instance, it allowed me to structure time and work neatly, but most importantly because probabilistic samples are considered representative of reality and allow sampling error control. So far, all the work previously described served to accurately determine the total number of bus stops that would constitute our sample frame; after conducting all fact-finding trips, we registered a total of 751 bus stops across 7 bus routes and from there I was able to calculate the sample size for the audit section of this approach. Because the path of some routes was longer than others, the number of total stops is not equally distributed across routes. For instance, route *5A* registered 131 bus stops compared to route *18 Directa* with 79 stops (see Table 3).

Table 3: Total of bus stops per route

Route	Number of bus stops	Percentage of a total
5A	131	17%
7A	87	12%
13B	119	16%
17	128	17%
Loma Linda	90	12%
2B San Angel	117	16%
18 Directa	79	11%
Total bus stops:	751	100%

In order to determine the probability sample (n), I used the following formula where “ z ” refers to the confidence level of the estimate, usually fixed at 1.96, corresponding to a 95% confidence level, pq is the variance (that is unknown and then fixed at its maximum value: 0.25), N is the size of the population, E is the sampling error (often < 0.04) (Lavrakas, 2008).

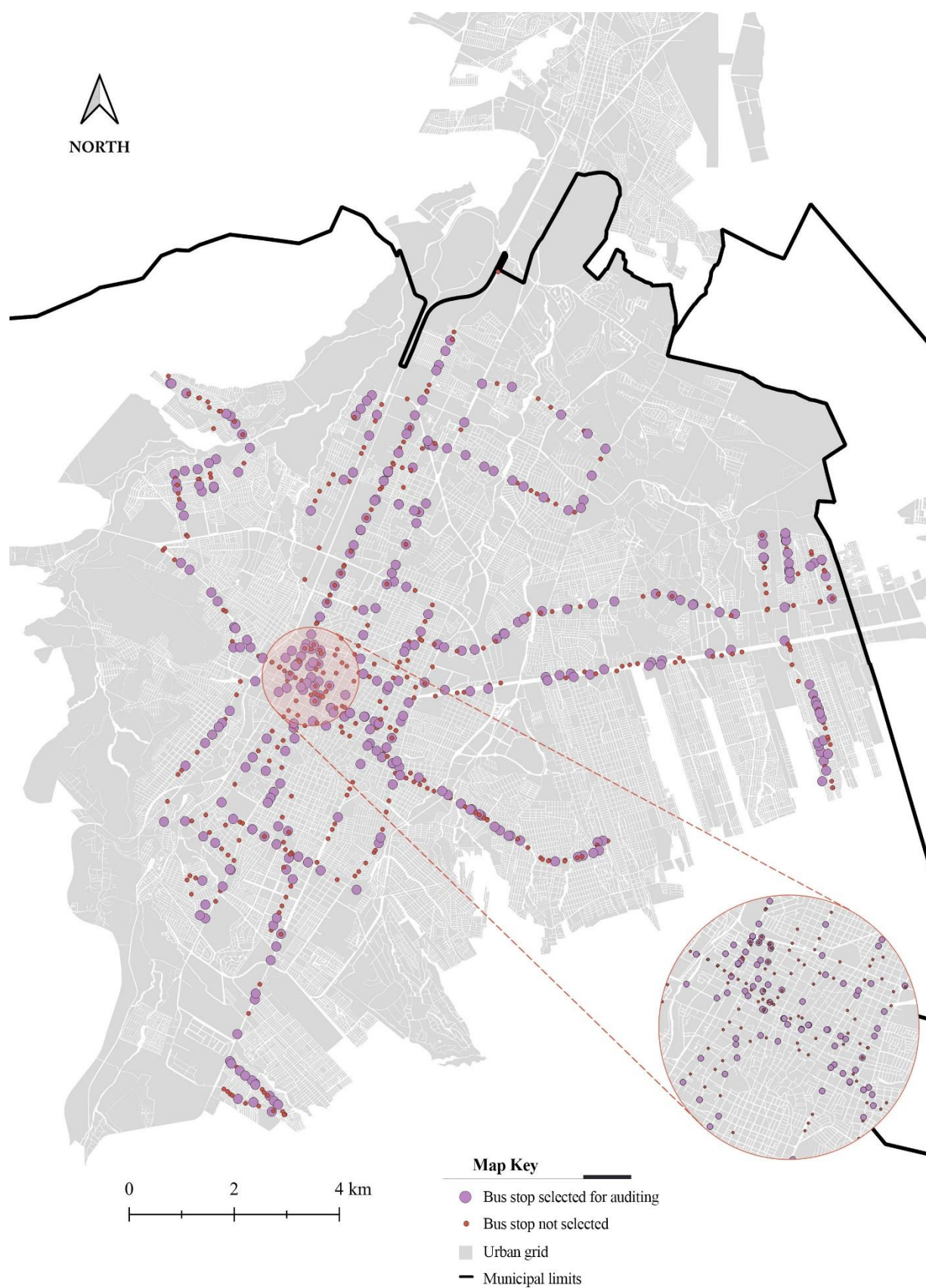
$$n = \frac{z^2 pq N}{E^2 (N - 1) + z^2 pq}$$

Having calculated $n=334$ bus stops, I decided to distribute this number for representative percentage rather than by unified intervals among all bus routes because some routes had more bus stops than others and assigning an equal amount of stops to audit would have prioritised some routes over others (see Table 4). All bus stops across all routes were randomly selected, carefully avoiding overlap in between routes that shared a common path (see Fig 12).

Table 4: Number of bus stops to be audited by percentage of total

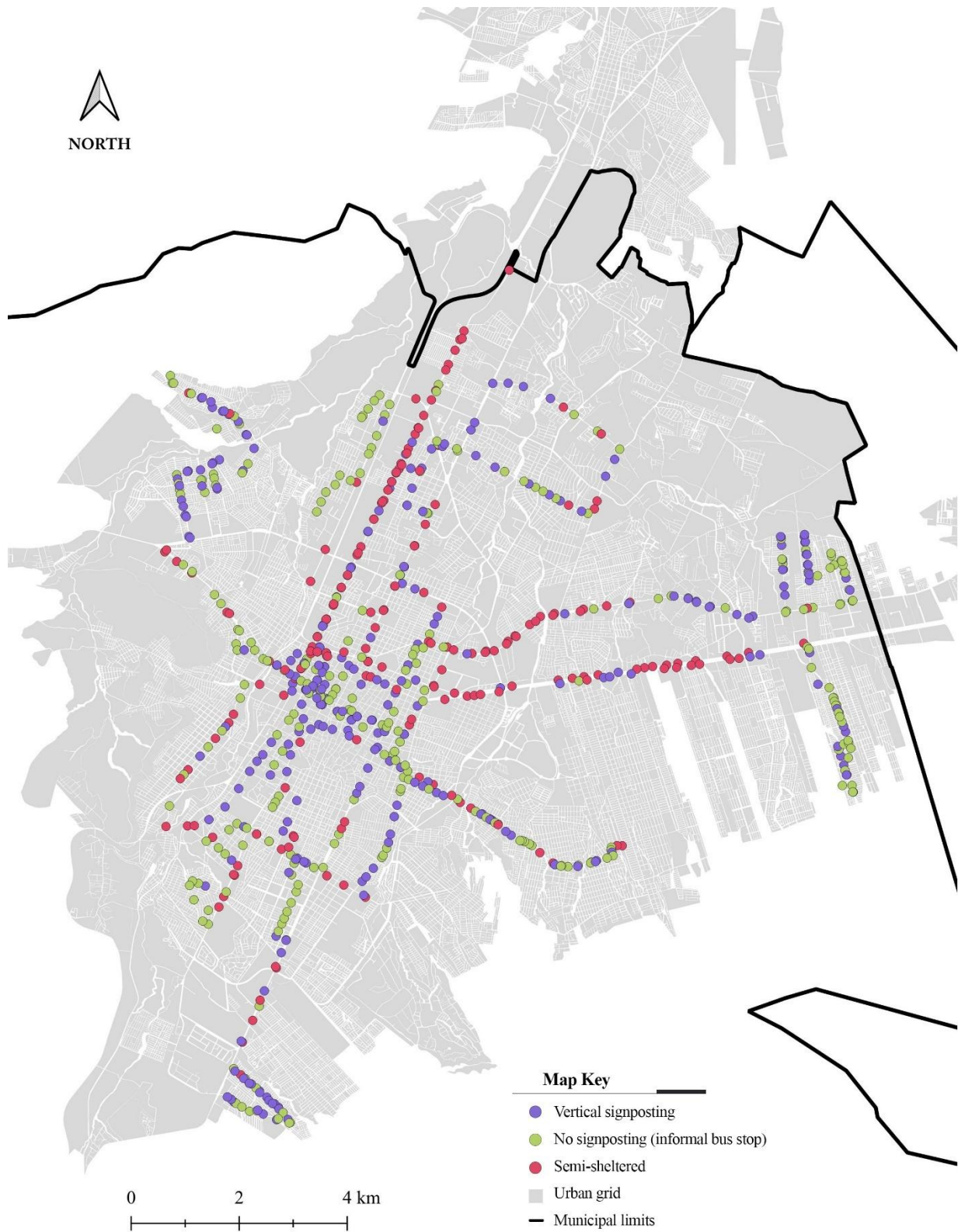
Route	Total number of bus stops	Percentage of total	Number of bus stops to be audited by percentage
5A	131	17%	58
7A	87	12%	39
13B	119	16%	53
17	128	17%	57
Loma Linda	90	12%	40
2B San Angel	117	16%	52
18 Directa	79	11%	35
Total	N= 751	100%	n=334

Figure 12: Mapping of bus stops in Saltillo



Source: Own elaboration (2024) with partial information from IMPLAN 2010 and INEGI 2020.

Figure 13: Map of identified bus stops colour-coded by type



Source: Own elaboration (2024) with partial information from IMPLAN 2010 and INEGI 2020

In total, Óscar and I walked almost 200km in the span of two weeks auditing 340 bus stops across the urban area of Saltillo. The process prior to carrying out the urban audits happened over the span of a week in mid-June 2023, and we carried out all urban audits in the first two weeks of July 2023. The result of this method in fieldwork is an interactive QGIS map with georeferenced points each containing information for over 20 variables including type of bus stop as seen in Figure 13. This method proved challenging not only because of the size of the sample and the urban area we needed to cover, but because I opted for using walking as a research tool for this method. As mentioned earlier, I interpreted the task of embodying my research practises with a dual meaning, firstly, as a way to question and reflect on the theoretical standpoint from where I research, and secondly, was a way to reflect on the embodied experience of where I walk and how my body relates to the field.

My decision to carry out the urban audits walking from one bus stop to another was rooted in *sentipensar* from a feminist researchers' standpoint. We could have opted to use a private vehicle to carry out all audits quicker and more efficiently, and it certainly would have been an easier process for us. But it would have shielded us (literally and figuratively) from living the city at a street-level, at human speed, and in turn, this would have also shaped our understanding and assessment of the bus stops. We could have also chosen to use bicycles to get around from one bus stop to the next, but our understanding of the city would have then reflected the many challenges that cyclists face in car-centric cities like Saltillo. Either option would have impacted our judgement, shaped our experiences of the city and we would have failed to *sentipensar* the challenges that “can only be felt on foot” (Middleton, 2010, p. 582). Instead, I decided to use walking as a way of embodying my research practices as a *sentipensante* and this opened up the door for many complexities along the way.

This method was challenging in more than one aspect. Firstly, fieldwork had to be carried out during the early morning hours or closer to sunset to avoid temperatures of over 36° that could cause heatstroke and dehydration as we often walked in areas with no vegetation that could provide respite from the sun as seen on the right hand-side of Figure 14. It is necessary to acknowledge that regular public transport users in Saltillo face these conditions and inclement weather daily, and in embodying our research practices is that Óscar and I were able to live the perils of public transportation and bring that lived experience to our assessment of each bus stop. Secondly, road safety was a significant concern for us while navigating the city on foot. Cars and trucks would often speed past us or cut us off at intersections—perhaps because they had not seen us walking, but arguably because overall the road design in Saltillo leaves pedestrians in vulnerable positions while prioritising car infrastructure. And thirdly, I was catcalled, ogled, followed, and nearly abducted while conducting fieldwork for the urban audit component of this research project.

Figure 14: Auditing process



Source: Own elaboration, August 2025.

As I explore in greater detail in Paper Four (Infante-Vargas and Mesta-Rodríguez, 2025b), a car approached me from behind as Óscar and I were auditing bus stops in a neighbourhood in the southwest area of Saltillo and tried to drag me into it. This event confronted me with my own positionality to the field and how my status as a woman overshadowed my identity as a researcher. This situation of harassment impacted the way Óscar and I carried out data collection and our perceptions of safety. The event reframed our *sentipensares* of fieldwork and made us reflect on how different it had been for each of us because of our perceived genders (Infante-Vargas and Mesta-Rodríguez, 2025b).

After this event unfolded, Óscar and I slowly engaged in reflexive and vulnerable conversations about how our experiences of fieldwork had been different and why—how our positionality to the project, and to the field, had impacted how we carried ourselves and the interactions we started. For instance, when we had been conducting the fact-finding trips, Óscar found it natural to engage with bus drivers and was concerned with not presenting himself as too formal or official so the conversation could flow more naturally without making the bus driver feel assessed or under examination. While I had similar concerns, I was also worried about managing my words and intonation to convey that I was asking questions because I had an interest in his profession and his lived experiences of being a bus driver,

careful that my actions and words could not be misinterpreted as any other type of interest (i.e., flirting) while also remaining approachable and building rapport with them.

During the implementation of this method the power relations and ethical considerations shifted in their place as I was not directly interacting with participants, and this made it harder to delineate them. For example, in this context there was a power differential between me and Óscar as I was responsible for managing and conducting the research; at the beginning Óscar was reluctant to adopt walking as a tool for the audit process mainly out of concerns of all the inconveniences it would represent and advocated for getting bikes. As I explained my argument, Óscar understood why this was essential for the project, but we did not explore the complexities that this would represent. We did not acknowledge—perhaps because at that point we were unaware—how fieldwork would be drastically different for each other even though we were walking the same city, the same streets, at the same time.

My personal standpoints as a feminist *sentipensante* have shaped this method and can be seen throughout this section in the series of decisions I made. For instance, I am from Saltillo and deeply familiar with its public transport system, and the set of bus routes selected for this study correspond to my situated understandings of the most important bus routes in the city due to the neighbourhoods they service, length of the route, and number of buses within the route in operation. In that sense, it is important to recognise that, I have achieved substantial coverage of Saltillo's urban area, this study does not necessarily advance statistically generalisable claims and only presents information regarding one-third of the entire bus route in the city. Another place where my standpoint can be observed is in my decision to adapt a framework of analysis for the urban audits that places an emphasis on analysing the city through a gender perspective. I chose to engage with the framework developed by IADB and *SampaPé!* because of its feminist perspective of assessing how the city is not neutral and its goal of identifying the physical ways in which the cities impact women's mobility. I also chose this framework because of its limitations as a technical assessment tool—I saw this as an opportunity to build on the knowledge developed by other Latin American feminist scholars, and an opportunity to bring women's voices and *sentipensares* to a research process that otherwise would have failed to recognise and interact with their lived experiences.

My decision to adopt walking for this method also reflects the importance I am placing in producing embodied knowledge that values urban *sentipensares*, therefore rejecting the idea of objective research. These are limitations and strengths in this method because they define my standpoint—one on hand this delineates the places I did not walk in, the groups and neighbourhoods that are not represented by my research practices, and on the other hand, this also locates and embodies my knowledge production endeavours, thus achieving the goal of decolonising my research practices. The ethical implications of carrying out embodied quantitative research demand coherence in understanding and articulating where our research practices are coming from, and where they are not. As a feminist *sentipensante*, my view

of Saltillo does not come from above, from anywhere and everywhere, but from the places where I got to walk/feel/live the city.

The information presented as part of the quantitative component of this research complements and contrasts the information collected through the qualitative methods in the study as a way to tie in the personal/individual/bodily urban experiences of participants with what can be observed on a larger scale across the public transport infrastructure of the city. The main analytical contribution of this quantitative material is grounding women's *sentipensares*, explored through qualitative methods, and demonstrate how women's perceptions of vulnerability and everyday challenges could be addressed through policy changes to the associated infrastructure in Saltillo.

In this section I have presented a thorough account of my decision-making process as I carried out this method to explain how I rooted my practices in a feminist-informed approach to *sentipensar*. One of the most important elements was choosing walking as our research tool for this method, but it can also be observed in my decision to incorporate more bus routes to include marginalised sectors of the city in my analysis, and in choosing to carry out fact-finding trips after doing an initial RSA. The goal of producing embodied quantitative data challenged me to confront the way I conduct research that is mindful and reflexive of my own point of view, how and where I walk, and how that walk informs my understandings.

Closing remarks

For decades, feminist geographers have called for urban design strategies that consider women's experiences in the urban space (Valentine, 1989; Wekerle, 2000; Ortiz Guitart, 2007; Moser, 2009; Ortiz Escalante, 2014; Jirón and Gómez, 2018). While there is not just one way to do research with a feminist scope, I argue that a feminist-informed approach rooted in *sentipensar* can be a tool to help better represent women's urban experiences and provide much needed depth and nuance to the conceptualisation of the city and space through a gender lens.

Mind and body, humans and nature, and nature and society coexist in a harmonious balance in Abya Yala's indigenous ontologies. *Sentipensar* as a way of knowing centres that interdependent cosmovision and challenges colonial rationality and its knowledge systems. Adopting this practice for our research endeavours can allow us to build embodied and situated knowledge that can dismantle objective, universal, and androcentric perspectives. While *sentipensar* shares characteristics of reflexivity and feminist standpoint theory, its root is located around the goal of decolonising knowledge production and has been around for centuries, embedded in indigenous communities' practices, long before the development of critical standpoint theory in western feminism. It places a heavy onus on reflecting on our physical positionality and our corporeal experiences and questioning how that impacts our knowledge production. However, *sentipensar* is not necessarily a feminist approach to knowledge

production in its own right and as feminists we must seek to move our focus from the *taita* to the grandmothers and the everyday women who walk/feel/live the city. A feminist approach to *sentipensar* will seek to problematise our knowledge practices (whose voice counts?) and incorporate candid reflections about our positionality as researchers aiming to produce knowledge that advances women's position in the world (how and where am I standing theoretically and physically?).

In my goal of questioning whose knowledge counts in order to decolonise my research practices, I encountered and created power dynamics that are present in my findings featured in the upcoming Papers, and during this analysis of my methodological *quehacer*. Nevertheless, in order for feminist research to achieve its goal, we cannot shy away from these processes of decision-making, interpretation, and analysis out of caution of muddying the waters of power relations and positionality because that is precisely what feminist research should do if the goal is producing knowledge for women that can advance women's emancipation (see Jayaratne, 1983; Maynard, 1994). Instead, our research practices should embrace these candid and vulnerable reflections around the power dynamics we encounter and create, and how our decision-making process are grounded in coherent and ethical feminist praxis. We should seek to engage with conversations that acknowledge the complexity of the insider/outsider and research/researched relationships because in doing so, we begin to decolonise our practices and question whose voice is our data representing and whose knowledge and experiences am I listening to.

Doing feminist research rooted in *sentipensar*, however, will look different for every *sentipensante* because our positionalities, context, and relation to the issue at hand are different. The findings in my research and my methodological approach are unique because they are ultimately based on a multilayered standpoint, and a set of relations to the project/participants that were dynamic and shifting (McCorkel and Myers, 2003). My approach to *sentipensar* as a feminist *mestiza* comes from a specific, personal standpoint, and I argue that other feminist researchers should address questions of power, knowledge, and method locally, in a piece-by-piece analysis of their specific circumstances of research in order to reflexively engage with *sentipensar* as a methodology.

Paper One. Enraizada en el sentipensar: Methodological approaches to walking/feeling/envisioning the city as a feminist researcher

Authorship statement

This paper is currently under review in the *Geographical Journal*, submitted on 19 August 2025. I led the conceptualisation and development of this paper and carried out all writing, editing, and manufacturing of all images presented. I planned and structured the fieldwork that this paper elaborates on, but received support from Óscar Mesta-Rodríguez, Triana Zepeda-Saldaña, and Atziri Herrera-Valero to carry out the methods in this project as clearly stated in this paper. Harriet Gray and Joshua Kirshner assisted by providing critical feedback and copyediting corrections as part of their role as Ph.D. supervisors. This paper is of my sole authorship.

Introduction

For decades, feminist human geographers have argued and demonstrated women's differentiated access to public space, and have called for urban design strategies and policies that consider women's experiences in the city (Wekerle, 1979; Monk and Hanson, 1982; Pain, 1991b; Del Valle, 2005; Laub, 2007; Phadke, 2012; Ajaz and Zakir, 2022). Still, women's access to the city continues to be shaped by constraints like gender-based violence (GBV) and care work. As such, questions around urban experiences remain an important issue for feminist researchers and policymakers.

Cities and their transport systems are the product of the social organisation of space, and within their spatial structures, they can reflect uneven power dynamics (Wekerle, 1979; McDowell, 1993b; Massey, 2008). Similarly, knowledge production and research processes can also reinforce uneven power dynamics when the resulting output fails to account for positionality of the researcher, power imbalances, and context of discovery (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; McCorkel and Myers, 2003). The task of dismantling the myth of the 'neutral' city and envision a gender-conscious alternative requires researchers to question our research practices. How do we engage with the city and its inhabitants? Who are we listening to and what urban experiences are we tapping into?

In 2023 I began conducting field work for my Ph. D. research in Saltillo, Mexico. I implemented a feminist mixed-method approach rooted in '*sentipensar*,' that combined 1) ethnographic shadowing, 2) group transect walks, and 3) urban audits to bus stops in order to understand women's urban experiences. My approach adopts a reflexive feminist standpoint of enquiry in order to centre women's

experiences of navigating the city and the *sentipensares*⁵³ it can evoke. In total I shadowed 10 participants, conducted two transect walks with 19 adult women, and audited 340 bus stops.

The contribution of this paper lies in its advocacy of *sentipensar* as a methodological approach for feminist human geographers and researchers, building on what other scholars have theorised around *sentipensar* as a tool for the production of knowledge (Escobar, 2016; Rodríguez Castro, 2021). In what follows, I present *sentipensar* as a methodological approach and engage with scholars who have critiqued concepts of objectivity and standpoint, problematising the relationships of researcher/researched, and outsider/insider positionalities (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; Maynard, 1994; McCorkel and Myers, 2003). I argue that *sentipensar* as a methodology with a feminist focus can represent a situated and embodied path to the construction of knowledge. I elaborate on how my work as a *sentipensante*⁵⁴ engages with feminist standpoint theory and reflexivity and present my journey into rooting my research endeavours in *sentipensar*. I present my *quehacer*⁵⁵ as a feminist *sentipensante* by 1) sharing my positionality as a researcher in relation to my project, to the field, and to the participants, and 2) by elaborating on the specifics of each method that I carried out. I also offer a candid reflection of the challenges and limitations for each method and how this relates to what has been theorised in the feminist research sphere. I conclude by arguing that it should be viewed as a flexible approach to question our standpoint and how we engage with the context we research.

Existing literature

Sentipensar was described in the 1980s by Orlando Fals Borda, a Colombian researcher and sociologist, as a living principle of indigenous communities of *campesinos* and fishermen in the Caribbean coast of Colombia that is rooted in Abya Yala's⁵⁶ ancestral knowledge (Fals Borda, 1986). *Sentipensar* translates to 'feel-think' (from Spanish *sentir*/feel and *pensar*/think) and refers to the holistic approach of knowing and being that is rooted in thinking with both heart and mind (Fischer, 2021). In the ontologies of the indigenous peoples of Abya Yala, the separations of spirit and body do not exist; matter and mind are interpreted as a continuum and theory could not be done without a body, without an action, without practices.

The separation between body and mind in Latin America advanced with colonisation processes that imposed colonial rationality. Cartesian dichotomies that separate mind and body, humans and nature,

⁵³ Feelings and thoughts

⁵⁴ Spanish for people who engage with the practice of *sentipensar*

⁵⁵ The word *quehacer* directly translates to 'chores' in English, but it is often also used to refer to everyday care work or housework activities. I use it as a play on words to not only reflect on the tasks I carried out as a researcher but to link them to the care work involved in conducting research as a *sentipensante*.

⁵⁶ Abya Yala is the preferred term for decolonial scholars and researchers as an alternative to 'Latin America' due to debates around identity, impositions, and exclusions. Abya Yala means 'land in full maturity' in the language of the Kuna of Panama and Colombia.

and nature and society are foreign in Mesoamerican and Andean cultures— all of these elements are interdependent and their cosmovision calls for a balanced and harmonious existence between all of them (Cariño and González, 2022). As Harding (2019) argued, for the Europeans, the discovery of new lands across the Atlantic appeared as a solution to some of their most pressing problems. Europeans welcomed the thought of being able to leave behind the economic and political problems as well as overpopulation and famines; with the discovery of new lands, they could “start over” (p.52). Colonial relations in the Americas began in 1492 and they came with an imposition of rigid knowledge systems and hierarchical concepts of race, sexuality, and gender (Segato, 2016; Lugones, 2023).

The Nahua, Incas, and Mayans—the major Amerindian groups inhabiting Abya Yala before 1492, mostly occupying what today is Mexico and Peru—had sophisticated knowledge systems for chronology, astronomy, agriculture, and construction. But for the Amerindians, the process of colonisation by the Europeans was a cataclysmic event that meant the destruction of their cultural and physical worlds; the loss of their sovereignty and the destruction and devaluation of their forms of knowledge and spirituality in favour of a colonial-western way of knowing (Harding and Mendoza, 2021).

Under this imposed perspective of the world, indigenous ways of knowing, like *sentipensar*, had no place in the new order— for colonial western knowledge systems to legitimise its artificial universalisation, they had to be de-localised and de-historicised (Rodrigues, 2022). Colonial androcentric and scientific rationality is the basis of the multiple separations or fragmentations of reality with the purpose of building knowledge that is not embodied, not contextualised, and therefore, “objective and universal” (Lander and Castro-Gómez, 2000; Cariño and González, 2022).

Mestiza and criolla feminists and decolonial scholars have deepened the conversation around the effects of colonialism in the production of knowledge and its relation to gender hierarchies. Scholars like Lugones (2010, 2023) have argued that the existing gender system was overwritten by the gender system introduced by Europeans. Scholars like Segato (2016) have argued that gender dynamics were present in pre-colonial times. Whilst these debates are not monolithic throughout the subcontinent or even throughout regions, indigenous conceptions of gender largely placed the feminine and masculine forces as complementary and parallel—women’s power of child birthing was understood as equally important as men’s role as warriors and soldiers (Harding and Mendoza, 2021). It was the advancement of the Mexica and Inca empires that heightened the differentiation between genders, and colonialism that introduced the separation of the public and private spheres thus minoritising indigenous women (Segato, 2016). While there are tenuous elements of gender hierarchy in indigenous Mayan communities, it was never a “full-blown ancestral patriarchy” (p.112), rather one in development, that was then fast-tracked with the introduction of European conceptions of gender binarism. Colonialism involved a social pact between colonised and coloniser men based on the acceptance of the

subordination of women to men; centuries before 1492 Amerindian women had occupied important social and political positions and were part of the production of knowledge in fields like agriculture, environmental and technical knowledge, and speculative ontology in the Aztec, Inca and Mayan communities, and were now relegated to the private, the intimate, the minority (Segato, 2016; Harding and Mendoza, 2021).

In the gender studies and feminism sphere, scholars have also problematised the concept of objectivity and have analysed the processes of knowledge production in the social sciences. Ideal objectivity assumes a homogeneous human nature where knowers are substitutable for one another; they could put themselves in anyone else's place and know exactly what she or he would know (Code, 1995). Haraway (1988) critiqued objectivity using the term "god trick" to refer to the apparently universal truths produced by disembodied researchers who can observe "everything from nowhere" (p.581) and argued that feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge. Her critique extended to western cultural narratives about objectivity and highlighted the need to learn in our bodies, attaching the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and where we are not. Objectivity then turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and only partial perspectives can promise objective vision. She built an argument against unlocatable knowledge claims instead arguing for a doctrine of embodied objectivity that would allow us (researchers) to become answerable for what we learn how to see.

There is power and privilege associated with shaping social science research. Disembodied research practices are a fundamental privileging of elite men's systems of thought because knowledge produced by these practices influence our conceptions of the social world (McCorkel and Myers, 2003). Under this epistemology, knowers that cannot see from an ideal objective observation that could be "anywhere and everywhere" cannot produce knowledge and therefore so-called "special interest groups" such as queer people, women, or POC, cannot be objective and their experiences and circumstances cannot yield knowledge (Code, 1995, pp. 16–17). Critical positioning and standpoint reflexivity is central to feminist research approaches in order to ground and situate knowledge; it is necessary to discuss the personal motivations that give rise to the study and recognise how the researcher's positionality facilitates specific forms of understanding and impedes others (McCorkel and Myers, 2003). Feminist reflexivity and positionality bring about questions related to power imbalances between the researcher/knower and the researched/known and requires the researcher to consider how she reproduces her own privilege through her analysis and practices.

While there is no single way to do feminist research, understanding the processes that result in inequalities is a necessary step toward changing women's positions in the picture of the world that results from scientific research. Feminist research, as Haraway argued, should engage with politics and epistemologies of location, positioning and situating; it should aim to visualise from a structuring and

structure body and reject the “god trick”, the view from above and from nowhere (Haraway, 1988). If the overarching goal of feminist research is better accounts of the world and situated knowledges that are about communities rather than isolated individuals, then a feminist-informed approach of *sentipensar* as a methodology can enable us to produce embodied, socially situated knowledge *for* women.

Sentipensar has developed as a way of feeling and knowing in the world, moving away from colonial anthropological research paradigms of studying people/places/nature to *doing knowledge with* (Rodríguez Castro, 2021, p. 67). It can be an approach to decolonise and situate knowledge production because it confronts researchers with questions about where we stand, what we see, how we research. It implies a conscious awareness of being interconnected with all entities at all times and explores the affective-sentimental of “feeling the feet on the ground” and requires the deconstruction of objectivity. *Sentipensar* calls for an exercise of explanation –akin to reflexive positionality–that engages with the larger social structures that manipulate, consciously or unconsciously, our rationality (Cepeda H., 2017, p. 15):

[...]
 The ontological *sentipensar*,
 as a *research method*,
 requires the non-pretentious facticity
 of the encounter with others,
 listening
 next to the fire,
 learning with humility
 from the indigenous, the farmer,
 the *taita*⁵⁷, the grandfather,
 the popular wisdom,
 paying attention respectfully to their *saying*
 just as respectfully as we read a scientific paper
 [...]

But while Fals Borda’s work of *sentipensantes* planted a seed and demonstrated the importance of grounding our work in social justice, political commitments and exercises of reflection, it is still important to acknowledge that the work of *sentipensantes* in Colombia was often seen through a male gaze that presented predominantly the *campesino* (male) rather than the *campesina* (female) lived experiences (Rodríguez Castro, 2021).

⁵⁷ The traditional male authority in native indigenous peoples (note from Cepeda H., 2017, p. 17).

Sentipensar as a root for the methodology allows me to centre (and immerse myself) in the knowledge and experiences of the participants who walk/feel/think/live the city I research, and adopting a reflexive feminist standpoint allows me to decentre the male experience as the main universal experience. As a feminist mestiza *enraizada*⁵⁸ in the north of Mexico, I view *sentipensar* as a decolonial approach to situated research that rejects the myth of disembodied knowledge and seeks to problematise our position as researchers. As a *sentipensante*, I interpret the task of embodying our research efforts with dual meaning. Firstly, as a way to reflect on the theoretical position from where I research, and secondly, as a way to reflect on how my body relates to the field, fieldwork, and my research practices, that is, the corporeal (embodied) experience of where I chose to walk, the circumstances surrounding *mis caminares*⁵⁹, and how that in turn also shapes my findings. I implement a feminist-informed approach to *sentipensar* in order to understand women's urban experiences/feelings/thoughts and produced embodied knowledge *for* women who use public transportation in Saltillo. I seek to listen next to the fire and learn with humility from mothers, grandmothers, the *trabajadoras del hogar*⁶⁰ and the everyday women who walk/feel/live the city.

In what follows I build an argument for *sentipensar* as a feminist approach to social science and knowledge production. I engage with issues of researcher's positionality and method selection and implementation and candidly reflect on the challenges in the field and how my own experiences and background shaped my research endeavours. The argument of this paper is to build a case for *sentipensar* as a methodology for feminist human geographers that seek to problematise the myth of the city as a neutral production of space and who wish to produce knowledge that decentres the male experiences of the city. I present a critical account of my research endeavours and selected methods as my attempt to produce feminist research, and as an illustration of what *sentipensar* as a methodology from a feminist standpoint can look like. I am not, however, claiming to solve the problems of doing emancipatory/feminist/reflexive research, but by sharing my accounts rooted in *sentipensar*, I am contributing to the re-imagination of research that is *for* women.

Sentipensar la ciudad (to think and to feel the city)

Who I am and where I stand has a significant impact in the way I shape my research and how I interact with others. I was born and raised in Saltillo and grew up using public transportation regularly. As I grew up, the decision to keep using public transportation in my city became a political one. As a feminist interested in sustainable transport and mobility justice issues, I actively wanted to reject car culture, and it was important for me to remain exposed to the experience of being a woman using Saltillo's transport system so that my approach at envisioning a gender-conscious city could come from the knowledge of

⁵⁸ Spanish for 'rooted'

⁵⁹ Spanish for 'my walks'. I use this term to refer more broadly to the political dynamics of my walking practices.

⁶⁰ Spanish for women who are domestic employees.

living the city. But there are underlying privileges that allowed me to use public transport as a political decision: at the time, I was a privileged middle-class woman who lived in a wealthy neighbourhood. I was also privately educated and had the financial and social capital that could allow me to remove myself from inefficient or uncomfortable experiences if needed.

My understanding of how the public transport network functions has been influenced and expanded by academic epistemologies throughout my years as a young professional and graduate student. Even though I have had first-hand experiences of sexual assault as a woman using public transportation, those experiences came from a very specific lens due to my class privilege— my personal aftermath of being assaulted on the bus looked different than for women without links to local government officials or media outlets. I was assaulted and the local authority tried to victim-blame me for the events; in that sense I share experiences with many women in Saltillo who use public transport. However, after the events took place local media outlets reached out to me to press the local authority into action and aided my case for reparations (Mexicano, 2019a, 2019b); by contrast, many women live these episodes as part of their everyday experiences and are systematically revictimised until they desist from reporting altogether (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2022). I research the public transportation system of the city in which I grew up; a transport system I am intimately familiar with, and in many ways, I am both an insider and an outsider to this because of my positionality.

Feminist research has challenged the notion of a static insider/outsider dichotomy. As Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) argued, this relationship is fluid and constantly shifting because as women researchers studying women's issues, the state of outsider/insider is negotiated throughout fieldwork. The knowledge of other women's experiences and our own are mutually informing because we share the condition of being a woman, but it would be simplistic to assume that all women identify and relate with each other by virtue of gender alone. Our shared experiences as a consequence of gender are not sufficient to override structural inequalities of social status, class, age, race, ethnicity, sexuality and disabilities (Cotterill, 1992).

Acknowledging my own positionality became a crucial part of designing the methodology of my feminist approach to research: it was key to recognise my privilege and opinions and situate them in relation to other women in Saltillo and my research. My standpoint of enquiry turned to women situated across various intersections of oppression and their relationship with public transportation: How do gender-related factors such as care work and gender-based violence shape the mobilities and access to the city of women in Saltillo? And how might we reimagine an alternative, gender-just transport system for Saltillo?

The selection of methods also was a fundamental aspect of creating a feminist approach to *sentipensar*. I opted for a mixed methods approach for multiple reasons: on a technical level, evidence shows that

mixed methods approaches can unearth unintended impacts and practical constraints that might be remain hidden in quantitative assessments (Lucas, Philips and Verlinghieri, 2022). If the goal is to bring the sexist structures of society to a more egalitarian one, then situating the individual personal experiences (qualitative accounts) within the broader socio-economic structures (critical quantitative methods) can provide a path to connect experience to understanding (Jayaratne, 1983; Maynard, 1994). As a *sentipensante*, I was also interested in exploring the dynamic of thinking and feeling about how to bring a corporal (embodied) aspect to the collection of qualitative and quantitative data in the field—how reflecting about my feet on the ground could inform my production of quantitative knowledge. I was interested in producing analytical data that could be tracked, georeferenced, and statistically analysed over time in order to create a reference point for future studies and as a way to produce knowledge *for* women that can be revisited and built upon. I also wanted to ground women's individual experiences in the collectiveness of living and enduring the city as a woman as a way to begin charting a path forward for women's emancipation in the city.

But how does one access women's experiences and perceptions of GBV? And what level of access am I seeking to obtain? *Sentipensar* as a methodology allowed me to reframe my role and reimagine how fieldwork could look like: it was not just about asking the participants to walk/feel/think the city, but to do so alongside them. I wanted to immerse myself in the participants everyday experiences and encourage them to share their *sentipensares* with me while navigating the city together. An important element of decolonising research and rooting my practices in a feminist approach to *sentipensar* is the reflection process on power dynamics and differentials. It allowed me to put into perspective how even when engaging in practices of walking the city alongside participants, our walks, and the interpretation of them, would not necessarily be the same. The process of critically reflecting on our *sentipensares* and the motivation behind our research practices should also involve an exploration of the power dynamics present in our endeavours—while I have elaborated on my positionality as both an insider and outsider, there is still work left to do in exploring how my situatedness brought about power dynamics in my research practices.

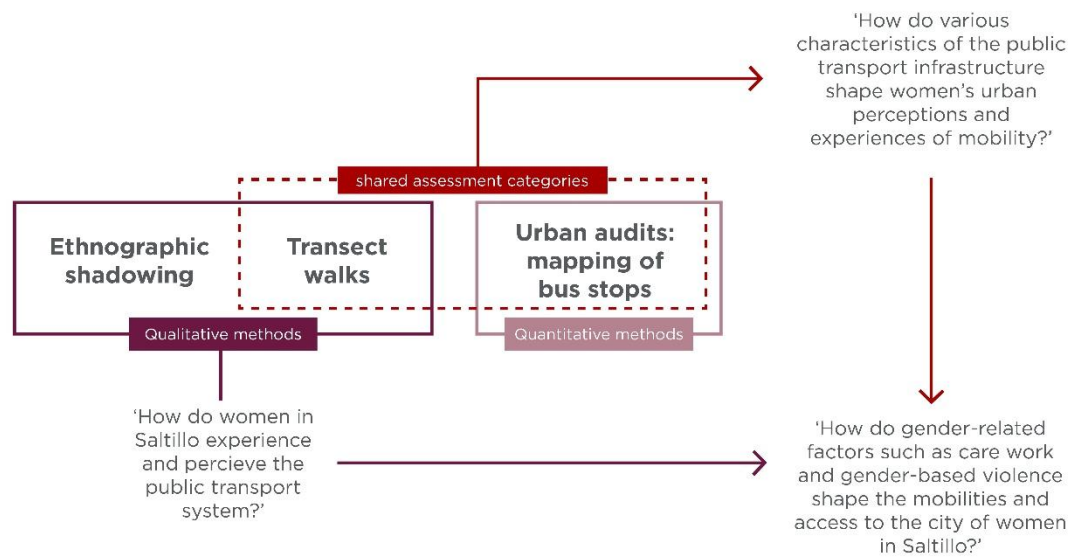
There are inherent power relations in the production of knowledge through the study of others; research is embedded in social relationships in which there are power differentials in favour of the knower (researchers) who assume power to define the process of research (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983). When researchers reveal aspects of their identity without engaging in a larger analysis of how her positionality shapes and is shaped by the power arrangements within specific context, then they fail to provide a meaningful account of how power organises knowledge production. Adopting a feminist standpoint is not about erasing these complicated dynamics, but about looking behind the curtain of our own research process and studying how position and privilege influenced our production of knowledge and research endeavours (McCorkel and Myers, 2003).

As much as I am being forthcoming about my *sentipensar* and positionality, this still comes with inherent power dynamics that no candid or reflexive accounts can erase. As feminist researchers in the field, there are various ways in which we can work to try and flatten the power disparities between researcher and researched, and still, the power imbalance will always remain to a certain degree because of our role as ultimate narrators and creators of the research process itself. Perhaps the largest disparity of power that favours the researcher is getting to define other people's realities for them, and for a wider audience (Cotterill, 1992). Reports and publications that stem from the research process are *our* interpretations of people's lives and experiences regardless of how involved they were during the data collection stage—we get to set the scene, articulate and analyse the participants and how it is linked to broader structural issues, and how it should be interpreted. From a *sentipensante* point of view, reflecting on and critiquing these power dynamics is a key process in decolonising the production of knowledge. It allows us to dismantle disembodied, “objective and universal” colonial practices by engaging and acknowledging the larger social structures that shape our rationality (Cepeda H., 2017; Rodríguez Castro, 2021).

The methods: implementation, challenges, and reflections

In order to narrow down the scope of my inquiry, I created two support research questions before reflecting on the methods that would suit the project. My supporting research questions 1) how do women in Saltillo experience and perceive the public transport system? and 2) how do various characteristics of the public transport infrastructure shape women's urban perceptions and experiences of mobility? aimed to collectively answer how we could envision an alternative, gender-just transport system for Saltillo. My approach to these questions was to develop a feminist methodology rooted in *sentipensar* in order to co-construct that vision alongside women in Saltillo (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Research methods in relation to research questions.



Source: Own elaboration, January 2023

Transect walks and ethnographic shadowing as qualitative methods enables me to get a first-hand experience women's day-to-day lives in different levels: during the former we walked a pre-planned route around the city while reflecting on participants' *sentipensares*; during the latter I got one-on-one time with each participant and walked alongside them for a day to understand their context and challenges. I combined these qualitative approaches with urban audits as a quantitative method to implement a mixed method approach rooted in *sentipensar*: I audited 340 bus stops and walked almost 200km across the urban area of Saltillo from one bus stop to the next as a way to explore the urban areas of the city that are not part of my usual routine due to my class privilege. It was important to situate my stance not only by framing it in feminist standpoint theory and building a critical reflexive analysis, but by embodying my research efforts through my walking practices, feeling my feet on the ground and letting the lived experience of walking the city inform my understandings.

1 Transect walks (*caminatas de exploración urbana*)

Transect walks are a participatory research tool that can be useful to explore human geography. They can unveil insights that could not have been gained through analysis of texts or interviews because the activity of walking and talking unearths feelings and thoughts that directly respond to the experience of navigating a place in real time (Paasche and Sidaway, 2010). I approached transect walks as a flexible,

creative method and implemented two ‘hybrid’ walks, a mix of walking and use of public transport, since I wanted participants to reflect on their experiences using public transportation and bus stops in Saltillo. The goal of the walks was to prompt participants to engage in informal dialogue and share their *sentipensares* about the city and the public transport system. For this method, I collaborated with Triana Zepeda-Saldaña from the feminist collective *Transeúntas*⁶¹ in order to implement both transect walks together safely.

Both transect walks happened over the course of one weekend during August 2023. At the highest point, temperatures reached almost 40°C and these conditions also impacted the walks. In total, Triana and I welcomed 19 adult women participants, some of whom had caring responsibilities and brought along four underage companions (all girls, aged 5- to 16-years-old). Both walks had the same start and finish point, but the walk and bus segment varied for each alongside the bus stops that we used and assessed.

I designed a ‘participant assessment booklet’ and invited participants to log their *sentipensares* related to four categories: pavements and walkability; road safety; signposting; and street furniture and comfort. These categories stem from the Technical Index of Walkability developed by the Inter-American Development Bank and match the ones considered in the urban audit component of the methodology (Sabino *et al.*, 2022). My focus on their *sentipensares* allowed me to bring topics of discussion and insights that can only come from day-to-day knowledge and would otherwise remain unnoticed by a technical assessment. Throughout the walk and bus journey participants shared previous experiences related to how care work or gender-based violence had shaped the way they move around the city.

Both transect walks finished at the local cultural centre *Casa Floral* where participants had the opportunity to rest before jumping into a discussion session after the walk. I opened the session by asking to revisit the path I had created for this walk and reenvision it through their *sentipensares*: I asked them to re-draw the route we travelled and to point out the positive and negative things that stood out to them while they discussed amongst themselves (see Fig. 2). These sessions were semi-structured, and participants were free to explore topics of conversation that were not necessarily the central point of the walk but that were relevant to them and their urban experiences. As a result, participants engaged with issues related to gender-based violence and care work in relation to their urban experiences, but also brought issues like climate change, police brutality and systematic corruption to the discussion table and how these also impact their urban experiences.

Figure 2. Reimagining the transect walk through their *sentipensares*

⁶¹ *Transeúntas* is a feminist collective based in Guadalajara, Mexico who implement transect walks as a way to reclaim women’s right to the city.



Source: Own elaboration, April 2025.

There were multiple challenges around the implementation of the transect walks for this research project. While moderating the walks, Triana and I had to halt traffic to allow the participants to safely cross the street. This did not allow me or her to be fully immersed in the participants' conversations while walking to or from a place during the walks and it exposed us to confrontational interactions with aggressive car drivers. During the implementation of the first transect walk, while boarding the second bus on our way to *Casa Floral*, the group boarded a bus route full of men and received lascivious looks and catcalls, the environment suddenly became tense and hostile. All participants descended safely from the bus shortly after boarding but this still impacted the rest of the walk and the discussion session that followed.

Sharing *sentipensares* alongside women opened the opportunity to produce knowledge that decentred the androcentric lived experiences of the city. Framing the transect walks in the context of *sentipensar* legitimised participants' urban experiences and *sentipensares* by counting them as valuable sources of information and, at least during the discussion section about the perils of being a public transport user, we were all women sharing *sentipensares* on a levelled ground. Participants could have reflected on their lived experiences of the transport system through a focus group approach or by only implementing the discussion section of the method and not the walking/busing, but these reflections would have not tapped as deep without the embodying of the research process. It was the act of *sentipensar* their walk and bus experience that broadened their discussions and arguments.

While I tried to mitigate the power disparities between the participants and me by letting them lead the semi-structured discussion, the imbalance remained there. To begin with, participants joined the

transect walks I had pre-planned, meaning they did not get a say on what area of the city we would walk or what bus routes we would use. They also qualitatively audited the bus stops I had pre-selected for them on the basis of the sample I had set for the quantitative urban audits' method. I chose the categories of assessment and provided questions to prompt them to reflect on specific characteristic for each section and in a way, this also shaped what things they were mostly focusing on while walking.

2 Ethnographic shadowing (*seguimiento etnográfico*)

I wanted to explore women's perceptions and experiences of their urban mobilities. Transect walks had allowed me to create an environment where women with various life experiences could come together and *sentipensar* the city while walking and using public transport together, however, these activities unfolded within a somewhat controlled environment. We still had to navigate the uncertain and unreliable transport system of Saltillo in summer heat, but participants relied on me and Triana to navigate them, and I had carefully planned the route for a 3.5-hour activity and covered their bus fares and refreshments. During the discussion session some participants jokingly commented on how positive the experience of walking the city had been for them during this activity: they felt comfortable surrounded by a group of women sharing *sentipensares* and opinions about the city; they felt safe enough to drop their guard and not feel the need to remain hypervigilant of their environment; they had crossed the streets easily and without rushing knowing that Triana and I were navigating (and halting) traffic for them to cross safely.

In many ways transect walks prompted nuanced discussions about public transport and the city but in some others, it was also an artificial bubble experience where participants did not necessarily live or reflect on the everyday experience—the juggling of care work responsibilities and the financial and time constraints. The decision to incorporate shadowing to the methodology came from confronting my own positionality and place of power as a narrator: whose realities and journeys am I paying attention to? What opinions am I incorporating in this study and what realities are those opinions reflecting? In order to understand those daily, often hidden and quiet struggles, I needed to walk the walk and listen to women's *sentipensares* in context.

I developed ethnographic shadowing through a three-stage approach: 1) starting-point interviews, 2) shadowing, and 3) exit interviews. The initial goal with the starting-point interviews was to familiarise myself with the participants' daily routine and get a sense for aspects of their lives that may have an impact on how they move around the city: the responsibilities they need to manage; the constraints that limit their mobilities; and the support networks in place that aid their everyday. Mainly, I needed to establish a connection with them and rapport to make them feel comfortable around me so during the

shadowing they would not feel monitored or invaded. During the shadowing stage of this method I documented their journey, mode of transport, expenses, waiting time at bus stops, and their interactions with the urban environment. During the exit interview I created a space where participants were encouraged to reflect on the barriers and obstacles they need to manage on their daily trips, as well as their support networks. I had the opportunity to shadow 10 participants (aged 18- to 67-years-old) over a day in their day-to-day routine. Participants were all women, of varying socioeconomic backgrounds, levels of education, and assigned care work and paid work status.

The immersive experience of walking the city together was equally helpful and stimulating for the participants and for me. At the beginning, during the starting-point interview, most participants described their everyday journeys as average or normal. Some women mentioned feeling uneasy when crossing big intersections or using crowded buses when navigating the city, but overall, none of the participants mentioned struggling to navigate the city due to gender-related issues like care work or GBV. As I shadowed them, I quietly realised their routines often involved walking next to urban highways with no pavement, crossing complex and dangerous intersections, and navigating unlit or crowded spaces during dark hours.

After we had our shadowing day together, during the exit interview, almost all participants began their interactions with me by commenting on how worried they had been for me and my safety during the shadowing. I had remained a few meters behind them during the shadowing and while I always had a visual of them when walking or moving about, they did not always have eyes on me, and this caused stress for most participants. A few of them were concerned about me navigating the streets safely (mainly crossing streets, dodging traffic) and the rest of the participants were concerned about me getting followed, catcalled, or left behind (alone) in what they perceived to be unsafe areas of the city. Their comments opened up a door for us to explore the participants' *sentipensares* that had been hiding under the surface. Participants reflected on the “everyday things” that make them feel uneasy and began elaborating on the rationale behind their decisions: where they sit when they get on the bus, what part of the bus stop (or which one) they wait at and why, what time they decide to leave home for work or school and what walking route they decide to take depending on multiple factors (Infante-Vargas, 2025). Shadowing as qualitative research tool opened the door to more accurate testimonies from participants but also allowed me to connect with them more intimately: we now shared *sentipensares* because I had lived what they live—the hidden, the quotidian. In a sense, the participants and I had walked the same walk, that is what allowed us to connect and co construct shared *sentipensares* about their lived experiences. However, my walk was different from theirs because after we had finished their participation I got to walk back to my life, and they stayed living their everyday, continuing the walk.

For all the positives that this method represents, there is still room for a nuanced discussion about the power relations that evolved dynamically with every participant. Unlike with the transect walks, I did

not cover the participants' bus fares on the day of the shadowing and perhaps as a consequence, a major point during both interviews was their financial and time constraints. Ethnographic shadowing required a lot more analysis and interpretation of participants' *sentipensares* in a way that contrasts with the data collected for the transect walks. During the semi-structured discussion for the transect walks, participants got to reflect on the experience of walking the city as women, and their reflections strongly guided my rendering of results. However, with the participants for the ethnographic shadowing, I needed to analyse and interpret how the various constraints and particularities they shared with me intersected with broader structural inequalities in order to point at the larger issue within their individual experiences. This meant that my role and privilege as the narrator and interpreter of their *sentipensares* further complicated the power dynamics.

There is also a power dynamic embedded in the process of creating categories for participants to fit into and assigning them a label. The need to contrast participants experiences and labelling them confronted me with my power as the narrator of their *sentipensares* in a similar way to how Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) faced a dilemma of placing women in categories. For them, it became problematic to label participants as 'not carers' because most women move from unpaid work to paid work during their lifetime, and only a few fit totally within the dichotomy. Failing to acknowledge the power imbalance of being the one with the power to label participants would have thwarted my attempts at decolonising my research practices. While there could be an argument for avoiding labelling, using categories as a tool to group participants is a useful way to identify factors that may exacerbate women's journeys (i.e., income, caring responsibilities, age, number of dependants) and draw conclusions as to how to address their needs through policy or research. In my case, I decided that a fitting label would be one that reflected their role within their sphere as women co-habiting with others, making the distinction for those participants who had direct full-time caring responsibilities assigned.

The issue of safeguarding measures for participants was a sensitive subject too. For many women, revisiting violent episodes through retelling can be a triggering experience; particularly if their stories are not met in the right environment. However, within the context of GBV, the naming of events and giving meaning to words can help individuals grapple with the injustices committed against them. Women can find validation and support through retelling their experiences of assault and sexual violence (Brison, 2002). There are risks present in research participation related to triggering issues of GBV, but risks are also present in not doing research related to women's experiences of sexual assault and violence. We run the risk to reinforce societal avoidance of this issue, ultimately harming survivors (McClain and Amar, 2013). To thwart victims and survivors of sexual abuse from sharing their experiences because of exposure risks can also rob them of their agency and decision-making ability to give informed consent for research participation (Young and Maguire, 2003).

Having this in mind, my approach to shadowing required careful and reflexive planning when it came to the type of questions asked, the environment where participants would be welcomed and the overall atmosphere of this activity for them. One of the challenges was to provide a safe space for them while also recognising that I am not professionally equipped to adequately handle an emotional outbreak if it were to occur. I teamed up with Atziri Herrera-Valero, the deputy director of the immediate attention department at the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims (CEAV) of Coahuila, Mexico to provide an emotional outlet for all participants from a trained professional.

3 Urban audits to bus stops (*auditorías urbanas*)

Rooting a quantitative approach in *sentipensar* felt more intricate and complex than the qualitative approaches for this research project. A significant part of that complexity stemmed from my own preconceptions of what a quantitative methodology should look like: representative sample sizes; high confidence levels; clear-cut assessment categories; in sum I thought to provide an objective and detached snapshot of what bus stops look like in Saltillo. But urban space is not produced in a neutral way, and our interpretation of space, even interpretations that come strictly from quantitative assessments, are not neutral either (Matrix, 1984; McDowell, 1993b; Massey, 1994a). There is an objective aura about traditional quantitative research that makes it convincing and influential because it is ‘detached’ but personal standpoints impinge on the research process in many ways: from theory formulation and interpretation, to development of design and data collection and analysis (Jayaratne, 1983). Our opinions, positionality, and lived experiences shape our research, what we analyse, and what lens we analyse it through. In order to frame my quantitative approach through *sentipensar* as a feminist, I had to reflect on what experiences would influence my perception and assessment of the bus stops and how my situatedness would be reflected in my findings.

So, what constitutes an embodied quantitative method? And how can we achieve this as feminist researchers? As a *sentipensante* approaching quantitative methods from a feminist stance, I drew from my dual interpretation of ‘producing embodied research’ and related my efforts to the corporeal experience of conducting fieldwork— I needed to reflect on *how* I collected data and what this positionality would reflect. Would it be from my desktop using databases of satellite imaging and if so, what and who would that information represent? Would it involve walking, cycling or driving, and how would each of these approaches shape my views?

For this method, I collaborated with Óscar Mesta-Rodríguez, a local activist for pedestrian and cyclists’ rights, who also has a background in urban planning and understands the urban challenges that face Saltillo in terms of sustainable and active mobility. In total, Óscar and I walked almost 200km in the

span of two weeks technically assessing 340 bus stops across the urban area of Saltillo. My decision to walk was rooted in *sentipensar* from a researchers' standpoint. We could have opted to use a private vehicle to carry out all audits quicker and more efficiently, and it certainly would have been an easier process for us. But it would have shielded us (literally and figuratively) from living the city at a street-level, at human speed, and in turn, this would have also shaped our understanding and assessment of the bus stops. We could have also chosen to use bicycles to get around from one bus stop to the next, but our understanding of the city would have then reflected the many challenges that cyclists face in car-centric cities like Saltillo. Either option would have impacted our judgement, shaped our experiences of the city and we would have failed to *sentipensar* the challenges that "can only be felt on foot" (Middleton, 2010, p. 582).

The local transport authority in Saltillo does not have a map with the location of the bus stops across the city, and in order for us to set a sample size of bus stops to audit, we first needed to conduct a rapid assessment analysis (RSA) and map the location of the bus stops. The study presents an analysis of the bus stops from 7 out of 20 bus routes. Firstly, I mapped all bus routes with Google My Maps and began looking at the visual information available on Google Street View to save pins for each bus stop depending on the type—informal, *parabus*⁶², or *poste*⁶³—and drew from Óscar's and I first-hand knowledge as users of the transport system to recall informal bus stops across the city. However, the information available on Google Street View was not entirely reliable since a few areas of the city did not have any visual information available or the latest dataset available dated back to 2008. This is where fieldwork began for us. Óscar and I conducted fact-finding trips for each bus route and began cross referencing the information I had mapped out on the RSA for each route. We rode each bus route on three occasions and began marking down informal bus stops as we rode each bus route and corroborated them on each lap. We amended the original map created during the RSA where necessary and incorporated all informal bus stops. I wanted to have a reliable snapshot and estimate of the bus stops across the city in order to set a sample size, but relying only on the information available online would have skewed our approach leaving marginalised neighbourhoods out of the picture. Óscar and I needed to walk the city from top to bottom to get a reliable idea of the amount of bus stops we were going to be dealing with.

A key challenge while conducting this methodology was discerning between coincidental stops and informal bus stops, that is, places where the bus stopped because a passenger requested so but did not necessarily constitute an informal bus stop—where the residents of a given neighbourhood would gather to wait for the bus despite no sign, shelter, or official signposting. As we conducted each fact-finding trip, Óscar and I informally engaged with the bus drivers and talked about some informal bus stops and

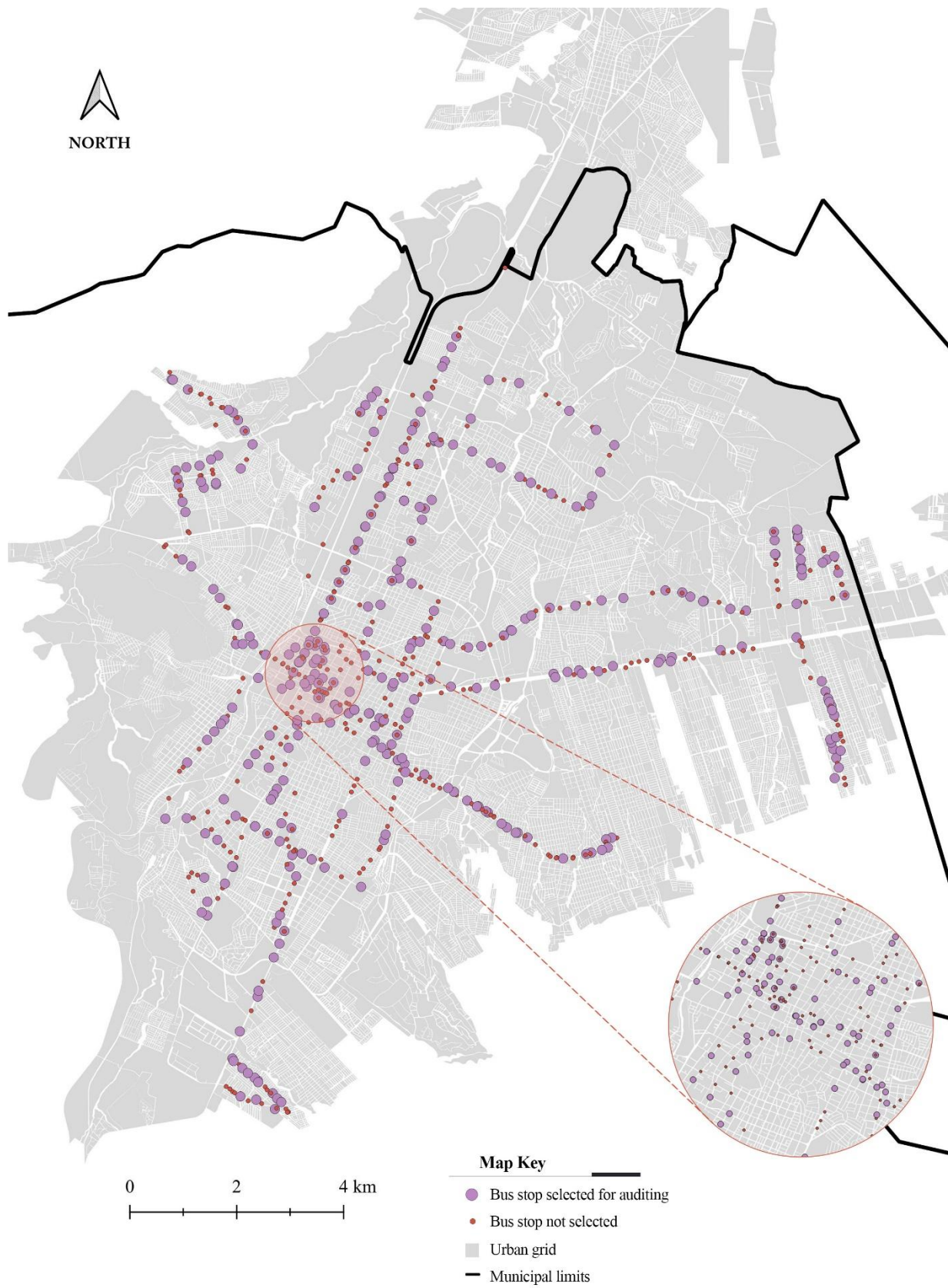
⁶² Semi-sheltered bus stop

⁶³ Vertical signposting (pole)

other official bus stops that they did not service (and why), among other things like their working conditions and their perceptions of safety. This was not originally planned as part of the methodology, but engaging with them allowed us to deepen our understanding of the transport system network and its' operational side, and this informed our understanding of the user experience going forward. In total, we located 751 bus stops and audited 340 (see Fig. 3).

The technical audits for each bus stop shared assessment categories with the urban audits carried out by participants during the transect walks. For instance, when assessing the pavement where a bus stop is located, participants of the transect walks were asked to reflect on their perceptions of it, while the technical assessment gathered data like width, type of material, presence of accessibility ramps, amongst other entry points. We evaluated characteristics of the built environment like type of bus stop, materials and conditions of the pavement, signposting, road safety, and comfort and street furniture using a Likert scale referencing the methodology developed by the Inter-American Development Bank for walkability assessments (Sabino *et al.*, 2022).

Figure 3. Mapping of bus stops in Saltillo



Source: Own elaboration (2024) with partial information from IMPLAN 2010 and INEGI 2020.

This method was challenging in more than one aspect. Firstly, fieldwork had to be carried out during the early morning hours or closer to sunset to avoid temperatures of over 36° that could cause heatstroke and dehydration. Secondly, road safety was a significant concern for us while navigating the city on foot. Cars and trucks would often speed past us or cut us off at intersections—perhaps because they had not seen us walking, but arguably because overall the road design in Saltillo leaves pedestrians in vulnerable positions while prioritising car infrastructure. And thirdly, I was catcalled, ogled, followed, and nearly abducted while conducting fieldwork for the urban audit component of this research project. I was confronted with my own positionality to the field and how my status as a woman overshadowed my identity as a researcher; it impacted the way Óscar and I carried out data collection and our perceptions of safety. This event reframed our *sentipensares* of fieldwork and made us reflect on how different it had been for each of us because of our perceived genders (Infante-Vargas and Mesta-Rodríguez, 2025b).

When implementing quantitative methods that require fieldwork data collection, I argue that feminist researchers can benefit from approaching this work through a methodology rooted in *sentipensar* in order to reflect on how their positionality and opinions are shaping the decisions that make up the project. My positionality to the field and how I carried out data collection mattered just as much as my positionality to the participants in the qualitative section of my research, and *sentipensar* allowed me to navigate those power dynamics in my endeavours as a feminist researcher. Moreover, walking from one bus stop to the next gave us situational context and infused much needed nuance to our interpretation of the bus stops (Infante-Vargas and Mesta-Rodríguez, 2025a).

Our walking between bus stops allowed us to build an analysis criteria rooted in our embodied fieldwork practices and interpret the city feeling our feet on the ground. The context of our discovery was shaped by our individual positionalities as well as the social structures that surrounded us (McCorkel and Myers, 2003). Therefore, the results and conclusions that stemmed from our fieldwork experience would have been significantly different had we decided to rely solely on the information available through Google Maps; if we had chosen to use bikes or cars to get from one bus stop to another; or if I had decided to carry out the data collection on my own. The goal of producing embodied quantitative data challenged me to confront the way I conduct research that is mindful and reflexive of where I am standing, what I am seeing, how and where I walk.

Closing remarks

For decades, feminist geographers have called for urban design strategies that consider women's experiences in the urban space (Valentine, 1989; Wekerle, 2000; Ortiz Guitart, 2007; Moser, 2009; Ortiz Escalante, 2014; Jirón and Gómez, 2018). While there is not just one way to do research with a feminist scope, I argue that a feminist-informed approach rooted in *sentipensar* can be a tool to help

better represent women's urban experiences and provide much needed depth and nuance to the conceptualisation of the city and space through a gender lens.

Mind and body, humans and nature, and nature and society coexist in a harmonious balance in Abya Yala's indigenous ontologies. *Sentipensar* as a way of knowing centres that interdependent cosmovision and challenges colonial rationality and its knowledge systems. Adopting this practice for our research endeavours can allow us to build embodied and situated knowledge that can dismantle objective, universal, and androcentric perspectives. While *sentipensar* shares characteristics of reflexivity and feminist standpoint theory, its root is located around the goal of decolonising knowledge production and has been around for centuries, embedded in indigenous communities' practices, long before the development of critical standpoint theory in western feminism. It places a heavy onus on reflecting on our physical positionality and our corporeal experiences and questioning how that impacts our knowledge production. However, *sentipensar* is not necessarily a feminist approach to knowledge production in its own right and as feminists we must seek to move our focus from the *taita* to the grandmothers and the everyday women who walk/feel/live the city. A feminist approach to *sentipensar* will seek to problematise our knowledge practices (whose voice counts?) and incorporate candid reflections about our positionality as researchers aiming to produce knowledge that advances women's position in the world (how and where am I standing theoretically and physically?).

In my goal of questioning whose knowledge counts in order to decolonise my research practices, I encountered and created power dynamics that are present in my findings and analysis. Nevertheless, in order for feminist research to achieve its goal, we cannot shy away from this process of interpretation and analysis because that is precisely what feminist research should do if the goal is to produce knowledge *for* women that can advance women's emancipation (Jayaratne, 1983; Maynard, 1994). Our processes of reflexivity should entail acknowledging the complexity of the relationships as insider/outsider, researcher/researched and engage with questions about whose voice is my data representing? Whose experiences am I not including and therefore should disclose in order to bring more validity to my production of knowledge?

Doing feminist research rooted in *sentipensar*, however, will look different for every scholar because our positionalities, context, and relation to the issue at hand are different. The findings in my research and my methodological approach are unique because they are ultimately based on a multilayered standpoint, and a set of relations to the project/participants that were dynamic and shifting (McCorkel and Myers, 2003). My approach to *sentipensar* as a feminist mestiza comes from a specific, personal standpoint, and I argue that other feminist researchers should address questions of power, knowledge, and method locally, in a piece-by-piece analysis of their specific circumstances of research in order to reflexively engage with *sentipensar* as a methodology.

Paper Two. Tracing women's patterns of mobility through ethnographic shadowing; time, money and care work constraints. A case study in Saltillo, Mexico.

Authorship statement

This paper is currently under review at *Mobilities*, submitted on the 21 July 2025. I was in charge of the conceptualisation, structure, and implementation of the research methods used for this paper. I carried out all interviews and ethnographic shadowings reflected in this Chapter. I was also in charge of all writing, editing, and manufacturing of all images and figures presented here. I collaborated with Atziri Herrera-Valero as part of the safeguarding measures for participants and her role and level of involvement is clearly stated in this paper. Harriet Gray and Joshua Kirshner assisted by providing critical feedback and copyediting corrections as part of their role as Ph.D. supervisors. This paper is of my sole authorship.

Introduction

Women's urban experiences can reveal complex mobility patterns shaped by gender-based violence, and the strain of having to juggle paid work and (often unpaid) care work. Many women face sexual harassment on a daily basis and navigate their urban contexts with fears of gender-based violence in a way that modifies how, when, and where they travel (Macmillan, Nierobisz and Welsh, 2000; Pain, 2001; Quinones, 2020; Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021). Care work responsibilities also further complicate women's mobility patterns, adding limitations and constraints through tasks that require a daily/weekly routines, systematic schedules, and mandatory completion, often without financial compensation on top of other work related responsibilities (Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017; Jirón and Gómez, 2018; Sánchez-De Madariaga and Zucchini, 2020). These gender-related factors influence women's movement through the city, creating a ripple effect that impacts their quality of life and well-being (Junqueira, Nunes and Leda Sabino, 2019; Montoya-Robledo *et al.*, 2020)

This paper presents the story of 10 women in Saltillo, Mexico who use the public buses system as their main mode of transportation. In it, I focus on how care work responsibilities shape their day-to-day routines⁶⁴ and how the current transport and its associated infrastructure help or hinder their mobilities. I view and analyse their urban experiences through the theorisation of mobility justice and delineate how their financial, temporal, and spatial constraints are examples of mobility injustice at the bodily

⁶⁴ There are other factors that shape women's mobilities like fears of assault and gender-based violence. However, they are outside of the scope of this paper and forthcoming research should pay attention to these issues as well.

and urban level (Sheller, 2018, 2020) in order to argue that the “seemingly individual” challenges they face are not individual at all; they are part of the gender load women bear and that the constraints they face as a result of the current transport system and its associated infrastructure are part of the continuum of violence against women and gender inequalities (Benalcázar-Luna, Venegas and de Inglés, 2015; Garza and Derbez, 2020).

In this paper I present my findings from a three-stage ethnographic approach including starting-point and exit interviews. I discuss how women’s urban experiences in public transport are intimately tied to systemic gender inequalities and focus on analysing three main issues affecting participants’ mobility patterns: 1) financial constraints, 2) time restrictions, and 3) unpaid care work and paid work dynamics. I build on conceptualisations of mobility justice to show that women’s personal urban experiences are linked to the current state of the transport system and its associated infrastructure and policies. The main contribution of this paper is analysing participants’ personal constraints and drawing a line that connects their urban experiences to the continuum of violence against women and the perpetuation of systemic gender inequalities.

This paper is structured as follows. Firstly, I present a literature review where I elaborate on how money, time, and reproductive labour shape women’s urban experiences and mobility patterns. Secondly, I introduce Saltillo and its current transport system. Thirdly, I present the methodology and a brief summary of each participant, and later I elaborate on the participants’ mobility patterns, constraints, and lived experiences. I conclude with reflections on gender-conscious transport policies and their impacts on redressing systemic inequalities.

Literature review

In the 1970s, feminist geographers began pushing for the theorising of the public space through a gender lens. In 1979, Wekerle highlighted that cities were planned by men, for men and that it would be impossible to understand women’s place in the city without simultaneously analysing their place in the house. In order to understand the extent and nature of women’s participation in productive activities (paid work) and in the public sphere, Benería (1979) argued that it is essential to analyse women’s role in biological and labour reproduction. As women began to navigate the private and public spheres, their ongoing domestic duties largely remained unchanged, in fact, their workload doubled (Harman, 1983; Pain, 1991a, 2001; Greed, 2008; Bardasi and Wodon, 2010).

Women’s incorporation in the “productive” sphere has been accelerating rapidly, but men’s involvement in care work has not grown proportionally (Pain, 1991b; Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017). Reproductive labour and care work are concepts that encompass work that is often unpaid and carried out historically by women to tend to the needs of children, elderly, and other dependants, including the work needed to run a household (Sánchez-De Madariaga and Zucchini, 2020). Importantly, care work

not only relates to sickness or feeding, but also to the everyday varied activities of taking kids to soccer and ballet classes, play dates, accompanying elderly people to hospital appointments, and supporting people with disabilities on their everyday journeys (Jirón and Gómez, 2018). It involves mandatory everyday tasks that require scheduling, planning, systematisation, and coordination with others in order to be carried out (Jirón, Carrasco and Rebolledo, 2020). When men engage in care work related tasks, they perform a different set of activities that concentrate largely in the execution aspect; men will likely take the kids to the playground or drive them to or from school while women are in charge of mandatory tasks that require careful planning, organisation, and coordination with others for their completion (Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017; Jirón, Carrasco and Rebolledo, 2020).

For many women, care responsibilities are a reality from a very early age and continue dynamically throughout their lives. In Latin American countries, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has estimated that unpaid care work could represent from 15% to over 24% of certain countries' gross domestic product (CEPAL, 2016). Since the availability of good quality services to care for children, people with disabilities and the elderly is scarce in Latin America, it is mostly women who sustain the care economy (CEPAL, 2016; Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017).

Care work responsibilities have a significant impact in women's resources, particularly time. In 1977, Vickery coined the term "time poverty" and highlighted that household members not only present differences in financial income but in time resources, too. People engaged in paid work face time poverty when they do not have enough time to meet their basic needs for rest and leisure because of excessively long work hours (Carmichael *et al.*, 2024). Time is an important determinant of human well-being and shapes one's ability to invest in human capital, build social networks, spend time with family, and remain engaged with cultural or political events (Qi and Dong, 2018).

However, time poverty is intimately intertwined with gender, class, and income disparities. While workers with high-earning jobs may choose to work long hours or face career pressures to chase success (p. 174), low-paid workers face a more acute work/leisure trade-off because they must work long hours to generate enough income to provide for their families (Qi and Dong, 2018). The lack of freely disposable time has gendered dimensions that affect women disproportionately; male workers are likely to be affected by this due to their class, income, or poor working conditions, whereas women are time poor as a consequence of the disproportionate levels of household tasks they are required to perform on top of paid work activities that may also be precarious or with low income (Vickery, 1977; Turner and Grieco, 2000; Lawson, 2007; Qi and Dong, 2018).

The incorporation of care work into women's daily routines complicates and shapes their mobility patterns profoundly. Given their role as caregivers, women have complex, multi-purpose trips to and from work, also known as "mobility of care" where women trip-chain journeys to cover multiple tasks

and errands (Turner and Grieco, 2000; Sánchez-De Madariaga and Zucchini, 2020). In many cases it is up to women to make sure housework and care work will run smoothly in their absence by relying on support systems that allow them to take on paid work alongside reproductive labour (Motta, 2013; Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017). That is how socioeconomic class intersects with gender and care work responsibilities: for women from more affluent backgrounds or with jobs with benefits, paid care workers or other paid care services are available (Warren, 2003). However, for women from poorer and more precarious backgrounds, support systems will usually involve family members, neighbours, or friends that will take on care work duties periodically to allow them to step out of the private sphere and engage in paid work. Taking on care-related tasks with no support systems in place results in a more restrictive time-space accessibility with more complex schedules and chained activities, that reduce women's employment opportunities depending on their access to support networks (Doherty, 2021; Garnica-Monroy and Hernández-Reyes, 2022).

Time and income poverty often reinforce one another for women because time spent doing care work can reduce the time available to engage in income-generating activities, and their ability to upskill or expand their capabilities through education (Turner and Grieco, 2000; Wodon and Blackden, 2006). Moreover, women from poorer background tend to spend more time on care-related tasks on an everyday basis, and when women spend a significant amount of their days commuting by public transport, it necessarily means that they are reducing the amount of time they could spend doing other activities that could further their professional, personal, and social development (Turner and Grieco, 2000). Poor and marginalised women face further financial, spatial and temporal obstacles when their everyday travel itineraries are worsened by transport systems that are infrequent, inefficient, overcrowded, and costly (Carmichael *et al.*, 2024). As a result, women are more prone to suffer more persistent and long-term poverty because of the restrictions that care work demands imposes on them (Román Rivas, 2009).

Drawing from Sheller's (2018, 2020) multi-scalar approach to mobility justice, women's urban experiences can also be seen as an example of personal mobility injustices at a bodily and urban level. When a mother or an elderly person is unable to access basic needs and activities because of the way transportation systems have been designed, there is a clear injustice of social exclusion that occurs through a restriction on their mobility. When women spend significantly more time and money on transport because of the current policies associated with transportation, these are individual mobility injustices that add up to a larger pattern. As Sheller argues, the problem of mobility injustice begins with our bodies and the ways in which some bodies can move more easily through space than others due to restrictions related to gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and physical abilities. At the bodily scale women struggle to individually secure resources like time, money, and access to structures of care and this affects how and when they can move in the public sphere; at the street or urban scale, women

navigate a city unreliable and infrequent transport systems that place further restrictions on their potential for mobility.

These mobility injustices are not individual at all; there is a connection between women's urban experiences and constraints, and the systems in place that fosters them in a way that reinforces wider structural gender inequalities (Hanisch, 2006; Jirón, 2007a). Patriarchal systems that keep women in subordinate positions to men reinforce their power through low intensity, symbolic, and socially accepted microaggressions; street harassment in public space, sexism in language, and the gendered distribution of tasks are everyday examples of how *micro-machismos* in fact sustain a larger problem (Benalcázar-Luna, Venegas and de Inglés, 2015; Garza and Derbez, 2020). When women face mobility injustice due to temporal, financial, and spatial constraints, they are in fact facing 'small' but systemic constraints that keep them trapped in the continuum of violence against women and this caps their opportunities for social and physical mobility (Doherty, 2021). Therefore, studies around *how* transport systems exacerbate and perpetuate urban challenges for women are necessary because, as Wodon and Blackden (2006) argued, we do not prioritise what is not there—if we do not visualise and articulate how transport policies and infrastructure affect women differently, then policymakers and planners are unlikely to prioritise investment in it.

Saltillo and its transport system

In this paper I have chosen to focus on the care work-related, financial, and time constraints that women in Saltillo face because these three aspects particularly shape women's urban experiences and quality of life. Saltillo presents an interesting case study: women rely more on public transportation compared to men (22.58% vs 16.46%, respectively), while men rely more on private vehicles, either cars or motorcycles, or company transport (69.05% vs 74.27%, respectively) (INEGI, 2020). In terms of women's participation in paid employment, only 47% of women reported being engaged in paid work activities. Among the remaining 53%, 59% cited their primary role as caregivers and household responsibilities as the main reasons for not entering the job market (IMPLAN Saltillo, 2024). Care work significantly shapes women's development opportunities in paid employment and urban experiences in Saltillo, and in turn, this impacts their earning potential and quality of life. Women who use public transportation while juggling financial, temporal, and care work-related constraints find themselves at the intersection of multiple mobility injustices and inequalities and thus they are the focus of this study.

Saltillo's public transport system has a distinct set of challenges for lower-income residents, and in particular, lower-income women. Firstly, the number of transport routes available to the public has been diminishing over the past 5 years, from 42 routes to only 20 currently in operation (Flores Ramírez, 2025b). The routes that have been slowly phased out used to provide public transportation services to

marginalised neighbourhoods in the south, east, and west areas of the city, leaving residents at a disadvantage on how to get around in the city. Secondly, the number of units in operation has also seen a steady decrease from 500 buses across all routes in 2024 to less than 330 as of 2025 (Flores Ramírez, 2025c). This means that there are less frequent buses for each route, and routes with lower occupancy rates that serviced marginalised neighbourhoods can feel the effects of this more vividly.

Over the years the local authority has tried to work alongside concession owners to avoid this and keep the routes afloat by increasing fares and granting subsidies to concession owners (Comunicación Social, 2019; Viveros, 2020; Aramayo, 2022b), however in Saltillo, more and more routes have become financially unsustainable and, as a result, over 250,000 people have no access to public transportation routes near their neighbourhood (Flores Ramírez, 2025d). Fewer transport routes, and fewer buses in operation leaves people —predominantly women— with longer walking distances to their nearest bus stop and longer waiting times in order to get on with their days. Thirdly, Saltillo's public transport system does not have a fare cap that would allow users to use public transit as needed throughout their day or week without financial considerations in mind. Women with care work responsibilities are disproportionately affected by this because of their mobility patterns; they pay full fares for each bus, often adding a layer of financial stress to their mobilities, leaving them at an economic disadvantage.

In 2013, the local authority at the time announced a 138 million pesos investment in the transport system of Saltillo. The project aimed to restructure Saltillo's transport route network and introduce 230 new single decker urban buses into service. This project also introduced the Municipal Institute of Transport in Saltillo and the reduced fare card program by the name of *Saltibus*. While the effects of this project only lasted a short time (Periódico Zócalo, 2011, 2013; Infonor, 2014), the fare card program survived and still remains in operation to this date⁶⁵. *Saltibus* offers four different types of cards, and these are available to all users that can provide the required documentation depending on the card they are looking for (see Table 1 for details).

Saltibus as a transport policy has many advantages for users and operators, but it also comes with many challenges. The process to obtain a *Saltibus* card requires users to personally attend a transport hub located in the south sector of the city, a neighbourhood that is only accessible by a handful of bus routes with low frequency. However, since it is mostly women in charge of caring for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, the responsibility of liaising and carrying out paperwork processes in order to access cheaper fares falls on them, too. Women would need to find the time to prepare all administrative paperwork and attend the government module in person, which often means their

⁶⁵ As of 2025, there have been multiple policy attempts to phase out *Saltibus* for other similar fare card programs, but these have been largely unsuccessful.

children would need to skip school and women would have to take the day off work, presumably without pay, assuming their workplaces allow it.

Table 5: Types of 'Saltibus' cards for reduced fares

Type of card	Fare (2025)	Reduction (%)	Documentation needed
Full fare (No <i>Saltibus</i> card)	\$15.00	NA	NA
Pre-paid fare	\$13.00	13.33	None
Student	\$8.00	46.66	Academic status letter issued by the school/university or valid student ID
Over-60	\$8.00	46.66	Valid INAPAM card (National Institute for Seniors) or valid national ID that proves over 60 years of age.
Disability	\$0.00	100%	Medical documentation that states a physical or cognitive disability

Source: Own elaboration with fares as of 2025 and with information from <http://www.saltibus.com.mx/>

Prices in MXN.

Moreover, the current discount fare program has a strict set of requirements that do not take into account people with complex mobility patterns, mainly women. People who use multiple buses a day because of their care work responsibilities pay full fares for each bus, and this can impose greater financial stress on them—children, people with disabilities, and the elderly are often accompanied by women to and from doctor's appointments, school journeys and social activities and women need to cover the financial aspect of these trips entirely. Given the restrictions around accessing a *Saltibus* card, women either need to shoulder the financial burden of dependants mobilities or take on the challenge of trying to get reduced fare card for their children or elders.

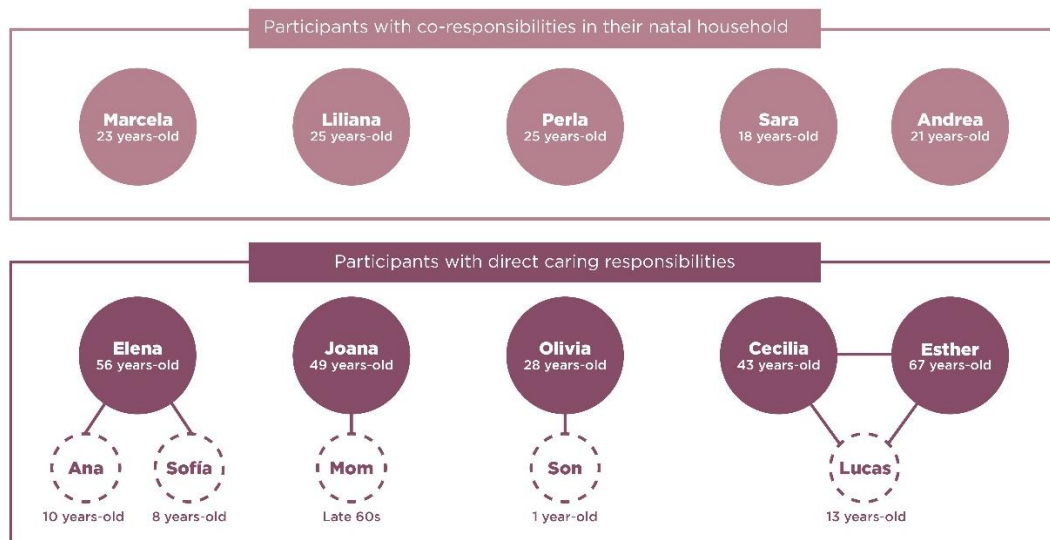
In what follows, I present the urban experiences of women in Saltillo to showcase how policies like *Saltibus* and the associated bus infrastructure of Saltillo fail to support women's mobility and contribute to their financial, spatial, and temporal constraints. I argue not only that personal is political, although it is (Hanisch, 2006), but that current policies are responsible for shaping the mobility injustices that women experience in the city, furthering the continuum of violence against women, and that we can address this imbalance only once we visualise its' extent.

Methods

I applied a three-stage ethnographic approach that consisted of 1) starting point interviews, 2) shadowing of participants, and 3) exit interviews. My approach to shadowing involved following participants closely for one day including all their local journeys. Participants were selected through a cluster non-probability sampling method aided by local organizations including feminist collectives and activist groups in Saltillo such as: *Proyecto Mujeres*, *Saltillo Decide*, *Matatena*, and *Ruedas Rebeldes*.

All participants were women aged 18 to 67. with varying income levels, levels of education, and assigned care work and paid work status. In total, 10 women participated in this research project; some participants cared for their children, grandchildren –some of whom had disabilities– or their elderly parents, either full or part-time. Others had co-responsibilities of care as part of their natal household but were not directly responsible for caring for family members (See Fig. 1). This study does not seek to gather a generalisable sample of participants, rather to explore different perspectives and intersections of social markers that can offer insights into women’s lives in Saltillo. I conducted all interviews in Spanish and gathered field notes and voice memos for transcription and translation purposes.

Figure 1: Diagram of participants



Source: Own elaboration, February 2025.

The participants⁶⁶

1. Marcela

Marcela is a 23-year-old student and young professional in her last year of university. She works as an administrative assistant at an education centre; her commutes are mostly to and from work and social events since her academic workload is coming to an end and does not need to attend classes at her university anymore. She lives with her mother, who often travels for a week or two at a time, and her brother (M, 17yo). Marcela has a *Saltibus* student card.

2. Elena

Elena is a 56-year-old woman who works as part of the cleaning crew in an office building. She is the main caretaker for her granddaughters Ana (F, 10yo) and Sofia (F, 8yo), daughters of her son (M, 28yo). She has been their caretaker on and off since Ana and Sofia were three and one years-old respectively, and she gained full time custody of the girls after a legal battle in which her son was convicted of perpetrating domestic violence against Elena and his daughters. Elena's journeys are to and from the girls' school and to and from her work. When Ana and Sofia finish their school day, Elena travels by bus to pick them up and then by taxi or an app-based rideshare back to Elena's work where the girls get to do some of their homework while Elena finishes up. She occasionally chains trips to run errands, get groceries and school supplies, or see friends for a walk around downtown at the end of a week. Elena's solo trips (to work after drop-off and to the school for pick-up) are done on public transportation, but when commuting with her girls she mostly relies on taxis and app-based rideshares. While the girls would be eligible to access a *Saltibus* card for students they do not currently have one. Elena does not have a pre-paid *Saltibus* card and pays full price per ride.

3. Liliana

Liliana is a 25-year-old young professional who works as a freelance architect in downtown Saltillo. She lives with her two young sisters and her mom in a neighbourhood in central Saltillo. Liliana works full time and attends yoga classes in the morning and therapy sessions weekly. She uses public transportation daily; she graduated university a few years ago but has been falsifying her academic status letter in order to keep access to her *Saltibus* card for students.

4. Joana

⁶⁶ The order in which I introduce the participants responds to the order in which they joined the research project. All identifying characteristics have been anonymised or slightly altered to protect participants' anonymity. While not shown here due to space restrictions, participants also shared stories related to how GBV shapes their mobilities and forthcoming research papers engage with those discussions.

Joana is a 49-year-old woman who works as a cleaning assistant at an architecture firm. She is the full-time caretaker of her mom (late 60s) who was diagnosed with dementia in 2021. She recently separated from her husband and moved out of the house she shared with him and her three grown-up children (aged 23-28yo). Her commutes involve traveling to and from work and going to the gym at a nearby mall in the evenings, often times she also chains trips to get supplies for her decoration and crafts business, groceries, or medicines. In terms of caretaking activities, she compares her workload to having a young child again—she is in charge of feeding, cleaning, and bathing her mom, and does not have a support network in place that can take over care work duties when she is at work. When Joana leaves the house, she takes her mom into a safe room where she stays locked in until Joana comes back.

5. Perla

Perla is a 25-year-old young professional working in the human resources department at an architecture firm. She lives with both of her parents and three younger siblings (16-22yo). Her work commute starts at 7:15 am each morning and she arrives back home 8:30pm, leaving her enough time to shower and prepare lunch for the next day and head to bed. Perla pays full fares when riding public transport because she does not have a pre-paid *Saltibus* and does not qualify for a reduced fare.

6. Olivia

Olivia is a 28-year-old young professional and mother of a one-year-old boy. She works as an administrative officer at an education and travel company and is the main caretaker of her son. In the mornings she takes her son to the local nursery by bus and then goes to work until 6:00 pm. She relies on her support network to take care of her son while she is at work, and the nursery hours are over. Her mom or mother-in-law will take turns picking up her baby from nursery and since they live only a few doors down her house, Olivia can pick up her baby when she finishes work and arrives home. Olivia's husband often travels for work but when he is around, he will also manage care work with her and coordinate pick up times while she is at work. Olivia used a *Saltibus* student card for reduced fares for a while – she was no longer a student but her younger cousin who was still enrolled in university gave her an academic status letter so she could keep paying cheaper fares. However, her cousin graduated and now she cannot get a student letter anymore, so Olivia has changed to a pre-paid *Saltibus* card.

7. Sara

Sara is 18 years old and is in her second year of undergraduate at the Coahuila's public university. She has a part-time job as a store attendant in downtown Saltillo. Sara's relies on public transportation and university shuttles to get to and from school and work and often spends over 3 hours each day commuting. Sara could access a student *Saltibus* card but has been unable to complete the paperwork

because the office hours at the government module are restrictive and hard to incorporate into her routine.

8. Cecilia

Cecilia is a 43-year-old administrative assistant at a government agency in Saltillo. She moved back home with her parents after divorcing her husband a few years ago. She is also the mother and main caretaker of Lucas, a 13-year-old boy on the autism spectrum. Everyday Cecilia wakes up and helps Lucas get ready for school—he attends a specific public school where all enrolled pupils have a cognitive or physical disability in varying degrees. In the mornings Cecilia takes Lucas to school by public transport and then heads to work. She works from 9:00 pm to 4:00 pm and cannot take a break to pick up Lucas from school so Esther, Cecilia’s mother, helps her by picking Lucas up from school and taking him home. Cecilia has a pre-paid *Saltibus* card for cheaper fares and Lucas has a disability *Saltibus* that allows him to travel for free in public transportation twice a day. Her mom has an over-65 *Saltibus* card and Cecilia covers the cost of her journeys as well.

9. Esther

Esther is a 67-year-old housewife who currently lives with her husband, her daughter Cecilia, and her grandson Lucas. She takes care of the housework and is also a caretaker for Lucas, a 13-year-old boy on the autism spectrum. During termtime Esther goes to pick Lucas up from school and bring him back home with her, all on public transport. She is in charge of cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, ironing, and grocery shopping but often shares some responsibilities with her daughter Cecilia who also contributes to the household economy. Whenever Esther leaves the house in order to pick up Lucas, she is expected by her husband to iron his work shirt, cook, and lay out the table for him to have lunch while she is out. She juggles housework and caring responsibilities on a daily basis to make time to pick up Lucas from school without any disruptions. Esther has high-blood pressure and struggles with acute foot pain often, making her journeys to and from school pick-up longer than average. Esther’s transport expenses are covered by her daughter Cecilia.

10. Andrea

Andrea is a 21-year-old university student in her third year of studies who works part time as a legal apprentice at a local law firm. She currently lives with both of her parents and her two brothers. Andrea does not have a *Saltibus* even though she would be eligible for a student card because the fuss of going through the process is off-putting; her university fees and daily expenses are covered by her parents, and her income is her own as she does not contribute to her household finances, so getting a discounted fare is not a priority for her.

Discussion

Women in Saltillo rely on public transportation more than men (22.58% vs 16.46%, respectively) (INEGI, 2020) and use the transport system more intensively to carry out their responsibilities as caregivers. In Saltillo, only 47% of women engage in paid employment, and they largely occupy lower paying jobs than men (IMPLAN Saltillo, 2024). Women shoulder the weight of care work to the detriment of their performance in the job market (CEPAL, 2016; IMPLAN Saltillo, 2024) and their access to resources and support networks shape the extent of their spatial, temporal and financial constraints.

Joana, for example, does not have a support network to help her with the care work responsibilities of looking after her mom and this has multiple implications. Every morning Joana wakes up at 5:00am to bathe and feed her mother before getting herself ready and preparing food for the day. Every time she leaves the house, Joana locks her mom in a room that she has altered to make safe for her; mainly, the door does not open from the inside to avoid Joana's mum from wandering out of the house and getting lost while Joana is at work. Her mother is in the advanced stage of dementia and can easily become disoriented. Joana works from 9:00 am to 2:00pm every day and will sometimes take extra afternoon shifts to make ends meet at the end of the month. After she finishes work, she must come back home to check on her mom, feed and clean her again. During our interview she mentioned that she does not like having to lock her mom in a room, but she feels like she has no other way of going about her life:

Joana: It's as if I'm a single mother, you know? You have small kids, and you need to leave them [at home] to go and work, so you lock them in the house. I go to work and then I run back to check on her. I basically have a child again because she needs feeding, cleaning, bathing. I don't really have support from other family members to take her of her, so she relies 100% on me and I need to be working. [...] I find I'm very limited in terms of time, sometimes my boss will offer me an extra afternoon shift from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm and I need to take it, but it does mean that when I finish work [at 2:00 pm], I need to run back to give her lunch and change [her diaper] before running back to work. Otherwise, I wouldn't tend to her until after 8:00 pm

The conditions Joana faces impose a spatial constraint on her because she has to be able to get back to her mother at certain times during the day. The way women allocate time on an everyday basis is how inequality and mobility injustice materialises—having time (or not) shapes their participation levels in the job market, their community, and the political sphere (Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017). Women are time-poor as a consequence of the disproportionate levels of household tasks assigned to them (Turner and Grieco, 2000), and this is worsened by poor transport systems that complicate their mobility around the city. Joana is vulnerable for time poverty because the neighbourhood where she lives is only serviced by one bus route with low frequency (20 min) that connects with the city centre. When she needs to go elsewhere in the city for odd-shift opportunities there is added anxiety around leaving her mother alone

more than usual and having to spend extra time and money in commuting. Joana needs to have a job that has certain flexibility for her to perform paid work and care work duties, but this limits her professional opportunities and development. She is spatially constrained to finding job opportunities close to her route, or she risks doubling her commuting time and cost, with further financial repercussions (Garnica-Monroy and Hernández-Reyes, 2022). At the individual level, the long and frequent commutes impact her earning potential, and both her and her mother's quality of life. The barriers Joana navigates are systemic gender barriers that affect women and people who carry the responsibility of unpaid care work also known as “sticky floors”, that is, low-wage, low-status jobs with limited room for development (Harlan and Berheide, 1994; Jaramillo, 2024). Joana cannot change jobs to seek higher salaries or professional development opportunities because her care work responsibilities have strict demands, and she is reliant on a bus transport system that further worsens her time availability and complicates her mobility and finances.

Elena is also in a “sticky floor” scenario because she does not have a support network in place. Elena and I met when she participated in my previous research study where I interviewed women who had lived an episode of sexual abuse or harassment while using public transportation in 2020 (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2022). She worked as part of a cleaning crew at a different office than she works at now. At first, I asked her if she had the same job as an icebreaker, but it turns out she had to switch jobs because they would not allow her to take an extended break to pick up her girls from school—she needed an extra half an hour to account for her journeys by bus. The buses in Saltillo are unreliable because there are no publicly available timetables; even if she left work exactly at her lunch time it would be hard for her to estimate when the next bus would go by, and she would face the same uncertainty after picking up her girls from school. Her then supervisor would also often get upset about Elena bringing the girls into the office after they had finished school, but she had no one else to look after them. Elena was able to switch jobs because a friend recommended her to a company that was looking for cleaning crew members, but it meant she had to cut back on work hours and find additional part-time jobs to compensate financially. Elena does not have a support network in place that could take over pick-up time as the girls' father has a restriction order in place due to domestic violence, and their mother is not in the picture. Like Joana, Elena faces similar limitations due to care work responsibilities; her granddaughters would have to be left alone at home – that is if Elena could take the time off from work to do school pick-up and could afford the exponential increase in her transport expenses –or she would have to sign them up for paid afterschool daycare, which she cannot afford either.

Other participants like Cecilia and Olivia, who have support networks in place, have differentiated urban experiences of these gender barriers. Cecilia currently has access to a support network in her mother, Esther, who takes over care work responsibilities when she is at work. Every morning Cecilia drops Lucas off at school, heads to work, and relies on Esther to help her with Lucas's pick-up time and

minding him during afterschool hours until Cecilia gets back. Cecilia separated from her husband when Lucas was 5 years old and shortly after his autism diagnosis. She has been the main provider and caretaker of Lucas ever since; her ex-husband will occasionally reach out once or twice a year but does not provide financial support or assists with the every-day care work related to his son. Lucas has full bladder control but has limited verbal communication skills and requires around-the-clock minding. While Cecilia can rely on Esther as a support network for now, it is only a thin layer that separates her from the sticky floor where Elena and Joana are:

Cecilia: I've thought about it a lot before. Sometimes I can see that my mom is not well [referring to her chronic foot pain] and I always tell her to not push herself, but she always says she is fine and carries on. [...] [Without her as a support] I would have to modify my everyday routine; I think I'd even need to find another job. Maybe another one where they would allow me to drop him off at school and pick him up.

In order for women to take part in paid work and navigate between the public (paid work) and private (care work) spheres of life, they must rely on others as a support network. However, the way in which women navigate temporal constraints and establish support networks is largely dictated by their socioeconomic status because time-poverty and mobility injustices are a class-and gender-based issue (Warren, 2003). For instance, while women in low-pay, low-status jobs rely on other women as support networks whenever possible, women with job security and formality may be able to access state-provided nurseries or daycare services at a reduced rate via their own work or their spouses place of employment. Olivia is able to access a state-run nursery centre through her work. She takes her baby to nursery every day, but when it comes to pick-up time, she relies on her mom or mother-in-law to pick him up. The commute by public transportation would be at least a couple of hours given the location of her work, home, and nursery— Saltillo's car-oriented urban development means that the distances between places of employment and residence are further apart, and this affects commute times and the efficiency of the public transport system. Furthermore, doing a nursery pick-up run would double Olivia's transport expenses and split her working day significantly. Since Olivia's parents live next door to her, it is far more efficient for her to rely on her relatives to allow her to continue working.

Women with higher socioeconomic status can rely on the paid work to cover house or care work activities. But more often than not, women rely on their aunts, sisters, mothers, or grandmothers to perform essential tasks related to care work and housework while they take on paid work hours (Jirón and Gómez, 2018). These support networks often evolve into interdependent mobility strategies like Cecilia and Esther, and it is marginalised women who often spend more time performing unpaid care work and housework activities (Scuro and Vaca-Trigo, 2017). The mobility patterns of women like Elena and Joana contrast with other participants' patterns *because* of their care work responsibilities *and* the lack of support networks, time, and money. Reaffirming that navigating gender-related barriers

and mobility injustices does not affect all women equally— access to resources influences women’s social and physical mobility and potential for mobility (Jirón, 2007a; Jirón, Carrasco and Rebolledo, 2020; Sheller, 2020; Jaramillo, 2024).

Participants had various strategies to deal with the financial strains related to the costs of public transportation depending on their varying levels of support networks. Some participants had access to *Saltibus* cards as students, and some used forged paperwork in order to access cheaper fares. These participants did not have direct caring responsibilities for other family members but still talked about how the elevated fare prices affected their finances. Marcela and Liliana, for example, rely on their reduced fare card to afford their commute because they are new in the job market and cannot afford to increase their transport expenses to pay full fares.

Joana is not eligible for a *Saltibus* card for reduced fares because she does not fit the categories set by the transport authority. Her mom, however, qualified for an over-60 *Saltibus* card, and Joana began doing all the paperwork shortly after her mom moved in with her following the dementia diagnosis. At the time, Joana’s mom needed to go to hospitals and government centres somewhat frequently, and it was Joana’s responsibility to take her to and from appointments by bus, so it made sense to reduce costs by sorting her mom’s *Saltibus* card at least. But as her mother’s condition advanced, her mobility significantly decreased, and Joana now prefers to use taxis and app-based rideshares to attend medical appointments to reduce her mother’s mental and physical stress of leaving the home. Nowadays, Joana uses her mom *Saltibus* card in order to get cheaper fares as a way to cope with the financial strains they face.

Women with direct caring responsibilities can only get a symbolic discount⁶⁷ per fare with a pre-paid card because the other categories are rarely applicable to them. Even though women are predominantly the ones in charge of accompanying all trips related to reproductive labour and care work, they cannot access cheaper fares that would reduce the strain that comes from their complex and pendular mobility patterns because the current transport system does not have a fare cap policy in place. On top of their fares, women often also need to cover travel expenses for dependants and, while in theory *Saltibus* can help them reduce their expenses, there is an unaccounted policy gap that adds on the workload of women. It is women who have to take on the task of sorting and preparing all administrative paperwork needed—this often means liaising with schools or hospitals— and attend the government module in person along with their children or elders. This process implies significant challenges that act as barriers for women wanting to seek reduced fares for the people they care for, and it is assuming women’s time availability to attend a government building with strict office hours that often conflict with school times or their own working hours.

⁶⁷ A pre-paid *Saltibus* card reduces the general fare by 2MXN (0.10 USD)

Care work and reproductive labour exacerbate financial, spatial, and temporal constraints reshaping women's cost-benefit balance when it comes to choosing modes of transport. Women rely on public transportation for its cheap fares, but for some women, there is a tipping point where public transportation is not the cheapest solution in terms of time and money. For Joana, paying a taxi becomes the preferred mode of transport when she needs to take her mom to and from hospital appointments because it is more convenient and easier on her mother's health, but she would hardly be able to justify the expense when traveling on her own. Esther commented on how she would rarely take a taxi to or from home with Lucas because they are never in a rush; since their combined expenditure on transport is a lot cheaper than any taxi would be⁶⁸, it is harder for them to reach a tipping point where enduring public transportation is not worth it. When commuting with multiple dependants, the tipping point is easier to reach: Elena and her girls used to have *Saltibus* cards; Ana and Sofia are eligible to get reduced fares because they are students, and Elena could get a pre-paid *Saltibus*, but she lost her coin purse a while ago and has not found the time and money to redo the process. After a few weeks she lost interest in renewing their cards because of the hassle it represented for not a lot of gain: without the cards, Elena would spend around 60% of her daily wage in public transport alone, having the cards would decrease that number to 40% but it exponentially increased the amount of time her and the girls spent commuting to and from work and school:

Elena: [After I finish work] we would have to take two buses to get home. We could walk all the way to the bus stop [downtown] and take only one [bus], but my girls are still young, and they are tired after school. Ana has been getting a lot of homework assigned lately and getting home quicker is less hassle. Taking two buses would be 90 MXN (3 full fares for every bus) and that's about the same as a [taxi]. With the bus it would take us at least an hour and a half to two hours when a [taxi] can get us home in 20 minutes.

For Elena, it is not just about the financial cost of using public transportation, but the time cost of relying on an unpredictable bus service since most of the commuting time is spent waiting for the bus to arrive. When Elena and her girls get home, Ana and Sofia have plenty of time to do their homework, watch cartoons, and play for a bit before bed. The tipping point for Elena is not just about money but about giving her girls time to "be girls— play, relax, rest" in a way that if she paid less money for transport, they would not get⁶⁹.

But when women start viewing private transport (either taxis or app-based rideshares) as the most convenient, cost-effective alternative, it has a broader, deeper impact on the transport system. When

⁶⁸ Taxis in Saltillo are regulated for minimum fares, and the starting point is 37.65 MXN, the cost then increases based on how many km the ride is.

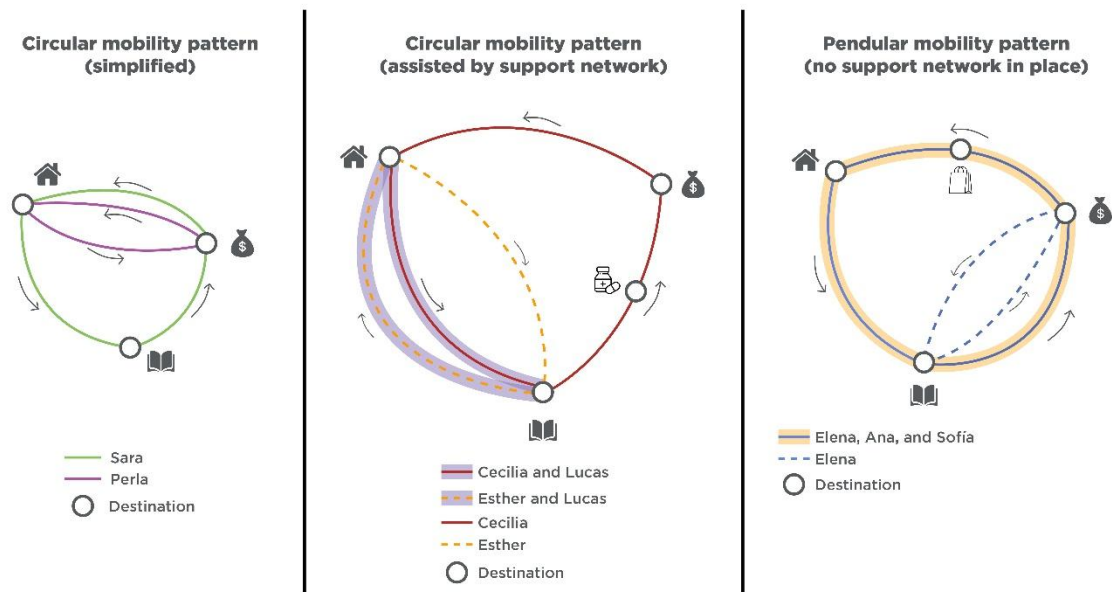
⁶⁹ While it falls outside of the scope of this specific paper, it is relevant to acknowledge that there is an important element of safety related to fears of harassment and GBV that contributes to women's cost-benefit balance and that shape their patterns of mobility in Saltillo (see Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021, 2022).

public transportation cannot retain ridership, transport routes face further financial struggles that will put them at risk of bankruptcy, subsequently impacting spatial constraints and transport coverage in the city. However, women's cost-benefit balance reflects many of the drawbacks for the transport system in Saltillo: The current infrastructure does not have estimated timetables and the information about the routes timings is not publicly available. In general, users navigate a public transport system riddled with uncertainty and whenever they reach the bus stop, they are left wondering whether the bus has already gone by and they missed it, or if it has not arrived and how long they will have to wait. Women's complex mobility patterns when caring for dependants means that this uncertainty can be a decisive factor in tipping the scale to opt out of public transport or out of navigating the city entirely, further exacerbating their spatial constraints (Sheller, 2020; Garnica-Monroy and Hernández-Reyes, 2022).

There are gender- and class-dimensions to the financial, spatial and temporal limitations caused by Saltillo's public transport system. Men who use public transportation also face uncertainty and unreliability and may face mobility injustice at the personal and urban level due to class and racial dynamics (Sheller, 2020); however, care work responsibilities are less likely to further curtail their mobilities. The mobilities of men and women without caring responsibilities may look similar, for instance, young women like Sara, Perla, and Marcela have 'simplified' mobility patterns meaning they commute to and from work/school in a circular way. However, women also face heightened constraints related to fears over sexual-based violence that disproportionally affects their mobility patterns, placing spatial constraints to how and when they travel (Fairchild and Rudman, 2008; Dhillon and Bakaya, 2014; Bhattacharyya, 2015; Quinones, 2020).

Lastly, participants with dependants displayed pendular mobilities that varied in degrees of complexity depending on their support networks in place. Participants like Olivia and Cecilia who have access to a support network (via their family members or through day care) have assisted circular mobility patterns. Their commutes are slightly altered by their care work responsibilities, but to a lesser extent. Participants who have no access to any sort of support network, like Elena and Joana, display pendular mobility patterns swinging back and performing the multiple different tasks associated with care work and housework, often juggling paid work in between (Turner and Grieco, 2000; Junqueira, Nunes and Leda Sabino, 2019). (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Types of mobility patterns



Source: Own elaboration, February 2025

Closing remarks

I have argued that the current transport infrastructure and policies in Saltillo play a role in women's financial, temporal, and spatial constraints. Poor public transportation services worsen women's precarious situations because they can reinforce systemic inequalities that keep women in sticky floors with low-wage, low-status jobs that come with limited development opportunities (Harlan and Berheide, 1994; Jaramillo, 2024). When public transportation services are unreliable and unpredictable, and fare policies are hard to access and only account for certain groups, all users lose out. However, it is women who are disproportionately hindered by this because they have higher reliance on public transport. Women face multiple social, spatial and temporal limitations that curtail their mobilities at the personal and urban level, and these are underpinned by systemic gender barriers that affect women's opportunities for development and equality. Not only is it that the personal is political (Hanisch, 2006), but that current policies in place Saltillo's public transport system and its unequal configuration are responsible for shaping women's urban realities and perpetuating mobility injustices.

As Sheller (2018, 2020) argued, addressing the injustices of unequal mobilities requires that we understand how mobilities relate not only to how we move around cities but also to gendered and racialised dynamics. In order to redress women's limitations in the public space, it is necessary to recognise and understand the collectiveness in women's personal experiences and approach transport policies through a gender lens. Firstly, limited transport coverage, low frequency of buses, and low

amounts of units in operation disproportionately affects women and complicates their mobilities. The goal should not be to facilitate women's migration from public transport to private vehicles, but to reenvision what transport commutes look like by considering women's lived experiences more centrally in the implementation of transport policy.

Secondly, there are already policies in place that recognise students, elders and people with disabilities need for reduced fares, but these do not account for the financial, spatial and temporal strain that comes from caregiving responsibilities. *Saltibus* has many advantages for people who fall under its umbrella, but the transport system and the local government still fail to take into account people's —namely women's— complex mobilities and the financial ramifications. If the goal is easing women's financial and spatial constraints, then introducing a general fare cap policy could incentivise ridership in public transport in general and particularly help women cope with the monetary costs of their pendular mobilities.

Local authorities need to recognise the complexity of women's mobilities and how the transport system plays a role in perpetuating mobility injustices and gender inequalities (Benalcázar-Luna, Venegas and de Inglés, 2015; Garza and Derbez, 2020). A mobility justice framework would allow key stakeholders to recognise how the personal and street level experiences of women are part of a multi-scalar system; transportation policies are important in enhancing women's mobilities, and reducing their time poverty, financial and spatial constraints but these systemic gender issues are also intimately connected to issues of childcare provision, state care, land use and zoning policies, and larger urban development strategies that reduce distance and enhance connectivity in the city (Sheller, 2018, 2020).

Future research can report on the effects and consequences of policies like fare caps in women in order to see how it affects their mobility patterns in relation to the barriers analysed in this study. Other projects could expand the conversation around the ramifications that a private-concession public transport system has on the user experience, particularly how it affects women's experiences in public transportation.

Paper Three. Easy prey: How the urban conditions of bus stops heighten women's vulnerabilities while navigating the city in Saltillo, Mexico.

Authorship statement

This paper is under review in *Gender, Place, and Culture*, submitted on the 7 July 2025 and coauthored with Óscar Mesta-Rodriguez. I led the conceptualisation, structure, and implementation of the research methods used for this paper and Óscar provided support as a research assistant for the urban audit method of this research project. Óscar and I shared the workload of fieldwork, however I was in charge of processing and corroborating all the information collected on the ground. In this paper I also present testimonies that stem from semi-structured discussion sessions with participants of the transect walks method. In regard to that, I was solely in charge of structuring, implementing, and processing all the information related to participants testimonies. Óscar contributed to the conceptualisation and discussion of this paper and I was in charge of all writing, editing and manufacturing of all images and figures presented here. Harriet Gray and Joshua Kirshner assisted by providing critical feedback and copyediting corrections as part of their role as Ph.D. supervisors.

Introduction

Women's differentiated mobility and experiences in the city have been the topic of research for many feminist scholars throughout the last decades (Monk and Hanson, 1982; Valentine, 1989; Fenster, 2005; Burgess, 2009; De Simone, 2018; Kern, 2020b). It remains a relevant area of interest given its complexity, but mostly, because of how intensely relevant those same issues are in most cities to this day still. In this paper, we will focus on how gender-related factors like fears of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and care work responsibilities shape women's mobilities, specifically in Saltillo, México, and we will adopt a gender lens to analyse the urban context that women navigate daily.

Saltillo presents a complex case study. The public transport system of the city consists of a buses network that has been slowly losing coverage of the urban area due to financial issues in the concession-based business model (Flores Ramírez, 2025b, 2025e). In general, users experience a transport system that is unreliable, unpredictable, and precarious (Aramayo, 2022a), and for women in particular, buses are also perceived as unsafe spaces where they face constant sexual harassment. In Saltillo, over 90% of women in Saltillo have suffered an episode of abuse to varying degrees while using public transport, from lascivious looks and catcalling to kidnapping and rape (Kaze, 2018; Gatica, 2020; Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021). This is a severe issue for women in the city, and still, the local authority in Saltillo systematically dismisses complaints, and avoids acknowledging the extent of the issue through a failed

reporting system that perpetuates and normalises violence against women (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2022).

Women in Saltillo rely more on public transportation compared to men (22.58% vs 16.46%, respectively), while men rely more on private vehicles, either cars or motorcycles, or company transport (74.27% vs 69.05% , respectively) (INEGI, 2020). Furthermore, duties assigned by traditional gender roles further exacerbate women's struggles in the city as they take on a double workload: paid work and care (unpaid) work. In Saltillo, only 47% of women reported being engaged in paid work activities, and among the 53% remaining, 59% cited their primary role as caregivers and household responsibilities as the main reasons for not entering the job market (IMPLAN Saltillo, 2024). Care work significantly shapes women's development opportunities in paid employment and urban experiences in Saltillo, and in turn, this impacts their earning potential and quality of life.

In this paper, we will focus on analysing Saltillo, and its public transport infrastructure through a gender lens. This study focuses on the characteristics of the urban environment in Saltillo that contribute to women's perceptions of vulnerability because infrastructure significantly impacts women's experiences of public space. We have implemented a mixed-method approach using transect walks and urban audits to bus stops to evaluate how the current conditions of the transport infrastructure in Saltillo shape women's mobilities. The objective of this paper is to delineate the spatial ways in which gender inequalities materialise in the city (Neupane and Chesney-Lind, 2014; Bhattacharyya, 2015). We focus on engaging with women from Saltillo to learn about their lived experiences while navigating the city to ground our research endeavours; produce knowledge about women, for women; and as a way to continue charting a path forward for women's emancipation in the city (Jayaratne, 1983; Maynard, 1994).

This paper contributes to the conversation around women's safety in public spaces in Mexico and Latin America, and how urban infrastructure can play a role in aiding or hindering women's mobility. In the following section, we engage with feminist scholarship that relates to women's differentiated urban experiences as a way to scaffold our research project. We contextualise our study and findings in this theoretical framework with the goal of advancing the empirical knowledge of how the current urban infrastructure affects women's mobilities in public transport in Saltillo, Mexico.

Literature **review**

While men and women navigate the same cities and transport systems, their urban experiences are significantly different. Fears of gender-based violence (GBV) and care work assigned to women by default severely impact women's mobility patterns in the city (Pain, 1991b; Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2010; Pilot and Prabhu, 2012; Bhattacharyya, 2015). One key element that shapes women's urban

experiences is fear of sexual violence. Fears of sexual assault have a widespread effect that casts a shadow over women's mobility patterns and affects how, when, and where they travel, what clothes they wear, and what areas of the city they avoid (Macmillan, Nierobisz and Welsh, 2000; Logan, 2015; Kern, 2020b; Quinones, 2020).

It is crucial to understand women's perceptions of fear and why they are distinct from men's fear in the city—not only are they different in extent and nature, they also have drastic differences in effects (Koskela, 1999). For instance, women's fears of violence in the city are closely associated with fear of rape and sexual violence, whereas men's fears are associated with property damage, theft, and mugging (Pain, 2001; Rodó-De-Zárate, 2016). Sexual violence is unique in its nature as a crime (Valentine, 1989; Pain, 1997, 2001). Rape and sexual assault are some of the most traumatic of crimes that have profound implications that extend beyond those of crimes against property or mugging (see Brison, 2002) and they have even been conceptualised as a powerful and effective tool to control and keep them women “in their place” (King, 1999, p. 6; Román Rivas, 2009).

Stranger harassment turns public spaces into an everyday hostile environment for women, and this affects women's use of public space from an early age. For instance, in Morelia, Mexico, researchers found that only 15% of girls aged 9-12 feel like they are able to walk around the city on their own compared to 64% of boys. Boys are allowed to explore on their own and wander further than girls while girls' freedom is more limited mainly due to fears of sexual assault. Boys are also exposed to high risks like traffic accidents, falls, and even sexual assault, yet their freedom of movement is not affected in the same way as girls and fear is not instilled in them as they grow. Girls' fears were mainly associated with fear of being abducted and conceptualising the city as a dangerous place due to the presence of strangers — and this is women's introduction to the streets of the city (Vargas Silva, Martínez Ruiz and Urquijo Torres, 2022).

Women's challenges in the city will be dynamic throughout their life, however, a woman's ability to choose a coping strategy— or power to alter her mobility through public space to feel safer— is largely shaped by her age, income, and caring responsibilities (Uteng and Turner, 2019; Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2022). Many women navigate their lives trying to balance a double workload between care (unpaid) work and paid work, adding complexity to journeys that may already be limited due to fears of GBV. Women often have complex, multi-purpose trips to and from work/home because GBV and their double workload, and poorly designed infrastructure poses yet another obstacle for them while navigating the city (Cristancho, M. and Buchely, L., 2016).

Women's daily journeys are worsened by transport systems that are designed for normative (male) standards of mobility (see Hamilton and Jenkins, 2000; Turner and Grieco, 2000; Greed, 2008) and by hostile built environments that worsen existing challenges. The focus of this paper is the physical infrastructure that further hinders women's mobility in Saltillo because women's constraints are not

abstract—as we will demonstrate, they can be seen plainly on the street and in the current state of the transport system, and if they can be seen, they can be addressed through policy.

We focus on the built environment of Saltillo to answer: how do various characteristics of the public transport infrastructure shape women's urban perceptions and experiences of mobility? We argue that infrastructure plays a role in exacerbating women's constraints related to GBV and care work responsibilities. We also argue that it is urgent and necessary to recognise how the current infrastructure is failing women if we aim to create public policy that addresses women's needs in the city.

From a sustainable public policy perspective, it is paramount to incentivise women to walk and use public transportation and making women feel safer is key. However, more often than not, authorities aim to increase women's perceptions of safety by implementing protectionist measures like increased policing, CCTV, and women-only transport facilities. For instance, cities like Mumbai, Tokyo, Pakistan, India, and Mexico City, among others, have opted for implementing women-only carriages or women-only buses. As Phadke (2012) and Whitzman (2013) argued, part of women's right to the city is the right to safely negotiate risk, and these strategies put the burden on women to protect themselves by withdrawing from the male gaze into second-class services. Installing protectionist measures dressed in pink⁷⁰ may provide temporary relief for some but does nothing to recognise and protect women's right to a life free of violence and their right to the city. Our focus is on understanding how and why the current infrastructure fails to respond to women's mobility needs in Saltillo and produce policy recommendations that respect women's autonomy.

In what follows, we present two layers of information that we weave together demonstrate how the current transport infrastructure in Saltillo fails to meet women's transportation needs. We present 1) the testimonies and opinions of the women who participated in the transect walks (n=19) in order to frame women's urban experiences in Saltillo. Later, we cross reference this information with 2) the data collected from 340 urban audits to bus stops to ground how participants' personal experiences add up to a collective struggle for women. We use both layers of information in parallel to obtain a reading of women's struggles while navigating transport, connecting individual experiences and concerns with city-wide information that unveils the severity of the issue. The objective is to produce empirical evidence of the infrastructure characteristics that shape women's perception of the city and the transport system. In doing this, we are analysing the city through a gender-lens that considers how care work and fears of GBV shape women's mobilities in Saltillo.

⁷⁰ In India, women-only bus system is called “Pink Express” and in Pakistan is called “the Pink Bus”. Mexico City's and Tokyo's women-only carriages are also pink.

Materials and methods

The findings of this paper stem from a larger mixed-method study conducted in Saltillo, Mexico that involved transect walks, ethnographic shadowing with women, as well as bus stop audits. For this paper, we have cross-referenced the information obtained through the implementation of transect walks and the urban audit data of bus stops across Saltillo's Metropolitan area (n=340).

1 Methods: transect walks

Transect walks are a flexible method that researchers can adapt to fit their focus and objectives across various research interests. For instance, Paasche and Sidaway (2010) have used transect walks as a method to reflect on social relations of power in the city, specifically through a focus on the ways that security and space are intertwined in Maputo, Mozambique. In Punjab, Pakistan, Ajaz and Zakir (2022) combine participatory spatial mapping with transect walks to analyse gendered power relations and elements like water resources, sanitation, wastewater flows and facilities like schools and hospitals. In Latin America, transect walks have also been paired with other community-based participatory methods to conduct urban assessments. The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) has explored the benefits of transect walks with a gender perspective in order to determine the walkability of an urban area (Sabino *et al.*, 2022) and their approach presents a comprehensive starting point on how to assess urban infrastructure in a Latin American context.

For this study, we adapted the concept of transect walks and modified it to include a bus journey since assessing bus stops was the main goal (see Fig. 1). We collaborated with Triana Zepeda Saldaña from *Transeúntas*, a Mexican feminist collective that uses urban exploratory walks as a way to protest for women and girls right to walk the city free of violence (Zepeda Saldaña, 2022) and implemented two transect walks in Saltillo, Mexico during August 2023. In total, 19 women joined as participants, as well as four underage companions. The transect walks happened over the course of one weekend; on Saturday we had 11 adult women, an 8-year-old girl and a 16-year-old girl, and on Sunday we had 8 adult women and two 5-year-old girls. All recorded testimonies arise from the semi-structured discussion sessions at *Casa Floral* and have been anonymised and translated.

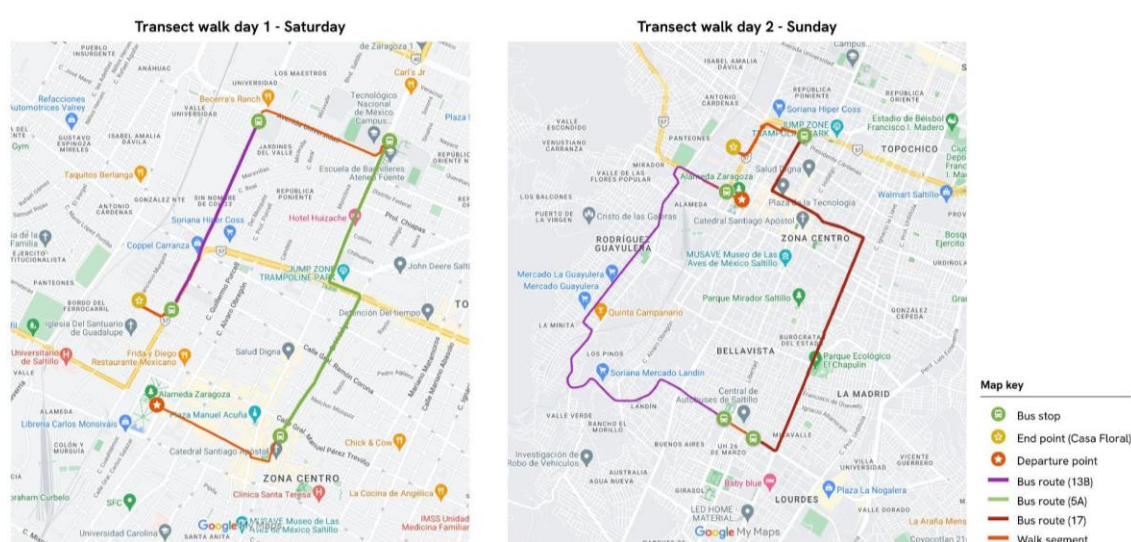
We wanted to welcome women with caring responsibilities because, as argued before, care work significantly shapes women's urban struggles. However, women with caring responsibilities can often struggle securing childcare services (Jirón and Gómez, 2018), and in recognition of those obstacles, it was important to welcome their dependants (namely children) too. We asked adult participants with children to sign a consent form on their behalf to allow them participation, however, we did not collect any personal data from underage participants, and the activity was not structured around their participation. The children who took part in the transect walks engaged with the rest of the group and the organisers with consent from their legal guardian/caregiver and their participations were

unprompted and unstructured. Some of their reflections and experiences of the walk are present during the analysis section of this paper because their comments would often redirect the line of conversation women were engaging with. When we arrived at the workshop set up in *Casa Floral*, children were asked to play in the patio while their carers took part in the discussion session after the walk.

All adult participants received an urban audit toolkit that included a participant assessment booklet where they logged their perceptions and thoughts of the bus stops we used throughout the activity. The categories of assessment that participants were asked about, matched the ones considered in the technical audits, therefore bringing a qualitative approach to the quantitative city-wide assessment. Both transect walks started at a meeting point in the city centre that was well-connected and easily accessible by different modes of transport. From there, the walks departed as pictured below:

<FIGURE 1>

Figure 1. Transect walks (mapped paths)



Source: Own elaboration with Google My Maps, September 2024.

2 Methods: bus stop audits

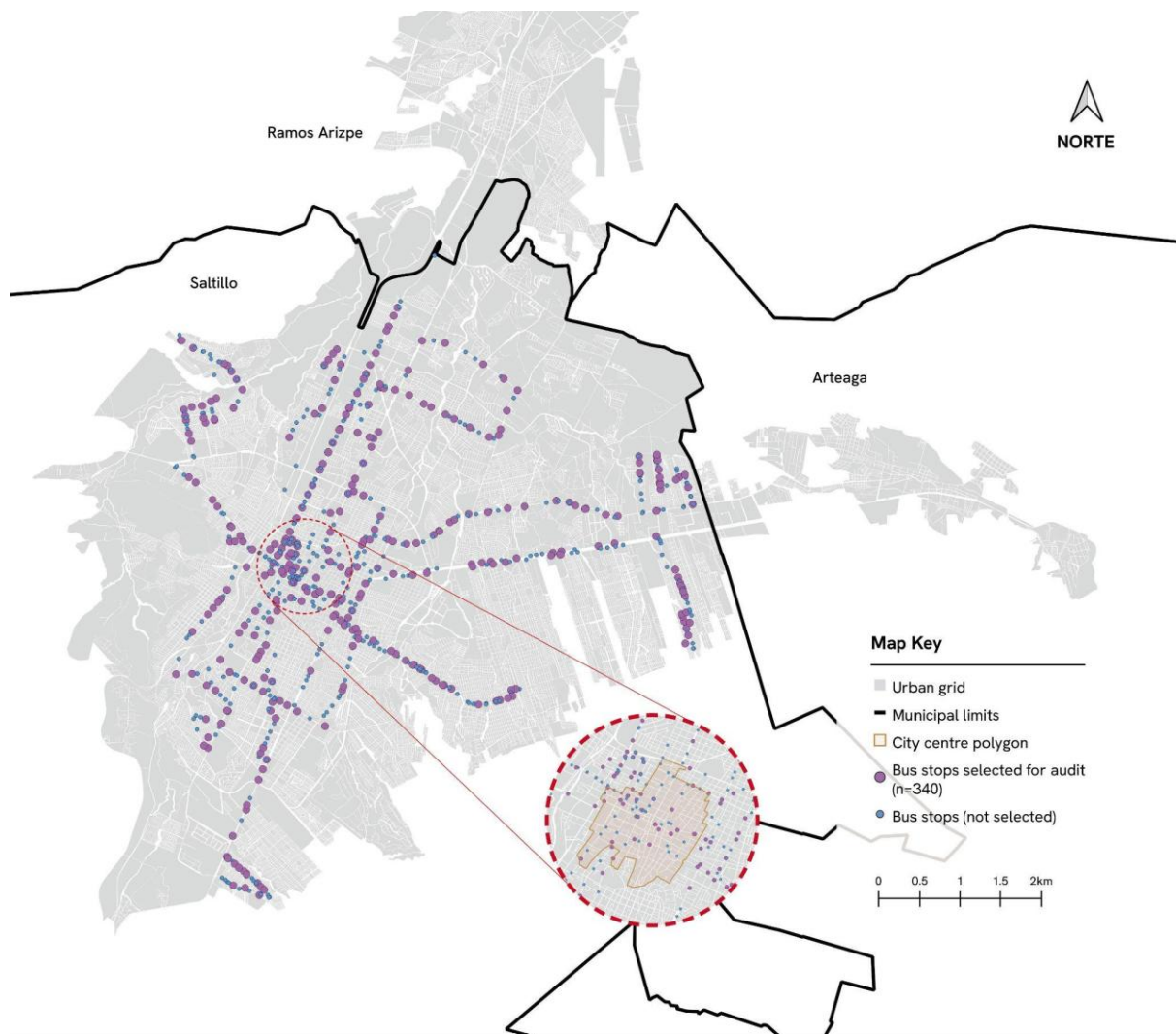
We focused on the physical elements of the transport infrastructure in Saltillo (bus stops) and their role in shaping women's mobility. We carried out a city-wide assessment, auditing 340 bus stops selected through a probability sampling strategy with a 95% confidence level (see Fig. 2). The technical audits for each bus stop shared assessment categories with the urban audits carried out by participants during the transect walks. For instance, when assessing the pavement where a bus stop is located, participants of the transect walks were asked to reflect on their perceptions of it (i.e., if they felt comfortable walking by, if the material of it made them feel like they could slip or walk securely, how they would feel if they needed to push a pram or a wheelchair), while the technical assessment gathered data like width, type

of material, presence of accessibility ramps, amongst other entry points. Mirroring IADB's Technical Index walkability (*Índice Técnico de Caminabilidad*), we defined five categories of assessment for bus stops: pavements and walkability; road safety; façades and buildings; street furniture and comfort; and signposting (Sabino *et al.*, 2022). In total, we collected 18 technical indicators for each bus stop. The bus stops mapped cover 7 routes out of 20 total current public transport routes in Saltillo.

Part of our feminist-informed approach to the city included reflecting on our positionality during our research endeavours. While these conversations are outside of the focus of this paper, it is important to acknowledge that our opinions, standpoint, and lived experiences shaped our research, what we analysed, and what lens we analysed it through. In order to frame our quantitative approach from a gender lens, we had to reflect on what experiences would influence our perception and assessment of the bus stops and how our situatedness would be reflected in the findings.

<FIGURE 2>

Figure 2: Map of selected bus stops across Saltillo, Mexico



Source: Own elaboration with information from IMPLAN Saltillo, 2017 and INEGI 2023. Made with QGIS, September 2024.

Findings

As we walked the city through a gender lens, we began recognising the subtle, everyday ways in which the current infrastructure fails to meet women's transportation needs in Saltillo. In what follows we present our findings divided in four subsections: type of bus stops, road safety, visual barriers, and information provision. These categories encompass the most prominent themes that women engaged with during the transect walks and the discussion sessions.

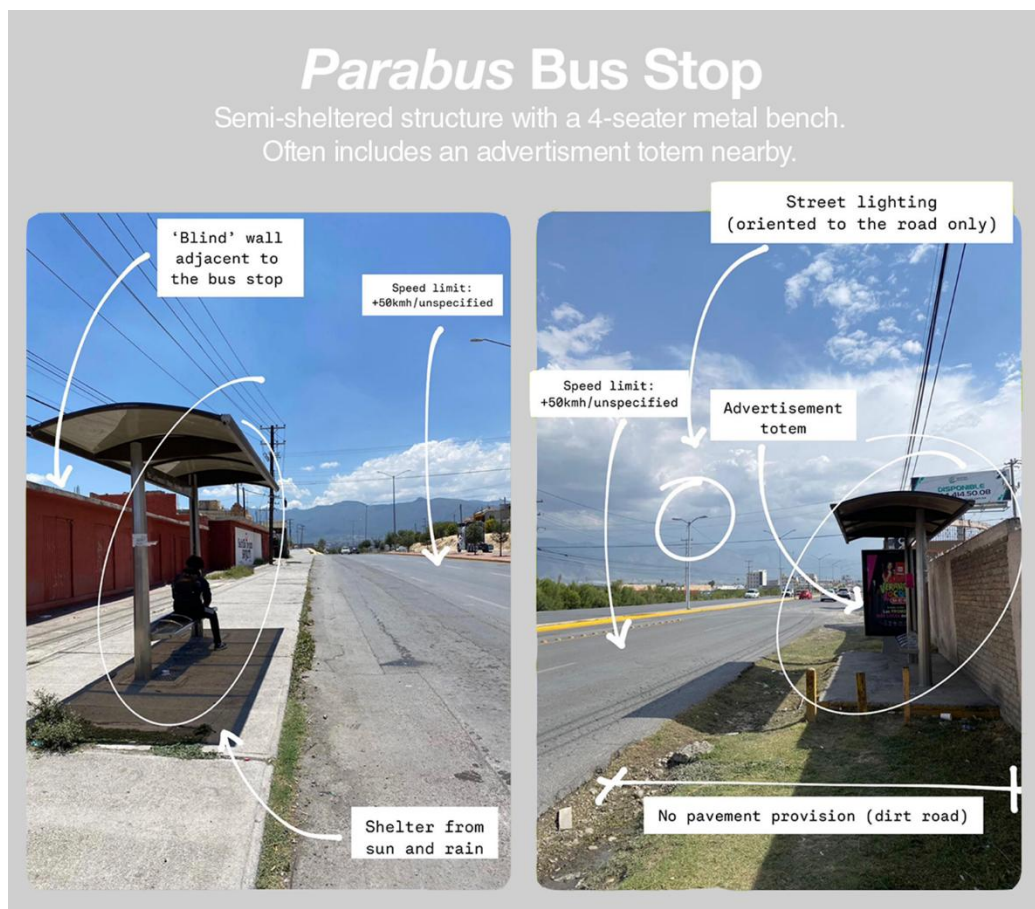
Type of bus stops

In our city-wide assessment, we identified three different types of bus stops. *Parabus* which refers to a semi-sheltered bus stop that includes a metal structure with a 4-seater bench, a roof, and, often, an advertisement totem (see Fig. 3). *Postes* which refer to vertical signposting that indicates a bus stop

with no additional urban furniture (see Fig. 4). And lastly, informal bus stops which refer to places where people congregate informally to catch a bus route but are not demarcated by either a *poste* or a *parabus* (see Fig 5). Out of 340 assessed stops, only 28% were *parabuses* (96), 37% were *postes* (127), and 34% were informal bus stops (117).

<FIGURE 3>

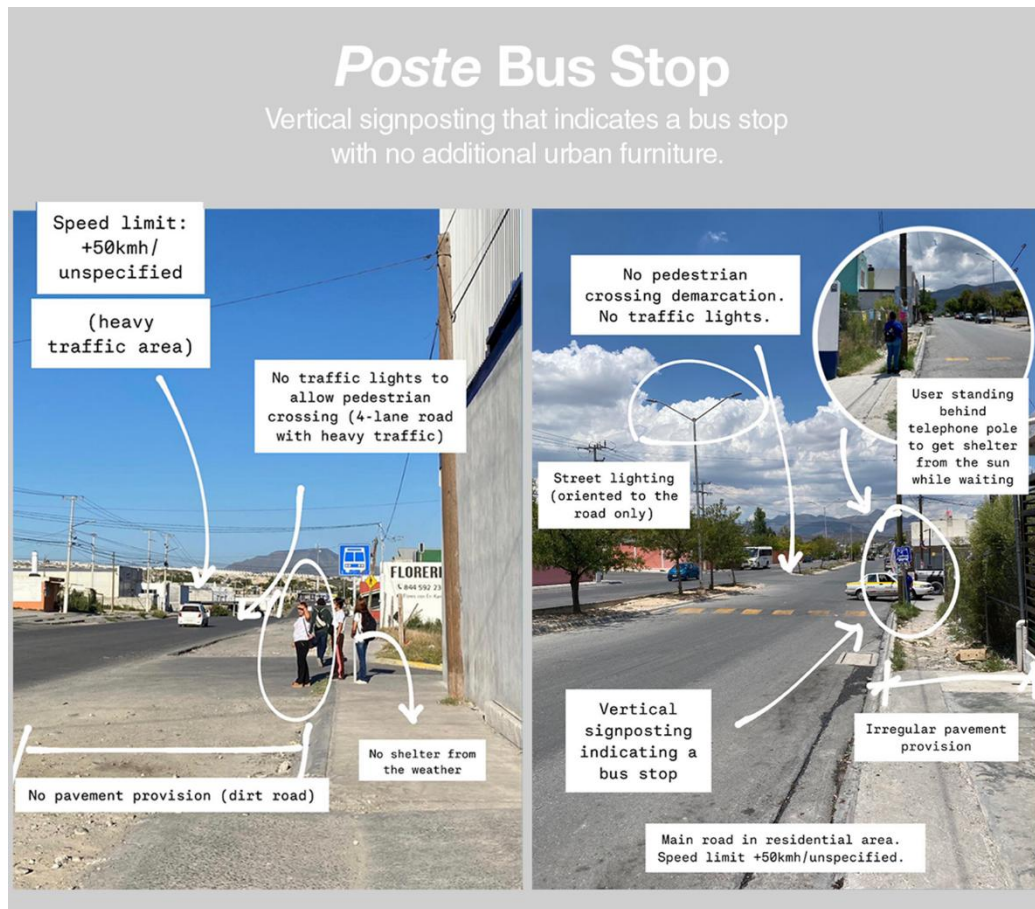
Figure 3: *Parabus* bus stops in Saltillo, Mexico (visual analysis)



Source: Own elaboration, November 2024

<FIGURE 4>

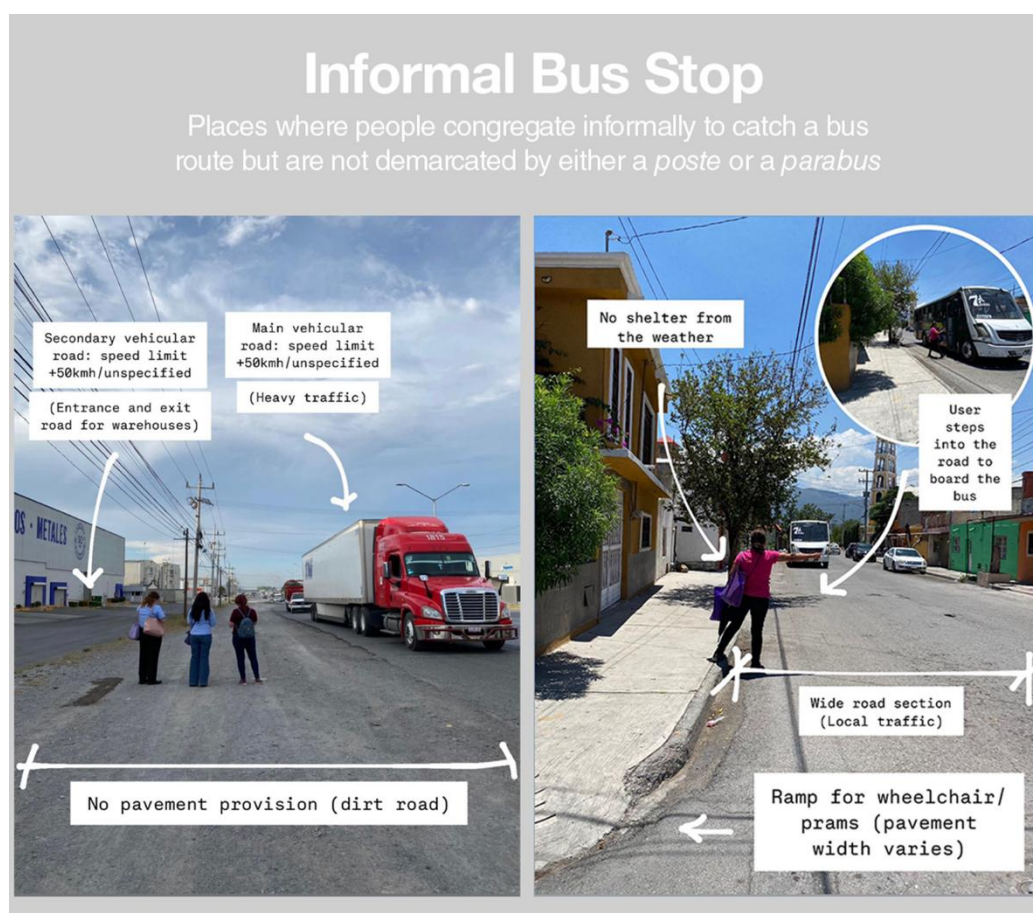
Figure 4: *Poste* bus stops in Saltillo, Mexico (visual analysis)



Source: Own elaboration, November 2024

<FIGURE 5>

Figure 5: Informal bus stops in Saltillo, Mexico (visual analysis)



Source: Own elaboration, November 2024

Both transect walks happened over the course of one weekend during August 2023. At the highest point, temperatures reached almost 40°C and these conditions impacted the walks significantly. These weather conditions are not uncommon for Saltillo during the summer; however, participants immediately began commenting on how exposed to the elements (rain, sunshine, dust) they felt—as shown, most bus stops in Saltillo are either *poste* or informal bus stops and this leaves users without any place for respite. For women, it was not just about having to endure the scorching summer sun. Some women shared anecdotes about why they avoid using shorts or summer dresses while using public transport even though wearing bulkier, thicker clothes is uncomfortable and can leave them at risk of heatstroke.

Women with caring responsibilities shared the same concerns and added that having no shelter from the sun or rain when navigating the city with a toddler or an elder, was too big of a challenge.

Teresa: [Children] walk slower and often need to sit and rest or they get fuzzy and overstimulated. Often times I end up not using public transport because it is so exhausting and inconvenient [...] but then the alternative is not any better because I either need to use a taxi which is so expensive, or I need to use a car.

Our study identified that 171 bus stops out of 340 have no structure that could provide a sitting opportunity or shelter from the rain or sun. An additional 70 bus stops had informal seating opportunities (i.e., steps or low walls from nearby private or commercial properties) while only 99 of the assessed bus stops had seating and shelter that was part of the official bus stop infrastructure. However, for participants, having bus stops with *parabus* was a positive but ‘did not mean that they were any better’ because the current *parabuses* are metal structures that retain heat and become difficult to use during better part of the year. A large part of the discussion centred around the lack of vegetation that could provide shade and regulate the temperature of the streets (also known as heat island effect, see Palme and Carrasco, 2022) because women argued that it was not just about having sitting opportunities but about making them comfortable to use.

Road safety

As we continued walking, participants talked about how the conditions of the road affect their perceptions of safety. They expressed frustration and anger about having to negotiate the right of way with aggressive motorists who would not yield or who would rush them to cross the street, and these feelings worsened whenever women travelled with infants or elders. Women’s perceptions in Saltillo are linked to broader findings; researchers have identified speed as a key risk factor in road traffic injuries—the higher the speed of a given road, the greater the risk of a crash, as well as the severity of the injuries that result from them (Johansson, 2009; Mendoza *et al.*, 2017). Higher speeds on roadways have a negative effect on pedestrians’ sense of comfort when navigating the city, particularly so when they were navigating the city caring for children or elders and therefore going at a slower pace. In Saltillo, 88% of all bus stops are located next to a street with a speed limit of 50 km/h or higher, or next to a street where the speed limit was not indicated at all.

Road distribution also shaped perceptions of comfort and walkability and in Saltillo, 174 bus stops are located on streets where the road dominates the street section—these bus stops have no parking lane or landscape section to create a buffer between moving traffic and pedestrians. 164 bus stops are located on streets with wide roads and narrow pavements, but with at least one row of street parking.

While moderating the walks, Triana and I had to halt traffic to allow the participants to safely cross the street and this prompted women to later reflect on the difficulty of crossing roads. Participants noted that crossing the street to get to or from the bus stop was a significant challenge because of the speed of the vehicles and the size of the street section (i.e., how many meters they needed to walk from A to B), and one participant candidly shared a previous experience: *Itzel: I remember a time when I was [catcalled] by a guy on the bus, he started touching my arm and I was very uncomfortable. I decided to get down from the bus, but he also went down at the same bus stop. I tried crossing the street, but it was really difficult. I thought*

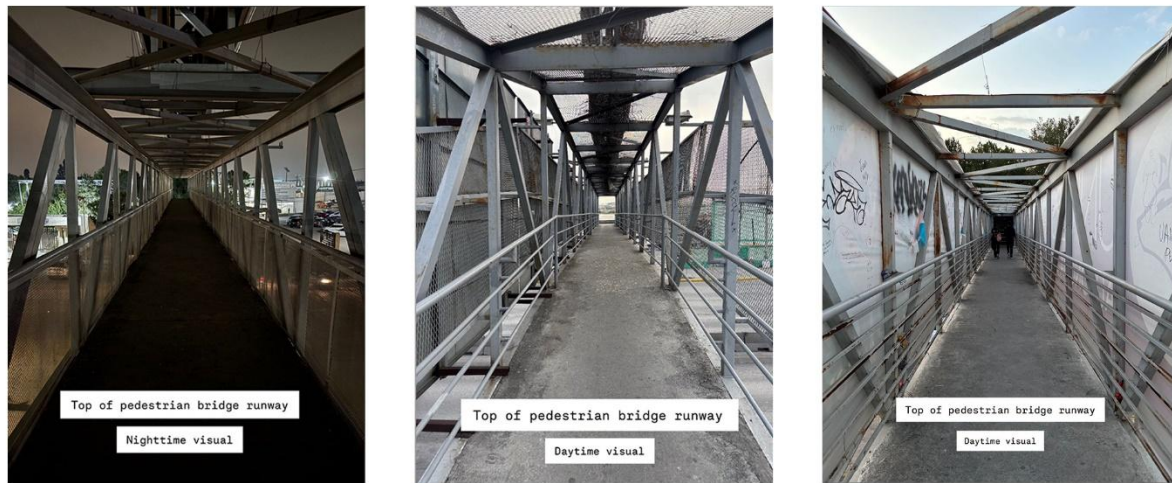
about going into a shop and hoping that would make him go away, but the oncoming traffic wouldn't stop, there was no pedestrian crossing, and I started panicking because I couldn't get away from him.

After Itzel shared her anecdote, other women also shared first and second-hand experiences and mentioned that in some areas of the city the situation is even more anxiety inducing because the only way to cross the road is through a pedestrian bridge. Car-oriented cities in Latin America have largely neglected pedestrians' need for accessible and safe walking infrastructure (Arias Gallegos, 2012; Whitzman, 2013; Ochoa and Gutiérrez, 2018). As a solution to facilitate pedestrian crossings without interfering with vehicular traffic, local authorities have implemented pedestrian bridges— an elevated metal or concrete structure placed over a road to allow pedestrians to cross 'safely'. However, pedestrian bridges introduce additional challenges and externalities to the streets where they are placed that challenge the idea that they are 'safe' for pedestrians. In many cases, these bridges complicate the mobility of people with disabilities and reduced mobility given that most of these structures are only accessible by climbing several flights of stairs. Even when they have wheelchair ramps to access the bridge, these multiply the distance a pedestrian would need to cross on a street level by three or four times, exacerbating the challenge of getting around with limited or restricted mobility.

Participants mentioned that these structures made them feel, isolated, vulnerable and uncomfortable, and these feelings resonate with what other scholars have found. For example, in Arequipa, Peru, Arias Gallegos, (2012) found that men avoid using pedestrian bridges to save time and effort, whereas women avoid them due to fears of crime. In Saltillo, participants agreed that they avoid using pedestrian bridges because they make them feel unsafe and paranoid about being attacked on top of the bridge (runway) where they are secluded and could be easily cornered (see Fig. 6). While in theory pedestrian bridges are meant as a 'safe' option for pedestrians, in practice these structures remove pedestrians from street-level crossings in order to prioritise vehicular traffic at the expense of pedestrians' safety (Andrade-Ochoa *et al.*, 2020; Soliz and Pérez-López, 2022). All participants agreed they avoid using pedestrian bridges during dark hours given the poorly lit environment, and by extension, the bus stops located next to pedestrian bridges.

<FIGURE 6>

Figure 6: Top of pedestrian bridge runway



Source: Own elaboration, November 2024

For the girls (ages 5-8) who joined the transect walks, crossing the bridge to get from the bus stop to the other side of the road was a challenging experience. On the second walk, navigating the section of the transect walk where the pedestrian bridge is located took twice as planned because the girls were afraid of falling and could only move slowly while holding on to the rusted railing of the bridge. They were afraid of the height and the cars speeding below them, and their fear was exacerbated by the oscillation of the structure at the top of the bridge. This section of the transect walks triggered participants to reflect on the challenges of navigating the city with a disability or as an elder with reduced mobility—some participants shared stories about family members who had opted out of walking the city and using public transport due to several barriers of physical inaccessibility and listed pedestrian bridges as a major obstacle. Participants highlighted that the ramps to access the bridge were considerably steep and would struggle to push a shopping cart, a stroller, or a wheelchair (see Fig. 7). One of the participants reflected on how her daily journeys would be drastically different if she had reduced mobility, and this prompted the rest of the participants to consider how being able-bodied allows them differentiated access to the city in relation to women with disabilities (Iudici, Bertoli and Faccio, 2017).

<FIGURE 7>

Figure 7: Visual analysis of a bus stop next to pedestrian bridge in Saltillo, Mexico



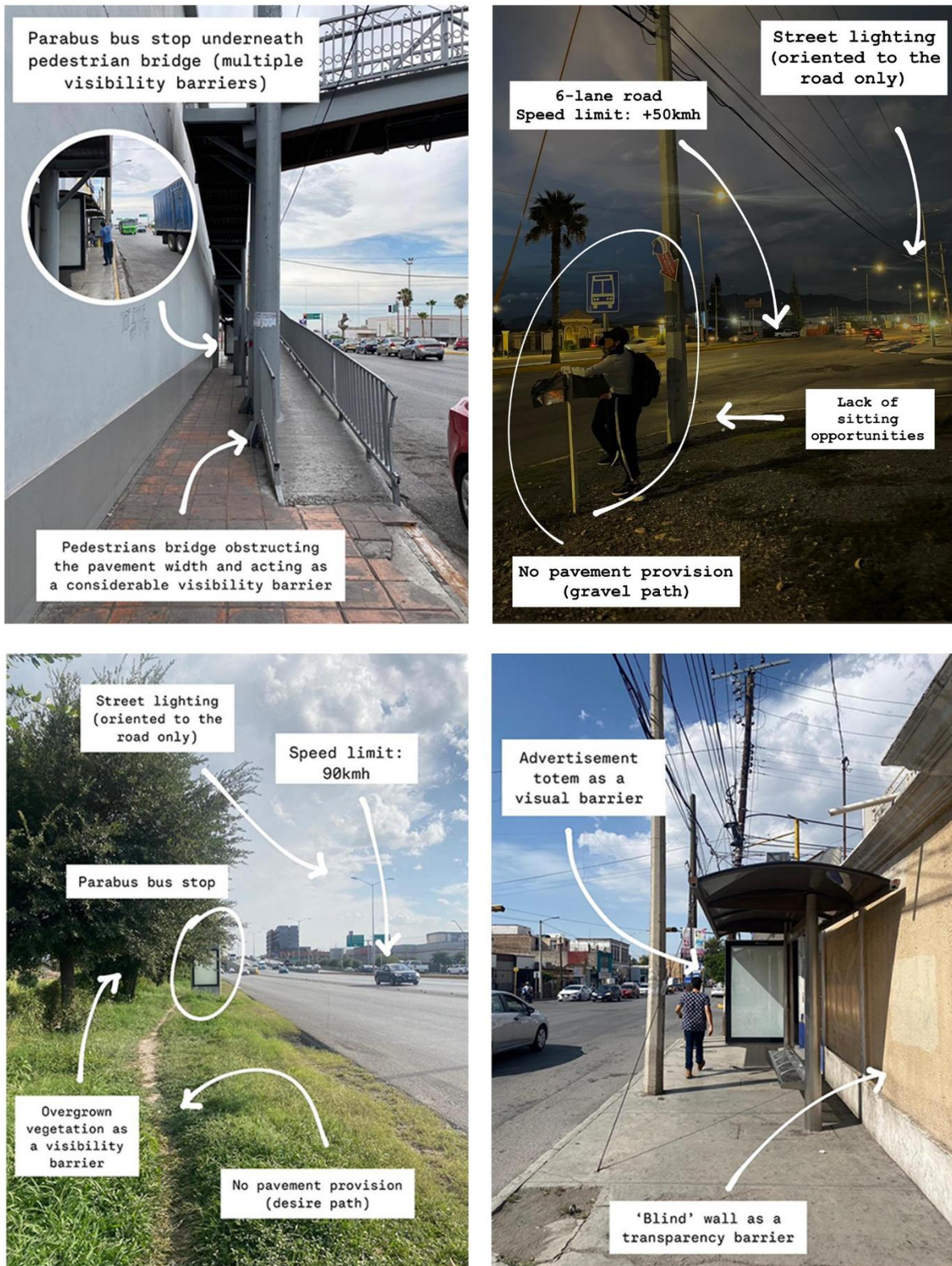
Source: Own elaboration, November 2024

Visual barriers

Participants also noted that often, urban structure itself presented a visual barrier that made them feel vulnerable. For example, pedestrian bridges present a double visual barrier: firstly, they often lack public lighting and regular maintenance, creating blind and isolated spots where women feel particularly vulnerable (see Fig. 6, image far-left), and secondly, these structures partially or fully block the pavement, adding complexity to pedestrians' mobility, and representing a significant barrier to user visibility (Fig. 8, top-left corner). Other bus stops also presented different types of visual barriers like advertisement totems (Fig. 8, bottom-right corner), overgrown vegetation (Fig. 8, bottom-left corner), and lack of public lighting at bus stops (Fig. 8, top-right corner).

<FIGURE 8>

Figure 8: Examples of visibility barriers next to bus stops



Source: Own elaboration, November 2024

For women, being able to see and to be seen was a key element that shaped how comfortable and confident they felt navigating the city. Women's perceptions of vulnerability at the bus stops were also heightened by how visible their surroundings seemed to them. For example, bus stops where the adjacent buildings had *blind walls* with no windows or doors overlooking the street, or fences with controlled access made them feel less safe and less likely to receive help in case of an emergency:

Cynthia: A lot of my journeys are almost marathonic; I need to commute from [southeast Saltillo] to the industrial area in the northwest and what makes me feel the most vulnerable there is that there is no one to ask for help in case anything happens. All of the surrounding buildings are industrial warehouses or are fenced properties, and the area is so poorly lit. If I was followed like [Iztel], I don't know where I would even run to.

In Saltillo, 217 bus stops presented at least one blind wall or fence with controlled access that prevented easy access to help, and 132 of the assessed bus stops have a significant visual obstacle over 1.5m tall and 1.2m wide (see Fig. 8). The fears participants mentioned also link to what has been found in other studies. For instance, in Santiago, Chile, women's sense of security improved based on the presence of others, proximity to shops, schools, parks, and the presence of familiar people. This study highlights that transparency in relation to fences and facades enhances women's sense of security (Paydar, Kamani-Fard and Etminani-Ghasrodashti, 2017).

It is important to acknowledge that the vitality of the built environment where the bus stops are located plays a key role in altering women's perceptions of vulnerability and safety. Similarly, lighting conditions drastically changed participants' perceptions of safety in the evenings, even when there were no visual barriers at the bus stop. While all bus stops are located in urban areas with provision of public street lighting, the light distribution is oriented to illuminating the road rather than the pavement or bus stop itself. Participants reflected on how in some areas of the city, even though there is street lighting, the pavement still feels poorly lit. This is either because of partial or total obstruction of the light (i.e., by overgrown vegetation) or because the light orientation did not prioritise the pavement, exacerbating perceived vulnerability by having to navigate dark environments in the evenings—often with significant visual barriers too. This study identified only one bus stop out of 340 with lightning that was part of the bus stop itself.

Information provision

The availability of information about the routes, timetables, and how to navigate the transport system altered women's ability to navigate the city. In Saltillo, 130 bus stops had no signposting for pedestrians or transport users, and 210 only had street names in the vicinity of the bus stop. There were no bus stops with any kind of information available about the routes that went by, how often, or estimated timetables.

Carmen: You can arrive at the bus stop, and you may have just missed the bus; you don't know if you'll be waiting 5 or 20 minutes, or if the next bus that comes along will be full and won't stop. [In that case] you'd have to wait another 10 or 15 minutes if you're lucky. There are no timetables, you can't really know what bus route goes by or when it's going to arrive, not even a rough estimate.

Verónica: [...] and there isn't a place where you can look up what route goes where, there's a website called 'mi ruta' (my bus route) but it's outdated, unofficial, and some route paths are not the current ones.

For participants with caring responsibilities, having no access to timetables or route information represented a temporal constraint and this can exacerbate their risk of time poverty, an issue that is intertwined with gender, class, and income disparities (see (Vickery, 1977; Turner and Grieco, 2000; Qi and Dong, 2018). Women who engage in paid work often also balance a significant part of the care and household responsibilities (Benería and Feldman, 1992; Jirón and Gómez, 2018) and this means that their days have tight schedules for where and when they need to travel, rarely leaving them with enough time to meet their basic needs for rest and leisure. When women are forced to navigate a public transport system that is unreliable and unpredictable, they end up wasting much of their time waiting for the bus and it necessarily means that they are reducing the amount of time they could spend doing other activities that could further their professional, personal, and social development

The lack of information available also affects women without caring responsibilities who struggle to navigate power dynamics while navigating a transport system that is perceived as unsafe:

Carmen: Sadly, all of this information [routes, timetables, destinations] is held by men. The only official person you could get this information from are the [male] bus drivers and sometimes asking puts you at risk.

Aquetzali: Yeah, I find myself in the same dilemma, should I ask [for directions] or not because [if you do], you're showing your hand. You're disclosing that you don't know where you're going or where you are and that's making yourself even more vulnerable. I've heard from so many women that they've been followed by guys who get off the bus at the same bus stop as them and they begin following them. So, if I let people know I don't know where I'm going, where I am, or what buses to use, then you open up the door to being followed; they've already seen that I am an easy prey.

Lack of wayfinding information constitutes a severe barrier for women trying to navigate the city through public transportation. In Spain, women report higher levels of spatial anxiety and fear of getting lost when spatially navigating compared to men, and this is related to personal safety and their perception of risk of being attacked (Mendez-Lopez *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, in a study conducted with

participants in the United States and Hungary, women also reported significantly higher wayfinding anxiety and even differentiated styles of orientation—women relied more on landmark-based route information whereas men were more likely to orient to global reference points such as compass points (Lawton and Kallai, 2002). Heightened concerns about personal safety not only result in emotional distress and anxiety—it affects women’s urban experiences and their sense of belonging in the city. Lack of information regarding routes, timetables, and destinations leads to wayfinding anxiety for women due to fear of assault, and in turn, this shapes how and when women get to explore the city. As Lawton and Kallai (2002) argued, wayfinding anxiety may lead a woman to choose a longer, more familiar route over a potentially shorter route or to avoid jobs or careers that require travel to unfamiliar destinations, particularly after dark.

Conclusions

As we have demonstrated, the city is not neutral, and neither are the urban conditions that women are forced to negotiate to get around. In Saltillo, women navigate deficient road conditions and fears of harassment while commuting and carrying out their everyday journeys. The constant threat of violence and the demanding nature of caregiving often require women to adjust their routes, schedules, and behaviours in ways that restrict their access to the city.

In this paper, we have identified the urban conditions around bus stops that exacerbate women’s feelings of vulnerability and insecurity. Visual barriers, lack of appropriate street lighting, and lack of wayfinding information severely impact women’s feelings of stress when using public transport bus stops and navigating the transport system. Road safety conditions like speed limits and crosswalks also play a critical role in influencing how comfortable women feel when walking in the city, particularly when travelling at a slower pace with children and people with limited mobility. The stress of ensuring the safety of dependents while navigating an environment that feels hostile or unsafe adds another layer of complexity to women’s daily routines. Additionally, participants identified pedestrian bridges as a mobility barrier and highlighted the aspects that trigger their perceptions of vulnerability, namely low-lit environments, blind spots, and secluded areas where they can be easily trapped. These characteristics in the urban infrastructure is how gender inequalities in the city materialise.

It is important to analyse the urban environment through a gender lens because hostile urban conditions not only hinder women’s physical mobility at an individual scale; they also contribute to a larger cycle of oppression that limits women’s access to spaces. When women cannot travel safely and freely, they face limited access to opportunities for education, professionalisation, and social development. The seemingly individual hurdles women have to endure daily are part of the continuum of violence that keeps women out of the public sphere and in a subordinate position in the social, political, and cultural aspects of our cities (Falú, 2014). It is important to contextualise women’s urban experiences to understand how they fit in the continuum of violence— how microaggressions like street harassment,

catcalling, and the defaulting of care work to women, are part of a larger structural issue that reinforce gendered power dynamics (Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2010). These *micromachismos*, while small-seeming, foster an urban environment that allows and incentivises violence against women that escalates in severity and expands throughout all aspects of women's lives (Garza and Derbez, 2020).

As we argued, envisioning policies that can address women's issues in the transport system needs to go beyond protectionist measures dressed in 'pink' because even if women boarded a women-only bus network, they would have already had to wait at bus stops that are precariously lit, that lack information, and that are located in hostile streets. Instead, we should foster dialogues about how to create urban environments where women can negotiate risks safely (Whitzman, 2013). While the onus should remain on men to stop harassing women, and not on women to escape them, infrastructure provision still plays a significant role in enabling women to navigate the city freely and safely (Loukaitou-Sideris *et al.*, 2009). The findings from this study help us identify infrastructure gaps in Saltillo and envision policy programmes that could make women feel safer while navigating the city and outline a point of reference for accessibility issues overall.

Policy recommendations

Current federal policy and design guidelines make recommendations regarding placement of bus stops in relation to intersections, road design layout for traffic flows, and frequency of bus stops depending on the type of road and frequency of service (Secretaría de Desarrollo Agrario, Territorial, y Urbano *et al.*, 2019; Secretaría de Gobernación, 2024). Transport authorities should comply with road design standards that specify the distance between one bus stop to another as well as all other standards that are also applicable depending on the size and type of transport network. However, there is a significant gap in local policy literature in Saltillo around design guidelines specifically for bus stops. Currently there are no guidelines that indicate characteristics such as: pavement width; where lighting fixtures should be located; dimensions and materials depending on the type of bus stop; provision of wayfinding information; or other characteristics that deeply impact women's urban experiences. Here we outline general recommendations that relate to infrastructure provision, urban planning and road design regulations, and policy and design guidelines.

Infrastructure provision

Bus stops should have integrated *parabus* where the pavement conditions allow it. For this, local authorities should take into account the width and type of the pavement, and the adjacent buildings to the bus stop. Where the road layout allows it, pavements should be expanded to comply with the width established by the federal government regulations according to the type of road. Bus stop shelters should have their own lighting fixture that illuminates the stop and the surrounding area, it should be connected to the general local energy line and should be monitored regularly. Where the width of the pavement

allows it and the demand on the bus stop is considerable, bus stops should provide sitting opportunities in form of a bench or backrests in narrower pavements.

Local authorities should remove and relocate advertisement totems next to bus stops in order to minimise blind spots and begin tackling pavement clutter. It is necessary to recognise that not all *poste* bus stops should be converted into *parabus*, however, this should be determined with a footfall analysis that indicate which bus stops should be upgraded depending on their specific urban conditions. In regard to ‘informal’ bus stops, a mixed-method footfall analysis should investigate which ‘informal’ bus stops should be equipped with signposting and urban furniture.

All bus stops should provide information regarding bus routes and timetables—for this, the local transport authority should work hand-in-hand with the local government to provide accurate and updated information. This is a key first step in enabling women to safely navigate transport routes independently and will improve the overall quality of the transport system for the rest of users.

Urban planning and road design

For women in Saltillo, a major cause of distress stemmed from lack of road safety and high speeds. Local authorities in charge of overseeing public transport infrastructure should conduct a network-wide study that can assess how road design impacts user experience in bus stops located on streets where the speed limit exceeds 50kmh. Local governments should adopt a vision-zero approach to road safety and implement policies that prioritise pedestrian safety in the city.

In the case of pedestrian bridges, the local government should carry out a participatory assessment of these structures in order to determine the viability of removal of the overhead bridge in the short and medium term. On a case-by-case basis, pedestrian bridges should be replaced with a street-level crosswalk that prioritises pedestrian traffic, with the ultimate goal of phasing out all pedestrian bridges where the road layout allows it. Local authorities should prioritise urban development projects that encourage mixed zoning in order to bring eyes to the street, a well-known passive design strategy that helps create safer places (Jacobs, 1961).

Policies and design guidelines

Authorities should work at the state and local level to develop collaborative design manuals for bus stops and transport transfer hubs. The elaboration of these guidelines should involve citizens (namely women, people with disabilities, and the elderly), activists, local and state planning authorities, and academics with knowledge relevant to the project. A three-stage project is recommended where local authorities begin by 1) conducting technical traffic studies followed by 2) participatory research methods, consultation processes, and tactical urbanism projects and 3) culminate with the publication of official design guidelines for gender-conscious bus stops.

These recommendations should be further expanded into a design manual for bus stops in Mexican cities in future research projects. The findings for this study are a reference point for other Mexican cities with similar urban challenges. Further research could complement this study by focusing on the urban experiences of elderly women, children, and people with reduced mobility or disabilities.

Limitations

For this study, we were not able to welcome people with reduced mobility and mobility aids because the transport network (buses) is not accessible. Further studies should engage with how the transport network shapes the mobility of elders, people with reduced physical mobility, and people with disabilities. While we were boarding a bus, a group of men harassed us (participants and researchers) with catcalling remarks and lascivious looks, and this further sparked conversations around women's coping strategies for the relentless violence they face when navigating the city. All participants from that walk descended the bus safely and decided to carry on with the activity, however, this was not the first time that GBV dismantled the process of researching GBV in the city (see Infante-Vargas and Mesta-Rodríguez, 2025).

Paper Four. These boots are made for walking: A reflexive analysis of negotiating unavoidable risks during fieldwork as a woman

Authorship statement

This paper is a co-authored piece of work with the collaboration of Óscar Mesta-Rodríguez. It was published as an original research article in *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* and can be found at this link: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654425132026> and in this thesis as Appendix 7. For this paper, Óscar and I share credits for the conceptualisation and structure of the paper. We conducted two in-depth interviews where we shared reflections, and our retellings of what fieldwork had looked and felt like for each of us. I was then in charge of grounding the material to the existing scholarship to build our argument and I wrote and developed the manuscript with input from Óscar. Harriet Gray and Joshua Kirshner assisted by providing critical feedback and copyediting corrections as part of their role as Ph.D. supervisors.

Introduction

In the summer of 2023, I (Diana) began conducting fieldwork in Northern Mexico as part of my doctoral studies in the UK. Overall, my research explores the relationship between gender and mobility; how gender-based violence can modify women's patterns of mobility across the public transport infrastructure of Saltillo, Mexico. During fieldwork, I carried out a mix-method approach combining qualitative methods like ethnographic shadowing and participatory transect walks, and urban audits of bus stops as a quantitative method. During six months of fieldwork in Saltillo, I was catcalled and harassed while carrying out all of these methods, nevertheless, the most harrowing experiences happened during the data collection process for the quantitative component of this project, where we used walking as research method. In this paper, we explore the differentiated experiences we had of fieldwork due to gender-based violence and the aftermath of being harassed, catcalled, followed, and nearly abducted while carrying out the research methods— we reflect on how that affected me and Óscar in differentiated ways and how that, in turn, also impacted the research. I was harassed while walking the city, yet these boots are made for walking, and that's just what they did⁷¹. What follows is

⁷¹ We reference the chorus line of the 1966 hit song by Nancy Sinatra and interpret walking as a metaphor for personal agency.

a retelling of the events and an exploration of the aftermath through a reflexive, feminist scholarship lens.

Over the last two decades, scholars have called on other researchers to share their practical experiences of fieldwork in an attempt to broaden the conversation around the place of emotions in academic research (Widdowfield, 2000; Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer, 2001; Hill, 2004; Pasquini and Olaniyan, 2004; Khalid, 2014; Kwak, 2019) and many have reflected on the shock of confronting how unprepared they were for the degree of professional vulnerability they experienced during fieldwork (Gurney, 1985; Ballamingie and Johnson, 2011). This paper also brings an important topic of conversation to the table: the emotional work of doing fieldwork as a woman and how significant it is to integrate these narratives of our reflexive methodology approaches. I write about my experiences of self-blame, shame, and guilt following the events, and reflect on the differentiated experiences that I (Author 1, female, Mexican, late 20s) had compared to Óscar (male, Mexican, late 20s), who worked as a research assistant during data collection, and how that played a key role in how fieldwork played out.

We explore issues of researchers' vulnerability during fieldwork and how it impacts the work and the researcher while critiquing the current ethics and safety procedures in place at research institutions (namely higher education institutions). We argue that when conversations around the risks and vulnerabilities of fieldwork revolve only around ethics and safety clearance processes within institutions, these dialogues can turn into a tick-box exercise that can further expose researchers by implicitly incentivising them to ignore or brush off potential harms.

This paper is a co-authored work that explores our accounts of the fieldwork, but we have chosen to adopt a first-person narrative that centres on my (Diana's) lived experiences of fieldwork and the aftermath both as a political and personal decision. Drawing from what other feminists have already voiced, first-person narratives are necessary to expose previously hidden biases, to facilitate understanding of (or empathy with) those different from ourselves, and to lay on the table our own biases as scholars (Brison, 2002). Moreover, our own anecdotes and lived experiences are political, and writing from an "I" perspective directly confronts the notion of objective, neutral, dispassionate researcher (Ballamingie and Johnson, 2011). As Gómez (2023) argued, it is crucial to write from our place of resistance— from the toilet seat; when we are doing laundry; on our commute to work; from painful memories. What follows may seem anecdotal at times, however, it is a political account that reflects my experience of the city as a woman (De la Cerda, 2020), and writing from this perspective allows for a richer, broader analysis of how women researchers experience fieldwork. I see this opportunity to write in first-person as a way to confront and re-signify my lived experience of fieldwork; I write my own story from a place of resistance against the neutral, "objective" and impersonal academic

discourse, and against the general tendency to ignore and brush off women's experiences of everyday gender-based violence.

A bit of context

Being a Mexican citizen and native to the city I was researching, I felt extremely familiar with the environment I was re-entering. At this point, while I was living full-time in the UK for my program, I had been a user of Saltillo's public transport for almost 15 years. I had experienced episodes of mild sexual harassment like catcalling and inappropriate ogling from bus drivers and other passengers to more severe episodes of sexual assault while in public transport. My relationship with the topic I research is one that has been evolving since I started using public transport and wandering the city over the years. Similar to me, many women develop mental maps as they navigate their cities and transport systems (Pain, 1991b; Fenster, 2005; England and Simon, 2010; Kern, 2020b), and my informal knowledge of the city, and its public transport system informed my choices and decisions, as well as the way I perceive Saltillo and other cities. My context and my experiences as a young woman from Saltillo have shaped me and in turn, they have shaped my research interests.

As a researcher and a woman who grew up using the public transport of Saltillo, I was aware that my position was both of an insider and outsider; I saw myself as an insider because of my particular informal knowledge of the environment, but an outsider as well, as an academic with greater epistemological influences that had not lived in the city (full-time) for a few years—my development as a researcher over the years has expanded my understanding of issues like transport planning, urban design, geographical concepts of space and territory, gender issues, and multiple other social inequalities and concerns over social justice. Importantly, there is a class dimension that filters my urban understandings—while I am a researcher that focuses on sustainable mobility, my socioeconomic background in Mexico is privileged middle class⁷², and this shapes my experiences in public transportation and the city. My destinations are usually around the city centre or the north part of the city in wealthier neighbourhoods; these areas still report cases of gender-based violence in public transportation but less so than the south, east, and west of Saltillo (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021). My reliance in public transport evolved from being the only choice I had available to me as a teenager needing to commute to school, to a political, intentional decision to actively reject car culture and remain exposed to the experience, and often perils, of being a woman using Saltillo's transport system (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2022), and still, my experiences of urban transport contrast with those of

⁷² We use the term “privileged middle class” to convey the nuance of our position. While we earn the average income considered by INEGI (2021, p.53) for the middle class in Mexico, we are both professionals who have had access to higher education and have obtained postgraduate degrees. In many ways, we are middle class, but our experiences are vastly different from other people with different cultural and social capital who are also considered middle class in Mexico.

users whose relationship with public transportation in Saltillo is not optional, who live in marginalised neighbourhoods serviced by infrequent, unreliable bus routes. My positionality as an insider/outsider to the subject I research is dynamic, and this has allowed me to create meaningful connections with participants who are also users of public transportation.

I began fieldwork with a cautious level of excitement, aware of the responsibility and seriousness of the issue at hand. I teamed up with multiple researchers and activists to be able to carry out my methods smoothly and in a way that felt like it would genuinely convey the experiences and challenges of the women who use Saltillo's public transport on a daily basis. I had the opportunity to work alongside researcher Óscar, a keen activist for pedestrian and cyclists' rights who also has a background in urban planning and understands the urban challenges that face Saltillo in terms of mobility. I asked Óscar if he would be interested in working with me to carry out quantitative urban audits of public transport bus stops across Saltillo but the offer had many challenges; to begin with, there was no publicly available data regarding the location or current state of bus stops across the city, so in order to carry out the urban audits we would need to first conduct an extensive recognition process to determine what we were going to be working with and set the sample size. Second, this would need to be carried out during the summer, which in northern Mexico can reach temperatures of over 42°C. And third, perhaps most importantly, I could not offer proper economic compensation for Óscar's labour as I also found myself in a precarious financial situation making ends meet with a small postgrad scholarship and part-time gigs as a barista⁷³.

For the audits of bus stops, we chose to walk from one stop to another in order to carry out the work efficiently and sustainably; in total, we walked almost 200km in the span of two weeks auditing almost 350 bus stops. Our decision to walk was a conscious one from the beginning— using a private vehicle for this exercise would have been a faster, easier process for us as researchers, but it would have defeated the purpose of auditing bus stops as a methodology to assess transport infrastructure in terms of comfort, accessibility, road safety, and walkability. Bicycles would have been an efficient, sustainable option, but seeing a street from a cycling perspective would have shielded us from challenges that 'can only be felt on foot' in contrast with the alternative experience of travel by car, bicycle, or bus (Middleton, 2010, p. 582). We intentionally used walking as a methodology *because* of the inconvenience it represented; walking in between auditing points gave us a deeper understanding of the environment in which the stops were located, and we were able to recognise physical characteristics that otherwise would have remained hidden.

Walking as a method can unearth intimate and embodied accounts of territory (Mason, 2021), and offers an opportunity to develop 'local literacy' through the identification and delineation of important sites,

⁷³ There is an important conversation around academia, privilege, and precariousness, and how that can affect researchers mental health (see Butler-Rees and Robinson, 2020). While we cannot engage with this issue at this point in time, it is still worth acknowledging and recognising that precariousness affected us and shaped our work plan.

processes and questions for examination (Pierce and Lawhon, 2015, p. 657). Moreover, walking is a way of exploring everyday political geographies of conflict and is significantly shaped by social markers like class, race, disability, and gender (Mason, 2021). As Pierce and Lawhon (2015) highlighted, not all walking practices are equal; for instance, if researchers walk exclusively in spaces of consumption, or if they avoid areas of low density for reasons of aesthetics or convenience, those practices will shape the scope of potential insights, so we navigated neighbourhoods we had never been in before. While Óscar and I are both from Saltillo and had a significant understanding of how the transport system operates— along with the limitations it faces— it was important for us to explore the urban areas of the city that were not part of our usual routines due to our class privilege. In a similar way to me, Óscar's socioeconomic background is also privileged middle class⁷⁴, and while he has chosen to navigate the city through cycling and walking as a political decision, his urban understandings are still filtered through his positionality. Walking as a methodology was also a deliberate decision to break out of the bubble we live in in Saltillo and stemmed from the acknowledgment that walking experiences— even within the same city— can be vastly different depending on the characterisation of a given neighbourhood. In sum, I chose to walk the city I research because that is what my boots are made for; it was an informed political and personal decision that related to my agency not only as a researcher but as a woman walking the city, taking up public space.

Throughout the weeks of auditing bus stops I had been catcalled and ogled; we tried to remain together most of the time mainly in case we needed each other's opinion while grading a bus stop, but it quickly became evident that being out on the street was not entirely safe, not only due to harassment, also due to hostile urban conditions that put pedestrians in risky situations. Overall, through the auditing process, the urban conditions heightened our sense of discomfort— cars would speed past at over 60kmh, sometimes even cargo trucks and lorries too; the pavements were in poor conditions at best, and non-existent at worst; and crossing streets represented a major challenge at main roads.

By the last week of audits, the urban conditions alongside the scorching summer sun had taken a toll on us and we wanted to get it over with as smoothly, and as soon, as possible. On one of our last auditing sessions, an unknown man followed me on their car for a few blocks, and later tried to drag me into it. Startled and scared, I was only able to scream Óscar's name for help and wave my arms but to almost no avail since the street was so wide and full of heavy (and loud) traffic. A few seconds later, the driver of the car noticed Óscar looking at me and trying to cross the street to help me; then the car sped off.

Many factors were at play when this happened; our working day had begun at 7:00am (6:00am when accounting for commuting time), and upon reflection, both of us had felt tense in the area prior to the event— the neighbourhood we were auditing has a significant amount of heavy traffic— namely private hire coaches, cargo vans, lorries, and public transport buses— and this shaped how comfortable we felt

⁷⁴ See footnote 26.

when walking. We were mentally and physically tired at that point of fieldwork but needed to continue on a tight schedule in order to complete the work on time. Óscar recalls noticing the type of street we would be working with— a two-way arterial road with considerable heavy traffic— and we both decided it was best to split up so we could audit bus stops in parallel and advance faster. At the time it made sense to split, and in a way, it still does; it streamlined the process and would get us out of the unsafe environment faster. There were no pedestrian crossings at any point in the street, and the safest bet was to try and cross the street at the nearest intersection with a traffic light. The intersection did not have a pedestrian crossing phase or a full-stop of traffic at any point – a common characteristic of intersections in Saltillo— but this was still the safest way to navigate the busy street we would be walking. The pavement on both sides of the road was gravel and it was clear that cars would frequently obstruct the gravel road to park off-side to the street. When Óscar crossed to the other side of the road we both began walking almost in parallel, the bus stops we had to audit were almost in front of each other, but the type of traffic, the speed of the road, and the lack of pedestrian infrastructure altered our perceptions of safety in the space. Shortly after we began walking down the road, I noticed a silver car driving slowly behind me, a person began shouting lascivious words at me, and I decided to ignore them in the hopes that they would get bored and drive away. The car eventually took a right at the next block and went away, but a couple of blocks later they showed up again. I was feeling angry and frustrated about it; women face catcalling every day while navigating their cities and adopt strategies to feel safer or mitigate the risks, this was no different (Pain, 1991b; England and Simon, 2010; Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021). In this case, I opted for displaying that I was not alone by calling out Óscar's name in a calm way, just as a way to get his attention and highlight that I was not alone. The car immediately took a right at the next block and went away only to come back a few minutes later after seeing that no one came when I called. The car cut me off at the pavement and I began screaming and waving my arms so Óscar could see me, but the road was so busy he struggled to cross immediately. The car sped off as soon as they saw Óscar. We both recall feeling anxious and overwhelmed, the event shook us and impacted how confident we felt on the street doing our work, but it still felt different for me.

Differentiated experiences of fieldwork

After the event, Óscar and I began having conversations around our own comfort levels while carrying out research; overall we had tried to keep an open line of communication and had a collaborative approach to the work. We were comfortable working together and excited about the work we were carrying out, but it was only after the event that we began talking about how different our experiences had felt thus far. My experience of fieldwork was significantly different from Óscar's in many ways; for instance, he was mindful of how he presented himself in the sense of not wanting to be perceived as an academic, a council inspector, or a reporter, his goal was to blend in with the everyday crowd and not stand out. He was mindful of his attire in this sense and did not want to dress too formally, but he was not concerned with how he was perceived in terms of being sexualised depending on his clothing

or how his interactions could be (mis)interpreted. On the other hand, I was mindful of how others (namely participants and bus drivers) perceived me while I interacted with them during research— I monitored my appearance and clothing and, similarly to what Kwak (2019) experienced, I had inadvertently developed strategies and tactics that I kept all along fieldwork. I was careful not to wear strappy tops, shorts, skirts, or anything form-fitting, even though it was the height of the summer in northern Mexico.

I was keenly aware of my position as a young female researcher whenever we engaged in conversation with bus drivers and was mindful of using the appropriate words, tone, and even body language to convey my professionalism. These interactions with the bus drivers were not part of the official research process, but they helped us gain a better understanding of how the transport system works and the drivers' working conditions. It was important that we did not present ourselves as "too official" or we ran the risk of the drivers not wanting to engage with us out of fear of being assessed by either a local authority representative or a reporter. In addition, in my mind, I felt the need to draw a subtle but clear line so my interest in the bus drivers' experiences could not be misinterpreted as any other type of interest (i.e., flirting) while also remaining approachable and building rapport with them. Professional enough to be taken seriously as a female researcher, but not too professional that they would not want to speak with us (Gurney, 1985; Kosygina, 2005; Khalid, 2014). A thin line to walk.

For Óscar— whenever we engaged with bus drivers— his main concern was slowly building up to more difficult questions like "have you ever heard of anyone being sexually assaulted while on the bus?". I certainly could have asked the question myself, and even tried to once or twice, but we quickly realised that the tone of the interaction would change if I asked the question rather than him. Almost all⁷⁵ bus drivers said they had never heard or seen anything related to that regardless of who asked the question, but our interaction following that question would change depending on *who* had asked it. For instance, if I had asked him about it, the driver would get tight-lipped, and his following answers would become less elaborate or detailed regardless of whether the following questions were related to sexual assaults while on transportation or not. Almost as if all rapport built thus far had been severed in a way and needed to be rebuilt again. However, whenever Óscar asked the question, the drivers would still brush it off and say they had never heard or seen anything, but the interaction would continue as casually as before.

While on the streets auditing bus stops, I was catcalled, ogled, and briefly followed and harassed by a moped driver during the audit process of other neighbourhoods, but had brushed those instances off as

⁷⁵ One bus driver initially said he had never heard anything related to gender-based violence on the bus when we first asked. Later on, when we arrived at the bus terminal, he brought it up again and said he had heard of a woman that had been molested while on the bus, and that a colleague of him had to kick the guy off. The interaction felt secretive in a way— like he was confiding in us, and when we asked what happened after he said no one followed up with a report or any official type of record.

the “everyday” harassment of walking the city as a woman. In many of those cases, Óscar was just a few meters ahead of me and I had a false sense of security in that. For the most part, my strategy to this everyday harassment was to ignore it, as that has been my strategy for the last few years whenever I am out in the city anyway, but in a way, I inadvertently relied on having a male research companion with me while out in the streets—particularly around empty neighbourhoods. After the most severe event of harassment, with the driver in the silver car, we began analysing our own fieldwork experiences and talking through the less-threatening instances that had not escalated as far—the ones we had brushed off as the norm—and how that had shaped our approach to fieldwork. Until then, Óscar had not thought about the small strategies and tactics I had considered every day. For him, the challenges of fieldwork mainly stemmed from the conditions under which we worked: the weather, the hours, how much we would walk on a given day, and most importantly, financial constraints. For me, all of these challenges applied in equal measure, but I also had to juggle the burden of navigating the city in an environment that sexualised and harassed me while attempting to conduct research.

Our motivation to pursue this manuscript also comes from a differentiated point of view. For Óscar, what we experienced while collecting data and what we have learned since the events could potentially make an important contribution to the field for current and future researchers and activists. I share that motivation, but for me this paper primarily stems from deep feelings of frustration and anger, and that it is an attempt to understand and contextualise what happened to me/us in order to understand where to go from here. As Brison (2002) argued, it is crucial for trauma survivors to attempt to reconstruct a coherent narrative of the self that allows them to rebuild the events and the self in order to re externalise the event. She writes, ‘Just as one can be reduced to an object through torture, one can become human subject again through telling one’s narrative to caring others who are able to listen’ (p.57). In the months following the event, most of my frustration laid in the fact that I felt like any conversation about it and the emotions it brought me had no place in academia or in any discussion of my fieldwork experience when, in fact, those emotions were an intrinsic part of fieldwork that shaped us as researchers and the way we view the research. As I began reading other researchers’ experiences of fieldwork, I realised the importance of making room to have conversations around the emotions of fieldwork, especially so when combined methodologies reformulate the relationship of the researcher with the research(ed). An important contribution of this manuscript lies in its capacity to provide a space to reconceptualise my/our experiences of fieldwork, ultimately allowing me to reconstruct my narrative-self as a researcher and an activist.

Lastly, Óscar and I also experienced the aftermath of the event in differentiated ways although with key similarities. We both experienced guilt and shame— Óscar regretted our decision of splitting up at the beginning of the auditing process and wearing his noise-cancelling headphones to block some of the noise from the heavy traffic. In a way, he had felt responsible for looking after me (as a friend and a co-worker rather than from a paternalistic point of view) and the events triggered feelings of shame. While

he struggled with these feelings for a short time, he quickly came to the realisation that the only person responsible for this had been the harasser— not him, not us— and he was able to see how the conditions of the environment had heightened the risks. He had been shocked, angry, and frustrated by the events, and it led him to think more consciously about the safety and wellbeing of the women around him. He was already mindful of how women experience the city differently because of gender-based violence, but witnessing it first-hand reformulated his understandings. However, for me, the events shook my self-narrative of a (neutral, objective) researcher and reduced me to a woman with no control over her safety while in the city, an object, even. In a similar way to what Brison (2002) experienced after her assault, my autonomous-self had been undone by the levels of violence I experienced. As Gurney (1985) had argued, there is an added embarrassment of acknowledging that one's status as a female overshadows one's identity as a researcher.

Directly after the attempted abduction occurred, I was reluctant to bring it up with my supervisors out of fear of being questioned for not having “foreseen” or prevented the situation. After all, the university had asked us (me and my supervisors) to go through multiple clearance processes prior to fieldwork, so in the first few days after it happened, –in my mind at least– it had been my fault. I had to deal with an immense sense of dread and shame that was rooted in my failure as a ‘thorough’ researcher, and these feelings were reinforced by having to be accompanied by a man for the rest of the audits for safety purposes— Óscar's working schedule and mine were conflicting too much but had agreed that it was not safe for me to venture by myself and so I arranged for a (male) friend to accompany me while I audited the last bus stops. The irony of it all is not lost on me: I began this research project to understand how gender-based violence shapes women's mobility in Saltillo and ended up having to modify my mobility patterns and strategies because I had been harassed while walking the city.

My shame and guilt opened the way for severe self-doubt in my abilities to conduct research (and later on, interpreting the data), and these feelings were reinforced whenever I had to share my account of fieldwork with other colleagues. It seemed like there was no room for a conversation on emotions, risks, and vulnerabilities of fieldwork as a female researcher. Equally, the amount of ethics and safety clearance forms I had to hand in prior to beginning fieldwork made me hesitate to recognise the validity of my experiences. Before beginning data collection, those procedures gave me a false sense of confidence in my ability to separate myself from the research and to control my fieldwork environments along with the vulnerabilities and risks that I would be exposed to. After the events had unfolded, those same procedures felt like a testimony of how unprepared and naïve *I* had been as a researcher. After all, the university had told me to be careful, right? And if this happened to me, then I had failed to prevent and foresee this. In reality, there is no way I (or anyone, for that matter) could have prevented the events, and even if they could have foreseen them as a possible risk of fieldwork, researchers are still humans that follow instinctive reactions— not predesigned university safety protocols— whenever facing dangerous scenarios.

You're not really asking, and I'm not really answering; ethics and risk assessments

Straight after the events unfolded, I had to confront reality and deal with how unprepared I was to face my own vulnerability as a young female researcher; I felt guilty and ashamed in a way I had no words for, as if somehow it had all been my fault for not planning measures to protect myself against someone trying to abduct me. As a feminist scholar and activist, I know that none of what happened is my fault and that I could not have prevented it, yet I somehow felt like a piece of the puzzle was missing, suddenly even the thought of opening my computer to look at my fieldwork data would fill me with anxiety and stress.

My methodology involved a mixed-method approach and in my mind, I had seen the “quantitative” component of my mixed-method approach as the most straight-forward step, the one that required the least safeguarding measures since I would not be interacting with participants; it was us (researchers) and the field (the city). We had taken sensible precautions into consideration; Óscar and I were aware of the risks of navigating the city on public transport and by foot and had unspoken agreements we followed to stay safe and look out for one another: we would identify neighbourhoods that felt rougher than others and avoid taking our phones out too much; we avoided carrying valuables and dressed casually to blend in as opposed to hi-vis vests that would have made us look too official and out of place; whenever walking next to an urban highway, we would take as much distance as possible from the cars and trucks speeding past us; and for the most part (perhaps most importantly) we would remain together while auditing the bus stops. In this sense, our positionality with the field mattered just as much as my positionality with the women I worked with during my qualitative methods.

My positionality and life experiences had led me to research gender-based violence in the urban context of Northern Mexico, and it affected the way I shaped my research, but I had conceptualised the quantitative component as a detached, objective process. As Widdowfield (2000) argued, there is less appreciation that this is often a two-way relationship; not only does the researcher affect the research process, but they themselves are affected by this process (Okely and Callaway, 1992; Pasquini and Olaniyan, 2004; Heller *et al.*, 2011) and discussions and critiques of the research process rarely involved any articulation of feeling from the researcher (England, 1994; Kwak, 2019). There is an intense focus on protecting the participants from emotional threat, and it is continuously addressed in methodological text particularly in those that adopt a reflexive starting point— and rightly so. Whenever working with participants, researchers should be careful of treating them like people and invest in building rapport to understand their context, instead of seeing them as mere mines of information to be exploited by researchers (England, 1994). However, in a similar vein, researchers are not merely instruments that facilitate data collection. As Hubbard, *et al.*, (2001) argued we can and do react (England, 1994), yet

this is rarely acknowledged when preparing researchers beginning field work. My experience was similar to Heller *et al.*, (2011):

Fresh from our qualitative methods course, many of us went to the fieldwork preoccupied with concerns related to ethics, positionality, power dynamics and so on. However, we were less aware of the potential changes in our lives that would accompany fieldwork (p.79).

Prior to fieldwork, I had spent weeks carefully crafting safeguarding measures for participants and contingency plans for each method. I was aware of the risks and dangers of researching GBV, had completed all ethics and risk assessments thoroughly and developed a methodological approach that was reflexive and mindful of the various ways in which the participants may be impacted; from the tone of the questions I would be asking, to the multiple barriers I would have to navigate to welcome a broader profile of participants. I was concerned about the wellbeing of all participants as I implemented participatory qualitative methods that more often than not included women who had been harassed while out in the city or had personal backgrounds of GBV in their own homes. I carefully crafted contingency plans and safeguarding measures for all participants, mainly out of my own sense of obligation to them, but also importantly in compliance with ethical research guidelines— however my reflexive approach to positionality began and ended with my relationship to the participants. I had considered my own positionality in relation to the women I worked with on the ethnographic shadowing and the hybrid transect walks but did not to reflect on my own positionality in the field in relation to the urban violence women face every day in the city. I had not been exposed to concepts like researchers' vulnerability or researchers' fatigue. While the university protocols had certainly asked me to pre-empt potential distressing scenarios for the participants I wanted to work with, it also had little to no room available to reflect on own safety in a way that felt genuine and not just a tick-box exercise.

Prior to fieldwork, the university ethics approval form had asked me to reflect on the risk of harm for participants. Although the form asked about significant risks of physical harm to participants or researchers, it did not consider potential psychological or emotional distress to researchers, only participants. My supervisors were aware of my research background and the personal motivation to pursue this project and had expressed concern about my wellbeing while on fieldwork; at the time, I appreciated their input and wrote a small paragraph in the 'other ethical risks' section reflecting on my positionality in relation to the research environment I would be re-entering. I was aware of the risks of researching GBV on public transport *while* using public transport in Saltillo but felt like I had to either underplay the risks or generalise them in a way that would not negatively impact the possibility of obtaining approval from the research ethics panel in order to conduct fieldwork. There was no malice or intent to misrepresent the research environment to the panel, but it felt redundant as most of the GBV women are exposed to while in the city happens while carrying out normal, everyday activities. In a

way, disclosing those risks would have raised concerns that could not realistically be mitigated without seriously impacting my research or curtailed my mobility. The structure of the current ethics approval form does not prompt researchers to reflect on the risks they will face during fieldwork outside of ethical considerations around interactions with participants.

On the other hand, the travel risk assessment (TRA) form focused entirely on the researcher and asked me to consider safeguarding measures for hazards like political instability, extreme weather, transport problems, cultural differences, security, emergency procedures and many others. Specifically, I was asked about the risk of abduction within the crime section, and I declared I would avoid walking alone around quiet areas, especially after dark, but does this answer mean I truly reflected on this risk? I ticked a box and wrote what I needed to move forward with fieldwork—the TRA form was not really asking me to reflect on the possibility of being abducted, and I was not really answering and therein lies our argument. The ethical approval form does not provide a space to reflect on the ethical considerations and risks that may impact the researcher, and neither does the TRA, specially so when a researcher truly reflecting on risks such as gender-based violence can signify getting significantly delayed or rejected for fieldwork. I did not reflect on my positionality in the field (the city) because doing so could have resulted in more obstacles.

Let's run a case scenario: In Saltillo, 9 out of 10 women have been sexually harassed or assaulted in some degree while on public transportation, some of the most gruesome cases including rape and kidnapping (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021); this implies a high-risk vulnerability and the university would have asked me why I needed to incur in these risks and how I would approach them—and reasonably so. But not using public transportation is not realistic given that my research focuses *on* public transportation and even if it didn't, it would have represented a severe restriction on my mobility because of my gender. In many ways, while I was keenly aware of the reality of being a woman trying to use public transportation in Saltillo, I did not feel like I could fully disclose this, or rather, I could, but to the detriment of my research. And this case scenario applies in many other instances of normal, everyday violence for researchers across multiple disciplines. Women navigate risks while walking down the street in their everyday lives, and it is only common to assume that they will encounter gender-related risks at some point while conducting fieldwork too. If we were to disclose all of these 'small' but consistent risks, would we even be cleared to conduct research in person? Perhaps I would have been asked to not use walking as a methodology for the audit process; maybe they would have asked me to have a companion (namely male) to keep safe while working in the city, and would those measures not have defeated the purpose and reliability of my research, too? The ethical approval protocol was concerned with safeguarding participants—and rightly so—but when it came to safeguarding measures for the researcher, the ethics approval form and the TRA were shaped in a way that did not *truly* encourage a reflexive process of the risks and harms associated with fieldwork lest we

(female, queer, or marginalised researchers) severely modify our methodology or refrain from traveling altogether.

In 2001, Hubbard et. al highlighted the importance of understanding emotion as a crucial part of the research experience. As such, there is an inherent need to develop strategies to manage the emotions of the researchers for the duration of the project. One of the objectives of this paper is to echo the reflection of other researchers that have found ways to navigate the emotions of fieldwork. Firstly, it is important to stimulate conversations about the emotional difficulties of fieldwork in academia and activism amongst peers, and particularly between supervisors and students when on postgraduate level. The process of conceptualising and writing this paper has served as a reflexive exercise in and of itself, but it has also had positive effects on my mental health; similarly to what Brison (2002) argued, narrating one's experiences of traumatic events plays a significant role in the recovery from trauma; it allows to establish greater control over traumatic memories and intrusive thoughts. I have developed a deeper understanding of the underlying issue that triggered my post-traumatic symptoms, and I am now able to incorporate these experiences as valuable knowledge that informs my interpretation of the research I conduct. While working on this manuscript, I also reframed my relationship with my supervisors as a doctoral researcher. They allowed me the agency, time, and space to process all the messy thoughts and emotions and put them into paper; their understanding of how critical it was for me to not brush this off or leave it as a footnote in my dissertation validated my experience and encouraged me to dig deeper to try and understand why the experience had affected me so deeply. Through this process I was able to identify similitudes in my situation with that of other researchers and draw strategies on how to cope going forward, I strengthened my understanding of the implications of fieldwork on a given research process and have a broader view on my role in relation to my research. In this sense, we need to encourage researchers and graduate students to participate in discussions around the emotions of fieldwork throughout all stages of it. For instance, Heller *et al.*, (2011) suggested incorporating journaling as a way to cope with fatigue and the broader implications of fieldwork. For them, reflecting on their challenges and being able to look back on them during a short-time period, allowed them to identify how their feelings were linked to research challenges, embrace the process, and establish positive coping strategies.

Researchers can also find resources for support in coping with fieldwork through counselling. For example, in the aftermath of her data collection experience, Kwak (2019) attended several counselling sessions after her supervisors arranged for it. She advocates for universities to offer professional training, support, and protection before and after research fieldwork takes place. Indeed, we argue this should be incorporated as a strategy for researchers undertaking fieldwork, particularly those whose research topic is associated with sensitive issues. In particular, we argue this resource for help should be put in place before fieldwork takes place as a safeguarding measure and should last throughout the duration and the period after fieldwork given how dynamic this stage can be and how much impact it

can have on the researcher. Conversations around risks and vulnerabilities should take place prior to doing fieldwork, and these should be fostered in environments that are not tied to university assessment forms—while these processes have a defined purpose and goal, and they are valuable tools within higher education institutions, they do not offer a truly reflective space where researchers can engage with potential risks and challenges, they could encounter while collecting data.

Where do we go from here?

As I began reading other researchers experiences of fieldwork, I felt less lonely, less guilty and ashamed, but the frustration somewhat persisted. Could this have been prevented? Not the event of harassment itself, instead, the intricate, painful aftermath that followed. While it is particularly complex to try and anticipate emotional challenges, especially if they arise as a byproduct of conducting fieldwork (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer, 2001), it still felt like the shock of the aftermath could have been mitigated. Once I began reading and talking openly about my fieldwork experience, other researchers slowly began sharing theirs, and that helped me ground the source of my frustration. The level of risk I was exposed to was not a reflection on my shortcomings as a researcher—in fact, many researchers had faced similar or worse scenarios while collecting data. Instead, it is a reflection on how ethics and safety protocols can narrow our understanding and approach to fieldwork—effectively developing tunnel vision—with no consideration for our role in the research. This is not to say that ethics forms and risks assessments are inherently flawed, but to argue that we should recognise these processes for what they are—administrative paperwork—and advocate for spaces where researchers can engage with issues of risks and vulnerabilities in a way that is not tied to their ability to conduct research. Acknowledging how researchers will have different experiences and obstacles during fieldwork adds much needed nuance to our interpretation of the data; it invites researchers to consciously reflect on their own positionality and how they may be exposed to different vulnerabilities because of their identity and shifting positionality, thus, grounding their research experience.

And so, where do we go from here? Researching institutions, namely higher education institutions, should switch from reactive to proactive measures when it comes to safeguarding their researchers. For this we suggest carrying out workshops and seminars that touch on vulnerabilities during fieldwork, however it is crucial that these sessions are not tied to any mandatory administrative paperwork that could impact the researcher's ability to conduct fieldwork. Particularly, women and queer researchers would specifically benefit from round table discussions where researchers with fieldwork experience can candidly reflect on the challenges they faced and share their stories and lessons learned with younger researchers in a safe space. At a graduate level, students would benefit from peer-to-peer semi-structured discussion sessions led by students with fieldwork experience, where they can reflect on their concerns prior to fieldwork and share their experiences after completion. We suggest that these measures would be beneficial for researchers who have not yet undertaken fieldwork and for researchers

who have completed their research work and may feel at odds with how the experience unfolded but are unsure of where or how to raise this to colleagues, supervisors, or peers. In all cases, universities should continue to invest in safeguarding researcher's well-being by providing one-on-one counselling services as needed.

Admittedly, these tools alone would not prevent cases of gender-based violence or harassment during fieldwork. That is not their purpose or objective because individual efforts cannot alleviate systemic violence. Women *will* face risky scenarios when researching because to be a woman is to be exposed to constant levels of gender-based violence in many facets of our lives. Hence, it is important to foster these conversations in a proactive manner with the aim to create safe spaces, to allow women to navigate and negotiate the risks of fieldwork as an act of self-determination, instead of cutting their agency at the knees in the name of risk assessment protocols.

In this paper, I have exposed the different ways in which my positionality as a researcher affected my lived experience of fieldwork—Óscar and I engaged in a reflective and emotional conversation about the various challenges I had to navigate. Still, in a similar manner, his positionality as an academic with precarious funding also significantly shaped his experience of doing research together. With this paper, we argue that these conversations about positionality should be stimulated in academia from an early stage in the research process—well before beginning fieldwork—and that these should be critical, reflexive, and not just part of university ethics applications and travel risk assessment procedures.

In reality, when conversations about risks and harms during fieldwork revolve only around ethics and safety clearance processes from institutions, these dialogues can turn into a performative tick-box exercise and may fail to invite the researcher to reflect on the implications of fieldwork truly. If the outcome of a researcher mindfully reflecting on their positionality— and the associated risks and vulnerabilities they will be exposed to during fieldwork— results in a significant constraint on their research methods or their ability to conduct research at all, then researchers are implicitly incentivised to ignore or brush off potential harms and the way fieldwork can impact them; therefore, exposing them even further. Additionally, these conversations need to be complemented by a supportive well-being department that allows researchers to share their experiences and equips them with coping mechanisms before (instead of when) conflict arises. Fieldwork is an intense, messy, personal journey, and researchers should engage in conversations about the nuances and complexities of data collection without the limitations that ethics and safety protocols can represent. More so, as academics, we should not rely on these protocols as the only sphere where we discuss the emotions and risks of fieldwork because by design, as we have argued, these processes do not have the capacity to prepare us for the vulnerability we will face on the field.

Chapter Five: Closing remarks

This thesis has taken a feminist-informed approach rooted in *sentipensar* in order to look into women's lived experiences of the public transport system in Saltillo. This involved examining women's perspectives, opinions, and feelings about their mobilities through qualitative methods, and framing them in the context of the built environment in which they navigate with quantitative data that reflects the broader picture. In presenting the challenges they juggle while negotiating the everyday city, this thesis advances the understanding of how the conditions of the transport system in Saltillo affect women's mobilities. It also contributes to the gap in the literature about the challenges women face in smaller Mexican cities like Saltillo in relation to public transport. In doing so, I'm building on existing work around women's differentiated mobilities and urban experiences, and existing understandings of how gender-related factors like care work and GBV affect women's urban understandings (Jirón, 2007b; Bhattacharyya, 2015; Chakraborty, 2015; Beebeejaun, 2017; Paydar, Kamani-Fard and Etminani-Ghasrodashti, 2017; Butcher and Maclean, 2018; Lei, Desai and Vanneman, 2019).

In this final chapter I turn to highlight and bring together the contributions and findings of this thesis and how they address the research questions I set out to answer with this study. I then point at the gaps in this study as a way to continue the ongoing thread of reflexivity and embodied research in this project, suggesting that only by recognising the positionalities that we are not representing in our research endeavours, is that we can create situated, embodied, reflexive, and feminist knowledge. Later I sketch out future lines for research and conclude by engaging with what a gender-conscious public transport system can look like by talk about how *otros mundos son posibles*⁷⁶ and how we can get there.

Findings and contributions

In this study, I have presented the testimonies of 10 participants in Saltillo with varying degrees of caring responsibilities and experiences of GBV in public transportation. I have contrasted this with detailed information about the current state of the bus stops in Saltillo in order to connect women's individual struggles to a broader systemic issue related to the transport system and its associated infrastructure. In doing so I have answered the main research question of this study: 'how do gender-related factors such as care work and GBV shape the mobilities and access to the city of women in Saltillo?' by addressing two supporting questions. First, how do women in Saltillo experience and perceive the public transport system? And second, how do various characteristics of the public transport infrastructure shape women's urban perceptions and experiences of mobility?

⁷⁶ Spanish for "other worlds are possible"

This research project brings forward contributions at a granular and a conceptual level. At the granular level, the findings that stem from the transect walks and the ethnographic shadowing depict how women in Saltillo experience and perceive the transport system, directly addressing the first supporting research question of this study. Women in Saltillo experience a transport system that is inaccessible, riddled with uncertainty, and largely perceived as unsafe and this has everyday ramifications and impacts their overall quality of life and access to opportunities. As the findings in paper Two and Three point out, women's perceptions of public transport are plagued by anxieties related to support networks, financial constraints and fears of sexual assault and harassment. Women face spatial and temporal constraints when relying on the bus system of Saltillo as their mode of transport because of gender-related factors like care work and fears of GBV further complicate their mobilities and the transport system fails to acknowledge women's complex challenges.

An important contribution of this research lies in underpinning the characteristics of the public transport infrastructure in Saltillo that shape women's mobilities and experiences of the city. The findings from the urban audits to bus stops across Saltillo further confirm women's perceptions as a systematic problem in the transport infrastructure. During the transect walk and ethnographic shadowing stage, women shared their *sentipensares* around the current characteristics of the transport system and mentioned the lack of demarcated bus stops, availability of timetables, vegetation, sitting opportunities, and appropriate lighting as major issues to their urban experiences of transportation as shown in Paper Three. They also highlighted how urban infrastructure like pedestrian bridges also play a key role in shaping the perceptions of vulnerability with using public transportation and walking to or from bus stops and this is an important indicator that addressing issues related to access to public transportation will also have links to broader themes of the politics of the city. These findings showcase the specific characteristics of the transport system that further women's exclusion in the city, and directly answer the second supporting question of this study. Users all across Saltillo are undoubtedly affected by the underprovision of information and infrastructure related to public transport, however it is women—mainly women from marginalised communities who rely on public transportation—who face the brunt of it because care work logistics and fears of being catcalled, followed, and abused exacerbate the dynamic challenges they need to negotiate in the city.

At the conceptual level, this research project has two significant contributions. Firstly, at the local level, this project fills in the gap about women's experiences of Saltillo's transport system. This study provides critical information that pinpoints aspects of the transportation infrastructure that should be addressed in order to redress women's urban experiences of public transport. It presents novel data through creative and engaging methodologies that can be a reference point for public policy and programmes that seek to address local challenges through local strategies. There is now rigorous and extensive data about the struggles of women in secondary cities like Saltillo and how they negotiate and

navigate the everyday city. This is a significant contribution at the local level given that many secondary, ordinary cities are often overlooked in favour of addressing the problematics of larger metropolitan areas— the depiction of the urban challenges that women in Saltillo face daily can be a more reliable, relatable point of reference and comparison for studies in other secondary cities in Latin America.

Secondly this project presents a significant conceptual contribution to the existing literature by reshaping the way in which we view women's access to the city. In bringing together understandings of gendered poverty and care work (Fukuda-Parr, 1999; Turner and Grieco, 2000; Warren, 2003; Lawson, 2007; Qi and Dong, 2018) and how fear alters women's perceptions of vulnerability in public space (Atkins, Husain and Storey, 1991; Koskela, 1999; England and Simon, 2010; Pilot and Prabhu, 2012; Fileborn and Vera-Gray, 2017), I have highlighted that women's challenges in the city are complex, dynamic, and urgent to address. In the field of feminist geography, we have known for decades that women experience and negotiate the city differently from men, and that social markers also play a role in shaping women's differentiated urban experiences of the city; however, with this study, we now know *how* urban exclusion materialises in urban contexts like Saltillo's. We can now look at a street and understand what can deter or incentivise women in Saltillo from navigating public space and transportation confidently and comfortably. Furthermore, this knowledge comes from the methodological approach of hearing and feeling women's *sentipensares* and contrasting them with embodied quantitative research, and therein lies the novelty of my conceptual contributions.

My approach to this research project has gone beyond theorisations of women's place in the city by implementing creative affective methodologies. I am positioning *sentipensar* as a way of producing embodied research for the field of feminist urban geography, and in doing so I present a way for human geographers, anthropologists, urbanists, sociologist and scholars interested in cities to question and problematise our knowledge production practices by placing the affective front and centre in our endeavours as researchers. The contributions of this research extend beyond answering the research questions set out in the study by proposing an avenue towards feminist, decolonial, affective research plans that can better represent urban experiences.

The gaps in this study

The findings of this research project contribute valuable insights about women's urban understandings and propose provoking and engaging ways to incorporate *sentipensar* in our research endeavours. However, in order to fulfil the objective of producing embodied, reflexive research, it is important to be critical of the gaps within this project. Adopting a feminist-informed approach to *sentipensar* as a methodological framework requires reflexivity of the voices that are not represented in my research

endeavours so in this section I elaborate on the gaps in the study related to the diversity of participants' profiles given the constraints I had to navigate.

Firstly, for the transect walks method, I was not able to welcome women with physical disabilities because Saltillo's buses are inaccessible for wheelchair users and people with mobility aids and I did not have the capacity in terms of human resources to provide the necessary accommodations and support in order to welcome them for this project. The participants of the transect walks briefly engaged with the challenges that a person with reduced mobility would face when navigating transport for example the difficulties crossing a wide, high-speed road with no pedestrian traffic light to get to a bus stop, navigating pavements with urban furniture that blocks the path to the bus stop, and the lack of ramps and dropped kerbs to continue with their journeys once they get off the bus. However, these reflections were often in tandem with reflections related to mobility of care, specifically having to accompany someone using a mobility aid like a cane or a walker (but not a wheelchair) and therefore the *sentipensares* of people with disabilities and reduced mobility are not directly presented in this study. In order to address this, future research can look specifically into the mobility of women with disabilities and craft research methods with safeguarding measures specific for the profile of the participants; it can look into the urban challenges that women with disabilities face when navigating the city and could include different types of mobility impairments.

Secondly, there is a similar gap in urban experiences given that all participants for the transect walks were aged 18 to late 30s because the open call for sign up was distributed mainly through social media with help from feminist and active-travel collectives with a similar age range of reach. I counterbalanced this gap by including women in their 40s, 50s, and 60s during the ethnographic shadowing, however future studies could modify the recruitment calls for engagement sessions to welcome women of all ages and diversify the profile of attendants for transect walks (see Cinderby et al., 2018; Mariotti, Brouwer and Gelormini, 2018). Lastly, there is a significant gap related to sexual orientation and gender identity, and how these markers play a role in women's urban experiences of public transportation. I did not collect information about participants sexual orientation or gender identity for this study because it fell outside of the scope of the current project. Future research could fill this gap by illustrating the differences in mobility patterns of queer and heterosexual women in small Mexican cities and how gender-related factors influence their daily mobility (see Valentine, 1993; Lombardi et al., 2002; Doan, 2007; Ritterbusch, 2016; Rodó-De-Zárate, 2016).

In terms of broader urban studies debates, this thesis leaves a trail for other researchers to explore how marginalisation and inequalities are reflected in the production of space. As mentioned earlier in this

thesis, in Chapter Three, I present Saltillo's case study as a 'comparative gesture'⁷⁷ to invite broader conversations, both at the local and international level, about how public transportation provision and urban experiences intersect with social markers like socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, migration status, gender, and age. Furthermore, my detailed exploration of how Saltillo's transport network affect women's mobility patterns can also become a comparative case study for other cities with similar sociopolitical dynamics. It is through broader conversations from multiple places of situatedness that innovative policies and ideas can come about to redress inequalities, and future research can fill this gap.

***Investigaciones vivas*⁷⁸: the challenge of addressing public transport in Saltillo**

In 2025, after fieldwork for this research project concluded, a new local government took office and launched a transport strategy called 'Aquí Vamos Gratis' in partnership with Coahuila's state government, to create two new public transport routes (north-south and east-west) that would service the urban area of Saltillo. In August 2025, Saltillo's government confirmed that they had reached a deal with a private concession owner (DM Control) for 146.3 million pesos (around 8.5M USD) to run and operate the free transport scheme *Aquí Vamos* from October 1st, 2025, until late December 2026. With this agreement DM Control is in charge investing in new, accessible buses; all expenses related to fuel; operating, maintaining, and running the public transport routes; and hiring and training all personnel involved (Flores Ramírez, 2025a). So far, the local and state government have highlighted the benefits that this program has brought for people in Saltillo mainly focusing on the financial aspect—because users do not have to pay a fare when riding *Aquí Vamos* as opposed to other bus routes, the local government claims this program reduced people's transport expenses by over 30%, and that this program enables the mobilities of new users that perhaps faced previous financial restrictions to travel in public transportation (Estrada, 2025a, 2025b; Hernández, 2025).

Meanwhile, activists and political leaders from the opposition have criticised this project. Primarily, activists have drawn attention to how the contract agreement with DM control played out; highlighting that after the accepted bid offer ends in late 2026, Saltillo's government will have to either launch another bid, extend the contract with DM control—meaning another multi-million sum for the operation and maintenance of a public service— or terminate the transport program altogether. Instead, the collective *Transporte Digno Saltillo* has urged the local government to transition to a model based on citizen's ownership over the public transport infrastructure. While the addition of two free public transport routes certainly represents an improvement on financial and accessibility terms in the short term, the longevity of public transport policies is still uncertain because there is no guarantee that the

⁷⁷ Referencing Robinson (2011), please refer back to Chapter Three, section 'From local conversations to broader debates' in pg. 51

⁷⁸ Spanish for Living research

transport strategy will continue once this local administration ends in 2027. This strategy largely obscures the issues of transportation infrastructure that women identified in this research and fails to acknowledge and address shortcomings in bus stop provisions, route connectivity, transport affordability in the long term, and time constraints, all of which are key factors that shape women's urban experiences in transport. Moreso, the already existing public transport network keeps struggling to stay afloat and this fracture in the public transport system could lead to an even more inefficient and disjointed transport network overall. Indeed, users who need to commute to or from neighbourhoods without access to the two available free routes still need to navigate an uncertain, expensive, and unreliable transport system that leads to time poverty and restricted access to educational or professional opportunities as demonstrated in this thesis.

The local authority's response to women's concerns over gender-based violence while using public transport has been adding surveillance cameras to the buses part of the *Aquí Vamos Gratis* program and synching them to police headquarters that monitor the routes in real time (Vega, 2025). While this may deter some violent behaviour, both the local government and the municipal transport authority still do not collect any metrics or reports of gender-based violence that could indicate if this strategy is working in reducing harassment cases. Furthermore, a strategy that hinges on surveillance does not recognise the deep-rooted pervasiveness of women's challenges in the city—it does not question how the reporting system works (or not); how the city hinders or stimulates women's urban and social mobilities; or how women's mobility challenges in the city extend beyond buses and episodes of harassment.

What does this strategy from Saltillo's local government mean for this thesis? The results present in this research reflect the multidimensional challenges that women face in the city demonstrating that in order to address women's mobilities, it is necessary to implement articulated public policies beyond protectionist measures that obscure women's concerns in the city. The local authority still fails to recognise women's complex mobilities and the findings of this research remain even more relevant because it points out how and why strategies like *Aquí Vamos Gratis* are destined to fail from the start—firstly, it reduces women's transportation challenges to financial and surveillance aspects, disregarding how these issues are also intrinsically tied together with struggles over care work responsibilities, time constraints, and transport accessibility and connectivity. Secondly, this strategy serves as an example of how public policy can fail to address a pressing issue when failing to listen to the voices most affected by the challenges at hand. And thirdly, it opens up questions about whose urban experiences informed a strategy that dismissed women's urban challenges? And how were these public policies created, by whom, and with what objective in mind?

This update on Saltillo's public transport provision reinforces the need to address issues of spatial injustice from a lens that taps into marginalised urban experiences to inform policy implementation that

can bring about meaningful and lasting change. This update, together with the gaps in this study, create a bubbling conversation where future researchers and scholars can analyse policy failures in public transportation agendas at the local level, and address questions like who wins and who loses when implementing transport policies. This strategy demonstrates that transport issues in Saltillo, and arguably in the world, are living challenges that evolve and morph dynamically, shaped by social processes full of power relations. It also brings about further questions about how hegemonic political narratives shape, and arguably will keep shaping, public transport policies in the city. It reaffirms the need to analyse local challenges with the broader sociopolitical in mind, to understand how power shapes space, that is, how hegemonic political narratives shape public policies, their implementation, and their success. In that sense, this thesis presents much needed empirical knowledge about women's urban experiences and in doing so, it helps us envision how to create and implement public policies that have women's needs front and centre; it helps us envision *otro mundo*.

***Otro transporte público es posible y con él otros mundos también*⁷⁹**

In August 2023, a few weeks after the transect walks had happened in Saltillo, Atziri messaged me with a sticker she found in one of the public transport buses in Saltillo. When I organised the transect walks, I had given all women a participant tool kit that contained their assessment booklet (see Appendix 1), a few sweets so they could snack during the activity, and some stickers, courtesy of Triana and her collective *Transeúntas*. The stickers were colourful and had phrases like *calles libres de acoso*— streets free from harassment, and *abajo el patriarcarro*— a play on words with “patriarchy” and “car”, a phrase that conveys that we stand against patriarchy and car culture. The photo Atziri sent me was of one of the stickers we had given participants placed inside one of Saltillo's public transport buses, however it now read *calles y autobuses libres de acoso*— streets and buses free from harassment. Someone, perhaps a participant in the transect walks, had written on the sticker and placed it inside a bus (see Fig. 12) and with this, it sparked this section in the thesis.

I had been consumed by the amount of data to analyse and how it pointed at all the struggles and injustices women face daily; when Atziri shared that photo, it brought me perspective and reminded me to see the collectivity in my work. Drawing from the women from the Zapatista movement in Mexico— who advocate for fighting systems of oppression by adopting an antiracist, anticapitalism, and antipatriarchal stance— *otros mundos son posibles*⁸⁰; other worlds where women can be free from violence and their paths through life and the city are not encumbered by fears of sexual based violence or restrictions imposed by gender-blind transport system infrastructures.

⁷⁹ The subheading for this section is in Spanish to reference the Zapatista slogan “*otro mundo es posible* / another world is possible” (See Valencia, 2024) and suggest that other transport systems are possible, and with this, other worlds, too (translation).

⁸⁰ Spanish for “other worlds are possible”

Figure 15: Sticker inside one of Saltillo public transport buses



Source: Courtesy of Atziri Herrera-Valero, August 2023

In 1979, Benería argued that the elimination of women's subordination would require two conditions to be fulfilled. Firstly, a fundamental change in women's access to economic resources, and secondly, the total elimination of all mechanisms that subordinate women to men. As I illustrated in Paper Two, while women have been entering paid employment rapidly over the last decades, care work responsibilities assigned by default significantly shape women's lives and this comes with financial constraints, time restrictions and spatial limitations. Currently, public transportation provision in Saltillo plays a role as a mechanism that exacerbates women's challenges of accessing resources, including economic resources, particularly for women from marginalised and vulnerable backgrounds. Even for women who use public transport but do not have caring responsibilities at this time, fear of sexual assault and GBV in public transport heavily shapes where, how, and when they move around the city, as illustrated in Paper Three, thus also limiting their access to resources. This thesis has focused on pinpointing how the current transport system and its associated infrastructure negatively impacts women disproportionately, highlighting the shortcomings that have a negative effect on women's

mobilities. However, public transportation can also positively impact women's development and place in the public sphere, but this can only be possible by dismantling the myth of the neutral city and recognising and understanding that space, and therefore, transport systems are political infrastructures full of power and symbolism (Wekerle, 1979; Mercier, 2009; Soto Villagrán, 2018; Enright, 2019).

Indeed, public transport systems can bring about positive effects when thought about as an interconnected public service that is universally accessible for users; it can have a positive effect on job accessibility and increased earnings by connecting people to different urban areas (Pons Rotger and Nielsen, 2015); it could secure and enable the mobility of people with disabilities and mobility impairments when it goes beyond technical solutions and considers visible barriers (i.e., steep curbs, lack of accessibility ramps) and invisible barriers (i.e., maintenance, bus drivers working conditions) (Aarhaug and Elvebakk, 2015). Transport infrastructure that goes hand in hand with walking and cycling infrastructure can also encourage active travel (Dédélé and Miškinytė, 2021) and in turn, this can also positively impact people's mental health (Kroesen and De Vos, 2020).

But how do we build those alternative worlds? How can we ensure that those worlds include gender-just transport systems? Through this thesis, I argue, that listening to women and centring their urban experiences can be a path to creating these *mundos*⁸¹. In order to fully address the needs of a community, particularly women and marginalised populations, objectives and strategies should be thought of at the local level, rejecting a one-size-fits-all approach, questioning the myth of the neutral city, and decentring androcentric, heteronormative conventions.

From a researchers' standpoint this means problematising our own research practices and questioning whose voices are we centring and which ones are not represented by our findings and endeavours. For policymakers, local authorities, and key stakeholders this means questioning the power dynamics embedded in shaping the city, specifically the transport system, and questioning who they have in mind when proposing, developing, and implementing urban policies. The infrastructure and policy changes suggested in this study, such as fare caps, bus stop demarcation, and the provision of timetables and wayfinding information, among others, are participants-informed policy recommendations that address women's needs and challenges in Saltillo, however, it is not only the stages of research and design that should have women's needs at heart, but the implementation and maintenance of these policies as well, in order to ensure a gender-just transport system.

The findings of this research respond directly to the *sentipensares* of women in Saltillo and create a point of reference for other Mexican cities who share circumstances and challenges. This project sets a precedent as the first study in Saltillo about women's urban mobilities and how they negotiate the

⁸¹ Spanish for "worlds"

everyday city and continues to have a lasting impact by contributing to the conversation at a local and national level; women in Saltillo continue to press local authorities to address their concerns in public transportation and have taken to the streets, and buses, to demand safer cities free from harassment. It also opens up the door for further research that can keep advancing the construction of *otros mundos*; for instance, future projects could look into the concession system in operation in Saltillo— and that is common in Mexican cities in general— to investigate how it plays a role in perpetuating challenges for women in the public sphere. Future research projects can also focus on the power dynamics between concessionaires and local authorities and analyse the shortcomings and failures (Temenos and Lauermann, 2020) in previous attempts to ‘modernise’ the public transport system of Saltillo (see Viveros, 2020; Aramayo, 2022). However, above all, future research projects that seek to address local urban challenges should bring forth a vision of co-creating *otros mundos; mundos donde quepamos todas*⁸² and where the production of knowledge seeks to problematise the myth of the neutral city and the neutral researcher. *Mundos* where women can be free from all the mechanisms that subordinate them, and where their *sentipensares* are heard.

⁸² Spanish for “worlds where we can all (plural, feminine) fit”

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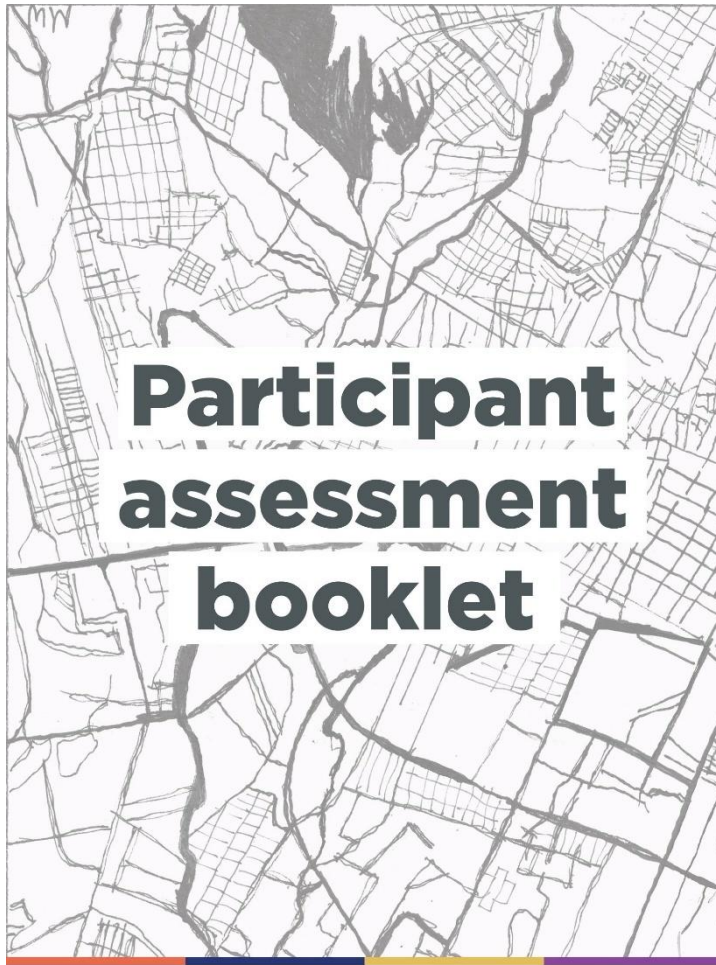
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Appendix 1. Participant assessment booklet (English)

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Illustrated by Maria West, 2021

What are **transect walks?**

Some feminist scholars and activists have implemented transect walks as a research methodology to explore urban spaces and get to know the urban experiences of various groups; women, people with disabilities, elders, children, or members of the LGBTQ+ community.

This time, transect walks will serve as a means to collectively explore an urban space and get to know women's perceptions of safety in Saltillo while combining walking and public transportation.

In what follows, we will discuss the history of transect walks where you will participate and what aspects of the urban environment we will be examining.

Recorrido día 1

Centro Histórico - Colonia República



Escanea con tu celular para ver este mapa en línea



Recorrido día 2

Centro Histórico - Central de camiones



Escanea con tu celular para ver este mapa en línea





For everyone's safety, it is important to lay out some guidance for participants:

During the walking segments of the trans walks **participants should not attempt to write in the assessment booklet.** Instead, follow the instructions of the team leader and pay attention to your surroundings. We encourage all participants to capture photographs of the elements they wish to discuss or write down at a later time once the group reaches a natural stopping point.

Please **follow all traffic guidance** and do not leave the group without informing one of the team leaders.

Your participation is very valuable and the workshop aims to be an enriching way to build community and reappropriate the public space; please **exercise sensible precautions** and protect your valuable items at all times.



PAVEMENTS AND WALKABILITY



Pavements and walkability



In this section we will focus on assessing the walkability of the pavements surrounding the bus stop. It is important to take notice of characteristics like width, material and the conditions.

A well-maintained pavement facilitates pedestrian mobility and can improve the experience of walkability in an area. Pavements are particularly important in women's mobility because of assigned gender roles like taking the kids to and from school or carrying out domestic chores like grocery shopping while pushing a pram. Similarly, accessible pavements are key in ensuring the mobility of people with disabilities or reduced mobility



Prompts:

- *Do you think a pram could use this pavement? What about people with limited mobility?*
- *Are there driveway inclines that interrupt the pavement? Could a wheelchair access this bus stop?*
- *Would it be slippery during the rain? Are there any rain puddles?*
- *Would it be slippery during the rain? Is it hard to push a wheelchair or a shopping cart?*

Notes:



ROAD SAFETY



Road safety



In this section we will focus on road safety, and how speed, crosswalks, accessibility and the distribution of the road shape your experience of this area. In order to assess this area, it is important to do so from a pedestrian point of view.

The speed limit of an area can influence the walkability and overall comfort of pedestrians, cyclists, children, elders, and people with disabilities. It can impact their sense of safety and how or when they use the public space. Similarly, road distribution and the allocation of pedestrian spaces can shape your experience and make you feel welcome or in danger.



Prompts:

- Is the speed limit sign clearly visible? Do drivers around the area seem to respect the speed limit? How safe do you feel on this road?*
- Do you feel safe as a woman walking along this road? Would this road be safe for children, cyclists or the elderly?*
- How would it be to cross the street with small children or a person with disabilities? How does the road layout make you feel?*

Notes:



SIGNPOSTING



Signposting



In this section we focus on the role of signposting when getting around the area. While vehicular signposting like speed limits and traffic lights are important, it is also important to have signposting that can direct you to transport routes or places of interest in the area.

This section is about how well you can read the environment and navigate the area while feeling confident and safe. This aspect plays a key role in encouraging active mobility like cycling and walking, and sustainable mobilities like public transportation.



Prompts:

- *Can you recognise crosswalks or areas where pedestrians and cyclists have priority? What's the state of the signposting around you?*
- *Are bus stops clearly indicated? How would it be to navigate this space at night or as a person new to the neighbourhood?*
- *What signs would improve your understanding and navigation of this area? How would they help? Where would you place them?*

Notes:



STREET FURNITURE AND COMFORT



Street furniture and comfort



In this section we will assess street furniture such as bins, lamp posts, bus stops and benches or places that could allow sitting opportunities for pedestrians.

Some areas can feel more hostile than others due to lack of street furniture like lamp posts or because of the way street furniture like bus stops have been designed. If, for instance, the view to and from a bus stop is completely blocked by ad totems or vegetation, this could shape your experience around the area. Similarly, sitting opportunities like benches, low walls or parklets can make you feel more welcome to take a break and spend some time in the public space.



Prompts:

- *Are there spaces where you could take shelter from the rain in this area? (i.e. a bus stop or a park with sheltered facilities?)*

- *Does the vegetation or the built environment create visibility barriers? How does that shape your experience right now and how would it change if it was dark (night hours?)*

- *What aspects of this area make you feel comfortable and what others could make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?*

Notes:



These hybrid transect walks are possible thanks to Triana Zepeda Saldaña and Transeúntas.

The implementation and design of this project has been approved by the University of York.

The methodology in this project is based off of "*Metodología para calcular el índice técnico de caminabilidad sensible al género*" by the Inter-american Development Bank.

For more information about the project and data management please contact
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Saltillo, Mexico
June, 2023



Appendix 2. *Libreto de Auditoría Urbana* (Spanish)

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Ilustración por María West, 2021

¿Qué son las caminatas de exploración urbana

Una caminata de exploración urbana es una actividad implementada con el propósito de conocer una zona urbana o identificar ciertos elementos. Algunas investigadoras feministas han utilizado las caminatas de exploración urbana como metodología de investigación para conocer las experiencias de distintos grupos; mujeres, personas con discapacidad, o miembros de la comunidad LGBTQ+.

En esta ocasión, estas caminatas de exploración urbana tienen el objetivo de conocer las percepciones de seguridad de las mujeres en Saltillo; combinaremos caminar y el uso del transporte público y discutiremos nuestras experiencias cotidianas.

A continuación, se presentan los recorridos que se realizarán en este taller, las características del entorno urbano que estaremos evaluando y algunas medidas de seguridad generales.

Recorrido día 1

Centro Histórico - Colonia República



Escanea con tu celular para ver este mapa en línea



Recorrido día 2

Centro Histórico - Central de camiones



Escanea con tu celular para ver este mapa en línea





Por la seguridad de todas, es importante que tomemos en cuenta algunas medidas generales.

Durante los segmentos donde nos encontremos caminando es importante que no intentemos escribir en el libreto o tomar notas. Siguen las instrucciones de las facilitadoras del taller y presta atención a tus entornos.

Alentamos a todas las participantes a tomar fotografías de los elementos urbanos que les llamen la atención o les recuerde a otras experiencias urbanas; una vez que lleguemos a un punto natural de parada podrán tomar notas en sus libretos.

Por favor **sigue todas las leyes de tráfico** y no te separes del grupo sin informarle a alguna de las facilitadoras del taller.

Tu participación es muy importante; este taller tiene el objetivo de ser un ejercicio colaborativo de reapropiación del espacio público. Por favor **toma precauciones sensibles** y protege tus objetos personales en todo momento.



BANQUETAS Y CAMINABILIDAD



Banquetas y caminabilidad



En esta sección nos enfocaremos en las banquetas y la caminabilidad de la zona que rodea a esta parada de transporte público. Es importante que notes características como el material, el ancho o las condiciones de la banqueta.

Una banqueta apropiada facilita la movilidad de los peatones y puede mejorar la experiencia de caminabilidad en una zona. La perspectiva de género es importante al analizar las banquetas particularmente porque **a las mujeres se les asignan los roles de cuidado como llevar a los niños a la escuela o hacer las compras del mandado**. De igual manera, la accesibilidad de una banqueta es clave para proteger la movilidad de personas con discapacidad o movilidad limitada

Notas:



Algunas ideas:

- ¿Crees que se podría utilizar una carriola en esta banqueta? ¿Cómo sería la experiencia para alguien en silla de ruedas o con movilidad limitada?
- ¿Existen rampas de cochera o escalones que interrumpen la banqueta? ¿Crees que el piso sería resbaloso en la lluvia?
- ¿Cuál es tu percepción de seguridad/inseguridad caminando por esta banqueta?



SEGURIDAD VIAL



Seguridad vial



En esta sección nos enfocaremos en seguridad vial, límites de velocidad, cruces peatonales, y la distribución del espacio público respecto a todos los usuarios (coches, transporte público, ciclistas y peatones). Para analizar esta sección es importante que lo hagas desde **la perspectiva de un peatón**.

El límite de velocidad de una zona puede influenciar la caminabilidad y la comodidad de usuarios como ciclistas, niños, personas de la tercera edad, y personas con discapacidades. Puede impactar nuestra percepción de seguridad y restringir si usamos o no esa zona de espacio público.



Algunas ideas:

- ¿Puedes ubicar fácilmente un signo de límite de velocidad? ¿Parece que los conductores en la zona respeten ese límite? ¿Qué tan segura te sientes en esta calle con la velocidad de los vehículos?
- Como mujer, ¿te sientes segura caminando por esta calle? ¿Crees que esta calle es segura para ciclistas, niños, personas con discapacidad, o de la tercera edad?
- ¿Cómo sería intentar cruzar la calle por aquí si estuvieras acompañada de niños o una persona con movilidad limitada?. Cuando analizas la organización del espacio en la calle, ¿cómo te sientes?

Notas:



SEÑALIZACIÓN



Señalización



En esta sección nos enfocaremos en la señalización que te ayuda a navegar la zona. Los elementos como límites de velocidad y semáforos son importantes, pero también se necesitan señalizaciones que indiquen pasos peatonales, paradas de transporte público y carriles ciclistas.

Esta sección se trata de qué tan bien puedes leer y navegar la zona sintiéndote segura y confiada. La señalización apropiada juega un rol importante en promover la movilidad activa como andar en bicicleta, caminar, y utilizar el transporte público.



Algunas ideas:

- ¿Puedes ubicar fácilmente los cruces peatonales o las zonas para ciclistas, qué otros letreros existen? ¿En qué estado se encuentra la señalización existente?
- ¿Las paradas de transporte público están señalizadas apropiadamente, en qué estado se encuentran los letreros? ¿Cómo sería transitar por esta zona de noche o estando sola?
- ¿Qué tipo de letreros crees que podrían mejorar tu entendimiento de la zona? ¿Los carriles vehiculares y los cruces peatonales están correctamente demarcados con pintura?

Notas:



MOBILIARIO URBANO Y COMODIDAD



Mobiliario urbano y comodidad



En esta sección vamos a evaluar mobiliario urbano como luminarias, botes de basura, paradas de transporte público, y bancas públicas o lugares que puedan crear oportunidades para que la gente se siente un poco.

Algunas áreas se pueden sentir más hostiles que otras dependiendo del tipo de mobiliario urbano que existe, o por cómo el espacio público ha sido diseñado. Por ejemplo, una parada de transporte público que tiene visibilidad obstruida por mamparas de anuncios o árboles sin podar puede hacerte sentir incómoda o insegura en la zona.



Algunas ideas:

- Si empezara a llover mientras estás aquí, ¿existe algún lugar donde podrías refugiarte de la lluvia?
- ¿Existen lugares donde te podrías sentar un poco o tirar la basura en caso de necesitarlo?
- ¿Crees que la vegetación de la zona crea barreras de visibilidad? ¿Existen elementos hostiles en la zona como picos o vidros en algunas repisas o paredes que podrían servir de asiento?
- ¿Qué aspectos de la zona te hacen sentir cómoda y cuáles te hacen sentir incómoda o insegura?

Notas:



La implementación y diseño de este proyecto fue aprobado por la Universidad de York, y está a cargo de Diana Infante-Vargas

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Para más información acerca de este proyecto y el manejo de datos por favor contacta a:

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Appendix 3. Reference list for Paper One: Enraizada en el *sentipensar*: Methodological approaches to walking/feeling/envisioning the city as a feminist researcher.

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Department of Environment & Geography, University of York

Research Ethics Approval Form (Form 2)

Research involving human subjects/participants or using related data not publicly available.

Read this first

Who should apply?

You should apply if you are carrying out any research activity or consultancy project through the Department of Environment and Geography, University of York: This includes:

Members of academic, research and SEIY staff

Honorary members of staff associated with the Department.

Research degree students (masters and PhD).

Undergraduate students and taught postgraduate students who are doing research projects.

Can I begin work before the project is ethically approved?

NO primary data collection can begin until you have approval from one of the following:

The Departmental Ethics Committee

An External Research Ethics Committee (NHS Research Ethics Committee, Lead Partner University etc) and communication of such to the departmental ethics committee

What will happen if I proceed without approval or falsely self-certify research ethics approval?

Collecting primary data in the absence of ethical approval or falsely self-certifying the level of risk associated with a project will constitute a disciplinary offence. This will result in:

Student – Disciplinary action resulting in immediate failure in any module or project associated with the research and potentially dismissal from the University.

Staff - Disciplinary action which may potentially lead to dismissal.

If you do not have ethical approval, the University's insurers will not cover you for legal action or claims for injury. In addition, you may face debarment from membership of some professional or statutory bodies and excluded from applying for some types of employment or research funding opportunities. You may not be able to publish your research.

You should consider the following codes of ethical practice and conduct relevant to your project before completing your form:

[The University's Code of practice and principles for good ethical governance](#)

[The University's Research Data Management Policy](#)

1. Does this project need full ethical review?

1a)

Does the project involve collecting primary data from, or about, living human beings?

Yes/No

1b)

Does the project involve analysing primary or unpublished data from, or about, living human beings? Yes/No

1c)

Does the project involve collecting or analysing primary or unpublished data about people who have recently died, other than data that are already in the public domain? Yes/No

1d)

Does the project involve collecting or analysing primary or unpublished data about or from organisations or agencies of any kind, other than data that are already in the public domain?

Yes/No

1f)

Does the project place the participants or the researchers in a dangerous environment, risk of physical harm, psychological or emotional distress? Yes/No

If you answered **Yes** to any of these questions, please proceed to **fill out this form. Expand spaces as necessary to give full information.**

If you answered **No** to all of the above questions, you are using the wrong form please look at the other download option – Form 1 and Form 3.

2. Project Information

2a)

Give the title of the project

Mobility and gender in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico; an analysis of the public transport system through a gender lens.

2b)

Name of Principal Investigator (PI) or Research Student and Supervisor

(Research Student) Diana Infante-Vargas / Supervised by: Dr Joshua Kirshner (DEG) and Dr Harriet Gray (Politics)

2c)

Degree course (students) or SEI-Y or Env & Geography Dept (staff)

PhD in Interdisciplinary Global Development (IGDC, join with Environment and Geography and Politics Departments)

2d) Names of Co-investigators (CIs) and their organisational affiliation

NA

2e)

How many additional research staff will be involved with the data for the project?

Give names and their organisational affiliation (please specify country)

Lic. Atziri Herrera-Valero

Deputy Director at the Immediate Attention Department

Executive Commission for Attention to Victims (CEAV) of the State of Coahuila de Zaragoza Mexico

(Psychosocial support only)

2f)

Proposed project start date (At least four weeks in the future)

June 1st, 2023

2g)

Estimated project end date

November, 14th 2023

2h)

Who is funding the project and has funding been confirmed?

As part of a CONACyT/University of York Partnership Scholarship

3. More detail about the project

3a)

What are the aims and objectives of the project?

During this research, I will aim to answer a series of questions that relate to women's differentiated urban experiences. My first overarching research question focuses on answering 'how do women's experiences and perceptions of gender-based violence on the transport infrastructure of Saltillo shape their mobilities and their access to the city?' through two subordinate questions. Firstly, how do women in Saltillo experience and perceive the public transport system? And secondly, how do various characteristics of the public transport infrastructure shape women's perceptions and experiences specifically in relation to gender-based violence? My second overarching research question departs from the knowledge that will emerge from the ethnographic fieldwork and will answer 'how might we reimagine a better transport system for Saltillo through a gender lens?'

My aim is to delve into how women's experiences and perceptions of gender-based violence on the transport system of Saltillo shape their mobilities and their access to the city. Drawing from the critical methodological framework developed by Dorothy Smith (Smith and Griffith, 2022), the standpoint of my inquiry stems from women's position in public and private spheres, specifically in Saltillo's context; my research inquiry focuses on their lived experiences and perceptions while navigating the city using public transport.

My objective is to further the understanding of women's mobility at the local level and contribute to the development of transport policy in Saltillo; I aim to produce information that can be used in comparative studies across other Mexican cities for gender-conscious planning. Finally, I intend to contribute to contemporary scholarship in Latin America regarding women's mobility and gender-conscious city planning.

3b)

Briefly describe the principal methods, the sources of data or evidence to be used and the number and type of research participants who will be recruited to /involved in the project.

The main objective of this research is to showcase women's experiences and perceptions while using the public transport system of Saltillo; I approach my research questions through a mixed-method approach as follows:

- *Ethnographic shadowing:*

In terms of qualitative approaches, there is a trend in academic literature to explore ethnographic approaches like participant observation to unveil women's experiences in the public space. Mainly, this approach will focus on women's perceptions of safety in their daily commute routines and how does that affect their mobility patterns. Departing from several studies, this thesis will adapt and implement participant shadowing methodologies used by Latin American scholars in order to answer the research questions outlined above (Moser and McIlwaine, 2006; Jirón, 2007a, 2017; Soto Villagrán, 2012, 2018; Jirón and Gómez, 2018; Jirón, Carrasco and Rebolledo, 2020; Castillo, Sanchez and Monsalve, 2021)

This thesis will apply a three-stage ethnographic approach; I will combine ethnographic shadowing with semi-structured interviews in order to delve into women's perceptions and experiences of the public transport in Saltillo. The selection of participants will be through a cluster non-probability sampling method aided by local feminist collectives and activism groups in Saltillo. All participants will be women with variations on age, socioeconomic background, level of education, assigned care work and paid work status. For this stage, I intend to shadow 12 participants over a day in their usual routine and conduct corresponding semi-structured interviews before and after. Throughout the shadowing exercise, I will collect written and recorded notes about the experience from my point of view as an ethnographic researcher; I intend to cross reference and complement these findings with their views at the beginning and exit interview with each participant (please see appendix 4.1 and 4.2). All interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and translation purposes.

More often than not, women in Mexico are exposed to high levels of gender-based violence in different environments in their lives, and talking about past or ongoing experiences of sexual violence can be emotionally draining. For many women, revisiting

violent episodes through retelling can be a triggering experience; particularly if their stories are not met in the right environment. As such, the development stage for this methodology has been carefully planned to avoid re-victimising participants. In order to mitigate risks and provide a professional helpline to all participants, I will partner with the deputy director of the immediate attention department at the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims (CEAV) of the State of Coahuila de Zaragoza– Bs. Psych. Atziri Herrera Valero, during the shadowing stage of my methodology. Her participation during the interviews and the remote monitoring of the shadowing process will allow participants to have professional psychosocial help and private, off-the-record sessions in case of any emotional distress. (please see appendix 4.3)

- *Transect walks and photo elicitation:*

I will conduct two hybrid transect walks where the aim will be to explore the urban areas of two different neighbourhoods in Saltillo. I will draw from various scholars that have implemented transect walks as a means to analyse urban areas and reflect on issues of security, power and urban infrastructure, and gendered experiences of the city (Paasche and Sidaway, 2010; Castán Broto, Sudhira and Unnikrishnan, 2021; Ajaz and Zakir, 2022; Zepeda Saldaña, 2022). My approach to transect walks proposes a hybrid model that combines walking and the use of public transportation; I aim to implement a hybrid strategy that will explore women's urban experiences on the public transport system and that reflects on the reality of their daily commutes, including walking segments. While collective transect walks have some limitations- for example, the real-life aspect of perceptions of fear or insecurity in the city may not be as present when walking as a small contingent in a pre-planned route- it still presents significant advantages to other collaborative methodologies like focus groups or workshops. This methodology immerses participants in the experience of assessing their urban environment and allows them to compare the selected transect to their everyday commute and draw points of interest that may not arise in a classic focus group setting.

Throughout the implementation of this methodology, participants will be encouraged to rethink the way they explore their city and their limitations, allowing them to lead the tone of the conversation as they share their experiences. As such, photo elicitation becomes a crucial aspect to integrate to this research, allowing participants to capture and share elements or situations that shape their mobilities or urban perceptions –a unique outcome that could be more difficult to obtain through prompted cues in a structured focus group. All photos will be taken on their personal phones and participants will be able to refer back to them during the discussion session at the end of the transect walk.

This research will implement two hybrid transect walk segments (please see appendix 6) that juxtapose different areas of the city in terms of socioeconomic background. The first transect walk will explore a neighbourhood in the south end of Saltillo, an area with a significant level of urban poverty according to Mexico's National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy, while the second will explore the north end of Saltillo, with a higher socioeconomic level. The group of participants will walk along the area for 15-20 minutes to reach a bus stop. While carrying out each hybrid transect walk, participants will be asked to fill out the participant assessment booklet on each bus stop we reach (two on each transect). They will evaluate items like pavements and walkability, road safety, signposting, and urban furniture and comfort (please see appendix 7.2). Afterwards, we will board the bus that will take us to the Cultural Centre Benito Juárez in the City Centre of Saltillo where we will have a discussion session about our experiences and perceptions. Each transect walk is expected to last up to 2.5 hours in total.

Due to the complex nature of this research method, there are several considerations that are important to take into account. This methodological approach has been developed in collaboration with Transeúntas MX, a Mexican collective that has significant experience designing and implementing urban transect walks in cities like Guadalajara and Querétaro. Their participation during the implementation of the hybrid walks in Saltillo will be mainly as a moderating aid to the main researcher and will not collect any data or conduct the research experiment; they will not have access to any non-anonymised information or personal data collected from the participant recruitment form. The recruitment of participants will be done through open calls on social media with the help of feminist collectives. All potential participants will be invited to fill out a participant recruitment form where all the basic information about the project is explained to them in plain language; the goal is to recruit between 6 to 8 participants that can take part in both transect walks. The group will be supervised by two moderators; main researcher and Triana Zepeda Saldaña from Transeúntas MX due to the complexity of managing groups in crowded urban areas or public transport buses. This thesis approaches transect walks as a hybrid, creative methodological approach with a combined element of photo elicitation.

The methodology implemented for this assessment stems from the Technical Index of Walkability (Índice Técnico de Caminabilidad) developed by the Inter-American Development Bank and has been adapted to assess the urban environment surrounding the bus stops that the group will be using. As the main researcher, I will also fill out my own assessment sheet with more technical items like measurements of the pavement, land uses of the area, speed limits, and conditions and materials of the pavement (please see appendix 7.2). In term, the bus stops that we will be analysing as part of the hybrid transect walks methodology will be part of the overall mapping of the bus stops for my third and final methodology. This will allow me to integrate the participants' comments and perceptions about the bus stops and draw conclusions on how the various characteristics of the transport infrastructure and the urban environment shape their experiences of the city and their mobilities. By prompting them to discuss their current experiences, this methodology also invites participants to reimagine what a gender-conscious transport system would look like compared to the current state and how this would shape their mobility. For this method, I will collect written notes and schematic drawings from all participants as part of their assessment booklet, as well as audio recordings from the sessions for transcription and translation purposes.

- *Mapping of bus stops:*

In addition to the qualitative data retrieved, I will map the existing bus stops in Saltillo through a series of fact-finding trips on five selected bus routes that are part of Saltillo's transport network. I will board each route and begin to mark down formal and informal bus stops to create a data base for each route. Later, each selected bus stop will be assessed on different categories departing from the Technical Index of Walkability (Índice Técnico de Caminabilidad) developed by the Inter-American Development Bank. I have adapted their methodology in order to assess different aspects of each bus stop, to provide a snapshot of the current state of the bus stops in Saltillo. For this, I will be using the same assessment sheet that is being used during the transect walk methodology (please see appendix 7.2). The goal of this methodology is to produce a map with the different bus stops assessed and their ranking as a departure point for policy planning. This fact-finding methodology will produce a map that assesses the current state of the bus stops in the transport infrastructure of Saltillo and will combine this information with the qualitative data retrieved from the transect walks and shadowing methodologies for a

more layered understanding of the way the various characteristics of the urban environment and the transport infrastructure can shape women's mobility.

3c)

What research instrument(s), validated scales or methods will be used to collect data (e.g. questionnaires, interview schedules etc)?

- *Ethnographic shadowing*
- *Semi-structured interviews (pre- and post-shadowing)*
- *Transect walks*
- *Photo elicitation*
- *Mapping*

3d)

If you are using an external research instrument, validated scale or research method, please specify.

3e)

If you are not using an externally validated scale or research method, please attach a copy of the research instrument you will use to collect data. For example, a measurement scale, questionnaire, interview schedule, observation protocol for ethnographic work or in the case of unstructured data collection a topic list. **Please submit as attachments to the e-mail that submits this form.**

For appendixes related to the ethnographic shadowing methodology please see:

- *Appendix 1- Participant information sheet*
- *Appendix 2- Research privacy notice*
- *Appendix 3- Consent form*
- *Appendix 4.1- Initial interview questions*
- *Appendix 4.2- Exit interview questions*
- *Appendix 4.3- Non-disclosure agreement with CEAV (psychosocial support only)*

For appendixes related to the hybrid transect walks please see:

- *Appendix 5- Participant recruitment form*
- *Appendix 6- Hybrid transect walks (layout)*
- *Appendix 7.1- Assessment booklet (participants only)*
- *Appendix 7.2- Assessment sheet (researcher only)*
- *Appendix 7.3 – Consent form for participants with children under 18 years of age*

For appendixes related to the mapping of bus stops please see:

• *Appendix 8- Selected routes of the public transport system of Saltillo*

3f)

In which country/countries will research be conducted?

Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico

3g)

In which country/countries will the data analysis take place?

Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico and York, United Kingdom

4. Does the project require Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) previously known as Criminal Records Bureau checks?

4a)

Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with children or people under 18 years of age? Yes/**No**

4b)

Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with adults who have learning difficulties? Yes/**No**

4c)

Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with adults who are infirm or physically disabled? Yes/**No**

4d)

Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with adults who are resident in social care or medical establishments? Yes/**No**

4e)

Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with adults in the custody of the criminal justice system? Yes/**No**

4f)

Has a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check been stipulated as a condition of access to any source of data required for the project? Yes/**No**

4 g)

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of the 4a-f questions, please explain the nature of the contact required and the circumstances in which contact will be made during the project.

If you require a DBS check, please contact the DBS or check their website for more details
<https://www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/contact-disclosure-and-barring-service>

5) External Ethical Reviews

5a)

Is this project liable to scrutiny by external ethical review arrangements? Yes/**No**

5b)

Has a favourable ethical opinion been given for this project by a social care research ethics committee, NHS, or by any other external research? Yes/**No**

5c)

Will this project be submitted for ethical approval to a social care committee or any other external research ethics? Yes/**No**

Please submit any external review documents that you can along with this form

6 Confidentiality and personal data

Does your project involve personal data as defined by the UK [GDPR](#)? **Yes**/No

If you answer YES to 6, please continue, if you answer NO, please go to 11

7a)

What types of personal data will you be collecting and/or processing?

[Use as many terms from the following list that apply: [Personal data](#); [Special category personal data](#); [Criminal offence or conviction data](#); data of children (under 18 years of age); data on vulnerable individuals (e.g. elderly or individuals with certain disabilities); Pseudonymised data (e.g. an NHS digital dataset); anonymised data where there is a risk of re-identification].

In order to conduct the ethnographic shadowing processes I will need to ask all participants for their home and work addresses and shadow them throughout the day. This may lead to the disclosure of personal data. During the initial interview for the ethnographic approach, I will ask participants personal information like age, income, occupation, civil status, and dependants. All participants will be above 18 years old. The participation of the psychologist who will provide psychosocial support to all participants may lead to the disclosure of personal data and I have arranged a non-disclosure agreement between the University and Lic. Artizi Herrera-Valero through the Research and Knowledge Exchange Contracts Team (please see appendix 4.3)

For the transect walks, participants will be asked to fill out a Google Forms link that will ask them their name, age, email, and phone number. This is only for the purposes of recruiting and organising participants in order to carry out the transect walks. No real names will be used in the writing up of this thesis or any derivative material. If any women wish to take part in the experiment with their children (under 18 years of age), a separate consent form will be drawn up between the researcher and the participant where the legal guardian will provide consent on behalf of their child (please see appendix 7.3)

7b)

Describe the nature of the personal or special category data you will be collecting or using (e.g. opinions, contact details, financial information, health data, information on beliefs)?
N.B. This response should be in line with the project details given in section 3 above and any attached research instruments (e.g. questionnaire survey)

For the ethnographic approach and the focus groups, I will be asking participants their perception and opinions regarding the public transport system of Saltillo and their experiences on it. During the interviews for the ethnographic process, I will ask participants their contact details such as personal address, personal phone number, work address. I will also collect personal data regarding occupation, income, age, dependants, and civil status. In some cases, I may need to ask information regarding health data depending on the participant (i.e., if they have a chronic condition that shapes their mobility)

For the transect walks I will ask participants to provide their name, age, phone number and email address.

7c)

Where will the personal data be sourced from (e.g. direct from the participant, from a (named) organisation/source, indirectly from observation, national data registry, from social media, etc.)?

All personal data collected will be source directly from each participant.

7d)

If the data is from NHS Digital, a registry (e.g. Eurostat) or organisation, give the identifiers for the datasets and/or reference the sharing agreements

N/A

8. Data Protection Impact Assessment

In line with UK Data Protection requirements, please confirm that you have completed the [Data Protection Impact Assessment Screening Questionnaire](#).

Yes/No

If the questionnaire suggests you need to carry out a [DPIA](#) have you contacted the University's data protection officers about this? Yes/No

9. Data protection by design and default

9a)

Will you be collecting the minimum amount of personal data necessary for the specified research purpose e.g. ensuring all data to be captured can be justified? **Yes**/No

9b)

Will you use the data only for the purposes of this research project? **Yes**/No

9c)

If you plan to use the data for additional purposes, will you bring this to the attention of the research participants at point of data collection or, where this is not possible, the University's Data Protection Officer? **Yes/No**

9d)

Will you anonymise personal data wherever and as soon as possible: either at point of data capture, collation, analysis or output? **Yes/No**

9e)

Will you use pseudonymised data wherever possible in cases where information cannot be anonymised e.g. will you separate research participant contact details from the data to be analysed and/or remove identifiers e.g. specific date of birth and replace with age within a date range? **Yes/No**

9f)

Will you issue research participants with a [GDPR compliant participant information sheet/privacy notice](#) at the point of data collection if you are gathering personal data (an example is given with the department ethics information) and will you attach your sheet/notice with this form when submitted? **Yes/No**

9g)

Will you process personal data to take 'measures or decisions' about particular individuals? [An exception can apply in the case of (NHS REC) approved medical research]. **Yes/No**

9h)

Where you are working collaboratively, will you document data flows between the various research partners (e.g. in a basic data flow diagram) and retain a copy of this document with your ethics application? **Yes/No**

9i)

Where you are working collaboratively, will you ensure the Research and Knowledge Exchange Contracts Team are consulted before any data is gathered or shared to ensure appropriate contracts and/or data sharing arrangements are in place? **Yes/No**

9j)

Where you are looking to engage third party services such as a transcription service, will you ensure the Research and Knowledge Exchange Contracts Team are consulted before any data is gathered or shared to ensure appropriate contracts and/or data sharing arrangements are in place? **Yes/No**

9k)

Where you are working collaboratively, will you ensure data transfers to the collaborators are undertaken in accordance with [IT guidance](#)? **Yes/No**

9l)

No data subjects will be identifiable in the final research output / data publication(s)? E.g. there will be no publication of direct quotations from respondents or publication of data that might allow the identification of individuals. **Yes/No**

9m)

If you answered no, to any of 9a-9l, please confirm that you have consulted the [University's Data Protection Officer](#) and obtained any necessary approval. **Yes/No**

10. Data retention

Data retention may be set by University policy, a data sharing agreement/data provider, be based on professional guidelines, or be approved by a York ethics committee. If the data is not going to be destroyed within a set time-scale please include a justification for this. The University's Research Data Management (RDM) policy applies to research undertaken by

postgraduate research students and research staff only. This recommends retaining important data for a period of 10 years. Taught students should retain such data until their degree is awarded. Useful links are given with questions and another useful link on [data sharing is here](#).

10a)

Where will results that include/may include personal data be reported and disseminated (e.g. reference data output, research publication)?

The main use for the data collected during this research project will be for the completion of my Ph.D. dissertation. Afterwards, these findings may be used as publication material for research journals and conferences.

10b)

[How long will you keep personal data after the project](#), in what form and for what reason?

All personal data collected will be kept for up to six months throughout the period of transcription, translation and anonymisation. After all personal data has been anonymised, this will be destroyed by the main researcher. All sets of data that will be shared with supervisors and with potential future publication editors will be anonymised.

All anonymised data will be kept in digital form, stored in the main researcher's institutional google drive account up to ten years after the completion of the PhD programme to allow for publication of research papers.

10c)

When will the research data be [destroyed, by whom, and how](#)?

All personal data collected during the initial ethnographic stage of the project will be destroyed after six months to allow for a period of transcription, translation and anonymisation. All written notes will be digitalised and destroyed afterwards. All digital notes containing personal data will be anonymised and stored in the main's researcher institutional google drive account. The main researcher in this project will be responsible for the transcription, translation, anonymisation and destruction of all personal data that derives from fieldwork.

10d)

Will any personal or special category data (i.e. data that is not truly and irrevocably anonymised) be deposited in an archive or external repository? Yes/**No**/NA

10e)

Where personal data are to be transferred to an archive or repository, please confirm that your information sheet or privacy notice will: (i) cover the archiving and reuse of any personal data and participant agreement to this; (ii) explain to participants the benefits of any data sharing; (iii) indicate where possible whether research data will be deposited in a named, recognised repository (e.g. Archaeology Data Service, UK Data Service, York's institutional repository, etc.) **Yes**/No/NA

10f)

Where you have special category personal data or criminal data, will it be destroyed in line with an agreed retention policy (set by the University, the data provider, or approved by this ethics committee)? Yes/No/NA

The rest of the form is for all applicants, regardless of whether personal data are being processed

11. Informed consent

11a)

Will all participants be fully informed why the project is being conducted and what their participation will involve, and will this information be given before the project begins?

Yes/No/NA

11b)

Will every participant be asked to give informed consent to participating in the project, before it begins? Yes/No/NA

11c)

Will all participants be fully informed about what data will be collected, and what will be done with these data during and after the project (note if [personal data](#) is collected you should have completed sections 7 to 10)? Yes/No/NA

11d)

Will every participant understand what rights they have not to take part, and/or to withdraw themselves and their data from the project if they do take part? Yes/No/NA

11e)

Will every participant understand that they do not need to give you reasons for deciding not to take part or to withdraw themselves and their data from the project and that there will be no repercussions as a result? Yes/No/NA

11f)

If you seek audio, video or photographic recording of participants, will consent be sought?

Yes/No/NA

11g)

If the project involves deceiving, or covert observation of, participants, will you debrief them at the earliest possible opportunity? Yes/No/NA

11h)

Explain how you will implement the informed consent scheme and attach copies of your participant information, consent scheme and privacy notice If personal data being collected)

For the ethnographic shadowing: I intend to approach each participant individually and explain my project, aims, objectives and methodologies in plain Spanish (the native language of all participants) for clarity and accessibility purposes. I will provide each participant with a project brief (in Spanish) and a consent form that details what type of personal data and information I will be collecting from them and how I intend to use it. (Please see appendix 1 and 2). All participants involved in the ethnographic shadowing stage will receive a simple breakdown of activities, how they will take place and the purpose of these methods. Before beginning fieldwork, I will ask all participants to sign a consent form; I will also explain to each participant that they can remove consent at any point.

For the transect walks: each potential participant will be asked to fill out a Google Forms where I explain the project, what it consists of and the overall layout of activities. All potential participants are informed of what type of information I will be collecting and how this will be used. In this case, I do not collect personal data other than name, age, email, and phone number for logistics purposes. Participants who may wish to take part with their children (under 18 years of age) will be asked to sign a separate consent form on the behalf of their children. All participants will receive a digital copy of their google forms response; I will inform them at the beginning of each transect walk that they can remove consent at any point.

11i)

If you answered NO to any of a-e, please give a full explanation here.

12. Data Security

12a)

How will the data be collected and stored electronically?

University of York's Google Drive (Online Cloud Storage)

12b)

Please detail who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the study.

(Main researcher) Diana Infante-Vargas

12c)

Will you use University approved software? (if no, please provide further details and consult IT Services before proceeding)

Yes

12d)

Will you use University approved file storage (Google Drive, University networked storage, research computing)? (if no, please provide further details)

Yes

12e)

Will you store personal or confidential data on laptop(s) with appropriate device encryption?
(if no,
please provide further details)

Yes

12f)

If capturing audio, will you use an encrypted device for recording (e.g. an Apple iOS device or encrypted voice recorder)? (if no, please provide further details)

Yes

12g)

Where data is held on an encrypted portable device (e.g. laptop, tablet) will you back it up to a University approved service as soon as possible and perform periodic checks to ensure data is being backed up appropriately? Yes/No/NA

12h)

Will you ensure confidential information is encrypted before it is transmitted/shared digitally? Yes/No/NA

12i)

Please detail what other protections will be used for digital data (e.g. access/edit permissions, procedural safeguards re downloads/making copies, remote access via VDS/VPN, 2 factor authentication)?

Access/edit permissions, two-factor authentication, and VPN

12j)

Have you reviewed the user commitments under the [Policy for the safe use of University information on devices](#). Yes/No

12k)

Detail anything in the user commitments that will pose a challenge in carrying out your proposed research.

NA

12l)

How will hard copy/analogue data (e.g. in paper form) be collected, sent and stored?

All physical notes will be digitalised and anonymised (where applicable) before sharing.

12m)

Will you ensure that personal data or confidential data held on paper are stored in a lockable filing cabinet or container, and/or a locked room in secure premises? (if no, please provide further details) Yes/No

12n)

How will devices be physically protected (e.g. in transit, when not in use or left unattended)?

Secured devices with password and fingerprint recognition.

12o)

Will you ensure the device(s), accounts, or storage area(s) used to store data are not accessible to any unauthorised parties? **Yes/No**

12p)

Set out any other measures or procedures for maintaining the confidentiality of information about the participant and information that the participant shares (e.g. other methods of anonymisation).

ID codes for every participant, pseudonyms

13. Risk of harm

13a)

Is there any significant risk that your project may lead to physical harm to participants or researchers? **Yes/No**

13b)

Is there any significant risk that your project may lead to psychological or emotional distress to participants? **Yes/No**

13c)

Is there any significant risk that your project may lead harm to the reputation of participants, or their employers, or of any other persons or organisations? **Yes/No**

13d)

Is there a significant possibility that the project will encourage children under 18 to access inappropriate websites, or correspond with people who pose risk of harm? **Yes/No**

13e)

Will the project incur any other risks that arise specifically from the use of electronic media ([useful link to social media research](#))? **Yes/No**

13f)

If you answered Yes to any of a-e: explain the nature of the risks involved; why it is necessary for the participants or researchers to be exposed to such risks; how you propose to assess, manage and mitigate any such risks; the arrangements by which you will ensure that participants understand and consent to these risks; the arrangements you will make to refer participants or researchers to sources of help, if they are seriously distressed or harmed as a result of taking part in the project; the arrangements for recording and reporting any adverse consequences of the research.

The nature of this research deals with issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence in public spaces. More often than not, women in Mexico are exposed to high levels of violence in different environments and talking about one experience of sexual assault or sexual violence may trigger past experiences to arise. Participants may be at risk of emotional distress during the process of interviews as part of the ethnographic shadowing and at risk of revictimization by retelling their story. In order to disclose this risk to all participants, I will include a section about how I intend to manage and mitigate these risks and why it is

important for them to consider this. Since I do not have the proper training needed to provide psychosocial support for participants, I will partner with a professional psychologist in Saltillo; the deputy director of the immediate attention department at the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims (CEAV) of the State of Coahuila de Zaragoza– Lic. Atziri Herrera-Valero– who will provide psychological accompaniment to all participants. The structure of her participation is as follows:

- *During the stage of planning and revision of interview structuring, I will involve Lic. Herrera-Valero to ask her point of view on the phrasing and angle of the questions that participants will be asked. This is a measure that can help me prevent any undue revictimization by dismissal or minimisation or events.*
- *During the initial interview, I will go over the consent form and explain how I intend to mitigate any emotional risks for participants. I will introduce Lic. Herrera-Valero to all participants and explain her role as source of help in case of emotional distress. After this, the interview will be conducted as planned unless the participant requires a time off for a private moment with the psychologist. Participants are able to remove consent at any stage of the research process.*
- *During the shadowing process, I will create a WhatsApp group with each participant and Lic. Herrera-Valero to create a source of immediate help should we need it. After the shadowing process is over, the group will be deleted.*
- *During the exit interview, I will go over my findings and conduct a semi-structured dialogue with the participant to gather her thoughts on the experience. At the end, I will step aside and leave the psychologist with the participant for a brief session where they can talk about any issues that the research experiment may have caused. I will have no access to notes or recordings of this of the exit interview, to preserve participants' privacy. Lastly, I will give all participants access to the psychologist work contact details to provide resources for help in case any emotional distress arises later on as a consequence of their participation.*
- *In order to protect participants' data and privacy, I will contact the Research and Knowledge Exchange Contracts Team to set up a data sharing agreement and ask Lic. Herrera-Valero to sign a non-disclosure of personal data form. This will be done prior to any data collection or data sharing stage. (Please see appendix 4.3)*

14. Risk of disclosure of harm or potential harm

14a)

Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence of previous criminal offences, or their intention to commit criminal offences? Yes/**No**

14b)

Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence that children or vulnerable adults are being harmed, or are at risk of harm? Yes/**No**

14c)

Is there any significant risk that your project may lead harm to the reputation of participants, or their employers, or of any other persons or organisations? Yes/**No**

14d)

Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence of serious risk of other types of harm? Yes/**No**

14e)

If you answered **Yes** to any of these questions explain: why it is necessary to take the risks of potential or actual disclosure; what actions you would take, if such disclosures were to occur; what information you will give participants about the possible consequences of disclosing information about criminal or serious risk of harm.

15. Payment of participants

15a)

Do you intend to offer participants cash payments or any other kind of inducements or compensation for taking part in your project? Yes/**No**

15b)

Is there any significant possibility that such inducements will cause participants to consent to risks that they might not otherwise find acceptable? Yes/No/**NA**

15c)

Is there any significant possibility that the prospect of payment or other rewards will systematically skew the data provided by participants in any way? Yes/No/**NA**

15d)

Will you inform participants that accepting compensation or inducements does not negate their right to withdraw from the project? Yes/No/**NA**

15e)

If you answered Yes to any of these questions explain the nature of the inducements or the amount of the payments that will be offered; the reasons why it is necessary to offer payments; why you consider it is ethically and methodologically acceptable to offer payments.

16. Capacity to give valid consent

16a)

Do you propose to recruit any participants who are under 18 years of age? **Yes**/No

16b)

Do you propose to recruit any participants who have learning difficulties? Yes/**No**

16c)

Do you propose to recruit any participants with communication difficulties, including difficulties arising from limited facility with the English language? Yes/**No**

16d)

Do you propose to recruit any participants who are very elderly or infirm? Yes/**No**

16e)

Do you propose to recruit any participants with mental health problems or other medical problems that may impair their cognitive abilities? Yes/**No**

16f)

Do you propose to recruit any participants who may not be able to understand fully the nature of the research and the implications for them of participating in it? Yes/**No**

16e)

If you answered Yes to any of the questions explain: how you will ensure that the interests and wishes of participants are understood and taken in to account; how in the case of children the wishes of their parents or guardians are understood and taken into account.

While I will not actively seek the participation of anyone under 18 years of age, participants with caring responsibilities may wish to take part in the hybrid transect walk methodologies. In such cases, their participation could provide interesting insights into the mobility of care in Saltillo; how their caring responsibilities shape their mobilities and vice versa. Their participation is welcome, and they will be asked to disclose the participation of their children during the initial Google Forms for participant recruitment. They will be asked to sign a consent form on behalf of their children (please see appendix 7.3). I will not collect any information on their child and will focus on the main participants' experience of the urban environment as a person with caring responsibilities.

17. Is participation genuinely voluntary?

17a)

Are you proposing to recruit participants who are employees or students of the University of York or of organisation(s) that are formal collaborators in the project? Yes/**No**

17b)

Are you proposing to recruit participants who are employees recruited through other business, voluntary or public sector organisations? Yes/**No**

17c)

Are you proposing to recruit participants who are pupils or students recruited through educational institutions? Yes/**No**

17d)

Are you proposing to recruit participants who are clients recruited through voluntary or public services? Yes/**No**

17e)

Are you proposing to recruit participants who are living in residential communities or institutions? Yes/**No**

17f)

Are you proposing to recruit participants who are in-patients in a hospital or other medical establishment? Yes/**No**

17g)

Are you proposing to recruit participants who are recruited by virtue of their employment in the police or armed services? Yes/**No**

17h)

Are you proposing to recruit participants who are being detained or sanctioned in the criminal justice system? Yes/**No**

17i)

Are you proposing to recruit participants who may not feel empowered to refuse to participate in the research? Yes/**No**

17j) If you answered Yes to any of these questions explain: how your participants will be recruited; what steps you will take to ensure that participation in this project is genuinely voluntary.

18. Other ethical risks

18a)

Are there any other ethical issues or risks of harm raised by your project that have not been covered by previous questions? **Yes/No**

18b)

If you answered Yes to this question, explain: the nature of these ethical issues and risks; why you need to incur these ethical issues and risks; how you propose to deal with these ethical issues and risks.

Given Mexico's context of violence against women, specifically women's disappearance and killings, it is crucial to address the measures I will be taking to protect myself. While I am originally from Saltillo, Coahuila and extremely familiar with its public transport system as a regular user, there are some challenges around my safety while conducting fieldwork. Mainly, the ethnographic shadowing stage may involve me travelling to remote urban areas during dark hours, triggering perceptions of unsafety. Additionally, conducting fact-finding trips in different bus routes alone or conducting shadowing processes during dark hours and remote locations puts me in a vulnerable position as a researcher. Lastly, as a victim of harassment and sexual assault while using the public transport of Saltillo, there is an inherent risk of revictimization and emotional distress while conducting field work.

Although the participant will be familiar with their own route and environment, this is a risk that is also present in their experience. In preparation of this, I will create a group with each participant and Lic. Herrera-Valero to share our location, intended duration of activities and action plan. This represents a resource for help for the participants and for me, where we can be safely monitored by a trusted external party while carrying on with the research process. I will also engage in weekly therapy sessions to deal with any emotional stress that may arise from being exposed to vulnerable situations.

19. Principal Investigator's Declaration

Please ensure that you can answer YES to all questions below:

19a)

I have completed all the required sections and kept a copy for my own records. **Yes/No**

19b)

I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described in this form. I will immediately suspend research and request a new ethical approval if the project subsequently changes the information I have given in this form. **Yes/No**

19c)

I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agree to abide by the University's [Code of practice and principles for good ethical governance](#) **Yes/No**

19d)

I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agree to abide by the [University's Research Data Management Policy](#) **Yes/No**

Signatures

Submit this form and any attachments by e-mail **including your surname** in the filename.

You should type your name in the signature space.

An email attachment sent from your University inbox will be assumed to have been signed electronically.

Students must get their Project Supervisor to countersign this declaration. Students should not submit forms directly. The supervisor must check the application and submit it.

Principal Investigator

Signed: Diana Patricia Infante Vargas (Principal Investigator or Student)

Date: April 2023

Students must ask their Project Supervisor to type their name here and to submit the application. The email submission will be taken as an electronic countersignature

Countersigned: Diana Patricia Infante Vargas

Student's Project supervisor: Dr Joshua Kirshner and Dr Harriet Gray

Date: April 2023

I have read this form and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the student and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

Submit to: [REDACTED FOR PRIVACY]

For office use only

Date form initially received:

Date considered by committee:

Approve? Yes/No (if no give details in Comment section below detailing potential actions)

Comments:

Date of reply to applicant:

Signature: (Chair of Ethics Committee)

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Appendix 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Mobility and gender in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico; an analysis of the public transport system through a gender lens

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask a member of the research team.

1. What is this research about?

This project aims to research the extent of gender violence in transport in Saltillo, Mexico. The research project will look into women's perception of transport systems and the city through a shadowing approach. This thesis aims to produce knowledge about the urban experiences of women from Saltillo.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

We are looking to capture women's urban experiences and perceptions while using the public transport system of Saltillo. You have been invited because you are a public transport user, and your everyday urban experiences could provide a departure point of analysis for this study.

3. Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary - you do not have to take part in the project. If you decide to take part, we will discuss the research project with you and ask you to sign a consent form. If you decide not to take part, you do not have to explain your reasons and it will not affect your legal rights.

You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in the research project at any time, without giving a reason, even after signing the consent form. If you withdraw from the project, we will destroy your data and will not use it in any way.

4. What will taking part involve?

Your participation will involve a series of events detailed as follows:

If you decide to take part in this research project, we will schedule an initial interview where we will talk about your everyday routine, how you move around the city, where, and when, and other issues related to your mobility around the city. During the initial interview I will also ask questions related to episodes of sexual harassment or sexual assault while using the public transport system. This will be a casual conversation where with the intention to understand your context and how you view the city and its transport system. During our initial interview I will introduce you to a psychologist that will be supporting you throughout the process should any emotional stress arise. This interview will take roughly one hour.

During the second stage of your participation, I will shadow a regular day in your life. This means that I will follow you on all your trips and commutes across the city while taking written

notes and voice memos with description of the surroundings and situations. During this stage, I will not engage directly with you unless there is an emergency. There will be measures in place to protect your safety like sharing our live location with a trusted psychologist via WhatsApp.

Later, we will schedule an exit interview where we will engage on how the shadowing process made you feel, your takeaways, and emotions you may want to share. I will ask some questions regarding our trips during the shadowing process and will ask you to share your perceptions on the transport system infrastructure and feelings of safety. During the exit interview, the psychologist will join us, and at the end of my interview, I will step aside to allow for a brief counselling session. This interview will take about one hour.

5. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There will be no direct advantages or benefits to you from taking part, but your contribution will help us understand women's mobility in Saltillo. Particularly how is it that women's urban experiences are shaped by the public transport system and in what ways. This, in time, could contribute to the design of public policies for Saltillo, Mexico.

6. What are the possible risks of taking part?

Gender violence is a sensitive issue for some women. The questions included in the interview are not designed to revictimize the participant, however the nature of the topic could be triggering for some women. I will ask you to remember and recount episodes of sexual harassment or sexual violence that have occurred while you used the public transport system, and this may lead to negative emotions that impact your psychological well-being.

To provide professional psychological help to all participants in this project, I have requested the collaboration of the Lic. Atziri Herrera-Valero, [REDACTED FOR PRIVACY] the current deputy director of the immediate attention department at the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims (CEAV) of the State of Coahuila de Zaragoza. Her presence during both interviews, and as a support resource during the shadowing stage are safeguarding measures. Her role is to provide emotional and psychological support to all participants, but it is important to understand that she will not be collecting any information about you and all your interactions with her will be under strict confidentiality.

7. Will my taking part in this research project be kept confidential?

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. No real names will be used in any presentations or publications unless you specifically agree to this on a case-by-case basis. All information collected from (or about) you during the research project will be kept confidential and any personal information you provide will be managed in accordance with data protection legislation.

8. What will happen to my Personal Data?

Prior to the interview we will request your contact information (mail and phone number) to arrange an initial meeting where I will go over the research project with you. This information will not be published at any stage of the research project and will be discarded once you have concluded your participation.

During the interview you will be asked to state your full name and date of birth. I will also ask questions that will disclose where you live, where you work, number of dependants, civil status, and health conditions. This information is considered personal data, according to the General

Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Your personal data will not be used directly at any stage of the research and will be anonymised within two weeks of concluding your participation. This means that while I may use findings related to your mobility patterns, I will not disclose name, addresses, phone numbers, or personal identifiers, either directly or by reference.

After two weeks from the exit interview, I will transcribe, translate, and anonymise all the personal data that has been collected from or about you in connection with this research project, with the exception of your consent form. Your consent form will be retained for up to five years and may be accessed by members of the research team, and where necessary, by members of the University's governance and audit teams or by regulatory authorities. Anonymised information will be kept for ten years, and it may be published in support of the research project and/or retained indefinitely, where it is likely to have continuing value for research purposes.

9. What happens to the data at the end of the research project?

The data collected will not be shared with other parties at the University of York or any other organizations. The psychologist involved during the both interviews and the shadowing process has signed a data-sharing agreement that prevents her from sharing or collecting information from or about you. There is a possibility that this information may be used for future research projects, in that case, it will only be the anonymized data that will be publicly available.

10. What will happen to the results of the research project?

All the information collected can be potentially used while writing my PhD dissertation. It is my intention to publish the results of this research project in academic journals and present findings at conferences. It is important for you to understand that participants will not be identified in any report, publication, or presentation.

There is an intention to use verbatim quotes and anonymized extracts from both interviews and the focus group in the writing process of the dissertation, this information will not contain any personal data that may lead to the identification of the participant.

11. Who is organising and funding this research project?

The research is organised by MSc. Diana Infante-Vargas, a PhD student in the Interdisciplinary Global Development Centre at the University of York, under the supervision of Dr Joshua Kirshner and Dr Harriet Gray.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Departmental Ethics Committee of the Department of Environment at the University of York. If you have any questions regarding this, you can email the Ethics Committee at [REDACTED FOR PRIVACY]

12. Further information and contact details

If you have further questions regarding this project, please feel free to contact:

Lead researcher:

Diana Infante-Vargas, PhD Student

[REDACTED FOR PRIVACY]

Derwent College, University of York, York. YO10 5DD, United Kingdom

[REDACTED FOR PRIVACY]

Supervised by:

Joshua Kirshner, PhD (Department of Environment and Geography): [REDACTED FOR PRIVACY]

Harriet Gray, PhD (Department of Politics): [REDACTED FOR PRIVACY]

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project. If you decide to participate, you will be given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and a signed consent.

Appendix 2: PRIVACY NOTICE:

This sheet explains how personal data will be used during the research project: *‘Mobility and gender in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico; an analysis of the public transport system through a gender lens’* led by Diana Infante-Vargas at the University of York.

For this project, the University of York is the [Data Controller](#). We are registered with the Information Commissioner’s Office. [Our registration number](#) is Z4855807.

1. What information do we have and where do we get your data from?

Please look at the participant information sheet given to you by the person telling you about this project. If you have any questions, you can ask them to explain.

2. What is our legal basis for processing your data?

Privacy law (the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018) requires us to have a legal reason to process your personal data. Our reason is we need it to perform a public task⁸³.

This is because the University has a [public function](#), which includes carrying out research projects⁸⁴. We need to use personal data in order to carry out this research project.

Information about your health, ethnicity, sexual identity and other sensitive information is called [“special category” data](#). We have to have an additional legal reason to use this data, because it is sensitive. Our reason is that it is needed for research purposes⁸⁵. All research projects at the University follow our [research ethics policies](#).

3. How do we use your data?

We will schedule an interview and transcribe all data obtained from it. After transcription, all identifiable information will be anonymised and discarded. This research project forms part of my doctoral research and any publication that may arise from the study will not contain identifiable data.

Please look at the participant information sheet given to you as it contains all relevant information about this project. If you have any questions, please ask Diana Infante-Vargas (main researcher) to explain them to you.

4. Who do we share your data with?

Your data will be accessible only to the researcher leading the project. The set of data that will be shared with my PhD supervisors, and journal editors for the purposes of publication, will be anonymised. As well as this, we use computer software or systems to hold and manage data. Other

⁸³This refers to [UK GDPR Article 6 \(1\) \(e\)](#): processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller

⁸⁴[Our charter and statutes](#) states: 4.f. To provide instruction in such branches of learning as the University may think fit and to make provision for research and for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge in such manner as the University may determine.

⁸⁵This refers to [UK GDPR Article 9 \(2\) \(j\)](#): processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes in accordance with Article 89(1) based on Union or Member State law which shall be proportionate to the aim pursued, respect the essence of the right to data protection and provide for suitable and specific measures to safeguard the fundamental rights and the interests of the data subject.

companies only provide the software, system or storage. They are not allowed to use your data for their own reasons.

We have agreements in place when we share data. These agreements meet legal requirements to ensure your data is protected.

5. How do we keep your data secure?

The University is serious about keeping your data secure and protecting your rights to privacy. We don't ask you for data we don't need, and only give access to people who need to know. We think about security when planning projects, to make sure they work well. Our IT security team checks regularly to make sure we're taking the right steps. For more details see [our security webpages](#).

6. How do we transfer your data safely internationally?

If your data is stored or processed outside the UK, we follow legal requirements to make sure that the same level of privacy rules still apply.

7. How long will we keep your data?

The University has rules in place for [how long research data can be kept](#) when the research project is finished.

8. What rights do you have in relation to your data?

[You have rights over your data](#). The participant information sheet explains how you can stop participating in the study, and what will happen to your data if you do.

If you want to get a copy of your data, or talk to us about any other rights, please contact us using the details below.

9. Questions or concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about how your data is being processed, please contact:

Lead researcher:

MSc. Diana Infante-Vargas, PhD Student

[REDACTED FOR PRIVACY]

Derwent College, University of York, York, YO10 5DD, United Kingdom

[REDACTED FOR PRIVACY]

Supervised by:

Dr Joshua Kirshner, PhD (Department of Environment and Geography): **[REDACTED FOR PRIVACY]**

Dr Harriet Gray, PhD (Department of Politics): **[REDACTED FOR PRIVACY]**

If you have further questions, the University's Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotection@york.ac.uk or by writing to: **Data Protection Officer, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD.**

10. Right to complain

If you are unhappy with how the University has handled your personal data, please contact our Data Protection Officer using the details above, so that we can try to put things right.

If you are unhappy with our response, you have a right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#). You can also contact the Information Commissioner's Office by post to

Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF or by phone on 0303 123 1113.

Appendix 3: CONSENT FORM

Title of research project: *Mobility and gender in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico; an analysis of the public transport system through a gender lens*

Name of Chief/Principal Investigator: Diana Infante-Vargas (PhD Student)

	Please mark the box
I confirm that I have read the project information sheet for the above research project.	Yes ☐ No ☐
I have understood the project information sheet, I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that these have been answered satisfactorily.	Yes ☐ No ☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any adverse consequences.	Yes ☐ No ☐
I consent to being audio recorded for the purposes of the research project and I understand how it will be used in the research. <i>(You may take part in the study without agreeing to this)</i>	Yes ☐ No ☐
I understand that anonymised excerpts and/or verbatim quotes from my interview may be used as part of the research publication and that it will not include information that could identify me.	Yes ☐ No ☐
I understand that the findings and results of the research project will be written up and published.	Yes ☐ No ☐
I agree to take part in this research project.	Yes ☐ No ☐

_____	_____	_____

Name of participant (print)	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____

Name of person taking consent (print)	Date	Signature

Role of person taking consent (print)

Appendix 4.1: INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Participant ID:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself, where did you grow up, occupation, age, family members (dependants), the area where you live.
2. How long have you used public transport, how often?
3. How has your usage of public transport changed throughout the years? Has it increased, decreased and what would you attribute it to?
4. Talk to me about a regular week in your life.
5. Are there any caring responsibilities that shape your outings? (i.e., how long you are gone for, how far you can travel, how much you can spend)
6. Have you ever experienced sexual harassment or sexual abuse while using the transport system of Saltillo? This may include while waiting at bus stops or inside the buses.
 - a. Did this change the way you move around the city or limit your behaviour in public spaces in any way?
 - b. What happened afterwards? Did you decide to file a report and if so, how did it go?
7. What are your main concerns when you are using public transport?
8. When you think of moving around the city, do you need to make preparations or arrangements of any kind to be able to go about your day before leaving the house?
9. On average, how much money do you spend on public transport in a week?

Appendix 4.2: EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Participant ID:

1. How did you feel during the shadowing stage?
2. Were there any moments when you felt in an unsafe environment or in a vulnerable position, and if so, when, or where?
 - a. How do you cope with feeling unsafe when you navigate the city in your daily commute?
 - b. What factors would you say contribute to your feelings of insecurity in the city?
3. Are there other days of the week where your daily commute changes, if so, in what ways does it change?

This section remains open because the outcome of the shadowing process will determine some questions in the exit interview.

Appendix 4.3: Non-disclosure agreement

CONFIDENTIAL DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

This Confidential Disclosure Agreement (the "Agreement") is made on the date it is last signed (the "Effective Date") between:

- (1) THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK, a body incorporated in England and Wales by Royal Charter with registration number RC000679, whose principal offices are at Heslington, York, YO10 5DD, UK (the "University"); and
- (2) STATE EXECUTIVE COMMISSION FOR ATTENTION TO VICTIMS OF THE STATE OF COAHUILA DE ZARAGOZA, a government organisation whose principal address is Calle Sinaloa #381 esquina con calle Veracruz, Colonia República Norte C.P. 25280 (the "Recipient"); and

(Each a "Party" and together the "Parties")

BACKGROUND

- A. Diana Infante-Vargas is a student of the University who is carrying out a research project in support of completing a higher degree at the University.
- B. The research project requires the student, under the supervision of the University and in accordance with the University's ethics procedures, to undertake fieldwork which will include the interviewing and shadowing research participants (the "Project").
- C. To support the Project, Atziri Herrera-Valero, an employee of the Recipient, will be privy to the details of the Project and will be available to provide psychosocial support to the research participants (the "Purpose").
- D. The Parties desire that the University's Confidential Information, including any information disclosed by research participants during the Recipient's involvement in the project, remains confidential upon the terms and conditions set forth in this Agreement.

Handwritten signature and date: 4/04/2023

The Parties, intending to be legally bound, agree as follows:

1. "Confidential Information" means information that falls within the types of information which:
 - (i) has been designated as confidential by the University or that ought to be considered as confidential (however it is conveyed or on whatever media it is stored);
 - (ii) information, conveyed in any medium, which the University directly or indirectly discloses, or makes available;
 - (iii) information which relates to the existence of the Project;
 - (iv) information which relates to the business, affairs, properties, assets, trading practices, goods, services, developments, trade secrets, intellectual property rights, know-how, personnel, customers and suppliers of the University and its affiliates, and commercially sensitive information.
2. The extent of Confidential Information to be disclosed will at all times be at the discretion of the University. This Agreement creates no obligation to disclose any particular Confidential Information.
3. The Recipient shall treat the Confidential Information as secret and strictly confidential. The Recipient will not use the Confidential Information except for the Purpose. The Recipient will not

disclose the Confidential Information to any third party. The Confidential Information must only be disclosed to the Recipient's employee Atziri Herrera-Valero, who should be bound by obligations of confidentiality no less restrictive than those contained in this Agreement. The Recipient will treat the Confidential Information with the same care as it treats its own confidential and proprietary information, but in any event no less than a commercially reasonable standard of care.

4. Confidential Information shall not include information which:
 - (i) is or becomes part of the public domain, other than through the Recipient's breach of confidentiality;
 - (ii) was already in the Recipient's possession at the time of disclosure, as proven by written records;
 - (iii) becomes known to the Recipient by a third party who has the right to disclose such information without any breach of confidentiality; or
 - (iv) is required to be disclosed by applicable law, court order, or order of a governmental department or agency, provided that the Recipient, where legally permitted to do so, gives the University adequate and prompt advance written notice so that the University can seek protective measures.
5. Upon the written request of the University at any time the Recipient shall, at the University's election, either return or destroy any of Confidential Information in its possession or under its control.
6. All Confidential Information disclosed under this Agreement remains the property of the University. Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as a grant of any right, title, or interest in any information, copyright, patent, or other intellectual property right.
7. The University represents and warrants that it has the authority to disclose the Confidential Information. To the extent permitted by law, the University excludes all other representations, warranties, and conditions (whether express or implied), including, without limitation, accuracy, completeness, quality, and fitness for any purpose.
8. In the event that a commercial collaboration between the Parties is agreed, the Parties shall enter into a separate definitive written agreement.
9. The Recipient agrees that damages would not be a sufficient remedy for any breach of this Agreement and the University will be entitled to, but not limited to, other remedies available at law or equity, including but not limited to injunctive relief and specific performance.
10. This Agreement shall commence in June 2023 and expire one (1) year thereafter. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Parties agree that this Agreement shall apply to any Confidential Information disclosed in furtherance of the Purpose before the Effective Date.
11. The obligations of confidentiality in this Agreement shall survive any termination or expiration of this Agreement and shall continue in perpetuity until, for each item of Confidential Information, an exception to confidentiality in clause 4 applies.
12. All notices and other communications required or permitted to be given under this Agreement must be in writing and will be effective when delivered personally; sent by facsimile or email and later confirmed by first class post; or two (2) days after having been sent by prepaid recorded,

14/04/2023


special delivery, or first class post at the address set forth below, or at any new address or addresses subsequently designated in writing by either Party to the other.

If to the University:

Research and Knowledge Exchange Contracts Team
Research and Enterprise Directorate
University of York
Ron Cooke Hub
Deramore Lane
York
YO10 5GE
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)1904 328674
Email: rkec@york.ac.uk

If to the Recipient:

Atziri Herrera-Valero
Deputy Director at the Immediate Attention Department
State Executive Commission for Attention to Victims of the State of Coahuila de Zaragoza
Calle Sinaloa #381 esquina con calle Veracruz. Colonia República Norte C.P. 25280

Email: [REDACTED]

13. No assignment of any right or interest and no delegation of any obligation under this Agreement may be made by the Recipient without the express prior written consent of the University. Any attempted assignments or delegations without such consent will be void.
14. If any provision of this Agreement is found by any court or other competent authority to be invalid, illegal, or unenforceable, the remaining provisions of this Agreement will continue in full force and effect.
15. No waiver of any breach of any provision of this Agreement shall constitute a waiver of any other breach of the same or any other provision. No waiver shall be effective unless made in writing and signed by an authorised representative of the waiving Party.
16. The Parties are independent contractors. Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as creating a partnership, joint venture, employment, or agency relationship between the Parties. Neither Party will make any warranties or representations or assume any obligations on the other Party's behalf.
17. No one who is not a party to this Agreement is intended to or may benefit from its terms because of the Contracts (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999.
18. This Agreement and any attachments constitutes the entire agreement between the Parties relating to the subject matter hereof and supersedes all prior and contemporaneous agreements or communications. This Agreement may only be amended in writing, signed by an authorised representative of each Party.

[Handwritten signature and date: 24/04/2023]

19. This Agreement is governed by, and is to be construed in accordance with, English law. The English Courts will have exclusive jurisdiction to deal with any dispute which has arisen or may arise out of, or in connection with, this Agreement.
20. This Agreement may be executed in any number of counterparts, each of which shall be an original, but all of which together shall constitute one instrument. Signatures transmitted by facsimile or in an Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) file attached to an e-mail shall be acceptable to bind each Party and shall not affect the validity of the Agreement in any way.

The Parties have signed this Agreement by their duly authorised representatives as of the Effective Date.

**SIGNED FOR AND ON BEHALF OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK**

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

**SIGNED FOR AND ON BEHALF OF
STATE EXECUTIVE COMMISSION FOR ATTENTION TO VICTIMS OF THE STATE OF COAHUILA DE
ZARAGOZA**

Signed: _____

Name: Alfonso Azemeth Herrera Valero

Title: MS

Date: 14/04/2023

Appendix 5: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FORM (Google Forms)

Hybrid transect walks

This workshop is part of the methodology developed for the research project "Mobility and gender in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico; an analysis of the public transport system through a gender lens".

This workshop has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Environment and Geography at the University of York and is carried out by lead researcher MSc. Diana Infante-Vargas and have been developed in collaboration with Triana Zepeda Saldaña from Transeúntas MX.

* Indicates required question

1. Participants with caring responsibilities *

For some women, caring responsibilities are a 24/7h job and may wish to participate alongside their small children; if this is your case, please let me know so we can arrange a separate consent form specifically for you.

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes, I am participating with my child

☐ Does not apply

About this project:

This is an open call to recruit participants for the hybrid transect walks that will take place on Saturday July 15th and Sunday July 16th, 2023.

During the workshops, participants will meet at the designed starting points for each transect walk:

- On the first transect walk, we will begin at a local park in the Teresitas neighbourhood. We will walk around the area for 15-20 minutes and reach a bus stop where participants will be asked to fill out their participant assessment booklet. You will evaluate items like pavements and walkability, road safety, signposting and street furniture and comfort. Afterwards, we will board the bus route "17" northbound and get off the bus at a bus stop near the city centre, where we will walk for 15-20 minutes toward the Benito Juárez Cultural Centre. Once at the cultural centre the group will begin discussing the experience and our perceptions of safety and how this experience relates to your regular commute. This activity is expected to last up to 2,5 hours
- On the second transect walk, we will begin at a local park in the Valle Real neighbourhood. We will walk around the area for 15-20 minutes and reach a bus stop where participants will be asked to fill out their participant assessment booklet. You will evaluate items like pavements and walkability, road safety, signposting and street furniture and comfort. Afterwards, we will board the bus route "5A" southbound and get off the bus at a bus stop near the city centre, where we will walk for 15-20 minutes toward the Benito Juárez Cultural Centre. Once at the cultural centre the group will begin discussing the experience and our perceptions of safety and how this experience relates to your regular commute. This activity is expected to last up to 2,5 hours.
- During this second discussion session we will also compare insights about the differences. For this, **it is important that participant only register if they can participate in both transect walks.**

During both transect walks participants are encouraged to take photos of elements they wish to discuss later on that; this could be a pavement, a bus stop, a bush or anything that has an impact on their experience of the public space

Hybrid transect walk 1 (Saturday July 25th)



Hybrid transect walk 2



2. I understand the way the workshop will take place and the activities that we will be carrying out *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

3. I understand that if I wish to participate and I have any questions about this project I can contact lead researcher MSc Diana Infante-Vargas via email at dpiv500@york.ac.uk *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

4. I confirm that I will be available to participate in both transect walks (July 15th and 16th) *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Sign up as a participant

All information is confidential and only for the purposes of signing up to participate. The researcher will not share any of your personal data at any stage of this project.

5. First name *

6. Last name *

7. Age *

Mark only one oval.

☐ 18-25

☐ 25-35

☐ 35-45

☐ 45-60

☐ 60+

8. If there are participants under 18 years of age (with the participation of their legal guardian) *

Mark only one oval.

☐ 0-5

☐ 6-10

☐ 11-15

☐ 16-18

☐ Does not apply

9. Phone number *

(This is only for logistics coordination and will not be shared with the rest of the participants, all personal data will be properly discarded after the workshop finishes)

10. I have understood the project and have had the opportunity to ask questions and these questions have been answered satisfactorily. *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

11. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without giving any reason and without any adverse consequences *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

12. I consent to being audio recorded for the purpose of the research project and I understand how it will be used in the research *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

13. I understand that anonymised excerpts and/or verbatim quotes from this experience may be used as part of the research publication and that it will not include information that could identify me *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

14. I understand that the findings and results of the research project will be written up and published *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. I agree to take part in this research project for both transect walks. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes. I confirm my availability for both transect walks
- ☐ No

Thank you for your collaboration

We will be in contact with you shortly.

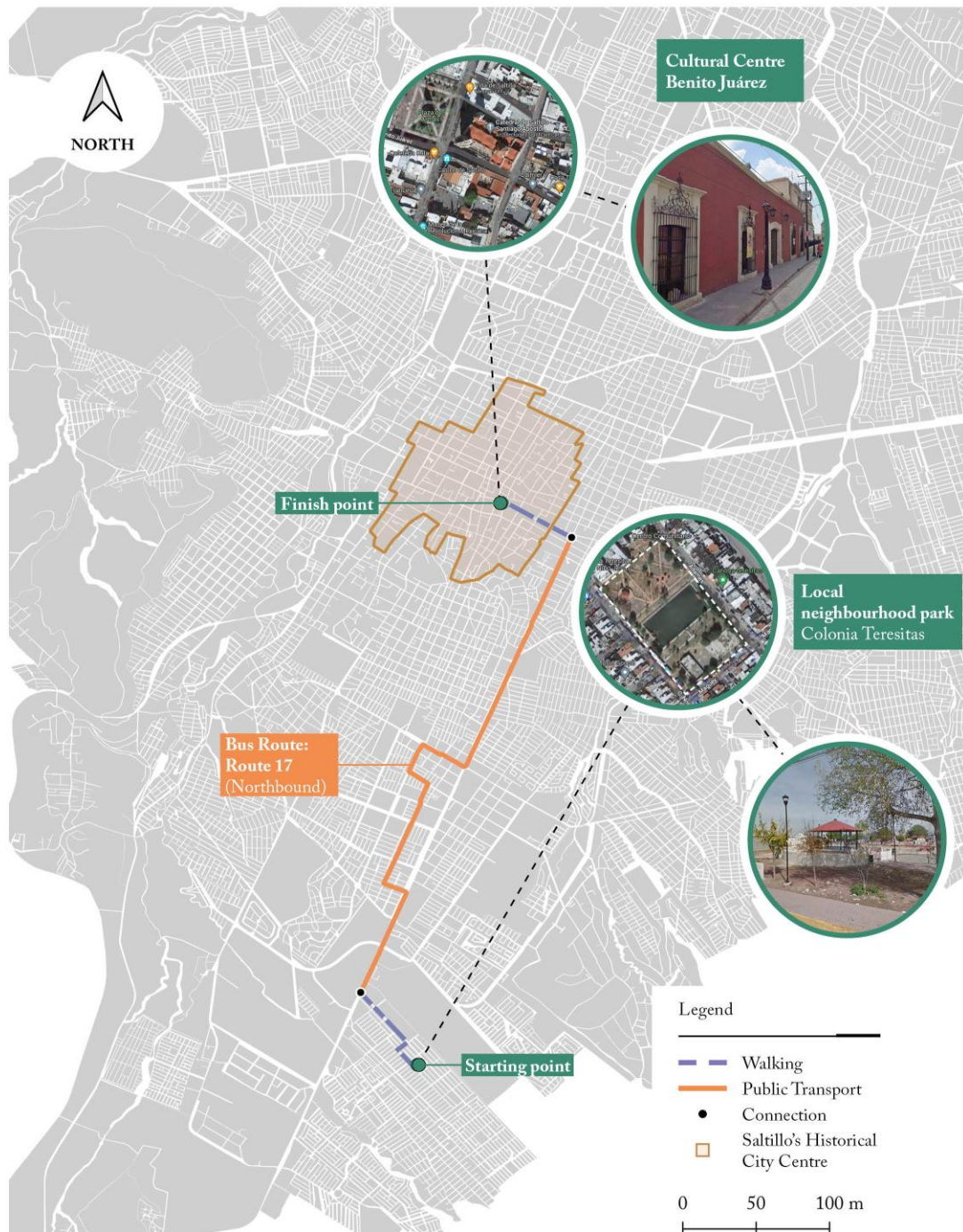
This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

Appendix 6: HYBRID TRANSECT WALKS:

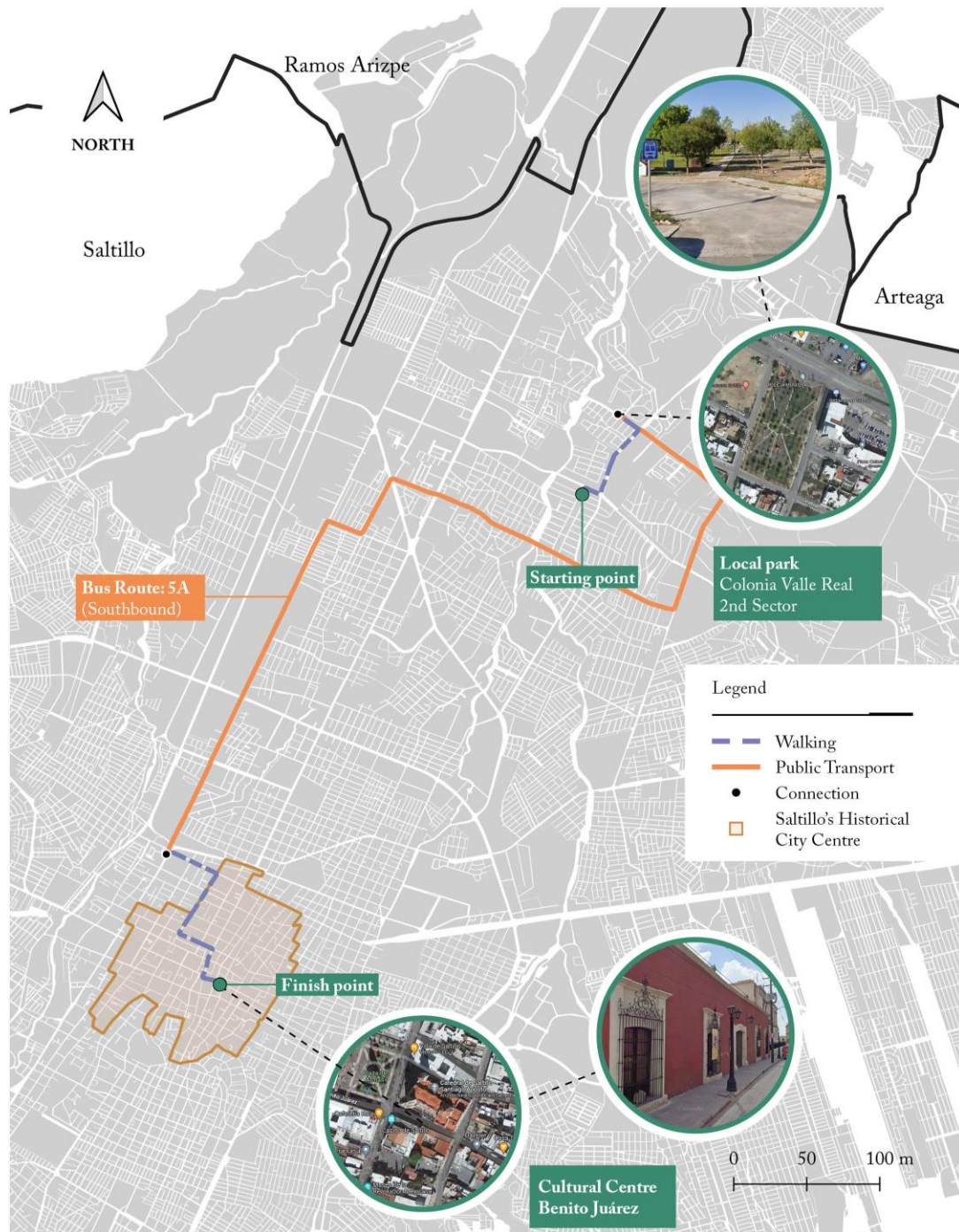
Hybrid transect walk 1

Source: Own elaboration with images from Google Maps



Hybrid transect walk 2

Source: Own elaboration with images from Google Maps



Appendix 7.1: PARTICIPANT ASSESSMENT BOOKLET

(see Appendix 1 and 2).

Appendix 7.2: RESEARCHER ASSESSMENT SHEETS:

	4	3	2	1	
Width	At least 1.80m or more	Between 1.50m and 1.80m	Between 1.20m and 1.50m	Less than 1.20m	Pavement walkability
Material	Non-slippery pavement	Cobblestone pavement	High-vibration pavement	There is no pavement	
Conditions	No steps or potholes	1-5 potholes or steps	6-10 potholes or steps	Over 10 potholes or steps	
Incline	Can't perceive an incline	Cobblestone pavement	High-vibration pavement	There is no pavement	
Pedestrian signaling	All pedestrian routes are clearly indicated with maps and signposting that includes connection to other modes of transportation	There are maps of the area with some signposting about surrounding urban elements	The only signposting available are street names and crosswalk signs	There is no signposting for pedestrians at all	Signposting
Priority for pedestrians	There is proper signposting that indicates pedestrian priority and school areas	There are some signs that indicate pedestrian priority and slow-traffic zones	There is no signaling indicating pedestrian priority	There are signs that restrict pedestrian mobility or that prioritize vehicular traffic	
Bus stop signposting	There is proper signposting that indicates the bus stop alongside street furniture (bin, shelter, lamp post). There's a map that indicates connection to bus routes and the city	There is some signposting that indicates the bus stop and some street furniture (lamp post, bench)	There is some informal signposting that indicate the bus stop	There are no signs that indicate the bus stop	

	4	3	2	1	
Visibility	There is no vegetation or street furniture that could create blind spots	The physical environment like street furniture or vegetation partially block the view— less than 80cm tall or 40cm wide	There is at least one element (street furniture or vegetation) that blocks the view— 0.80-1.50m tall and 0.40-1.20 wide	There is at least one big element that blocks vision— over 1.50m tall and 1.20m wide	Comfort and street furniture
Sitting opportunities	There is more than one possibility to sit, bus bench, park bench or parklets	There is one possibility to sit, bus bench, park bench or parklets	There are only informal sitting opportunities	There is no street furniture that could provide sitting opportunities	
Lighting	There are street lights on the pavement lighting up the road, with no elements that obstruct them	There are street lights along some parts of the pavement or road, but with some obstructing elements	There is public lighting but only to light up the road, at least one lamp post on the pavement	There is no public lighting	
Speed	Max speed 30km/h	Max speed 40 km/h	Max speed 50 km/h	Max speed over 50 km/h or no signposting to indicate speed limit	Road safety
Road distribution	Pedestrian road or pedestrian priority	Shared road with cycle lane and wide pavements	Shared road, narrow pavements, parking lane	Shared road, wide car lanes, no parking, narrow pavements	
Crosswalks	Leveled pedestrian crossing	Pedestrian crossings at every corner or in the middle of a long road	There are no signaled pedestrian crossings only at traffic lights	No pedestrian crossings, only underground/ overhead crossings	
Accessibility	Tactile pavement, access ramps and accessible pedestrian traffic lights	Some tactile pavement, access ramps and pedestrian crossings	Almost no tactile pavement, access ramps, one accessible pedestrian crossing	No universal access facilities	

Appendix 7.3: CONSENT FORM (only for children under 18 years of age participating alongside their legal guardian):

CONSENT FORM

Title of research project: *Mobility and gender in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico; an analysis of the public transport system through a gender lens*

Name of Chief/Principal Investigator: Diana Infante-Vargas (PhD Student)

	Please mark the box
I am signing on behalf of a person under 18 years of age and I confirm that I have read the project information sheet for the above research project.	Yes ☐ No ☐
I have understood the project information sheet, I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that these have been answered satisfactorily.	Yes ☐ No ☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any adverse consequences.	Yes ☐ No ☐
I consent to being audio recorded for the purposes of the research project and I understand how it will be used in the research. <i>(You may take part in the study without agreeing to this)</i>	Yes ☐ No ☐
I understand that the main researcher will not collect any information about or from my child, but that they might be referenced in the findings and results of this research project.	Yes ☐ No ☐
I understand that the findings and results of the research project will be written up and published.	Yes ☐ No ☐
I agree to take part in this research project.	Yes ☐ No ☐

Name of participant (print)

Date

Signature

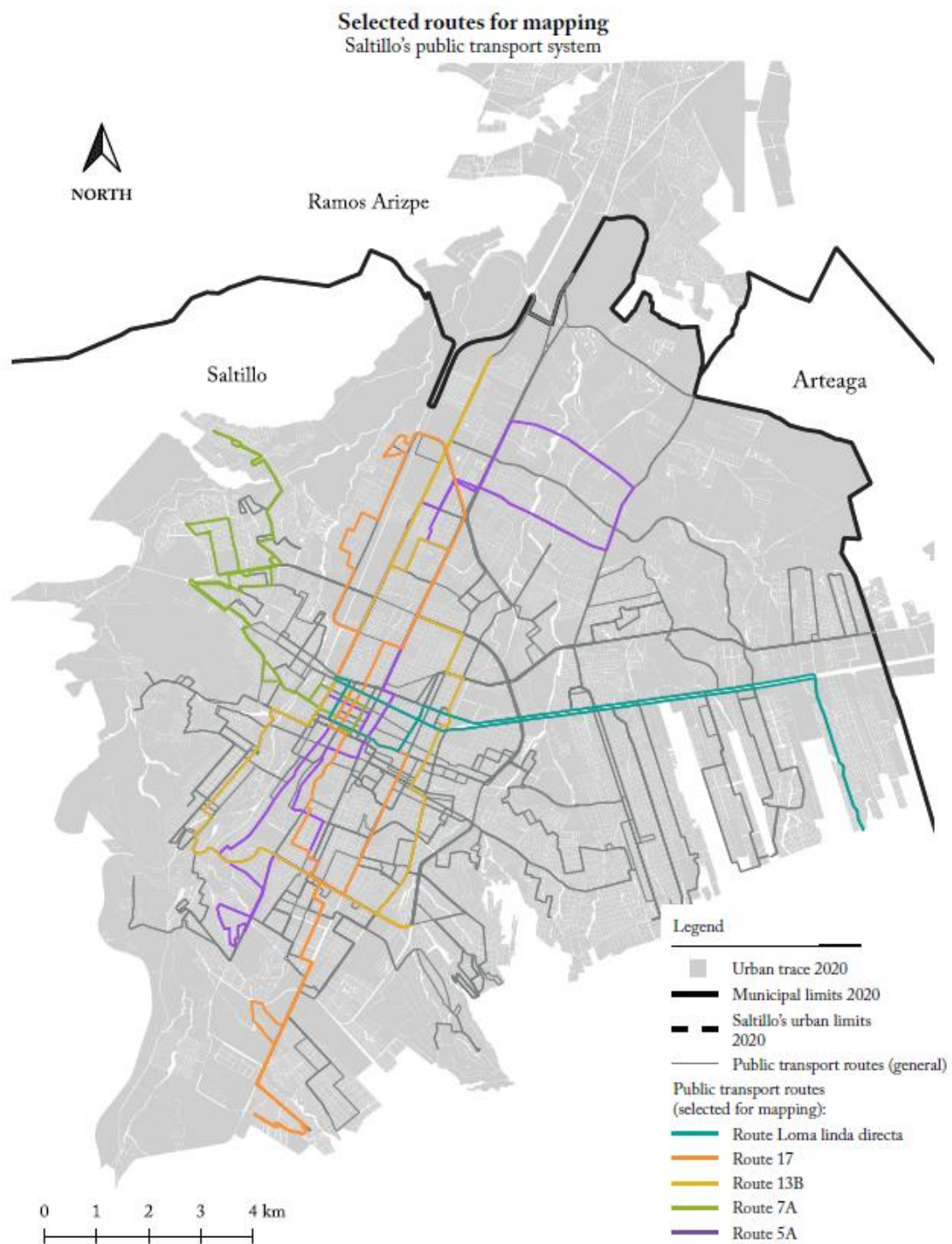
Name of person taking consent (print)

Date

Signature

Role of person taking consent (print)

Appendix 8: SELECTED BUS ROUTES FOR MAPPING:



Appendix 8. These boots are made for walking: A reflexive analysis of negotiating unavoidable risks during fieldwork as a woman'. (Published PDF)

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These boots are made for walking: A reflexive analysis of negotiating unavoidable risks during fieldwork as a woman

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Diana Infante-Vargas 

University of York, UK

Óscar Mesta-Rodríguez

Universidad de Guadalajara, Mexico

Abstract

In the summer of 2023, I (Author 1, lead researcher, young adult, cis female, Mexican) began fieldwork in Saltillo, Mexico, researching the public transport infrastructure in relation to women's differentiated mobility and their perception of safety from gender-based violence. During fieldwork, I was catcalled, followed, and harassed on multiple occasions. In this paper, Author 2 (research assistant, young adult, cis male, Mexican) and I explore issues of researcher's positionality and vulnerability. We engage in a dialogue to provide a retelling of events, and we reflect on our differentiated experiences of fieldwork due to gender-based violence and the aftermath of being harassed while conducting research. We reflect on our differentiated degrees of vulnerability and perceptions of the city while walking the streets of Saltillo and how that reshaped our understanding of the research process. I highlight the importance of talking about these types of experiences openly in academia and queer/feminist activism, especially so when combined methodologies reformulate the relationship of the researcher with the research(ed). In this paper we critique the current fieldwork preparation processes in place at higher education institutions that focus mostly on safeguarding participants, arguing that current ethical approval forms and travel risk assessments do not provide a space where true reflection on risks and vulnerabilities can occur, therefore failing to prepare researchers for the impact that fieldwork can have on us. We conclude that academia should foster and incentivise spaces where real reflection on the researcher's positionality can occur without the limitations of administrative processes.

Keywords

Fieldwork, gender-based violence, positionality, reflexivity, walking

Corresponding author:

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Email: dpiv12@hotmail.com

Introduction

In the summer of 2023, I (Author 1) began conducting fieldwork in Northern Mexico as part of my doctoral studies in the UK. Overall, my research explores the relationship between gender and mobility; how gender-based violence can modify women's patterns of mobility across the public transport infrastructure of Saltillo, Mexico. During fieldwork, I carried out a mix-method approach combining qualitative methods like ethnographic shadowing and participatory transect walks, and urban audits of bus stops as a quantitative method. During 6 months of fieldwork in Saltillo, I was catcalled and harassed while carrying out all of these methods, nevertheless, the most harrowing experiences happened during the data collection process for the quantitative component of this project, where we used walking as research method. In this paper, we explore the differentiated experiences we had of fieldwork due to gender-based violence and the aftermath of being harassed, catcalled, followed, and nearly abducted while carrying out the research methods—we reflect on how that affected me and Óscar in differentiated ways and how that, in turn, also impacted the research. I was harassed while walking the city, yet these boots are made for walking, and that's just what they did.¹ What follows is a retelling of the events and an exploration of the aftermath through a reflexive, feminist scholarship lens.

Over the last two decades, scholars have called on other researchers to share their practical experiences of fieldwork in an attempt to broaden the conversation around the place of emotions in academic research (Hill, 2004; Hubbard et al., 2001; Khalid, 2014; Kwak, 2019; Pasquini and Olaniyan, 2004; Widdowfield, 2000) and many have reflected on the shock of confronting how unprepared they were for the degree of professional vulnerability they experienced during fieldwork (Ballamingie and Johnson, 2011; Gurney, 1985). This paper also brings an important topic of conversation to the table: the emotional work of doing fieldwork as a woman and how significant it is to integrate these narratives of our reflexive methodology approaches. I write about my experiences of self-blame, shame, and guilt following the events, and reflect on the differentiated experiences that I (Author 1, female, Mexican, late 20s) had compared to Óscar (male, Mexican, late 20s), who worked as a research assistant during data collection, and how that played a key role in how fieldwork played out.

We explore issues of researchers' vulnerability during fieldwork and how it impacts the work and the researcher while critiquing the current ethics and safety procedures in place at research institutions (namely higher education institutions). We argue that when conversations around the risks and vulnerabilities of fieldwork revolve only around ethics and safety clearance processes within institutions, these dialogues can turn into a tick-box exercise that can further expose researchers by implicitly incentivising them to ignore or brush off potential harms.

This paper is a co-authored work that explores our accounts of the fieldwork, but we have chosen to adopt a first-person narrative that centres on my (Diana's) lived experiences of fieldwork and the aftermath both as a political and personal decision. Drawing from what other feminists have already voiced, first-person narratives are necessary to expose previously hidden biases, to facilitate understanding of (or empathy with) those different from ourselves, and to lay on the table our own biases as scholars (Brison, 2002). Moreover, our own anecdotes and lived experiences are political, and writing from an "I" perspective directly confronts the notion of objective, neutral, dispassionate researcher (Ballamingie and Johnson, 2011). As Gómez (2023) argued, it is crucial to write from our place of resistance—from the toilet seat; when we are doing laundry; on our commute to work; from painful memories. What follows may seem anecdotal at times, however, it is a political account that reflects my experience of the city as a woman (De la Cerda, 2020), and writing from this perspective allows for a richer, broader analysis of how women researchers experience fieldwork. I see this opportunity to write in first-person as a way to confront and re-signify my lived experience of fieldwork; I write my own story from a place of resistance against the neutral, "objective" and

impersonal academic discourse, and against the general tendency to ignore and brush off women's experiences of everyday gender-based violence.

A bit of context

Being a Mexican citizen and native to the city I was researching, I felt extremely familiar with the environment I was re-entering. At this point, while I was living full-time in the UK for my program, I had been a user of Saltillo's public transport for almost 15 years. I had experienced episodes of mild sexual harassment like catcalling and inappropriate ogling from bus drivers and other passengers to more severe episodes of sexual assault while in public transport. My relationship with the topic I research is one that has been evolving since I started using public transport and wandering the city over the years. Similar to me, many women develop mental maps as they navigate their cities and transport systems (England and Simon, 2010; Fenster, 2005; Kern, 2020; Pain, 1991), and my informal knowledge of the city, and its public transport system informed my choices and decisions, as well as the way I perceive Saltillo and other cities. My context and my experiences as a young woman from Saltillo have shaped me and in turn, they have shaped my research interests.

As a researcher and a woman who grew up using the public transport of Saltillo, I was aware that my position was both of an insider and outsider; I saw myself as an insider because of my particular informal knowledge of the environment, but an outsider as well, as an academic with greater epistemological influences that had not lived in the city (full-time) for a few years—my development as a researcher over the years has expanded my understanding of issues like transport planning, urban design, geographical concepts of space and territory, gender issues, and multiple other social inequalities and concerns over social justice. Importantly, there is a class dimension that filters my urban understandings—while I am a researcher that focuses on sustainable mobility, my socioeconomic background in Mexico is privileged middle class,² and this shapes my experiences in public transportation and the city. My destinations are usually around the city centre or the north part of the city in wealthier neighbourhoods; these areas still report cases of gender-based violence in public transportation but less so than the south, east, and west of Saltillo (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021). My reliance in public transport evolved from being the only choice I had available to me as a teenager needing to commute to school, to a political, intentional decision to actively reject car culture and remain exposed to the experience, and often perils, of being a woman using Saltillo's transport system (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2022), and still, my experiences of urban transport contrast with those of users whose relationship with public transportation in Saltillo is not optional, who live in marginalised neighbourhoods serviced by infrequent, unreliable bus routes. My positionality as an insider/outsider to the subject I research is dynamic, and this has allowed me to create meaningful connections with participants who are also users of public transportation.

I began fieldwork with a cautious level of excitement, aware of the responsibility and seriousness of the issue at hand. I teamed up with multiple researchers and activists to be able to carry out my methods smoothly and in a way that felt like it would genuinely convey the experiences and challenges of the women who use Saltillo's public transport on a daily basis. I had the opportunity to work alongside researcher Óscar, a keen activist for pedestrian and cyclists' rights who also has a background in urban planning and understands the urban challenges that face Saltillo in terms of mobility. I asked Óscar if he would be interested in working with me to carry out quantitative urban audits of public transport bus stops across Saltillo but the offer had many challenges; to begin with, there was no publicly available data regarding the location or current state of bus stops across the city, so in order to carry out the urban audits we would need to first conduct an extensive recognition process to determine what we were going to be working with and set the sample size. Second, this would need to be carried out during the summer, which in northern Mexico can reach temperatures of over 42°C. And third, perhaps most importantly, I could not offer proper economic compensation

for Óscar's labour as I also found myself in a precarious financial situation making ends meet with a small postgrad scholarship and part-time gigs as a barista.³

For the audits of bus stops, we chose to walk from one stop to another in order to carry out the work efficiently and sustainably; in total, we walked almost 200 km in the span of 2 weeks auditing almost 350 bus stops. Our decision to walk was a conscious one from the beginning—using a private vehicle for this exercise would have been a faster, easier process for us as researchers, but it would have defeated the purpose of auditing bus stops as a methodology to assess transport infrastructure in terms of comfort, accessibility, road safety, and walkability. Bicycles would have been an efficient, sustainable option, but seeing a street from a cycling perspective would have shielded us from challenges that 'can only be felt on foot' in contrast with the alternative experience of travel by car, bicycle, or bus (Middleton, 2010: 582). We intentionally used walking as a methodology *because* of the inconvenience it represented; walking in between auditing points gave us a deeper understanding of the environment in which the stops were located, and we were able to recognise physical characteristics that otherwise would have remained hidden.

Walking as a method can unearth intimate and embodied accounts of territory (Mason, 2021), and offers an opportunity to develop 'local literacy' through the identification and delineation of important sites, processes and questions for examination (Pierce and Lawhon, 2015: 657). Moreover, walking is a way of exploring everyday political geographies of conflict and is significantly shaped by social markers like class, race, disability, and gender (Mason, 2021). As Pierce and Lawhon (2015) highlighted, not all walking practices are equal; for instance, if researchers walk exclusively in spaces of consumption, or if they avoid areas of low density for reasons of aesthetics or convenience, those practices will shape the scope of potential insights, so we navigated neighbourhoods we had never been in before. While Óscar and I are both from Saltillo and had a significant understanding of how the transport system operates—along with the limitations it faces—it was important for us to explore the urban areas of the city that were not part of our usual routines due to our class privilege. In a similar way to me, Óscar's socioeconomic background is also privileged middle class,⁴ and while he has chosen to navigate the city through cycling and walking as a political decision, his urban understandings are still filtered through his positionality. Walking as a methodology was also a deliberate decision to break out of the bubble we live in in Saltillo and stemmed from the acknowledgment that walking experiences—even within the same city—can be vastly different depending on the characterisation of a given neighbourhood. In sum, I chose to walk the city I research because that is what my boots are made for; it was an informed political and personal decision that related to my agency not only as a researcher but as a woman walking the city, taking up public space.

Throughout the weeks of auditing bus stops I had been catcalled and ogled; we tried to remain together most of the time mainly in case we needed each other's opinion while grading a bus stop, but it quickly became evident that being out on the street was not entirely safe, not only due to harassment, also due to hostile urban conditions that put pedestrians in risky situations. Overall, through the auditing process, the urban conditions heightened our sense of discomfort—cars would speed past at over 60 km/h, sometimes even cargo trucks and lorries too; the pavements were in poor conditions at best, and non-existent at worst; and crossing streets represented a major challenge at main roads.

By the last week of audits, the urban conditions alongside the scorching summer sun had taken a toll on us and we wanted to get it over with as smoothly, and as soon, as possible. On one of our last auditing sessions, an unknown man followed me on their car for a few blocks, and later tried to drag me into it. Startled and scared, I was only able to scream Óscar's name for help and wave my arms but to almost no avail since the street was so wide and full of heavy (and loud) traffic. A few seconds later, the driver of the car noticed Óscar looking at me and trying to cross the street to help me; then the car sped off.

Many factors were at play when this happened; our working day had begun at 7:00 a.m. (6:00 a.m. when accounting for commuting time), and upon reflection, both of us had felt tense in the area prior to the event—the neighbourhood we were auditing has a significant amount of heavy traffic—namely private hire coaches, cargo vans, lorries, and public transport buses—and this shaped how comfortable we felt when walking. We were mentally and physically tired at that point of fieldwork but needed to continue on a tight schedule in order to complete the work on time. Óscar recalls noticing the type of street we would be working with—a two-way arterial road with considerable heavy traffic—and we both decided it was best to split up so we could audit bus stops in parallel and advance faster. At the time it made sense to split, and in a way, it still does; it streamlined the process and would get us out of the unsafe environment faster. There were no pedestrian crossings at any point in the street, and the safest bet was to try and cross the street at the nearest intersection with a traffic light. The intersection did not have a pedestrian crossing phase or a full-stop of traffic at any point – a common characteristic of intersections in Saltillo—but this was still the safest way to navigate the busy street we would be walking. The pavement on both sides of the road was gravel and it was clear that cars would frequently obstruct the gravel road to park off-side to the street. When Óscar crossed to the other side of the road we both began walking almost in parallel, the bus stops we had to audit were almost in front of each other, but the type of traffic, the speed of the road, and the lack of pedestrian infrastructure altered our perceptions of safety in the space. Shortly after we began walking down the road, I noticed a silver car driving slowly behind me, a person began shouting lascivious words at me, and I decided to ignore them in the hopes that they would get bored and drive away. The car eventually took a right at the next block and went away, but a couple of blocks later they showed up again. I was feeling angry and frustrated about it; women face catcalling every day while navigating their cities and adopt strategies to feel safer or mitigate the risks, this was no different (England and Simon, 2010; Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021; Pain, 1991). In this case, I opted for displaying that I was not alone by calling out Óscar name in a calm way, just as a way to get his attention and highlight that I was not alone. The car immediately took a right at the next block and went away only to come back a few minutes later after seeing that no one came when I called. The car cut me off at the pavement and I began screaming and waving my arms so Óscar could see me, but the road was so busy he struggled to cross immediately. The car sped off as soon as they saw Óscar. We both recall feeling anxious and overwhelmed, the event shook us and impacted how confident we felt on the street doing our work, but it still felt different for me.

Differentiated experiences of fieldwork

After the event, Óscar and I began having conversations around our own comfort levels while carrying out research; overall we had tried to keep an open line of communication and had a collaborative approach to the work. We were comfortable working together and excited about the work we were carrying out, but it was only after the event that we began talking about how different our experiences had felt thus far. My experience of fieldwork was significantly different from Óscar's in many ways; for instance, he was mindful of how he presented himself in the sense of not wanting to be perceived as an academic, a council inspector, or a reporter, his goal was to blend in with the everyday crowd and not stand out. He was mindful of his attire in this sense and did not want to dress too formally, but he was not concerned with how he was perceived in terms of being sexualised depending on his clothing or how his interactions could be (mis)interpreted. On the other hand, I was mindful of how others (namely participants and bus drivers) perceived me while I interacted with them during research—I monitored my appearance and clothing and, similarly to what Kwak (2019) experienced, I had inadvertently developed strategies and tactics that I kept all

along fieldwork. I was careful not to wear strappy tops, shorts, skirts, or anything form-fitting, even though it was the height of the summer in northern Mexico.

I was keenly aware of my position as a young female researcher whenever we engaged in conversation with bus drivers and was mindful of using the appropriate words, tone, and even body language to convey my professionalism. These interactions with the bus drivers were not part of the official research process, but they helped us gain a better understanding of how the transport system works and the drivers' working conditions. It was important that we did not present ourselves as "too official" or we ran the risk of the drivers not wanting to engage with us out of fear of being assessed by either a local authority representative or a reporter. In addition, in my mind, I felt the need to draw a subtle but clear line so my interest in the bus drivers' experiences could not be misinterpreted as any other type of interest (i.e., flirting) while also remaining approachable and building rapport with them. Professional enough to be taken seriously as a female researcher, but not too professional that they would not want to speak with us (Gurney, 1985; Khalid, 2014; Kosygina, 2005). A thin line to walk.

For Óscar—whenever we engaged with bus drivers—his main concern was slowly building up to more difficult questions like "have you ever heard of anyone being sexually assaulted while on the bus?" I certainly could have asked the question myself, and even tried to once or twice, but we quickly realised that the tone of the interaction would change if I asked the question rather than him. Almost all⁵ bus drivers said they had never heard or seen anything related to that regardless of who asked the question, but our interaction following that question would change depending on *who* had asked it. For instance, if I had asked him about it, the driver would get tight-lipped, and his following answers would become less elaborate or detailed regardless of whether the following questions were related to sexual assaults while on transportation or not. Almost as if all rapport built thus far had been severed in a way and needed to be rebuilt again. However, whenever Óscar asked the question, the drivers would still brush it off and say they had never heard or seen anything, but the interaction would continue as casually as before.

While on the streets auditing bus stops, I was catcalled, ogled, and briefly followed and harassed by a moped driver during the audit process of other neighbourhoods, but had brushed those instances off as the "everyday" harassment of walking the city as a woman. In many of those cases, Óscar was just a few meters ahead of me and I had a false sense of security in that. For the most part, my strategy to this everyday harassment was to ignore it, as that has been my strategy for the last few years whenever I am out in the city anyway, but in a way, I inadvertently relied on having a male research companion with me while out in the streets—particularly around empty neighbourhoods. After the most severe event of harassment, with the driver in the silver car, we began analysing our own fieldwork experiences and talking through the less-threatening instances that had not escalated as far—the ones we had brushed off as the norm—and how that had shaped our approach to fieldwork. Until then, Óscar had not thought about the small strategies and tactics I had considered every day. For him, the challenges of fieldwork mainly stemmed from the conditions under which we worked: the weather, the hours, how much we would walk on a given day, and most importantly, financial constraints. For me, all of these challenges applied in equal measure, but I also had to juggle the burden of navigating the city in an environment that sexualised and harassed me while attempting to conduct research.

Our motivation to pursue this manuscript also comes from a differentiated point of view. For Óscar, what we experienced while collecting data and what we have learned since the events could potentially make an important contribution to the field for current and future researchers and activists. I share that motivation, but for me this paper primarily stems from deep feelings of frustration and anger, and that it is an attempt to understand and contextualise what happened to me/us in order to understand where to go from here. As Brison (2002) argued, it is crucial for trauma survivors to attempt to reconstruct a coherent narrative of the self that allows them to rebuild the

events and the self in order to re externalise the event. She writes, 'Just as one can be reduced to an object through torture, one can become human subject again through telling one's narrative to caring others who are able to listen' (p. 57). In the months following the event, most of my frustration laid in the fact that I felt like any conversation about it and the emotions it brought me had no place in academia or in any discussion of my fieldwork experience when, in fact, those emotions were an intrinsic part of fieldwork that shaped us as researchers and the way we view the research. As I began reading other researchers' experiences of fieldwork, I realised the importance of making room to have conversations around the emotions of fieldwork, especially so when combined methodologies reformulate the relationship of the researcher with the research(ed). An important contribution of this manuscript lies in its capacity to provide a space to reconceptualise my/our experiences of fieldwork, ultimately allowing me to reconstruct my narrative-self as a researcher and an activist.

Lastly, Óscar and I also experienced the aftermath of the event in differentiated ways although with key similarities. We both experienced guilt and shame—Óscar regretted our decision of splitting up at the beginning of the auditing process and wearing his noise-cancelling headphones to block some of the noise from the heavy traffic. In a way, he had felt responsible for looking after me (as a friend and a co-worker rather than from a paternalistic point of view) and the events triggered feelings of shame. While he struggled with these feelings for a short time, he quickly came to the realisation that the only person responsible for this had been the harasser—not him, not us—and he was able to see how the conditions of the environment had heightened the risks. He had been shocked, angry, and frustrated by the events, and it led him to think more consciously about the safety and wellbeing of the women around him. He was already mindful of how women experience the city differently because of gender-based violence, but witnessing it first-hand reformulated his understandings. However, for me, the events shook my self-narrative of a (neutral, objective) researcher and reduced me to a woman with no control over her safety while in the city, an object, even. In a similar way to what [Brison \(2002\)](#) experienced after her assault, my autonomous-self had been undone by the levels of violence I experienced. As [Gurney \(1985\)](#) had argued, there is an added embarrassment of acknowledging that one's status as a female overshadows one's identity as a researcher.

Directly after the attempted abduction occurred, I was reluctant to bring it up with my supervisors out of fear of being questioned for not having "foreseen" or prevented the situation. After all, the university had asked us (me and my supervisors) to go through multiple clearance processes prior to fieldwork, so in the first few days after it happened, —in my mind at least—it had been my fault. I had to deal with an immense sense of dread and shame that was rooted in my failure as a 'thorough' researcher, and these feelings were reinforced by having to be accompanied by a man for the rest of the audits for safety purposes—Óscar's working schedule and mine were conflicting too much but had agreed that it was not safe for me to venture by myself and so I arranged for a (male) friend to accompany me while I audited the last bus stops. The irony of it all is not lost on me: I began this research project to understand how gender-based violence shapes women's mobility in Saltillo and ended up having to modify my mobility patterns and strategies because I had been harassed while walking the city.

My shame and guilt opened the way for severe self-doubt in my abilities to conduct research (and later on, interpreting the data), and these feelings were reinforced whenever I had to share my account of fieldwork with other colleagues. It seemed like there was no room for a conversation on emotions, risks, and vulnerabilities of fieldwork as a female researcher. Equally, the amount of ethics and safety clearance forms I had to hand in prior to beginning fieldwork made me hesitate to recognise the validity of my experiences. Before beginning data collection, those procedures gave me a false sense of confidence in my ability to separate myself from the research and to control my fieldwork environments along with the vulnerabilities and risks that I would be exposed to. After the events had unfolded, those same procedures felt like a testimony of how unprepared and naïve I had

been as a researcher. After all, the university had told me to be careful, right? And if this happened to me, then I had failed to prevent and foresee this. In reality, there is no way I (or anyone, for that matter) could have prevented the events, and even if they could have foreseen them as a possible risk of fieldwork, researchers are still humans that follow instinctive reactions—not predesigned university safety protocols—whenever facing dangerous scenarios.

You're not really asking, and I'm not really answering; ethics and risk assessments

Straight after the events unfolded, I had to confront reality and deal with how unprepared I was to face my own vulnerability as a young female researcher; I felt guilty and ashamed in a way I had no words for, as if somehow it had all been my fault for not planning measures to protect myself against someone trying to abduct me. As a feminist scholar and activist, I know that none of what happened is my fault and that I could not have prevented it, yet I somehow felt like a piece of the puzzle was missing, suddenly even the thought of opening my computer to look at my fieldwork data would fill me with anxiety and stress.

My methodology involved a mixed-method approach and in my mind, I had seen the “quantitative” component of my mixed-method approach as the most straight-forward step, the one that required the least safeguarding measures since I would not be interacting with participants; it was us (researchers) and the field (the city). We had taken sensible precautions into consideration; Óscar and I were aware of the risks of navigating the city on public transport and by foot and had unspoken agreements we followed to stay safe and look out for one another: we would identify neighbourhoods that felt rougher than others and avoid taking our phones out too much; we avoided carrying valuables and dressed casually to blend in as opposed to hi-vis vests that would have made us look too official and out of place; whenever walking next to an urban highway, we would take as much distance as possible from the cars and trucks speeding past us; and for the most part (perhaps most importantly) we would remain together while auditing the bus stops. In this sense, our positionality with the field mattered just as much as my positionality with the women I worked with during my qualitative methods.

My positionality and life experiences had led me to research gender-based violence in the urban context of Northern Mexico, and it affected the way I shaped my research, but I had conceptualised the quantitative component as a detached, objective process. As Widdowfield (2000) argued, there is less appreciation that this is often a two-way relationship; not only does the researcher affect the research process, but they themselves are affected by this process (Heller et al., 2011; Okely and Callaway, 1992; Pasquini and Olaniyan, 2004) and discussions and critiques of the research process rarely involved any articulation of feeling from the researcher (England, 1994; Kwak, 2019). There is an intense focus on protecting the participants from emotional threat, and it is continuously addressed in methodological text particularly in those that adopt a reflexive starting point—and rightly so. Whenever working with participants, researchers should be careful of treating them like people and invest in building rapport to understand their context, instead of seeing them as mere mines of information to be exploited by researchers (England, 1994). However, in a similar vein, researchers are not merely instruments that facilitate data collection. As Hubbard et al. (2001) argued we can and do react (England, 1994), yet this is rarely acknowledged when preparing researchers beginning field work. My experience was similar to Heller et al. (2011):

Fresh from our qualitative methods course, many of us went to the fieldwork preoccupied with concerns related to ethics, positionality, power dynamics and so on. However, we were less aware of the potential changes in our lives that would accompany fieldwork. (p. 79)

Prior to fieldwork, I had spent weeks carefully crafting safeguarding measures for participants and contingency plans for each method. I was aware of the risks and dangers of researching GBV, had completed all ethics and risk assessments thoroughly and developed a methodological approach that was reflexive and mindful of the various ways in which the participants may be impacted; from the tone of the questions I would be asking, to the multiple barriers I would have to navigate to welcome a broader profile of participants. I was concerned about the wellbeing of all participants as I implemented participatory qualitative methods that more often than not included women who had been harassed while out in the city or had personal backgrounds of GBV in their own homes. I carefully crafted contingency plans and safeguarding measures for all participants, mainly out of my own sense of obligation to them, but also importantly in compliance with ethical research guidelines—however my reflexive approach to positionality began and ended with my relationship to the participants. I had considered my own positionality in relation to the women I worked with on the ethnographic shadowing and the hybrid transect walks but did not to reflect on my own positionality in the field in relation to the urban violence women face every day in the city. I had not been exposed to concepts like researchers' vulnerability or researchers' fatigue. While the university protocols had certainly asked me to pre-empt potential distressing scenarios for the participants I wanted to work with, it also had little to no room available to reflect on own safety in a way that felt genuine and not just a tick-box exercise.

Prior to fieldwork, the university ethics approval form had asked me to reflect on the risk of harm for participants. Although the form asked about significant risks of physical harm to participants or researchers, it did not consider potential psychological or emotional distress to researchers, only participants. My supervisors were aware of my research background and the personal motivation to pursue this project and had expressed concern about my wellbeing while on fieldwork; at the time, I appreciated their input and wrote a small paragraph in the 'other ethical risks' section reflecting on my positionality in relation to the research environment I would be re-entering. I was aware of the risks of researching GBV on public transport *while* using public transport in Saltillo but felt like I had to either underplay the risks or generalise them in a way that would not negatively impact the possibility of obtaining approval from the research ethics panel in order to conduct fieldwork. There was no malice or intent to misrepresent the research environment to the panel, but it felt redundant as most of the GBV women are exposed to while in the city happens while carrying out normal, everyday activities. In a way, disclosing those risks would have raised concerns that could not realistically be mitigated without seriously impacting my research or curtailed my mobility. The structure of the current ethics approval form does not prompt researchers to reflect on the risks they will face during fieldwork outside of ethical considerations around interactions with participants.

On the other hand, the travel risk assessment (TRA) form focused entirely on the researcher and asked me to consider safeguarding measures for hazards like political instability, extreme weather, transport problems, cultural differences, security, emergency procedures and many others. Specifically, I was asked about the risk of abduction within the crime section, and I declared I would avoid walking alone around quiet areas, especially after dark, but does this answer mean I truly reflected on this risk? I ticked a box and wrote what I needed to move forward with fieldwork—the TRA form was not really asking me to reflect on the possibility of being abducted, and I was not really answering and therein lies our argument. The ethical approval form does not provide a space to reflect on the ethical considerations and risks that may impact the researcher, and neither does the TRA, specially so when a researcher truly reflecting on risks such as gender-based violence can signify getting significantly delayed or rejected for fieldwork. I did not reflect on my positionality in the field (the city) because doing so could have resulted in more obstacles.

Let's run a case scenario: In Saltillo, 9 out of 10 women have been sexually harassed or assaulted in some degree while on public transportation, some of the most gruesome cases including rape and kidnapping (Infante-Vargas and Boyer, 2021); this implies a high-risk vulnerability and the

university would have asked me why I needed to incur in these risks and how I would approach them—and reasonably so. But not using public transportation is not realistic given that my research focuses *on* public transportation and even if it didn't, it would have represented a severe restriction on my mobility because of my gender. In many ways, while I was keenly aware of the reality of being a woman trying to use public transportation in Saltillo, I did not feel like I could fully disclose this, or rather, I could, but to the detriment of my research. And this case scenario applies in many other instances of normal, everyday violence for researchers across multiple disciplines. Women navigate risks while walking down the street in their everyday lives, and it is only common to assume that they will encounter gender-related risks at some point while conducting fieldwork too. If we were to disclose all of these 'small' but consistent risks, would we even be cleared to conduct research in person? Perhaps I would have been asked to not use walking as a methodology for the audit process; maybe they would have asked me to have a companion (namely male) to keep safe while working in the city, and would those measures not have defeated the purpose and reliability of my research, too? The ethical approval protocol was concerned with safeguarding participants—and rightly so—but when it came to safeguarding measures for the researcher, the ethics approval form and the TRA were shaped in a way that did not *truly* encourage a reflexive process of the risks and harms associated with fieldwork lest we (female, queer, or marginalised researchers) severely modify our methodology or refrain from travelling altogether.

In 2001, Hubbard et al. highlighted the importance of understanding emotion as a crucial part of the research experience. As such, there is an inherent need to develop strategies to manage the emotions of the researchers for the duration of the project. One of the objectives of this paper is to echo the reflection of other researchers that have found ways to navigate the emotions of fieldwork. Firstly, it is important to stimulate conversations about the emotional difficulties of fieldwork in academia and activism amongst peers, and particularly between supervisors and students when on postgraduate level. The process of conceptualising and writing this paper has served as a reflexive exercise in and of itself, but it has also had positive effects on my mental health; similarly to what Brison (2002) argued, narrating one's experiences of traumatic events plays a significant role in the recovery from trauma; it allows to establish greater control over traumatic memories and intrusive thoughts. I have developed a deeper understanding of the underlying issue that triggered my post-traumatic symptoms, and I am now able to incorporate these experiences as valuable knowledge that informs my interpretation of the research I conduct. While working on this manuscript, I also reframed my relationship with my supervisors as a doctoral researcher. They allowed me the agency, time, and space to process all the messy thoughts and emotions and put them into paper; their understanding of how critical it was for me to not brush this off or leave it as a footnote in my dissertation validated my experience and encouraged me to dig deeper to try and understand why the experience had affected me so deeply. Through this process I was able to identify similarities in my situation with that of other researchers and draw strategies on how to cope going forward. I strengthened my understanding of the implications of fieldwork on a given research process and have a broader view on my role in relation to my research. In this sense, we need to encourage researchers and graduate students to participate in discussions around the emotions of fieldwork throughout all stages of it. For instance, Heller et al. (2011) suggested incorporating journaling as a way to cope with fatigue and the broader implications of fieldwork. For them, reflecting on their challenges and being able to look back on them during a short-time period, allowed them to identify how their feelings were linked to research challenges, embrace the process, and establish positive coping strategies.

Researchers can also find resources for support in coping with fieldwork through counselling. For example, in the aftermath of her data collection experience, Kwak (2019) attended several counselling sessions after her supervisors arranged for it. She advocates for universities to offer professional training, support, and protection before and after research fieldwork takes place.

Indeed, we argue this should be incorporated as a strategy for researchers undertaking fieldwork, particularly those whose research topic is associated with sensitive issues. In particular, we argue this resource for help should be put in place before fieldwork takes place as a safeguarding measure and should last throughout the duration and the period after fieldwork given how dynamic this stage can be and how much impact it can have on the researcher. Conversations around risks and vulnerabilities should take place prior to doing fieldwork, and these should be fostered in environments that are not tied to university assessment forms—while these processes have a defined purpose and goal, and they are valuable tools within higher education institutions, they do not offer a truly reflective space where researchers can engage with potential risks and challenges, they could encounter while collecting data.

Where do we go from here?

As I began reading other researchers experiences of fieldwork, I felt less lonely, less guilty and ashamed, but the frustration somewhat persisted. Could this have been prevented? Not the event of harassment itself, instead, the intricate, painful aftermath that followed. While it is particularly complex to try and anticipate emotional challenges, especially if they arise as a byproduct of conducting fieldwork (Hubbard et al., 2001), it still felt like the shock of the aftermath could have been mitigated. Once I began reading and talking openly about my fieldwork experience, other researchers slowly began sharing theirs, and that helped me ground the source of my frustration. The level of risk I was exposed to was not a reflection on my shortcomings as a researcher—in fact, many researchers had faced similar or worse scenarios while collecting data. Instead, it is a reflection on how ethics and safety protocols can narrow our understanding and approach to fieldwork—effectively developing tunnel vision—with no consideration for our role in the research. This is not to say that ethics forms and risks assessments are inherently flawed, but to argue that we should recognise these processes for what they are—administrative paperwork—and advocate for spaces where researchers can engage with issues of risks and vulnerabilities in a way that is not tied to their ability to conduct research. Acknowledging how researchers will have different experiences and obstacles during fieldwork adds much needed nuance to our interpretation of the data; it invites researchers to consciously reflect on their own positionality and how they may be exposed to different vulnerabilities because of their identity and shifting positionality, thus, grounding their research experience.

And so, where do we go from here? Researching institutions, namely higher education institutions, should switch from reactive to proactive measures when it comes to safeguarding their researchers. For this we suggest carrying out workshops and seminars that touch on vulnerabilities during fieldwork, however it is crucial that these sessions are not tied to any mandatory administrative paperwork that could impact the researcher's ability to conduct fieldwork. Particularly, women and queer researchers would specifically benefit from round table discussions where researchers with fieldwork experience can candidly reflect on the challenges they faced and share their stories and lessons learned with younger researchers in a safe space. At a graduate level, students would benefit from peer-to-peer semi-structured discussion sessions led by students with fieldwork experience, where they can reflect on their concerns prior to fieldwork and share their experiences after completion. We suggest that these measures would be beneficial for researchers who have not yet undertaken fieldwork and for researchers who have completed their research work and may feel at odds with how the experience unfolded but are unsure of where or how to raise this to colleagues, supervisors, or peers. In all cases, universities should continue to invest in safeguarding researcher's well-being by providing one-on-one counselling services as needed.

Admittedly, these tools alone would not prevent cases of gender-based violence or harassment during fieldwork. That is not their purpose or objective because individual efforts cannot alleviate

systemic violence. Women *will* face risky scenarios when researching because to be a woman is to be exposed to constant levels of gender-based violence in many facets of our lives. Hence, it is important to foster these conversations in a proactive manner with the aim to create safe spaces, to allow women to navigate and negotiate the risks of fieldwork as an act of self-determination, instead of cutting their agency at the knees in the name of risk assessment protocols.

In this paper, I have exposed the different ways in which my positionality as a researcher affected my lived experience of fieldwork—Óscar and I engaged in a reflective and emotional conversation about the various challenges I had to navigate. Still, in a similar manner, his positionality as an academic with precarious funding also significantly shaped his experience of doing research together. With this paper, we argue that these conversations about positionality should be stimulated in academia from an early stage in the research process—well before beginning fieldwork—and that these should be critical, reflexive, and not just part of university ethics applications and travel risk assessment procedures.

In reality, when conversations about risks and harms during fieldwork revolve only around ethics and safety clearance processes from institutions, these dialogues can turn into a performative tick-box exercise and may fail to invite the researcher to reflect on the implications of fieldwork truly. If the outcome of a researcher mindfully reflecting on their positionality—and the associated risks and vulnerabilities they will be exposed to during fieldwork—results in a significant constraint on their research methods or their ability to conduct research at all, then researchers are implicitly incentivised to ignore or brush off potential harms and the way fieldwork can impact them; therefore, exposing them even further. Additionally, these conversations need to be complemented by a supportive well-being department that allows researchers to share their experiences and equips them with coping mechanisms before (instead of when) conflict arises. Fieldwork is an intense, messy, personal journey, and researchers should engage in conversations about the nuances and complexities of data collection without the limitations that ethics and safety protocols can represent. More so, as academics, we should not rely on these protocols as the only sphere where we discuss the emotions and risks of fieldwork because by design, as we have argued, these processes do not have the capacity to prepare us for the vulnerability we will face on the field.

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Ethical statement

Ethical approval

The project from where this paper stems from received ethical approval by the Ethics Committee at the Department of Environment and Geography, at the University of York.

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Notes

1. We reference the chorus line of the 1966 hit song by Nancy Sinatra and interpret walking as a metaphor for personal agency.
2. We use the term “privileged middle class” to convey the nuance of our position. While we earn the average income considered by INEGI (2021: 53) for the middle class in Mexico, we are both professionals who have had access to higher education and have obtained postgraduate degrees. In many ways, we are middle class, but our experiences are vastly different from other people with different cultural and social capital who are also considered middle class in Mexico.
3. There is an important conversation around academia, privilege, and precariousness, and how that can affect researchers mental health (see Butler-Rees and Robinson, 2020). While we cannot engage with this issue at this point in time, it is still worth acknowledging and recognising that precariousness affected us and shaped our work plan.
4. See footnote ².
5. One bus driver initially said he had never heard anything related to gender-based violence on the bus when we first asked. Later on, when we arrived at the bus terminal, he brought it up again and said he had heard of a woman that had been molested while on the bus, and that a colleague of him had to kick the guy off. The interaction felt secretive in a way—like he was confiding in us, and when we asked what happened after he said no one followed up with a report or any official type of record.

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