

# Urban Journeys and Intersectionality: Geographies of Inequality in the Appropriation of Public Space in Mexico City\*

Recorridos urbanos e interseccionalidad: geografías  
de desigualdad en la apropiación del espacio público  
en la Ciudad de México

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**| Abstract:** In this qualitative research, I analyze how the intersection of class with other dimensions of categorical inequality (gender, sexuality, and racialization) produces differentiated situations of vulnerability and discrimination in the experience of public space by young people from popular sectors. I focus on two different spatial scenarios in which youth from popular sectors encounter the “other”. On the one hand, I analyze experiences of exclusion and discrimination when these young people exceptionally visit places of consumption and recreation oriented towards upper-middle and high-class sectors. On the other hand, I analyze the insecurities and urban violence associated with the use of public transportation in their daily routines of moving around and through the city.

**Keywords:** Inequality; Public Space; Intersectionality; Violence; Racism; Mexico City.

**| Resumen:** En esta investigación cualitativa, analizo cómo la intersección de la clase con otras dimensiones de desigualdad categorial (género, sexualidad y racialización) produce situaciones particulares y diferenciadas de vulnerabilidad y discriminación en la experiencia

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del espacio público de jóvenes de sectores populares. Me centro en dos escenarios espaciales diferentes en los que los jóvenes de sectores populares se encuentran con el “otro” en el espacio público. Por un lado, analizo las experiencias de exclusión y discriminación cuando, de manera extraordinaria, estos jóvenes visitan lugares de consumo y recreación orientados a sectores de clase media alta y alta. Por otro lado, analizo las inseguridades y violencias urbanas asociadas al uso del transporte público, como parte de las rutinas cotidianas de moverse por la ciudad.

**Palabras clave:** Desigualdad; Espacio Público; Interseccionalidad; Violencia; Racismo; Ciudad de México

## INTRODUCTION

In this research I use an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1989; Nash 2008) to study inequalities in the urban experience in Mexico City. The intersectional perspective responds to the need to recognize the interweaving of inequalities corresponding to different systems of oppression (such as class, gender, ‘racialization’, ethnicity, age, ableism, etc.). It also responds, consequently, to the heterogeneity of experiences based on the differences in the identity categorizations that cross people’s lives (Nash 2008). Intersectionality, thus, challenges the dichotomous categorization of experiences, often supported by top-down theoretical approaches, by approaching the everyday, multiple, relational, situated ways in which inequalities, oppression and exclusion are experienced at the ground level (Yon and Nadimpalli 2017, 6). By recognizing and discerning between different situated orders of oppression, intersectionality allows us to explore the different logics of power and inequality in greater depth (McKinzie 2017); as well as the complex and contradictory ways in which oppression and privilege are intimately connected (Nash 2008, 12).

Central to the study of urban inequalities, and in relation to urban experience and public space, are the processes in which people inhabit and appropriate the city, where encounters and interactions with “others” (involving recognition, relationship and conflict between bodies) are at the center (Goffman 1997; Segura and Ferretty 2011). In this sense, an intersectional approach is relevant because people have multiple dimensions of identity. Moreover, in the different dynamics and processes of everyday interaction, people are subject to diverse categorizations. Hence, their experiences cannot be confined to a single system of inequality (McKinzie 2017, 524). While different studies have analyzed inequalities in the experience of public space among popular sectors in a unidimensional way (traditionally around class and more recently around gender), in this article I analyze how the intersection of social class with other dimensions of inequality generates specific and differentiated situations of vulnerability and discrimination. On the one hand, I focus on racializing categorizations, a dimension that has been scarcely explored in Mexico, since beyond the recognition of processes of ethnic/cultural discrimination, racism has been systematically denied in the country

based on the ideology of *mestizaje* (Navarrete Linares, 2016 and 2022; Cerón-Anaya 2022). On the other hand, I analyze the role of gender and sexuality, acknowledging that public space in the city is patriarchal and heteronormative. I center my analysis on two socio-spatial scenarios of the experience of the city that are linked to the encounter with the ‘other’ in legally public space and in spaces of private domain but of public use (Duhau and Giglia 2016).<sup>1</sup> Both reveal segregated spatial dynamics that go beyond neighborhood areas, which have traditionally been the primary focus when analyzing inequalities, and the exclusionary conditions faced by popular sectors. Firts, as Saraví (2015, 154) explains, young people from both popular sectors and privileged classes in Mexico City ‘construct a particular and unequal insertion in the socio-spatial structure’ of the city, each with their own urban geography and their own maps of the city. However, while broad class spatialities are unknown to both groups, these geographies are constituted not only by repeated visits to known places and by imaginaries and fantasies about the spaces of ‘others’, but also, in the case of the popular sectors, by the discomfort, feelings of vulnerability and forms of discrimination that they experience when occasionally venturing into places and areas dominated by the presence of middle and upper sectors. I focus on these experiences in the first section. I expose and analyze some of the symbolic violence experienced by young people from popular sectors in these spaces, also highlighting the inequalities that cross them through the intersectionality of class with racializing and gender categorizations. The second dimension I analyze has to do with some aspects of the insecurity experienced by these young people as they move around the city by walking and using public transport. These are often extensive journeys that take up large amounts of time. This experience is also marked by class positions, as they are the predominant forms of mobility for popular sectors within Mexico City, in contrast to the experience of the middle and upper sectors, who use private cars, thus isolating themselves from the dynamics of interaction and encounters in public space, to some extent as a response to insecurity (Saraví 2015). However, as feminism has emphasized, urban insecurity and violence have specific gender components (Soto 2012, 149). Thus, I analyze how unequal experiences of urban insecurity are shaped by gender differences, focusing on the contrast between men with masculine heteronormative appearances, women, and heterodissident men. In doing so, I challenge and try to go beyond dyadic analyses of unequal insecurity framed solely through the ‘woman-man’ dichotomy.

<sup>1</sup> It is important to highlight, first, that the activities and uses of public space in the contemporary city are closely linked to different activities and practices of consumption, in accordance with the centrality that this activity has gained in recent decades, which even implies the commodification of ‘experiences’. Second, as Duhau and Giglia (2016, 140) remind us, taking up Jane Jacobs, the variety of activities and uses that different actors give to legally public space depends on the variety and characteristics of the activities for which the surrounding premises and buildings are intended (i.e. housing, offices, workshops, restaurants, museums, bars, cafés, public offices, markets, etc.), many of which form spaces of private domain but of public use that are accessed simply by walking in from the public space.

Finally, I highlight that class experience in the city is not homogeneous. Rather, the intersection of class with other categorical orders such as racialization, gender and sexuality in particular urban socio-spatial contexts, configures specific and unequal forms of discrimination and violence (Viveros 2016, 12).

This research is qualitative, based on nine semi-structured in-depth interviews with young people (between 23 and 31 years old), who are public university students belonging to popular sectors, living in low and low-middle income households, in which the sources of income were linked to manual labour, low-skilled service jobs or jobs in popular commerce, and are all inhabitants of low-income areas, mostly in peripheral zones within Mexico City. But the interviewees differed in the positions they occupy in other categorical orders of inequality such as gender, sexual identity and the racialization of bodies. Although the sample is not exhaustive in its heterogeneity, it does provide sufficient elements to analyze different intersectional crossings related to the orders of oppression that we are interested in. Through these interviews I was able to discuss experiences of discrimination, vulnerability and urban insecurity from the actors' own perspective. These were carried out between July and August 2024.

## 1. CLASS BOUNDARIES, RACIALIZATION AND GENDER

I do not know if there are spaces where such different classes coexist. I rather feel that the spaces I go to are of the same social class. I have been to spaces where... and not because of me, but because of a friend [...], of people who have more money, and it is different. I don't think there are spaces where classes mix. I think that there is still a very big difference between spaces, where one social class goes and another goes (Arturo, age 27).

As Arturo's words show, the interviewees reported inhabiting a segregated (and fragmented) spatiality, marked by the popular class character of the urban spaces they go to. However, as this quote also shows, although it is not common, for one reason or another, other places and areas of the city dominated by the presence of middle and upper-class sectors are also visited. Some of these include shopping centers as well as certain neighborhoods in the central city: la Juárez, la Roma and la Condesa, characterized by being urban centralities, places of consumption and leisure (bars, cafés, restaurants, theaters, forums, dance halls, clothes shops, galleries, etc.) (close to other areas of the inner city which are an important centrality for young people from popular sectors<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>2</sup> In agreement with the findings of Saraví (2015), an important place in the leisure and consumption trajectories of the young people interviewed is the Historic Centre. However, beyond visits to museums and other cultural spaces, their itineraries were characterized by visits to spaces for the lower and lower-middle sectors: both around the market and street trade areas to the east and north of the Centre (in the areas of La Merced and Tepito), and around the bars and nightclubs on the streets of República de Cuba, Donceles, Tacuba, Regina and San Jerónimo.

The experiences of the young people interviewed in their walks and visits to such places show different social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002), which highlight different dimensions of class inequalities that cut across everyday life and shape the limits on the maps that trace their urban geographies. However, as we shall see, while there is a shared experience of exclusion, it is not homogenous. It goes beyond class-related inequalities alone, and we find that the intersection of racializing and gender categorizations produce user specific experiences of discrimination.

As may be evident, a first barrier to walking around these places and areas of the city is constituted by the costs of the products and services sold there. However, in addition to this, we also find different dynamics and situations of social interaction that reinforce social distances. The interviews reveal a discomfort and a sense of vulnerability linked to the fact that class inequalities are not only inequalities in access to consumption, but also broader inequalities in terms of power: of recognition and prestige, pointing to symbolic dimensions of inequality (Dammert 2018). Social fragmentation, as Saraví (2015, 178) outlines, ‘goes beyond economic inequality and implies a social and cultural dimension of alienation and exclusion’. For example, in the following quotes, Verónica and Arturo speak of a strong discomfort linked to differences in the possession of goods that, among other uses, have the function of being symbols of distinction and status.

To me it seems pretentious, like maybe you have a certain purchasing power and you want to show it to society. So, of course! [At this point Verónica speaks as if she were one of the people she criticizes] ‘I take my little Pomeranian dog (who has a terrible time, but I do not care, I do not care about my dog, I just care that people see that I have it)’. Or, I don’t know, for example, everyone is always walking around in those areas with bags of certain brands or iPhones... (Verónica, age 28).

You see the difference as, well, a bit of what you wear... that is, yes, like a lot... based on what you bring... well, on what you carry, what you have in terms of material belongings. [...] As I don’t have many [things]... I mean, I cannot buy pairs of tennis shoes, I mean, I repeat the same clothes, and my clothes are from the *tianguis* and all that [...] So yes, sometimes I do feel a bit of pressure that I cannot have certain [brand name] clothes from a shop. In the end I try not to let it affect me, but then it does feel a bit bad (Arturo, age 27).

As we see in these quotations, material objects and clothing become symbols of social status. Verónica points to the ostentation of certain goods as a way of demonstrating a distinctive social status, of highlighting a privileged position in the social structure. Arturo’s quote introduces us to a more subtle dimension, beyond the specific commodities mentioned by Verónica, Arturo gives an account of a more mundane, everyday situation of inequality that is evidenced simply in the differences in everyday clothing. Both are indicative of the preponderance of identities linked to consumption in contemporary societies, in which commodities are established as the mechanism through which the ‘Self’ is reconstructed and visually represented, insofar as they are

linked, through the juxtaposition of images and symbols, to different social and cultural values, that is, to unequal and exclusive lifestyles (Lowe 1995, 47). The function of commodities is emphasized not only as ‘utilities’, but also as meaningful symbols, as ‘communicators’ that account for the insertion or exclusion in the different social spheres of their possessors, as they participate in a structured system of social differentiation and classification (Douglas and Isherwood 1990; Bourdieu 2003).

Now, the following quote from Patricia introduces us to another dimension of inequality that in Mexico deeply intersects with class structure, skin color and the most visible physical features, what is often referred to in everyday language as phenotype and what Frantz Fanon refers to as the ‘epidermal schema’<sup>3</sup> (Cerón-Anaya 2022, 158).

You definitely notice the difference in the people who usually go to these places, the color of their skin.... the clothes, even. Yes, I feel that I do not belong in those places, I do not feel good. [...] Yes, it is uncomfortable, I experience it like that, right? I try to deal with it, no, like... no matter what, I can go to eat or go for a coffee or whatever, but yes. [...] Yes, the appearance, yes, for example, well generally the people who serve, who are serving, well, they are people, well, *morenas* [brown skinned], right? with whom I easily identify myself with and not with the people who buy (Patricia, age 23).

Patricia emphasizes that the feeling of being out of place in these spaces is not only constituted by differences related to the systems of objects/commodities, to the articles worn (such as clothes) by the regular visitors to these spaces, but is also constituted by observable differences in their physical features, which she synthesized in reference to skin color. But if her observation shows, on the one hand, a socio-spatial segregation of the users/consumers of these spaces linked to the epidermal schema, to the whiteness of their skin, at the same time she points out that *morena* people (brown skin) like her, and with whom she identifies, are found in these spaces but in subordinate roles, as workers. This alludes to the fact that the structure of work is also marked by inequalities linked to the epidermal schema. Thus, Patricia’s words allow us to recognize that, despite the discourses of *mestizaje* and the processes of ‘whiteness’ that accompanied it, the class structure in Mexico has not ceased to be intertwined with a racialized hierarchy, although, and this is important to note, there is no exact isomorphism between these two dimensions (Solís and Güemes 2021; Navarrete Linares 2022; Cerón-Anaya 2022).

The quotes I have presented so far allow us to recognize the discomfort that the interviewees experience when confronted with contexts in which the inequality of the social structure and their position in conditions of subalternity are strongly felt. But the violence they experience is not limited exclusively to the violence of the social

<sup>3</sup> According to Cerón-Anaya (2022, 58): “Frantz Fanon coined the term epidermal schema to explain the way in which skin and eye color, hair texture, the shape of the nose and lips, as well as body fat are commonly used to group subjects into units that apparently share common biological and social characteristics”.

structure in the unequal distribution of goods and occupations, nor to the symbolic violence in the assignment of meanings to material objects and human bodies. It is also about violence that they experience in these places, embedded in subtle, and not so subtle, forms of discrimination that occur in face-to-face interactions, in the dynamics of exchange and in relationship with ‘others’: in the looks and ways of being or not being seen, in the bodily dispositions and the silent language of bodies and gestures, and in the exaggerated, rather watchful, attention or in the various ways of being neglected or ignored.

What I don’t like, well, are the poses. I feel that the places here [La Roma or La Condesa], well, they are very *posturientos* [pretentious], are they not? It is like the people themselves do not approach you, they do not say anything to you, they do not really talk to you, but there is like this bodily dialogue. It is like a: ‘Don’t come near me’, or like... I do not know how to explain it, I mean, it is like they are very *mamertos* [snobby]!, well, and I do not like it, even if they do not do anything to me, I mean, I do not like how they treat other people, I do not like how they see them, I do not like how they behave (Andrea, age 29).

Andrea shows that the behaviors, attitudes and forms of treatment in these places express subtle violences that generate a sense of discrimination and exclusion. As Ramiro Segura (2022, 391) has pointed out, on the experience of popular classes in urban spaces marked by the presence of upper-middle and upper classes, the gaze appears as ‘a powerful practice of regulating the ways of being, using and staying’. Just like Andrea, many of my interlocutors state the looks, the way they are seen, as a central element of discomfort in these spaces, which generates feelings of vulnerability, and even fear. It is important to emphasize, as Hernández (2015, 95) observes, that ‘the way of directing the gaze and turning it into expression’ is an enunciative act.

Andrea’s quote refers to the ways of being and behaving in the space by other visitors and users of places, whether it is in parks, squares, or sidewalks, or in terraces, restaurants, or cafés. However, a greater discrimination was reported, not in relation to the treatment received by the users of the spaces, but by the workers of different places of consumption: waiters, salesmen and security guards in restaurants, cafés, department stores’ chains, fashion shops, etc.

The common thing for people, well, of my skin color, is that they chase you, that the police [private guards] chase you or that they ask you what you are looking for or that they are watching you, they are observing you, that if you go into the dressing room they kind of check you. I mean, that kind of thing they do with people, well, who are not blanca [white] or *güeras*. [...] It depends a lot on who you come with. Because if I come with my friends who are like whiter than me, it’s like: “Ah, ok”. But if I come with friends who are the same as me, it is a different kind of treatment. I would not say that we are treated one hundred percent differently just because we look the way we look, but you feel it, you feel it when you come with people who look one way than when you come with people who look another way. Because the treatment is even friendlier, like more, I do not know how to say it... with more kindness and in others they are like super cold, abrupt, so that you

leave faster, like... and this happens to me in a lot of restaurants in slightly more expensive areas. [...] (Catalina, age 23).

I feel like my phenotype just kind of keeps those things from happening, I do not know... the color of my hair.... I feel like people like just kind of go with like a very simple reading, like: 'Oh, she's this color.' [...] [For example], we were at a restaurant, and I went to the bathroom and everything was fine, but then my cousin went to the bathroom, and they did not let him in. They told him, 'No, what is your waiter's name?' or something like that. So, my cousin went back to ask for the waiter's name, and once he came back, they let him use the bathroom. So... my cousin is like *morenito* [has much browner skin]. So, I feel like sometimes my phenotype like kind of helps me in certain situations. (Verónica, age 28).

As mentioned in these quotes, discriminatory treatment also occurs in the interaction with the workers of these places, who in different ways act as the guards and reproducers of the symbolic boundaries of their working places (Çankaya 2020). They thus participate, to one extent or another, in contemporary forms of spatial governmentality (Merry 2001).

In the interviews, these dynamics of differential treatment were associated, as the quotes show, with the racialization of bodies. The people interviewed who identified their appearance as somehow closer to white or less *moreno* (brown skinned) did not report similar situations of discrimination associated with other possible class markers; or even, as in the case of Verónica, noted an exemption from this singular dimension of discrimination, highlighting inequalities that have to do with the experience of other young people with whom they share similar positions in the socio-economic structure, and who they had seen discriminated against in many other cases before. We see that people with more *moreno* (browner) skin tones (such as Catalina and Verónica's cousin) receive discriminatory treatment, while people with lighter skin tones (Verónica herself and Catalina's friends) are not discriminated against in the same way, and even receive more considerate treatment. This is because in Mexico whiteness is associated not only with belonging to high positions in the socio-economic structure, but also with the possession of moral values and cultural capitals hegemonically constituted as superior, associated with civilization, modernity, progress, law, order, rationality, etc. (Leal 2016; Cerón-Anaya 2022; Navarrete Linares 2022).

Finally, the following experiences recounted by Arturo and Manuel show another intersection of different dimensions of inequality that produce specific situations of discrimination.

It has to do with the way people treat others, certain people that, well yes, people, well that maybe do not fit the status quo. And it also has a lot to do with skin color. For example, my brother. He [...] has *moreno* [brown] skin and all and has often been treated badly because of that, and it is noticeable. It is one of the things he faced when he did not believe it was really happening. Especially when we are [walking], and someone is walking down the street, they change [cross the street] because they then associate... he himself has told me, that people think that he is going to mug them (Arturo, age 27).

I have really been walking down streets that are, like say, *un poco más tranquilas* [uses a euphemism to refer to an affluent place]... [...] where there is access like for a specific public [middle and upper classes] and that even people... well, you go down the street and they move to one side! I mean, it is like that even in the street, where one would feel without the spotlight and with an anonymous condition, well, you are also labelled there!... (Manuel, age 26).

Experiences like the one Arturo narrates about his brother, and the ones Manuel experiences personally, reflect a particular intersection of class, racialization, and gender that constructs their specific bodies, not only as “dangerous” subjects, but also as “threatening,” and in line with how being a man, *moreno* (brown skinned), and poor is associated with violent criminality in Mexico.

## 2. INSECURITY, GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY

Insecurity has become an issue and one of the main problems in the daily life of contemporary Latin American cities. What is dominantly understood as “insecurity” and “security” presupposes discursive and practical fixations of meaning, mediated by power relations, which render invisible other possible constructions and understandings of in/security for actors with subaltern positions (Hansen 2000). However, I understand that senses of insecurity are constructed from processes of discursive production on a daily basis (Schepherd and Weldes 2008; Goldstein 2010). These are processes that are framed in particular spatial and historical configurations, conjunctures and dynamics, involving relational frameworks between different actors (including state agents) and discourses, so that the multiplicity of senses of insecurity, produced by individuals and collectives in their daily experience, tends to be heterogeneous (Pain 2001). In this sense, in the conversations I had, three senses of insecurity in public space emerged, which unequally affected the ways of being and getting by in the city. First, insecurity is linked to muggings (which entails a risk of physical violence). Additionally, insecurity is related to sexual violence, reported by women. Lastly, insecurity is associated with homophobic and transphobic violence, referred to by people with non-heteronormative identities. In this section I will account for the heterogeneity of experiences of insecurity at different intersections with gender. I will first address the singularity of women’s experience; and then that of gay men.

While the interviewed men with masculine identities dismiss muggings as an insecurity that has no significant influence on their way of moving and being in the city, or is confined to very specific areas and situations (even if they were subjected to violent muggings: threatened with firearms or bladed weapons), for women, the insecurity related to assaults is intertwined, and in a certain way subsumed, with the risks of sexual violence. Sexual violence is experienced as a haunting threat throughout the city, even though there are certain places that are more conducive to certain aggressions and

sexual harassment than others, just as there are times (the night and the early morning) that are profoundly threatening. Thus, for example, the women interviewed plan their trips within the city at night, taking into account public transport schedules to return home, as well as avoiding exposing themselves to situations of insecurity on public transport and in the street.

When I go out to bars around downtown or places like that, I go back before the subway [el metro] closes, around 11 [pm], to catch the transportation, and then meet my parents at [the metro station] Constitución [close to home], or my parents come all the way [downtown] to pick me up. Because, for example, I do not take Didi or Uber, I mean, not at all, not at all. If I am by myself, no. If I am with friends or something, maybe, but my friends do not usually live where I live. [...] Yes, because like what happened, for example, a month ago, I don't know if you heard about a girl who I think was from a northern state [of the country], who took a Didi [...] and well, they killed her. Even though it is like an app-based taxi and there is more control, right?, because you know who the driver is and everything, well, despite that, those things happen. For safety reasons, I do not take that kind of transport alone. And well, for example, taking *combis* or *peseros* [public vans and minibuses] [to my house] at night is super dangerous, like, you could get mugged or something worse, so I do not take them either (Verónica, age 28).

As Verónica shows, the use of public transport (taxi services, app taxi services, *combis* and *peseros* (vans and minibuses)) is restricted by issues that not only concern the timetable of the service, but also insecurity. While some men mention *combis* and *peseros* (vans and minibuses) in peripheral areas as vehicles they seek to avoid due to the recurrence of assaults, in the women's accounts, all means of public transport they use are sources of danger and threats, as is walking. Furthermore, it is significant that even taxi services through apps such as Uber or Didi, which, unlike traditional taxis, involve some control in the identification of the driver and the vehicle, are also marked by insecurity, which is supported by the news of different cases of violence experienced by women in this type of transport, as the one that Verónica refers to (in addition to the fact that it was not considered accessible due to the cost of these services).

Faced with these conditions of insecurity, we find that different strategies are used to avoid or contain mobility-related risks. One of these is that, as evidenced in the quote, journeys made at certain times or in certain areas tend to be with other people, due to the implicit risk assumed when a woman travels alone in public spaces, generating different situations of dependence on others, and in particular on men, reinforcing different gender divisions and imaginaries associated with power relations. Traveling in the city accompanied is not the only strategy used to avoid or reduce exposure to dangerous situations. In the following quote, Viviana describes a series of measures to avoid exposure to potential threats:

The ugliest things that have happened to me have been in the metro [subway] [...] things like being inappropriately touched or something like that. That happens to me in the metro. I feel that it doesn't happen to me so much because I avoid it. I mean, for example: I go

on the women's trolleybus, I go in the women's subway car. I'm like one of those people that maybe I walk fast or [...] then if they talk to me I pretend I don't listen and I keep walking, right? I mean, I try not to put myself in those [risky] situations... but I feel that there isn't, there isn't an area, I mean, it's not like I say here it happens more and there in Insurgentes [in the centre of the city] no, no, because I mean it happens to me everywhere. [...] I don't go around the city with shorts, skirts or dresses like that, but not at all, unless [...] we go to a club and I say, well, but my parents are going to pick me up and they're going to drop me off. So in that case, I'm like, okay, I can wear this dress, right? But in general, no, no, I don't like it. I don't feel safe in that kind of clothing. I feel like if they already bother me as it is, I mean, if I wear a skirt, they're going to bother me even more, so I just don't wear that kind of clothing... (Verónica, age 28).

As can be seen, in the face of different situations of violence, responses are oriented towards the avoidance of different spaces, the limitation of sociability and the restriction of ways of presenting oneself and being in places (or, as Rodó 2015, puts it, 'the "how" one is in places'). In other words, these responses are aimed at 'territorial confinement' (Soto 2012, 163). However, as various studies have pointed out, insecurity is also often met with boldness and defiance (Pain 2001, 904).

Since I studied anthropology, I have struggled with gender issues, I mean, the truth is... [...] If they don't give me permission to go somewhere, I say: "Hey, would you let your son go?" [...] I think it was part of studying Anthropology, that I have fought more and that I think that now we do have the same possibilities of going out. [...] When I was younger, I think when I was in high school, even in middle school [on public transport I was intimidated by] the lascivious glances or the touches that were not accidental, right? I used to stop myself from wearing certain clothes to school or to go out, but after I going to the University I don't care as much anymore, and I don't stop myself from wearing certain clothes anymore... (Patricia, age 23).

Yes, no, always, even though I know there is danger. Aha. And even though I know they are red zones, I go alone. I know it's wrong. No, I mean, well, I know I expose myself a lot. I expose myself a lot, but I don't like... I feel that transportation, money, certain things are already a limitation, so much so that I still have to depend on someone [to accompany me] (Andrea, age 29).

Andrea and Patricia's quotes show dispositions and practices that break with the boundaries that insecurity establishes on their lives and the limiting ways of inhabiting the city. Both of them show a tension and a personal negotiation between the need for security and the desire to maintain both a personal autonomy and to break the "territorial confinement". Thus, they face the control that is exercised from within the women's home over their outings to the city space, the control of fear and feelings of insecurity felt by the women themselves (as shown by Andrea), but also the control that the aggressions they have experienced exert on their future practices (as illustrated by Patricia). (Pain 2001, 902). In sum, in both cases we find a tension between staying safe by accepting restrictions on mobility or on forms of presence in the space, or

assuming different risks and violences, but extending their appropriation of the city. Andrea's expression: "I feel that transportation, money, certain things are already a limitation, so much so that I still have to depend on someone", emphasizes that the insecurity these women face is not only produced by inequalities in gender relations, but also by inequalities in terms of class that prevent them from accessing other means of transport and urban mobility that, like the private car, would shield them from a large number of situations of harassment and sexual aggression.

The way in which gender mediates inequalities in the experience of urban insecurity is not only about power dynamics between men and women, but also about power relations between heteronormative identities and sex-gender dissidence. The discrimination that the LGBTIQ+ community has experienced and continues to experience in multiple spheres also takes shape in the everyday life of the city and is spatialized (Boivin 2014; Gutiérrez, Evangelista and Duarte 2023). In the remainder of this section, I will point out some issues surrounding the insecurity experienced by gay men.

As a homosexual man and particularly in the periphery, I mean, there is a concern in that sense [of receiving homophobic violence], however, I think the fact that helps me... I don't know if I'm very heteronormative, but my gender expression is not like, maybe, other homosexual people [of a more feminine appearance]. So, I mean, I put it in this sense, [...] in my neighborhood I am not like with my partner, [...] we don't get around there, if I had to get around with my partner in my neighborhood, I would do it carefully, because yes, it is *feo* [dangerous]. Yes, I have had people shout things at me, that I was a *puto* [faggot], in short, in my neighborhood. Maybe people just say that, but it doesn't take away the worry that they will do something else to you, but... how sad! [...] In the end, I manage [with my partner] in other spaces, for example, in the centre, where I have never felt [insecure in that sense]... [...] I live in the east and [the person I go out with] lives all the way to the north. When I'm there [...] I have noticed, for example, that he is also worried [...]. There are spaces where we better let go of each other's hands close to where he lives and, well, we are 'friends'. Also, it's not like... their gender expression is like mine, I mean, if they saw us, I think, in the street, they would say: 'Ah, they're mates'. [...] I do think that the [central] spaces lend themselves more to, well, more diversity, etcetera, and here on this side, that is, at least on the periphery, well it does have to do with an issue of masculinity, because we come back to the same thing, people don't like to see this kind of [gender expressions], I don't know, they think it's bad, it's very, very, very strange (Carlos, age 25).

Yes, there is a lot of homophobia in that part of the city [in Iztapalapa]. Yes, I don't feel safe, for example, when I went to the [Pride] parade, I was still embarrassed to take this jacket out around my house, I mean, I have a pin, I had pins that have to do with the fact that I am gay, with sexual diversity, or then I would take my huge flag, but I would hide it near my house for fear that they would assault me. Yes, people there are very direct, very violent, especially with expressions that are out of touch with masculinity. Yes, anything that comes out of that, they can attack you. No, I didn't feel safe in that aspect. [...] In general, in the whole city, outside of those spaces [Zona Rosa and República de Cuba in the historic center], I don't feel safe, well, except for this area that is very... like Roma, Condesa, Polanco, blah blah blah, like this line that foreigners know, is where I feel a little safer (Arturo, age 27).

Carlos and Arturo's quotes direct us to various dimensions of insecurity that gay men experience in the city. Urban spaces, particularly the periphery and public transport, are shown as spaces of heteronormative control, not only because they are produced by heterosexual practices (as Carlos points out, it is very rare to see dissident gender expressions) (Rodó 2013, 3), in addition, there is homophobic and transphobic violence against those who disrupt the dominant gender order. Thus, for people in the LGBTIQ+ community, public space becomes a place of control and risk (Rodó 2015). Although Carlos and Arturo have gender expressions closer to hegemonic masculinity, which in many situations veils their identification as gay men, homophobic violence continues to limit the expression of their identity, and their ways of being and showing oneself in different aspects: both by hiding material symbols of their identity, and by limiting the expression of their affections towards another man, to pass as only "friends" (Rodó 2015, 18). Thus, taking into account "territorial confinement" they have learned to negotiate the expressions of their identity in different spaces, "passing" as heterosexuals.

I think that people are particularly bothered when a homosexual person has a very feminine gender expression. [...] On one occasion I was with my partner, we got on the subway, but he was with all his friends [...] who are also gay, but their gender expression is more feminine, I mean, they even speak to each other using feminine pronouns, and that time I remember that a man spat on us, literally!, to all of us. [...] It had never happened to me, but it was the opposite for them [...] I think that this question of femininity, because several things happened to me with them (Carlos, age 25).

Carlos' experience highlights the need to recognize another dimension of inequality in the experience of insecurity of gay men, splitting the category, insofar as gender dissidence is embodied in more or less heteronormative expressions. In the interviews, the recurring violence that people with less heteronormative and feminine appearances receive daily in the city's public spaces was discussed. "Like sexual abuse perpetrated against all women, antigay violence exists on a continuum from comments to threats, assault to murder" (Valentine 1993, 407). However, as has also been registered in relation to the insecurity experienced by lesbian women, part of the violence of the attacks, even when they are "minor" attacks, is that, as Carlos says, it is not known to what extent they can escalate (Valentine 1993, 408).

The insecurity Carlos and Arturo face due to homophobic violence is unevenly distributed across urban spaces. Both point out a marked contrast between spaces on the outskirts and areas in the city centre, which are said to be safer spaces. However, it is necessary to make some points that reconnect again with inequalities in terms of class (and with what we saw in the previous section). Although in fact, different investigations agree in pointing out la Roma, Condesa and Juárez (where the Zona Rosa is located) as "gay-friendly" areas (as one interviewee called them) (Islas Vela 2015, 197), we have already seen that especially Roma and Condesa are also experienced as spaces of discrimination associated with classist and, also,

racist discriminations (Islas Vela and Hernández 2024, 11) where heterodissident people belonging to the popular sectors are also excluded (Boivin 2013). Within Colonia Juárez, the Zona Rosa presents more heterogeneity in terms of class, but only República de Cuba (in the Historic Center) has a marked popular character. However, most gay clubs and bars in the República de Cuba only open on weekends (Islas Vela 2020, 303). The places in which a certain tolerance is given and/or the “gay neighborhoods or streets” constitute spaces of segregation in the face of heteronormativity and homophobic and transphobic discrimination that inhabits the city in general. However, this is a fragmented spatiality, on the one hand, and, on the other, since the production of these places is closely linked to the market, it reproduces the different “faults” and exclusionary dynamics it has (Boivin 2013; Islas Vela and Hernández 2024).

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

In this article, we have seen how the territorialization of youth from popular sectors in the city is bounded and restricted not only by class aspects, but also by the intersection with other dimensions of categorical inequality such as gender, sexual diversity and the racialization of bodies. However, far from an orderly and stable structure of inequalities, different dimensions of identity and categorization are constituted as elements of discrimination and oppression in an unequal way in the relational and interactional contexts that shape specific and concrete public spaces.

I focused on two distinct spatial scenarios. Both show segregated spatialities, beyond the residential spaces that have traditionally been the focus of the analysis of inequalities and the conditions of exclusion experienced by popular sectors (Caggiano and Segura 2014). First, the rather extraordinary or exceptional visits to engage in consumption and leisure practices, in neighborhoods and places characterized by the presence of upper-middle and upper classes. If, on the one hand, I showed how class dimensions (economic, but also social and cultural) produce some similar experiences of discrimination, on the other hand, we saw that at the intersection with other categorical orders of oppression the experiences of inequality were differentiated. Thus, young people from popular sectors racialised as ‘moreno’ are objects of specific forms of mistreatment and rejection, and, even more so, if these bodies are those of masculine men.

In second place, I analyzed situations related to mobility: the use of public transport and walking, as part of the rather ordinary routine of moving around the city, that account for experiences linked to class. However, once again, these experiences are differentiated at the intersection with other orders of categorization, such as gender and sexual diversity in relation to insecurity. In the experience of women, transiting through the city is framed by the risk and permanent fear of being sexually assaulted and harassed, as a dimension of being in public space. Similarly, we also saw

how homophobic violence shapes the experience of gay men and the risks they face when in public space they manifest their rupture with gender normative frameworks. However, unlike the case of women, the fears of being assaulted are inscribed in specific spatial spheres, in particular the peripheral popular spatiality. Nevertheless, the areas of the city in which they felt they could express their gender identity more safely were also, for the most part, areas from which they were excluded by class and racialization.

In sum, we saw how the class experience is not homogeneous, but rather unfolds into diverse experiences according to the way in which subjects position themselves or are positioned in other orders of categorical inequality in particular socio-spatial configurations. There is no “neutral” social class subject.

I conclude these final reflections with one last observation and one proposal.

The racialization of young people from popular sectors –that is, the specific discriminatory treatment that those identified as *morenos* (brown skinned) receive–, does not occur solely because the *moreno* (brown) skin color in Mexico is commonly associated with lower class strata. But it is not merely a class indicator, which would reduce the discrimination they face due to their identification to a simple marker within the socioeconomic structure as “poor”. Rather, the racialization of young people must be understood as intertwined with meanings and prejudices of colonial and national roots, which build on the *moreno* (brown skinned) concept. In other words, these young people face discriminatory treatment for being both “poor” and *morenos* (brown skinned). As Federico Navarrete Linares (2016) has consistently argued, the ideology of mestizaje in Mexico has been extremely successful in covering up the reproduction of racism in the country.

Randol Contreras (2017) has coined the concept “spatial anguish” to describe the feeling that inhabitants of stigmatized spaces often have when they have to talk about their neighborhood in front of people from other areas. He points out that it is a feeling that originates from the shame that one feels when “others” (outsiders of the place) fear, condemn or ridicule the place where one resides (Contreras 2017, 657). In a similar way, I propose the concept “categorical anguish”, to address the feeling of vulnerability that people who tend to be discriminated against, due to their subaltern position in different systems of oppression, feel when they face situations of interaction with “others” who are in dominant positions in these systems of inequality.

Looking ahead to future research, this concept could prove valuable for analyzing how past experiences of discrimination not only shape and mold socio-spatial practices, but also reproduce the confinement of diverse bodies and identities within urban spaces. However, as the experiences of the young people in this study demonstrate, they position themselves in diverse ways in response to the discrimination and violence they face in the city’s public spaces. Not only do they avoid certain places, but they also, for example, seek to evade violence by managing their appearance to go unnoticed or, on other occasions, challenge and confront it.

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